

STATE OF ALASKA

SEAN PARNELL, Governor

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January 4, 2011

Paul Anderson
Superintendent
Denali National Park and Preserve
P.O. Box 9
Denali Park, Alaska 99755

Dear Mr. Anderson:

At our meeting of December 3, 2010, the Denali National Park and Preserve Aircraft Overflights Advisory Council expanded the recommended "Best Practices" for aircraft landings and overflights. The new recommendations specifically address aircraft operations in the vicinity of the Ruth Gorge. Please update the attached Recommendations and Best Practices on the Council's official website.

Also attached is a recommendation concerning hiker education for the Triple Lakes Trail.

As you know, our work as a Council is not done. These Recommendations and Best Practices represent interim products that remain subject to change based on continued data gathering, monitoring, and the practicalities of implementation.

Thank you for the substantial time and support you and your staff have provided to the Council. We look forward to continued dialogue at our next meeting on March 24, 2011.

Sincerely,



Sally Gibert, Chair
Denali National Park and Preserve Aircraft Overflights Advisory Council

cc: Miriam Valentine, Designated Federal Officer

Denali Air Tour Operators Best Practices to Minimize Sound Impacts

Introduction:

The Denali Overflights Council has identified sound sensitive areas in Denali National Park, where competing uses among park visitors engaging in ground activities (hiking, camping, climbing, etc.) are in conflict with visitors who are experiencing the park via air tours.

To minimize these conflicts, a working group comprised of council members and air tour operators has developed a set of “best practices” to adjust flight patterns, when safety permits, to reduce the sound impact in these key areas. Where practical, the goal is to separate aircraft from park visitors on the ground.

Aviation safety is identified as the top priority when conducting flight operations by air tour operators. While the voluntary procedures described below are recommended, they are subject to the influence of weather, and local operator and transient traffic operations which may require that aircraft and helicopters deviate from these procedures to preserve safety for pilots and passenger safety.

Area 1) Triple Lakes Departures and Arrivals

Nature of surface activity: The Triple Lakes trail is heavily used by day hikers during the summer months between the Parks Highway and Triple Lakes.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators departing from the Denali (Private) Airstrip to the north will extend their climb beyond the Triple Lakes when practical before turning west. Aircraft arriving from the west will plan their approach to use minimum power settings to reduce sound impacts on this area. Helicopters departing from the ERA Heliport proceed upriver in a maximum allowed performance climb to Crisscross, before turning west to cross the Triple Lakes Trail.

Area 2) Park Road Corridor and Entrance

Nature of surface activity: During the summer season, June 1 through mid September, Park Road Visitors and backpackers may be subject to aircraft noise from air taxi and flightseeing operations.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators conducting air taxi and flightseeing operations in the Park will avoid flying over the Park Road when conditions allow. Operators will shift flights to the North of the Park Road Corridor as conditions allow. Arrival and departure procedures will make use of Healy Canyon when feasible. The goal is to minimize sound impact for those in the backcountry and traveling by bus into the Park.

Area 3) Mt. McKinley Summit Flights

Nature of surface activity: During climbing season (late April to early July) climbers at the high camps, 14,000 and 17,000 foot camps and enroute to the summit are subject to aircraft sound from summit flights.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators conducting summit flights are requested to avoid the 17,000 and the 14,000 foot camps and make approaches east of the south summit and north of the north summit. The goal is to minimize sound impact on the high camps and along the summit route by not flying close to these areas.

Area 4) Kahiltna Pass Crossings

Nature of surface activity: During climbing season (late April to early July) climbers traveling up the Kahiltna Glacier and located at the 11,000 foot camp are subject to sound from aircraft crossing Kahiltna Pass.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators planning to fly through Kahiltna Pass are asked climb to a safe crossing altitude well before arriving at the pass and avoid orbiting at climb power in or south of the pass to minimize sound impact for climbers.

Area 5) Ruth Gorge

Nature of surface activity: During the climbing season (late April to mid-June) climbers may be utilizing the Ruth Gorge. The gorge can channel aircraft sound, which may disturb climbers who are camping, traveling and climbing in this area.

Air Tour Operator Procedure: Operators who are conducting scenic flight tours and Ruth Mountain House glacier landings can minimize overflights of this area when weather allows by using Pittock Pass or Buckskin Gap when accessing the Ruth Amphitheater from the south.

Flight tours transitioning across the gorge are encouraged to fly north or south of the Ruth Gorge, or above 10,000', when able.

When leaving the Ruth Amphitheater via the Ruth Gorge, operators are requested to fly directly through the gorge at low RPM settings, and to fly on the right side to minimize sound impacts at the camping areas in the middle of the gorge and to avoid possible conflicting traffic.

Summary

These procedures are designed to reduce sound impact in these key areas of Denali National Park. They are subject to refinement and revision as operational experience is gained.

Adopted by the Denali Overflights Council, December 3, 2010