

Acoustic Environment and Soundscape Resource Summary Minidoka National Historic Site

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natural Resource Stewardship and Science
Natural Sounds & Night Skies Division



The acoustic environment is a resource with intrinsic value. It is important as a natural resource, a cultural resource, or both. It is a critical component of wilderness character and plays an important role in wildlife communication, behavior, and other ecological processes. Results from multiple surveys of the American public indicate that hearing the sounds of nature is an important reason for visiting national parks. Therefore, the value of acoustic environments and soundscapes is related to an array of park resources and has broad implications for park management. The quality of the acoustic environment is relevant in nearly every unit in the NPS System. When developing the foundation document, park staff should consider the acoustic environment as a resource with inherent value. The topics in Attachment 1 discuss the importance of the soundscape and the acoustic environment in relation to park resources and values.

At **National Park Name**, acoustic resources protection and noise reduction are related to the following park priorities:

- reflective and commemorative setting of the park
- ability to enhance visitor experience
- interpret history of the site and the circumstances around its development

Potential Threats

- Noise from park facilities and operations
- Noise from visitors such as visitor vehicles, music, shouting, electronics
- Noise from nearby development, transportation, and aircraft

Potential Opportunities

- Outreach to visitors about reducing noise from sources such as electronics and idling vehicles
- Reduce noise from park operations (time activities to preserve quiet times, purchase quieter equipment)

Existing data/planning:

- Predicted acoustic conditions based on continental geospatial sound model

Future data/planning:

- Collect acoustic data to measure baseline acoustic conditions
- Develop acoustic goals, indicators and standards in related park plans

Quality of the Resource at Minidoka NHS

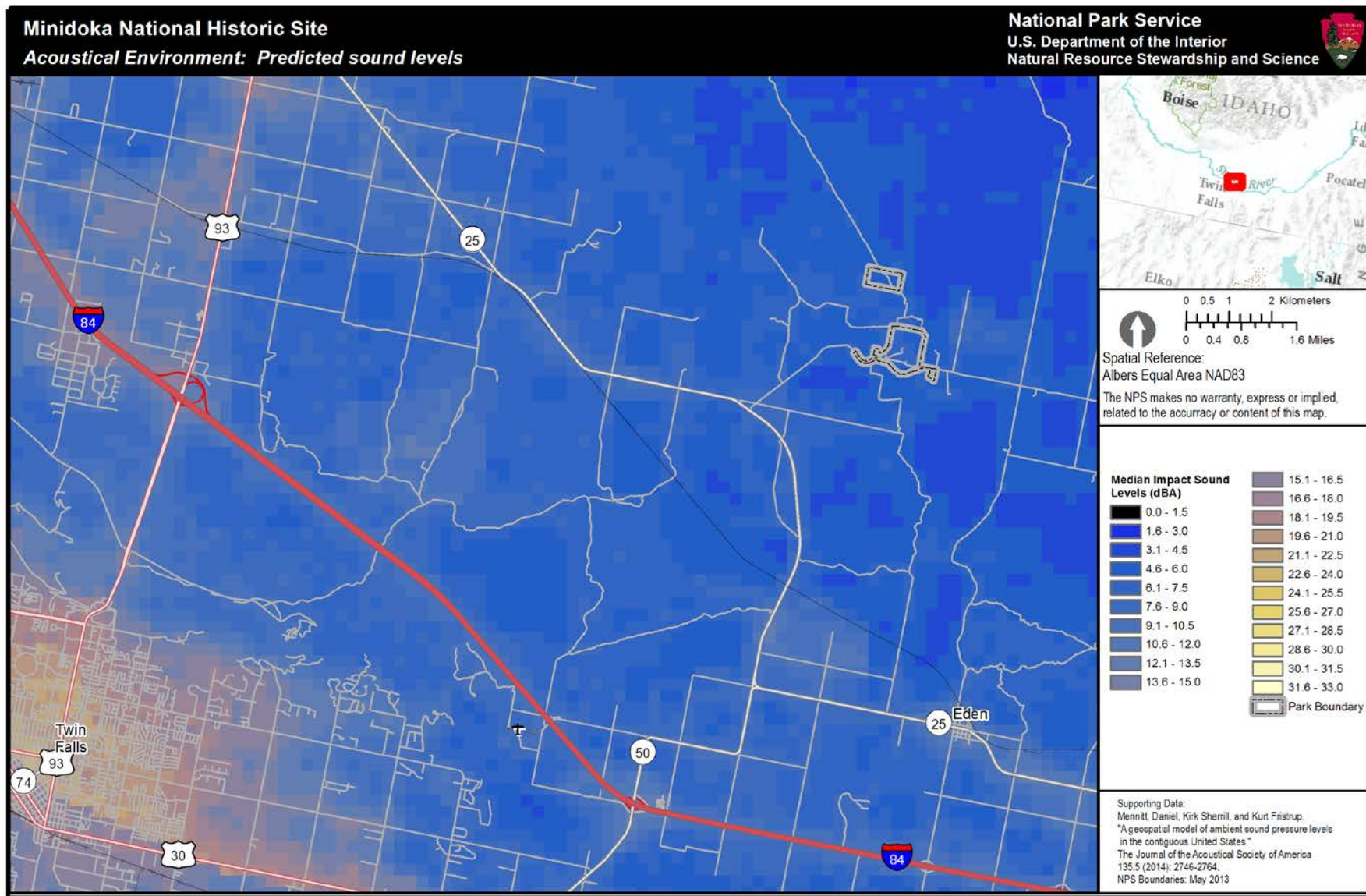
A single parameter that is useful for assessing a park's acoustic environment is the impact of man-made sound sources in relation to natural acoustic conditions. The Natural Sounds and Night Skies Division (NSNSD) estimates the impacts using predictions from a geospatial sound model. The model predicts how much man-made noise raises ambient sound levels. Sound pressure levels for the continental United States were predicted using actual acoustical measurements combined with a multitude of explanatory variables such as location, climate, landcover, hydrology, wind speed, and proximity to noise sources (roads, railroads, and airports). The model predicts daytime impacts during midsummer. The impacts are determined by the difference between the *natural* ambient sounds levels (without the influence of human-made sound) and the *existing* sound levels (including human-caused sound) as predicted by the model. It should be noted that while the model excels at predicting acoustic conditions over large landscapes, it may not reflect recent localized changes such as new access roads or development.

To better express the variation of impact across parks, a park-specific impact map was generated from the geospatial sound model. The park map for Minidoka NHS is shown in Figure 1 below. The map was generated using 270 meter resolution, meaning that each pixel represents 270 square meters. At Minidoka NHS, the mean impact is predicted to be 6.0 decibels (dBA). That is, the average existing sound level (with the influence of man-made sounds) is predicted to be 6.0 dBA above the natural ambient sound level.

A one decibel change is not readily perceivable by the human hear, but any addition to this difference could begin to impact listening ability. An increase of 6.0 dBA would reduce listening area for wildlife and visitors by 75%. For

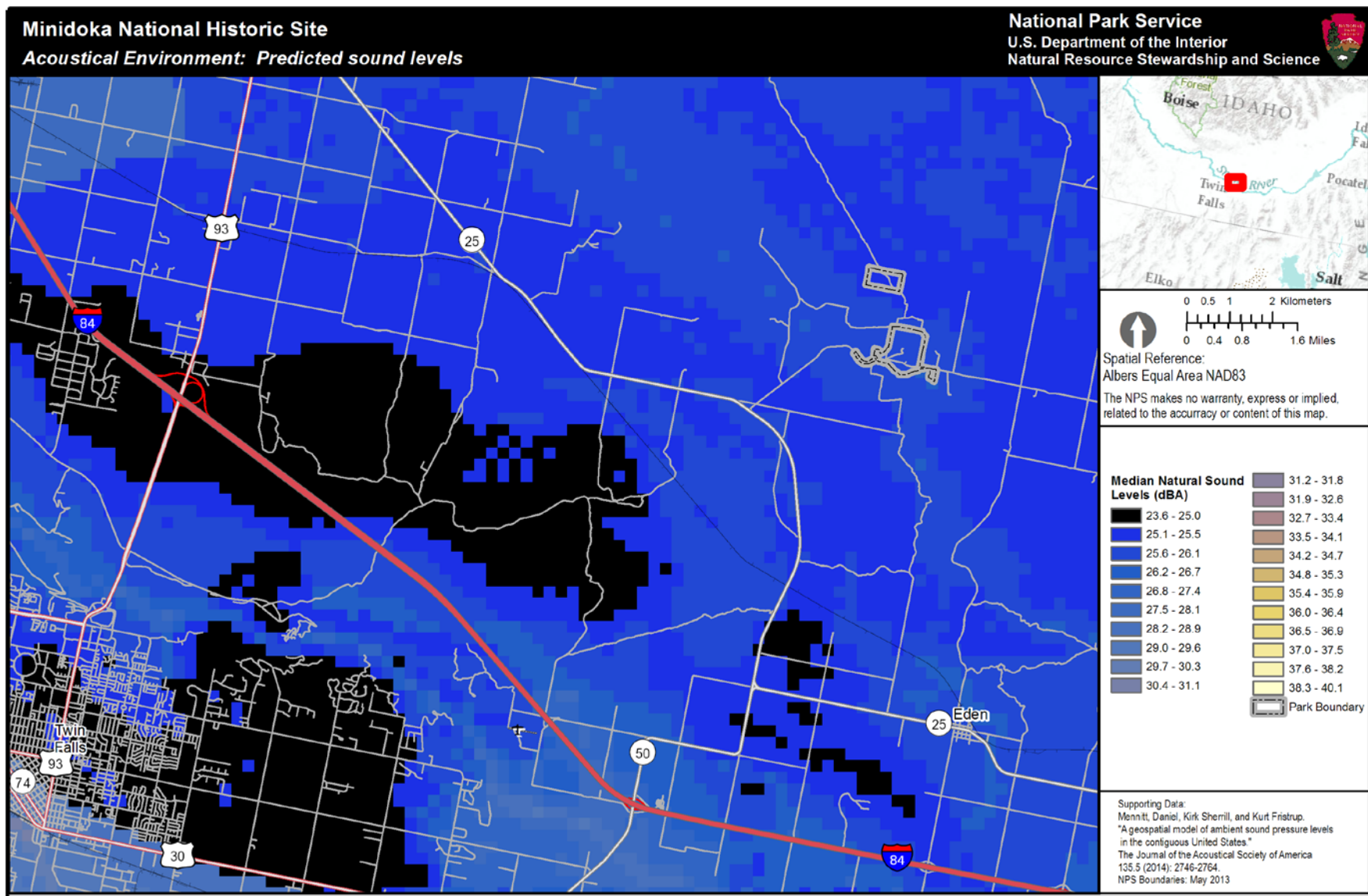
example, if a predator can hear a potential prey animal in an area of 100 square feet in a setting with natural ambient sounds, that animal's ability to hear would be reduced to 25 square feet if the sound levels were increased by 6.0 dBA. Similar reduction would occur for visitors and their ability to hear natural sounds or interpretive programs. Keep in mind this is a mean impact across the park and impacts vary spatially throughout.

The park-specific map is a subset of the national model and shows median acoustic impact sound pressure levels for the park unit. An inset map is included in each park-specific map to provide a better sense of context, and major roads and highways are labeled for reference. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show natural and existing sound pressure levels for the park unit respectively.



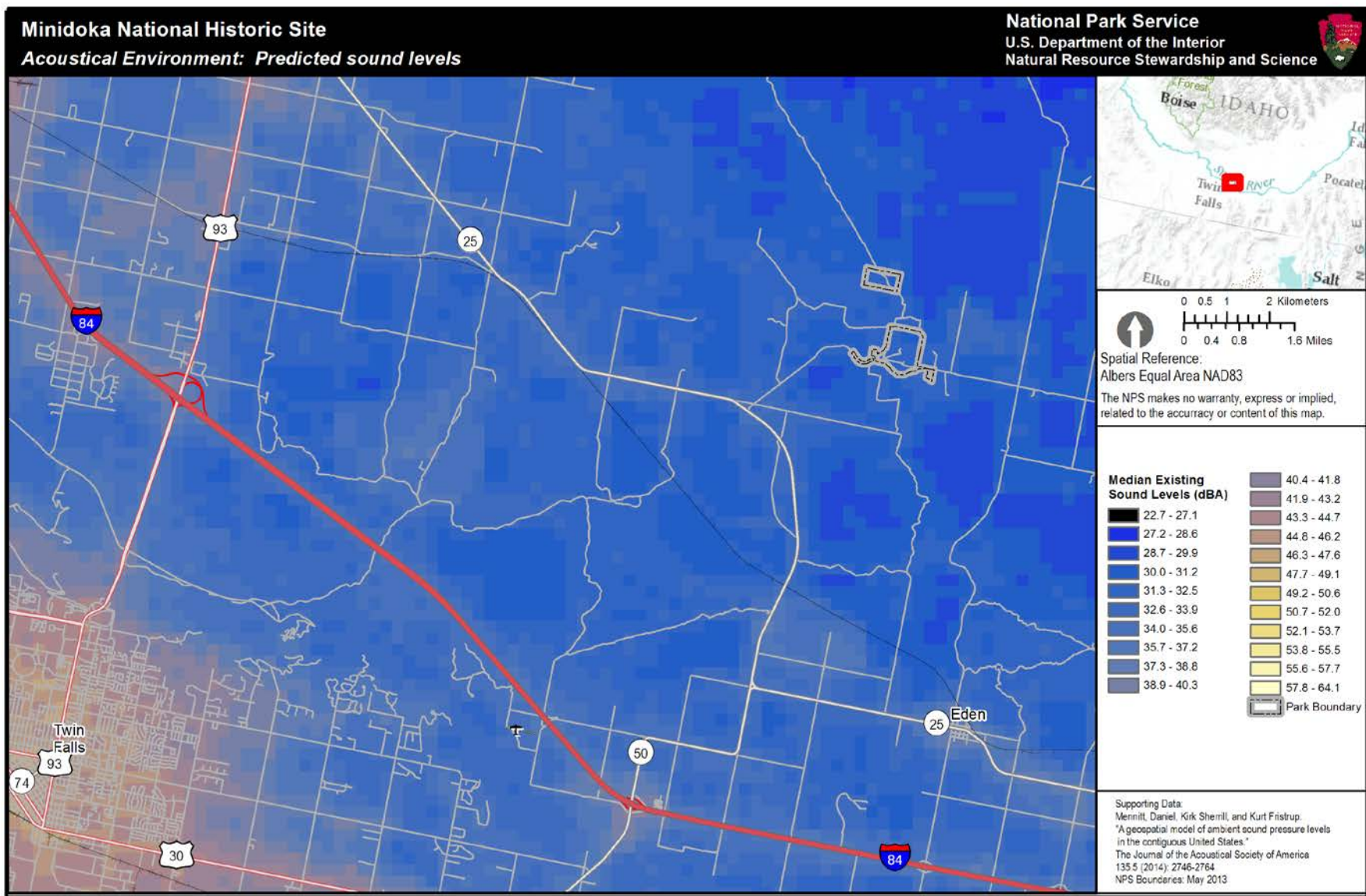
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Figure 1. *Median sound level impact map for Minidoka NHS.* This park-specific L50 dBA impact map is generated by version 3 of the geospatial model. The color scale indicates how much anthropogenic noise raises the existing sound pressure levels in a given location (measured in A-weighted decibels, or dBA), with 270 meter resolution. Black and dark blue colors indicate low impacts while yellow or white colors indicate greater impacts. (note: each figure has different legend values)



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Figure 2. Median **natural** sound pressure levels for Minidoka NHS. This park-specific natural sound level map is generated by version 3 of the geospatial model. The color scale indicates the decibel level that is predicted in the park based only on natural sound sources. Sound level is measured in A-weighted decibels, or dBA, with 270 meter resolution. Black and dark blue colors indicate low decibel levels while yellow or white colors indicate higher decibel levels. (note: each figure has different legend values)



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Figure 3. Median **existing** sound pressure levels for Minidoka NHS. This park-specific existing sound level map is generated by version 3 of the geospatial model. The color scale indicates the decibel level that is predicted in the park based only on both human-caused and natural sound sources. Sound level is measured in A-weighted decibels, or dBA, with 270 meter resolution. Black and dark blue colors indicate low decibel levels while yellow or white colors indicate higher decibel levels. Sound levels in national parks can vary greatly, depending on location, topography, vegetation, biological activity, weather conditions and other factors. For example, the din of a typical suburban area fluctuates between 50 and 60 decibels (dBA), while the crater of Haleakala National Park is intensely quiet, with levels around 10 dBA. (note: each figure has different legend values)