FCC Sets Date, $1.56B Target for First Spectrum Auction in Five Years

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The FCC Friday announced January 14, 2014 as the date for its next spectrum auction [1], its first major spectrum sale since 2008. The Commission set a reserve price of $1.56 billion for the 10 MHz of nationwide PCS H Block spectrum it plans to sell to the highest bidder.

“I am pleased that the FCC is moving expeditiously to implement Congress's direction to auction this spectrum, and that we are doing so in a way that ensures substantial revenues will flow to FirstNet,” FCC Chairwoman Mignon Clyburn wrote in a statement.

FirstNet is a planned nationwide network for first responders that will be at least partially funded through spectrum auctions.

In the official filing, the FCC said that the $1.56 billion reserve price was calculated using a $0.50/MHz-POP rate suggested by Dish Network.

Dish, which recently gained FCC approval to deploy a terrestrial network on the AWS H Block licenses it already holds [2], seems like a likely bidder come Jan. 14. But the satellite provider in an FCC filing in August indicated it did not intend to “meaningfully participate” in the H Block auction [3], due to current regulatory requirements surrounding that spectrum.

That doesn’t necessarily rule out Dish. But if the Dish decides to jump into the fray, it will likely go up against bids from Sprint. Sprint hotly argued against Dish deploying a full-power network on its AWS spectrum for fear that it would interfere with adjacent H Block spectrum up for bids. Sprint has already deployed part of its LTE network in the 1900 PCS frequency so the PCS spectrum the FCC will be auctioning off would be particularly useful Sprint.

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[1] http://www.fcc.gov/document/clyburn-statement-scheduling-h-block-spectrum-auction
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