

National Parks Air Tour Management Program



**Federal Aviation
Administration**



**National Park
Service**

**WELCOME – WE WILL
BEGIN SHORTLY**

September 23, 2021



Photo Credit: National Park Service (NPS) Photo by Jacob W. Frank

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**Draft Air Tour
Management Plan for:**

**Natural Bridges
National
Monument**

September 23, 2021



Photo Credit: National Park Service (NPS) Photo by Jacob W. Frank

Welcome

- Thank you for joining us today.
- Today's meeting focuses on the draft Air Tour Management Plan for the Natural Bridges National Monument.
- We invite you to share your feedback on this draft.
- Specific instructions will be provided throughout this meeting on how to submit your questions.
- This meeting is held pursuant to the National Parks Air Tour Management Act (NPATMA) and its implementing regulations.



Presenters

- **Eric Elmore**, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Environment and Energy, FAA
- **Vicki Ward**, Overflights Program Manager, Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division, NPS
- **Patty Trap**, Superintendent, Natural Bridges National Monument
- **Matt Van Scoyoc**, Ecologist, Southeast Utah Group, NPS



Asking Questions

- Throughout the meeting, we invite you to share your questions. Please submit questions using the Google form posted by the FAA in the chat area of the social media platform you are using (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube).
- Questions will be addressed at the end of the presentations as part of the Q&A portion.



Submitting Comments

- All written comments for the record must be submitted via the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment (PEPC) site or sent to the mailing addresses listed on the Natural Bridges National Monument PEPC site.
- These written comments become part of the official record.
- Please note that written comments must be submitted on or before October 3, 2021.



Format of Meeting

- This meeting will be 90 minutes long.
- We will adjourn at 6:00 PM Mountain Time.
- In the event questions are addressed before this end time, we will continue to hold the meeting until this identified end time to allow for any additional questions that might come in.



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**Overview of the National
Parks Air Tour
Management
Act (NPATMA) and Air
Tour Management Plans
(ATMP)**

September 23, 2021



Photo Credit: National Park Service (NPS) Photo by Jacob W. Frank

NPATMA Overview

- Requires the FAA, in cooperation with the NPS, to develop an ATMP for those parks and Tribal lands where operators have applied to conduct commercial air tours
- Act applies to commercial air tours:
 - Within ½ mile of park
 - Over Tribal lands within or abutting a park
 - 5,000 feet altitude or less above ground level (AGL)



NPATMA Overview

- Does not apply to general aviation, commercial airline, or military flights
- Does not apply to Alaska parks, Grand Canyon National Park, or Rocky Mountain National Park
- Parks with 50 or fewer reported flights per year are exempt from developing an ATMP, unless this exemption is withdrawn by NPS
- If abutting Tribal lands are or may be overflowed, Tribes must be invited as cooperating agency for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance



NPATMA Overview

- Commercial air tour operators apply for FAA Operating Authority in order to operate over National Park System units and abutting Tribal lands
- Commercial air tour operators fall into two categories:
 - Existing commercial air tour operator
 - New entrant commercial air tour operator



Air Tour Management Plans

The objective of any ATMP is to develop acceptable and effective measures to mitigate or prevent the significant adverse impacts, if any, resulting from commercial air tour operations upon natural and cultural resources, visitor experiences, and Tribal lands.



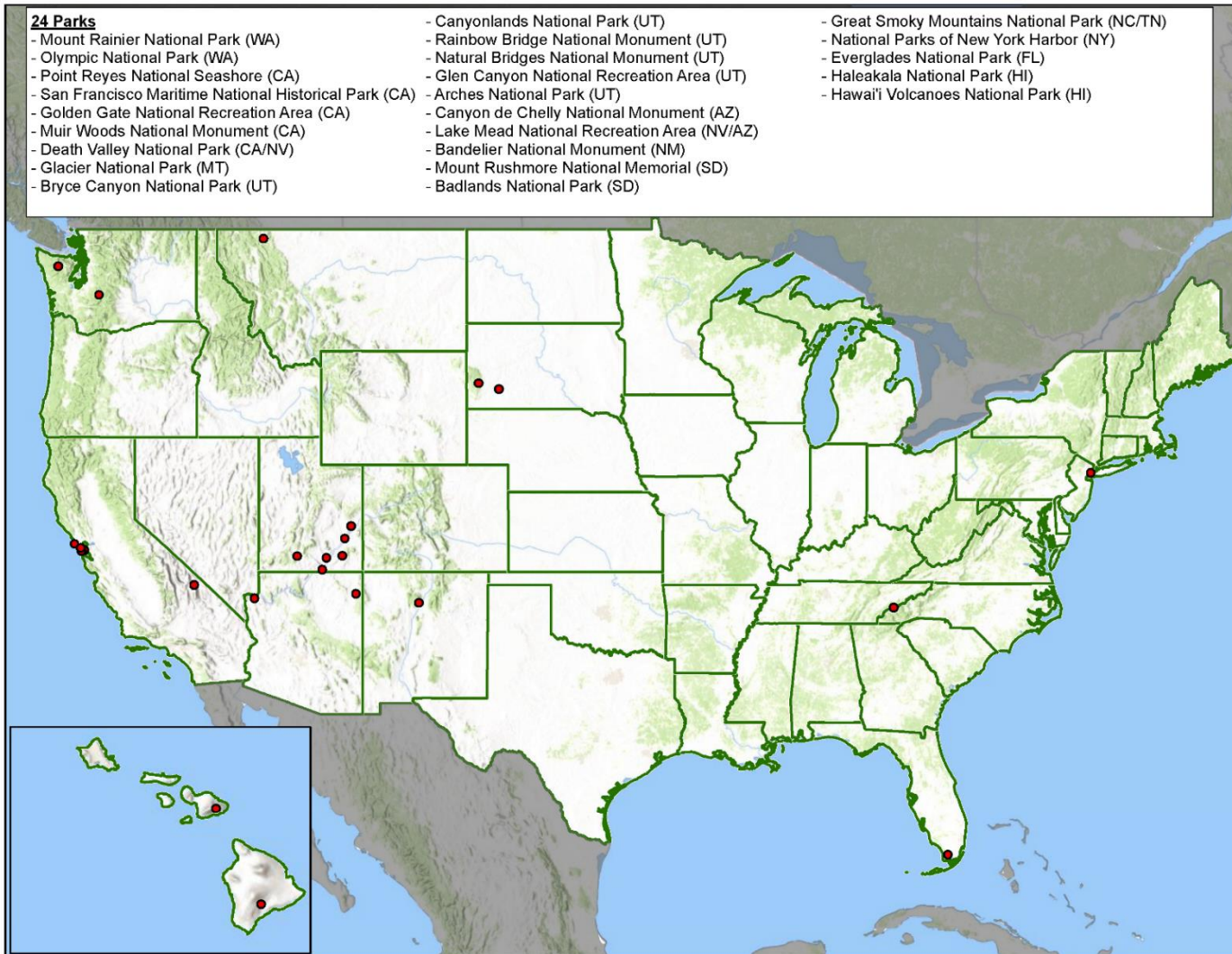
Air Tour Management Plans

An ATMP:

- A. May prohibit commercial air tour operations in whole or in part
- B. May establish conditions for the conduct of air tour operations including routes, altitudes, time-of-day restrictions, restrictions for particular events, maximum number of flights, etc.
- C. Shall apply to all commercial air tour operations within ½ mile outside the boundary of a national park
- D. Shall include incentives for the adoption of quiet aircraft technology
- E. Shall provide for the allocation of opportunities to conduct air tours when the ATMP limits the number of operations
- F. Shall justify and document the need for measures taken pursuant to items (A) through (E), above, and include such justifications in the record of decision



ATMP Parks



ATMP Development

- For each ATMP, the agencies will:
 1. Publish proposed ATMPs in the Federal Register;
 2. Hold at least one public meeting;
 3. Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other legal requirements; and,
 4. Invite Tribes to participate as cooperating agencies for NEPA compliance in cases where Tribal lands are, or may be, overflown.
- The purpose of today's meeting is to review the components of the draft ATMP.



National Parks Air Tour Management Program



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Draft Air Tour Management Plan for: Natural Bridges National Monument

September 23, 2021



Photo Credit: National Park Service (NPS) Photo by Jacob W. Frank

Park Overview

- Natural Bridges National Monument consists of 7,637 acres located in the southeast corner of Utah, 43 miles west of Blanding in San Juan County.
- The park preserves three of the world's largest stream-eroded natural bridges, and approximately 70% of the Park is eligible wilderness managed as designated wilderness in accordance with NPS 2006 Management Policies.

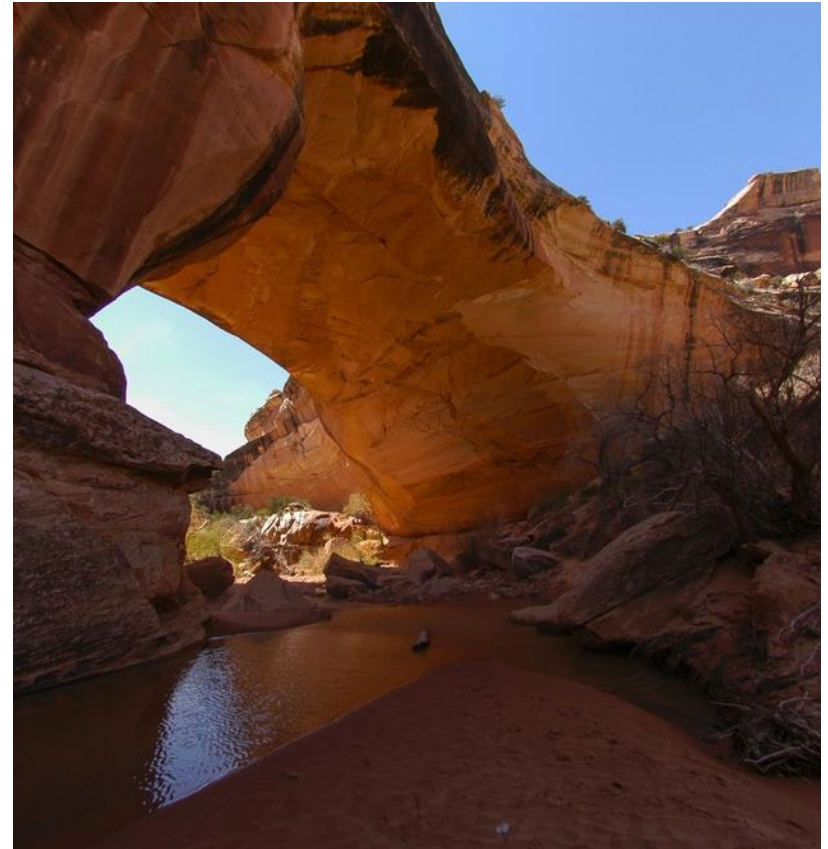
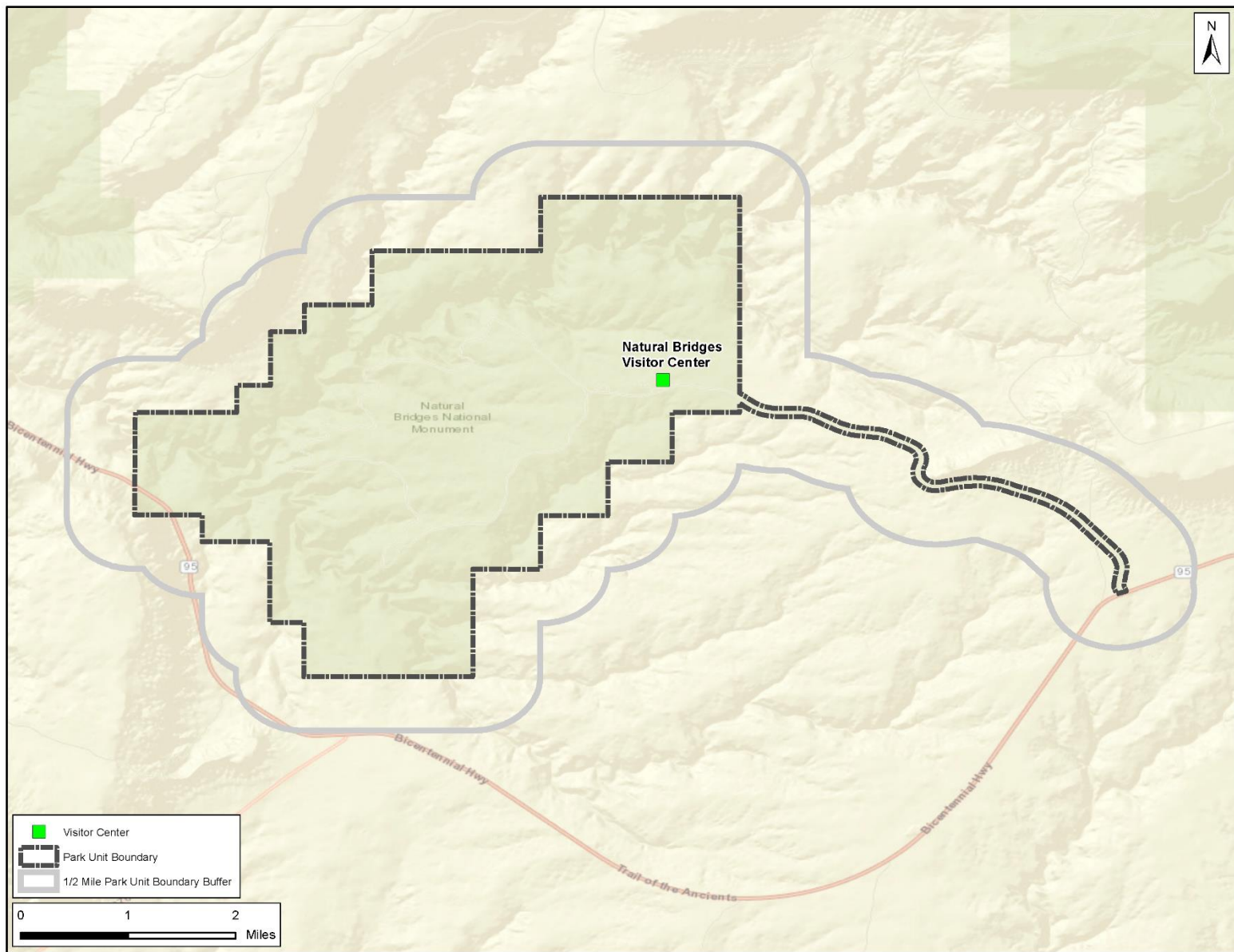


Photo Credit: NPS Photo by Neal Herbert



Park Resources

- The three natural bridges within the Park holds spiritual and cultural significance as ancestral homeland for many Native American communities.
- The entire Park has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Natural Bridges Archeological District, which includes 507 contributing resources.
- Park serves as habitat for a variety of wildlife species, including:
 - Federally listed Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo.



Photo Credit: NPS Photo by Neal Herbert



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Existing Air Tour Conditions at the Park

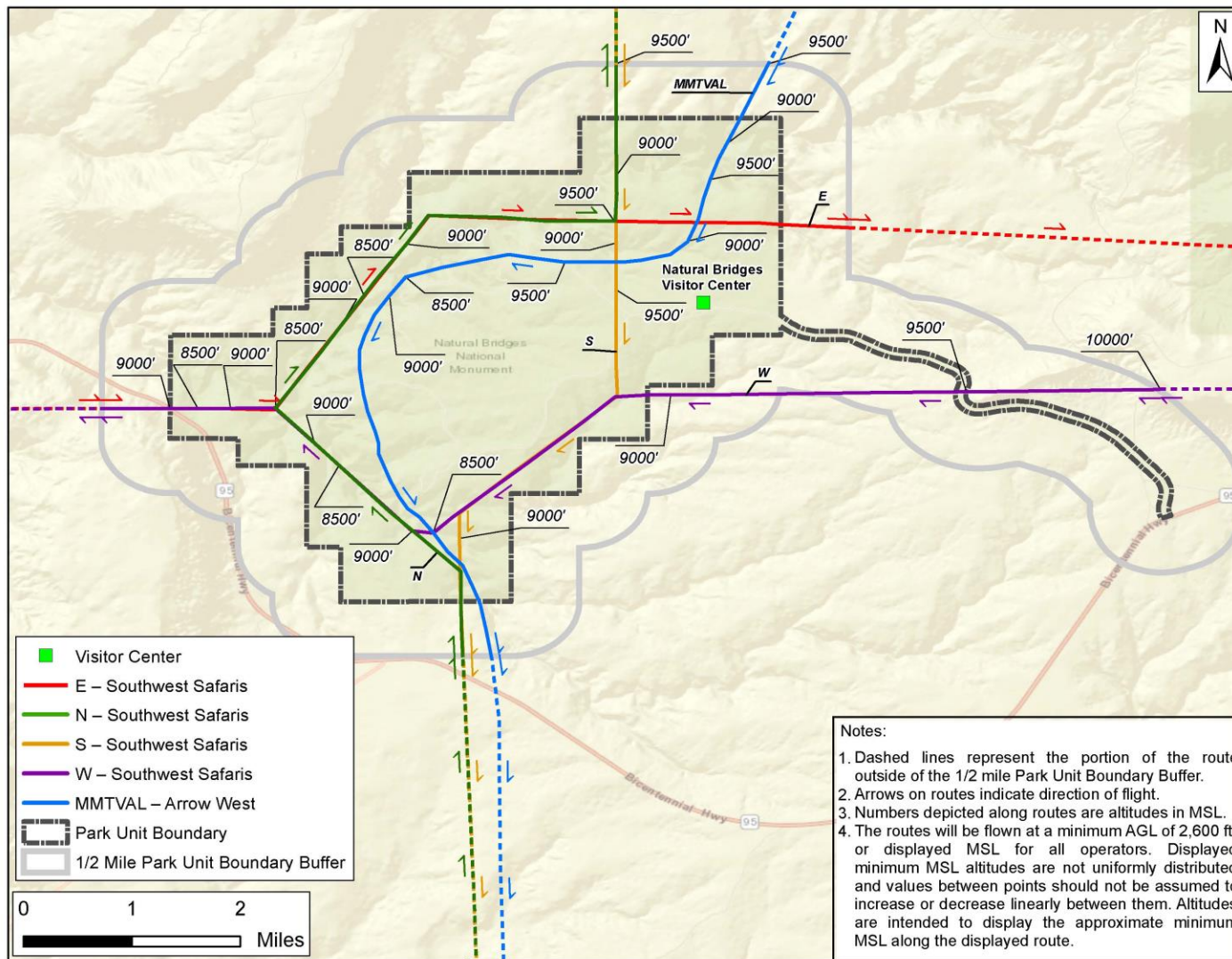
- Five commercial air tour operators hold Interim Operating Authority (IOA) for a total of 145 flights each year.
 - Three of those operators have not reported flying commercial air tours at the Park since reporting began in 2013. Two operators currently conduct commercial air tours at the Park.
- The three-year average of reporting data (2017-2019) is 73 flights conducted by the two operators each year.
- Annual number of commercial air tours at the Park is limited by the IOA.
- There are no designated parameters on route, time-of-day, or altitude restrictions; no procedures to establish no-fly periods; and no training or education requirements.

Draft ATMP at the Park

Category	Existing Air Tour Conditions	Draft ATMP
Number of Air Tours Authorized Per Year	IOA: 145 3 Year Average (2017-2019): 73 flights per year	73
Altitudes	No restrictions, reported altitude currently ranging between 1,000 feet and 2,000 feet above ground level (AGL)	No lower than 2,600 ft. AGL
Aircraft Types	No restrictions, currently reported as fixed wing	Specifications for each individual operator
Time-of-Day Restrictions	No restrictions, No restrictions, reported air tours currently between 7:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. local time	May operate two hours after sunrise until two hours before sunset
Day-of-Week Restrictions	No restrictions, may occur on any day of the week	The NPS can establish temporary no-fly periods for special events or planned Park management.
Required Reporting and Additional Requirements	Semi-annual reporting requirement; no additional requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Semi-annual reporting requirement ▪ Operator training when made available by NPS ▪ Option for annual meeting ▪ Specified in-flight communications frequency



Proposed Air Tour Routes



Justification for Measures Taken

- Annual flight limits are intended to protect park soundscapes, visitor experience, cultural resources, wilderness character, and wildlife.
- 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, endangered and migratory birds as stated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Guidelines for Raptor Protection from Human and Land Use Disturbances (2002).



Justification for Measures Taken

- Reducing the intensity of air tour noise to visitors on the ground would improve wilderness character and visitor experience.
- Total number of air tours proposed under this draft ATMP would be consistent with the existing air tours reported over the Park.
- Operator training/education and annual meeting facilitate effective implementation of the ATMP.



National Environmental Policy Act

- The FAA and the NPS must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in development of the draft ATMP.
- NEPA requires that the agencies:
 - Consider the human and natural environment that could be affected by their action (ATMP).
 - Determine the appropriate level of environmental review.
 - Prepare associated environmental review documents.
- At this time, the FAA and the NPS have conducted an initial impact analysis and are considering developing the ATMP under an NPS Categorical Exclusion.
- The agencies will consider public comments on the ATMP, information obtained during consultations, and fully assess the environmental impacts before making a final decision on the appropriate level of environmental review.



Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

- The FAA and the NPS are working to complete Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act in development of the draft ATMP.
- Section 106 includes the requirement that the agencies:
 - Define the Undertaking and Identify Consulting Parties
 - Determine the Area of Potential Effects and Identify Historic Properties
 - Assess Effects to Historic Properties
 - Resolve Adverse Effects, if Any, to Historic Properties
- The FAA and the NPS have initiated consultation with the SHPO, Tribes, and consulting parties.



Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act

- The FAA and the NPS are complying with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in development of the draft ATMP.
- Section 7 includes the requirement that the agencies:
 - Ensure their actions do not jeopardize the existence of any species listed under ESA or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.
- The NPS and the FAA have begun early coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and anticipate a determination of may affect, not likely to adversely affect for the Mexican spotted owl and California condor.



Public Review of the Draft ATMP

- The FAA and the NPS invite comments from the public, agencies, Tribes, and other interested parties on the draft ATMP.
- Comments must be received on or before October 3, 2021.
- Submit your comments:
 - Online: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/NaturalBridgesATMP>
 - Via Mail:

National Park Service
Natural Sounds & Night Skies Division
Natural Bridges ATMP
1201 Oakridge Dr., Suite 100
Fort Collins, CO 80525



Next Steps

- Following the end of the public comment period, the FAA and the NPS will:
 - Review the comments and use these to inform the final ATMP.
 - Continue to coordinate and complete Tribal, Section 106, and Section 7 consultations.
 - Conclude the NEPA process by signing a decision document.
- Upon the completion of the public comment period, consultations, and NEPA process, the ATMP will be finalized. The final ATMP will be available on the FAA and the NPS websites.
- Once the final ATMP is in place, the FAA will update Operations Specifications for each air tour operator.



Questions and Comments

- **During the meeting**, please submit questions using the Google form posted by the FAA in the chat area of the social media platform you are using (Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube).
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- **After the meeting**, please submit your comments for the record on or before October 3, 2021, at:
 - Online: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/NaturalBridgesATMP>
 - Via Mail:

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