**President Joe Biden has created more national monuments in a single term than any president since President Jimmy Carter left office in 1981.**

**Tribes and environmental advocates are pressing him to do even more.**

**The Mountain West News Bureau’s**[**Rachel Cohen**](https://www.kunc.org/people/rachel-cohen)**reports.**

After President Donald Trump shrunk the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante monuments in Utah, Biden’s first step was restoring them.

“And because of that, he really started thinking about monuments right from the get go. So you see much more activity than you usually see during the first term.”

Justin Pidot is a professor at the University of Arizona law school, who worked in the Biden and Obama administrations.

He says Biden has had a particular focus on monuments proposed by tribes. That includes Avi Kwa Ame established last year in Nevada. It’s a site sacred to the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, among others.

Before leaving the White House, Biden could designate more national monuments.

Local campaigns are advocating for protection of the Owyhee Canyonlands on the border of Oregon and Idaho and the Dolores Canyons in southwest Colorado.

**The Alutiiq Museum is currently under construction to expand its footprint near downtown Kodiak, April 8, 2024. (Photo: Brian Venua / KMXT)**

**The Alutiiq Museum received** about $150,000 to revamp the Koniag Cultural Library.

The grant comes as it’s finishing construction on its new building.

As KMXT’s [Brian Venua](https://www.kmxt.org/people/brian-venua) reports, staff say it’s good timing to have even more to show off at its future grand reopening.

The Alutiiq Museum has been closed for over a year for an expansion to nearly double its size.

Museum officials plan to display more items from its collections as well as feature more art from contemporary culture bearers.

But now with this grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the museum will make it easier than ever to access its library, too.

“In the past, we had a library – I don’t think anyone knew that.”

That’s Amanda Lancaster, the museum’s curator of collections.

Since 2018, the library has served as the official tribal library of Koniag, Kodiak’s regional Native corporation.

“It was in the basement, it was very inaccessible, you had to make an appointment, you had to have a staff member with you just because it was in the basement and sort of more of a staff space.”

The library features thousands of printed materials, hundreds of audio/visual items, and well over 10,000 photos as part of the collection for people to research Alutiiq culture.

The new funding will help the museum pay for renovations for a more friendly library space.

Lancaster says they’re aiming to have matching shelving units, furniture for a seating area and computers for research.

Patrons won’t need appointments or staff supervision just to be in there – they’ll just need to check in and use the library at their leisure.

**Conservationists and tribes say** they [intend to sue](https://www.westernwatersheds.org/2024/11/conservation-groups-file-notice-to-sue-u-s-fish-and-wildlife-service-over-failure-to-protect-endangered-springsnail/) the federal government if it doesn’t take steps to protect a rare snail – which is threatened by a lithium mine.

The Mountain West News Bureau’s [Kaleb Roedel](https://www.kunr.org/people/kaleb-roedel) has more.

The Kings River pyrg is *tiny* – about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen. And it’s found only in an area of Nevada called Thacker Pass, where there are plans to mine lithium, the key ingredient for electric car batteries.

Paul Ruprecht is with the Western Watersheds Project.

He says mining will shrink the small springs that the snail relies on.

“The species is really vulnerable because fluctuations in water availability could really impact its ability to continue to exist in these areas.”

The conservation group had previously petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service to list the snail as endangered.

The agency was supposed to make a decision this year, but never did.

So the nonprofit and several tribes informed the government they intend to sue.

The People of Red Mountain is a group of knowledge keepers from the Fort McDermitt Paiute, Shoshone, and Bannock Tribes.

They say they have a cultural responsibility to protect native species in the area.

Federal officials now have until mid-January to respond.

‘We’re just hoping that it will make it much more accessible so that people will want to come and use it.”

While the new money won’t cover new acquisitions, it could make room for future donations.

“It’s going to be much larger and much more spacious and (have) space to sit and read.”

It’s also a reason to recatalog and reorganize all of those resources.

“I’m just really excited to have one sort of dedicated project where we make sure everything’s in the right space.”

After the renovations, the grant will also pay for an outreach effort to solicit comments on how to make the library as useful as possible.

The Alutiiq Museum is set to have a grand reopening in May.

**Hundreds of volunteers from Utah and Idaho gathered recently to help** the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation restore the site of the Bear River Massacre.

For the Mountain West News Bureau, [Clarissa Casper](https://www.sltrib.com/staff/ccasper%40sltrib.com/) of the Salt Lake Tribune and Utah Public Radio has more.

Rios Pacheco stood on the land where, in 1863, his ancestors were victims of one of the deadliest massacres of Native Americans in United States’ history.

Behind him, across the site of the Bear River Massacre, hundreds of volunteers planted native shrubs and trees –– a collective effort to heal what was taken from both the land and the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation.

For Pacheco, who serves as the tribe’s spiritual leader, planting native plants on the land where hundreds of his ancestors’ lives were stolen is a way to not only restore the ecological balance of the area but also to heal the spirits of his people.

Once you plant something in the ground, he said, life is restored.

Through the plants, he feels connected to his ancestors.

Planting native species on this sacred ground is a way for his people to return and heal –– much like a plant regenerates from its own seeds.

In reconnecting with the land and honoring the memories of those who survived, the plants offer both renewal and forgiveness for the past, he said.

“That’s just like the plants. When you plant them, the forgiveness comes by taking care of them, fertilizing them, watering them, so that way that plant will grow again.”

The Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation began its journey to ecologically and spiritually restore the site of the Bear River Massacre in 2018 when it purchased approximately 350 acres of their ancestral land just north of Preston, Idaho.

This is the second year the tribe has held a planting weekend at the site for volunteers, and the second time hundreds of individuals from both Utah and Idaho have dedicated their time to the effort.

The Bear River Massacre occurred during one of the coldest winters his ancestors experienced at the site, Pacheco said.

His people would camp in the valley where the attack occurred during winters because of the warmth the area provided with surrounding hot springs.

The tribe’s efforts to heal the site –– named “Wuda Ogwa,” which directly translates to “Bear River” –– are also meant to honor the plants that used to be abundant in the area and aided Pacheco’s ancestors in a variety of ways.

Because Wuda Ogwa is primarily a wetland habitat, many of the native plants that volunteers planted on Friday and Saturday were water-based and will help filter the river,

Pacheco said the tribe has also made efforts to build beaver analogs to hopefully bring beavers back to the area to perform their beneficial river duties.

As volunteers worked, Pacheco observed them and heard them share stories about the plants they planted last year and the friendships they have developed through the effort.

“You’re not just elevating the landscape. You’re elevating your inner spirits.”

Although the tribe has only involved the broader public in its project since 2023, a great deal of work has been done to prepare the land for the new plants.

For the past three years, the Utah Conservation Corps has been removing thousands of invasive Russian olive trees that have invaded Wuda Ogwa’s floodplain since the massacre.

This tree, according to UCC Northern Regional Coordinator Ben Borgmann-Winter, outcompetes the native vegetation the tribe hopes to revive in the area.

Russian olives also serve as “junk food” for wildlife, Borgmann-Winter said, as their olives are high in sugar and not nutritionally valuable.

In addition, these trees channelize and hold riverbanks in place, leading to various issues, including lowering the water table and decreasing moisture levels in the soil.

They also siphon an estimated 75 gallons each day from the Bear River that could ultimately make its way to the Great Salt Lake, Borgmann-Winter said.

“This is a really special space, a sacred space. Look at how many hundreds of volunteers are here right now from all over Utah, all over Idaho. It’s a pretty special project. We’re very honored to be involved in that.”

The tribe’s big-picture vision for the land includes planting 300,000 native shrubs and trees, cleaning up the land’s creeks, and restoring degraded agricultural fields into wetlands abundant with life.