

NEWS RELEASE



For more information:

John F. Sheehan
518-432-1770 (ofc)
518-441-1340 (cell)

Released: Friday, January 20, 2012

**NATIONAL ACID RAIN STUDY: PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN CLEAN AIR
PAYING RICH DIVIDENDS TO ADIRONDACK LAKES, PUBLIC HEALTH & CONSUMERS**
Reductions in Acid Rain-Causing Emissions from Power Plants are Allowing Adirondack Soils and Waters to Recover; Saving Money; Saving & Lengthening Human Lives Around United States

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Government-ordered pollution controls on power plant smokestacks are saving Adirondack Park lakes and streams from destruction, protecting public health and saving huge amounts of money for the average American, according to new federal study.

“This study shows that the national cap-and-trade program for acid rain has been effective, has cost much less than anyone predicted and has returned huge benefits in terms of both environmental protection and money,” said Brian L. Houseal, Executive Director of the Adirondack Council, a privately funded environmental organization that has been a national leader in the fight against acid rain. “Acid rain falling on the Adirondack Park has decreased by about 60 percent since 1990. For every dollar spent on cleaning up acid rain and smog, the public has realized a benefit of between \$50 and \$150.

“The only realistic conclusion you can reach after reading this report is that pollution controls save lives, save lakes and save money,” Houseal said. “There is no public downside to controlling air pollution. People are healthier, the environment is recovering and the impact on the economy is positive. Best of all, we know how much more pollution we need to cut to protect the most sensitive places on the country, such as the Adirondacks and the Appalachians Mountains.”

The 2011 National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program was completed in December and released to Congress this week. It was prepared by the US Department of Energy, the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, US Geological Survey and National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

The study was mandated by Congress to track the impacts of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, which led to the nation’s first acid rain control program. Its findings will be used to judge the success of existing government-ordered pollution control programs and predict what is needed to fully protect the nation’s most hard-hit locations.

The NAPAP program has been tracking environmental progress in nearly 1,500 Adirondack lakes and ponds of 10 acres in size or larger. In all, the Adirondack Park contains more than 11,000 lakes and ponds and an estimated 30,000 miles of rivers, brooks and streams.

“The report predicts that the new Cross-State Pollution Rule will reduce the number of Adirondack lakes that are too acidic for their native life from 33 percent in 1990 to about 8 percent by

2050,” Houseal explained. “Additional cuts beyond the new rule could take that number closer to zero. There are a few lakes in the Adirondacks that are naturally acidic, but just a few.”

However, the Cross-State rule is currently the subject of lawsuits from power companies and states that don’t want to comply with the new rules.

“We urge the courts to reject those arguments, and we call on Congress to take additional action to reduce power plant emissions if the courts fail to uphold the Cross State Pollution Rule,” Houseal said. “Pollution cuts are good for everybody, even the investors in power plants if they really think about it.”

Highlights of the 85-page report include:

Financial benefits

- The report estimates that power companies spent \$3 billion complying with pollution rules in 2010
- The report estimates that the public realized benefits between \$170 billion and \$430 billion as a result of those investments;
- Savings include: 12,000 avoided deaths per year; avoided hospitalizations, treatments and drugs for people with aggravated lung diseases; avoided costs in lost productivity in the workforce; avoided insurance claims for medical benefits and less damage to buildings, monuments, automobiles and bridges.

Environmental benefits since 1990

- Nationwide sulfur dioxide emissions fell by 64 percent below 1990 levels to 5.7 million tons;
- Emission from Ohio alone fell from 4.5 million tons to 1.5 million tons over the same period;
- Nationwide nitrogen oxide emissions fell by 67 percent below 1995 levels (the first year nitrogen oxide emission reductions were required);
- 90 percent of Adirondack Park lakes studied show decreased sulfur content;
- 32 percent show less nitrogen pollution;
- 58 percent of watersheds (soils around lakes) showed increased capacity to neutralize acid on their own (because decreased pollution means the naturally occurring alkaline minerals get used up less rapidly).

Nitrogen levels were not reduced as greatly by power plant emissions cuts as sulfur emissions were because power plants account for only 20 percent of all nitrogen emissions nationwide, while power plants cause 70 percent of all sulfur pollution, the report notes.

New York’s 9,300-square-mile Adirondack Park is the largest American park outside of Alaska. It is larger than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon and Glacier national parks, combined.

The Adirondack Park is the hardest-hit area of the nation in terms of acid rain. Over more than a century, hundreds of lakes and ponds became too acidic from air pollution to support their native life. High-elevation spruce forests were wiped out. Acid rain also caused toxic metals such as aluminum and mercury to kill some fish and contaminate others. Mercury contamination has spread to every lake in the Adirondack Park, requiring fish consumption warnings for children and women of child-bearing age, due to concerns over organ damage and birth defects mercury can cause.

The Adirondack Council is a privately funded, not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the ecological integrity and wild character of the Adirondack Park. Adirondack Council members live in all 50 United States.