



April 22, 2025

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Media contacts:**

Joshua Watts, [jwatts@archaeologysouthwest.org](mailto:jwatts@archaeologysouthwest.org), 480-326-6421

Skylar Begay, [skylar@archaeologysouthwest.org](mailto:skylar@archaeologysouthwest.org), 520-367-5338

Kate Sarther, [kate@archaeologysouthwest.org](mailto:kate@archaeologysouthwest.org), 520-818-8033

## Archaeology Southwest Prepares to Fight Unlawful Grant Termination

*DOGE-rescinded award supported regional nonprofit's collaborative project with Tribes regarding culturally important animal and plant species*

TUCSON, Ariz. (April 22, 2025)—On April 2, 2025, Tucson-based nonprofit Archaeology Southwest received digital correspondence stating that the organization's [recently awarded \\$350,000 National Endowment for the Humanities \(NEH\) grant](#) was terminated. The funding, which had in January been bestowed upon Archaeology Southwest's [cyberSW](#) program by the prestigious and highly competitive Digital Humanities Advancement Grant Program, was the third-largest awarded by NEH in 2025. The nonspecific termination letter was signed by Acting NEH Director Michael McDonald.

The grant supported development of a digital Indigenous field guide of key Sonoran Desert plant and animal species in partnership with local Indigenous nations, including a formal partnership with the Gila River Indian Community, as well as improvements to the cyberSW database's open-access web platform.

The email correspondence justified the termination by stating that the grant “no longer effectuates the agency's [NEH] needs and priorities,” and concluded, “Please remember that your obligations under the Grant Agreement continue to apply. Additionally, the NEH may conduct an audit after the termination of your grant.”

“We were notified via an email address that didn't end in a dot gov,” said **Steve Nash, Archaeology Southwest's president and CEO**. “It looked like the kind of shady email you instinctively know not to open.”

“This is the first time a federal granting agency has reneged on an award in our 35-year history, and it sets a dangerous precedent,” said **Joshua Watts, cyberSW manager and principal investigator** on the terminated grant. “The gutting of federal programs, including NEH and the work the agency supports, is not just an abstract or symbolic policy shift. These moves deny critical resources to real people doing important work in communities across the US. [Our work on the cyberSW Digital Indigenous Field Guide is one very real local example of this, affecting Archaeology Southwest and Tribes in southern Arizona.](#)”

The award had included funding for stipends for Indigenous participants.

Archaeology Southwest is in the process of strenuously appealing the termination, and is urging Arizona elected representatives to restore funding to NEH and reverse what the nonprofit contends are erratic terminations of this and other awards already granted by this American institution. The cyberSW team is adamant that its work with and commitments to Tribes involved in the project will continue.

*Archaeology Southwest also issues the following statements:*

**Jeffery Clark, Vice President for Research at Archaeology Southwest:**

“Archaeology Southwest has a decades-long history of successfully securing highly competitive grants to fund a wide gamut of collaborative research and projects. We spent a substantial amount of time and resources writing the proposal and planning this project. This capricious and unethical act is against NEH policy and betrays the trust between grantor and grantee.”

**Caitlynn Mayhew (Diné), cyberSW Native American Fellow:**

“The criteria for terminating federal grant programs are a directed attempt at ecocide, dismantling public education and interdisciplinary research, and systematically instilling fear in women and marginalized communities.”

**Sarah Oas, cyberSW Data Specialist:**

“Our ecosystems are changing at an alarming rate, and the field guide project would have placed a timely focus on keystone species, including Arizona’s iconic saguaros and the [cactus wren](#), both of which are experiencing steep population declines.”

**Skylar Begay (Diné), Director of Tribal Collaboration at Archaeology Southwest:**

“The sudden loss of \$350,000 will impact our organization and our partners in myriad negative ways. One potential impact is the termination of staff positions funded by this grant and others like it, including Indigenous staff. This grant was the culmination of years of work building relationships with Tribes in southern Arizona and putting in place collaborative frameworks and agreements. In other ways, it was just the beginning of collaborative research that had input from the start from local Indigenous communities. Although this is a substantial setback, ASW will continue to stand behind our commitments to collaboration with Tribes.”

**About cyberSW**

[cyberSW](#) is an online gateway to regional archaeological knowledge that supports big-picture research. A Tribal Working Group guides development, consults on priorities, and helps expand the platform to include data of interest to Tribes. cyberSW is headquartered at Archaeology Southwest and runs on the [Neo4j platform](#).

**About Archaeology Southwest**

Founded in 1989, [Archaeology Southwest](#) is a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Tucson, Arizona, on the homelands of the Tohono O’odham Nation and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe. We are privileged to work across the US Southwest and into northwestern Mexico on the Lands and Territories of many Indigenous Tribes and descendant communities.

We practice Preservation Archaeology, a holistic and conservation-based approach to understanding and protecting sites and landscapes for the histories they hold and the people they serve. We are committed to real and ongoing collaboration with Tribes in all areas of our work.

###

