

November 21, 2017

Members of the New York State Congressional Delegation:

We, the undersigned organizations, support meaningful reform of the federal Renewable Fuel Standard to protect our environment and our economy. We urge our members of Congress to change the law quickly to reduce the ethanol mandate and address its ongoing unintended consequences to the wildlife, water bodies and people of New York. Corn ethanol has not lived up to its goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and is not a sustainable path forward to a climate smart future for our country.

In 2007 Congress expanded a mandate to blend corn-based ethanol into gasoline. This mandate has fueled a boom in corn production, which has led to the destruction of millions of acres of native prairies, wetlands and other wildlife habitat. In fact, more than 7.3 million acres nationwide were converted into cropland between 2008 and 2012, which can in part be tied to the increased demand for corn. The law was intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging a shift away from petroleum-based fuels but very little reductions have been made. The massive land conversion has led to an enormous release of carbon dioxide, directly contributing to climate change. Considering a life cycle assessment, including production, transportation, processing and use, corn ethanol has not lowered greenhouse gas emissions.

The lands hardest hit are our country's grasslands, including native prairie, less than 10 percent of which remain intact. This loss directly affects wildlife that New Yorkers love: migratory waterfowl use these grasslands as breeding grounds and pollinators like bees and monarch butterflies rely on the prairie as habitat.

Increasing the amount of land dedicated to intensive corn agriculture also increases use of pesticides and fertilizers, which runoff into freshwater bodies and cause toxic algal blooms. Algal blooms lead to contamination of drinking water, massive fish die-offs and the closure of beaches. Lake Erie has seen massive algal blooms in recent years with devastating impacts on public health, wildlife and the tourism, fishing and recreation industries.

The ethanol mandate has harmed our economy as well. The outdoor recreation industry – which nationwide creates and sustains 7.6 million jobs and adds \$88.7 billion in consumer spending, largely in rural communities – has taken a hit from reduced wildlife habitat, lost hunting and fishing opportunities and damage to boats and other small engines and equipment.

Finally, corn ethanol threatens our air quality, because it produces more ground level ozone — known as smog — than gasoline alone. Ozone is linked to asthma attacks and other respiratory illnesses, particularly in children and the elderly.

It is time for Congress to step up and reform the Renewable Fuel Standard by reducing the ethanol mandate including stronger protections against clearing new land to grow fuel crops and establishing new funding for private land conservation and restoration to address the negative impacts that have accrued as a result of the mandate. These changes will result in a healthier environment, stronger economy and better energy choices for all Americans. We appreciate your consideration of these matters.

Sincerely,

Neil Woodworth
Executive Director
Adirondack Mountain Club

Lori Fisher
Executive Director
Lake Champlain Committee

Brian Eden
Vice-Chair
Campaign for Renewable Energy

David DeGennaro
Agriculture Policy Specialist
National Wildlife Federation

Katherine Nadeau
Deputy Director
Catskill Mountainkeeper

Peter Bauer
Executive Director
Protect the Adirondacks

Barbara Warren
Executive Director
Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Gordian Raacke
Executive Director
Renewable Energy Long Island (reLI)

Conor Bambrick
Air and Energy Director
Environmental Advocates of New York

Lee Willbanks
Executive Director
Save The River/ Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper

Irene Weiser
Coordinator
Fossil Free Tompkins

Karen Miller
President
Huntington Breast Cancer Action Coalition, Inc