

Tribal Grants that Address Grave Environmental Problems on Indian Lands Would be Severely Cut

What challenges do tribal environmental assistance grants address?

There is a staggering need for funding to support programs that address significant public health and environmental problems on Indian lands.

- Nearly two million Native Americans live on Indian lands, which cover an area roughly the size of Idaho. Government figures show that rates of poverty and unemployment among Native Americans are the highest of any ethnic group in the U.S., while per capita income, education, home ownership and similar economic indicators are among the lowest.
- A 1999 study found that some 90,000 Native American families were homeless or living in substandard housing, with one out of five Indian homes lacking plumbing. While there is a general lack of comprehensive health data on tribes and their members, statistics suggest an alarming disparity in the health status of Native Americans compared to the general population, with much higher death rates for diabetes, tuberculosis, pneumonia and influenza.

States generally lack regulatory authority over tribal lands and early environmental statutes did not address them. EPA worked with tribes to protect Indian lands, and eventually Congress amended several major statutes to authorize the tribes to play the management role on their lands, rather than the states. The tribes, however, have limited resources needed to develop programs to protect their lands.

What will be lost if grants to Indian Country are slashed?

The proposed budget calls for 30% reductions in two critical tribal grant programs. A loss of a significant amount of funding is likely to:

- Delay or prevent tribal progress in building environmental capacity,
- Impede efforts to put programs in place that protect the environment and the vulnerable and overburdened children and adults who live in Indian Country, and
- Result in ongoing and serious risks to public health from environmental problems that continue to go unaddressed due to a lack of funding.

How does the tribal program achieve results?

EPA assistance is critical in helping tribes develop programs to protect public health and the environment in Indian Country. The agency provides several types of grant funding to the tribes:

- Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (GAP) – Under this grant program, authorized under the 1992 Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act, EPA has provided funds to 530 tribal governments and tribal groups for planning, developing and establishing environmental protection programs in Indian Country, and for creating and implementing solid and hazardous waste programs on tribal lands.
- Other tribal assistance grants – These grants fund tribal efforts to implement federal environmental programs, most notably for air pollution control programs.

Successes of the program

Tribes throughout the country have used these grants to establish tribal programs under the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, and other statutes and to assist EPA in implementing federal environmental programs on Indian land.

- Twenty-five tribes had active agreements to assist EPA by FY2014.
- Twenty-three tribal inspectors have obtained EPA certifications, and 200 tribes have established integrated plans to manage waste.
- EPA tribal air quality management grants have enabled tribes to build air management programs, assess air quality, establish site monitors and address violations of national air quality standards.

Baseline Budget FY 2016

Indian Environmental General Assistance Program and Tribal Air Quality Management grants -
Approximately \$78 million