

RISKS OR REWARDS FROM BIOFUELS; WILL WE BE PROACTIVE OR REACTIVE?

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Abstract: Significant changes in our energy consumption behavior and policy are clearly necessary for long-term stability and energy independence. Renewable energy standards at state and national levels require it. The current rapid expansion of the biofuels industry presents tremendous opportunities to help meet management goals while providing cleaner energy, and simultaneously introduce serious threats to native ecosystems. The harvest of native polycultures, especially those planted on degraded lands, can provide energy and essential ecosystem services such as pollination, pest control, and habitat for native species, to a degree unlikely from non-native or genetically modified energy crops. Conversely, tens of billions of dollars are already spent or lost annually in the U.S. alone to non-indigenous plants. It is essential that the conservation community engage in the discussion to encourage sensible application of biofuels. We need to get involved professionally; we need to get involved as citizens. Instead of being at odds with business and energy interests, the conservation community could become partners. A desirable future could include a Midwestern culture that embraces and appreciates their native prairie ecosystem and the species that inhabit it.