

I have lived in or near Yellowstone or Glacier National Parks for nearly 50 years. In Glacier, commercial helicopter scenic flights have, in at least the past decade, greatly degraded the quality of experiences for park visitors on the ground - to a far greater degree than any other human activity. The vast majority of visitors are on the ground; only a small minority fly in commercial helicopters, but there are now so many flights that the noise is nearly continuous on many days. The solitude, the natural quiet that formerly contributed to Glacier's uniqueness are now gone. Local operators daily violate the current FAA altitude advisory; in the autumn and spring they fly with impunity through a major raptor migration corridor. I have seen them hover near wildlife. In contrast, fixed-wing flights above 5,000 ft AGL represent a well-established means of viewing Glacier from the air. Compared to helicopters, most fixed-wing flights are far quieter, fly higher, do not hover, and when flown appropriately, are not a major intrusion. Commercial helicopters are inappropriate and totally disrupting to park visitors in Glacier. The FAA needs to act swiftly to establish a means whereby commercial helicopters can be banned over national parks.

Accordingly, I support the 5,000 ft AGL altitude recommended by the FAA as the "triggering" altitude for air tour management purposes. The FAA should defer to the National Park Service's expertise in issues of noise impact on resources and visitors. The "no new entrants" clause should immediately be enforced. Any existing operators that did not notify the FAA of their over-park operations, in accord with the National Parks Air Tour Management Act, should be immediately prohibited from further operation.

Most importantly, the FAA should clearly define the process and the time table by which air tour management plans for national parks will be formulated, adopted, and implemented.

Sincerely, Riley McClelland