

ARCHIVED NEWS RELEASE

July 9, 1999

## **FAA Announces Latest Plans To Restore Natural Quiet At Grand Canyon National Park**

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) today released a set of proposals that bring the National Park Service (NPS) closer to achieving the congressionally mandated goal of "substantially restoring natural quiet" at Grand Canyon National Park (AZ). The NPS defines natural quiet as the natural ambient sound conditions (e.g. non-mechanized sounds) found in the park, and defines substantial restoration as over half of the park meeting those conditions more than three-fourths of each day. The proposals were drafted by the two agencies over the past two years and included extensive consultation with Native American tribes.

The NPS has a clear legislative mandate to preserve the national parks unimpaired for the enjoyment and inspiration of this and future generations. Through this cooperative effort by the NPS and FAA, visitors to Grand Canyon National Park will have a greater opportunity to experience natural sounds of the park, a resource that is becoming increasingly rare in our modern, mechanized world. National parks prevail as some of the best places to hear the calls of wildlife and the melodies of wind and water. One reason national parks remain such special places is that, among other things, they preserve the unique resource of natural quiet.

"When visiting a national park, people should have an opportunity to hear the call of a raven or the howl of a coyote; the rush of the streams and rivers, fluttering of leaves, the whistling of wind and other natural sounds," stated Jackie Lowey, Deputy Director for the National Park Service. "It is an important responsibility of the National Park Service to provide an opportunity for people to experience these valuable resources. These most recent actions move us closer to ensuring that Grand Canyon National Park will be conserved and experienced as Congress intended in 1919 when it created the park."

With the passage of the National Parks Overflights Act in 1987, Congress instructed the NPS and the FAA to work together to substantially restore the natural quiet and experience of the park. Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) 50-2 became effective in late 1988 and established minimum altitudes and flight-free zones over the park. However, despite this and subsequent rulemaking by the two agencies, the park's natural quiet has continued to erode as commercial air tour operations increased.

In 1996, President Clinton issued an Executive Order directing the agencies to work together to substantially restore natural quiet at Grand Canyon National Park by 2008. The FAA regulations put the park service on track to accomplish that goal.

The documents released today by the FAA include a Notice of Availability (NOA) of routes to be flown by commercial air tour operators; a draft regulation modifying the airspace, including flight-free zones and

minimum altitudes; and a regulation temporarily freezing the number of commercial air tours over the park until the NPS and FAA analyze noise conditions and develop a Comprehensive Noise Management Plan.

These proposals, together with other rulemaking published in December 1996, extend and increase the protection initiated twelve years ago by SFAR 50-2. The new rules will allow for the continuation of air tours over the park, but will reduce their overall impact substantially by redirecting routes from especially sensitive areas and temporarily limiting additional growth in operations.

The public comment period will extend 60 days from the date of publication of the notices in the Federal Register. Copies of the regulation temporarily freezing the number of commercial air tours and the NOA are available by contacting the FAA Office of Flight Standards, at (202) 267-8321. For a copy of the draft regulation modifying the airspace, including flight-free zones and minimum altitudes, contact the FAA Office of Air Traffic Airspace, Airspace and Rules Division at (202) 267-8783.

The FAA documents listed above are also available on the Federal Register's web site at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>

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