



Fact Sheet

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



Visibility on the Colorado Plateau

January 1997

97-2

Background

Amendments of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. 7401-7671q [as amended in 1990], 91 Stat. 685, Pub. L. 101-549) in 1990 required the establishment of the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The commission was charged with the assessment of effects of regional haze on the Grand Canyon National Park, on 15 other parks, and on wilderness areas on the Colorado Plateau and with making recommendations to EPA by November 1995 for measures to remedy existing impairment and to prevent future impairment of visibility in these specially protected (Class I¹) areas. (Nine of the Class I areas are under the management of the National Park Service. The other eight areas are under the management of the U. S. National Forest Service.) On 10 June 1996, the commission submitted a report to EPA about a wide variety of pollution sources and measures to address them. One of the major recommendations was about prescribed fire on federal lands. At the direction of the Secretary of the Interior, a group of representatives of federal land

management agencies was formed to address this issue.

The members of the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission are governors or their delegates from the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming and the Hopi Tribe, Pueblo of Acoma Tribe, and Hualapai Tribe. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission have ex officio, nonvoting memberships in the commission.

The Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission consists of an Operations Committee, Technical Committee, Alternatives Assessment Committee, Communications Committee, and Public Advisory Committee. The Operations Committee consists of one representative of each commissioner who are members of state, tribal, or federal governments; industry; environmental agencies; academia; or private business of predominantly utility companies and smelter industries. Assisted by the Western Governors' Association, the Operations Committee reviews and approves products, resolves conflicts, and provides direction to the other committees.

The commission has met approximately once a year. By an unanimously approved motion, the Operations Committee met in summer 1996 to propose the structure and functions of entities that will succeed the commission and track progress in furthering the recommendations by the commission.

Current Status

Commensurate with directions by the Operations Committee, the Western Governors' Association in summer 1996 circulated the draft of a mail ballot. The association recommended the formation of a policy organization to initiate and coordinate recommendations by the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission and the inclusion in the organization of all member states of the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission; the states of Idaho, Montana, Texas, and Washington; as many as 12 tribes; the Secretary of the Interior; the Secretary of Agriculture; and the EPA Administrator or their respective delegates. Each member was to have one vote, and the Western Governors' Association was to lead the group initially. Because the mandated commission required representation by land management agencies (three representatives of each bureau in the Department of the Interior) and the new policy body proposed only one seat for the Department of the Interior, effective

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).

representation is a challenge. A second group will coordinate air quality science and technology issues for multiple purposes throughout the West. A proposal for forming this second group is under consideration.

Because of an insufficient number of votes, the ballot remains open. However, the representatives of the states assured the Western Governors' Association of their favor of the ballot.

Position of the National Park Service

The National Park Service will participate in the Grand Canyon Visibility Transport Commission or its successor as much as other priorities and a limited staff complement allow to ensure the implementation of the recommendations by the commission..

Positions of Other Agencies

In general, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the states, tribes, conservation groups, the public, the Congress, and other agencies support the position of the National Park Service. However, at times, industry, some states, and representatives of the Department of Energy may oppose the position by the National Park Service.

Required Funding for Participation

In-kind services may be funded with existing monies. Additional funding by the National Park Service and other federal agencies may be desirable to help ensure credible products and outcomes.

Maintaining funding for travel to meetings is a concern.

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