

**Coalition Opposing the National Park Service / Federal Aviation Administration Draft Agreement entitled “Commercial Air Tour Voluntary Agreement for Statue of Liberty National Monument and Governors Island National Monument”**

**Contact:**

**Friends of Liberty State Park, President Sam Pesin** [pesinliberty@earthlink.net](mailto:pesinliberty@earthlink.net)  
**Stop the Chop NY/NJ, Melissa Elstein, Board Chair** [info@stopthechopnynj.org](mailto:info@stopthechopnynj.org)

November 15, 2022

Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland  
U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

National Park Service Director Charles F. Sams III  
U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

Federal Aviation Administrator U.S Administrator Billy Nolan  
Federal Aviation Administration 800 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, DC 20591

Dear Interior Secretary Haaland, NPS Director Sams III, and FAA Administrator Billy Nolan,

We the undersigned urban quality of life and environmental nonprofit groups are writing to you in opposition to the National Park Service / Federal Aviation Administration Draft Agreement entitled “Commercial Air Tour Voluntary Agreement for Statue of Liberty National Monument and Governors Island National Monument” herein after referred to below as the “Agreement”.

This proposed Agreement, if implemented, would create devastating effects on users of New Jersey's Liberty State Park (LSP), Governor’s Island (south side), and residents of New York City’s Battery Park, South Street Seaport, Brooklyn Heights, and Red Hook neighborhoods due to the intensely loud noise the tourist helicopters would create over said geographic areas.

We urge you to immediately grant a 90-day extension of the November 21 Public Comment Period deadline. We just learned about the plan last week and we have contacted our NJ and NY Congressional delegations who ironically, were not made aware of this plan in advance with its severely harmful impacts. With this late notice and people already immersed in the holiday season and with so much at stake, it is the fair thing for you to extend the deadline until after the holidays.

**Friends of Liberty State Park statement:** The unconscionable helicopter noise barrage directly over and immediately adjacent to the park will destroy the public's peaceful use of this heavily used park. Families and people of all ages come to LSP for quality of life, mental and physical health experiences in the heart of densely populated Jersey City and Hudson County.

**This is also a LSP homeland security issue, with over 5 million users a year visiting our popular urban park.**

**Additionally, this is an environmental justice issue as local Jersey City residents use LSP to enjoy picnics, barbecues, relaxation, recreation and nature. LSP is a special and unique park with inspiring views of Lady Liberty, Ellis Island and New York City. If this Agreement is implemented, it will negatively impact park users celebrating holidays, engaging in nonprofit 5K fundraisers, and enjoying free and admission-fee festivals and special events.**

Also negatively affected by every day loud helicopter flights will be LSP permanent and seasonal employees, especially those who work in the maintenance department.

**Stop the Chop NY/NJ (“STCNYNJ”) Statement in Opposition to Agreement:**

Stop the Chop NY/NJ is an all-volunteer, grassroots community organization with supporters and members on both sides of the Hudson River. (See our diverse coalition here: <https://stopthechopnynj.org/our-coalition/> ) STCNYNJ formed as a result of the ever increasing problem of nonessential (tourist/sightseeing and commuter/charter) helicopter traffic over the New York City metropolitan area. We have been invited to speak at the Congressional press conferences held in the past four years at which New York Congressmembers Carolyn B. Maloney, Jerry Nadler and Nydia Velazquez introduced important pieces of legislation aimed to address the nonessential helicopter problem in said geographic area. (See <https://stopthechopnynj.org/legislation/> ) The NPS/FAA draft Agreement runs counter to our and the electeds’ goals of banning or substantially reducing nonessential helicopter traffic in the NYC region, and we have serious concerns regarding it for the reasons below.

The proposed new 1,000 foot lateral setbacks and ½ mile voluntary agreement boundaries over the three national parks (Governors, Ellis and Liberty Islands) in the New York Harbor, were recently created by the NPS and FAA to “minimize effects of commercial air tours on the Parks” and “to protect visitor experience throughout the Parks by reducing potential disturbances caused by commercial air tours.” (See Agreement section 3.1). However, by creating this buffer around these Parks to protect tourists, the unintended negative consequences will be to bring the sightseeing helicopters closer to land on both sides of the Hudson River resulting in more noise and air pollution for New York and New Jersey residents! Tax paying New Yorkers and Jerseyites (who are already suffering the effects of incessant noisy and low-flying sightseeing and commuter helicopters) will ironically and tragically be subjected to even more noise pollution, sound vibrations, and reduced air quality as this Agreement only considers those effects on the tourists physically on the Parks. (It should also be noted that this Agreement will NOT reduce the visitor noise experience while they wait for ferries to bring them to the Parks, nor as they try to enjoy the south part of Governors Island over which one boundary divides).

Millions of New Yorkers who reside, work and/or recreate in the following neighborhoods (including their use of waterside parks) will be negatively impacted if this Agreement is implemented: Manhattan’s Battery Park and South Street Seaport, and Brooklyn’s Red Hook and Brooklyn Heights. This Agreement sacrifices the health, well-being and quality of life of New Yorkers and Jerseyites in the impacted areas so that for-profit polluters can take joy-riding tourists near the National Monuments in the New York Harbor.

We have other serious concerns, such as: the fact that the helicopter companies were at the drafting table with the NPS and the FAA in creating this Agreement, and no community groups, community boards, or any other representatives from the impacted public; there is only a 500 foot above ground height limit; there are no sightseeing tour caps; the Agreement allows two additional tour companies to be included, and even possibly more, thereby likely creating more helicopter traffic than the present; the Agreement does not mention any terrorism prevention plans even as it notes the high terrorism risk to the Parks; the excessively short 30-day public comment period; and the fact that there were no scientific studies conducted to address how the noise and air pollution created by this Agreement will impact residents and the environment, nor how sightseeing helicopter noise gets conducted over water (the New York Harbor) to impact those on land.

**For reasons set forth above, we urge you to extend the Public Comment Period and we also urge you to amend this Agreement as it is detrimental to the users of Liberty State Park and the residents of the above-mentioned areas of New York City.**

Sincerely,

Friends of Liberty State Park  
Stop the Chop NY/NJ

**NJ Coalition members list in formation:**

Communications Workers of NJ, Local 1037  
Jersey City Parks Coalition  
Bike JC  
NY/NJ Baykeeper  
Empower NJ

CC

**New Jersey Congressional Delegation**

Senator Robert Menendez  
Senator Cory Booker  
Congressmember Albio Sires  
Congressmember Donald Payne, Jr.  
Congressmember Bill Pascrell

**New York Congressional Delegation**

Senator Chuck Schumer  
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand  
Congressmember Jerry Nadler  
Congressmember Carolyn B. Maloney  
Congressmember Nydia Velaquez  
Congressmember Yvette Clark  
Congressmember Grace Meng