



David Guralnick / The Detroit News

Peat, which covers a considerable chunk of Michigan, is a better fuel source because it requires no fertilization, researchers say.

# Peat grows as new fuel source

■ Naturally occurring material is cheaper and more earth-friendly than corn, scientists say.

BY ANDY HENION  
*The Detroit News*

Turning corn into fuel is all the rage these days as America attempts to reduce its oil dependency.

But a team of Metro Detroit researchers has identified a potentially cheaper and more earth-friendly fuel source: peat, that half-rotted vegetation that covers a considerable chunk of Michigan.

The scientists, from University of Detroit Mercy and Wayne State University, are working to develop what they call "pethanol" to run small, fuel-cell-powered vehicles such as golf carts and riding mowers.

Because peat forms naturally and requires no fertilization, it's a benefit over corn, the researchers say. And Michigan, with its

## Where's the peat?

■ Michigan ranks third nationally in peat resources – behind Alaska and Minnesota – with an estimated 6,500 square miles of the decomposing matter, much of it in the Upper Peninsula.

■ In southeastern Michigan, St. Clair County has about 3,000 acres of peat reserves, while Oakland County has about 40.

■ Michigan typically ranks second to Florida in peat production, with more than 120,000 tons annually.

Sources: University of Minnesota's National Resources Research Institute; researcher William Walden; Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station

swampy environs, has one of nation's largest peat reserves.

"Corn's biggest problem is that you only get one crop a year," said John Shewchun, an adjunct chemistry and engineering professor at Wayne State. "Peat is dirt cheap (to harvest), and with it

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