

Remember Maine's air during Earth Day visit

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● President Bush's policies on the environment hurt the state.

In the 34 years since the very first Earth Day, America's environment has breathed much easier.

Laws designed to protect the nation's air, water and endangered species have helped restore some of what was lost and have made the world a little healthier.

President Bush and his administration, however, are threatening to undo a lot of the good that's been done.

When the president visits Maine today for Earth Day, he should be reminded that this beautiful state and the people who live here suffer when his administration undermines environmental laws.

The president's environmental record is troubling, and most worrisome to Maine are his proposals to cripple air pollution laws.

Maine's geographic position makes it the unfortunate receptor of jet stream pollution from other parts of the country, particularly from the coal-fired power plants in the Midwest. That brings all sorts of dangerous pollutants to our state, including asthma-aggravating nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide, as well as the toxic metal mercury.

These air transport issues are of major concern to a state with the highest adult

asthma rate in the nation, as well as a state that relies greatly on its natural resources for industry and tourism.

The president's Clear Skies initiative undercuts the Clean Air Act by delaying a reduction in these air pollutants – in some cases by more than a decade – thus vastly increasing the amount of pollutants that will end up in Maine.

That's not something our state needs. An air quality report revealed that Maine's coastal areas – even Acadia National Park – are failing federal standards for smog. It's doubtful that Mount Desert Island generates enough air pollution to drop Acadia into the failing category.

The EPA proposed a rule last week that would delay air cleanup in Acadia and other parks, said the Appalachian Mountain Club, whose researchers study air quality in natural areas. The Bush administration also wants to make it easier for the power industry to upgrade without having to install better pollution control technology.

The president seems to want to do anything he can to make life easier for industry. The environmental laws that were established after the first Earth Day, however, weren't made to be easy. They were made to protect America and its residents, including Mainers, who don't have a choice whether to breathe.