



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Southeast Utah Group
Arches National Park
Canyonlands National Park
Hovenweep National Monument
Natural Bridges National Monument

2282 S. West Resource Blvd
Moab, UT 84532

Public Scoping for the Southeast Utah Group Soundscape Management Plan

Dear Friends of Arches National Park, Canyonlands National Park, Hovenweep National Monument, and Natural Bridges National Monument.

The Southeast Utah Group (SEUG) parks (Arches, Canyonlands, Hovenweep, and Natural Bridges) are beginning a process to develop a soundscape management plan and associated environmental assessment. The general purposes of this plan are to (1) protect the acoustic experience of park visitors and ensure that natural sounds continue to play an important role in the enjoyment of park resources and values, (2) protect natural soundscapes and acoustic conditions for wildlife, ensuring healthy and dynamic ecosystems, and (3) provide an approach to managing the natural soundscape that is consistent with National Park Service policy.

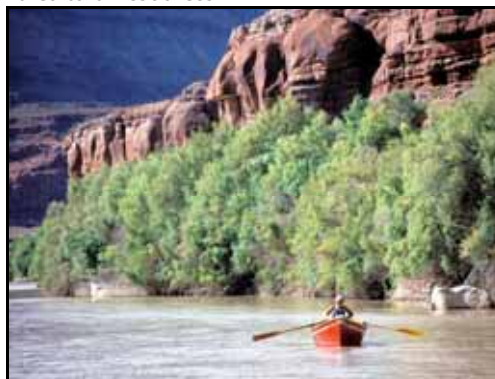
Introduction

Arches, Canyonlands, Hovenweep, and Natural Bridges include diverse geologic, biological, cultural, and wilderness resources that are enjoyed by over 1.5 million visitors annually. The park units are characterized by high plateaus, a maze of narrow, deep, sandstone canyons and striking rock towers and mesas. This varied topography includes life zones that range from pockets of coniferous forests at the highest elevations, to juniper and pine forests at mid-elevation, and desert shrublands at the lowest elevations of the parks.

The park soundscapes offer an array of rich and diverse natural sounds. In some areas of the parks this natural soundscape can be experienced relatively free of human-caused sound. However, like many areas in the United States, including other national parks, the sources and intensity of noise in SEUG units has increased in recent decades. Tour buses, trucks, cars, and motorcycles as well as park operations and other activities also add to noise levels in many areas of SEUG park units. This plan will look at these human caused sounds and analyze how the parks can better maintain or improve the natural soundscape within the parks.

What is natural soundscape?

Natural soundscapes are sounds that exist without human influence. Natural sounds include animal sounds, from the chirruping of crickets to the vocalizations of animals and birds. They also include the sounds of other natural phenomena, such as water sounds: the sound of rain falling on the ground or on water, the sound of a waterfall, a rushing river, waves lapping or rolling gravel on a shoreline; and wind sounds, such as the murmur of wind rustling the leaves in trees, the howling during a gale and the roar of a whirlwind. An important part of the National Park Service mission is to preserve or restore these natural sounds in a park and provide the opportunity for visitors to experience these soundscapes as well as the natural and cultural resources.



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The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Why are natural sounds important at Arches, Canyonlands, Hovenweep, and Natural Bridges?

Natural sounds are inherent components of “the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life” protected by the National Park Service Organic Act. They are vital to the visitor experience and can provide valuable indicators of the health of various ecosystems.

Natural sounds:

- Add to visitors’ enjoyment of the parks.
- Are considered essential for ensuring an authentic experience of cultural and traditional landscapes, resources, and values;
- Play an important role in maintaining healthy and diverse ecosystems, as some studies suggest; and
- Are important for animal communication, territory establishment, predator-prey relationships, mating behaviors, nurturing young and effective use of habitat, as some studies suggest.



Intrusive sounds are of concern to park managers because they sometimes degrade habitat conditions for wildlife and diminish the National Park Service’s ability to accomplish its resource protection mission. Intrusive sounds also are a matter of concern to park visitors. A system-wide survey of park visitors revealed that nearly as many visitors come to national parks to enjoy the natural soundscape (91 percent) as come to view the scenery (93 percent).

In order to manage for and protect natural sounds the park will, through this planning process:

- Identify appropriate and inappropriate soundscape conditions or backcountry and frontcountry areas;
- Identify indicators of soundscape condition;
- Develop soundscape standards for backcountry and frontcountry areas;
- Identify methods for monitoring soundscape conditions;
- Identify management actions to be initiated that will improve and/or restore degraded soundscapes to desired conditions; and
- Identify a process and set standards for evaluating proposed future actions on the basis of potential impacts to soundscape conditions.

The purpose of this scoping effort is to collect input from concerned and interested citizens and businesses regarding this soundscape management planning effort. The NPS wants your suggestions and comments concerning the following questions.

Questions to consider:

1. What sounds do you feel are inappropriate in a national park?
2. What sounds do you feel are appropriate in a national park?
3. Do you have specific suggestions for ways that NPS operations and/or visitor activities might be modified to minimize impacts on the natural soundscape?
4. Here are some acoustic measurements used to describe desired conditions. Which ones do you feel may be easy to understand and explain?

- Percent time audible - the percentage of time that sounds are audible to humans with normal hearing
- Noise free interval - the amount of time with natural sounds only
- Number of events per day or hour - the number of human-caused events per day or hour
- Lmax dBA - the maximum allowable sound level, dBA
- Sound level of human-caused events (Leq) - the maximum allowable sound average, Leq



How do I comment on this plan?

You are invited to become part of this planning effort by assisting us in identifying concerns, issues, and alternatives to be addressed in the environmental assessment. Please note that there will be no individual response to your concern or issue. Rather, the response to your concern or issue will be addressed as part of the environmental assessment.

You can comment one of three ways:

1. You are invited to participate in an open house session where park staff will be available to provide information and answer questions about the natural sound environment in these park units and the overall soundscape management planning process:

**September 29, 2011 from 5-7pm
Grand Center
182 N 500 West, Moab, UT**

2. You can comment online at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany> and scroll down and click on the *SEUG Soundscape Management Plan*. Click on the "open for comment" project link on the left to view this newsletter and provide a comment.

3. You can mail your comments to:

**Southeast Utah Group
National Park Service
Attn: Planning and Compliance
2282 S. W Resource Blvd
Moab, UT 84532**

Please provide your comments by October 14, 2011. If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list for future correspondence, please indicate that in your response.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. Although you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

What's next?

The interdisciplinary planning team will review all of the public comments received. Relevant issues and alternatives from public comments will be incorporated into the Draft Soundscape Management Plan and Environmental Assessment and should be available for public review and comment in the spring of 2011. If you have questions regarding this planning process, please visit the National Park Service Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/cany>.

Thank you for your participation in the development of the Soundscape Management Plan and Environmental Assessment for Arches, Canyonlands, Hovenweep, and Natural Bridges. To learn more about natural sounds and the National Park Service soundscape management program, please visit the following website:
www.nature.nps.gov/naturalsounds.