

KWSO, other tribal and rural stations facing budget cuts

The tribes' KWSO 91.9 FM radio station is among many public radio stations facing budget cuts, resulting from recent reductions in federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For Tribal and rural stations - the funding makes up a significant percentage of their operating budget.

The funds had been appropriated for 2026 until recent passage of a \$1.1 billion rescission, or 'claw back' measure by Congress.

For KWSO and other stations, the federal funds have helped with programming costs, participating in the Emergency Alert System, staffing, and for broadcast equipment.

KWSO, owned and operated by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, may lose 40-percent of its operating budget.

"We would continue to exist, but our operations and our offerings would be significantly cut back," said Sue Matters, station manager.

KWSO is the only source of local and culturally-specific radio programming on the reservation. "All our content for our programs that we produce locally are local, and specific to Warm Springs and the

Warm Springs tribes," Ms. Matters said.

Two of the six staff members at KWSO are funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Matters said "the station's first priority is to identify money to keep those staff on board. Next priority is for engineering and support for our automation system, our steaming and our website. Native American Calling and National Native News are the primary national programming we would fight to keep."

KWSO also provides the Emergency Alert System for the Warm Springs area, informing the community about fire alerts, school and road closures, and snow events. "We definitely play a critical role even in small things," Matters said.

She said what's most troubling isn't just the short-term scramble for funding; instead it's the long-term risk of dismantling an information system built over decades.

"At KWSO we have built up our programming over the years, and now our online work as well, to meet the needs of our com-

munity. We have been focused on improving quality and continuing to grow what we offer so now losing a significant chunk of funding for our operations is a blow—but it's one we intend to overcome as best as we can."

She says, "There is a chance to advocate for funding still in the federal budget process in the future. People can contact your members of congress and let them know you support Public Media and funding should be restored."

Congressman Cliff Bentz who represents Oregon's Second District did vote for the rescission of funding for public media, citing concerns about left leaning bias. Matters stated "clearly he hasn't listened to KWSO."

KWSO is part of a broader Indigenous public media at risk of losing funding: Programming from Native Voice One—like daily news shows Native America Calling and National Native News—could be canceled or might become unaffordable to smaller stations.

Matters says they've gotten some cash donations and new sustaining memberships in the past

week that will hopefully be the start of an increase in revenue to help fill the new funding gaps. "We will be relying on our efforts to bring in new business underwriting as well

as roll up our sleeves on finding new individual donors. Folks can make a one-time donation or sign up to contribute monthly at our website kwsso.org."



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More federal cuts to tribes

A proposed federal freeze on federal grants would cut \$24.5 billion in funding to Native communities for health, law enforcement, education and key social services. This is according to an analysis by the nonpartisan Brookings Institution.

If the cuts gain approval through the courts, they may violate treaty obligations to tribal nations, impacting nearly every tribe across the United States.

The funding freeze would impact Native people both on and off reservations, according to the report. The report found that since 2018, the federal government has obligated funding to more than 1,700 tribal governments, Native nonprofits and Native-owned businesses involving more than 750 programs.

The federal government has obligated nearly \$93 million in funds since 2018 through grants and cooperative agreements, but Brookings found that \$24.5 billion remains unpaid for more than 700 programs.

Those funds would be temporarily or permanently inaccessible if the order from the federal Office of Management and Budget, known as OMB, is allowed to go into effect.

"Nearly all tribes would be affected by a federal grant freeze, with many facing the prospect of losing tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars—funding that is critical for supporting some of the most historically underserved communities in the United States," the report concludes.

"When the federal government withholds funding from tribes and Native American people, it's not just a policy change. It's a violation of those commitments—putting essential services at risk and undermining tribal governing capacity."

A federal appeals court will decide if the administration has the legal authority to mass-suspend the grants, with arguments set in coming months in a lawsuit filed by the state of New York.



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