

## Protecting Visibility in National Parks and Scenic Areas

### DRAFT GUIDANCE FOR THE REGIONAL HAZE PROGRAM

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- On June 30, 2016, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a draft guidance document for the Regional Haze Program titled, “Draft Guidance on Progress Tracking Metrics, Long-term Strategies, Reasonable Progress Goals and Other Requirements for Regional Haze State Implementation Plans for the Second Implementation Period.” The purpose of this non-binding draft guidance document is to advise states on how to develop and submit regional haze State Implementation Plans (SIPs) for the second implementation period (2018-2028), which, under the currently proposed revision of the Regional Haze Rule, are due by July 31, 2021. This draft guidance document also includes EPA recommendations for how states should use the flexibilities provided by the Regional Haze Rule.
- This guidance document, when final, is expected to complement the EPA’s separate action to revise the Regional Haze Rule.
  - The EPA recently extended the public comment period on the proposed Regional Haze Rule revisions to ensure overlap between the public comment periods on the draft guidance document and the proposed rule revisions.
  - The proposed Regional Haze Rule revisions address, among other issues, state plan requirements for the second planning period.
- The Regional Haze Program, which implements a part of the Clean Air Act (CAA), helps to protect clear views in national parks, such as Grand Canyon National Park, and wilderness areas, such as the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.
  - Vistas in these areas are often obscured by regional haze caused by emissions from numerous sources located over a wide geographic area. Over the past decade, the Regional Haze Program has helped to reduce emissions of visibility-impairing pollutants and improve visibility.

## ACTION

- States are required to submit periodic plans demonstrating how they have and will continue to make progress towards achieving their visibility improvement goals. The first state plans were due in 2007 and covered the 2008-2018 first planning period. This draft guidance document provides useful background information and EPA guidance on meeting the requirements of the Regional Haze Rule for the second planning period from 2018-2028.
- The most significant issues addressed in this guidance include:
  - Consideration of visibility impacts and benefits along with the four statutory factors described in the CAA. The four statutory factors are the cost of compliance, the time necessary for compliance, the energy and non-air quality environmental impacts of compliance, and the remaining useful life of any potentially affected source.
  - The relationship between reasonable progress goals (RPGs) and the long-term strategy.
  - Describing the planning obligations of a state based on the relationship of its 2028 RPG to the uniform rate of progress that if continued beyond 2028 would achieve natural visibility conditions in 2064.
  - How a state should evaluate small stationary sources and area sources for additional control.

- How a state should consider measures for its own sources that may be necessary for reasonable progress at Class I areas in other states.
  - Clarifying consultation requirements among states.
  - How a state can address the fact that highly variable natural sources, especially large fires, can mask the benefits of controlling anthropogenic sources, particularly in western areas of the United States (U.S.).
  - How a state can address impacts from sources outside the U.S. in a realistic but effective way.
  - How a state can address the expected increase in the frequency of wildfires, due to the past accumulation of fuel loads in wildlands and to climate change.
- The EPA will accept comment on this draft guidance document for 45 days after a notice of its availability is published in the *Federal Register*. This public comment period overlaps with the public comment period for the proposed revisions to the Regional Haze Rule, which was recently extended to August 10, 2016.

## **BACKGROUND**

- In the CAA, Congress established a national visibility goal to prevent any future, and remedy any existing, visibility impairment in national parks and wilderness areas. “Impairment” specifically refers to human caused air pollution. Regional haze reduces visibility and is caused by the emission of air pollutants, primarily particle pollution, from numerous sources located over a wide geographic area. Fine particle pollution can also cause serious health problems including premature death.
  - In 1980, the EPA finalized regulations to address Reasonably Attributable Visibility Impairment.
  - In 1999, the EPA promulgated the Regional Haze Rule to address regional haze. The Regional Haze Rule calls for states to establish goals and emission reduction strategies for improving visibility in Federal Class I areas.
  - In 2003, the EPA issued guidance titled, “Guidance for Tracking Progress Under the Regional Haze Rule,” which clarified how states and tribes could track progress under the regional haze program.
  - In 2003, the EPA also issued guidance titled, “Guidance for Estimating Natural Visibility Conditions Under the Regional Haze Rule,” which clarified how states and tribes could estimate natural conditions under the regional haze program.
  - In 2007, the EPA issued a guidance document titled, “Guidance for Setting Reasonable Progress Goals Under the Regional Haze Program”. This 2007 guidance document will be superseded by this new draft guidance document once it is final.
- Based on visibility data through 2014, considerable visibility improvements have been made in affected areas in the eastern United States and in some western areas on the 20 percent haziest days.
  - The National Park Service estimates that emission controls established under the first planning period led to approximately 500,000 tons/year of sulfur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) and 300,000 tons/year of oxides of nitrogen (NO<sub>x</sub>) reductions.
  - In many cases, these improvements in visibility are a result of state and federal efforts to reduce particle pollution and the precursor pollutants that contribute to it, including the Regional Haze Rule.

## HOW TO COMMENT

- Comments, identified by Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2016-0289, may be submitted at <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments. For additional submission methods, the full EPA public comment policy, information about CBI or multimedia submissions and general guidance on making effective comments, please visit <http://www2.epa.gov/dockets/commenting-epa-dockets>.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To download a copy of the draft guidance document from the EPA website, click on “Guidance Documents” at the following address: <https://www.epa.gov/visibility>.
- This draft guidance document and other background information are also available either electronically at <http://www.regulations.gov>, the EPA’s electronic public docket and comment system, or in hardcopy at the EPA Docket Center’s Public Reading Room.
  - The Public Reading Room is located in the EPA Headquarters, Room Number 3334 in the EPA William Jefferson Clinton West Building, located at 1301 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. Hours of operation are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. eastern standard time, Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays.
  - Visitors are required to show photographic identification, pass through a metal detector and sign the EPA visitor log. All visitor materials will be processed through an X-ray machine as well. Visitors will be provided a badge that must be visible at all times.
  - Materials for this action can be accessed using Docket ID EPA-HQ-OAR-2016-0289.
- For further information about the proposed rule, contact Phil Lorang of the EPA’s Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-5463 or [lorang.phil@epa.gov](mailto:lorang.phil@epa.gov).