DRAFT
National Parks Overflights Advisory Group Meeting Summary
July 22-23, 2014
Marriott Hotel / Windsor Room
350 East Horsetooth Road
Fort Collins, CO 80525

The National Park Overflights Advisory Group (NPOAG) met July 22-23, 2014 at the Marriott Hotel in Fort Collins, Colorado. The purpose of this meeting was to hear about the implementation of the new air tour operator reporting requirements, agency research on effects of aviation noise on park visitors, status updates on specific park unit plans, and Grand Canyon quiet technology incentives.

This summary provides a general overview of the meeting topics and discussion. While topics are provided in chronological order, some have been consolidated to represent discussion as a whole even though some topics may have received comments at different times during the day.

July 22

- **Introductions/Welcome**
- Dale Bouffiou – NPOAG Chair, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
    - Request suggestions for improvement
    - NPOAG Vacancies – 2 open environmental seats (Greg Miller recently resigned), Rory Majenty (tribal representative) up next year
    - Voluntary Agreement (VA) for Big Cypress out for public review, a few more out this year
    - Discuss reporting requirements
    - Initiated 2 quiet technology incentives at Grand Canyon
    - Glen Martin new regional administrator in Western-Pacific Region
- Bruce Peacock, Acting Deputy Associate Director, Natural Resource Stewardship and Science (NRSS), National Park Service (NPS) -
    - Bert Frost's position (Associate Director, NRSS) is open
    - Excited to be involved
- Vicki Ward, Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division (NSNSD), NPS – NPOAG Co-Chair
    - Karen Trevino (Chief, NSNSD) sends her regrets that she could not attend
    - Last year tough due to hiring freeze and budgets
    - Brent Lignell hired a year ago and has responsibility for processing air tour reports
    - Hoping to hire another overflights planner
    - A lot of progress on VA's
    - 2 vacant environmental positions on NPOAG, please refer anyone interested

- **Ground Rules**
  - Housekeeping
  - Vote on approval of September 19th 2013 Minutes – Accepted

- **Air Tour Reporting**
  - Presentation by Brent Lignell, Vicki Ward and Keith Lusk on the reporting requirement and reporting spreadsheet
  - Summary of presentation:
    - NPOAG members asked about opportunities to tweak requirements
    - The spreadsheet was based on Grand Canyon National Park reporting requirements- the agencies would like to improve it for reporting requirements under NPATMA
    - 33 parks qualified for the exemption from the requirement to prepare an air tour management plan or voluntary agreement due to 50 or fewer annual commercial air tour operations – NPS confirmed with the superintendents that they want to retain the exemption
    - When FAA and NPS have questions on reports that do not follow the template, the operator is contacted– no assumptions made on intent
    - FAA and NPS requested feedback on whether "cheat sheet" instructions were effective in improving use of the reporting spreadsheet.
    - Another 25 to 30 parks qualify for the exemption based on 2013 reporting data. – FAA and NPS will publish an updated list later this year
    - 95% of reported commercial air tours are at 7 national park units
  - Discussion
    - Native Hawaiian groups are included in consultations, but do not have the same legal requirements as other federally recognized tribes
    - Reporting does not apply to flights over tribal lands
    - At first getting 65% of air tour operators complying with reporting – now think they are getting close to 100%. Working out discrepancies to get an accurate list of operators with interim operating authority (IOA) due to time that has passed since IOA was issued in 2003.
    - Enforcement for those not reporting? Nothing strictly in place, FAA has rolled out reporting guidance, but in the process of updating B0-57 template and reporting requirement will be in Operating specifications . Then lack of reporting would be enforceable as a violation of op specs. Options will be fleshed out later in the year.
    - Does all the data requested in reporting need to be in the VA or is it for noise modeling? Maybe once a VA is in place less info can be reported.
    - Certain portions more burdensome to report? Operators may look at flights differently then what is in reporting requirement. Dynamic allocation of resources. Often notes section most valuable info in the report.

- Need a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request to get individual operator information requests by park (broken down by operator and by park).
- Discrepancy in preliminary operations reported – 90K vs 78K is due to one operator in NY who was operating outside park boundary and not required to report since the operator does not have IOA. 78K is final number.
- Example: Zion numbers – Operators stopped flying over Zion since IOAs issues
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- Some old data and old IOA that were questionable have been reconciled and updated.
- Updated IOA list is being worked on and will be provided (FOIA not needed).
- There is a list of current active IOA's but FAA and NPS don't always know who is still conducting air tours. . There is a lot of labor involved in collecting data. Not automated.
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o Reporting Suggestions – Template review
  - Departure Date – may not need exact date/time, but notes section could indicate typical operating windows – but would not be standard across operators. As currently set up, need one row for each flight
    - All Pro – expensive and would preclude small operators from using
    - Spider tracks – can't pull reports
    - Goal – lessen burden and maintain intent of data needed
    - Flight route – column could be simplified to a single character (each operator can define their own code)
    - *Action Item – can specific report be shared with NPOAG to see how data is coming in can be understood? Scrub specific operator info*
  - Make, model, and number of airplane – big part of burden – need for noise modeling but maybe can be in notes. Heli (Helicopter), FW (Fixed Wing), QT (quiet technology), etc. Let's work on coding so can have one character per type.
    - It's not the keying of the data. It's the gathering of the data that is the burden.
    - Even though requirement is quarterly operators do it monthly or it would be too much.
  - Departure airport or helipad
    - Can be removed
  - Top portion of form is necessary
  - Flight routes necessary

        - So one column can potentially be removed and then determine if individual items can be grouped to lessen burden.
- **Presentation on Agency Research on Effects of Aviation Noise on Park Visitors**
    - Q. Does the question how annoyed are you bias the answer?
        - Response: Legacy questionnaire – use for statistical comparisons
    - Q. Asking questions under an air tour corridor also biases answers
        - Response: Not all survey locations were under an air tour corridor – backcountry, camp sites, etc.
    - All locations chosen to give a variety of dose (aviation noise) information – both high and low
    - GPS card given to hikers – script "doing research on visitors to national parks and needed to know where they went." No verbiage on anything to do with noise or air tours.
    - Audio clip starts out with ambient, announced aircraft clip coming, 30 second clips, then questions asked.
        - Not a representation of everything they heard in the park
        - Intent to determine if audio clips can be used as a second way to collect dose response data. It was a test. There are many people who when asked annoyance – answer not at all.
        - Used to inform both agencies to determine if moving forward the agencies don't need to go into the field but can do it in a lab. Not just for dose response curves. Can they get the same statistically accurate answer in the lab as in the field? Then they can do more analysis if this is the case.
        - Statistical and financial restrictions they are trying to work with
        - In the first round of studies in the 1990s, the sites were front country so ambient was higher – When in backcountry area, lower ambient and predominant human caused sound is aircraft noise. So clips are pretty representative of what they would hear.
        - Distinguish between General Aviation (GA)? GA can be extracted out. That is why reporting data is so important. (Ex. Annoyance level of small children is in HR2.)
        - There is no legislative mandate to deal with military and GA overflights, but NPS does work with the military to try to improve conditions in parks. Another example was changing high altitude jet routes crossing over Rocky Mountain National Park as they approach Denver International Airport.
        - *Action Item – set up laptops with the audio clips at the next NPOAG meeting so members can experience*
    - *Q: Can NPOAG members have a copy of the power point presentation? Response: This is a preview for NPOAG but not ready to be released until peer reviewed. Hoping it will be published soon. Submitted in May/June – typically takes 6-9 months. Same data, different presentation*.

- *% of visitors that are backcountry varies from park to park. Q: Can someone provide that data? Would like to see parks with most tours and what that number is. Response: This information is not always available unless users get permits. Soundscapes are a park resource that needs to be protected whether there is 1 visitor or 100,000 visitor – tolerances are different for front and back country.*
- Q: Makes sense back country users are more sensitive – but how many is that over all the visitors to the park? Response: NPS will protect backcountry resources and visitor experience very rigorously.
- *Overlay of ambient noise vs aircraft noise in front country and backcountry – NPOAG members would like to see.*
- FAA and NPS sees this work presented as a small number of sites (7-8 sites) would like additional samples for overnight hikes. Studies provide strong foundations to look at air tour impacts. However agencies not ready to use it definitively yet. Very encouraged by results but not there yet.
- Time Audible correlation to backcountry dose response results have been matching expectations so far.
- Work going on for American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standard for soundscapes in parks. Would codify methods but not address standards.
- Q – Voluntary Agreements (VA's) can be established without analysis? VAs exempt from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), but not the use of data and information to inform and address park management issues.

- **Park Voluntary Agreement Updates**
  - Fees – 80% goes to park, 20% to a fund for fee demo money that other parks can compete for. – Projects must be specific to improving visitor experience.
  - If VA is terminated – oversight reverts back to IOA
  - 1 VA per park or 1 VA per operator per park? Big Cypress one per operator. But not decided for all parks yet. Makes sense to keep compartmentalized if things change with an operator but not with others. At Big Cypress operators were flying different routes. All other terms standard.
  - Preference at Glen Canyon one agreement so everyone knows what everyone is doing. Everyone does not need to do the same thing.
  - Does competitive bidding come in? Only for ATMPs. Not for VAs
  - VAs go out for public review, so even separate ones public. Operators would be a part of process of all before public though.
  - *Concern over some operators wanting more flights when there is "max" at a park? Ways to address that based on park resource concerns and other operators maybe not flying up to what they have for IOA (suggestion to include in Glen Canyon VA)*
  - *What happens if an operator goes away? Can other operators pick-up their flights? (suggestion to include in Glen Canyon VA)*

- Consultation with interested tribes on VA's – meet with elders to incorporate their concerns and then go to full council and president. Will determine best process on a tribe by tribe basis.
- So far all new entrant requests and modifications to IOA have been denied. Biscayne, Big Cypress, and Jefferson all have new entrants. Past ones have been denied for lack of information and would have had to go through NEPA compliance process. New legislation allows for new requests to be approved without NEPA process.
- Parks that have tribal land (Canyon de Chelley) still falls under ATMP/VA if managed/within legislative boundary of NPS. Other examples are easements at Acadia and Jefferson.
- Provisions for growth? For Big Cypress room for growth is built in the VA…this will be park specific. There is always the option to terminate or request an amendment.
- If a park's ATMP was started and could go exempt, NPS does not need to go through the withdrawal process if park wants to continue with a VA. At Biscayne there is a new entrant too which keeps that process going.
- Badlands – language in VA for park and operators to temporarily adjust routes based on sheep lambing, etc.
- Superintendent and operators at Badlands in agreement with ops levels.
- Reporting – only 9 air tour operations reported at Mount Rushmore. This is incomplete data.
- Rainbow Bridge – very important cultural religious site. Current air tour operations do a J loop around the bridge. Through discussions with tribes and operators, FAA and NPS will look into an agreement everyone is happy with.
- Tribes concerns are noise during ceremonies and flying through bridge as well as vibration and integrity of the bridge itself. NPS is doing a literature search for studies on vibration effects to natural structures.
- Current air tour operations staying at least ½ mile away. Not within Rainbow Bridge boundaries but within Glen Canyon boundaries. Operators want to be sensitive to concerns.
- Wilderness designations – park superintendents want operators to modify routes. Not possible for operators to comply with 2000 AGL advisory due to altitude variance and McCarran airspace at Lake Mead. So how do they accommodate air tours over increasing wilderness areas? In VA process – work out a modification that is satisfactory to the operators. Ex. Big Cypress – fly over the highway. Designated wilderness areas or areas managed as wilderness in parks will need to be looked at in a VA.
- Jefferson National Expansion Memorial – Part 91 operator was doing elevator flights from barge within ½ mile buffer of the park. Not legal so FAA stopped. The operator is working with FAA to get a Part 135 certificate. The superintendent supports the air tours, they bring visitors to the Arch. In mean time, the operator is flying under a Letter of Authorization (LOA) as a transportation route until a VA in place.

- Part 135 certificate has more restrictions and creates a higher level of safety than a part 91 certificate.
- All new operators must be a Part 135 certificate – operators grandfathered in prior to 2000 can be part 91 operators, but have to have applied for a part 135.
- IOA is retained by a business even if they are not doing air tours anymore – IOA would go away only if they went out of business and turned all their paperwork in. Businesses are usually bought out before this happens
- A Part 135 certificate is hard to get. The process can take 2-3 years. FAA has a waiting list of 2-3 years before the process starts. Then it takes 6 months to a year for the certificate to be approved.
- Zion National Park– high on list for natural quiet restoration. Only 6 flights reported in 2013. Good candidate for this process (VA). It is up to the park superintendent and NPS regional office to commit to go through process. Developing a VA takes staff time.
- There is a very large group of parks with high IOA that was not seeing a lot of air tour activity and they wanted to wait for reporting data to decide if/when they wanted to prioritize a VA.
- Bryce Canyon National Park – air tour activity level is down to 10% of IOA so it may be good candidate for this process. Same response as for Zion.
- Muir Woods National Monument – The park has completed sophisticated soundscape planning. Cathedral Grove, endangered birds, 514 flights reported. Same response as Zion and Bryce. Golden Gate National Recreation Area superintendent manages Muir Woods. Air tours will be addressed at same time as Golden Gate. Golden Gate is waiting on information from more reporting.
- Right now IOA is most permanent part of process. So what is the incentive for operators to be involved if they don't need more IOA? Nothing really, but operators usually live in the community, want to be good neighbors, and are willing to work together to do the right thing. Operators like something in writing for future stability – but does it do that in reality?
- VAs are a tool for new entrants – only way for them to get in. From FAA FSDO perspective, the guidance is drafted to say it needs to be a win-win situation for all, park and operator. Removes Flight Standards from process.

<u>July 23</u>

- **Grand Canyon Quiet Technology Incentives**
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Summary of comments from NPOAG members:

- Incentives in place since 2000 are paltry - $5 fee reduction is not enough to buy a QT helicopter
- Wants to see a budget for Grand Canyon monitoring of natural quiet
- Overflight fee should only be used as aircraft activities – not a slush fund

- No one has defined cumulative increase – it is %TA – a) asking for a proportional increase in the use of allocations would be a meaningful incentives. b) relief in April and October of winter curfews would also be an incentive for QT only (9-5 winter 8-6 summer). c) Exploring a west end QT route that would be an incentive. Total route 53 miles – over other routes – 13 miles not currently flown. Modification of Blue Direct route affected Grand Canyon Airlines and their companies.
- Would like to present a QT route proposal over the phone to the NPOAG as a gotomeeting when ready (would like to fly route to make sure it is viable)
- Environmental organizations would object to cutting into curfews – should be expanded not shortened.

- **Update on Detail with NPS (Dennis Pratte)**
- **Summary of presentation:**
  - Working on guidance so inspectors know what to do in regards to VAs – meant as a vehicle to issue and establish VAs and maintain historical record of IOA.
  - Jurisdiction of ATMP or VA is within ½ mile boundary and includes any tribal lands within the buffer.
  - Cannot provide this to NPOAG at this point since it would have to go in the Federal Register – most of the information is cited in regulations
  - There will be a period for IOA confirmation and update of ops specs
  - Chapter 9 updated with VA's – for a new operator to include a letter of support from NPS that the operator has spoken to the park first before approaching FAA to get the process started. FAA and NPS both like this approach because it streamlines the review process
  - Estimate of November timeline to publish – needs to be published before first VA is signed.
  - FAA order 8900.1 Flight Standards guidance

- **Parking Lot**
  - HAI Heli-Expo (Helicopter Tour Operators Committee) in Orlando – see new aircraft, safety forums, etc., in conjunction with next NPOAG? – first week in March 2015
    - Do two hour telecons in between face to face meetings.
  - Noise gathering – concerned about visitors being asked if they hear a tour when they are being asked under a route.
    - Could have chosen backcountry not under/near routes
    - Why not at other parks?
    - A. In backcountry air tours primary non-natural sound and since want a response on tours need to choose sites based on where they will be.
    - Look at frequency of tours and frequency of visitors – that is how those spots were chosen thinking they could get the most amount of data

- Different amounts of air tour traffic with enough visitors to get data for – also filling in data gaps from the original data. Needed a broader range of noise doses.
- Method applicable to other places besides Grand Canyon – looking at the method to determine how visitors respond to certain doses
- *Action – FAA Office of Environment and Energy (FAA/AEE) and Volpe to give an explanation on the different surveys at the next meeting- shows they are not leading to a bias.*
- FAA and NPS would like additional backcountry research, don't think they have enough data right now.
- Think other parks with varied areas need to be looked at, not just at Grand Canyon – like Hawaii.

Press release that represented dose response results as negative– Agencies had no control over that release and would not have allowed it to go out that way.

Some NPOAG members felt this is being passed off as science and view it as it as a social experience. Some members felt surveys are leading down a road for a pre-determined response.

- The rating scale is from pleasing to annoyed. This rating scale has been used for other management approaches, ex. Cell phones. Also used for airports for years.
- Tribal consultations – Tribal president/chairman should be the one forwarding the information – can be on a tribe by tribe basis depending on what they prefer.
- For Rainbow Bridge and Navajo work with President's office.
- Why do you have to ask about specific sources? Can you ask about their auditory experience and not trigger any specifics? FAA/FAA to discuss offline. A whole resource study on dose response and questions like that are not useful.
- Vicki highlighted – work with FAA on Rocky Mountain National Park – sat down and used data and have improved conditions.
- Maybe a park superintendent could come to the next NPOAG and give their point of view.
- Redwoods Act – Preservation takes precedence over visitation.
- Value judgments – operators don't think there are any impacts to park. No physical impact
- Operator frustration – with monitoring under routes (example if done under Trail Ridge Road right now – since considered a success)
- Air tour participants are considered park visitors by some superintendents and not others.

        - Repeat visitors are more sensitive – need visitor experience from elderly etc. who can't hike into the backcountry – will they survey air tour passengers?
        - New noise modeling data?
            - What is wrong with what they had? – Old data is still good it just needed to be augmented with backcountry data to provide a wider range of doses. HR1 was used in front-country. HR2 is more advanced
            - After HR1 and HR2 have digital tape – what is value – how does it capture natural setting? – Response: Audio clip less successful. HR1 and HR2 have a good correlation. Suggests cannot use audio clips.
            - This is a research process – not making any determinations with this data. When can we say this dose response data is sufficient? Right amount of data in front country but not ready to determine a threshold. Still feel backcountry need additional data. No schedule for that yet.
            - Point of ASA article to get methodology out there, not to say these are the results we are going to use. Want input from scientific community on methodology.
            - Would like to see results at Lake Mead since it is a completely different type of park and managed/used very differently.
            - So maybe use curves…no stipulations right now. If this is the right approach will gather more data to get dose response curves as accurate as possible.

- **Soundscape Initiatives**
    - Soundscape management planning – usually parks do if compelling issue
    - Revision of Director's Order (DO-47) – Soundscape protection and Reference Manual (RM-47) – how to implement DO-47 and protect soundscapes
    - Motorcycle outreach
    - NPS generated noise
    - Parks need help addressing soundscape – working to generate guidance that they can follow on their own without a lot of NSNSD support
    - New initiatives
        - Quieter pavement
        - Quiet parks initiative
        - Sustainable lighting policy
        - Staffing NSNSD in regions
        - More outreach

- **Closing Comments**

- Martin Begaye - Thank you for hearing concerns on preserving quiet for ceremonies and religious areas in tribal areas. Feel there needs to be an environmental assessment of areas of concern with VAs. Navajo Heritage Program can provide feedback on ceremonies.
- Matt Zuccaro – appreciates opportunity to meet and HAI would like to help host or facilitate a meeting. Critical to keep information exchange moving forward.
- Alan Stephen – Echo's Matt and appreciates everyone's preparedness.
- Mark Francis- Ditto – looks forward to seeing how it shakes out.
- Dick Hingson – very glad to see the systematic reporting. Get up from 65% and look at ways to present the data to understand it better. Glad science is getting published.
- Vicki Ward – Thank you. Happy for face to face meeting – good exchange, ideas, and suggestions. Looking forward to working on VAs and improving that. Hope next meeting in Orlando on March works out. In mean time will look in to providing more info on dose response research. Happy to see all the public attendees.
- Dale Bouffiou – Thank you for setting up open environment for exchange of ideas. Eye opening discussion being new, clear from discussion everyone has goal of improving parks environment and moving in that direction. Research will make decisions better informed. Appreciate public attendees. Progress made.

Action Items/Data Requests

1. Have laptops with audio clips set up at the next NPOAG meeting so members can listen to that dose response survey
2. Share a filled in quarterly report so NPOAG members can see how the air tour operating data is provided. Scrub specific operator information.
3. Provide an overlay of ambient noise vs aircraft noise in front country and backcountry.
4. % of visitors that are backcountry. It varies from park to park – is it available for parks with the most air tours? This information is not always available unless users get permits. Park resource that needs to protected whether there is 1 visitor or 100,000 visitor – tolerances are different for front and back country.
5. FAA/AEE and Volpe give an explanation on the different surveys at the next meeting- shows they are not leading to a bias. When just asked about aircraft and when asked with it mixed in with a lot of other subjects.
6. HAI show (Helicopter Tour Operators Committee) in Orlando – see new aircraft, safety forums, etc. in conjunction with NPAOG – first week in March 2015
7. Do two hour telecons in between face to face meetings.
8. Maybe a Park Superintendent could come into next NPOAG and give their point of view