

WNBZ
July 8, 2011

EPA: Groundbreaking clean air rules benefit the ADKs

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized Clean Air Act protections Thursday that will slash several hundred thousand tons of smokestack emissions.

The pollutants travel long distances through the air leading to smog, acid rain and mercury contamination that threaten the health of hundreds of millions of Americans living downwind.

As George Earl reports, environmentalists are hailing the new regulations as a major victory...

The Cross-State Air Pollution Rule was granted final approval by the Obama administration on Thursday.

The EPA says the new rules will benefit 27 states in the eastern half of the country from the deleterious effects of pollution generated by coal-burning power plants.

The regulations are especially good news for the North Country, a region that has been described by scientists as a mercury and acid rain "hotspot."

Environmentalists and public health officials are calling the regulations an historic chapter in the battle against cross-state pollution.

John Sheehan is the spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

"This is enormous," Sheehan said. "The Adirondacks Council has been trying to get to this point since 1975 when we started working with other activists in Canada to bring attention the problems of acid rain."

The new rules will require a 73 percent cut in sulfur dioxide and a 54 percent cut in nitrogen oxides by 2014.

The EPA expects the rules to prevent 240 million premature deaths.

Environmental groups say it will also lead to an environmental renaissance in places like the Adirondacks, where chemical poisoning has stunted and killed plants and wildlife.

Again, here's John Sheehan.

"It's a new regulation and we believe that this is capable of ending chronic acid rain in the Adirondacks," he said. "The science shows that we will see an end to the continuing damage in the Adirondack Park within a decade."

The new regulations replace a similar 2008 Clean Air Interstate Rule that was challenged in court by a couple of Midwestern power companies.

Proponents of the regulations say the new rules address the concerns of the power companies without weakening its main purpose of cutting emissions.

As a result, they say the rules are more likely to hold up in the event of a lawsuit.