

## Using less-profitable farmland to grow bioenergy crops also supports biodiversity

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Planting native grasses such as the bioenergy crop switchgrass can restore habitat for birds like this Eastern kingbird. Credit: Chris Lituma/West Virginia University

An analysis by Oak Ridge National Laboratory showed that using lessprofitable farmland to grow bioenergy crops such as switchgrass could fuel not only clean energy, but also gains in biodiversity.

Researchers examined segments of land in the Midwest responsible for a loss of approximately \$110 million per year from 2013 to 2016. If about 3% of those areas were converted to switchgrass, they could generate about 7.6 million dry tons per year of plant material for use in biofuels and bioproducts.

Growing <u>native grasses</u> could also help birds, increasing <u>species diversity</u> by up to 8% according to models developed by ORNL's Jasmine Kreig.

"Finding ways to grow crops for <u>economic benefit</u> that also help restore habitat for grassland bird species is a win-win," ORNL's Henriette Jager said. "This is an opportunity to achieve both renewable energy and conservation goals."

The findings are published in a special issue of the journal *Biological Conservation*.

**More information:** Jasmine A.F. Kreig et al, Growing grasses in unprofitable areas of US Midwest croplands could increase species richness, *Biological Conservation* (2021). <u>DOI:</u> 10.1016/j.biocon.2021.109289



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