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The Worst Environmental Policy in U.S. History: As stated by Emily Cassidy, Frank Rusco, Director of Natural Resources and Environment at the Government Accountability Office [testified](#) before the Senate to discuss the results of a study released by the agency. [The study found](#) the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), which requires corn ethanol to be blended into gasoline, is unlikely to meet its targets to reduce carbon emissions. While reducing climate-warming carbon emissions was one of the primary reasons for the passage of the RFS in 2007, I think the GAO put it lightly when it said the law is not likely meet its targets.

The truth is the corn ethanol mandate has actually **increased carbon emissions**, as well as incentivizing the destruction for millions of acres of grasslands. I can't think of any other well-intentioned environmental policy that has done so much environmental damage.

And sadly, just recently the EPA upped the ante on this destructive policy. Last November, the EPA set the 2017 mandate for corn ethanol at [15 billion gallons](#), the maximum amount of corn ethanol that can be mandated by the RFS. Many environmentalists have decried the RFS, because of the destruction it has done to the American landscape.

"We're losing habitat at an alarming rate," Collin O'Mara, President and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation [stated](#) during his testimony on the RFS before the Energy and Commerce committee this past June. Mr. O'Mara was referring to the rampant grassland destruction that has occurred since the RFS was passed in 2007.

Grasslands in the U.S. are [near extinction](#), and the RFS has recently contributed to their demise. Over 99 percent of tallgrass prairie grasslands have gone under the plow to grow more crops to meet increasing crop demands. And we're now using 40 percent of the corn we grow to make ethanol.

In the Dakotas, for example, thousands of acres of grasslands were intentionally [set ablaze](#) and plowed under by producers wanting to cash in on the high corn and soybean prices between 2010 and 2014, when the RFS was ramping up. A 2015 [University of Wisconsin paper](#) found that over 7 million acres of grasslands were plowed up to grow more crops, predominantly corn, during this time.

Grassland destruction leads to carbon emissions. When they are burned the carbon stored in plants is released into the air (obvi) but also when the soils are plowed up they release the carbon locked in the soils into the air (not-so obvi).

The University of Wisconsin study found that recent land conversions to grow more corn and soybeans could have emitted 131 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the air, as much as [34 coal-fired power plants](#) operating for one year. So while the GAO found that the RFS probably won't meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets, they forgot to mention that this federal policy is actually increasing carbon emissions by destroying American grasslands.

Changes at the EPA and with Ethanol: As stated in Trade Only - There's little doubt that the Trump administration will soon be making some major changes in the federal agencies. One that should be of real interest to boating is Scott Pruitt, who was named to head the EPA. That agency in recent years has gone beyond its authority in creating rules that could kill coal, attempted to federalize ponds and damaged scores of small engines because of ethanol's affinity for water and solvent properties.

As attorney general of Oklahoma, Pruitt led or was included in a number of lawsuits challenging the EPA's rules and, in some cases, received favorable rulings in the courts. His no-nonsense style will be a relief and should end eight years of agency overreach. And that brings us to the question of ethanol.

It seems politically unrealistic to think that even with Pruitt at the helm, the EPA will suddenly advocate for the reduction or elimination of ethanol from the nation's fuel supply. After all, the **Farm Lobby** is strong and the fact that most Midwest corn-growing states turned out for Trump makes any rollback from the present amounts of ethanol seem unlikely.

Then there's the sticky matter of the nation's Renewable Fuel Standard that was increased by Congress in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007. While the EPA administers the RFS program's volume requirements, the law calls for 36 billion gallons of renewable fuel use (in essence ethanol) by 2022. However, the only way to meet that requirement is to add higher and higher amounts of ethanol to each gallon of gas. In other words, increasing blends from E10 to E15 and higher going forward. But anything above the current E10 will be devastating to millions of small engines, marine and otherwise.

So the marine industry and allied groups that recognize that the RFS is clearly outdated now have an opportunity to make a successful appeal to the incoming administration for revision of the RFS that would limit future gasoline blends not to exceed the current E10 level. While revising the fuel standard wasn't possible under the outgoing administration, the time has never been better with the new leadership coming to Washington.