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NEWS RELEASE

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Report Names Sequoia-Kings Canyon Smoggiest Park

Ozone pollution threatens park, visitors' health

Washington, DC — A new report released today by three conservation groups ranks Sequoia-Kings Canyon as America's most ozone national park. The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), Our Children's Earth, and Appalachian Voices analyzed National Park Service data to write Code Red: America's Five Most Polluted National Parks, which updates a 2002 report.

“ In 1977 amendments to the Clean Air Act gave special protection to the national parks in this country. They were designated places in which we must do our utmost to ensure we have pristine air quality,” said Courtney Cuff, NPCA's Pacific Regional director. “This means that visitors to our national parks deserve to find a place where they can escape urban air pollution. But the reality is that they are exposed to some of the most unhealthy air in the country. Code Red should serve as a call to action to state and federal decision makers to clean the air in our parks and communities.”

With 370 unhealthful air days during the report's study period of 1999 through 2003, park visitors and staff had more occasions on which to be cautious about ozone pollution exposure than did people in Atlanta, New York City, or Washington, DC. And the levels of ozone pollution in two of the park's most popular areas, Grant Grove and Giant Forest, can exceed even those in Los Angeles. Ozone, which contributes to smog, damages the lungs of humans and is especially hazardous for children, those with heart and respiratory ailments such as asthma, and the elderly.

“Recent reports confirm ozone and other pollutants that contribute to smoggy and hazy skies do have long-term health effects,” said Tiffany Schauer, executive director of Our Children's Earth Foundation. “We know that our national parks, places we visit with our children every year, are suffering from air pollution much like that in our cities.”

And that pollution could be affecting the health of communities as well as park visitors. In Fresno County more than 16 percent of all children suffer from asthma, which is twice the national average. In addition, ozone damages plants at even lower levels than those set to protect human health. In Sequoia-Kings Canyon, Jeffrey and ponderosa pines are among 28 plant species especially susceptible to ozone damage.

Across the country, nearly all of the pollution plaguing our parks comes from sources located outside of their boundaries. Power plants and industrial facilities as well as cars, trucks, planes, trains, and construction equipment produce fossil-fuel pollution. None of the 13 parks with long-term ozone monitoring in this study have seen statistically significant improvement in their ozone pollution levels.

Hazy skies also trouble the park and lessen the quality of park visitors' experiences. Views that should stretch from 122 to 158 miles average only 39 miles in the summer. And acid snow poses problems for the parks as well. Although Sequoia-Kings Canyon receives less of the pollutants that compose acid precipitation, nitrogen and sulfur, than other parks in the study, the park is greatly affected. Snowmelt in the spring and summer can mean acidified streams that place creatures such as the California newt at risk.

Code Red ranks the following national parks as the five most polluted:

1. Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina
2. Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky
3. Shenandoah National Park in Virginia
4. Acadia National Park in Maine
5. Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks in California

Conditions at Sequoia-Kings Canyon national parks, like others on the list, have not significantly improved since the most recent Clean Air Act Amendments were passed in 1990. Many power plants and industrial facilities continue to operate with limited pollution controls as proposed sources threaten to incrementally add more pollution to the unresolved problem. And this year, the EPA designated several national parks among areas in which the air is unhealthy and violates the federal health standard_ Acadia, Shenandoah, Great Smoky Mountains, Rocky Mountain, Joshua Tree, Yosemite, and Sequoia-Kings Canyon national parks along with Cape Cod National Seashore. These findings echo those in Code Red: America's Five Most Polluted National Parks, which offers recommendations for addressing national park pollution.

Although agricultural equipment, which factors in to state air quality problems, will begin permitting processes for the first time this year, emissions reductions from this program will not be evident for some time and more reductions will be needed to improve air quality. Strong implementation of critical measures already adopted, such as California's A.B. 1493, would reduce automobile greenhouse gas emissions in the state. Fully funding the Carl Moyer Program, through proposed legislation such as S.B. 403, would help shoulder some of the capital costs associated with purchasing cleaner than required vehicles and equipment that would help clear the air for parks and California. A.B. 198, currently before the legislature, would also shift state

tax incentives for purchases of heavily polluting vehicles to purchases of clean vehicles at no net cost to the state.

“ Our national parks should provide refuge from the problems and hectic pace of everyday life,” said Courtney Cuff, NPCA’s Pacific Regional director. “Visitors should not have to worry that enjoying the outdoors will threaten their health.”

To read Code Red: America’s Five Most Polluted National Parks, please go to www.npca.org/codered.

Appalachian Voices is a nonprofit conservation organization focused on protecting forests and communities of the Appalachian Mountain region. For more information on the effects of air pollution on forests as well as on the effects of coal mining on communities and the environment, see www.appvoices.org.

NPCA - Protecting Parks for Future Generations - Founded in 1919, the nonpartisan National Parks Conservation Association is America's only private, nonprofit advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting, preserving, and enhancing the National Park System. Today, NPCA has 300,000 members. A library of national park information, including fact sheets, congressional testimony, position statements, and press releases, can be found on NPCA's Web site at www.npca.org/media_center.

Our Children’s Earth is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the public from the harmful effects of air pollution. For more information, see www.ocefoundation.org.

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