

**American Lung Association, Appalachian Mountain Club,  
Center for International Environmental Law,  
Clean Air Task Force, Clean Water Action, Clear the Air, Defenders of Wildlife,  
Environmental Working Group, Friends of the Earth, Izaak Walton League,  
National Audubon Society, National Environmental Trust, National Parks  
Conservation Association, National Tribal Environmental Council, National  
Wildlife Federation, Natural Resources Defense Council, Physicians for Social  
Responsibility, Scenic America, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists,  
U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Wilderness Society**

March 30, 2004

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Re: Air Pollution in Our National Parks

Dear Governor Leavitt:

On behalf of our millions of members, we are writing to urge you to take action to achieve clean air for America's parks by issuing a strong Best Available Retrofit Technology (BART) proposed rule and a stringent final Interstate Air Quality Rule (Docket No. OAR-2003-0053) that achieves deeper and faster reductions in air pollution.

***Introduction:***

Many of our nation's parks and wildernesses are shrouded in an unnatural haze. Visibility is very poor in parks such as the Great Smoky Mountains, and in fact has been deteriorating at revered places like Bryce Canyon and Big Bend National Park. Regional haze, caused in large measure by pollution emitted from poorly controlled power plants and industrial facilities, dramatically reduces downwind visibility. Instead of enjoying scenic vistas, visitors to our nation's parks are confronted with views marred by serious visible air pollution.

The pollution creating regional haze not only impairs visibility and seriously diminishes the quality of visitors' experience at our public lands, it poses a significant threat to the health of American citizens. Sulfates, nitrates, suspended particulate matter, and the other pollutants that produce fine particle-regional haze contribute to a host of medical problems. Respiratory ailments, heart disease, cancer, birth defects, and premature death have all been linked to the fine particles that cause haze. Attempts to reduce the interstate transport of fine particle and ozone pollution must be harmonized with ongoing efforts to improve air quality in our public lands. Current efforts to pit these programs against each other must be rejected.

### ***The BART proposal:***

This Administration has committed to protecting and restoring America's national parks as a centerpiece of its conservation agenda. Proposing, finalizing and implementing a stringent and enforceable BART rule is essential to fulfilling that commitment. Despite the fact that over twenty-five years ago Congress established as a national goal the “prevention of any future, and the remedying of any existing, impairment of visibility ” in Class I national parks and wilderness areas, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has made little to no progress toward clearing the haze in these areas. With visibility loss in these national treasures ranging from forty-three to eighty percent, a stringent final rule is critical to achieving real improvements in air quality and visibility. We urge you to use the BART rulemaking to bring our nation closer to realizing the promise of clean air in the parks.

Additionally, these pollutants are responsible for unhealthy air days, ozone damaged plants, and acid rain impacting forests, streams, coastal waters, and wildlife. Despite steps taken in other Clean Air Act programs, these threats to our health and the environment stubbornly persist in our national parks and wilderness areas because many of the facilities most responsible for the problem remain under-controlled for haze-causing pollutants.

Solving the problem of regional haze requires cleaning up the major industrial sources that emit pollutants upwind of our national parks and wilderness areas. A stringent BART rule will result in significantly cleaner air in these treasured areas. In comparison, a weak final BART rule will lack the scope and rigor necessary to adequately improve visibility. We urge you to issue a strong BART proposal by EPA’s promised deadline of April 2004<sup>1</sup>.

### ***The Interstate Air Quality Rule:***

EPA recently proposed the Interstate Air Quality Rule (IAQR) to reduce the fine particles and ozone pollution plaguing unhealthy communities in downwind states. These power plant emissions not only threaten the health of American citizens, they are also responsible for much of the regional haze found in parks and wildernesses. While the IAQR documents that interstate air pollution is a major problem, it must be strengthened to adequately protect polluted communities. Clearly, it cannot serve as a substitute for the carefully crafted procedures and requirements set forth by Congress and EPA to specifically address the problem of regional haze in public lands. EPA’s failure to adopt an IAQR rule that achieves all available pollution cuts as quickly as possible would be bad policy and violate the requirements of the Clean Air Act.

EPA is soliciting comment on whether the reductions to be achieved by the IAQR should satisfy the visibility improvement goals for the regional haze program during the 2008-2018 time frame. The IAQR was not intended to improve visibility in Class I areas. While the reductions should be taken into consideration, it cannot legally serve as a substitute for the requirements outlined in the Regional Haze Rule, which sets forth visibility goals, progress requirements and milestones.

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<sup>1</sup> See April 1, 2003 correspondence from EPA Administrator Whitman to then-Governor Leavitt promising to issue the BART rulemaking proposal by April 2004.

The IAQR will fail to deliver the necessary improvements for us to achieve the congressional visibility goal.

Today, visitors to our most visited national park, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (which attracts 9 million visitors and brings an estimated \$1 billion to the local economy annually),<sup>2</sup> can only expect to see views that extend for 12 miles on average for the equivalent of two or more months a year. Under estimated natural conditions in the Southeast vistas should reach to 70-80 miles. Furthermore, the limited analysis accompanying the IAQR suggests that when the emission reductions are fully implemented, views in southeast parks may improve by only a few miles over half a generation. This will not be “reasonable progress” toward restoring views in one of America’s haziest national parks, the Great Smoky Mountains, or many of the other polluted eastern parks.

As states develop plans to comply with the Regional Haze Rule, it is entirely appropriate for them to consider the projected reductions from the Interstate Air Quality Rule. However, this cannot excuse states from considering visibility-impairing pollution from all sources and determining the additional reductions needed to restore park views. As a legal matter, states will also still need to identify the power plants and other industries that must install the “best available retrofit technology” (BART). While the IAQR will deliver some of the reductions necessary to improve visibility, states must complete the appropriate technical analyses to determine the amount of additional pollution reductions that will be needed from power plants, industrial facilities, and other sources in order to achieve progress goals required under regional haze state implementation plans.

EPA must act to further reduce the power plant pollution transported across state borders. Even with the rule fully implemented, a number of eastern counties will continue to violate federal health standards for fine particle and ozone pollution long after their respective attainment dates have passed. The IAQR also provides no relief for western states.

Emissions from power plants should be reduced to national levels no less stringent than those expected under the Clean Air Act, equivalent to two million tons of sulfur dioxide and 1.25 million tons of nitrogen oxide annually.<sup>3</sup> This will save many additional lives, and will be highly cost effective. EPA must require these reductions at an earlier date, in time to allow states to attain the PM<sub>2.5</sub> and ozone NAAQS on schedule. Earlier reductions are practicable and are required by law.

***Conclusion:***

America’s national parks and wilderness areas are home to some of our country’s most majestic scenery. More than 250 million people visit the nation’s parks each year, and these visitors have responded in past surveys that clean, clear views are extremely important. A strong BART

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<sup>2</sup> National Park Service Air Resource Division, Air Quality in the National Park, 2nd Edition, July 2001; pg 36; National Park Service Visitation Database <http://www2.nature.nps.gov/NPstats/dspAnnualVisits.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. EPA, “Discussion of Multi-Pollutant Strategy,” Meeting with EEI, September 18, 2001, “Comparison of Requirements Under Business-as-Usual and the Straw Proposal,” pg 10.

proposal will help safeguard the precious scenery and natural environments preserved in some of our most appreciated natural and cultural landmarks.

EPA must act to further reduce the power plant pollution transported across state borders by finalizing a strengthened Interstate Air Quality Rule that achieves deeper and faster reductions in air pollution to citizens in polluted communities. The rule must be strengthened to meet both your legal obligations and your responsibility to protect the public's health and our environment. Finally, a regional haze program that is suspended by the Interstate Air Quality Rule is the worst outcome of all.

We urge you to seize this historic opportunity to address the problem of parks plagued by air pollution by expeditiously proposing a strong BART rule and resisting pressure to weaken the regional haze program through the Interstate Air Quality Rulemaking.

Sincerely,

Thomas C. Kiernan  
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