



PO Box 1934  
Flagstaff, AZ 86002  
(928) 773-1075 phone  
(928) 773-8523 fax  
[gcrg@infomagic.net](mailto:gcrg@infomagic.net)  
[www.gcrg.org](http://www.gcrg.org)

February 13, 2008

Superintendent Steve Martin  
Grand Canyon National Park  
PO Box 129  
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023-0129

Dear Superintendent Martin,

This year the National Park Service will be making very important policy decisions about natural quiet in the Grand Canyon. These decisions will deeply affect the way visitors experience the park for years to come. They will become part of the legacy that we pass along to future generations. We know that you are hearing from many interested parties, and that you and your team are thinking carefully about the matter. We would like to speak for ourselves, as people dedicated to preserving the canyon and providing the some twenty thousand river travelers who pass through it each year with the fullest possible experience.

Almost no one comes to the canyon anticipating the silence. They know about the visual beauty, the whitewater, maybe the hiking, but they don't even imagine such a thing as a quiet place. Life is full of mechanical background noise. At home there are the humming refrigerator, air conditioner and heater, the squawking television, radio and computer. Outside it's traffic, construction noise and airplanes. Most people have no escape from it. They grow accustomed, until they don't even imagine anything else could exist.

But then they get on the river. Usually the quiet first strikes them somewhere in the heart of Marble Canyon, where the river is calm and the walls so steep you have to lie back to look at them. The boat drifts through a flock of two hundred swallows, darting, diving, feasting on bugs, and not making a flutter of sound. A burbling spring covered with monkey flower makes the only sound on a half-mile stretch of river. There's the chirping of insects in the morning, the rumble of a distant rapid. People look into a sky bluer than

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they have ever seen, or blacker and full of more stars than they ever imagined, and feel the spacious quiet of the place.

This expansiveness that comes from listening deepens with the hours and days. Helicopter rotors cutting the air and airplanes buzzing overhead injure it. It's a simple truth: noise from scenic overflights damage the river runner's experience of the Grand Canyon. Hikers and backpackers are affected as well. We know this.

We also know that the canyon belongs to all of us. The demand on its resources is great, and we have to share. To share well, to protect the resource properly, we all have to minimize our impact on the place and on other visitors. River trips take great pains to achieve this. We pack out all our trash and human waste. We camp and hike carefully, with an eye toward minimum impact. For the good of the resource, there are places we can't camp, and places we can't even visit. We do our best to *leave no trace*.

Scenic flights should be governed similarly. Motor and rotor noise is a waste product that should be controlled in flight corridors and some areas of the canyon should be kept completely free of it.

The quiet of the Grand Canyon has as much depth and beauty as the majestic canyon walls, as much intimacy as the tiniest slot canyon creek. It touches people deeply -- when they are given a chance to experience it. That kind of quiet is exceedingly rare in our cacophonous world, as precious as any resource in the canyon. *In advance of a Draft EIS on overflights in Grand Canyon, please strengthen the park's definition of the "substantial restoration of natural quiet" by 1) setting the bar higher throughout the entire park, more in keeping with the 1995 NPS recommendation (mid-range plus) and 2) utilizing audibility rather than noticeability as the more stringent noise standard.*

We at Grand Canyon River Guides hope you will do your best to preserve and defend natural quiet in Grand Canyon for ourselves, for our passengers, and for all who will visit the canyon in generations to come. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sam Jansen  
President  
Grand Canyon River Guides, Inc.

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