

# Noise polluting large swath of protected U.S. lands

By Katie O'Reilly, Sierra

Noise pollution is typically considered an urban problem. However, new research shows that the invisible threat found in the din of human activity (also known as anthropogenic sound) is increasingly taking its toll on the natural world.

A first-of-its-kind study, released last week from scientists at Colorado State University and the National Park Service (NPS), shows that anthropogenic noise pollutes 63 percent of all U.S. protected lands—that includes city and county parks, state and national forests, and national parks, monuments, and refuges.

After culling more than a million hours of recorded data from 492 protected sites across the continental United States, researchers concluded that anthropogenic noise doubled background sound levels in most of these areas. They also detected elevated sounds in 14 percent of endangered species' critical habits. Protected areas with the most stringent regulations, such as national parks and designated wilderness areas, suffered the least noise pollution.

The issue does more than disrupt the natural serenity of protected places like parks, forests, and historical battlefields. According to George Wittemyer, a Colorado State University conservation biologist and one of the authors of the study, the impact of excessive noise—which has been steadily mounting since the Industrial Revolution—includes increased heart rate in humans, as well as disrupted sleep, irritability, negative cardiovascular and psychophysiological effects, and even shortened life spans. He's not the only one to say so. The World Health Organization considers noise

pollution to be an environmental burden second in scope only to air pollution.

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