

EPA haze plan ignores economic reality

In San Juan County we are blessed with some of the clearest air in the nation. The Four Corners region is also blessed with some of the most scenic locations in the nation, and we need to do our part to preserve them for future generations.

Forty years ago, the federal government established a long-term, achievable timetable for improving visibility in national parks and wilderness areas. New Mexico has an important role to play in that process. To that end, two different plans have been developed for New Mexico to meet its current obligations: one developed by the state and the other by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Both plans meet the government requirements, but with very different technology. And very different cost implications for both our economy and for electricity consumers.

According to the EPA,

haze comes from many sources. Natural contributors to haze include wind-blown dust and soot from wildfires. Manmade contributors include motor vehicles, fires created for heating or cooking, manufacturing operations (like oil and natural gas development in our area), and the production of electricity from fossil fuels.

Tackling haze demands a smart, comprehensive solution. Good public policy should set a target for improvement and accomplish that goal at the lowest possible cost to the public. That's important anytime, but particularly in this economy.

I believe in our community's promise and reality: We have enormous natural resources available to us, and through hard work we have produced outstanding results. Our region is beginning to see unemployment rates improve, having fallen from 10.5 percent in 2010 to 7.1 percent this summer in

San Juan County. This improvement is encouraging, but many of our citizens are still out of work and our progress must continue.

Into this context comes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's new rule on regional haze for New Mexico. I appreciate much of the work that agency does, but this is a seriously flawed plan for several reasons:

- The Clean Air Act gives the states the primary role in addressing regional haze. The plan developed by the state addresses all of the major sources contributing to regional haze in New Mexico. EPA's plan focuses on only one source: the San Juan Generating Station.
- The two plans recommend different technologies

be installed at San Juan. Scientific modeling shows that both technologies meet the federal standard for improved visibility by 2018. But there's an enormous cost difference.

- EPA's latest estimate for its required technology is \$345 million -- up by nearly 50 percent from last December's estimate of \$229 million. PNM's figures for that same technology, which come from estimates provided by two engineering firms with

experience on both technologies, put the figure closer to \$750 million or more. In contrast, the plan developed by the state is estimated to cost \$77 million.

- There are multiple owners of San Juan Generating Station, each of whom

would bear a portion of the cost. Some of those owners include both the City of Farmington and Tucson Electric Power, which provides electricity to the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority and its customers. Cost increases at the plant will likely be reflected in electric rates, and the result could undermine our ability to attract and retain businesses in the Four Corners region.

Here's what I keep coming back to: The two plans meet the same federal visibility requirements. But EPA's is considerably more expensive. In this economy, spending more to achieve the same requirement defies common sense. The people of this region should not be asked to pay for additional technology that is not necessary.

We all have a role to play as stewards of the environment, and New Mexico is prepared to do its part to address regional

haze. But we cannot ignore the need to keep electricity affordable, especially when so many folks in New Mexico are struggling in this tough economy.

I have been engaged in challenging the EPA's mandate since it was first presented in draft last winter. I was proud to be joined by many residents and leaders of this community at the EPA hearings. We must continue to challenge this decision, and I encourage residents of San Juan County and the region to learn more about this issue and take action today in support of New Mexico's regional haze plan. We need to convince EPA to abandon its plan and adopt the state's plan, which meets the legal requirements while mitigating the economic impact on our region.

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San Juan voice