

Testimony of Simone Lightfoot, National Wildlife Federation

Public Hearing on EPA's Proposed Rule for Renewable Fuel Requirements in 2019 and Biomass-Based Diesel in 2020 Wednesday, July 18, 2018

My name is Simone Lightfoot, and I serve as the director of national urban initiatives for the National Wildlife Federation. One of the top priorities of the National Wildlife Federation is to elevate the serious environmental challenges in our nation's urban centers—and to advance solutions that protect the air quality, drinking water, and public health for the millions of people who live within city limits.

My comments today will focus on the urgent need for the nation's federal officials to support common-sense reforms to the the Renewable Fuel Standard to advance cleaner, more sustainable fuels that help confront—rather than exacerbate—climate change and its impact on urban populations.

Climate change is perhaps the greatest environmental threat to people and wildlife in urban and rural communities alike, and solutions to the climate crisis are tightly intertwined with improving lives and creating livelihoods. Unfortunately, the science has shown that the Renewable Fuel Standard has probably made climate pollution worse rather than better.

Many of the serious threats from climate change are acutely felt in the nation's urban centers.

More frequent, more intense storms overwhelm old, dilapidated water infrastructure, causing flooding and water contamination, as well as toxic algal outbreaks that poison drinking water, close beaches, and hurt local economies.

Warming temperatures are felt more acutely in cities, a phenomenon called the heat island effect, which can threaten the health of people—especially the elderly, sick, and those with conditions like asthma. Many communities with poor people and people of color already bear the brunt of environmental injustices such as lead contamination and air pollution, which is why, in Detroit, some neighborhoods have some of the highest childhood asthma rates in the state. We need to do everything we can to not worsen current environmental injustices.

Further, the costs to address these issues often fall on the people who can least afford them. Higher utility bills stemming from needed water treatment facility upgrades to address increased run-off of nutrient pollution from farms and more frequent flooding, for example, will only put additional pressure on already-strained family budgets. For people who drive older cars out of economic necessity, the push for higher biofuel blends in gasoline that can wreak havoc on older automobile engines is the wrong direction to go. Not to mention that ethanol in gasoline increases the incidence of smog pollution, which impacts urban populations more so than rural.

To help continue the development of strong urban centers, the country needs to embrace forward-thinking policies to confront climate change—including the adoption of clean, sustainable transportation fuel as a bridge to electric cars fueled by clean, renewable sources that don't pollute the air we breathe.

While many of the voices you hear today will speak to the needs of farmers and rural communities, we need fuel policies that protect clean water for all, our public health, and economic well-being of communities big and small.

We don't need false solutions. We need real results. We need a Renewable Fuel Standard that advances solutions to climate change.

That's why we support a set of simple, common-sense reforms to the Renewable Fuel Standard that will promote cleaner fuels while protecting our drinking water, public health, and communities.

We encourage the U.S. EPA to:

First, lower the volumes of corn ethanol and soy biodiesel; and,

Second, enforce existing protections so that biofuel policy protects natural spaces and does not incentivize the large-scale conversion of wild spaces.

These solutions will start to reverse the negative impact that the Renewable Fuel Standard is having on the climate—and help us to move forward on our clean fuel goals the right way—thereby benefiting people in urban and rural communities alike.

Thank you.