

President Bush will speak just before noon today at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve.



# President to give Earth

● Protesters will demonstrate against his policies, which they say hurt the environment and our health.

By **MEREDITH GOAD**  
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President Bush will highlight efforts to protect natural resources

during his Earth Day visit to Maine today, but he faces protests by environmentalists who say his administration's policies are polluting the state's air and water, and putting

## Day speech in Wells

Mainers' health at risk.

Bush is scheduled to give his annual Earth Day speech just before noon today at the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve. He is expected to talk about the role of citizen stewardship and conservation partnerships in protecting the country's natural

resources.

"When we were collecting our short list of places that best demonstrate the spirit of partnership, the combination of the Wells Reserve, the Rachel Carson refuge and the

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## BUSH

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Laudholm Trust Farm was high on our list as a great example of how that can work well," said James Connaughton, chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality and Bush's senior environmental adviser.

Bush also will take a tour of the Wells reserve and do some water-quality sampling with volunteers.

Maine environmentalists said the visit amounts to a "greenwashing" of Bush's environmental record - a record they say is regressive and harmful to public health. Several groups plan demonstrations outside the reserve to coincide with Bush's visit.

"What's deeply troubling is that this administration has undertaken a concerted, systematic, very vigorous effort to undermine or repeal every important environmental law protecting the people and the environment of the United States," said Brownie Carson, executive director of the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

While not billed as a campaign stop by the White House, Bush's visit to Maine has political overtones. Maine is one of 18 so-called "swing" states in the presidential election. Sen. John Kerry, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president, has spent the week attacking Bush on the environment.

The issue that has perhaps received the most attention in Maine is clean air. More than 13 percent of Maine children have asthma, a problem that is exacerbated by air pollution that blows in from out-of-state industrial facilities. The state also has the second-highest rate of adult asthma in the country.

Last week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency listed more than 100 coastal Maine towns - including Wells - as places where there is a

serious summer smog problem.

Environmentalists have protested what they say is the Bush administration's weakening of a key provision of the Clean Air Act, requiring aging coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and other industrial facilities to upgrade pollution controls when the plants are modernized or expanded.

Maine officials are fighting that weakening of the law through two lawsuits, and has filed a third lawsuit over the regulation of carbon dioxide emissions, which are a contributor to global warming.

Bush's Clear Skies Initiative would eliminate the section of the Clean Air Act that lets states like Maine petition the EPA to crack down on out-of-state polluters, according to the Maine Attorney General's Office.

"I don't think since Sen. (Edmund) Muskie wrote the Clean Air Act that there has been a worse record by a president on air," said Conrad Schneider of the Clean Air Task Force in Brunswick.

Connaughton called concerns over Bush's air policies "misinformed." He said new rules announced by the EPA last week will help Maine communities that are struggling with smog.

"We are moving forward with and implementing the new, much more stringent air quality standards to battle smog," he said. "Later this year, we will be moving forward with new standards on fine particles. That's going to take us to a brand new, much stricter air pollution standard than we've ever had in the country before."

Connaughton also pointed to the new Interstate Air Quality Rule, which will require additional controls on power plants in 25 states that contribute to Maine's air pollution problem. The rule cuts down on emissions of nitrogen oxide, a pollutant that is a precursor to smog, and includes a cap-and-trade program.

He also cited the new EPA rule

that targets pollution from non-road diesel vehicles such as construction equipment and off-road farm equipment.

Maine has filed comments with the EPA protesting its proposed new mercury rule, which officials say would allow coal-fired power plants to emit more mercury over a longer period of time than a previous EPA proposal.

"If the rule is finalized as it's currently proposed, it's likely a significant number of states would file a lawsuit about that, including Maine," said Assistant Attorney General Jerry Reid.

Mercury is a toxic contaminant that has been linked with neurological and developmental problems. Maine has statewide advisories that caution children under 8 and women of child-bearing age not to eat more than one fish meal a month from Maine waters.

Connaughton said Bush committed to cutting mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants as soon as he entered office in 2001.

"As we sit here today, there is no regulation of mercury from power plants," he said. "What we have proposed is a 70 percent cut in the mercury pollution from power plants, and we have proposed two different ways of getting there."

The Bush administration prefers a market-based approach that creates an incentive for facilities to reduce pollution earlier and more than legally required, he said.

But environmentalists say that taking 15 years or more to reduce mercury pollution is too long, and they prefer the earlier EPA proposal that would cut mercury pollution by 90 percent, with a target compliance date of 2008.

Environmentalists are also upset about Bush administration policies that exempt the Defense Department from laws protecting marine mammals and endangered species. And

they say there has been a 40 percent drop in federal prosecution of criminal pollution cases.

Environmentalists contend that taxpayers, instead of polluters, are being forced to pay for cleaning up toxic Superfund sites. Fewer toxic waste sites are being added to the national priorities list, they say, and others - including the Eastland Woolen Mill in Corinna - are taking longer to clean up.

Wetlands such as those found on the Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve are also in trouble, said Maureen Drouin, Northeast regional representative of the Sierra Club.

"Wetlands and small streams filter pollutants out of our water," she said. "But the Bush administration has eliminated Clean Water Act protections from 20 million acres of wetlands."

Kate Moffat of Kennebunk, a teacher, said the Wells reserve is one of her favorite places to spend her free time. She said to have President Bush at the reserve on Earth Day "is an insult."

"I was kind of upset that he is literally coming to our back yard on Earth Day, because his environmental record is just awful," she said. "It just feels to me like he's trying to look green for a day by coming up here to this beautiful spot."

But Jonathan Reisman, associate professor of economics and public policy at the University of Maine in Machias, said he believes Bush's policies are important for a healthy economy. He accused environmental groups of playing on people's fears when they talk about issues.

"The reality is the air and water are substantially cleaner than they were 30 years ago, but you wouldn't know it by listening to our environmental groups," he said.

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