



Fact Sheet

U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service Natural Resource Information Division



Air Quality in the Southern Appalachian Mountains

December 1996

Background

Research and monitoring in the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia and in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee revealed adverse effects from air pollution on vegetation, soils, streams, and visibility. In September 1990, the Assistant Secretary of Fish and Wildlife and Parks in his capacity as federal land manager announced a preliminary determination of adverse effects on the Shenandoah National Park and stated that the emissions from many proposed power plants would exacerbate the effects. He recommended that Virginia not issue permits unless the prospective owners obligated themselves to mitigate the effects. Similarly, in February 1992, the federal land manager announced a determination of adverse effects from air pollution on Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Whereas the responses to the announcement about the Shenandoah National Park in 1990 overwhelmingly supported the federal land manager's position, for various reasons the responses to the announcement about the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1992 were largely critical of the manager's position. States in the region acknowledged that the national parks and several wilderness areas in national forests are harmed by air pollution but continued to issue permits to major new sources of air pollution over the federal land managers' objections.

In March 1992, the National Park Service sponsored a well attended conference in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, to examine the scientific understanding of air pollution in the Southern Appalachians and ideas for addressing air pollution. In response to the controversy over permits for new sources of air pollution and the discussions at the Gatlinburg conference, representatives of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, the U. S. Forest Service, and eight southeastern states (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) met in June 1992 to launch the Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative (SAMI; see appendix on the flip side). SAMI members will be able to consider more comprehensive regional solutions to air pollution problems in the southern Appalachians. Although SAMI is a voluntary initiative, it provides the opportunity to (1) consider all air pollution sources in the region, (2) examine what various Clean Air Act programs can do for the protection of air quality in special (Class I¹) areas, and (3) develop cost-effective, innovative ways to reduce air pollution levels in the southern Appalachians.

¹A classification established by the U.S. Congress to implement the prevention of significant deterioration of air quality in specific areas, including national parks larger than 24.3 km² (6000 acres).

Current Status

The Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative comprises a governing body with representatives of states, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, the U. S. Forest Service, industry, and public interest groups; an operations committee; a public advisory committee; a policy committee; and a technical oversight committee. Representatives of the National Park Service serve on every committee.

During the first annual meeting in November 1993, the governing body adopted bylaws and the mission of *identification of anthropogenic air pollution and of recommendations for reasonable measures to remedy existing and to prevent future adverse effects from such pollution in the southern Appalachians, primarily in Class I parks and wilderness areas*. The governing body obligated itself to weigh the environmental and socio-economic implications of any recommendations. During the meeting, the governing body also confirmed committee membership and officers. The committees developed plans and schedules, which were included in an overall plan of operation by SAMI.

The committees developed management options to reduce emissions in the southern Appalachians. The first set of approved options pertained primarily to energy conservation but included the reduction of automobile emissions in national parks and improved coordination

by the federal land manager and the states in the permit review process. Subcommittees of the technical oversight committee developed a framework for evaluating options for emission management and are working on its implementation. An emission inventory subcommittee proposed to fill data gaps in existing emission inventories. A modeling subcommittee requested the approval of atmospheric modeling. An effects subcommittee requested to analyze the effects of acid deposition in two watersheds with two models and the effects of impaired visibility and ozone. The technical oversight committee expects to have results of preliminary modeling available for a meeting of the governing body in spring 1997. The subcommittee chairs are holding monthly meetings to ensure the coordination of tasks.

Position of the National Park Service

The National Park Service continues to participate in SAMI and its committees to develop regional solutions to problems from air pollution in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Shenandoah National Park, and other national park units in the Southeast.

Positions of Other Entities

In general, all SAMI participants support the mission but differ on specific tasks. No entity seems to oppose the position of the National Park Service at this time. However, opposition may be expected from sources of air pollution if recommendations by SAMI result in new state programs or regulations that affect such organizations.

Funding of SAMI

SAMI is funded by EPA grants and congressional appropriations. The participants provide in-kind services. The participants hope for additional funding from the Congress. In addition, through a consent decree with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Justice, Georgia Pacific agreed to spend \$4.25 million on supplemental environmental projects, including \$2.75 million for the identification and acquisition of permanent nitrogen oxide offsets by SAMI and \$1.0 million for the identification of emission management options through the integrated assessment framework by SAMI.

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Appendix.

Southern Appalachian Mountains Initiative (SAMI)

Mission

The identification of anthropogenic air pollution and of recommendations for reasonable measures to remedy existing and to prevent future adverse effects from such pollution in the southern Appalachians, primarily in Class I parks and wilderness areas. The weighing of environmental and socio-economic implications of any recommendations as part of the mission.

Organization

Governing body of representatives of the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, the U. S. Forest Service, eight southeastern states (Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) public interest groups, environmental interest groups, industry, and academia.

The entire organization meets semi-annually in one of the eight member states. The committees, subcommittees, and workgroups meet when necessary throughout the year in various locations of the region or conduct business in conference calls.

Principal Functions and Structures of Committees

Governing Body: Makes executive decisions and gives direction to subcommittees; consists of representatives from 8 voting states, 3 non-voting federal agencies with 4 representatives, 1 non-voting public interest representative, and 1 non-voting industry representative.

Operations Committee: Provides the administration and management of SAMI, receives and reviews the work products and other information from advisory committees, and formulates and prioritizes proposals for votes by the governing body.

Funding Committee: Keeps track of the funds, makes budget recommendations to the operations committee, and identifies additional funding avenues.

Public Advisory Committee: Educates the public about air quality in the southern Appalachians, gathers public concerns, and encourages public participation in SAMI.

Policy Committee: Develops and analyzes regulatory and non-regulatory strategies or Emission Management Options and makes policy recommendations to the governing body through the operations committee to improve and protect air quality and associated air quality related values in the SAMI region; evaluates the environmental, socioeconomic, and other implications of emission management prior to formulating recommendations.

Technical Oversight Committee: Identifies, prioritizes, and reviews activities that provide the scientific and technical information needed by SAMI and provides technical support to all committees.

Selection Committee: Gives advice for the selection of contractors for SAMI. (The scope of this committee's activity is yet to be determined.)