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Sierra Club Argues in Federal Court for Texas to Clean Up the Air in San Antonio and Surrounding Communities

New Orleans, LA -- Today in federal court, counsel for the Sierra Club and the Environmental Defense Fund argued against a State of Texas appeal on the decision by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to declare Bexar County, Texas as nonattainment with the 2015 ozone standard. In addition, the Sierra Club argued to include additional Texas counties (Atascosa, Comal, and Guadalupe) in the nonattainment area.

In July 2018, EPA recognized that Bexar County's failing air quality required action under the law, and finally took the tardy and necessary step towards protecting San Antonians from dangerous ozone (smog) pollution by designating the area as being in nonattainment, or violating, public health safeguards. EPA failed, however, to address significant pollution impacts from all the surrounding counties, which will frustrate efforts in actually cleaning up the harmful levels of pollution affecting San Antonio. Shortly after the designation, the State of Texas sued EPA in hopes of overturning this decision.

A nonattainment designation for ozone is an important step in ensuring that local, county, and state agencies work together to clean up the air in Bexar and surrounding counties. Ozone pollution is formed when pollutants from different sources like power plants, oil and gas fracking, cars, and cement kilns react with sunlight and other chemicals in the atmosphere to produce smog. Long-term exposure to smog pollution is linked to chronic respiratory diseases like asthma attacks, reproductive and developmental harm, and even premature death. In San Antonio, high levels of smog pollution disproportionately impact our most vulnerable populations, which includes children, the elderly, and those who spend time outside for long periods of time.

Just after the hearing, Josh Smith, Senior Attorney for the Sierra Club, released the following statement:

"It is truly counter to the mission of environmental agencies like the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to look the other way and ignore public health data and the hard and fast requirements of the Clean Air Act. TCEQ's own air quality monitoring data shows indisputably that air quality in San Antonio fails to meet federal public health protections for smog, and is unsafe to breathe. TCEQ's own data similarly shows that very large power plants and oil and gas fracking facilities in the counties surrounding San Antonio contribute to the city's

smog problems, and need to reduce their share of the harmful pollution affecting San Antonio. Instead of fighting public health safeguards and continuing to ignore San Antonio's worsening air quality, TCEQ should be working with local, state, and federal partners to clean up the air."

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About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3.5 million members and supporters. In addition to protecting every person's right to get outdoors and access the healing power of nature, the Sierra Club works to promote clean energy, safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and legal action. For more information, visit www.sierraclub.org.