

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2004

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**EPA Weakens “Clean Air in the Parks” Rule, Delaying Cleanup of Haze Pollution
in National Parks and Wilderness Areas**

BOSTON, Mass — Less than a week before Earth Day, the Environmental Protection Agency on April 15 issued a draft rule that would delay cleanup of air pollution in national parks and Wilderness Areas by a decade or more. The Appalachian Mountain Club is voicing concern about the proposal, which, the organization said, would weaken provisions in the “Clean Air in the Parks,” or Best Available Retrofit Technology (BART) Rule, designed to improve visibility in many of the country’s most popular natural areas.

The proposed rule, if finalized, would delay specific protections for air quality in 156 national parks, Wilderness Areas, and wildlife refuges across the United States contained in the original BART rule.

“Coming as it does so close to Earth Day, this EPA proposal truly looks like a missed opportunity to make significant progress toward healthier air and improved visibility in our national parks and Wilderness Areas. On this day when Americans are celebrating the natural environment through the observance of Earth Day, AMC is concerned about the ability of this proposed rule to adequately improve air quality in several of our nation’s most cherished places,” said Susan Arnold, director of conservation for the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Areas impacted by the EPA rule include Acadia National Park in Maine, New Hampshire’s Great Gulf Wilderness and Presidential-Dry River Wilderness Areas in the White Mountain National Forest, the Lye Brook Wilderness in Vermont’s Green Mountain National Forest, the Brigantine Wilderness in New Jersey’s Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia.

AMC researchers have monitored air quality in Wilderness Areas and other natural areas since the mid 1980s.

Visibility on the worst days is at a level considered “unacceptable” by the majority of Wilderness visitors, based on AMC’s research in New Hampshire.

Under the new proposal, EPA would allow the regulation of haze-causing emissions from BART-eligible power plants through the Interstate Air Quality Rule (IAQR) until 2018. Currently, IAQR does not contain the specific protections or clean-up schedule for parks and Wilderness Areas included in BART. IAQR, while providing some improvements, is unlikely to achieve the level of haze reduction and visibility improvement necessary in the first decade of the program to ultimately achieve the goal mandated by Congress under the Clean Air Act amendments of 1977, according to AMC research.

“Twenty-seven years ago, in the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act, Congress mandated action leading to ‘the prevention of any future, and the remedying of any existing, impairment to visibility’ in 156 national parks, Wilderness Areas and national wildlife refuges. Yet, in many parks, little progress has been made toward improving air quality and restoring natural visibility,” said Arnold.

Arnold said AMC is reviewing the detailed language of the new BART proposal, and will provide official comments to EPA once it has completed its analysis. EPA is accepting public comment on the proposed rule for a 60-day period.

Also on April 15, EPA announced “non-attainment” areas for ground-level ozone that included several national parks in the Northeastern United States, underscoring the need to reduce air pollution in our most popular natural areas.

“Dirty air is a problem in places we wouldn’t expect to find it — on remote mountaintops and in natural areas that people rely on for outdoor recreation. This has a direct impact on the outdoor experience, as well as on human health and the health of the region’s forests. Meaningful progress will not be made unless these steps to clean the air are taken swiftly, without further delay,” said Arnold.

EPA was legally required to issue a draft Best Available Retrofit Technology (BART) rule by April 15. Finalizing a strong BART rule is needed to fulfill a mandate laid out in the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act and the subsequent Regional Haze Rule of 1999, which requires a return to natural visibility in 156 national parks, refuges and Wilderness areas by 2064.

Each summer in the Northeastern United States, regional haze, primarily caused by sulfur dioxide emissions from coal-burning power plants in the Midwest, cuts visibility in the most scenic of our national parks and Wilderness areas by up to 70 percent. Humid summer conditions in the Northeast cause particulates to expand by two or three times, further increasing pollution-induced haze. Some of the same pollution that causes haze, namely nitrogen oxide gas, is also the same compound responsible for ground-level ozone formation.

Research by AMC and other organizations show that the air in Acadia National Park and the White Mountain National Forest can be as dirty as that found in such urban centers as New York and Philadelphia.

“Regional haze is destroying scenic views in our most precious wild places while negatively impacting human health and the environment. Strong measures are needed to reduce air pollution and restore clean air and natural visibility to our national parks and Wilderness areas, and those measures must be implemented immediately,” said Arnold.

AMC research documents effects of air pollution

AMC has been studying air quality on New Hampshire’s Mt. Washington since the early 1980s, where it has recorded rainwater and cloud water as acidic as vinegar.

Since 1986, the AMC has monitored ozone levels at the summit and base of Mount Washington in cooperation with the White Mountain National Forest, the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services Air Resources Division, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Mount Washington Observatory.

A scientific study of hiker health, conducted by AMC in conjunction with Brigham and Women’s Hospital and the Harvard School of Public Health demonstrated that the lung function of healthy adult hikers is impaired at ambient ozone levels 50 percent below EPA’s eight-hour ozone limit. *See study data at:*

<http://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/docs/1998/106p93-99korrick/korrick-full.html>

Visibility is reduced when certain gases and fine particulate matter in the air cause haze. Some particulates are naturally occurring, such as dust, certain types of organic carbon, and smoke from forest fires. Others originate from human activity, particularly fine particle nitrates, often the result of automobile and power plant emissions; and fine particle sulfates, largely the result of emissions from coal-fired power generation plants.

Throughout our region, 90-mile views are routinely cut to 40 miles or less by pollution-induced haze. Annual visibility averages about 22 miles in Shenandoah National Park — or less than 20 percent of the approximate 115-mile vistas that could be expected under natural conditions, according to the National Park Service. And Acadia National Park on the coast of Maine, long one of the nation’s favorite vacation destinations, is home to some of the dirtiest air in the country, due to its extreme East Coast location, at the end of the line, so to speak, for windblown pollutants.

Regional haze pollution can travel from many sources, many miles away, to impact parks and Wilderness areas. It is widely accepted that sulfur dioxide and sulfate can travel hundreds of miles before being removed from the atmosphere. Sulfur dioxide, and subsequent sulfate aerosol formation, is still the major cause of visibility impairment. The major sources of these pollutants are coal-fired power plants to the south and west of the Northeast region.

“AMC members are active outdoors enthusiasts who are deeply concerned about the quality of the air they breathe and the condition of the public lands they seek for quiet recreation and spiritual renewal,” said Arnold. “It has been 27 years since the 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act, and the air in our national parks and Wilderness Areas still is not clean. We urge EPA and our elected leaders in Congress to work together to

implement effective public policies to restore clean air to our national parks and Wilderness Areas.”

More information on AMC’s air quality research can be found on the Web at <http://www.outdoors.org/research/airwater/index.shtml>. A white paper documenting the problem of air pollution in our parks titled “Toward a Strong Clean Air in the Parks Rule: Restoring Clean Air to the Northeast’s National Parks and Wilderness Areas” is available on AMC’s website at <http://www.outdoors.org/pdfs/cleanair-parks.pdf>

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the United States. With more than 91,000 members in the Northeast and beyond, the nonprofit AMC promotes the protection, enjoyment, and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Appalachian region.

The AMC supports natural resource conservation while encouraging responsible recreation, based on the philosophy that successful, long-term conservation depends upon first-hand enjoyment of the natural environment.

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