

WESTAR Public Hearing Testimony
Proposed Amendments to the Regional Haze Rule
June 1, 2016
Denver, Colorado

My name is Mary Uhl. I am the Executive Director of the Western States Air Resources Council or WESTAR, the association of 15 western state air quality management agencies. Thank you for holding a hearing in the western U.S. and providing an opportunity for WESTAR and others to comment on the proposed changes to the Regional Haze Rule.

The Regional Haze Rule proposal is particularly significant to western state air quality agencies because 118 of the 156 Class 1 federal areas in the United States are located in the WESTAR member states. We are proud of these national treasures and their spectacular views that are best appreciated with good visibility. They provide citizens throughout the nation the opportunity to enjoy their great beauty and recreational opportunities. They are also a source of employment and an integral component of the local economy.

Much of the visibility protection framework in the Regional Haze Rule was formulated in the West by the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission. A companion organization, the Western Regional Air Partnership (WRAP) was formed in 1997 to verify the causes of western haze to help states meet their Clean Air Act obligations. This multi-stakeholder organization, comprised of WESTAR member states in addition to tribes, federal land managers, EPA, and local air quality regulators, worked together to prepare the necessary regional analyses and strategies to reduce haze, as described in the initial Regional Haze State Implementation Plans (SIPs). Continued federal financial support for the WRAP will be essential for the upcoming SIP revisions, as the complex technical analyses necessary to meet the regional haze rule requirements are beyond the capability of many individual WESTAR states.

In the Clean Air Act “Congress ... 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.” This provision of the Clean Air Act should be recognized for what it is: A goal to strive toward. As we have learned from data analysis and research, the 1999 Regional Haze Rule goal of attaining “Natural Conditions” at Class 1 areas by 2064 is not universally achievable unless some revisions are made. Although we can do everything feasible and reasonable over time to make significant reductions in manmade pollution under state and federal control, we are still challenged by visibility impairment from transported international pollution and natural sources of haze such as wildfires, dust storms, and volcanic activity, which can overwhelm the benefits achieved by local, state, and federal controls that reduce anthropogenic emissions on the haziest days in the West.

Accounting for the reduction in manmade visibility is critical in the West, because much of the haze observed at Class 1 areas on the haziest days is from natural sources.

Western states are concerned that our achievements in reducing controllable man-made pollution are not being recognized using the 1999 rule construct. By recognizing that reducing anthropogenic visibility impairment should be the focus of the regional haze rule, the proposed rule revision steps in the right direction.

We support EPA's response to several important recommendations made by WESTAR based on the western experience in identifying the causes of haze, natural and anthropogenic. The Clean Air Act directs federal and state governments to reduce manmade pollution, so it is essential that visibility protection planning incorporate the multifaceted elements of pollution control in the U.S. Extending the deadline for the next round of SIPs does not alter the fact that the 2028 deadline for achieving measurable emission reductions to improve visibility remains in place. Furthermore, allowing states additional time to prepare the next plan enables a full accounting of planned reductions from federal mobile source controls; the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards; the 2010 1-hour SO₂ NAAQS; the 2012 PM_{2.5} NAAQS; and the 2015 Ozone NAAQS. It has long been recognized that the better we integrate planning to take account of federal control measures, the more efficient our regulatory development processes will be. We also strongly support the reduction in administrative burden EPA is proposing for the interim progress reports that are due in the middle of the 10-year planning period.

WESTAR expects to make further detailed comments on the proposed rule revisions. While WESTAR supports this rulemaking for the reasons just mentioned, we reserve judgment on the ultimate impact of potential changes to the rule until such time as we have a chance to review and comment on the proposed guidance that will soon be released by EPA. The rule and guidance need to be understood together to fully appreciate the impact of the rule on future efforts to improve visibility in the west.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to comment, and for listening to western state concerns and suggestions to improve visibility in the west. We look forward to seeing the draft guidance that will form the basis for how the goals of the regional haze program will be implemented.