

## A Frog Does Not Drink up the Pond in which it Lives

Unfortunately, many communities in Racine and Kenosha Counties, as well as the rest of Wisconsin, are not only drinking up their ponds, but actually gulping them down. By pond I mean our natural resources and, especially, irreplaceable land. It seems as though many people are trying to cash out on their land before the party comes to an end. And, increasingly, studies show the party cannot last much longer. We are burning up, literally, the hydrocarbon basis of our economy at a furious rate with little thought to the future.

### **Expect Rapidly Rising Gas Prices**

A recent study by the highly respected International Energy Agency forecasts that worldwide demand for oil will exceed supply by 2012. In the meantime, supply will barely keep pace with demand, and we can expect prices of fuel to continuously rise. Basic economics suggests that after 2012 prices will rise rapidly until demand drops sufficiently to come in balance with supply. Given that \$3.50 per gallon gas has not dampen demand, my guess is that we will be paying five dollars per gallon for gas and, probably, considerably more.

### **Are Renewable Fuels the Answer?**

In a couple years there will be about 200 factories producing 11 billion gallons of ethanol, which equals about 8% of total US fuel consumption in 2006. To supply these plants will require about 35% of the estimated 2007 corn crop. Using the entire crop would provide about 25% of total gas demand. Factor in the considerable energy required to grow the corn and manufacture the ethanol and the net offset to gasoline is even less.

So while ethanol from corn does not look promising, a huge amount of research is being funded to find viable alternatives. In February, BP PLC announced a \$500 million grant to Cal Berkeley, the University of Illinois, and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory to develop plant based fuels. ConocoPhillips and Chevron have similarly made multi-million dollar grants to develop such fuels. Clearly the oil companies understand the challenges and opportunities ahead. To maintain our prosperous economy, renewable fuels will be essential.

### **Land, the Key to Renewable Fuels**

And what is the prerequisite for producing renewable fuels? Land, of course; without vast areas of productive farm land, it will be impossible to produce renewable fuels regardless of advances in technology.

In Wisconsin the richest, most productive crop land lies in the triangle between Madison, Milwaukee and Kenosha. Unfortunately, this is the area where unplanned, reckless development is proceeding most rapidly. Thousands of acres of prime farmland are being lost to development every year.

For the last decade, lots in Wisconsin have averaged 1.5 acres compared to 0.5 acres nationally. Much of this is driven by the rural communities not understanding the difference between minimum lot size and average lot size. Raymond, Caledonia, and Yorkville in Racine County do understand. On a one hundred acre development they require 60 to 65 contiguous acres to be set aside permanently. Over the past three years K/RLT has accepted conservation easements on 502 acres in these communities. These acres will be available to future generations for fuel farming if needed.

Other towns in the area are not so enlightened, as they would allow similar developments to spread the same number of houses over the entire 100 acres, thereby permanently destroying the agricultural potential of all 100 acres.

K/RLT encourages citizens concerned about what type of community and life style their children and grandchildren will inherit to become involved in land use planning in their community. State law empowers each municipality to determine its own land use plans. You have the power to preserve your rural environment.

*If you are interested in helping K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Spring//Summer Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at [www.krlt.org](http://www.krlt.org).*

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