



National Wildlife Federation Fact Sheet: Supporting the GREENER Fuels Act

What is the GREENER Fuels Act?

The Growing Renewable Energy through Existing and New Environmentally Responsible (GREENER) Fuels Act (S.2519, H.R. 5212), introduced on March 8, 2018, by Senator Udall (D-NM) and Representative Welch (D-VT), takes a number of steps to refocus the ethanol mandate, or Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS).

How does the GREENER Fuels Act fix the ethanol mandate?

The bill shifts the program away from first generation corn- and soy-based fuels in favor of fostering more sustainable alternatives. It also strengthens provisions meant to safeguard land, water, and air resources. Finally, it establishes a new federal fund to protect wildlife habitat at risk of being destroyed for energy crops, and to restore land that has already been converted into agricultural production.

Why do we need to fix the ethanol mandate?

While the goals of the ethanol mandate are well-intentioned, an increased demand to grow corn for ethanol leads to a number of unintended consequences, such as conversion of natural areas and wildlife habitat into cropland.

- Nationwide, the ethanol mandate caused a corn ethanol ramp up between 2008 and 2012, resulting in over seven million acres of grasslands and other habitat being converted into agricultural uses — an area larger than Massachusetts.¹
- By 2012, less than 20 percent of the country's native grasslands remained, with a mere three percent of tallgrass prairie.²
- In the Prairie Pothole region of the United States, between 2005 and 2007, more than 3.2 million acres of natural grasslands and wetlands were plowed and drained for corn plantings.³

Once native prairie is plowed for agricultural use, its soil structure is permanently altered and the ecosystem can never fully be restored.⁴ Doing so also releases enormous amounts of carbon stored in the soil— equivalent to as much as 20 million additional cars on the road during the height of conversion.⁵

The ethanol mandate is impacting wildlife that depend on biologically diverse habitats, such as the Great Lakes and Prairie Pothole region for breeding, migration, and food.

What are the GREENER Fuels Act priorities?

National Wildlife Federation supports the GREENER Fuels Act because it would fix shortcomings in the existing ethanol mandate and/or reorient it in a more sustainable manner. A few priorities are:

- **Ramping down corn ethanol** to zero by 2030;
- **Establishing a new Private Land Protection and Restoration Fund** to address damage done to the landscape because of higher crop production and prevent further destruction;
- **Enforcing existing law** prohibiting conversion of land to produce fuel crops;
- **Eliminating climate pollution loopholes** to ensure all fuels are meeting minimum requirements for reduction;
- **Preventing invasive and harmful plant species** as a source material, and;
- **Preventing approval of ethanol blends higher than 10 percent**, or federal infrastructure for these higher blends, pending a comprehensive study on impacts to the environment and engines.



Prevents additional demand for ethanol up to
7.5
billion gallons, reducing pressure on sensitive habitats.



Provides
\$11
billion to help farmers protect and restore marginal lands to pasture and wildlife habitat.



Promotes sustainable biofuels by providing at least
15
years certainty for cellulosic fuel markets.

References:

- 1 Lark, T. J., Salmon, J. M. & Gibbs, H. K. Cropland expansion outpaces agricultural and biofuel policies in the United States. *Environmental Research Letters* 10, 044003 (2015).
- 2 United States Geological Survey, <<https://www.npwrc.usgs.gov/resource/habitat/grlands/grasses.htm>> (Accessed April 2013).
- 3 Brooke, R., Fogel, G., Glaser, A., Griffin, E. & Johnson, K. Corn ethanol and wildlife. National Wildlife Federation, Washington, DC, USA (2009).
- 4 Claassen, R., Carriazo, F., Cooper, J., & Hellerstein, D. Do Farm Programs Encourage Native Grassland Losses?, <<http://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2011/september/native-grassland/>> (2011).
- 5 Spawn, S.A., Lark, T. J., and Gibbs, H. K. [U.S. Cropland Expansion Released 115 Million Tons of Carbon \(2008-2012\)](#) (2017).

