

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 19, 2026

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

Millions of people travel from around the world each year to enjoy America's national parks and public lands and experience the unique landscapes, wildlife, and natural wonders they protect. Preserving the iconic views of these treasured parks and wilderness areas is why Congress established the Regional Haze Program nearly fifty years ago, recognizing that some landscapes are simply too important to allow pollution to obscure. Yet today, 98 percent of national parks suffer from hazy skies, reducing visibility by an average of 50 miles.¹

Haze is more than a visibility problem. The same fine particle pollution that obscures views at national parks across the country also poses great harm to public health. Fine particulate matter, including particles formed from sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides emissions, have been linked to asthma, decreased lung function, heart problems, and premature death in people with existing conditions.² Reducing haze-forming pollution helps protect not only the views that draw millions of visitors to our national parks, but also the health of those visitors and nearby communities.

A lack of clean air also hurts local communities that rely on tourism dollars. Nationally, outdoor recreation generates \$1.3 trillion in economic input and 5.2 million jobs.³ National Park visitors spend an estimated \$29 billion in park gateway regions supporting local economies and over 340,000 jobs across the country.⁴

In the 1977 Clean Air Act (CAA) Amendments, Congress established a national goal of preventing future and remedying existing human-caused visibility impairment in our nation's most treasured national parks and wilderness areas. The Regional Haze Rule implements that mandate by requiring states to submit plans every ten years identifying emission reductions needed to make reasonable progress toward natural visibility conditions.⁵ In determining what

¹ D. Orozco, U. Reeves, N. Levine. 2024. *Polluted Parks: How Air Pollution and Climate Change Continue to Harm America's National Parks*. National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). Washington, DC: <https://www.npca.org/reports/air-climate-report>.

² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Health and Environmental Effects of Particulate Matter, 2026: <https://www.epa.gov/pm-pollution/health-and-environmental-effects-particulate-matter-pm>

³ Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation, 2024: <https://www.bea.gov/news/2026/outdoor-recreation-economic-statistics-us-and-states-2024>.

⁴ National Park Service, National Park Visitor Spending Effects, 2024: <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/socialscience/vse.htm>.

⁵ United States Environmental Protection Agency, Regional Haze Program, 2026: <https://www.epa.gov/visibility/regional-haze-program>

constitutes reasonable progress, the Clean Air Act directs states to consider four factors: the cost of compliance, the time necessary for compliance, the energy and non-air-quality environmental impacts of compliance, and the remaining useful life of the source.⁶

To review state plans, EPA uses the uniform rate of progress (URP), a benchmark for measuring progress toward natural visibility by 2064. However, beginning in 2025, EPA has allowed states projected to outperform the URP to avoid new emission reductions without meaningfully applying the four statutory factors.⁷ As EPA reviews Round 2 State Implementation Plans (SIPs), this represents a departure from its previous position that being ahead of that benchmark does not, by itself, relieve states of their obligation to evaluate additional reasonable pollution controls. At the same time, EPA is considering more permanent changes to the rule. In September 2025, EPA issued an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) seeking input on potential revisions to the program, including changes to how states determine reasonable progress and whether simplified metrics or thresholds could be used in place of aspects of the existing analysis.⁸

These actions come as recent emissions trends underscore the continued need to address haze-forming pollution. In 2025, power-sector sulfur dioxide emissions increased 18% and nitrogen oxides emissions 7%, driven partially by an increase in coal generation under the Trump administration.⁹ These increases risk slowing progress toward restoring natural visibility.

Congress established the Regional Haze Rule to ensure that future generations can experience places like the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Shenandoah, Rocky Mountain, Crater Lake, and other national parks and wilderness areas as they were meant to be seen. It is important that changes to the program remain consistent with the Clean Air Act and continue making meaningful progress toward that goal. Accordingly, we request responses to the following questions by November 6, 2026:

1. How will EPA ensure that its actions on Round 2 SIPs continue to make progress toward preventing future and remedying existing visibility impairment, including where a state plan requires no new emission reductions?
2. Given the recent increase in power-sector sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides emissions,¹⁰ how will EPA ensure that the increases in haze-forming pollution since January 2025 do not slow or reverse progress toward natural visibility in Class I areas?

⁶ Code of Federal Regulations, 51.308 Regional haze program requirements:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-40/chapter-I/subchapter-C/part-51/subpart-P/section-51.308>

⁷ Federal Register, Air Plan Approval; West Virginia; Regional Haze State Implementation Plan for the Second Implementation Period, 2025: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/18/2025-06608/air-plan-approval-west-virginia-regional-haze-state-implementation-plan-for-the-second>

⁸ Federal Register, Visibility Protection: Regional Haze State Plan Requirements Rule Revision, 2025: <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2025-10/advance-notice-of-proposed-rulemaking-visibility-protection.pdf>

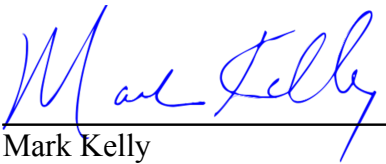
⁹ K. Maher. *U.S. Power-Plant Pollution Rose Sharply in 2025*. Wall Street Journal, 2026: <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/climate-environment/u-s-power-plant-pollution-rose-sharply-in-2025-081779c0>

¹⁰ Ibid.

3. Since April 2025, EPA has approved state plans requiring no new emission reductions whenever a protected area is projected to fall below the URP. How does EPA reconcile this URP policy with the agency's independent obligation to review each and every plan a state submits?
4. The Clean Air Act requires states to evaluate pollution sources against four specific criteria, as described above. The ANPRM proposes replacing that analysis with a simplified progress metric. Congress has not amended the statute. Does EPA intend to proceed without a statutory change, and on what authority?
5. EPA has extended the deadline for third-round state plans from 2028 to 2031. What steps will EPA take to ensure this extension does not delay implementation of reasonable emission reductions needed to improve visibility during the third planning period?

Thank you for your prompt response to these questions.

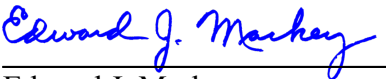
Sincerely,



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



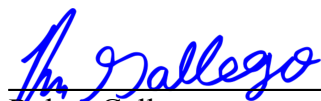
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