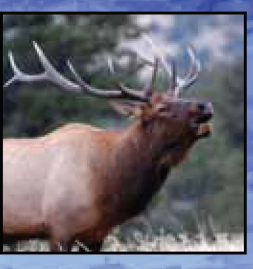
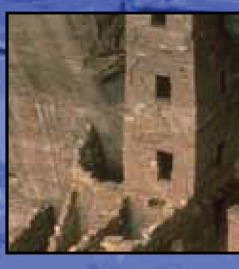
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

A National Park Guide: Protecting and Enhancing Soundscapes





Natural Sounds Program Mission

"…to protect, maintain, or restore acoustical environments throughout the National Park System. We fulfill this mission by working in partnership with parks and others to increase scientific and public understanding of the value and character of soundscapes and to eliminate or minimize noise intrusions"

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Natural Sounds Program
Natural Resource Program Center
1201 Oakridge Drive, Suite 100
Fort Collins, CO 80525-5596

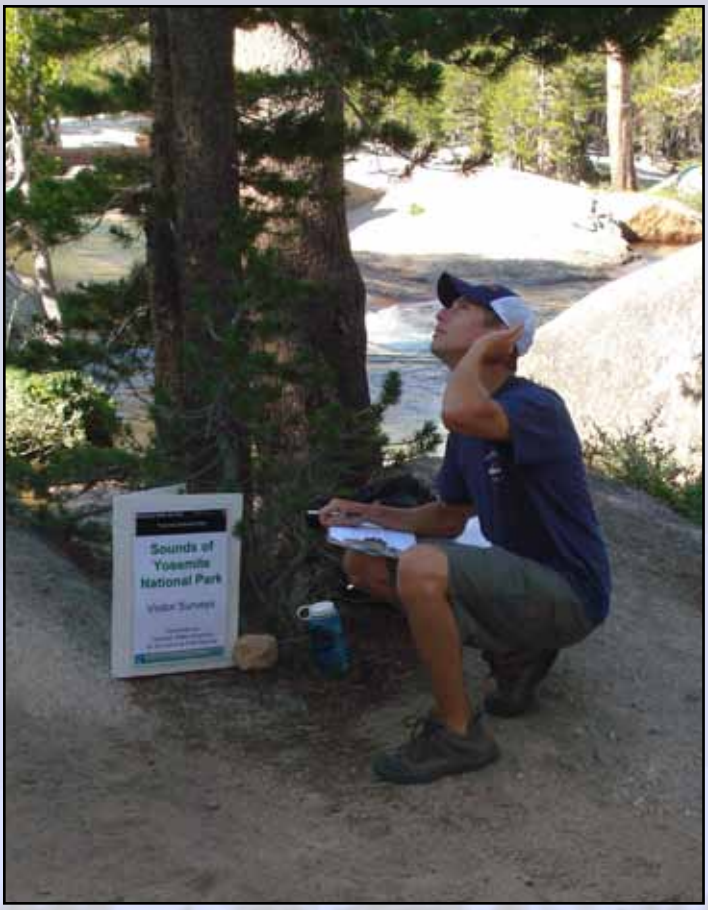
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Content by: Randy Stanley / Natural Sounds Program Team
Editing, Design, Layout by: Ericka Pilcher

Take a moment to close your eyes and listen to the sounds around you. You may be surprised by what you hear.



A visitor in Yosemite National Park enjoys the sound of the Tuolumne River while participating in a listening exercise and survey about park sounds.

A Fascinating World of Sounds Awaits You

Our ability to see is a powerful tool for experiencing the world, but sound adds a richness that sight alone cannot provide. In many cases, hearing is the only option for experiencing certain aspects of our environment. Listening to natural sounds can present the best opportunities to find wildlife because animals can often be heard even when they cannot be seen. Noise impacts the acoustical environment much like smog impacts the visual environment; it obscures the listening horizon for both visitors and wildlife.

An appropriate acoustical environment is also an important element in how we experience the cultural and historic resources in the national parks. Visitors want to immerse themselves in the historic time period or cultural expressions associated with a site. The quiet of a civil war battlefield can evoke reflection and feelings of reverence; silence and the sound of gulls heard from a jail cell on Alcatraz Island can elicit feelings of empathy, despair or isolation.

Noise from various sources such as recreational vehicles, transportation, construction equipment, and energy development can detract from the overall enjoyment of their experience. The National Park Service manages park units to protect natural, cultural, and historic sounds they consider fundamental to the purposes and values for which the parks were established.

How Can I Enhance My Soundscape Experience?

Visitors and park employees can improve their natural and cultural soundscape experience in our national parks by simply becoming more aware of the sounds around them. By taking steps to protect park soundscapes, we can hear and see more of our parks including wildlife that might otherwise move away from noise sources. Here are a few simple steps for getting started:



Minimize Your Noise Footprint

• Speak softly when having conversations, especially on hiking trails and at campsites.

• Be aware that the noise you make could affect other visitors, and encourage friends and family to do the same.

• Be considerate of campground quiet hours.

• Look for mute options on electronic equipment such as cell phones, watches, or cameras.

• Turn off cell phones / avoid using speakerphones.

• Consider leaving iPods and or personal radios in the car or at home.

• Avoid using external speakers that others can hear.

Enjoy a Quieter Ride

• Turn off car alarms and disable sounds on electronic door locks.

• Use alternative transportation such as shuttles.

• Turn off vehicle engines when stopped at wildlife traffic jams, overlooks, or roadside pullouts. Idling vehicles create unnecessary noise.

• Keep car radio volume at a low level to avoid disturbing other visitors.

• Turn off radios and open windows to hear interesting park sounds.

• Drive at posted speed limits (driving faster creates more noise).

• Don't rev it up! Ride motorcycles respectfully in parks.



Free hybrid shuttle bus in Yosemite National Park

Plan for the Future

• Reduce unwanted exhaust noise by replacing faulty mufflers or installing quieter models.

• Check for Environmental Protection Agency noise certifications especially for motorcycle exhaust systems.

• To achieve a more pleasant ride and a quiet environment, install quiet tire models. Check tire noise ratings at Consumer Reports.

• Rent a hybrid vehicle while on vacation.

• Reduce and repair vehicle rattles and other problems that cause excessive noise.

Enjoy !

