

Preserving silence in national parks

GARRET KEIZER, WRITER FOR *SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE*, traveled to the NPS Natural Resource Program offices in Fort Collins, Colorado, to learn more about the Natural Sounds Program and to take a peek at the lives and work of the staff there. When he walked through the door, “cases of sound equipment—cables, decibel meters, microphones—were laid out like a dorm room’s worth of gear on the hallway carpet . . . members of the team were preparing for several days of intensive work out in the field.” Established in 2000, the Natural Sounds Program works to protect, maintain, and restore acoustical environments throughout the National Park System. With 185,000 air tours flying over parks every year, much of this research informs management planning efforts mandated by the National Parks Air Tour Management Act of 2000. From a policy perspective, the program asks what noises are appropriate for park settings and at what levels. Program Director Karen Treviño explains that the National Park Service has made significant progress in combating noise, yet much remains to be done. Examples of those successes include a propane-fuel shuttle system in Zion National Park that has made the canyon quieter, the establishment of a quiet zone in Muir Woods National Monument that allows visitors to enjoy a moment of silence among the redwoods, and cooperation from military overflights in Sequoia–Kings Canyon National Parks to fly above 3,000 feet. These successes may seem like small victories, but they may provide monumental opportunities for park visitors and wildlife.

Reference

Keizer, G. 2008. Preserving silence in national parks: A battle against noise aims to save our natural soundscapes. *Smithsonian Magazine*. Accessed 1 December 2008 from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/sounds-in-parks.html>.

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