

**AIR TOUR  
MANAGEMENT PLAN  
NATURAL BRIDGES NATIONAL MONUMENT**

**SUMMARY**

This Air Tour Management Plan (ATMP) provides the terms and conditions for commercial air tours conducted over Natural Bridges National Monument (Park) pursuant to the National Parks Air Tour Management Act (Act) of 2000.

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The Act requires that commercial air tour operators conducting or intending to conduct commercial air tours over a unit of the National Park System apply to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for authority before engaging in that activity. The Act further requires that the FAA in cooperation with the National Park Service (NPS) establish an ATMP for each National Park System unit for which one or more applications has been submitted, unless that unit is exempt from this requirement.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this ATMP is to develop acceptable and effective measures to mitigate or prevent the significant adverse impacts, if any, of commercial air tours on natural and cultural resources, visitor experiences and tribal lands.

**2.0 APPLICABILITY**

This ATMP applies to all commercial air tours over the Park and commercial air tours within ½ mile outside the boundary of the Park, as depicted in Figure 1 below. A commercial air tour subject to this ATMP is any flight, conducted for compensation or hire in a powered aircraft where a purpose of the flight is sightseeing over the Park, during which the aircraft flies:

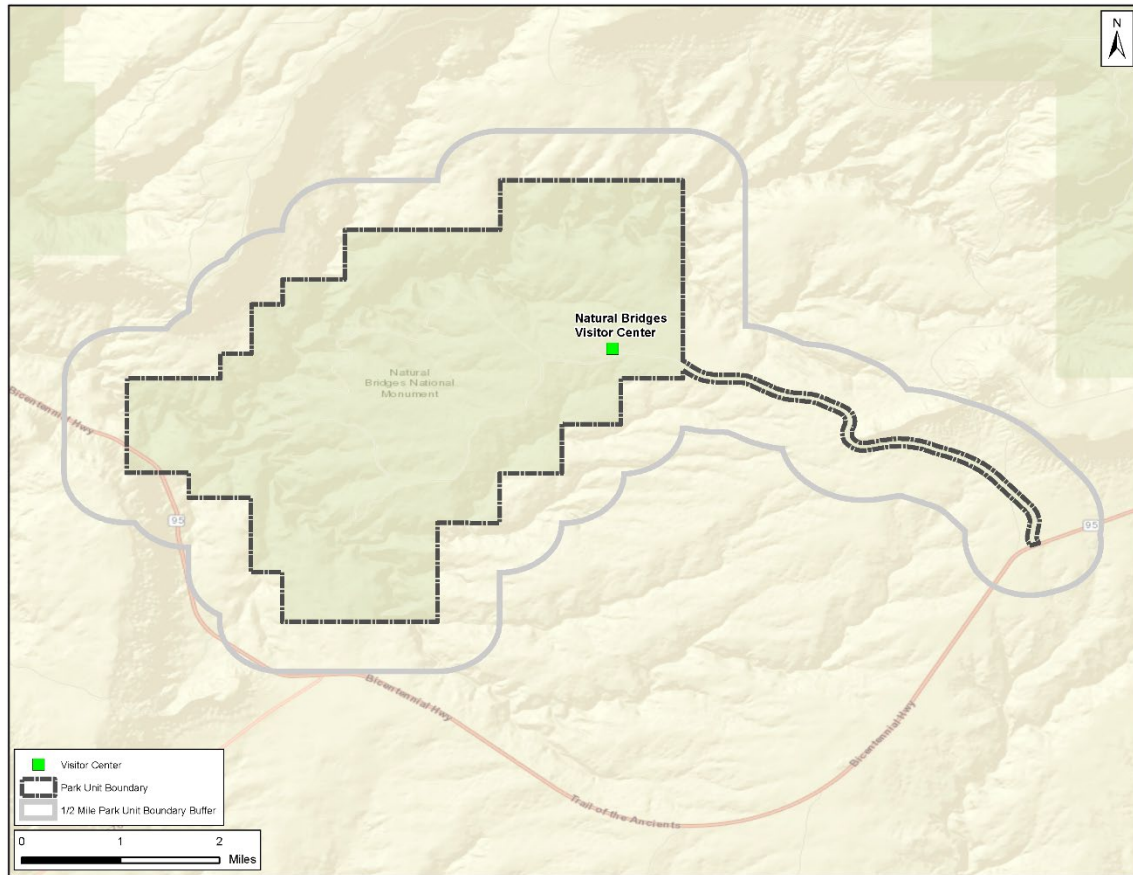
(1) Below 5,000 feet above ground level (except solely for the purposes of takeoff or landing, or necessary for safe operation of an aircraft as determined under the rules and regulations of the FAA requiring the pilot-in-command to take action to ensure the safe operation of the aircraft); or

(2) Less than one mile laterally from any geographic feature within the Park (unless more than ½-mile outside the Park boundary).

*See* 14 CFR § 136.33(d).

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<sup>1</sup> The Act provides an exemption to the ATMP requirement for parks with 50 or fewer commercial air tour operations each year unless the exemption is withdrawn by the Director of NPS. *See* 49 U.S.C. § 40128(a)(5). As an alternative to an ATMP, the agencies also have the option to prepare a voluntary agreement for the Park.



**Figure 1.** Map of area subject to this ATMP for Natural Bridges National Monument

## 2.1 Park Overview

Natural Bridges National Monument preserves and provides for public enjoyment of three of the world's largest stream-eroded natural bridges, and Native American cultural heritage sites in their natural settings. The Park consists of 7,637 acres located in the southeast corner of Utah, 43 miles west of Blanding in San Juan County. Within the physiographic region of the United States known as the Colorado Plateau, the land area surrounding the Park ranges from the desert canyons along the Colorado River to the forested mountains of the Abajo Mountains range. Elevations on the Colorado Plateau vary approximately from 4,200 to 10,000 feet. Approximately 70% of the Park is eligible wilderness managed as designated wilderness in accordance with NPS 2006 Management Policies.

The three natural bridges found here are among the world's largest: Sipapu, Kachina, and Owachomo. The bridges exemplify natural geologic and hydrologic processes that form and modify natural bridges over great spans of time. Sipapu—a Hopi word meaning “place of emergence”—is a massive, mature bridge. Kachina is named for the rock imagery at its base that resembles Katsina, supernatural beings that have the power to bring rain, control weather and assist Hopi with many other needs. The last bridge, Owachomo, named for the rock mound on its east abutment, is an old bridge nearing collapse. The General Land Survey assigned the current Hopi names attesting to the deep

human history and significance of the area as ancestral homeland for many Native American communities.

The Park was first inhabited during what archeologists call the Archaic period, from 7000 BC to AD 500. Paiute, Ute, and some Pueblo people hold that they are descendants of these Archaic peoples. The Paiute and Ute oral tradition tells them that they were on these landscapes since time immemorial. Around AD 700, many people adopted dryland farming lifeways and later emigrated as the natural environment changed and farming became unsustainable. Around AD 1100, new migrants moved into the area and by the 1200s, tens of thousands of people associated with the Mesa Verde culture lived in the greater Cedar Mesa landscape surrounding and including Natural Bridges. As the climate changed during the late 1200's, and the onslaught of a long term drought intensified, most inhabitants of the Natural Bridges area migrated elsewhere while others stayed and adapted to the changing conditions. These groups are believed to have been subsumed into groups of Navajo, Ute, and Paiute immigrating into the area from the North and West. Navajo oral tradition holds that their ancestors lived among the earlier Pueblo people.

The entire Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Natural Bridges Archeological District, which includes 507 contributing resources. These resources contribute to the broader knowledge of the full range of prehistoric occupation on Cedar Mesa and include both simple lithic scatters as well as multi-room pueblos. The natural bridges are among the many physical and ethnographic features that are sacred to Native American Tribes currently associated with the Park.

Deep, moist canyons and associated diverse biotic assemblages of the Park are regionally significant due to a long history of protection that has maintained these systems in their natural condition. The remote nature of the Park provides opportunities for the nearly 100,000 annual visitors to discover and enjoy wildness and solitude. In a remote natural setting essentially unchanged since Native People inhabited the area, the Park protects and preserves the same dark night skies, natural soundscapes, and clean air that people observed and valued hundreds of years ago.

The following Park management objectives relate to the development of this ATMP:

- Protect individuals and populations of wildlife species known to be sensitive to the effects of aircraft overflights, including several species of diurnal raptors (e.g., golden eagle, peregrine falcon) and the federally listed Mexican spotted owl and southwestern willow flycatcher, as well as desert bighorn sheep, mule deer, mountain lion, and black bear.
- Protect cultural properties and related cultural landscapes that are important to Native American Tribes traditionally associated with the Park.
- Protect primitive and remote experiences for visitors and opportunities to experience quiet and solitude in a remote natural setting.

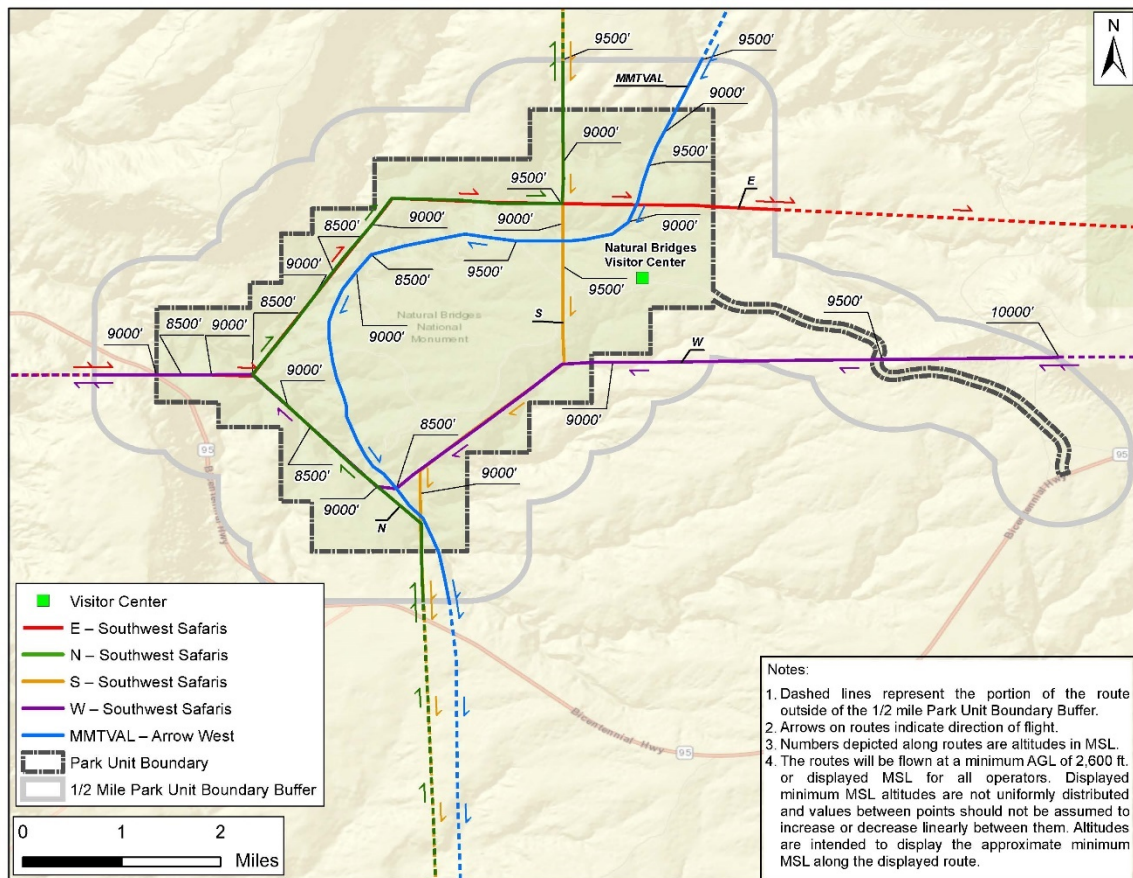
**3.0 CONDITIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF COMMERCIAL AIR TOUR  
OPERATIONS AT THE PARK**

**3.1 Annual Commercial Air Tours Authorized**

Under this ATMP, 73 annual commercial air tours are authorized. Appendix A identifies the operators authorized to conduct commercial air tours and annual flight allocations.

**3.2 Commercial Air Tour Routes and Altitudes**

Commercial air tours authorized under this ATMP shall be conducted on designated air tour routes specific to each operator (Figure 2; Appendix B contains an enlarged Figure 2). Altitude expressed in units above ground level (AGL) is a measurement of the distance between the ground surface and the aircraft, whereas altitude expressed in mean sea level (MSL) refers to the altitude of an aircraft above sea level, regardless of the terrain below it. Aircraft flying at a constant MSL altitude would simultaneously fly at varying AGL altitudes, and vice versa, assuming uneven terrain is present below the aircraft. At the Park, air tours will fly no lower than 2,600 feet (ft) AGL, referencing the topographic high-point within 1/2 mile of the flight path. The minimum altitude applies to the entirety of the routes. Except in an emergency or to avoid unsafe conditions, or unless otherwise authorized for a specified purpose, operators may not deviate from these routes and altitudes.



**Figure 2.** Commercial air tour routes at Natural Bridges National Monument

### 3.3 Aircraft Type

The aircraft types authorized to be used for commercial air tours are identified in Appendix A. Any new or replacement aircraft must not exceed the noise level produced by the aircraft being replaced. In addition to any other applicable notification requirements, operators will notify the FAA and the NPS in writing of any prospective new or replacement aircraft and obtain concurrence before initiating air tours with the new or replacement aircraft.

### 3.4 Day/Time

Except as provided in the section below entitled “Quiet Technology Incentives,” air tours may operate two hours after sunrise until two hours before sunset, as defined by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).<sup>2</sup> Air tours may operate any day of the year, except under circumstances provided in the following section entitled “Restrictions for Particular Events.”

<sup>2</sup> Sunrise and sunset data are available from the NOAA Solar Calculator, <https://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/grad/solcalc/>

3.5 Restrictions for Particular Events

The NPS can establish temporary no-fly periods that apply to air tours for special events or planned Park management. Absent exigent circumstances or emergency operations, the NPS will provide a minimum of 15 days written notice to operators for any restrictions that temporarily restrict certain areas or certain times of day, or 60 days written notice to operators for any full-day restrictions in advance of the no-fly period. Events may include tribal ceremonies or other similar events.

3.6 Required Reporting

Operators will submit to the FAA and the NPS semi-annual reports regarding the number of commercial air tours over the Park that are conducted by the operator. These reports will also include the flight monitoring data required under Section 5.1 of this ATMP and such other information as the FAA and the NPS may request. Reports are due to both the FAA and the NPS no later than 30 days after the close of each reporting period. Reporting periods are January 1 through June 30 and July 1 through December 31. Operators shall adhere to the requirements of any reporting template provided by the agencies.

3.7 Additional Requirements

3.7A Operator Training and Education: When made available by Park staff, operators/pilots will take at least one training course per year conducted by NPS staff. The training will include Park information that operators can use to further their own understanding of Park priorities and management objectives as well as enhance the interpretive narrative for air tour clients and increase understanding of parks by air tour clients.

3.7B Annual Meeting: At the request of either of the agencies, the Park staff, the local FAA Flight Standards District Office (FSDO), and all operators will meet once per year to discuss the implementation of this ATMP and any amendments or other changes to the ATMP. This annual meeting could be conducted in conjunction with any required annual training.

3.7C In-Flight Communication: For situational awareness when conducting tours of the Park, the operators will utilize frequency 122.9 and report when they enter and depart a route. The pilot should identify their company, aircraft, and route to make any other aircraft in the vicinity aware of their position.

3.7D Wildlife Avoidance: California condors have not been found to be present in the Park and their presence is thus not a current resource condition requiring active mitigation. However, California condor habitat does exist in the Park, and protective measures are necessary should a condor be identified in the Park. This ATMP includes the following protective measures for California condors:

- Air tour operators are required to report visual identification of California condors to the NPS, with an optional notification to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), within 24 hours of initial sighting.

- Once NPS becomes aware of the presence of California condor nests, notification and coordination will be conducted between the Park staff, the NPS Intermountain Region Wildlife Biologist and Threatened and Endangered Species Coordinator, the local USFWS field office, the air tour operators, and the FSDO, as necessary, to determine the best avoidance measures for operators to take. Generally, operators will be required to avoid identified nesting areas, feeding areas, or other known areas of congregation by one mile vertically or laterally as long as the NPS determines that other natural or cultural resources are not impacted or affected and such avoidance measures would not result in operating conditions deemed unsafe by the FAA.
- The agencies may temporarily restrict use of air tour routes over nesting areas, feeding areas, or other known areas of congregation while: 1) working with operators to modify air tour routes (i.e., one mile shifts away from sensitive condor areas); and 2) assessing the natural, cultural, and safety impacts of any changes.
- Avoidance measures will remain in effect until the NPS determines that condors are no longer present and notifies the operators in writing that avoidance measures are no longer necessary.

### 3.8 Quiet Technology Incentives

This ATMP incentivizes the adoption of quiet technology aircraft by commercial air tour operators conducting commercial air tours over the Park. Operators that have converted to quiet technology aircraft will be allowed to conduct tours beginning one hour after sunrise until one hour before sunset on all days that flights are authorized. If implementation of this incentive results in a change in existing conditions or a change in the effects of air tour noise on Park resources or visitor enjoyment, additional analysis may be required in order to ensure the continued effectiveness of the incentive.

## **4.0 JUSTIFICATION FOR MEASURES TAKEN**

The provisions and conditions in this ATMP are designed to protect Park resources and visitor experience from the effects of commercial air tours, and support NPS management objectives for the Park.

Under the Act, the FAA granted Interim Operating Authority (IOA) for air tours over the Park. IOA does not provide any operating conditions (e.g., routes, altitudes, time of day, etc.) for air tours other than an annual limit.

The total number of air tours authorized under this ATMP is consistent with the existing air tours reported over the Park. The annual flight limits in this ATMP are intended to protect visitor experience, wildlife, and cultural properties and related cultural landscapes throughout the Park by limiting the number of potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours.

The conditions that commercial air tours fly no lower than 2,600 ft AGL, referencing the topographic high-point within 1/2 mile of the flight path, complies with guidance for raptor protection including threatened and endangered and migratory birds.<sup>3</sup> Because raptor habitat exists throughout the Park and nest locations may change over time, the minimum altitude restriction extends uniformly to all routes over the Park. It will further avoid or minimize potential effects on other avian species and wildlife by reducing the noise intensity of air tour events in the areas nearest the routes. Additionally, this provision improves visitor experiences on the ground, including opportunities for solitude and remoteness from sights and sounds in the recommended wilderness, as well as conditions at sacred cultural properties and landscapes by reducing the intensity of air tour noise at ground level.

Sunrise and sunset are important times of the day for wildlife and visitor use and experience. Biologically important behaviors for many species occur during this time, such as the dawn chorus for songbirds. Wildlife viewing is often conducted during this time of day as well. The time restrictions have been included in this ATMP to protect these Park resources. The hours of operation provide quiet periods of the day during which visitors can enjoy natural sounds and preserves opportunities for solitude in backcountry areas.

Restrictions for particular events are intended to prevent noise interruptions of Park events or tribal practices.

Operator training and education facilitates effective implementation of the ATMP by making sure that operators remain informed regarding the requirements of this ATMP including any adaptive management measures or amendments, advances operator understanding of Park management objectives and priorities, including noise sensitive areas, and provides opportunities to enhance the interpretive narrative for air tour clients and increases understanding of parks by air tour clients. The annual meeting will be used to review and discuss implementation of this ATMP between Park staff, local FAA FSDO, and all operators and will serve to ensure that air tour operators are aware of the terms and conditions of this ATMP and are made aware of new or reoccurring concerns regarding Park resources.

## **5.0 COMPLIANCE**

On the effective date of this ATMP, all commercial air tours over the Park must comply with the terms of this ATMP in all respects, except that operators may continue to conduct the number of air tour operations authorized under IOA as reflected in their existing Operations Specifications (OpSpecs) until such OpSpecs are modified to require compliance with this ATMP. The NPS and the FAA are both responsible for the monitoring and oversight of the ATMP. If the NPS identifies instances of non-compliance, the NPS will report such findings to the FAA's FSDO having geographic oversight for the Park. The FSDO will investigate all reports of noncompliance. The

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<sup>3</sup> Utah Field Office Guidelines for Raptor from Human and Land Use Disturbances, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah Field Office, Salt Lake City, January 2002 update, L.A. Romin & J.A. Muck.



public may also report allegations of non-compliance with this ATMP to the FSDO which may result in an investigation by the FAA.

Investigative determination of non-compliance may result in partial or total loss of authorization to conduct commercial air tours authorized by this ATMP. Any violation of OpSpecs shall be treated in accordance with FAA Order 2150.3, *FAA Compliance and Enforcement Program*.

#### 5.1 Aircraft Monitoring Technology

Operators are required to equip all aircraft used for air tours with flight monitoring technology and to report flight monitoring data as part of their semi-annual reports. Required flight monitoring data shall include the following:

- Latitude, longitude, and geometric altitude
- Tail number
- Date and time stamps for each ping
- Operator and Doing Business As (DBA), if different
- Aircraft type
- Pings set to a maximum of 15 seconds
- Certificate number

Operators already using aircraft equipped with flight monitoring technology shall ensure it meets the performance standards listed above or acquire and install acceptable flight monitoring technology within 180 days of the effective date of this ATMP. For aircraft not already equipped with flight monitoring technology, within 180 days of the effective date of this ATMP, operators shall equip those aircraft with suitable flight monitoring technology. Operators shall use flight monitoring technology during all air tours under this ATMP.

#### **6.0 NEW ENTRANTS**

For the purposes of this ATMP, a “new entrant” is a commercial air tour operator that has not been granted any operations under this ATMP or that no longer holds operations under this ATMP at the time of the application. New entrants must apply for and be granted operating authority before conducting commercial air tours over the lands and waters covered by this ATMP.

The FAA and the NPS will publish additional information for interested parties about the form and required content of a new entrant application. The FAA and the NPS will jointly consider new entrant applications and determine whether to approve such applications. Review of applications submitted prior to the effective date of this ATMP will commence within six months of the effective date. Applications submitted after that time will be considered no less frequently than every three years from the effective date of this ATMP.

If any new entrant is granted operating authority under this ATMP, the FAA will issue OpSpecs (and, if necessary, will revise OpSpecs to operators whose allocation of

283 operating authority change due to accommodation of a new entrant) within 90 days of the  
284 publication of an amended ATMP or of the effective date of ATMP changes  
285 implemented through the adaptive management process.

## 286 **7.0 COMPETITIVE BIDDING**

287 When appropriate, the FAA and the NPS will conduct a competitive bidding process  
288 pursuant to the criteria set forth in 49 U.S.C. § 40128(a)(2)(B) and other criteria  
289 developed by the agencies. Competitive bidding may also be appropriate to address: a  
290 new entrant application; a request by an existing operator for additional operating  
291 authority; consideration by the agencies of Park-specific resources, impacts, or safety  
292 concerns; or for other reasons.

293 The agencies will request information necessary for them to undertake the competitive  
294 bidding process from existing operators. Failure to provide such information in a timely  
295 manner may result in the disqualification of any such operator.

296 Competitive bidding may necessitate an amendment to this ATMP, additional  
297 environmental review, and/or the issuance of new or revised OpSpecs. If updated  
298 OpSpecs are required, they will be issued within 90 days of the effective date of this  
299 ATMP.

## 300 **8.0 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

301 Adaptive management allows for minor modifications to this ATMP without a formal  
302 ATMP amendment if the impacts of such changes are within the impacts already  
303 analyzed by the agencies under the National Environmental Policy Act, the National  
304 Historic Preservation Act, and the Endangered Species Act. Adjustments to the number  
305 of commercial air tours allocated to individual operators as a result of the competitive  
306 bidding process and minor changes to routes, altitudes, or other operating parameters are  
307 examples of adaptive management measures that may not require a formal ATMP  
308 Amendment. Such modifications may be made if: 1) the NPS determines that they are  
309 necessary to avoid adverse impacts to Park resources, values, or visitor experiences;  
310 2) the FAA determines the need for such changes due to safety concerns; or 3) the  
311 agencies determine that appropriate, minor changes to this ATMP are necessary to  
312 address new information or changed circumstances.

## 313 **9.0 AMENDMENT**

314 This ATMP may be amended at any time: if the NPS, by notification to the FAA and the  
315 operators, determines that the ATMP is not adequately protecting Park resources and/or  
316 visitor enjoyment; if the FAA, by notification to the NPS and the operators, determines  
317 that the ATMP is adversely affecting aviation safety and/or the national aviation system;  
318 or, if the agencies determine that appropriate changes to this ATMP are necessary to  
319 address new information or changed circumstances that cannot be addressed through  
320 adaptive management.

The FAA and the NPS will jointly consider requests to amend this ATMP from interested parties. Requests must be made in writing and submitted to both the FAA and the NPS. Requests must also include justification that includes information regarding how the requested amendment: is consistent with the objectives of this ATMP with respect to protecting Park resources, tribal lands, or visitor use and enjoyment; and would not adversely affect aviation safety or the national aviation system. The FAA will publish additional information for interested parties about the form and manner for submitting a request.

Increases to the total number of annual air tours authorized under this ATMP resulting from accommodation of a new entrant application or a request by an existing operator will require an amendment to this ATMP.

Notice of all Amendments to this ATMP will be published in the Federal Register for notice and comment.

#### **10.0 CONFORMANCE OF OPERATIONS SPECIFICATIONS**

New OpSpecs that incorporate the operating parameters set forth in this ATMP will be issued within 90 days of the effective date of this ATMP.

#### **11.0 EFFECTIVE DATE**

This ATMP is effective [date].

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<INSERT name>, Superintendent,  
Southeast Utah Group  
National Park Service

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[Name], [Title]  
[Office]  
Federal Aviation Administration

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<INSERT name>, Regional  
Director  
Unified Interior Regions 6, 7, & 8  
National Park Service

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<INSERT name>, Associate  
Director  
Natural Resource Stewardship and  
Science Directorate  
National Park Service

341

## APPENDIX A

## 1.0 COMMERCIAL AIR TOUR ALLOCATIONS

Table 1 provides allocations of the annual operations along with authorized aircraft type by operator.

**Table 1.** Air Tour Operations and Aircraft Type by Operator

| Air Tour Operator   | Annual Operations | Daily Operations | Aircraft Type  |
|---|-------------------|------------------|--|
| Arrow West Aviation, Inc. / Slickrock Air Guides, Inc. (Redtail Aviation) | 53                | No set limit     | GIPPS-GA-8, CE-172-N, CE-207-207, CE-207-T207A, Kodiak-100-100 |
| Adams, Bruce M. (Southwest Safaris)                                       | 20                | No set limit     | CE-182-R   |

## 2.0 DAY/TIME RESTRICTIONS

Table 2 lists the time-of-day and day-of-week when air tours may occur.

**Table 2.** Air Tour Authorizations by Time-of-Day and Day-of-Week

| Air Tour Operator   | Time-of-Day   | Day-of-Week   |
|---|---|---|
| Arrow West Aviation, Inc. / Slickrock Air Guides, Inc. (Redtail Aviation) | Two hours after sunrise until two hours before sunset | The NPS can establish temporary no-fly periods that apply to air tours for special events or planned Park management. |
| Adams, Bruce M. (Southwest Safaris)                                       | Two hours after sunrise until two hours before sunset | The NPS can establish temporary no-fly periods that apply to air tours for special events or planned Park management. |

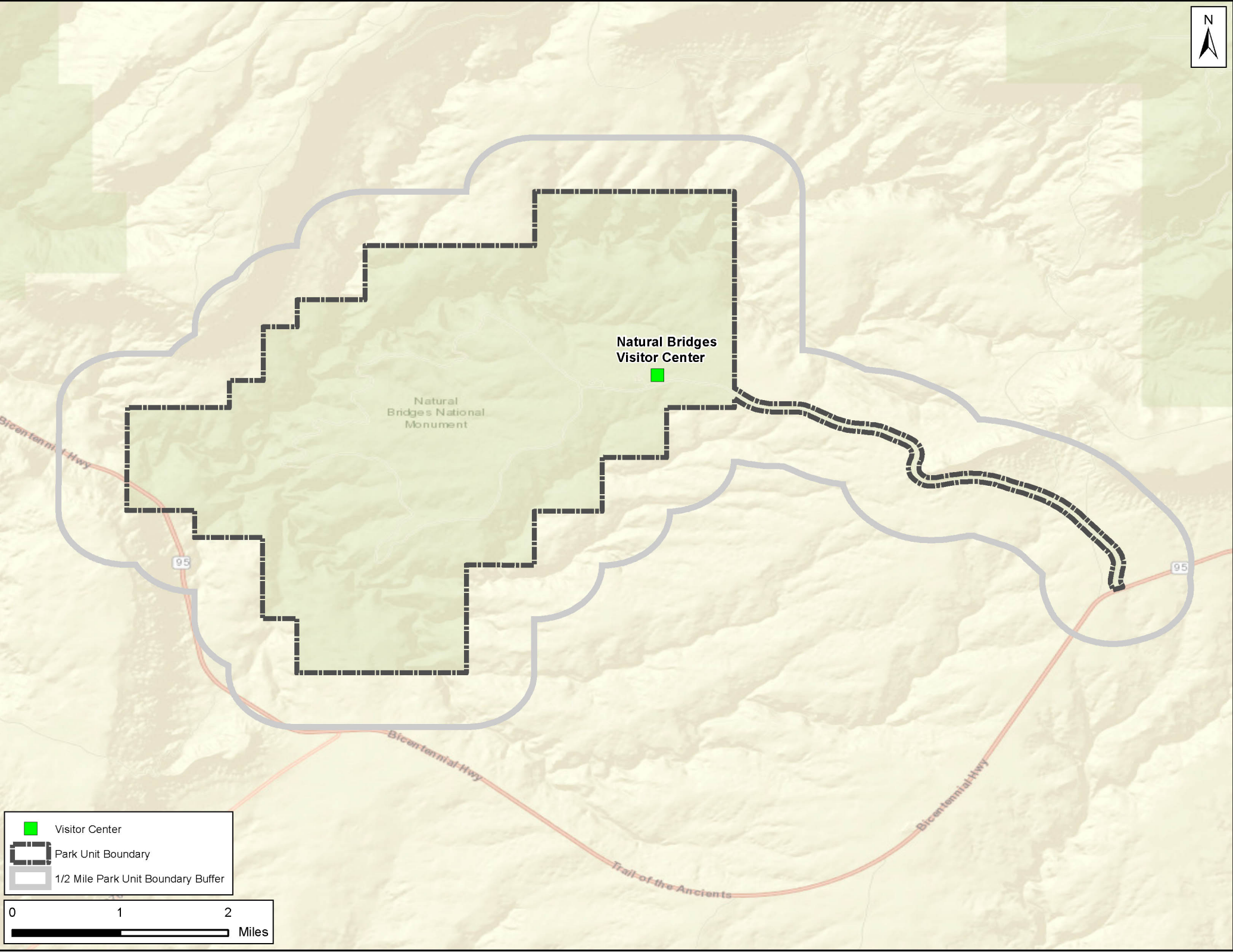
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**APPENDIX B**

355    Enlarged Figure 1 and 2



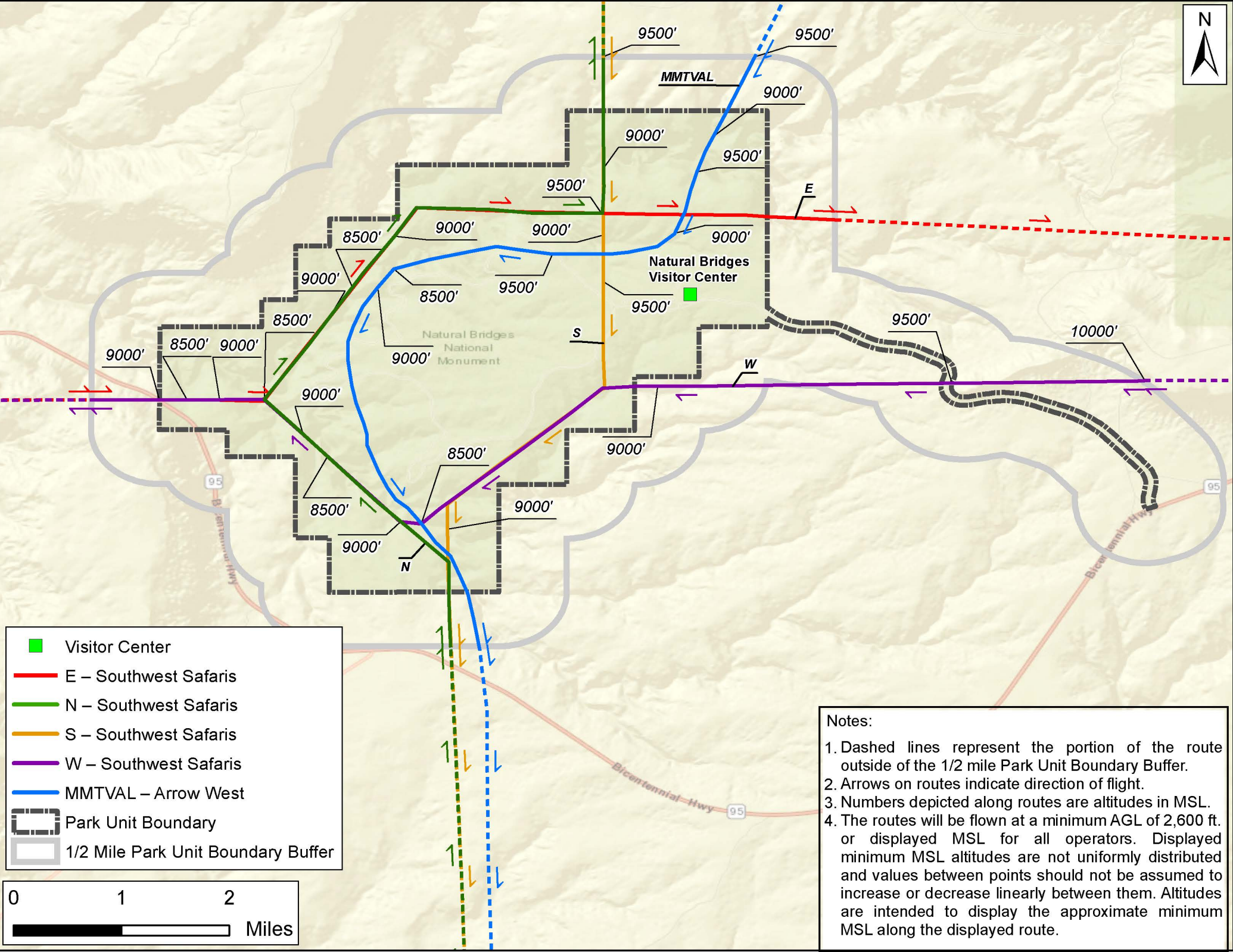
Visitor Center

Park Unit Boundary

1/2 Mile Park Unit Boundary Buffer







- Visitor Center
- E – Southwest Safaris
- N – Southwest Safaris
- S – Southwest Safaris
- W – Southwest Safaris
- MMTVAL – Arrow West
- Park Unit Boundary
- 1/2 Mile Park Unit Boundary Buffer

- Notes:
1. Dashed lines represent the portion of the route outside of the 1/2 mile Park Unit Boundary Buffer.
  2. Arrows on routes indicate direction of flight.
  3. Numbers depicted along routes are altitudes in MSL.
  4. The routes will be flown at a minimum AGL of 2,600 ft. or displayed MSL for all operators. Displayed minimum MSL altitudes are not uniformly distributed and values between points should not be assumed to increase or decrease linearly between them. Altitudes are intended to display the approximate minimum MSL along the displayed route.