



Frequently Asked Questions

Question: How would the daily cap work in the NPS Preferred Alternative?

Answer:

- The NPS Preferred Alternative includes a daily cap of 364 commercial tour operations (fixed-wings and helicopters). The maximum peak day actually flown during 2004-2006 was 314, so the reported data indicates that there should not be any reduction in air tours under the proposed daily cap. In fact, that the daily cap would allow for some flexibility and growth in air tours even on the busiest days.
- The daily cap would apply to the total of all commercial air-tour operations, not to individual air-tour operators, nor to non-air-tour operations (i.e., transportation, maintenance, training, and repositioning flights). Daily caps would also not apply to exempt operations.
- There is also a requirement for reporting daily operations by each air-tour operator. Reporting would be the primary means of monitoring compliance with the daily cap and annual allocations, but additional monitoring may occur.
- There would also be a communication-based adaptive management approach to review reporting and monitoring data and address any problems encountered in implementing the plan, including if the daily cap was found to have been exceeded. It is intended that air-tour operators would coordinate flights to avoid exceeding the daily cap as part of this adaptive management process.
- Procedures would be developed as part of the adaptive management approach to address any weather issues that may shut down one or more flight routes creating daily cap issues.

Question: How would allocations work in the NPS Preferred Alternative?

Answer:

- The NPS Preferred Alternative includes an annual allocation of 65,000 air-tour and related operations. This total is based on the maximum number of actual operations reported by air-tour operators during 2004-2008, which was about 57,000 air-tour operations actually reported and allocations actually used.
- Most non-air-tour operations would be moved outside the Special Flight Rules Area.
- Annual allocations would be provided to each operator similar to today, except totals for each operator would be adjusted based on the allocation limit. Each non-exempt operation in the SFRA would require use of an allocation. Current exemptions would remain in place.

Question: How would Quiet Technology (QT) conversion work in the NPS Preferred Alternative?

Answer:

- Full conversion to QT aircraft required in 10 years.
- Phased-in QT-only routes across North Rim for fixed-wings and helicopters would be open all year. A north-bound route in Marble Canyon would be available for QT-only fixed wing aircraft (no phase-in).
- Use of an allocation would not be needed for QT operations Jan. 1-Mar. 31 (subject to monitoring to ensure that noise provisions of law are met).

Examples of current QT aircraft

Fixed Wing	Helicopter
Piper PA-18-150	ECO-Star 130
Vistaliner (DHC - 6QP)	Bell 407 (with Quiet Cruise Kit)
Dornier 228	Whisper Jet S-55QT
Cessna 208	McDonnell-Douglas 900
Cessna 425	
Cessna TR 182	

Question: What are QT aircraft?

Answer:

- QT aircraft for Grand Canyon are defined by FAA, generally based on measured flyover noise levels of an aircraft and its seating configuration.
- Examples of current QT aircraft are listed in the table.

Question: What changes would occur to General Aviation Corridors in the NPS Preferred Alternative?

Answer:

- Very little. The four current general aviation flight corridors would remain with minimum flight altitudes of 10,500 feet same as current. The Fossil Canyon Corridor would be pivoted slightly to the southeast in response to a request from the Havasupai Tribe, and the Dragon Corridor would change slightly to include a dogleg.

Question: What changes would occur to the Flight-free Zones in the NPS Preferred Alternative?

Answer:

- The ceiling would be raised to 17,999 feet MSL for all Flight-free Zones. Boundaries would be modified slightly to accommodate the Dragon Corridor dogleg. No flights would be allowed below 18,000 feet MSL except for 1) aircraft in transition on Victor airways V210, V257, and V293 at or above 14,500 feet, 2) aircraft under the positive control of an air-traffic control center or tower when necessary for safety, 3) administrative use under an appropriate written waiver approved by both the FAA and the manager(s) of the over-flown land(s).

Question: What are Peak and Off-Peak seasons?

Answer:

- Because Alternatives E, F and the NPS Preferred Alternative propose seasonal route shifts, they are analyzed for different Peak and Off-Peak Seasons. Alternative A (No Action/Current Condition) does not contain, and is not analyzed for, Peak and Off-Peak Seasons. In the Draft EIS, Peak and Off-Peak Season analysis is based on the day of the greatest actual number of flights reported in 2005 within the dates of each season shown in the table.

Peak and Off-Peak Season by Alternative

Alternative	Peak Season	Off-Peak Season
E	July 1 – September 15	September 16 – June 30
F	February 1 – November 30	December 1 – January 31
NPS Preferred	May 1 – October 31	November 1 – April 30



Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What were the objectives that NPS considered when developing the Draft EIS?

Answer:

- Improve and maintain Substantial Restoration of Natural Quiet and enhance Grand Canyon National Park visitor experience
- Provide a reasonable opportunity for visitors to safely experience Grand Canyon by air tour, without adversely affecting the national airspace system
- Protect public health from adverse effects associated with aircraft Overflights
- Protect wilderness character in Wilderness in the Special Flight Rules Area
- Provide primitive recreation opportunities without aircraft intrusions in most backcountry areas, most Colorado River locations, and destination points accessed by both backcountry and river visitors
- Provide recreational opportunities with limited aircraft intrusions for visitors at developed areas along the rim and major front-county destination points accessible by road
- Protect sensitive wildlife habitat and cultural resources
- Provide a quality aerial viewing experience while protecting park resources and minimizing conflicts with other park visitors
- Maintain an economically viable and safe air-tour industry

Question: Why change the current condition?

Answer:

- As directed in the 1987 National Parks Overflights Act, the NPS is developing a plan for substantial restoration of natural quiet and experience of the park, and for the protection of public health and safety from adverse effects associated with aircraft overflights. The NPS is concerned that sensitive natural and cultural resources and ground-based visitors in some areas of the park continue to be adversely affected by aircraft overflights. Therefore, the NPS has determined that additional action is needed to achieve substantial restoration of natural quiet at more than minimum levels, improve visitor experience, and ensure that restoration of natural quiet is maintained over time.

Question: Why not ban all air tours? How can any air-tour impacts be acceptable? Why should anyone be allowed to fly over the park at all?

Answer:

- Air tours can provide a unique visitor experience at Grand Canyon National Park. However, like all visitor experiences, air tours are only appropriate in some places at some times and at amounts consistent with protecting park resources and minimizing conflicts with other types of visitor experiences. The goal is to ensure air tours are managed in a manner that protects park resources and ensures that substantial restoration of natural quiet is achieved and maintained in the park.

Question: What role does each agency have in the development of the Draft EIS?

Answer:

- In 2006, the NPS and FAA published a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the substantial restoration of natural quiet. The 1987 National Parks Overflights Act directed the NPS to develop recommendations for actions to provide for the “substantial restoration of natural quiet.” The Act further directed the FAA to implement the NPS recommendations “without change,” barring safety concerns. Therefore, the development of a Draft EIS is under the purview of the NPS, including impact analysis. FAA will be the lead agency for rule-making to implement the NPS recommendations.

Question: What is the Grand Canyon Working Group (GCWG)?

Answer:

- Federal Register Notice of May 31, 2005 solicited membership in the GCWG under authority of the National Parks Overflights Advisory Group (NPOAG) Aviation Rulemaking Committee. The role of the GCWG (within the NPOAG) was to provide advice and recommendations regarding the implementation of the National Parks Overflights Act of 1987 with respect to the Grand Canyon. GCWG was comprised of a representative and balanced group of agency, tribal, environmental, aviation and other interests.

Question: How would this planning effort affect commercial aviation?

Answer:

- This plan will not affect commercial aviation above 17,999 feet MSL. The FAA has stated that in the future they will consider air space redesign, improvements in navigational capabilities and the use of advanced technology for aircraft to reduce noise over Grand Canyon National Park from commercial aircraft above 17,999 feet MSL.

Question: What is the definition of “Substantial Restoration of Natural Quiet?”

Answer:

- Substantial restoration of natural quiet has been defined by NPS as the achievement of natural quiet (i.e., no aircraft audible) in 50% or more of the park for 75-100% of the day, each and every day. 50% is a minimum in the restoration goal.

Question: Why has the goal of 50% or more not been met based on current conditions for Substantial Restoration of Natural Quiet?

Answer:

- In the 1995 Report to Congress, the NPS recommendation indicated that “50% or more” could be as high as 80%. The NPS definition, which was clarified in a September 24, 2008 Federal Register notice, is purposeful in stating “or more” to ensure that park resources and visitor experience are protected at more than a minimum level. It has always been the position of the NPS that 50% restoration is not the goal, it is minimum restoration.

Question: How would tribes be affected by the NPS Preferred Alternative and Draft EIS?

Answer:

- Grand Canyon National Park consults with all 11 affiliated American Indian tribes. There are four tribes that were part of the GCWG and actively participated in the development of the plan.
- Hualapai Indian Tribe: would remain similar to current conditions and continue to be exempt from allocations and caps. SFRA boundary and routes would be adjusted to address concerns expressed by the tribe.
- Navajo Nation: the NPS Preferred Alternative is the only Alternative expected to provide a socioeconomic benefit to the tribe by providing entrance and exit to/from Navajo lands to/from SFRA tour routes. Operations that land on Navajo lands and also fly on SFRA routes would not be exempt from allocations and the daily cap. They would be permitted to deviate from the SFRA routes by a 7711 waiver. The waiver would only allow deviations at locations agreed to by NPS and Navajo Nation through the EIS process.
- Havasupai Indian Tribe: the Fossil Canyon General Aviation Corridor would be changed slightly to move it away from Supai Village. The Brown 6 helicopter route between Tusayan and Supai Village would be shifted as requested by the tribe.
- Hopi Indian Tribe: the plan reflects concerns regarding sacred sites, including moving routes west of the Little Colorado River confluence.