



Issue Overview, Dec. 11, 2023

Congressional Update

[HAI Tells Congress: Keep Our National Parks Open to All, including Air Tour Operators](#)

[HAI Hosts Annual Aerial Work Safety Conference](#)

State and Local Updates

[HAI Participates in Orlando, Florida, AAM Industry Day and Tabletop Discussion](#)

Congressional Update

HAI Tells Congress: Keep Our National Parks Open to All, including Air Tour Operators

Summary of Facts

On Dec. 5, the US House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations held a crucial hearing looking into new rules that limit and, in some cases, eliminate air tours over US national parks. Two HAI members, Mark A. Schlaefli, president of Rushmore Helicopters, Black Hills Aerial Adventures, and Badger Helicopters and vice chair of the HAI Board of Directors, and Jake Tomlin, president of Papillon Grand Canyon Helicopters and Grand Canyon Scenic Airlines, told Congress that the National Park Service (NPS) and the FAA overstepped and failed to consider operational, environmental, and access issues for the public and air tour operators.

At the Dec. 5 hearing, Schlaefli emphasized that air tours have a minimal impact on national parks, as they require no ground-based infrastructure such as roads, trails, signs, or facilities.

Tomlin pointed out the safety concerns arising from failing to involve crucial stakeholders such as air tour operators in the planning process. He cited issues such as conflicting tour routes with nearby airports and military installations, aircraft flying within 500 ft. of each other, lack of consideration for weather conditions, and inadequate coordinated radio communications in the area.

Both Schlaefli and Tomlin stressed that the NPS failed to consider the devastating consequences of air tour management plans (ATMPs) on their businesses and their ability to retain employees. Schlaefli noted that the ATMPs for Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Badlands National Park effectively ended more than 9,000 previously approved flights, severely affecting operations in those areas. Tomlin added that the NPS did not adequately assess the potential economic ramifications of plans that severely limit overflights, which could make it economically unviable for air tour companies to remain in business.

HAI Position and Actions

HAI opposes the rushed development of ATMPs, and we advocate for collaborative solutions.

We believe the NPS and the FAA have overstepped their decision-making responsibilities by hastily limiting or eliminating air tours at national parks. [Watch the entire hearing here.](#)

HAI Hosts Annual Aerial Work Safety Conference

Summary of Facts

HAI is hosting its annual Aerial Work Safety Conference in Boise, Idaho, Dec. 9–11. The event features safety presentations by government professionals from the FAA, US Army, US Department of the Interior, and US Forest Service, along with leaders from industry organizations. Attendees gain insights into safety enhancements, protocols, and risk management while also having opportunities to network with their rotorcraft peers and industry experts.

The conference delves into key issues pertinent to aerial work operations and covers various aspects of vertical aviation. John Shea, senior director of government affairs for HAI, is providing a government affairs overview of issues pertinent to the aerial work industry. Breakout sessions are focusing on firefighting, restricted-category aircraft, and utility, patrol, and construction operations.

HAI Position and Actions

HAI remains committed to advancing safety standards and practices within the helicopter industry. The Aerial Work Safety Conference serves as a pivotal platform for fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange between industry professionals, government representatives, and organizations involved in aerial work operations.

State and Local Updates

HAI Participates in Orlando, Florida, AAM Industry Day and Tabletop Discussion

Summary of Facts

Last week, HAI and other aviation stakeholders immersed themselves in the future of advanced air mobility (AAM) in the dynamic city of Orlando, Florida. Orlando City Hall served as the center for a tabletop planning exercise, bringing federal, state, and local policymakers together with industry leaders. The collective goal was to sculpt the landscape of vertiport infrastructure development.

Meeting participants discussed four scenarios for vertiport infrastructure during the tabletop exercise: new private vertiport on greenfield property (would need rezoning); new private vertiport on previously developed property (zoning already approved); new vertiport on airport property; and existing heliports.

This initiative aligns with Orlando's commitment to foster AAM innovation and create a future-ready master plan and transportation strategy.

HAI Position and Actions

HAI Manager of Government Affairs Katia Veraza attended alongside our AAM members at this event. As Florida takes the spotlight because of its robust rotorcraft industry and significance for the AAM community, HAI is dedicated to ensuring the successful implementation of AAM and safeguarding the interests of the vertical aviation industry in the Sunshine State.

[Manage how often you receive emails from HAI.](#)