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U.S. Department of Transportation Dockets
Docket No. [FAA99-5926]-23
400 Seventh Street, SW.
Washington DC, 20590.
August 19, 1999

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
99 AUG 31 PM 12:04

Dear Sir or Ma'am,

STOP THE AIR RAID AT GRAND CANYON!

The FAA proposes to amend the special operating rules for air tour flights in the Grand Canyon. The agency proposal is inadequate to meet the legal mandate. Congress enacted the National Parks Overflights Act in 1987, which required the FAA and the National Park Service to "substantially restore the natural quiet" of Grand Canyon National Park by creating no-fly zones and other restrictions on air tours. In the nine years following the congressional action, the number of air tours doubled, and they continue to increase!

The FAA is consistently failing to meet the mandate to "substantially restore the natural quiet" in the 1987 law. The agency should follow the law.

The FAA should require the removal of all flights below the rim.

The FAA has allowed the noise to get worse at the Canyon. The number of air tours has doubled from 50,000 annually in 1987 to around 120,000 now. The FAA should both reduce and cap the number of air tours to at least 1987 levels to achieve the natural quiet that the law mandates.

Substantial restoration of natural quiet requires that most of the Park is free of aircraft noise most of the time, for example 75% of the Park, 100% of the time. The agency says that only 41% (improved from 32%) of the Park will be quiet 75% of the day. All the rest of the Park has aircraft noise up to 100% of the day! This does not even meet the weak Park Service standard of 50% of the Park with aircraft noise "only" 25% of the day (with no noise limits in the other 50% of the park)

The FAA should close the Dragon Corridor (which is located just west of Hermit's Rest.) This corridor impacts the Hermit, **Boucher**, Waldron, and **Tonto** trails.

The FAA proposal would wrap tour flights closer around the south side of Point Sublime. This is an unacceptable way to treat visitor experience at such a spectacular and noted backcountry vista site, one the Park's own management plan says will be a future focus of increased North Rim visitation.

The Grand Canyon is one of the naturally quietest places on Earth. It is a place where visitors expect to get in touch with nature and enjoy the "natural quiet," including the sounds of the wind, trickling streams, or the call of a condor. They should not have to listen to aircraft up to every three minutes as occurs in many locations. Quiet deserves as much protection as other park resources.

Flight free zones need to be large or they do not work. The FAA should demand larger flight free zones in order to protect areas like Marble Canyon and the Powell Plateau.

Over 94% of Grand Canyon National Park is proposed wilderness; it should sound like a wilderness.

The FAA should require all air tours at the Canyon to use the quietest aircraft.

Sincerely,



Mary Jane Feldman

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Co-Chair, Conservation Committee

Southern Nevada Group of the Sierra Club