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FACT SHEET

Indirect Land Use Change and the Renewable Fuel Standard

SCIENCE, NOT CONGRESS, SHOULD DETERMINE HEAT-TRAPPING EMISSIONS FROM FUELS

A major new study published in *Science* by researchers at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory shows how much is at stake in the land use provisions of the Renewable Fuel Standard. Wise et al.¹ find that bioenergy/biofuels policy that does not account for the value of carbon sequestered in soils and trees can wipe out the world's forests and other unmanaged land while at the same time making it more difficult and more than twice as expensive to achieve climate goals. In the long term, effective climate policies must both control heat-trapping emissions from fossil fuels and recognize the value of carbon stored in trees and soils, and do all of this in a coordinated global fashion. In the meantime, less elegant approaches -- such as biomass safeguards and biofuels lifecycle accounting with indirect emissions from land use change -- can serve as a band-aid to steer the biofuels industry in a beneficial direction and limit the harm that could otherwise be done in a marketplace with an incomplete set of incentives.

“The public must be able to trust the science and scientific process informing public policy decisions.”

– President Barack Obama

The EPA is in the midst of a comprehensive scientific and stakeholder review of the scientific approach they developed to this tricky problem. In the rules being developed for the Renewable Fuel Standard, the EPA is following the intent of the statute – development of low carbon biofuels, while accurately accounting for heat-trapping emissions, including indirect emissions from changes in land use. If EPA were to ignore emissions from land use changes, biofuels could easily produce paper gains within the RFS program that would be negated, off the balance sheet, by increased emissions from deforestation and other emissions of carbon stored in soils and trees. The public comment period is ongoing, closing on July 27th, and EPA is engaging with the general public, the agricultural community and fuels industry, and convening peer review panels of technical experts. The public debate and technical review of the science of biofuels lifecycle accounting is critically important to ensuring that the reductions in heat-trapping emissions credited to biofuels have real credibility.

If the public comment and scientific peer-review process is short circuited, and the EPA's scientific findings are overridden by legislation, it will be a hollow victory for the biofuels industry, as the reductions in heat-trapping emissions claimed on-paper will lack scientific credibility and public acceptance. Congress should put public interest and scientific integrity before industry demands and allow the technical review and public comment process to move forward without interference.

¹ M. Wise *et al.*. 2009. Implications of Limiting CO₂ Concentrations for Land Use and Energy. *Science* 324: 1183

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