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NEWS COLUMN

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Poppe addresses fuel blends and buffer implementation

St. Paul, Minn. – With the summer months approaching quickly, many Minnesotans will be getting ready to spend some quality time in the car. Whether it is visiting family, taking a trip to the cabin, or taking the kids on a road trip, gas consumption will be increasing in the weeks ahead.

A newer fuel blend is popping up around the state and you may have already seen it or even used it. The official name is E15 and, as the title implies, it is a blend of 85 percent gasoline and 15 percent ethanol. Gas pumps market E15 as “unleaded plus” with an 88 octane rating. Currently, most gas includes 10 percent ethanol, but as of 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency ruled that any cars made after 2001 can run safely on E15.

Some gas stations have made this available and more are on the way. In addition to price savings at the pump due to the lower cost of ethanol, positive effects on the environment would result as well. Annual gasoline consumption in Minnesota averages 2.4 billion gallons. According to Steffen Mueller, a research economist at the University of Illinois – Chicago, if all 2.4 billion gallons were converted to E15 from E10, the state would save 358,000 metric tons of CO2 equivalent gases from release into the atmosphere per year.

Buffer compliance increasing ahead of deadline

Minnesota landowners have made significant progress implementing the buffer law passed in 2015. Sixty-four of the 87 counties in the state are above 60 percent compliance with seven months to go until the November 1, 2017 deadline.

It is important to note that the buffer requirements do not fit all areas. Flexibility in the law allows landowners to use alternative practices that will still provide benefits to Minnesota’s water quality.

A “6-pack” of these alternative practices were developed in response to suggestions from SWCD staff around the state. They include a program for water quality certification, filter strips, and cover crops.

It remains to be seen if further changes will be made to the buffer law during this legislative session. A move to delay full implementation until 2018 is in the House omnibus environment and natural resources bill.

Ditch mowing/haying legislation signed into law

Gov. Dayton signed legislation last week implementing a moratorium on the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) enforcing permits until April 30, 2018, for mowing and baling in right-of-way on trunk highways, except for land that adjoins state land. Many farmers raised concerns with the new permit system MnDOT had announced in December 2016.

The end is near

The end of the legislative session is one month away; the legislature returns from break on Tuesday, April 18. When we are back in session, conference committees to negotiate the omnibus bills will be named. A lot hinges on these final negotiations. The end result should be bills Gov. Dayton can sign that will have a positive impact on all Minnesotans.

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