

Air Tour Management Plan – Frequently Asked Questions

Death Valley National Park

- What are the existing commercial air tour operations at the park? How would conditions under the ATMP be different than what is currently occurring?
 - Under interim operating authority (IOA), four operators are currently authorized to fly a combined total of 37 commercial air tours per year over the Park. Interim operating authority does not set routes or operating conditions for an operator except to limit the number of air tours the operator is permitted to fly each year. In the three year period from 2017-2019, two commercial air tours were reported over the Park. ATMPs include conditions designed to protect natural and cultural resources and visitor experience. These conditions may include the number of authorized air tours, routes, altitude, aircraft type, day or time restrictions, and restrictions for particular events.

- Why are specific operating conditions recommended in the proposed ATMP?
 - ATMPs include conditions designed to protect natural and cultural resources, tribal concerns, and visitor experience. These conditions may include the number of authorized air tours, routes, altitude, aircraft type, day or time restrictions, and restrictions for particular events. Section 3 of the draft ATMP provides the proposed operating conditions at the Park.

- Does the proposed ATMP require that air tours follow specific routes and/ or fly at certain altitudes?
 - Yes, Section 3.2 of the ATMP specifies routes. Helicopter air tours are allowed above 1,000 feet above ground level (AGL) and fixed-wing (airplane) air tours are allowed above 1,500 feet AGL. Except when necessary in an emergency or to avoid unsafe conditions, or unless otherwise authorized for a specified purpose, the operator would not be able to deviate from the routes and altitudes in the ATMP.

- Does the proposed ATMP specify when commercial air tours could occur?
 - Yes. Sections 3.4, 3.5, and Appendix A of the ATMP specify that air tours are limited to from two hours after sunrise to two hours before sunset. The ATMP also establishes procedures for the Park to place additional restrictions for blocks of time, such as special events.

- How does the proposed ATMP protect wilderness character and opportunities for solitude in wilderness?
 - The proposed annual flight limits routes, minimum altitudes in this ATMP are intended to protect wilderness and visitor experience by limiting the number of potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours, by providing opportunities for solitude and remoteness from sights and sounds in the designated wilderness, and by reducing the intensity of air tour noise at ground level. The hours of operation would provide quiet

periods of the day during which visitors can enjoy natural sounds and preserves opportunities for solitude.

- Would commercial air tours be visible to park visitors?
 - Yes. Whether a visitor on the ground sees a commercial air tour aircraft depends on a number of factors including proximity to the flight path, altitude, topography, and the presence of other sounds that may mask detection. Visitors near an air tour's flight path are more likely to see and hear the aircraft passing overhead. Aircraft are transitory elements in a scene and visual impacts tend to be relatively short. In Death Valley's uniquely open terrain, it is likely that visitors will see commercial aircraft conducting flight tours.

- Would park visitors be able to hear commercial aircraft tours from the ground?
 - Yes. Visitors to Death Valley specifically come to experience the natural quiet found here due to the remoteness and distance from competing noises. The intensity of the noise a visitor hears when a commercial air tour flies here depends on a number of factors, including proximity to the flight path, type of aircraft, other sources of noise, and surrounding landscape features. Visitors near an aircraft's flight path are more likely to hear the aircraft passing overhead. Other noise sources such as vehicles, people, wildlife, and wind can mask the sound of an aircraft. If a hill or building is between the visitor and the aircraft, that can reduce the noise also. However, if a visitor is in a canyon as an air tour flies overhead, that can amplify the noise.

- How does the proposed ATMP seek to protect cultural resources?
 - The proposed annual flight limits in this draft ATMP are intended to protect cultural resources and related cultural landscapes and ethnographic resources throughout the Park by limiting the number of potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours. The ATMP may include additional conditions as identified during current and future consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

- How would the proposed ATMPs protect tribal lands, properties, ceremonies, or practices?
 - The proposed ATMP allows restrictions for particular events, which are intended to prevent noise interruptions of Park events or tribal practices. The ATMP may include additional conditions as identified during consultation with tribes under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.