

August 23, 2013. WTE Editor's Headline: "EPA Upgrades Good for Wyo."

The EPA has proposed a strong implementation plan for key Wyoming coal-fired power plants, which would require the plants to modernize their outdated pollution controls. In so doing, the EPA wishes to override proposed state controls it considers inadequate. Public comment is encouraged, see below, until the 26th of this month.

It appears, the EPA was unduly ham-fisted in the present case, inviting the animosity of the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (WDEQ) and rule-making officials; still, stricter regulations would benefit visitors and Wyomingites alike. At a recent hearing in Cheyenne, presided over by Judge Sutton, I offered that the EPA upgrades would be good for Wyoming. Here are my reasons:

Under the terms of the Clean Air Act, signed into law by George H.W. Bush, important wilderness areas and national parks—"Class I" areas—must be guarded against industrial pollution. Wyoming's "Class I" include Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park, as well as the Washakie, North Absaroka, Teton, Fitzpatrick, and Bridger Wilderness Areas.

Many Wyoming coal-fired plants have been operating for decades without the up-to-date pollution controls required elsewhere (e.g., in Germany). Our coal plants annually emit more than 60,000 tons of nitrogen dioxide and almost 65,000 tons of sulfur dioxide, while most of the power generated is not even consumed here but is sold to other states.

The Clean Air Task Force estimates that, in Wyoming, the above-mentioned pollutants result in more than \$850 million in preventable health care costs. I'm told that the city of Douglas, downwind from one of the disputed plants, has the highest rate of childhood asthma in Wyoming. While not a focus of the proposed regulations, the EPA's plan would substantially reduce the state's health problems along with the health-care costs involved to address these.

Additionally, pollution controls are important to tourism, not to mention residents' recreational activities. According to Wyoming's Office of Tourism, our travel and tourism industry annually creates 30,000 jobs and generates \$730 million in employment earnings, plus \$2.8 billion in travel expenditures. More than 3.5 million people visit Yellowstone National Park each year, where visibility has gone from 140 miles to 35 to 90 miles.

Now to the heart of the matter. Haze pollution is a mix of extremely small particles and liquid droplets, made up of components that include nitrates and sulfates, organic chemicals, metals, and soil or dust particles. The size of these "particulates"—ten micro-millimeters in diameter or smaller—enables them to pass through the throat and nose and enter the lungs. Once inhaled, the particulates affect the heart and lungs and cause serious health problems.

Further, particulates can be carried by wind over long distances and then settle on the ground or in the water, making lakes and streams acidic while changing the nutrient balance in coastal waters and large river basins. They deplete soil nutrients, stress forests and farm crops; and affect the diversity of ecosystems.

The particulates also settle on newly fallen snow. This causes the snow to melt prematurely, because dust absorbs heat. Dust kills snow—and snow is a precious commodity in the West.

At the hearing, Governor Mead and representatives of WDEQ, as well as industry heavies, argued that worsening haze has been caused by wildfires. While this may be true, two wrongs don't make a right. Several outdoor enthusiasts testified that the haze has been a problem for the past ten years, long before the last couple of years' wildfires began their contributive damage. Then the rhetoric focused on the “prohibitive” cost of modernizing Wyoming's coal-fired plants. It's worth noting, however, that the costs would be shared by all utility ratepayers, in states including Utah, Idaho, Oregon, and Colorado.

Barb George's recent letter to the editor argued that Governor Mead should use rainy-day funds to help retrofit our coal-fired power plants. The paper I submitted to Judge Sutton suggested a similar tactic, urging the governor to apply a portion of the state's roughly seventeen-billion-dollar surplus toward incentives for utilities to retire aging coal-fired plants, retrofit the rest with scrubbers, and encourage renewable-energy production. “If Germany can do it, Wyoming can do it.”

Finally, the proposed regulations are hardly surprising. Wyoming politicians and industries have known for decades that control of pollutants would become a fact of life, once the Clean Air Act was implemented. What's more, the regulations are portents of CO2 controls in the works. The state of Wyoming is among the top five carbon dioxide emitters, annually spewing a worrisome 124.1 metric tons of the waste into the atmosphere while California, with all its vehicle exhaust, emits a mere 9.9 tons. Obviously, our power plants are the worst polluters, as they ship their products elsewhere. Though sparse in population, Wyoming generates unconscionable pollution. Rather than pour time and money into full-page advertisements combatting the need to reduce pollution, the industry—and Wyoming regulators—ought to face the music.

Residents can make their voices heard by writing or emailing on or before August 26, as follows:

Referencing Docket ID No. EPA-R08-OAR-2012-0026 (this is essential), and sending comments by one of these methods:

visit <http://www.regulations.gov> and follow the simple instructions for submitting comments;

email comments to: r8airrulemakings@epa.gov;

fax comments to: (303) 312-6064;

snail-mail comments to: Carl Daly, Director, Air Program, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 8, Mailcode 8P- AR, 1595 Wynkoop Street, Denver, Colorado 80202-1129.