Area Post Offices May See Hours Cut

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Jennifer Canfield/KMXT

Rural post offices across the country are off the chopping block as part of new plan proposed by the U.S. Postal Service last week. Instead of mass closures, the Postal Service has proposed to cut hours at over 13,000 locations. Over 90 locations in Alaska could see their hours cut; four of those are in the Kodiak area. Five post offices in Alaska are still being considered for closure. Ernie Swanson is a spokesperson for the Postal Service.

"The reasons they're on the list and perhaps other ones aren't is declining revenue. We're experiencing, of course, declining revenue, declining mail volume throughout the Postal Service but some offices seem to be declining at a greater rate and in some cases we have post offices that are quite close together where we could efficiently close one and serve the people from another location."

The Postal Service expects a $14.1 billion loss this year and the plan announced last week would save them about $500 million, or 3.5 percent. Post offices in Ouzinkie, Old Harbor and Larsen Bay would have their hours cut from eight per day to six. Pt. Lions would have their hours cut in half and Karluk would increase from two hours per day to six. Post offices that get increased hours- such as the one in Karluk- are slated to become administrative centers for surrounding locations. Swanson says that just like last year, the agency will hold public meetings in affected communities.

"We will be holding public meetings in all these communities where we are proposing to reduce the hours. We'll also be discussing with the people whether they

would feel they were getting adequate service if we contracted with a local business for something we call a village post office that would be able to provide limited postal services to the community but in most cases this would be like a commercial establishment open for longer hours than the 2,4, or 6 that we were proposing for their local post office."

The "village post office" Swanson mentions would have the Postal Service contracting with a local general store or other local business to offer basic postal services. The village post office model would save the Postal Service money, but it would also stop paychecks and benefits for postmasters in those areas. Swanson says nothing has been decided when it comes to the employees that will be affected by these cuts.

"It's up in the air to a certain extent. Right now postmasters are salaried and those offices where the hours are reduced to two, four or six would probably be paid on an hourly basis rather than salaried and there could be a possible reduction in their benefits along with that. That hasn't been completely determined at this point."

Last week's announcement comes at the end of a moratorium on post office closings that was to end May 16th. The five Alaska locations still up for closure are Ft. Wainwright, Eielson AFB, Elmendorf AFB, Douglas Station and the store inside the 5th Avenue Mall in Anchorage. The agency still wants to end Saturday delivery and will announce the fate of 223 mail sorting facilities that are slated for closure this week.