

Columbia Gorge Air Quality Strategy Report



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Department of
Environmental
Quality

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Overview

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Southwest Clean Air Agency (SWCAA) have developed an air quality strategy report addressing visibility and other air quality concerns in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The strategy report summarizes the conclusions of a multi-year air quality study conducted by the air agencies, and describes a variety of current, new, and possible future emission reduction strategies that will continue to improve visibility in the Gorge. The agencies' strategy report will be presented to the Columbia River Gorge Commission in April 2008.

Air Quality Study

SWCAA and DEQ have conducted an air quality study over the past several years to characterize and identify local and regional emission sources contributing to haze pollution in the Gorge. Haze pollution degrades our ability to view and enjoy scenic vistas, especially in wilderness areas like Mt. Hood or Mt. Adams, national parks, and special scenic areas like the Gorge. The agencies also looked at regional growth projections, and estimated future trends in Gorge haze and visibility. The agencies' study involved national experts in haze and visibility.

Science Conclusions

The agencies' peer reviewed study taught us several important facts about haze in the Gorge.

- Current haze levels in the Gorge are not getting worse in spite of regional growth pressures.
- Haze levels and visibility in the Gorge are expected to continue to improve slightly over the coming decade.
- Gorge haze comes from all over the Pacific Northwest; including both local sources, and those as far away as Canada and overseas. Both "man-made" and natural sources (like wildfires and vegetation) contribute to haze pollution.
- Generally, each "man-made" emission source (such as motor vehicles, power plant emissions, and woodstoves) contributes a relatively small amount to total haze pollution. High haze events

in the Gorge occur in both summer and winter, and result from the collective contribution of many different natural and "man-made" emission sources across the region.

- Because haze comes from so many places, there is no single action that can be taken to dramatically improve haze in the Gorge.
- Haze reduction will come over time as many different strategies across the region act together to reduce emissions.

The strategy report describes a suite of existing and new emission reduction actions and programs that will help improve visibility in the region. Some of these actions include:

- Federal requirements for haze reduction in wilderness areas like Mt. Hood and Mt. Adams.
- New emission controls on select older major industries.
- Clean car emission standards in Oregon and Washington.
- Cleaner diesel fuel standards.
- Cleaner engine standards.

Special Issues of Concern

There are several issues of special concern to Gorge area residents and concerned citizens.

Balance: The National Scenic Area Act calls for the protection and enhancement of scenic, natural, recreational, and cultural resources in the Gorge in a way that also protects local Gorge economies and communities. New air quality strategies developed for the Gorge must keep this balance in mind.

Risks to Natural and Cultural Resources: The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Gorge-area Native American Tribes have begun important research into the question of acid deposition in the Gorge and the potential risk to important cultural and ecosystem resources. The DEQ and SWCAA encourage the USFS and Tribes to continue this important research. Additional studies will be needed before conclusions can be drawn about the risk to cultural and natural resources from acid deposition.

Many of the same pollutants that cause haze also contribute to acid deposition. Therefore, many of the upcoming strategies to reduce haze will also help reduce acid deposition in the Gorge and reduce risks to cultural and natural resources.

PGE Boardman Coal-Fired Power Plant: Many citizens are concerned that air emissions from the Boardman facility are affecting the Gorge. The Boardman power-plant, along with several other older industrial facilities in Oregon and Washington, are currently being evaluated for emission control options as part of the federal regional haze program.

In the summer of 2008, DEQ will conduct a public rulemaking process to require emission controls for oxides of nitrogen and sulfur dioxide (NOx and SO2) at PGE's Boardman facility. DEQ's rulemaking will also address emission reductions at other select older industrial sources in Oregon. The state of Washington will begin a similar process, likely in late 2008 or 2009. The agencies' will invite public input during these rulemakings.

Emission reductions at the Boardman facility will help improve visibility in the Gorge and help reduce acid deposition. This will in turn help reduce the risk to scenic, recreational, natural, and cultural resources in the Scenic Area.

Ammonia Emissions and Dairies: Regional ammonia emissions play an important role in the formation of haze pollution. There are many sources of ammonia, including agricultural fertilizer use, and regional animal feeding operations, including dairies.

In January 2008, the Oregon Task Force on Dairies and Air Quality convened to study air emissions from dairy operations and explore options for reducing those emissions. The task force will release its report in July 2008.

The air agencies hope the task force report will identify ways to reduce dairy emissions statewide, and perhaps act as a springboard for bi-state cooperation in reducing ammonia emissions from Oregon and Washington dairy operations, especially in regions east of the Gorge. DEQ and SWCAA will have a better sense of future possibilities when the task force has completed its work this summer.

Summary

The air agencies' Gorge strategy report provides a thorough understanding of the emission sources that influence haze in the Gorge, a look into the likely future of haze trends in the Scenic Area, and a path forward for continued visibility improvement over time. DEQ and SWCAA are grateful to the scientists, state and federal agencies, elected officials, Tribes, stakeholders and members of the public who have offered their thoughts and recommendations. DEQ and SWCAA look forward to future conversations about Gorge air quality as we learn more over time.

It will take several years to fully develop and implement many of the current and new air quality improvement strategies. In five years the air agencies will conduct a progress assessment to determine if Gorge visibility is improving as expected. At that time, DEQ and SWCAA will work with the U.S. Forest Service to report to the Columbia River Gorge Commission on the state of air quality in the Gorge, as well as the status of emission reduction strategies.

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More information about the Gorge air quality project, Air Quality Study, and Gorge Air Quality Strategy Report can be found on the Web at: www.gorgeair.org

Alternative formats

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