Name of Property: 1956 Grand Canyon TWA-United Airlines Aviation Accident Site
City, State: Grand Canyon, Nevada
Significant Dates: June 30-July 12, 1956
NHL Criteria: 1
NHL Theme: V. Developing the American Economy
3. Transportation and Communication
Previous Recognition: Grand Canyon National Park Archeological Site AZ:C:13:0755
National Historic Context: 2011 *American Aviation Heritage National Historic Landmarks Theme Study*

NHL Significance:

- The 1956 mid-air collision between commercial airliners TWA and United Airlines is associated with the modernization of America's aviation airways. In the decade after World War II, congested airspace and inadequate aviation facilities caused an "airways crisis." In this situation, civilian and military aircraft operated under separate air traffic control systems, and pilots in uncontrolled airspace flew under the "see and be seen" principle with little or no external traffic control assistance. Efforts to address the airway crisis under the Eisenhower administration had begun, but the air traffic control system was outdated and the specter of a mid-air collision loomed.
- On June 30, 1956, under the "see and be seen" principle, a Trans World Airlines Super Constellation L-1049 and a United Airlines DC-7 collided in uncongested airspace 21,000 feet over the Grand Canyon in Arizona, killing all 128 people onboard the two flights. It was the worst aviation disaster to date. The Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), army helicopter pilots, mountaineering teams, and the National Park Service conducted a challenging recovery effort within two impact sites and a debris area covering over 1,000 acres. Clues from the aircraft wreckage, the distribution of aircraft parts, and interviews with air traffic controllers led the CAB to cite the collision's probable cause as the failure of the pilots to see one another. Regarded as an important watershed in aviation history, the accident dramatically accelerated movements already underway to address the airways crisis. Public reaction to the tragedy spurred congressional funding in an unprecedented effort to modernize America's postwar airways with nationwide radar coverage, a common military/civilian navigation system, and new flight rules placing all aircraft above 15,000 feet under

control of ground personnel. Technologies such as collision avoidance systems and flight data recorders were rapidly developed. In August 1957, President Eisenhower signed the Airways Modernization Act, a prelude to the establishment of the independent Federal Aviation Agency (renamed the Federal Aviation Administration in 1967).

Integrity:

- The hundreds of pieces of aircraft material and the evidence of land disturbance that remain in this remote section of the canyon's vast landscape make this property very compelling. The site's isolation conveys a sense of the accident's improbability due to the area's uncongested airspace, the challenges associated with recovering accident victims, and the accident investigation.

Owner of Property: National Park Service

Acreage of Property: 1,332 acres

Origins of Nomination: The National Park Service Intermountain Regional Office (Denver), the Grand Canyon National Park, and the Northern Arizona University developed this nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation as an NHL will assist in protecting and recognizing a seminal event in the nation's postwar airways crisis.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of):

Advisory Board Recommendation: