



The National Park Service Air Quality Program



Each year hundreds of millions of people visit areas of the National Park System. They go to hike, fish, camp, and enjoy the area's spectacular views and other natural resources. Many of the national parks were created for their natural resources such as beautiful vistas. Unfortunately, sweeping views and other natural resources are threatened by air pollution. Air pollution can cause harm to the ecosystem and lessen the park visitor's experience of being able to see "forever."

Scenic views such as this one across Lake McDonald at Glacier National Park, Montana, are an important part of the national park experience. Preserving clean air is critically important to preserving natural resources, including beautiful vistas, for the enjoyment of park visitors and is a primary responsibility of the National Park Service Air Quality Program.

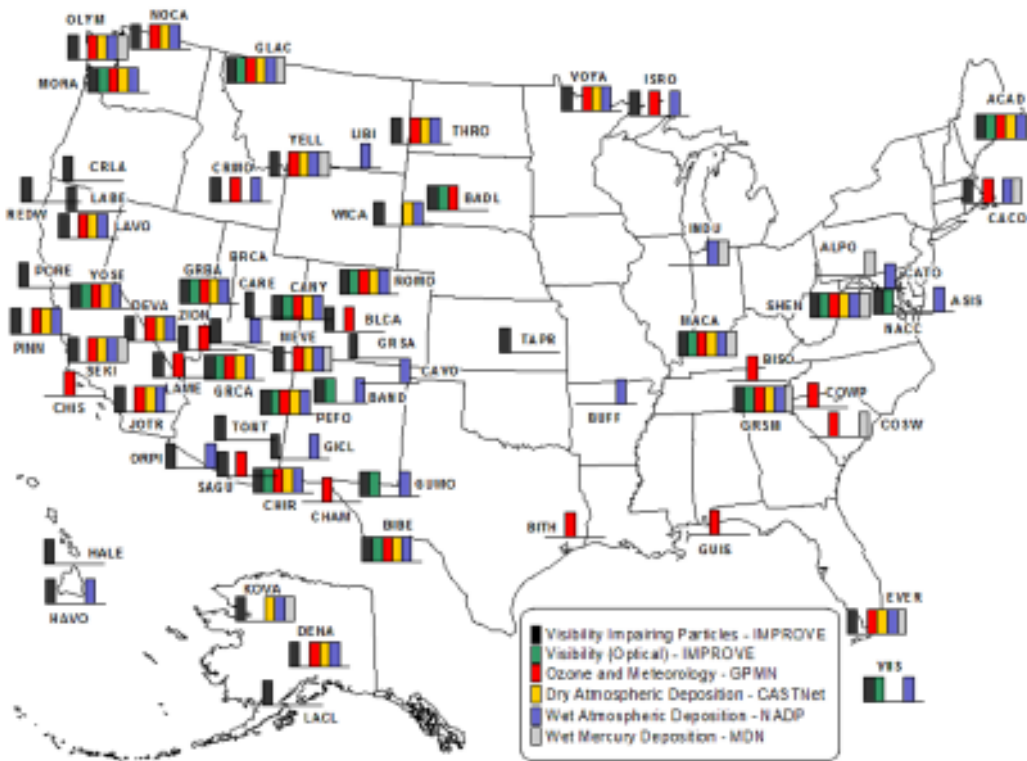
Protecting park resources

The National Park Service Air Quality Program protects park resources from air pollution. This is a challenging responsibility because the National Park Service has no authority to regulate sources of air pollution located outside park boundaries. The Air Quality Program strives to understand how air quality affects park resources. A variety of activities, strategies and partnerships are used to protect and enhance park air quality.

The National Park Service monitors air quality in many park units, reviews permit applications for proposed major emitting sources, study

air quality legislative and regulatory proposals, and participates in the development of state air quality plans. Program staff collect data on air quality effects on sensitive park resources; apply models to assess air pollution impacts; conduct visibility research; and perform statistical analysis on air quality data collected in parks and across the country. The Division also disseminates air quality information to parks, scientists, policy makers, and the public. Clean air goals for parks can be achieved through communication, consultation and cooperation with other agencies and stakeholders.

The Air Quality Program uses a variety of strategies and activities to help promote clean air in parks.



The map shows parks where air quality monitoring is being conducted for various parameters, as listed in the legend. The four-letter codes are abbreviations for names of units in the National Park System (e.g., BADL = Badlands National Park; BIBE = Big Bend National Park).

Importance of research

Since research is key to understanding the effects of air pollution on park resources, the Air Quality Program promotes and participates in both long -and short -term studies of air quality related issues in parks. Since 1979 the National Park Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency participated in long -term visibility monitoring program at selected national parks. The National Park Service also sponsors research on air pollution effects to vegetation, wildlife, soils, and lakes and streams. Scientists from universities and other government agencies have documented acidification of streams, ozone injury to plants, and changes in soil chemistry in parks. Studies have shown that air pollution can change plant communities, changing the very nature of park landscapes. Toxic air pollutants have accumulated in fish and wildlife, prompting fish consumption advisories in some parks. Monitoring data on visibility, ozone, and acid deposition show that air pollution is affecting some park resources nationwide.

Public awareness

The Air Resources Division provides technical and financial assistance to parks for the design and development of air quality -related public awareness programs. Products from these efforts are critical to communicating the threat of air pollution to national parks and what can be done to improve air quality.

Program staff work together on the design of air quality interpretive information, ensuring that the information is technically accurate and consistent with National Park Service policy. A variety of air quality information products are used by park personnel and managers. They include brochures, pamphlets, manuals, summary reports, slides, videotapes, exhibits, and posters.

Expanded monitoring

Established in 1999, the Natural Resource Challenge is a multiyear funding initiative and action plan focused on improving the management and protection of park natural resources. It represents a substantial effort to gather scientific information on the presence, distribution, and condition of natural resources; enhance the ability of the National Park Service to make informed decisions for their protection and management; and actively engage the public and scientists at large in their protection. This initiative and action plan expanded air quality monitoring and increased professional air resources management expertise primarily in national parks or their field offices. As a result, approximately 55 national park areas benefit from this recent expansion of air quality monitoring coordinated by the National Park Service Air Quality Program.

For more information

Please visit <http://www2.nature.nps.gov/air/>.



Visitors at Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona, enjoy the vistas along the South Rim, part of the park experience that is enhanced by good air quality. Informational exhibits help interpret the views and the role of air quality monitoring in air pollution control in the region, which is

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