

Air Tour Management Plan Program

Public Law 106-181, the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000, required that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the National Park Service (NPS) jointly develop air tour management plans (ATMPs) for all parks with actual or proposed commercial air tour operations. The FAA issued a rulemaking on October 25, 2002, that codified the act and completed the definition of a commercial air tour operation. The rulemaking also required that existing and new-entrant operators apply to the FAA for operating authority to continue park overflights or to initiate such actions. As a result, air tour operator applications were submitted from over 100 parks and several Native American reservations. That means that approximately 110 ATMPs will be developed for the appropriate parks and tribal lands in the next six to ten years.

An ATMP park priority list was initially developed in 2000 after consultation with park superintendents or key staff at parks that were believed to have commercial air tour operations. At that time, 56 parks were identified as having such operations. A variety of criteria addressing noise issues, interpretation of park sounds, sound issues in park planning documents, presence of park wilderness, and other factors were applied to each of these parks. Points were assigned to the criteria and a total point value was derived to determine the priority of the parks for development of ATMPs. The priority list was subsequently modified in the first half of 2003 to include the expanded number of ATMP parks and to cluster parks for logistical efficiency and cost savings.

In preparation for development of the ATMPs, the FAA and the NPS Natural Sounds Program Office have developed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) spelling out roles and responsibilities of each organization, procedures for development of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance document/

ATMP, the conflict resolution process, products and services to be provided, and a joint funding approach. A joint FAA/NPS implementation plan that tiers off of the MOU is being developed. This plan will further define the process of producing and implementing ATMPs and complying with applicable environmental requirements.

The ATMP planning process will consist of data acquisition, scoping, formulation of alternatives, development of a draft NEPA compliance document (environmental assessment or environmental impact statement) and ATMP, public involvement, production of the final NEPA compliance report/ATMP, and signing of the NEPA record of decision (ROD). The Air Tour Management Act of 2000 designated FAA as the lead agency and NPS as a cooperating agency. However, since both agencies must sign the ROD, it is truly a joint or collaborative process in every sense. If any tribal lands are situated within or adjacent to a park unit, the tribe(s) will be a cooperating agency. The act also requires that at least one public meet-



Figure 1. Buffalo are part of the natural sounds and natural resources at Badlands National Park. An air tour management plan was initiated at the park in the late summer of 2003.

ing be held during the ATMP planning process.

Acoustical data acquisition to characterize park soundscapes and to ascertain the level, type, and duration of noise intrusions was initiated at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park in late October 2002. Pre-scoping meetings with the Hawaiian parks staff, FAA, Natural Sounds Program Office, and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Volpe Center were held in late winter and spring 2003 to determine the project management and public involvement approaches, roles and responsibilities, logistics, and schedules. Additional acoustical

data acquisition and analysis were conducted concomitantly at Haleakala National Park and several other Hawaiian parks. Acoustical equipment was set up in identified park acoustical zones to characterize the various park soundscapes and noise intrusions. Other park ATMPs that began in fiscal year 2003 (FY03) were Badlands National Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, and Lake Mead National Recreation Area. The number of new ATMPs that will be started this fiscal year is predicated upon available funding and personnel, as well as progress on the FY03 planning efforts.

References

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