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U.S. Department of Transportation Dockets
Docket No. [FAA-99-59261 - 34]
400 Seventh Street, SW.
Washington, DC 20590

DEPT. OF TRANSPORTATION
DOCKET SECTION

99 SEP -8 AM 11:09

Dear Sirs:

I have been hiking in the Grand Canyon since 1972. I go there to experience unspoiled nature. Unfortunately, as the years have gone by, there have been fewer and fewer places available in the Grand Canyon to experience unspoiled nature. Instead, hiking in the Grand Canyon has become more like hiking in a particularly rugged airport. This is not what National Parks were created for, nor is it the reason I go to visit National Parks. And not only has it become difficult to find places to hike to that are free of aircraft noise, even spectacular rim viewpoints like Point Sublime are not immune.

Nor is this just my opinion. For the last 7 years, I have been teaching workshops at the Grand Canyon for the Grand Canyon Field Institute. In our post course surveys, one of the most common complaints is that the serenity they came to find was so often shattered by the noise of aircraft overflights.

It has been ~~twelve years~~ since congress enacted the National Parks Overflights Act requiring aircraft overflights of the Grand Canyon to be controlled to "substantially restore the natural quiet." Yet in the intervening years the noise of aircraft overflights has actually increased. There is less natural quiet now than when the law was passed. There has been no true attempt to restore the natural quiet. Rather the FAA has paid only lip service to the law, while allowing the number of aircraft overflights to more than double.

Not only has there been no attempt to limit the number of aircraft, the FAA has consistently failed to require tour companies to adopt quiet aircraft technology. The FAA must obey the law. The FAA must immediately implement measures to reduce aircraft noise and restore the natural quiet.

The number of air tours must be reduced to the number present in 1977—when air tour noise was not a problem.

All aircraft that are allowed to fly in the Grand Canyon vicinity must be required to use the quietest possible aircraft.

The FAA must prohibit all flights below the rim. Not the fictional 6000 foot above MSL rim, but the actual rim-8800 feet above MSL.

Flight free zones need to be enlarged-with no flight corridors cutting them. The goal should be that by 2007 the entire Grand Canyon National Park be a flight free zone. [Note: National Parks were created for people to get in touch with nature, not as a place to get in touch with motors, or as revenue generating entities for private enterprise.] The FAA is to be lauded for its efforts to promote aircraft safety. The best way to ensure aircraft safety at the Grand Canyon is to keep the planes on the ground.

The Dragon Corridor must be closed. When I hike into the Grand Canyon on the Hermit trail now, I am accompanied by the constant drone of air craft. A far cry from natural quiet.

Point Sublime needs to have a flight free zone around it that is at least 20 miles in diameter.

The FAA proposal to amend the special operating rules for air tour flights in the Grand Canyon is a total flouting of the law. Substantially restoring natural quiet requires that at least 94% of the Park be entirely noise free 100% of the time and the other 6% must be noise free 75% of the time. Ninety four percent of Grand Canyon National Park is proposed wilderness. It must sound like wilderness. That is, no aircraft noise.

It is time for the FAA to start obeying the law. It needs to adopt measures that actually restore the natural quiet to a substantial extent. The FAA must quit protecting the air tour industry, and start protecting the National Park.

Sincerely,

Kenneth A. Walters

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