

Environmentalists to sue EPA over park haze

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WASHINGTON -- Environmentalists took steps on Wednesday to sue the Environmental Protection Agency for failing to compel states to clean up the haze plaguing the nation's parks, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas.

Federal law required all 50 states to submit plans to the federal agency by December outlining how they would reduce the pollution sullyng park vistas and diminishing air quality at places where the environment is protected. The plans would specifically target older factories and power plants without pollution controls.

But to date, only six states -- North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Iowa, Missouri and Louisiana -- have complied.

"This program to clean up dirty air in parks has always been the stepchild of the anti-pollution efforts. It always gets put on the back burner. As a result, go to one of these parks and there is a good chance you are not going to see the clean fresh air you expect," said David Baron, an attorney for Earthjustice who is representing Environmental Defense Fund and the National Parks Conservation Association. The two groups gave the EPA notice on Wednesday that they plan to file a lawsuit within 60 days, unless the agency enforces the deadline.

While the 1977 Clean Air Act established a national goal to restore visibility in protected areas to conditions that would exist naturally, without pollution, the EPA did not issue rules to fully meet the mandate until 1999.

Timothy Lyons, deputy press secretary for EPA administrator Stephen Johnson, said that the agency expects the remaining states to submit their cleanup plans later this year, with a few extending into 2009. The delay, Lyons said, should have no effect on meeting visibility goals by 2064, he said.