

# Denali Air Tour Operators Best Practices to Minimize Sound Impacts

## Introduction:

The Denali Overflights Council has identified sound sensitive areas in Denali National Park, where competing uses among park visitors engaging in ground activities (hiking, camping, climbing, etc.) are in conflict with visitors who are experiencing the park via air tours.

To minimize these conflicts, a working group comprised of council members and air tour operators has developed a set of “best practices” to adjust flight patterns, when safety permits, to reduce the sound impact in these key areas. Where practical, the goal is to separate aircraft from park visitors on the ground.

Aviation safety is identified as the top priority when conducting flight operations by air tour operators. While the voluntary procedures described below are recommended, they are subject to the influence of weather, and local operator and transient traffic operations which may require that aircraft and helicopters deviate from these procedures to preserve safety for pilots and passenger safety. The Denali Air Tour Operators use the Best Practices defined in this document to minimize noise conflicts, and in addition participate in annual operator meetings to mitigate potential conflicts among individual operators who participate in this program.

## **Area 1) Triple Lakes Departures and Arrivals**

Nature of surface activity: The Triple Lakes trail is heavily used by day hikers during the summer months between the Parks Highway and Triple Lakes.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators departing from the Denali (Private) Airstrip to the north will extend their climb beyond the Triple Lakes when practical before turning west. Aircraft arriving from the west will plan their approach to use minimum power settings to reduce sound impacts on this area. Helicopters departing from the ERA Heliport proceed upriver in a maximum allowed performance climb to Crisscross, before turning west to cross the Triple Lakes Trail.

## **Area 2) Superseded: See Area 6 North Side/Park Road Region**

## **Area 3) Mt. McKinley Summit Flights**

Nature of surface activity: During climbing season (late April to early July) climbers at the high camps, 14,000 and 17,000 foot camps and enroute to the summit are subject to aircraft sound from summit flights.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators conducting summit flights are requested to avoid the 17,000 and the 14,000 foot camps and make approaches east of the south summit and north of the north summit. The goal is to minimize sound impact on the high camps and along the summit route by not flying close to these areas.

#### **Area 4) Kahiltna Pass Crossings**

Nature of surface activity: During climbing season (late April to early July) climbers traveling up the Kahiltna Glacier and located at the 11,000 foot camp are subject to sound from aircraft crossing Kahiltna Pass.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators planning to fly through Kahiltna Pass are asked climb to a safe crossing altitude well before arriving at the pass and avoid orbiting at climb power in or south of the pass to minimize sound impact for climbers.

#### **Area 5) Ruth Gorge**

Nature of surface activity: During the climbing season (late April to mid-June) climbers may be utilizing the Ruth Gorge. The gorge can channel aircraft sound, which may disturb climbers who are camping, traveling and climbing in this area.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators who are conducting scenic flight tours and Ruth Mountain House glacier landings can minimize overflights of this area when weather allows by using Pittock Pass or Buckskin Gap when accessing the Ruth Amphitheater from the south.

Flight tours transitioning across the gorge are encouraged to fly north or south of the Ruth Gorge, or above 10,000', when able.

When leaving the Ruth Amphitheater via the Ruth Gorge, operators are requested to fly directly through the gorge at low RPM settings, and to fly on the right side to minimize sound impacts at the camping areas in the middle of the gorge and to avoid possible conflicting traffic.

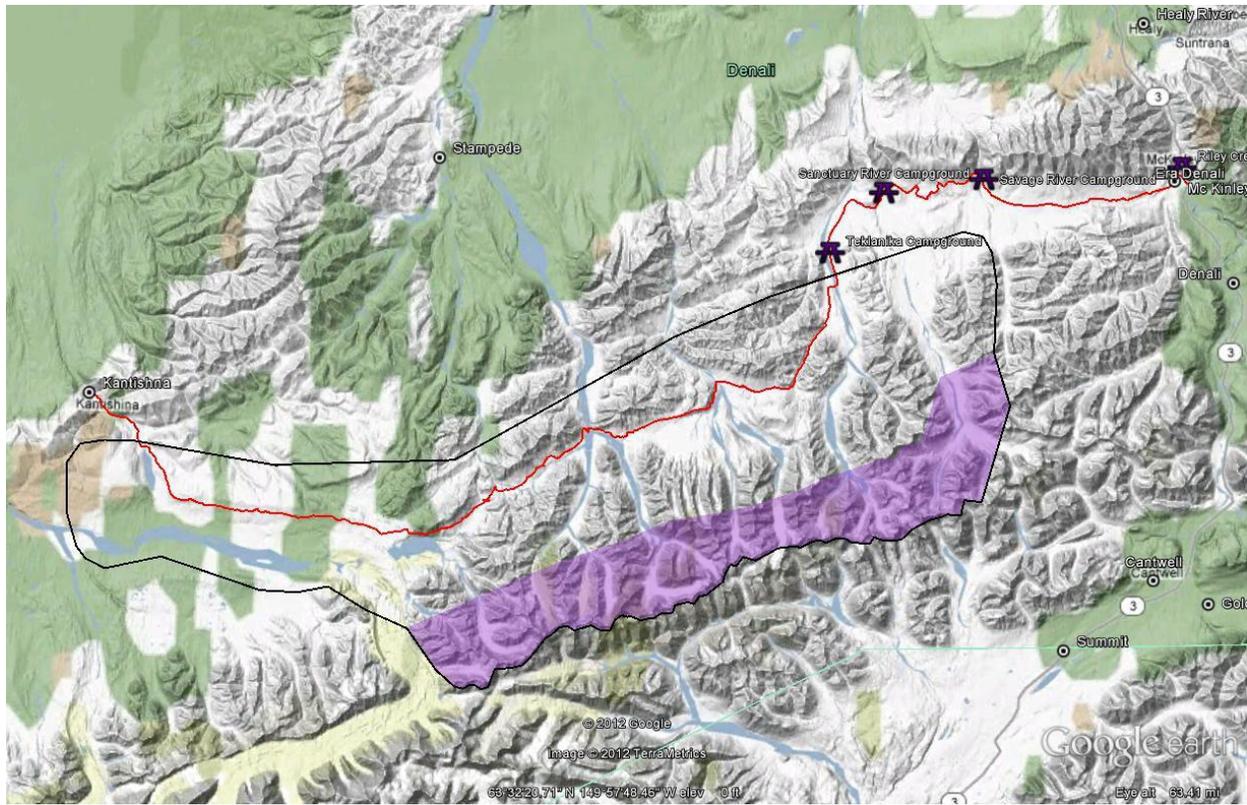
#### **Area 6) North Side/Park Road Region**

Nature of surface activity: During the summer visitor season (June 1 to Sept. 15), the bulk of Denali hikers and backpackers utilize the area from north of the park road, south to near the crest of the Alaska Range. While the largest concentration of surface activity is in the corridor along the park road, the zone along the north side of the Alaska Range crest has been identified as the area where backpackers are most sensitive to aircraft operations. (See purple area on map below.) All the lands inside the boundaries of this region are designated Wilderness and have been assigned the highest level of soundscape protection by the Denali Backcountry Plan.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operator's transiting this area are asked to maintain an altitude of 8,000 feet MSL, and to use minimum RPM settings, if not in a descending flight pattern, to reduce sound impacts. When weather and safety considerations allow, avoid the zone immediately north of the spine of the Alaska Range (see purple area on map below). In the remainder of the zone, spread flights out to minimize sound impacts in any one area.

Campgrounds outside the zone (see symbols on map) also represent concentrations of people, and should be avoided when possible.

### North Side/Park Road Sound Sensitive Area



### Summary

These procedures are designed to reduce sound impact in these key areas of Denali National Park. They are subject to refinement and revision as operational experience is gained.

Revised, April 23, 2012