

EPA Turns A Blind Eye To Ethanol's Environmental Impacts

Agency Announces It Will Maintain Current Renewable Fuel Standard Ethanol Volumes Through 2018

Thursday, November 30, 2017

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Today, the EPA [announced](#) it will maintain the current renewable fuel volumes for the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) through 2018 and biomass-based diesel volumes through 2019.

Since its adoption, the Renewable Fuel Standard has resulted in unchecked land conversion, causing the elimination of vast native landscapes for the production of corn for ethanol. In just the first four years of the RFS' implementation, more than 7.3 million acres of land – largely grassland including native prairie, pasture, and federal Conservation Reserve Program lands -- were converted to cropland to meet EPA's ethanol volume requirement. Approximately 40 percent of the U.S. corn crop is diverted to biorefineries for fuel production, up from nine percent in 2001. Excessive nutrient runoff from this increased agriculture production have contributed to severe algal blooms in water bodies including the Great Lakes and the hypoxic area known as the "Dead Zone" in the Gulf of Mexico.

The Sierra Club [filed a lawsuit](#) against the EPA in October 2017 for its failure to conduct the mandatory environmental analysis of the RFS for nearly a decade.

In response, Sierra Club Deputy Legislative Director for Transportation Andrew Linhardt released the following

statement:

"As its name would suggest, the Environmental Protection Agency is charged with protecting the environment, but the agency's continued support for the unsustainable ethanol volumes mandated in the Renewable Fuel Standard suggest the exact opposite. Given what we know about how the production of corn ethanol impacts communities and the environment, it's unconscionable that the EPA continues to turn a blind eye to this burgeoning environmental crisis. Scott Pruitt may be content to oversee the degradation and destruction of native grasslands in the name of energy production, but we will continue to challenge him every step of the way."

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More about the [Renewable Fuel Standard](#):

The Clean Air Act was amended in 2005 and 2007 to address the significant climate change-inducing emissions from the transportation sector with the goal of reducing and replacing gasoline and other petroleum-based fuels with significant quantities of renewable fuels. The amendments require the Environmental Protection Agency to conduct triennial reports to Congress on environmental and conservation impacts of the Renewable Fuel Standard and an anti-backsliding analysis to determine if mitigation measures are necessary to address any adverse air quality impacts. The law requires specific amounts of biofuels, mostly corn-based ethanol, to be blended into the nation's fuel supply each year. The EPA sets annual standards of billions of gallons, but has been increasing volumes without analyzing the environmental impacts and reporting them to Congress. These impacts include converting millions of acres of native grasslands to cropland, with attendant loss of habitat and harm to sensitive wildlife species, increased use of pesticides and water pollution, and release of carbon into the atmosphere.

In addition, the RFS program is undermining the federal Conservation Reserve Program which was designed to encourage farmers to preserve grasslands in their natural state, while the RFS program encourages conversion to corn for use in gasoline.

About the Sierra Club

The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 3 million members and supporters. In addition to helping people from all backgrounds explore nature and our outdoor heritage, 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.

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