Alutiiq Museum, Koniag to Explore New Archaeological Sites

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

The Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository is partnering with Koniag, Inc. to explore new archaeological sites around the archipelago that have yet to be investigated.

The 16-month land surveying project will open the door for new discoveries and help the museum, and Koniag, better explore what Archaeologist Amy Steffian calls Kodiak’s amazingly rich archaeological record.

“It’s Alutiiq history in the ground, a library of Alutiiq history, if you would,” she said.

Steffian will work alongside Lead Archaeologist Patrick Saltonstall to explore Koniag lands on Afognak Island and parts of Kodiak.

“Izhuit Bay is one area, and up near Malina Creek, in that area as well, he’ll be in those two areas. And then next spring we’re going to send our team down the Sturgeon River,” she said. “We’ve never done a lot of work on these sort of large interior streams that don’t have lakes, because typically lake-headed streams have lots of sites. But Patrick will be going down the Sturgeon River to look for sites on that system, we know there are a few.”

From there, Steffian said the crew will travel to the west side of Kodiak to examine known, but unexplored sites in Uyak Bay.

“We know a lot about the sites in Uyak Bay, but we haven’t looked at them in probably, oh, over 20 years. So we’re very excited to get out there and not only look for new sites but evaluate the sites we know have been there for awhile.”

Alutiiq Museum Director Alisha Drabek said the money for the surveying project came from the National Park Service’s Tribal Historic Preservation Fund, at the request of Koniag.

“They submitted a proposal to the National Park Service for a grant,” she said.

The financial support, totaling about $39,500, will also allow the archaeologists to develop a proposal for Koniag on cultural resource management.

“After they have completed their site surveys they will be working on producing a report about the conditions of the site,” she said. “They’ll be discussing with Koniag land managers to look at maybe imminent threats to integrity of the site, as well as any recommended action for continued preservation or research of the resources there.”

Drabek said this could be the beginning of many more partnerships with other land owners. She said the museum will be sharing a report with the Koniag Region Land and Natural Resources Committee, a group of Native Corporations from across the archipelago.

“Throughout our region we’ve had a number of research studies conducted, and there’s a great deal of information that we know, but there’s still so much more that we should know and there’s also resources that are at risk. And through this process we’ll be able to work with other land owners to consider doing site surveys as well.”

Other areas that will be included in the Koniag Lands Survey Project are Perenosa Bay and Paramanof Bay on Afognak Island.