

# KSKO's One Man, Full-Time Operation Connects Interior Alaska

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KSKO in central Alaska.  
Photo by Paul Walker.

*Paul Walker, the self-professed “Alaska Radio Nerd” is the sole full-time employee of a station that provides news, music, and emergency services across a wide swath of central Alaska.*

When Paul Walker flips his phone camera around to give a virtual tour of [KSKO](#) and its compact studio in McGrath, Alaska, the screen fills with a maze of wires, weathered equipment, and the unmistakable charm of a place well-loved. “This is our rack of equipment,” Walker says with a mix of pride and humor. “It’s a result of managers like me knowing enough to get something done — we add on rather than take away.” As the station’s program director and only full-time employee, Walker navigates this labyrinth daily, ensuring that the voices and needs of interior Alaska’s remote communities are broadcast across the airwaves.

KSKO isn’t just any radio station. Alongside the McGrath studio, [a collection of seven repeater stations and two partner stations](#) broadcast widely — across stretches up to 150 miles in some directions, reaching villages across the center of Alaska where the population sometimes doesn’t even hit triple digits. Walker estimates that they serve around 1,200 people, so in a land where the internet is spotty and cell service is a luxury, radio remains a vital lifeline. “The cornerstone of KSKO’s local programming is weather forecasting and what we call ‘messages,’” Walker explains. These messages act as a community bulletin board, sharing everything from emergency alerts to mother moose sightings in town.

Walker's journey to KSKO is rooted in a lifelong passion for radio. "Ever since I was a little kid, I knew I wanted to be in radio," says the man who calls himself the "Alaska Radio Nerd." With over two decades in the industry, much of it in commercial radio, Walker found his calling in Alaska's unique broadcasting landscape. "I really got a firsthand experience as to just how important radio up here really is," he notes. "They depend on us for local information."

Operating largely alone, Walker's days are long but fulfilling. Living in the same building as the station, he starts before dawn, typically waking around 5:30 a.m. and heading into the studio by 5:45. "I don't move very fast at a quarter of six in the morning," he jokes. "The brain is just starting to rev on a couple cylinders." By 7 a.m., he's on air, hosting the morning show until 9 a.m., sharing weather updates, local news, and music carefully curated to match the day's mood. After a break, he then hops on to host the lunchtime show as well.

Between and after shows, Walker wears multiple hats — station manager, technical engineer, community liaison. He reaches out to the villages KSKO serves, gathering news and ensuring their voices are heard. Despite the challenges, he embraces the autonomy. "It's empowering," he says. "The board has never put their fingers in my programming pie. I'm entrusted."

KSKO plays a critical role during emergencies, a responsibility Walker takes seriously. During the spring thaw, known locally as "breakup," communities face the threat of floods as ice melts and rivers swell. "We broadcast information like, 'You have a high risk of a flood, and the forecast breakup date is approaching. Be on the lookout,'" he explains. In wildfire season, the station becomes a hub for evacuation notices and safety information.

The personal connections Walker fosters are evident in the stories he shares. He recounts how a few years ago the station chartered a small plane to visit some of the repeater stations, during which he visited an elderly listener in one of the villages. "She didn't know we were coming, but as soon as I spoke, she recognized my voice," he says. "She had a TV on, but it was turned down. She was listening to the radio. We are her outlet to the world."

Walker notes that these connections aren't limited to in-person visits. "We don't have caller ID up here on landlines," he explains. "But I have quite a few listeners that I know who's on the other end with the first words out of their mouth." This familiarity underscores the station's role as a community hub, where voices are recognized and relationships are nurtured over the airwaves.

Music programming at KSKO reflects the diverse cultures of its audience. While sourcing local artists directly in such small communities can be challenging, Walker incorporates regional music to resonate with listeners. "Even if the artists aren't from McGrath or our immediate area, we still consider it local," he says. The station also offers an eclectic mix of shows, from ["Native America Calling"](#) to unique programs like ["Cruising the Decades with Brad Savage,"](#) which KSKO helped bring to a global audience.

Walker's passion for radio extends beyond his professional duties. An avid radio hobbyist, he engages in "DXing," the practice of listening for distant radio signals. "Signals bouncing through the ether of the universe fascinate me to no end," he says. "I have actually [made news on](#)

[nationwide TV in Australia](#) for [...] picking up a station 8,000 miles away at the tip of Australia.” This hobby not only fuels his enthusiasm but also deepens his appreciation for the medium’s ability to connect people across vast distances. “Even though I know how radio waves work, the childhood magic of the fact that they do work has never left me,” he adds. Despite the logistical and technical challenges, Walker’s love for the station and the format keeps him dedicated to KSKO’s mission. “At the end of the day, I know I’ve made some amount of difference to someone,” he reflects. In a region where isolation is the norm, KSKO serves as a beacon of connection, whether on-air in each town or to anyone via [its stream](#). Through Paul’s commitment and ingenuity, and the station’s constant presence on-air, the voices of Interior Alaska’s remote communities are heard, their stories told, and their needs met.