

Biden, in environment push, protects lands near Grand Canyon

August 9 2023, by Jim Watson, with Aurelia End in Washington



US President Joe Biden signed a new national monument into existence in Arizona, protecting a wide swath of lands surrounding the Grand Canyon National Park and deemed sacred by some Native Americans.

Joe Biden used the backdrop of the Grand Canyon Tuesday to champion the climate fight—and distinguish himself from the Republican

right—by designating large swathes of surrounding sacred land with protective status.

The US president, kicking off a three-day tour of the American southwest, pumped his fist after signing into existence the country's newest [national monument](#), with Native Americans dressed in traditional outfits and headdresses standing at his side.

"Folks, preserving these lands is good not only for Arizona (and) for the planet. It's good for the economy, it's good for the soul of the nation," said Biden, shielded from the sun by his cap and dark sunglasses as he spoke before a landscape of grasses, shrubs and juniper-dotted hillsides.

The national monument—which designates that the area's natural wealth, historical significance and economic interest have earned it special protection status—is a place of unique biodiversity that has long been cherished by local Native American tribes.

The groups hold it in high spiritual significance and have sought curbs on mining activity around the sweeping, spectacular river valley for decades.

'Our ancestral footprints'

The territory created Tuesday will be known as Baaj Nwaavjo I'tah Kukveni—Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon. The name is derived from phrases in the languages of the Havasupai Indians and the Hopi, which translate to "where Indigenous peoples roam" and "our ancestral footprints."

It will conserve nearly one million acres (about 405,000 hectares) made up of three distinct areas surrounding the Grand Canyon, an immense gorge up to 6,000 feet (1,800 meters) deep carved over millennia by the

Colorado River into endless strata of colorful rock.

According to the White House, the area's protected status will now prohibit new uranium mining projects on the site, without affecting existing mining rights.

Grassroots [environmental group](#) the Sierra Club hailed Biden's move as a "historic step" that safeguards traditional use and "ensures these lands will be protected for generations to come."

Biden was due to enjoy his own moment of contemplation Tuesday at the rim of the nearby Grand Canyon, an iconic landscape of the American West that he hailed as a "national treasure."

The world-famous tourist attraction was formalized as a national park in 1919.

"There's more work ahead to combat the existential threat of climate change," the Democrat said.



The South Rim of the Grand Canyon offers a spectacular view - and a backdrop for US President Joe Biden as he announces a new nearby national monument.

The visit comes as southwestern states, Arizona in particular, bake under a brutal, record-setting heat wave and drought crisis.

Biden, who at age 80 is seeking a second term in the 2024 presidential election, is also using the trip to set himself apart from the Republican opposition.

Referring in part to Indigenous tribes driven from their lands, Biden castigated unnamed officials in some conservative-run states who "seek to ban books and bury history."

He also criticized the most radical forces in the Republican Party for "trying to undo" a centerpiece of his first term in office, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)—a landmark law for boosting green investment—that he signed into law last August.

Failure to act?

The White House is keen to mark the anniversary of this mammoth package of climate investments and other programs, which Biden described Tuesday as largest climate bill "in the history of the world."

Biden regularly describes climate change as an existential threat, and criticizes his Republican opponents for failure to act on the issue.

Among Biden's climate pledges is to halve the country's CO₂ emissions by 2030.

"We're well on our way," he proclaimed Tuesday, even as many experts, while applauding the Democrat's initiatives, say that aspirational deadline won't be met.

The IRA funnels some \$370 billion into subsidies for America's energy transition, including tax breaks for US-made [electric vehicles](#) and batteries—domestic incentives that have irked US trading partners.

Biden will be emphasizing new factories and his "Bidenomics" economic agenda on Wednesday when he visits New Mexico, followed by a Thursday trip to Utah, where he will highlight programs that help military veterans.

Utah is represented in the US Senate by Mitt Romney, who strongly condemned Biden's national monument for limiting new uranium mining.

"By eliminating this important source of uranium, President Biden has increased both our dependence on Russia and China and our ultimate carbon footprint, while decreasing our energy efficiency," Republican Romney said in a statement.

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