

Polluted Parks

HAZE FACT SHEET

The Regional Haze Rule

The Regional Haze Rule is the blueprint to reduce—and eventually eliminate—human-caused air pollution in America’s most iconic 48 national parks and 108 wilderness areas (Class I areas). Once a decade, states must revise plans to lower air pollution affecting these places until natural air is restored.

The Regional Haze Rule has already driven the retirement of dozens of power plants and led to reduced pollution at scores more. By 2021, all states must create new haze plans to continue improving Class I area air quality. With these plans comes a new opportunity to reduce a significant amount of pollution across the nation.

To develop haze plans, states first identify sources of visibility impairing pollution potentially affecting Class I areas. Then they evaluate a host of factors to determine the emission cutting requirements they will propose. During this process, states engage various stakeholders and federal land managers and must provide the public an opportunity to comment on draft plans. They send final plans to EPA by July 2021. Strong state plans will mean clearer skies and healthier air for our national parks, our communities and our planet.

Top: Visitor enjoys view in Rocky Mountain National Park, CO ©Margaret619 | Dreamstime



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A Vision of Clean Air for Parks and People

National parks and wilderness areas should have clean air, but sadly many struggle with unhealthy air, hazy skies, and the impacts of climate change. The Regional Haze Rule is the clean air tool designed to restore air quality in these special places, and states must now develop strong haze plans to meet this goal.

Yosemite, Everglades, Acadia and Joshua Tree national parks. Shining Rock and John Muir wildernesses. These are just a few of our nation’s greatest wild places that experience widespread effects from air pollution even if sometimes they don’t appear to be polluted. In fact, ninety-six percent of national parks are plagued by significant air pollution problems.

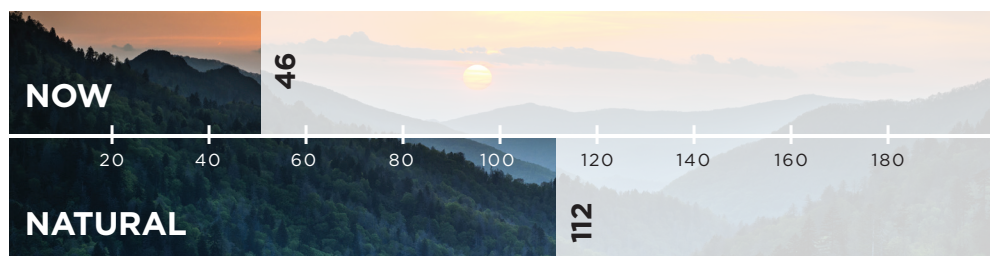
Behind these numbers are children, families, recreation enthusiasts, business owners and others with firsthand experiences dealing with the effects of air and climate pollution across

the country. These human connections reveal a common theme: the problems of pollution afflict both people and our parks in similar ways.

Fortunately, certain national parks and wilderness areas have the strongest clean air protections in the country, mandated by the Clean Air Act’s Regional Haze Rule. The Regional Haze Rule is a time-tested, effective program that requires federal and state agencies as well as stakeholders to work together to restore clear skies at 156 “Class I” designated public lands.

Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Visibility in Miles



NPCA identified 1,221 point sources of visibility impairing pollution across the country



UNHEALTHY AIR

85%

National parks that have air that is unhealthy to breathe at times



HARM TO NATURE

88%

National parks where air pollution is damaging sensitive species and habitat



HAZY SKIES

89%

National parks that suffer from haze pollution



CLIMATE CHANGE

80%

National parks where climate change is a significant concern



What is Haze?

While most air pollution doesn't originate in national parks, it can travel hundreds of miles from its source, affecting parks near and far — including remote ones. Haze is made of tiny airborne particles, called particulate matter (also known as soot), and gases that block light that reduce visibility while also jeopardizing public health. The air pollution that causes haze comes from a variety of industrial sources, including coal-fired power plants, chemical manufacturers, oil and gas operations, industrial agriculture, cement plants and pulp and paper mills. Emissions from these and other sources can be regulated under the Regional Haze Rule, and with strong state plans, we can anticipate steep reductions in:

- **Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x), Ammonia, & Sulfur Dioxide (SO₂):** All three are direct and indirect sources of particulate matter (PM), which cause haze. PM pollution is also directly emitted from certain pollution sources..
- **Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs):** VOCs and NO_x both contribute to the formation of haze pollution as well as the creation of ozone, or smog, which is dangerous to breathe. Cutting both helps solve haze and ozone problems.
- **Carbon Dioxide, Mercury & Other Toxic Emissions:** Requirements to reduce or eliminate haze pollution often results in a decrease in these pollutants.

Above: Cars pack the 10 lane Interstate 80 near Berkeley, California. ©Minesweeper | Wikipedia
Left: Oil Pump ©Andrey Burmakin • The Navajo Generating Station, the nation's eighth largest coal-fired plant, is just outside Glen Canyon National Recreation Area and only 12 miles from Grand Canyon National Park. ©Frontpage | Shutterstock

The Regional Haze Rule in Action

Pollution from the Centralia Power Plant, a coal burning power plant in Washington State, has contributed to poor air quality in communities across the Northwest for decades, as well as other Class I public lands like Mount Rainier and Olympic National Parks.

Due to the plant's effects on the state's Class I areas, stakeholders came together around a plan that would require prompt reductions in haze pollution and full closure of the plant by 2025. This plan was made enforceable through Washington's regional haze plan.

The first of the two power plant's units will close in 2020, resulting in reductions of thousands of tons of haze-causing, health-harming and climate-disrupting pollution.

These victories are what NPCA works for, and more can be achieved with strong state regional haze plans.



33

OF AMERICA'S MOST-VISITED NATIONAL PARKS ARE AS POLLUTED AS OUR

20

LARGEST CITIES



Air quality in metropolitan areas has significantly improved since the 1990s.



National parks have not experienced a similar rate of improvement.

Top: Los Angeles skyline, CA ©melpomen | 123rf **Bottom:** Vista point at Moro Rocks in Sequoia National Park, CA ©Maria Feklistova | Dreamstime



“The [national] parks, are a place to be free, to breathe clean air. We believe the air is clean because there are so many trees here, so far from the cities. I think a lot of us are wrong in that.”

— GEMA PEREZ,
 Mother and activist,
 Bakersfield, California

Above: Gema Perez stands in front of the playground in Stiern Park, Bakersfield, CA ©Mark Rose
Left: Girls enjoy views of the Grand Canyon ©Fcastello | Dreamstime

CONTACT INFO

Visit the npca.org website to learn more about what you can do.

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