



National Wildlife Federation Fact Sheet: Reforming the Renewable Fuel Standard

A Campaign to Protect Clean Water, Public Health, and Wildlife

What is the Renewable Fuel Standard?

The Renewable Fuel Standard is a federal program administered by the U.S. EPA that mandates transportation fuel (for example, gasoline for your car), include a minimum amount of alternative fuels — such as those derived from corn ethanol. The goal of the program — which ratchets up the volume of renewable fuels each year — is to move away from petroleum-derived gasoline.

Why was the ethanol mandate enacted?

The Renewable Fuel Act was created and enacted with good intentions: securing greater energy independence for the country, reducing harmful pollutants that cause global warming, and fostering economic development in rural America. Unfortunately, the Renewable Fuel Standard has not lived up to its promise and, in fact, is causing several serious unintended consequences.

What is the problem with the mandate?

In its current form, the RFS provides incentives to convert natural areas and wildlife habitat into large corporate farms. Seven million acres of grassland and other habitats have been converted, even though less than 5 percent of the country's native grasslands remain. This conversion of natural areas to crops has led to water pollution — reducing supply and threatening public health — and destruction of habitat for wildlife and important pollinators such as bees. Expanded and intensified farming means more pesticides, chemical fertilizers, erosion, and runoff. Serious impacts include a resurgence of harmful algae blooms in places like Lake Erie, and the Gulf of Mexico “dead zone,” which is uninhabitable for most marine life. Increasing irrigation also depletes aquifers, threatening water supplies.

What are the ethanol mandate's impacts on wildlife?

The largescale loss of habit over the last 10 years — driven in part by the ethanol mandate — is a serious threat to wildlife. The conversion of wetlands and grasslands to crops threaten many species, including waterfowl, upland birds, and pollinators such as bees and monarch butterflies. The largescale loss of habitat loss may also harm mammals such as the swift fox — a rangeland animal already considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

How can we fix the Renewable Fuel Standard?

The National Wildlife Federation will work with Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. Congress to update the law. There is a set of common-sense reforms that work for family farmers to protect public health and the environment — keeping us moving forward on our clean fuel goals the right way. These include promoting biofuels made from sources other than corn, funding habitat restoration and conservation, prohibiting converting native wildlife habitat into cropland for the purpose of making biofuels, and limiting the share of ethanol made from corn that can be used to meet renewable fuel targets.



**7.3 Million
Acres**

of land converted to crop
production between
2008 and 2012



**2.7 Million
Acres**

of lands converted
within 50 miles of an
ethanol plant



40%

of U.S. corn
crop used for
ethanol