

Natural and Cultural Resources Management, Part 610 Wilderness Stewardship

Chapter 2 Wilderness Administration and Resource Stewardship, 610 FW 2

2.25 How does the Service protect air resources in wilderness? Maintaining the wilderness character and values of an area requires proper stewardship of air resources.

- A. Clean Air Act (CAA).** Congress passed the CAA to protect both human health and the environment and to provide protection of air quality in wilderness areas by means of national standards for air quality and the prevention of significant deterioration (PSD) program (also see the air quality protection policy, 563 FW 2).
- (1) Class I Air Quality Areas.** The PSD program designated all wilderness areas over 5,000 acres (2,000 hectares) in existence on August 7, 1977, as mandatory Class I air quality areas. This includes 21 of our wilderness areas. The CAA gives Class I areas the highest level of protection from air pollutants. The PSD program established limits for the additional amounts of air pollution (PSD increments) that can be allowed in Class I areas.
 - (2) Class II Air Quality Areas.** We classify all other Service areas as Class II, including wilderness areas less than 5,000 acres in size and wilderness areas coming into the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) after August 7, 1977. Class II classification allows moderate deterioration of air quality associated with well-managed growth.
 - (3) Air-Quality-Related Values (AQRVs).** The CAA charges the Federal land manager and the Service with an “affirmative responsibility” to protect the AQRVs of Class I lands. In the Department of Interior, the Federal land manager is the Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. AQRVs, including visibility, wildlife, vegetation, soil, water, and geological and cultural resources, may be adversely affected by air pollution. While the CAA provides legal tools to help protect wilderness from the impacts of air pollution, our air quality stewardship goals come from the Wilderness Act. As such, we will identify the AQRVs of each wilderness area and evaluate their sensitivity to air pollution in the unit’s WSP. We may allow air quality and AQRV monitoring, including the placement of samplers, within wilderness areas subject to the conditions outlined for research (see section 2.27) and inventory and monitoring (see section 2.28).
- B. Visibility.** The CAA grants special protection to visibility in Class I areas. The CAA establishes a national goal of remedying any existing and preventing any future, human-caused visibility impairment in mandatory Class I areas. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established regional haze regulations as part of their strategy to meet this goal, requiring the States to make “reasonable progress” towards natural visibility conditions. We work with the EPA and the States to identify natural visibility conditions and set reasonable goals for improving visibility in Class I areas.
- C. External Pollution Sources.** Even small amounts of air pollution from external sources such as power plants, industries, and automobiles can cause significant changes to sensitive AQRVs. To ensure the protection of AQRVs from these external sources, we:
- (1)** Conduct monitoring as appropriate to determine the existing condition of AQRVs and evaluate their sensitivity to increases in air pollution. We use this information to participate in State and local planning and permitting processes, including the review of air pollution permit applications for major new sources or modifications of existing sources of air pollution.
 - (2)** Review the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents for projects with the potential to affect wilderness areas. In consultation with the EPA, other Federal, State, or local agencies, we will determine whether air pollutant emissions from a proposed action will adversely affect AQRVs in wilderness and, if so, make recommendations to minimize or eliminate any adverse impacts.
 - (3)** Monitor the existing condition of those most sensitive AQRVs to determine if existing air pollution sources are causing or contributing to adverse impacts. Where appropriate, we will work with air regulatory agencies to reduce existing air pollution emissions.
- D. Internal Pollution Sources.** Emissions also can come from sources within wilderness areas, notably fire. We may use fire as a tool to restore or maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and

environmental health of wilderness ecosystems. However, we must balance the use of fire and its resultant smoke with our responsibility to comply with Federal, State, and local air quality plans and regulations and to protect public health, safety, and visibility both inside and outside wilderness (see section 2.23 and the fire management policy at 621 FW 1-3 for additional guidance).

Additional links to FWS policy:

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/561fw2.html>

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/563fw2.html>

<http://www.fws.gov/policy/E1563fw2.html>