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Appalachian Mountain Club Commends Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative Agreement

Bipartisan Agreement Aims to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the nation's oldest conservation and recreation organization, today commended a regional, first-in-the-nation agreement reached by seven states in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic to place a cap on carbon dioxide emissions from their state power plant facilities. This model rule, called the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), takes effect in 2009 and aims to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10 percent below current levels by 2019. RGGI will use a market-based strategy of "cap and trade," which provides power plant operators with an incentive to implement cleaner energy technologies, while allowing flexibility in meeting the cap on emissions.

The result of more than two years of planning, the RGGI agreement includes Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, and Vermont. In September, the AMC submitted comments to the regional staff working group developing the RGGI proposal.

In New Hampshire, AMC applauded Governor Lynch's participation in RGGI and his commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions.

"This agreement is a tremendous credit to the leadership of the RGGI states, who have not only taken a significant step as a region in attaining meaningful carbon dioxide reductions, but have also sent a powerful signal for federal action," said Susan Arnold, AMC's Director of Conservation. "The AMC believes that aggressive application of RGGI and other climate change policies at the state level has the ability to successfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as other harmful air pollutants. As RGGI progresses to state adoption, the AMC will show strong support for implementation of environmentally and economically responsible programs."

Protection of the Northeast's alpine zones from major identified threats, including climate change and air pollutants, is a fundamental goal of AMC conservation efforts. AMC recently launched a "citizen-science" program, called Mountain Watch, to track indicators of climate change and air quality, and AMC research has established baseline data to monitor responses of the alpine vegetation communities to climate change in New Hampshire and Maine. Results to date suggest these alpine areas are exposed to changing climatic and chemical environments that could endanger their existence and the endemic habitats they support.

In 2005, the Mount Washington Observatory's summit weather station, located in the heart of New Hampshire's alpine zone, experienced its warmest summer (June, July, and August) on record, with an average of 50.3 degrees Fahrenheit—more than 3 degrees above the 1935-2005 average. While a single warm season does not indicate a warming trend, recent statistical analysis reveals a long-term warming on the summit of Mount Washington that is consistent with decades of observations documenting a gradual rise in global temperature.

The AMC, in collaboration with state and federal groups, has been monitoring ozone, fine particulates and acid rain, and cloud water concentrations for more than two decades on the Presidential Range in New Hampshire's White Mountains.

“We are deeply concerned about the impacts of air pollution and climate change, including the environmental threat to the unique alpine areas of the Northeast's mountains, scenic views obscured by regional haze, and impaired human lung function from elevated levels of ozone,” said Georgia Murray, AMC Staff Scientist. “The RGGI effort is a first step in a much needed major shift to improve energy efficiency and spur alternative energy development.”

The AMC will continue to work closely with other environmental partners to promote clean and environmentally sound state-based energy policies that include RGGI.

The final RGGI model rule is expected in July 2006, following a public comment period, with final state adoption by 2008. A regional organization will be formed to oversee the RGGI program.

Founded in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the United States. With 90,000 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.