

October 1, 2020

Andrew Wheeler, Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20460
Submitted via regulations.gov

RE: Secondary National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Ozone; Proposed Rule; Docket No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2018-0279-0044

Dear Administrator Wheeler,

We, the undersigned public lands and conservation organizations, strongly oppose the proposal to retain the current, inadequate secondary National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for ozone. We respectfully urge the agency to revise the proposal considering the decades of science it has ignored and propose a new rule in a new comment period to protect the public welfare. We recognize that ozone pollution is a serious threat to nature and must be effectively controlled to protect ecosystems, the climate and sensitive species across national parks and other public lands that we work to protect.

The NAAQS are fundamental public health and welfare safeguards – and ozone pollution is not only harmful for humans to breathe, ozone threatens the health of trees, crops and overall ecosystem and forest productivity, resilience and scenic beauty. Ozone pollution is also a greenhouse gas, contributing directly to global warming, which further threatens our ecosystems and forest and crop health.

The Clean Air Act provides that welfare effects include impacts on soils, water, crops, vegetation, manmade materials, animals, wildlife, weather, visibility and climate. Effects also include damage to and deterioration of property as well as effects on economic values and on personal comfort and well-being, whether caused by transformation, conversion, or combination with other air pollutants.

The secondary NAAQS for ozone ought to be independently and adequately evaluated and regulated, yet EPA has repeatedly failed to do so. While leaving the current primary and secondary standard set at 70 ppb (parts per billion) over an 8-hour period is inadequate for both standards, for the secondary standard, it is inadequate for several reasons. Most notably, while the current averaging time works for the primary standard, it is insufficient for the secondary because of how ozone uniquely affects plants and ecosystem services. EPA must establish a separate secondary standard that relies on a distinct science-supported method to effectively protect natural resources against cumulative ozone impacts on trees, plants, ecosystems and our climate.

The proposal to retain the ozone secondary standard also does not follow the best science. Keeping it at current levels will result in three times as much biomass loss from trees because of

the harms that ozone pollution poses to them and their surrounding ecosystems. Certain tree species across the nation are uniquely vulnerable to ozone pollution, including: Black Cherry, White Pine, Tulip Poplar, Aspen, Ponderosa Pine and Red Alder.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that alterations to the make-up of the EPA Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) have left this body devoid of the necessary expertise to appropriately inform decisions on this issue. As a result, CASAC failed to conduct a meaningful scientific review on the ecosystem effects of ozone pollution at ongoing levels. Accepting their advice as justification for doing nothing distinct on the secondary standard will undoubtedly result in further ecosystem damage and harm to public welfare.

We urge EPA to start over and revise its proposal for the secondary ozone standard to better reflect the science, such as considering cumulative impacts on vegetation, consistent with the Clean Air Act's welfare requirements and then reopen the comment period. The review must independently evaluate scientific and policy issues, not jam them together. The secondary standard must protect all aspects of public welfare from known or anticipated adverse effects from ozone pollution. We thank you for your attention to and consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Appalachian Mountain Club
Capital Region Land Conservancy
Center for Biological Diversity
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Law & Policy Center
Environmental Protection Information Center
FracTracker Alliance
GreenLatinos
John Burroughs Association, Inc.
League of Conservation Voters
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Nature for All
Otsego County Conservation Association
Rachel Carson Council
Southern Environmental Law Center
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Sierra Club
Uplift