

MOUNT RAINIER

Concession company pays higher fee under new contract

MORE INSIDE

Information on the reopening of Paradise Inn, See E6

BY JEFFREY P. MAYOR
Staff writer

A new concessions contract means more money for Mount Rainier National Park, completion of deferred maintenance work and additional steps to reduce the environmental impact of park operations.

The contract between the park and Rainier Guest Services LLC went into effect April 1 following a final 60-day congressional review. The Ashford-based company operates the lodging, food and beverage, retail and other commercial services at Longmire, Paradise and Sunrise Day Lodge.

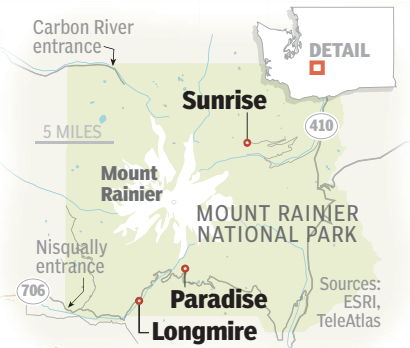
Rainier Guest Services is a subsidiary of the Fairfax, Virginia-based Guest Services Inc. Guest Services also runs the concessions at North Cascades National Park Complex facilities at Stehekin on Lake Chelan.

The concession company has worked at Mount Rainier for more than 40 years, said David Wilde, chief operating officer for Rainier Guest Services. It has about 35-40 full-time employees and hires about 200 people during the busy summer season.

Financially, the new deal is lucrative for the park. Rainier Guest Services will pay a franchise fee of 9 percent of its gross revenue, twice what it paid under its previous contract, according to Mary Wysong, the park's concessions manager.

Assuming overnight stays, food sales, snowshoe rentals and the like hold steady – gross receipts are about \$7.5 million a year – the contract should net the park about \$675,000 a year.

See RAINIER, E6



ADVENTURE

thenewstribune.com/adventure

SUNDAY, MAY 18, 2014 • SECTION E

GEAR

Swim jacket

THE SITUATION: For little ones learning how to swim, a bit of assurance goes along way. The Original Konfidence jacket is a swimming aid with adjustable buoyancy that can help increase children's confidence in the water. While not a replacement for full supervision or a life jacket, it can be a nice tool to introduce young children to swimming techniques.

THE DETAILS: Made from a water-resistant, flexible outer and a soft binding inner to prevent chafing, the jacket includes a system of eight floats that can be removed according to the child's comfort and ability. The jacket has a strong YKK zipper with a Velcro strap for security, with an internal zipper guard to avoid pinching or rubbing against skin.

The jackets are available in a range of designs and colors including red, blue and pink. All jackets include a bright yellow backing for high visibility. Available in sizes small (up to 44 pounds), medium (up to 55 pounds) and large (up to 66 pounds).

PRICE: \$39.99.

AVAILABILITY: For additional sizing information, or to purchase, visit konfidence-usa.com.

Shelby Sheehan-Bernard, McClatchy-Tribune News Service



DON'T MISS

Boat show wraps up

1 Cabela's will conclude its weekend parking lot boat show; the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary will do life jacket fittings and there will be demonstrations; 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, May 18, at 1600 Gateway Blvd. NE, Lacey; 360-252-3500.

Intro to road cycling

2 This ride from Capital Bicycle Club will teach riders hand signals, basic safety skills, how to be seen on the road by drivers and more; participants will ride together 13-17 miles at a fairly even pace; people wanting skills training should meet at 5:30 p.m. Monday at Joy Ride Bikes, 1225 Ruddell Road SE, Suite D, Lacey; those who have gone through the training will leave the store at 6 p.m. and join the other group; ride leaders are Jenny Mercer and Michelle Kautzman, 360-480-0196 or mtkkautzmann@yahoo.com; capitalbicycleclub.org.

Walk through Tumwater parks

3 The Capitol Volkssport Club is leading this walk through Tumwater Falls Park and Watershed Park, as well as neighborhoods with historic homes and the business district; 11K with shorter options; meet at 6 p.m. Tuesday at Safeway, 520 Cleveland Ave., Tumwater; free; capitolvolkssportclub.org.

Learn to ID birds

4 The Tacoma Mountaineers will offer the first of a two-part bird identification class; the instructor is David Kaynor, who has been an active birder in Washington for more than 25 years; 6:30-9 p.m. Thursday, with the second class May 29; The Mountaineers Tacoma Program Center, 2302 N. 30th St., Tacoma; \$50 for both classes; for more information or to register, Kaynor at 360-688-6636 or dkrkaynor@live.com; tacoma.mountaineers.org.

INSIDE

TRAVEL, South Carolina

Seeing old Charleston in new light

City mansions, cemeteries and more to explore,

See E8



Photos by DREW PERINE/Staff photographer

Sound recordist Gordon Hempton stops to admire one of the massive trees in the Hoh Rain Forest at Olympic National Park. On rainy days, Hempton carries a colorful umbrella to keep his equipment dry and for use as a parabolic reflector to detect natural sound.

Desperately seeking silence

It's getting tougher all the time to find refuge from human-made noise. One man is trying to preserve a place of quiet in Hoh Rain Forest



Gordon Hempton records nature sounds in a Hoh Rain Forest location he has designated as One Square Inch of Silence, the quietest place in the contiguous United States.

BY JAKE BULLINGER
Staff writer

Our world is a noisy one. Indoors or out, the racket from appliances, vehicles and airplanes is nearly constant. But within a few hours of the South Sound sits one of the contiguous United States' last respites from noise pollution, a place where one can experience true quiet.

Visitors can count on periodic freedom from noise in Olympic National Park's Hoh Rain Forest, a valley blessed with copious rainfall and remote geography. But if one reinvigorated activist gets his wish, the Hoh will become a permanent sanctuary from the man-made noise that persistently encroaches on wilderness.

ON ONE MARCH MORNING, Gordon Hempton is ecstatic; he woke up to birdsong. Two years ago, Hempton was despondent; he was going deaf.

He could hear a passing car, a television, a human voice, but none of these sounds matter to him. For Hempton to feel alive, he must hear what humans evolved to hear – such as birdsong. For two years, chirps eluded him. But now, allergy treatments have restored his hearing, and with it his organization's audacious cause.

See SILENCE, E4

MORE INSIDE

Olympic National Park too far? We give you 5 quiet options around South Sound, See E4

ONLINE

View a video where we go inside Hoh Rain Forest to experience true quiet, [thenews tribune.com](http://thenewstribune.com)

ADVENTURE

SILENCE

From E1

“We want to see in the year 2016, when we celebrate the centennial of our National Park Service, Olympic National Park be declared the world’s first no-flight zone for environmental reasons,” Hempton says. “Think of it as a renewal of vows, getting back to the basic environmental values, why our parks were created.” Hempton lives through his ears. The sound recordist has spent four decades chasing pristine soundscapes, work that has taken him to locations such as the Amazon rain forest and the Kalahari desert. Multiple documentaries, one an Emmy Award winner, and a book have chronicled Hempton’s quest.

As Hempton traveled the globe to record places unmolested by humankind’s noise, he noticed a trend – the quantity of his subjects was diminishing. This realization birthed Hempton’s activism career. He began documenting the number of quiet places – defined by Hempton as locations free from human-made noise for consistent 15-minute intervals – within the U.S. In 1984, there were 21 locations in Washington Hempton considered quiet. In 2007, there were just 12 locations in the contiguous U.S., and only three in Washington. Today, Hempton doubts there are even 10 spots in the country that offer 15 minutes of quiet.

The most placid location he came across wasn’t far from his home in Joyce on the Olympic Peninsula. On Earth Day 2005, in the hopes of building awareness for America’s quiet crisis, he publicly designated One Square Inch of Silence – in the Hoh Rain Forest – the quietest place in the lower 48.

ONE SQUARE INCH

isn’t a tourist destination. The park doesn’t officially acknowledge its existence, and rangers aren’t supposed to guide you to the location 3.2 miles up the Hoh River trail. It’s not more spectacular than Sol Duc Falls, Hurricane Ridge or any of the park’s other scenic vistas. Visitors are surrounded by the same flora and fauna as the rest of the rain forest, so its acoustic profile is no different than anywhere else in the Hoh.

But the rest of the Hoh doesn’t have the rock. When Hempton designated the location in 2005, he marked it with a small red stone given to him by a Quileute Nation elder. The original stone has since been replaced, but its meaning remains: This is a place of reverence. You come here to sit, be patient and immerse yourself in the soundscape around you.

No signs mark One Square Inch’s entrance – park staff has made sure of that so passers-by aren’t tempted to venture off trail. Instead, one must watch for the spot’s subtle but fitting door, an arched sitka spruce trunk on the north side of the trail. Say what you must now, Hempton instructs, because once you step through the arch, verbal communication ends.

Beyond the spruce, a game trail winds roughly 30 yards into the forest. When you find the tiny red stone resting on a mossy log, the next step is simple: sit and listen.



Photos by DREW PERINE/Staff photographer

Gordon Hempton checks the sound level in a Hoh Rain Forest location he publicly designated as One Square Inch of Silence, the quietest place in the Lower 48. Hempton says the Hoh enjoys consistent 20-minute intervals free of human-made noise.

ON A QUEST FOR QUIET

By Hempton’s standards, you will listen poorly at first. You will focus on individual sounds and identify them in your thoughts – river, leaf, bee. But one doesn’t listen to an orchestra only to single out the violin, and before long, the Hoh’s myriad sounds come together as a composition.

“Every sound has a feeling,” Hempton says. “If you think every sound has a thought, or words form in your mind, I don’t think you’re listening. True listening is worship. It’s where you’re completely open and you’ve completely let go of outcome.”

The Hoh’s symphony is made possible by its geography and ecology. Thirteen feet of annual precipitation coats the forest in moss, which insulates the area like foam on recording studio walls. The abundant foliage attracts wrens, owls, elk and squirrels whose chatter flutes through trunks of sitka spruce, Western hemlock and broadleaf maple.

A lack of transportation infrastructure aids the all-important quiet. Olympic is one of few national parks without a bisecting road, and the Olympic Peninsula isn’t a popular flight corridor. The result is stretches of 20 minutes or more where the Hoh sounds exactly as it did thousands of years ago.

BUT BEFORE LONG,

the deep rumble of a plane yanks listeners back into the 21st century. At a cruising altitude of 30,000 feet, a jetliner will register anywhere from 40-60 decibels, Hempton says. Military and propeller-driven planes are much louder, often reaching 75 decibels.

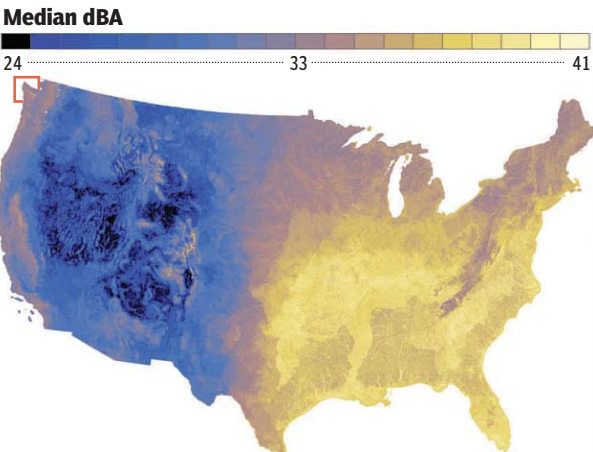
In a location such as the One Square Inch, where the ambient sound level is typically 27 decibels (40 in a heavy rain), an airplane commands the ear’s attention. Even if a plane is technically quieter than the ambient landscape, it can often be heard because its low-frequency drone cuts through sound waves that would otherwise mask it.

Noise levels in the U.S.

Experts say the entire country is affected by the noise of human development. The following maps look at the U.S. sonic profile on a typical summer day. All measurements are in A-weighted decibels (dBA), which are adjusted to reflect human hearing.

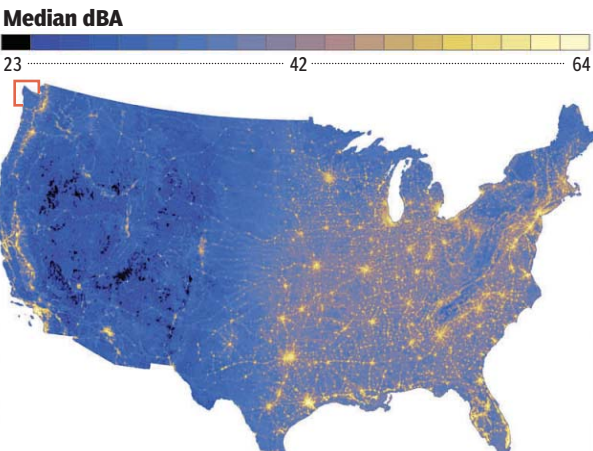
Natural sound levels

This map shows what sound levels would be without human development. Hot and humid areas of the country would be 41 dBA, while deserts and dry highlands would be a much quieter 24 dBA.



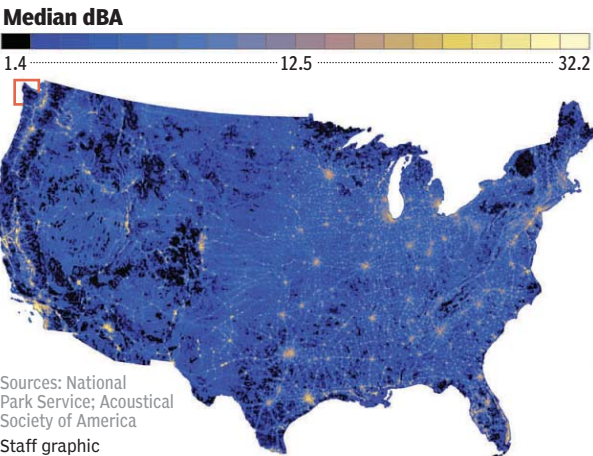
Existing sound levels

Population and transportation are the drivers of present-day sound levels. Urban areas can have a median sound level greater than 60 dBA, while some sparsely populated locations remain nearly as quiet as in a natural state.



Noise impact of humans

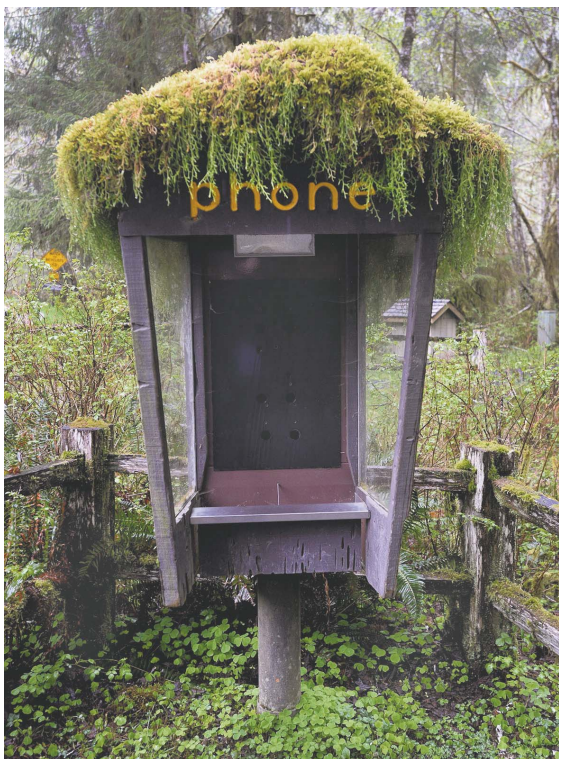
Bright areas of this map are where humans have increased the median sound levels by about 30 dBA. In some metro areas, Seattle-Tacoma included, human development has roughly doubled the median sound levels. Dark locations are rural or uninhabited locations barely affected by human noise.



Sources: National Park Service; Acoustical Society of America
Staff graphic

On a recent visit, planes dominated the soundscape no fewer than 15 times during an hour of walking. Traffic like this is a new development. Hempton says in 2007, when he began

writing “One Square Inch of Silence,” the noise-free interval in the Hoh was usually an hour or more, despite an overall decrease in airline traffic over the past seven years.



Hempton teasingly suggests this moss-covered non-working phone booth outside the Hoh Rain Forest Visitor’s Center may be the most-photographed sight in Olympic National Park. It’s certainly an indicator of the copious amount of rain that falls there each year.

DECIBEL LEVEL EXAMPLES

| SOURCE / SOUND | LOUDNESS (dBA) |
|--|----------------|
| Crater at Haleakala National Park | 10 |
| One Square Inch location in Hoh Rain Forest | 27 |
| Whisper (16 feet) | 30 |
| Residential neighborhood at night | 35 |
| Crickets at Zion National Park (16 feet) | 40 |
| Conversational speech (16 feet) | 60 |
| Heavy truck (49 feet) | 90 |
| Auto horn (3.3 feet) | 110 |
| Military jet (328 feet above ground) | 120 |
| Deck of an aircraft carrier | 140 |

Sources: National Park Service; Gordon Hempton

Noise pollution, particularly from airplanes, is pervasive across the continent. Wilderness overflights are so common that backpackers in multiple national parks alerted rangers when all commercial traffic was grounded after the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

On the ground, the nation’s roadways are plenty noisy. A Park Service study found 83 percent of U.S. land is within 3,500 feet of a road, a distance from which an automobile is usually louder than the listener’s immediate surroundings.

Animals have noticed the noise. Studies show birds have reacted to noise pollution by altering the pitch of their calls or avoiding loud locations altogether.

According to Kurt Fristrup, science and

technology chief of the National Park Service’s Natural Sounds division, the biggest issue is when consistent noise forces animals to adapt to a new sonic landscape.

“Wildlife species have evolved hearing thresholds that are low enough to take advantage of the quietest conditions that ever occur,” Fristrup says. “If we chronically elevate those sound levels, and thereby render those very low hearing thresholds moot, we are countering hundreds of thousands of generations of evolution.”

Boise State University researchers, with Fristrup’s help, are working on a project that aims to single out noise pollution’s effect on wildlife. In an otherwise pristine area of Boise National Forest, researchers have hung speakers that play highway noise, creating a kilometer-long phantom road that can be flipped on and off to isolate sonic effects.

The first year of the study saw migratory bird density and diversity drop during noisy periods, and the birds that did stick around exhibited symptoms that surprised researchers.

“When the noise is on,” Fristrup says, “the birds that do manage to stop in the noisy corridor tend to lose weight, even though there is less competition for food. When other birds land in the same place when the noise is off, they gain weight. For migratory birds trying to tank up for the next flight, this weight loss is a significant issue.”

Spots to find peace and quiet closer to home

No place in the South Sound is as quiet as the Hoh Rain Forest, but there are plenty of spots to escape the din of Tacoma and Olympia. The trick is to find places with few (or no) roads and a physical barrier between you and Sea-Tac International Airport. Thick vegetation also helps dissipate noise. Here are some easy-to-access spots for peace and quiet:

MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK: This national park has its own quiet spots, too. Hit the Carbon River area for a hushed temperate rain forest. Another good bet is the park’s south-east corner, which is shielded from Sea-Tac noise by the 14,411-foot mountain. Try the Owyhigh Lakes and Cowlitz Divide trails.

KOPACHUCK STATE PARK: Forested trails help buffer car noise, and Carr Inlet gets less boat traffic than the Gig Harbor side of the peninsula. When fishing boats aren’t revving their motors, Kopachuck’s a good bet for solitude.

THE EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE TRAILS: The school has trails snaking through 1,000 acres of forest and along 3,000 feet of shoreline, making this arguably the quietest spot within Olympia city limits.

ANDY’S PARK: Wetlands, a tidal estuary, plenty of wildlife and few people make this Anderson Island gem not only a quiet spot, but one of the better parks in the South Sound.

KEY PENINSULA: The entire peninsula has a good recipe for quiet: few people and few roads. The communities are some of the more placid in the area, while Joemma Beach and Penrose Point state parks offer hiking for visitors.



Mount Rainier



Sound-deadening moss covers nearly all flora in the Hoh Rain Forest at Olympic National Park. That feature and the remote geography of the park create an ideal acoustical environment.



A stream cascades through the Hoh Rain Forest, on the west side of Olympic National Park, one of the few remaining examples of temperate rainforests in the United States.



Every time Hempton visits One Square Inch of Silence, he replaces a stone that marks the site as a place of reverence. It is one of the spots most free of man-made noise in the Lower 48.

NOISE POLLUTION IN the Hoh is relatively sparse, but Hempton wants it gone. The no-fly goal of the One Square Inch Foundation, the nonprofit he established to promote natural quiet, would both preserve the soundscape and, he says, boost the area's economy. "This is not resource preservation versus aviation at all," Hempton says. "This would, I think, create a tremendous boom in Olympic tourism. And not just local tourism — this would be the world's first quiet place, and people are going to fly to Sea-Tac to visit."

Hempton says planes cast a noise shadow of 1,000 square miles. By this logic, keeping planes

away from One Square Inch would preserve the soundscape in nearly all of Olympic's 1,441 square miles.

An ambitious goal, yes. One likely to succeed by 2016, no.

Efficiency and safety are the main criteria the Federal Aviation Administration uses to draw up flight paths, says spokesman Hank Price. Environmental effects are factored in, but the agency doesn't consider the noise from cruising-altitude planes detrimental. The power to alter flight corridors is wielded solely by the FAA. The Park Service has only the authority to seek voluntary overflight mitigation.

banned sightseeing tours at Rocky Mountain after a successful campaign by the local League of Women Voters chapter. Even the FAA has gotten in on the act. Last year, a trio of flight paths over the park were consolidated into one path over a heavily traveled road, reducing park overflights to an area where car noise could mask the sound of planes.

Similar movements aren't in the works at Olympic, but the park is paying more attention to noise. All three alternatives in the park's draft wilderness stewardship plan address noise pollution through methods that include "formalizing partnerships to reduce overflights."

"We would be looking to meet with the FAA and commercial airlines, along with military and local tour operators, to discuss voluntary agreements where the operators might be able to modify what parts of the park they fly over," says Olympic spokeswoman Barb Maynes. "The quiet and the ability to really listen to natural sounds is so outstanding at Olympic, and it's something we strive to protect."

HEMPTON THINKS saving the quiet at One Square Inch of Silence comes down to building awareness. As the nation's population flocks to urban areas, more people adapt to the constant whine of electricity and internal combustion engines. Hempton says the key to preserving quiet is to avoid being conditioned to our noisy surroundings and learning to appreciate and understand what little natural quiet remains.

"Unless we create preserves of quiet," Hempton says, "unless we take legislative action to create quiet places and protect them from noise pollution, we will lose all quiet during daylight hours everywhere in the United States."

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Flight restrictions not likely to happen anytime soon

BY JAKE BULLINGER
Staff writer

It's simple to Gordon Hempton. If the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Park Service want to preserve a sensitive soundscape, they'll make Olympic National Park a no-fly zone.

While undeniably effective, achieving Hempton's goal would require a significant departure from current practices.

The Park Service has the authority to lessen noise on park grounds, but existing regulations give it little power over aviation noise. The Air Tour Management Act, which requires commercial sightseeing tours to file an application with the FAA before they fly over national parks, gives the Park Service no jurisdiction. It wasn't until 2012 that parks received authorization to seek voluntary flight path modifications from tours, a significant noise source in many parks.

The law allows national parks to work with the FAA to develop air tour management plans — park-specific rules for sightseeing tours — but the efforts have yet to bear fruit.

"We have worked with the FAA since 1987 trying to create an air tour management plan for Grand Canyon, and since 2000 trying to put together a plan for other national parks," says Kurt Fristrup of the Park Service's Natural Sounds division. "The formal agency process has not yet produced a single agency plan."

Just 13 of the 385 eligible national park units have committed to the initial phase of developing a plan. Mount Rainier National Park is one of the 13; Olympic is not. Rainier's progress is on hold, and Olympic has yet to begin its plan.

Any large-scale flight plan alteration such as Hempton's proposal must receive FAA approval. Environmental concerns are factored into flight corridor decisions, but the agency doesn't consider the noise from planes at cruising altitude a threat to any ecosystem.

"In most cases, aircraft noise levels in national parks are not high enough to cause a significant noise impact," FAA spokesman Hank Price said in an email. "Noise from en-route aircraft at high altitudes is either not heard or not noticed on the ground."

Sensitive landscapes do receive extra examination, Price says. When the agency proposes or studies an aviation action — such as shifting flight corridors — it typically monitors the sound of aircraft up to 10,000 feet above ground level. When a national park could be affected, the ceiling jumps to 18,000 feet but is well shy of including jetliners that cruise at 30,000 feet.

Planes themselves are becoming quieter, though. In 1975, the FAA estimated 7 million Americans living near airports were subjected to "significant noise levels," defined by the FAA as a daylong average of 65 decibels or more. Price says quieter planes and more efficient flight procedures have cut that number by 95 percent.

Furthermore, flight volume has dropped in the past decade. According to the Bureau of Transportation, 986,136 commercial passenger planes took flight in August 2005. In August 2013, that number had fallen to 844,071.

Sound levels in the U.S. airspace have decreased since the 1970s, but that's of little comfort to Hempton. Until commercial aircraft are completely silent, he says, creating no-fly zones is the only way to preserve natural soundscapes.

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MORE ONLINE

View a video where we go inside Hoh Rain Forest to experience true quiet, thenewstribune.com

"It's an area of active research, but not an area of active regulation," says Fristrup. "Given the very limited success the Park Service has had in managing air tours, which are far more specific to parks, any attempt to modify the national air space would be, at least in today's sociopolitical environment, fruitless."

There have been small-scale victories in the fight against overflights. One case study is Rocky Mountain National Park, which has the most comprehensive noise-mitigation policies in the national park system.

In 2000, Congress

