Court Blocks EPA Rules for Power Plants

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — A federal appeals court has blocked enforcement of an Environmental Protection Agency plan that would reduce pollution from Oklahoma's coal-fired power plants.

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday granted a request by the Attorney General Scott Pruitt, Oklahoma Gas and Electric Co. and others for a stay pending a review of the EPA's rule requiring the reduction of sulfur dioxide emissions at four electric generating units.

The EPA's plan is designed to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants and industrial sources to improve visibility at federally managed wilderness areas, including the 59,000-acre Wichita Mountain Wildlife Refuge near Lawton. It would affect plants operated by OG&E at Red Rock and Muskogee and another operated by Public Service Co. of Oklahoma at Oologah.

Those three facilities, built more than 30 years ago, are responsible for more than one-third of the sulfur dioxide pollution emitted by all industrial and utility sources in the state, according to the EPA.

The EPA accepted most of Oklahoma's plan for targeting the haze, but it also wanted the utilities to retrofit power plants with technology to reduce pollution.

Pruitt, citing data from the utilities, has said the cost of installing that technology could cause consumer electricity rates to rise more than 13 percent over the next three years.

On Friday, he called the appeals decision "a significant victory" for Oklahoma.

"The EPA exceeded its authority under the Clean Air Act, and we will continue to challenge that decision to preserve the ability of Oklahoma stakeholders to create an Oklahoma solution," Pruitt said in a statement.

An EPA spokesman didn't immediately return telephone and email messages seeking comment.

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