

ADOT Officials Get Creative To Stay Within Severely Restricted Budget

By Tammy Gray-Searles

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By Tammy Gray-Searles While the State Transportation Board attempts to divide up federal funding for roadway construction, local Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) crews are finding creative ways to deal with an 11-percent cut to an already depleted budget. Holbrook District Engineer Lynn Johnson explained that ADOT recently had an overall 11-percent budget cut, causing the local district to curtail maintenance work and cut hours. "Every employee is now taking two days off a month without pay," Johnson noted. "That's one day every pay period." In addition, snow removal services have been cut back, and any rental equipment that is not absolutely essential has been returned. Johnson explained that the Holbrook district had been paying a monthly rate to a separate ADOT division to keep equipment handy, but to save money, that equipment has been turned in. "We don't want to endanger the public," he remarked, "but we need to cut back." Several service contracts, such as those for janitorial services at the district offices, have also been canceled, and employees are not allowed to work any overtime, except in case of a dire emergency. All training, except that which can be attended at no cost, such as a webinar, has been canceled, and no overnight travel is allowed. "Our hiring freeze that's been in effect for a long time is still in effect," Johnson added. All of the heavy equipment in the district has been parked, even if it doesn't incur a monthly rental charge, to save on costs such as fuel and mileage. "We've parked the heavy equipment unless there's something critical," Johnson said. "Crews are keeping busy with litter pickup, weed control and things that don't take heavy equipment to do." Prior to the 11-percent across the board budget cut, the district's project budget had already been reduced, leaving little funding for road maintenance. Johnson explained that, once again, he doesn't know what services will have to be reduced if the agency must cut the budget even further. One small bit of hope for work and projects may come from federal economic stimulus funding designated for highway construction projects. According to Johnson, the Holbrook District submitted a long list of projects that meet the criteria of the stimulus funding. The State Transportation Board met Tuesday to discuss the potential expenditures. Details of the projects selected by the board for funding are included in a separate article. "We submitted quite a few," he said. In the meantime, district crews will attempt to do as much maintenance as possible while staying within the parameters of the severely restricted budget.