Frequently Asked Questions

***General Questions***

What is “regional haze?”

Regional haze is a term that EPA uses to refer to visibility impairment at designated national parks and wildernesses caused by air pollution from numerous sources dispersed over a wide geographic area. EPA distinguishes this kind of visibility impairment from the kind caused by a single source that impairs visibility at a single park or wilderness.

What causes regional haze?

Regional haze is caused by air pollution made up of particles that scatter sunlight, thus obscuring visibility over distances visible to the human eye. The particles that cause this affect form from both particles and gasses emitted by human activity and natural events. On the human activity side, industrial facilities like power plants emit and vehicles like cars and trucks emit particles and gasses that can be carried long distances and can interact with other substances to form visibility-obscuring particles. On the natural events side, wildfires and high winds can throw particles into the atmosphere that also obscure visibility.

What does the federal government do to try to alleviate regional haze?

The federal Clean Air Act mandates that EPA issue regulations to improve improve visibility in Class 1 Areas. These regulations require states to submit plans periodically to EPA, which must do three things.

* The plans must show which Class 1 Areas have visibility that’s affected by the air pollutant emissions from that state, whether those areas in the state or beyond its borders.
* The plans must show feasible pollution control measures the state will put in place to reduce the state’s emissions from human activity (not natural events beyond human control) that affect visibility at Class 1 Areas.
* The plans must show how much visibility improvement is expected to result from the pollution control measures. The federal regulations on Regional Haze require that visibility conditions in Class 1 Areas must return to “natural conditions” by 2064.

What are the designated parks and wildernesses where visibility is impaired by regional haze?

EPA refers to these designated parks and wildernesses as “Mandatory Federal Class 1 Areas,” which we’ll refer to as Class 1 Areas. There are 156 of these, listed in federal regulations. You can see the list at <https://www.epa.gov/visibility/list-areas-protected-regional-haze-program>.

How do we know how much visibility impairment exists at a Class 1 Area?

Air quality monitors are positioned in or near each Class 1 Area. These monitors measure the amount of visibility impairing particles in the air – that is, how much “stuff” is in the air that can keep people from seeing natural vistas clearly. They also measure something related, but different: how badly is the view being obscured, i.e. how much visibility impairment exists. This nationwide network of monitors is called the IMPROVE (**I**nteragency **M**onitoring of **PROT**ected Visual Environments) network. IMPROVE is managed and operated by a committee of federal agencies, including EPA and the various land management agencies, as well as organizations that represent state regulatory agencies. More information on IMPROVE is available at <http://vista.cira.colostate.edu/Improve/>.

How do we know where the visibility impairing pollutants in an area come from?

Federal and state air quality planners, working with federal land managers, have to do highly technical analysis to answer that question. In part, they do this by identifying air pollutant emission sources in the region around a Class 1 Area. For each source, planners and land managers measure the amount of air pollutants emitted that are known to contribute to visibility impairment. They use sophisticated computer simulations (typically called “models”) to identify where these pollutants are traveling, taking into account things like:

* the type of emission source (for example, a power plant versus a wildfire);
* the kind of pollutant;
* wind and temperature conditions;
* how different pollutants interact with each other in the atmosphere;
* how pollution travels across state boundaries; and
* how pollution is transported into the United States from outside U.S. borders.

How do we know how much visibility impairing pollution is coming from particular sources?

EPA regulations require states to keep track of air pollutant emissions, from both natural and human sources, that are subject to EPA regulations. Every year, states must report the amount of these pollutants from their biggest sources (called “major sources” in air regulatory lingo). Every three years, states must report their emissions of regulated pollutants from all their sources, not just the biggest ones. WRAP uses data from the once-every-three-year emissions inventories as the basis for the emissions data found in the TSS.

What does “WRAP” mean?

“WRAP” is the Western Regional Air Partnership, an organization representing state air quality regulatory agencies in the Western states. WRAP serves as an umbrella organization assisting state air agencies in preparing plans to meet requirements in federal regional haze regulations. WRAP member states help operate and manage the TSS. WRAP has also set up a planning group that brings member states together to develop resources that can be used by states in putting together the regional haze plans they must submit to EPA.

***Data-related questions:***

Which sites/locations do these data apply to?

The TSS v2 houses monitoring data from all IMPROVE sites across the country. However, the analysis for various metrics, including the Most Improved Days (MID) metric, follows a calculation methodology recommended by the WESTAR/WRAP Regional Haze Planning Work Group’s “Monitoring Data / Glide Path” Subcommittee. (Note that, while this methodology is recommended, some states may diverge from this methodology for site-specific or state-specific reasons.) The methodology for analyzing monitoring data may vary from region to region. Similarly, modeling data is specific to the western region, i.e., the WRAP region.

Where does the IMPROVE data originate and what vintage is utilized?

The IMPROVE dataset was originally taken from the Federal Land Managers Environmental Database (FED - [http://views.cira.colostate.edu/fed/](https://clicktime.symantec.com/a/1/cLSHyBrJQJ1G1VjvL-frv0gjrWxHJ8YEz06gneMWPgE%3D?d=oRJc8FoNc4BEg1NVjlHOAexh3X6X-ugSSgj5bFvpiTvmWNGcmn3e88QT-LkIJmKx2wlSavINYOkkoZ9YCoI1nhe0sBGBp87He68748UWGIetLCkeFm58pKYg6upGnV3cg0xQ8hJ27Ie5_epqrfwTm6zlNnSWQtWABu--Td2Gc7w9Ar0fNXVGDtry0UPXOfu0wcFiZlmMWsmmeoJdvgXf-zEklDExw-2FSczGHbHfTItdko7CBC38Cqhbuw75CJ1UMmGR0OZWBVjbwiJBk9RcJh9bbygCXzGbrTxu6_m2O4QM_iPfuKs3wlfXlRINHh2eFHDlPiBHnRPus2AXqkHLIi2j-XRQQT6UyMkHN67PcrqM_lEPRsgTpWYAVE1MoH42TNqYz2uvShBG7PkQeOcCEgQaxAZEEQ%3D%3D&u=http%3A%2F%2Fviews.cira.colostate.edu%2Ffed%2F)). The data has been augmented to substitute for those sites which are missing data. This augmentation was performed by Air Resource Specialists and finalized in December, 2018. The dataset currently includes data up to and including the year 2017. The final data download from the FED occurred on ??????

What are “most impaired days?”

“Most impaired days” is a term used by EPA to describe the 20% of monitored days that have the most haze due to anthropogenic (human induced) haze. The recommended method first takes out the light extinction caused by pollutant species that are statistically likely to have been present due to extreme episodic events – what EPA refers to as e3. (Light extinction refers to the decrease in visibility because of haze-related pollutants in the atmosphere.) For the remaining light extinction, a previously determined “natural conditions” level of light extinction is subtracted. Natural conditions refers to an estimate of average haze levels (light extinction) due to biogenic sources (such as trees), sea salt in the atmosphere, light scattering due to the density of the air mass, and other sources of natural visibility-reducing particles or gases in the air. Whatever is left over after this subtraction is deemed to be anthropogenic. For each year, the days are sorted and ranked according to calculated anthropogenic contribution to overall haze, from highest to lowest. Analysts then choose 20% of all monitored days in a year, starting with the highest anthropogenic contribution day. These are determined to be the “Most Impaired Days” for that year.

Why are the most impaired days different from the haziest days?

As explained above, the most impaired days are analysts’ best estimate of the amount of light extinction due to anthropogenic contributions. In other words, overall haze is separated into natural haze and anthropogenic haze; most impaired days looks only at the anthropogenic portion – the portion that states may be able to control. These days may be referred to as “worst” days in this round of regional haze planning, based on the 2016 Visibility Protection Rule (or Regional Haze Rule). In the first round of regional haze planning, based on the 1997 rule, the word impairment was used differently. It referred to the 20% of monitored days that had the most overall haze, regardless of whether the source was anthropogenic or natural. In short, “haziest days” really are the worst days – overall haze (what you would notice if you went to a park) is highest on these days. On haziest days, however, some of the haze may be from wildfires or windblown dust – which no one can control! On the most impaired days, in contrast, the haze effects from natural sources – which may be MUCH larger than from anthropogenic sources – has been removed from consideration. “Most impaired days” is the set of days deemed to have the most haze-related pollution from anthropogenic sources.

How are the natural-routine portions of the daily samples determined?

The natural-routine portions (for each species), determined after the natural-episodic portions are accounted for, are scaled in a way that, when averaged over each year, equal the NC-II annual average value (for each species). The NC-II originates from region-specific (Eastern/Western U.S.) mass concentrations reported by Trijonis (National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program State of Science & Technology, Vol. II, 1990) and adjusted in EPA’s 2003 guidance (Guidance for Estimating Natural Visibility Conditions Under the Regional Haze Rule) to account for the IMPROVE light extinction algorithm. The steps to convert the mass concentrations to the light-extinction NC-II values are described by Copeland, et. al. (Regional Haze Rule Natural Level Estimates Using the Revised IMPROVE Aerosol Reconstructed Light Extinction Algorithm, 2008). Sea salt is considered all natural-routine. (See [Draft Guidance for the Second Implementation Period of the Regional Haze Rule (PDF)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-07/documents/draft_regional_haze_guidance_july_2016.pdf).)

How are the natural-episodic portions of the daily samples determined?

Episodic natural contributions are designed to capture wildfire and dust effects, those that are likely extreme events, and non-anthropogenic in origin. Threshold values are determined by first taking the 95th percentile of the carbon (organic + elemental) and dust (fine soil + coarse mass) species for each year in 2000-2014. Then take the minimum yearly 95th percentile for each (carbon and dust), and call those two values the thresholds. The portions of the carbon and dust species that exceed those thresholds are considered natural-episodic. (See [Draft Guidance for the Second Implementation Period of the Regional Haze Rule (PDF)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-07/documents/draft_regional_haze_guidance_july_2016.pdf).)

How are the anthropogenic portions of the daily samples determined?

The anthropogenic portions are assigned to the remaining species contributions of the daily samples after natural-routine and natural-episodic are accounted for.

How are the 2064 endpoints determined?

The endpoints are determined by averaging the daily natural (episodic and routine) portions on the 20% most impaired days in each year from 2000-2014. This answer needs some further work, once MDGP SC has finalized their recommendations. (See [Draft Guidance for the Second Implementation Period of the Regional Haze Rule (PDF)](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-07/documents/draft_regional_haze_guidance_july_2016.pdf).)

***Website-related questions:***

What is the WRAP Technical Support System

The WRAP Technical Support System (more on “WRAP” below) provides air quality data to planners, land managers, and the public on regional haze. The TSS is currently still in development, but when it’s complete it will offer interactive displays showing technical data and measurements about, among other things:

* the location of Class 1 Areas and IMPROVE monitor sites;
* visibility conditions at Class 1 Areas over time (that is, how much is light being scattered and thus preventing people from seeing clearly over long distances);
* amount of visibility-impairing particles in the air at Class 1 Areas;
* amount of emissions by sources in each state of pollutants known to contribute to formation of visibility impairing pollutants;
* results of computer modeling showing how emissions travel long distances from a human or natural source, how they help to form visibility impairing particles, and how much visibility impairment happens as a result;
* results of computer modeling showing how air pollution control measures might affect visibility conditions at Class 1 Areas.

Do I need to login?

Not always. There are resources and pages on the website that do not require a login to access, but many others that do. Most of the data-intensive tools and resources will require you to login because we need to protect these pages from hackers, spammers, and bots - leaving them "wide open" to the general public can significantly affect the performance of the site for regular users, so we choose to protect many of these pages with a login requirement. If you click on a link or visit a page that requires a login, you will simply be redirected to the [Login page](http://views.cira.colostate.edu/tssv2/Auth/Login.aspx).

I’m new to regional haze planning, where do I start?

Where to start on the TSS v2 depends on what you are trying to accomplish. First, you can check out the [Overview of Regional Haze Planning](https://clicktime.symantec.com/a/1/hPD8h4c9HT3bm7YzzgswYki9RZD-Ys6t3UkioRs0wMU%3D?d=Q4yGtHmeAOGMDKqtbAiPoHFyaLARu1sIJBy5iuBjGmA4WlK9J7ES6oDhCUcsiqDLW4lHMuG9P4OpYtWNfPeQTbcvhHEkxkGpqKdp6ycspAExYd5mqOy6y_64W04LQFtIib_Dd-VfPAPVGIw3wwCd1Nc4jf6p2-vEtAPGyLhMuRFIZoswQWoCRIGkQS5GYnBw_ATPD_K1BUp-irg3AJ5qyjOHjZc_NPcv1Vpu4P9zzZOiWDuz5UzyK6_QasP3lV8mQ8vF7tXTWHphejSTZxRKS3FHCuZp1i2JRGW7FLCoVBKb4jnKvr27Hf41GuvoExF98Z9t7ADvsjC411ji3QdQhOLWMTNk0lcmMD2DjlDiBcTR6pBTIUAaooUqeCMGz5tWMbvylLwbp2tTyCfxdg%3D%3D&u=http%3A%2F%2Fviews.cira.colostate.edu%2Ftssv2%2FDoc%2FRHPlanningOverview.aspx) to get a general overview of how regional haze planning works. Once you are ready to start looking at data for your Class I areas, there are numerous tools on the TSS v2 website to help you.

A good place to start is the [Visibility Summaries](https://clicktime.symantec.com/a/1/JDCEcVYAsFCIfECi9HG35-DITgsqeeZAq_P9QHzZpqU%3D?d=Q4yGtHmeAOGMDKqtbAiPoHFyaLARu1sIJBy5iuBjGmA4WlK9J7ES6oDhCUcsiqDLW4lHMuG9P4OpYtWNfPeQTbcvhHEkxkGpqKdp6ycspAExYd5mqOy6y_64W04LQFtIib_Dd-VfPAPVGIw3wwCd1Nc4jf6p2-vEtAPGyLhMuRFIZoswQWoCRIGkQS5GYnBw_ATPD_K1BUp-irg3AJ5qyjOHjZc_NPcv1Vpu4P9zzZOiWDuz5UzyK6_QasP3lV8mQ8vF7tXTWHphejSTZxRKS3FHCuZp1i2JRGW7FLCoVBKb4jnKvr27Hf41GuvoExF98Z9t7ADvsjC411ji3QdQhOLWMTNk0lcmMD2DjlDiBcTR6pBTIUAaooUqeCMGz5tWMbvylLwbp2tTyCfxdg%3D%3D&u=http%3A%2F%2Fviews.cira.colostate.edu%2Ftssv2%2FSiteBrowser%2FDefault.aspx%3Fappkey%3DSBCF_VisSum) page. From here you can click on any Class I area on the map at the top and get a quick view of the visibility trends at that site. The first tab “Dv Trends” shows how the haziest and clearest days have changed over time compared to the baseline natural conditions. The “Haze Budgets, Clear Days” tab shows the annual average of individual species contribution on the clearest days through time. The “Haze Budgets, Hazy Days” tab shows the annual average of the individual species contribution on the haziest days through time. Finally, the “Haze Budges, Most Impaired Days” tab shows the annual average of the individual species contribution on the most impaired days through time. To find out more about the difference between the haziest and most impaired days, see here (link to another question?).

To dig deeper into the visibility data, you can go to the [Haze Analysis Tools](https://clicktime.symantec.com/a/1/nzlraaIXjm3B3-RLjYnjG7oG6qfZP2KnpvmvHgRugK0%3D?d=Q4yGtHmeAOGMDKqtbAiPoHFyaLARu1sIJBy5iuBjGmA4WlK9J7ES6oDhCUcsiqDLW4lHMuG9P4OpYtWNfPeQTbcvhHEkxkGpqKdp6ycspAExYd5mqOy6y_64W04LQFtIib_Dd-VfPAPVGIw3wwCd1Nc4jf6p2-vEtAPGyLhMuRFIZoswQWoCRIGkQS5GYnBw_ATPD_K1BUp-irg3AJ5qyjOHjZc_NPcv1Vpu4P9zzZOiWDuz5UzyK6_QasP3lV8mQ8vF7tXTWHphejSTZxRKS3FHCuZp1i2JRGW7FLCoVBKb4jnKvr27Hf41GuvoExF98Z9t7ADvsjC411ji3QdQhOLWMTNk0lcmMD2DjlDiBcTR6pBTIUAaooUqeCMGz5tWMbvylLwbp2tTyCfxdg%3D%3D&u=http%3A%2F%2Fviews.cira.colostate.edu%2Ftssv2%2FHazeAnalysis%2FDefault.aspx%3Fappkey%3DHACF_VisSummary) page. This page allows you to dig deeper into the visibility data by seeing individual days selected for the clearest, haziest, and most impaired days. On the “Daily, All Days” tab shows the individual light extinction by species for each day of the selected year. These graphics are sorted by calendar day, total haze, or impairment. The “Daily, Group Days” tab shows the individual days selected for clearest, haziest, and most impaired days only. The “Monthly, “Seasonal”, and “Annual” tabs show the average light extinction by month, season, or year for the period selected. The “Glide Path” tab shows the glidepath information for the clearest, haziest, and most impaired metrics.

There is also the ability to download raw data and conduct further analysis. The raw data can be accessed via the [Query Wizard](https://clicktime.symantec.com/a/1/qKr5TVlLVeCr4j3FIgbpVszxqTKSiaN0lU-BTjJm_FU%3D?d=Q4yGtHmeAOGMDKqtbAiPoHFyaLARu1sIJBy5iuBjGmA4WlK9J7ES6oDhCUcsiqDLW4lHMuG9P4OpYtWNfPeQTbcvhHEkxkGpqKdp6ycspAExYd5mqOy6y_64W04LQFtIib_Dd-VfPAPVGIw3wwCd1Nc4jf6p2-vEtAPGyLhMuRFIZoswQWoCRIGkQS5GYnBw_ATPD_K1BUp-irg3AJ5qyjOHjZc_NPcv1Vpu4P9zzZOiWDuz5UzyK6_QasP3lV8mQ8vF7tXTWHphejSTZxRKS3FHCuZp1i2JRGW7FLCoVBKb4jnKvr27Hf41GuvoExF98Z9t7ADvsjC411ji3QdQhOLWMTNk0lcmMD2DjlDiBcTR6pBTIUAaooUqeCMGz5tWMbvylLwbp2tTyCfxdg%3D%3D&u=http%3A%2F%2Fviews.cira.colostate.edu%2Ftssv2%2FQueryWizard%2FDefault.aspx) page.

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