

NPS Director's Order #41

13. Air Quality in Wilderness

The purpose(s) of this part [Prevention of Significant Deterioration of Air Quality] are as follows...to preserve, protect, and enhance the air quality in national parks, national wilderness areas, national monuments, national seashores, and other areas of special national or regional natural, recreational, scenic, or historic value...

The Clean Air Act: Section 160

Congress hereby declares as a national goal the prevention of any future, and the remedying of any existing, impairment of visibility in mandatory Class I federal areas, which impairment results from manmade air pollution.

The Clean Air Act: Section 169A

The Clean Air Act (CAA) as amended specifically gives Federal Land Managers (FLMs) the affirmative responsibility to protect the air quality related values (AQRVs), including visibility, of Class I areas and to consider, in consultation with the Administrator of EPA, whether a proposed major emitting facility will have an adverse impact on such values (CAA, Section 165 (d)(2)(B)).

AQRVs and levels of impact vary for different Class I areas. Managers must inventory wilderness ecosystems, collect baseline data, and identify sensitive indicators to air pollution. Long term monitoring programs should be established to track changes to these indicators.

Air pollution is a threat that knows no boundaries and is caused by many diverse sources. Most air pollution is generated outside Class I area boundaries and transported into wilderness areas and national parks. These sources of pollution include electric power generation, automobiles and other mobile sources, industrial manufacturing activities, dust from roadways, construction activities and other urban and rural sources, for example. To mitigate the impacts of these sources, managers will be involved in State and local air quality planning and permitting processes and in reviewing NEPA projects with the potential to impact Class I areas. Smoke from wildland fire is an exception, in that it commonly occurs within our Class I areas. Managers will be responsible for reducing the impacts of smoke from wildland fires on visibility in Class I wilderness, while understanding and promoting the need to re-introduce the natural role of fire into wilderness ecosystems.

As community leaders in environmental stewardship, NPS managers are committed to using sustainable practices in parks that will reduce air pollution, such as the use of alternative energy sources, i.e., solar power, wind energy, and alternative fuels.

Interpretation of these and other sustainable practices in parks will also help educate visitors on ways they can reduce their contribution to air pollution.

Notwithstanding the FLM's affirmative responsibility to protect AQRVs in Class I areas, we have no direct permitting or enforcement authority over air pollution sources. Ours is a consultation role with the regulatory agencies. Our recommendations can be accepted or rejected by EPA, State, or local air permitting authorities. Therefore, it is very important that managers communicate routinely with regulatory agencies regarding sources that threaten resources in our Class I areas. Managers will participate in interagency partnerships for the purpose of protecting Class I air quality and related values.