

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
“Examining EPA’s Regional Haze Program: Regulations Without Visible Benefits”
March 23, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you to our witnesses for being here this morning. On August 25th of this year the National Parks Service will celebrate their centennial. So it is fitting that we are discussing EPA’s efforts to reduce regional haze and maintain the scenic outlook of our most treasured locations.

President John F. Kennedy said of the creation of the National Park System: “It is the course of wisdom to set aside an ample portion of our natural resources as national parks and reserves, thus ensuring that future generations may know the majesty of the earth as we know it today.”

In 1977, Congress had the foresight to take President Kennedy’s sentiment to heart. And they recognized the threat air pollution posed to our iconic parks and called on EPA to reduce regional haze.

Some may think that preserving the views in our parks and wilderness areas isn’t worth the cost, but clearer skies actually have a direct effect on the economy, especially in the local communities that surround our National Parks.

Studies have consistently shown that park visitors will cut their trip short if the park they are planning to visit is hazy. Shorter trips and fewer visitors means less money spent on recreational activities, lodging, and food. In 2014, more than half a million visitors traveled to Oregon’s Crater Lake, supporting more than 760 jobs. As a whole our National Parks System had 293 million visitors who added \$29.7 billion to the U.S. economy and supported 277,000 jobs. We should be doing more, not less, to protect these iconic landscapes and the local economies they support.

I'd like to put up a slide that shows the progress we've made under the regional haze program, and emphasize that there are visible benefits but still work to be done.

This slide shows a side-by-side comparison of the Great Smokey Mountains, illustrating the air pollution that existed in 1990, the clearing that occurred in 2010, and the goal of natural visibility that still needs to be achieved. In 1990 a park visitor could only see 25 miles out, in 2010 they could see 46 miles, and when we get to natural visibility conditions they will be able to see 112 miles of this magnificent mountain range.

I know some consider EPA's efforts to improve air quality under the Clean Air Act, including the regional haze rule, to be a "war on coal." Earlier this month, Oregon became the first state to enact bipartisan legislation to eliminate the use of coal-fired power by 2035. We did this because coal-fired power plants are some of our biggest polluters, and if we are going to make significant progress in combating air pollution in the future then we need to transition to cleaner sources of energy now. Such a transition will provide economic opportunities, improve public health, and preserve the majesty of our National Parks for future generations.

Mr. Chairman, I have a letter from the National Parks Conservation Association that I'd like to submit for the record. The letter describes the importance of clean air to our National Parks and the need for the Regional Haze Program. Specifically, the letter states a "Steady reduction in haze-causing pollution is precisely what is required under the Regional Haze Rule to safeguard our iconic landscapes, support local communities, and protect the health of all." I ask unanimous consent that the letter be part of the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I yield back the balance of my time.