

Straight TALK

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Beware of E15

You are probably wondering why the photo in this article is of me and a couple of wild pheasants that I had the opportunity to harvest on a hunt in South Dakota last fall. Well, stay with me, and I will try to explain why wild pheasants in South Dakota and our anglers and boaters in Pennsylvania need to be concerned about the same issue.

This story began in 2005 when Congress passed the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) Act. The intent of the law seemed reasonable and necessary at the time since our country was in an energy crisis, and we were looking for various forms of alternative energy to meet our growing energy demands. At the same time, we needed to find a way to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. Congress and the President believed that if we could gradually increase the amount of renewable fuels we add to the gasoline we use, we could reduce our reliance on foreign oil and also reduce greenhouse gases. The strategy seemed to make sense at the time; however, many critics of the approach warned that the Environmental Protection Agency's model predicting the net impacts of the change was wrong, and we could head down a path that would drive up the cost of corn, encourage farmers to plow more land and create more and not less carbon dioxide. Although the RFS encouraged a variety of alternative fuels, ethanol currently controls about 90 percent of the RFS market.

Now, let's fast forward to the present since a number of things have happened since the RFS Act was passed that we, as anglers and boaters, need to understand. First and foremost, Congress designed the act with the assumption that gasoline usage would continue to increase, which would require a parallel increase in ethanol. The act

specifies how many gallons of ethanol should be added to gasoline rather than a percentage of ethanol to gasoline actually used. When gasoline consumption started decreasing in 2008, the law



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still required a fixed amount of renewable fuel (ethanol) be produced. When we went to the pump to fill our automobiles or, more importantly, our boats, the E10 label greeted us (90% gasoline and 10% ethanol). My prior training and experience in organic chemistry taught me that alcohol and water do mix and combine to form an azeotrope, which is heavier than gasoline and sinks to the bottom of the tank and gets drawn into our motors. This ethanol and water mixture can cause pitting of cylinders and pistons and degradation of rubber hoses and gaskets, which were designed to burn gasoline and not an azeotrope. If you talk to any small engine or boat motor mechanic, you will find that there is an increase in engine problems due to ethanol-based fuels. I personally add a fuel stabilizer to every tank of fuel that I use in my boat and recommend that you do the same.

In 2011, EPA approved using E15 (85% gasoline and 15% ethanol) in 2001 and newer passenger vehicles, but they warned "using E15 fuel in older vehicles or in power equipment such as mowers, chainsaws and boats can cause damage." At the end of 2013, EPA reduced the amount of ethanol to be blended in gasoline from 16.55 billion gallons in 2013 to 15.21 billion gallons in 2014 due in part to the overall declined demand for gasoline in the United States. This may only be a temporary solution since a permanent solution would require Congress and the President to change the RFS Act of 2005. However, EPA's announcement came shortly after an Associated Press investigative report concluded:

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ATTENTION

E15

Up to 15% ethanol

Use only in

- 2001 and newer passenger vehicles
- Flex-fuel vehicles

Don't use in other vehicles, boats or gasoline-powered equipment. It may cause damage and is **prohibited** by Federal law.

“The ethanol era has proven far more damaging to the environment than politicians promised and much worse than the government admits today.”

So, how do wild pheasants in the Midwest factor into this story? Well, farmers planted 15 million more acres of corn last year in places where they have never previously grown corn. The price of corn has risen from \$3.22 per bushel in 2010 to the current \$7.00 per bushel. Historically, our nation's corn supply was turned into livestock feed. Now, 43 percent of corn production goes to fuel and 46 percent goes to livestock production. The more corn that goes to ethanol increases the amount of corn that needs to be planted to satisfy other demands. Statistics show that

over 5 million acres of land that farmers used to be paid to keep in the Conservation Reserve Program are now being farmed for corn. That is equivalent in land area to the state of New Jersey. I personally witnessed this last fall on my visit to South Dakota, and I heard stories about the impact to wild pheasant populations, the creation of more highly erodible land and the application of more fertilizers and pesticides, which require additional energy to make them.

The National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) and other fishing and boating organizations are advocates for boat owners across the nation and continue to lobby Congress to change the law for the good of boat owners and wild pheasants. If you are concerned about the potential impacts these changes may have on you, I encourage you to contact your member to Congress and write to EPA about your concerns. I certainly plan to write them with my opinion.

Your Director,
><(John{(°>



The mission of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.



photo: Steve Krulitz

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3-YEAR
5-YEAR
FISHING LICENSES



In addition to their annual license, anglers fishing in Pennsylvania can purchase a fishing license for three years or five years with just one purchase. Each multi-year license buyer is eligible to receive rewards, including receiving a free subscription to the new digital version of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* magazine. **Resident, non-resident and senior resident licenses and permits are available for multi-year purchase.** Alternate display fishing license buttons are also available for individual year purchases.



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