

**Project Summary**  
**Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit**

**Project Title:** Assistance for Visibility Data Analysis and Image Display Techniques

**Discipline:** Natural Resources  
**Type of Project:** Research  
**Funding Agency:** National Park Service  
**Other Partners/Cooperators:** Colorado State University  
**Effective Dates:** 1/1/2011 - 1/31/2012  
**Funding Amount:** \$314,412

**Investigators and Agency Representative:**

NPS Contact: Bret Schichtel, National Park Service, Air Resources Division, CIRA Foothills Campus, Colorado State University, 1375 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80523; Tel: (970)-491-8292; Fax: (970)-491-8598 e-mail: Schichtel@cira.colostate.edu

Investigator: Jenny Hand, Colorado State University, Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA), 1375 Campus Delivery, Fort Collins, CO 80523; (979)-491-3699; Fax (970)-491-8598 e-mail: hand@cira.colostate.edu

**Project Abstract:** The public visits national parks and wilderness areas to enjoy nature in an unblemished setting. Air pollutants can adversely affect that visitor experience by degrading the vistas they come to see and by affecting the natural ecosystems of these areas. The NPS and CSU scientists are working together to better understand the scientific basis of these issues, make that information available to regulatory agencies, and interpret it for the public.

Particles and gases in the atmosphere scatter and absorb light, affecting the view one has of a scene. This project analyzes particle data collected through the Interagency Monitoring of Protected Visual Environments (IMPROVE) program to determine its origins and radiative properties and to better understand its chemical makeup. These analyses will be published in the scientific literature, presented at scientific meetings, and made available with the data through the World Wide Web. The optical properties of aerosols affect how the particles impair visibility. However, it is difficult for the public to visually interpret the meaning of changes in optical variables used to quantify changes in scene appearance under different atmospheric-particulate-loading conditions. The most effective ways to present the effects of pollutants on scenic vistas are by photographic imaging techniques that accurately depict how the scene will appear under various illuminations and meteorological and pollutant conditions, through video productions that demonstrate pollutant effects on a scene over time, and by regional air quality simulation modeling. An image-based depiction of visibility reduction due to pollutants is dependent on a firm understanding of the optical characteristics of pollutants, on state-of-the-art measuring techniques, on a valid understanding of how chemicals are transformed as they travel through the atmosphere, on the ability to simulate accumulated effects, and on professional quality image and video production techniques. The aforementioned analyses and techniques are the key elements of successfully carrying out this cooperative project.

Healthy ecosystems are critical to having a natural, unblemished visitor experience. Ecosystem changes due to atmospheric deposition of nitrogen compounds have been documented at Rocky Mountain National Park. The origins, chemical makeup, and temporal scales of changes in the deposition are not well understood. Field measurements were made in the spring and summer of 2006 and for the entire year of 2009 to provide data to enhance our understanding. This project analyzes some of these data and runs 4-dimensional chemical transport models to assess atmospheric nitrogen deposition at the park.

**Outcomes with Completion Dates:** January 31, 2012  
Analyses, Publications, Web Pages, Final Report

**Key Words:** air pollutants, visibility, visitor experience, Air Resource Management, Colorado State University, Cooperative Institute for Research in the Atmosphere (CIRA), National Park Service