

## Air Tour Management Plan – Frequently Asked Questions

### Golden Gate National Recreation Area

### Muir Woods National Monument

### San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

### Point Reyes National Seashore

- What are the existing commercial air tour operations at the parks? How would conditions under the ATMP be different than what is currently occurring?
  - Operators currently conduct tours under interim operating authority (IOA), which 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 over or within ½ mile of the park boundary. All current tours consist of a flight over or within ½ mi of both Golden Gate National Recreation Area and San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park during the same tour, and a subset of these tours also fly over Point Reyes National Seashore. The IOA for each park and the average number of tours reported per year from 2017-2019 are as follows:
    - **Golden Gate National Recreation Area:** Under IOA, two operators are currently authorized to fly a combined total of 5,090 commercial air tours per year for this park. On average from 2017-2019, 2,548 commercial air tours were reported per year for the park.
    - **San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park:** Under IOA, two operators are currently authorized to fly a combined total of 5,090 commercial air tours per year for this park. On average from 2017-2019, 2,548 commercial air tours were reported per year for the park.
    - **Point Reyes National Seashore:** Under IOA, two operators are currently authorized to fly a combined total of 5,090 commercial air tours per year for this park. On average from 2017-2019, 143 commercial air tours were reported per year for the park.
    - **Muir Woods National Monument:** Under IOA, two operators are currently authorized to fly a combined total of 5,090 commercial air tours per year for this park. Based on reporting data from 2017 to 2019, neither operator has reported conducting commercial air tours for the park. The draft ATMP does not authorize any commercial air tours at Muir Woods National Monument.
  - Conditions under the ATMP would be different in that 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.

- 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 and altitudes. Except when necessary for takeoff or landing, in an emergency or to avoid unsafe conditions, or unless otherwise authorized for a specified purpose, upon approval of the final ATMP, operators 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? Why are those conditions recommended?
  - Yes. Sections 3.4, 3.5, and Appendix A of the ATMP specify proposed days and times when air tours may occur. 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 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 parks.
- 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?
  - Whether a visitor on the ground sees a commercial air tour aircraft depends on a number of factors including how often tours occur, the time of day of the occurrence(s), 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; however, a viewer's eye is often drawn to the horizon to take in a park view, and aircraft at higher altitudes are less likely to be noticed. Aircraft at lower altitudes may attract visual attention but are also more likely to be screened by vegetation or terrain. Aircraft are transitory elements in a scene and visual impacts tend to be relatively short.
- Would park visitors be able to hear commercial aircraft tours from the ground?
  - Whether a visitor on the ground can hear a commercial air tour 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, but other noise sources such as vehicles, people, insects and other wildlife activity, wind, and precipitation can mask the sound of

an aircraft. Terrain features and buildings, which block the direct line-of-sight between a noise source and a visitor, also may have an effect.

- 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 in each of the four parks by limiting the number of potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours. The ATMP may include additional conditions as identified during 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 held inside the park, 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, including protections for tribal lands outside the park but within ½ mile outside of park boundaries.
- Will commercial air tours be allowed to fly under the Golden Gate Bridge?
  - The minimum altitude requirements in the proposed ATMP exceed the height of the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge; therefore, the minimum altitudes would not allow flights under the bridge.
- Why does the proposed ATMP manage air tours across multiple park units?
  - The commercial air tour routes flown by the two existing air tour operators transit multiple park units that share boundaries. In addition, two of the four parks – Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Muir Woods National Monument – are jointly managed by the NPS. Thus, the agencies determined that a single ATMP covering all four parks made the most sense for future management of commercial air tours. ATMP provisions such as the annual meeting provision in Section 3.7B provide an opportunity to ensure the cohesive management of commercial air tours across these park units.