

# Why the West?

*Mountains and desert landscapes are not only iconic images of the American West. Residents of the region tell us that the public lands, opportunities for outdoor recreation, and clean air and water they find here are significant reasons they choose to live where they do.*

**Residents across the Western states rank the clean environment, outdoor lifestyle, and living near public lands as among the most significant reasons they live where they do.**

Majorities say “clean air, clean water and environment” (57%) and the “healthy, outdoor lifestyle” (56%) are significant factors in living where they do, and 49% say the same of “ability to live near, recreate on and enjoy public lands like national parks and forests.” The cost of living or economic opportunities are lower-rated drivers of location choice than these lifestyle factors.



<b>Reasons for Living in West Ranked By Significant Factor</b>	<b>Significant Factor</b>	<b>A Factor</b>
Clean air, clean water and environment	57%	85%
Healthy, outdoor lifestyle	56%	88%
Ability to live near, recreate on and enjoy public lands like national parks and forests	49%	80%
Cost of living	44%	80%
Economic opportunities	41%	78%
Quality of public schools	36%	63%
Quality of health care and hospitals	32%	66%
Level of traffic congestion	32%	64%
Amount of taxes	27%	61%
Hunting and fishing opportunities	25%	48%
Opportunities to open my own business	25%	45%

**These aspects of life in the West are significant draws for men and women, young and old, across ethnic and political lines, and in cities, suburbs, and rural areas.**

For those who have ever lived outside of their current state, six-in-ten say the clean environment (60%) and healthy lifestyle (59%) are significant factors in choosing to live where they do.



*"I love the outdoors. I go hunting and hiking. I go hiking and camping. I love all the outdoor and openness of the country area."*  
**- Woman Age 25-34, Montana**

*"I moved here because of the climate, because of work, and just the environment and the beauty of the state. I've lived a lot of places around the country and this has always been my favorite place."*  
**- Woman Age 45-54, New Mexico**

<i>Living in the West (Significant Factor)</i>	<i>More than 20 Times</i>	<i>6-20 Times</i>	<i>1-5 Times</i>	<i>Never</i>
<b>Healthy, outdoor lifestyle</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>Ability to live near, recreate on and enjoy public lands like national parks and forests</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Clean air, clean water and environment</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>

Westerners do more than pay lip service to their enjoyment of the outdoors. 95% have visited public lands managed by the federal government in the last year. Not surprisingly, those who visit more frequently place higher importance on the presence of public lands as a reason they live in the West, with 74% of the most frequent visitors saying the ability to use these lands is significant for them.

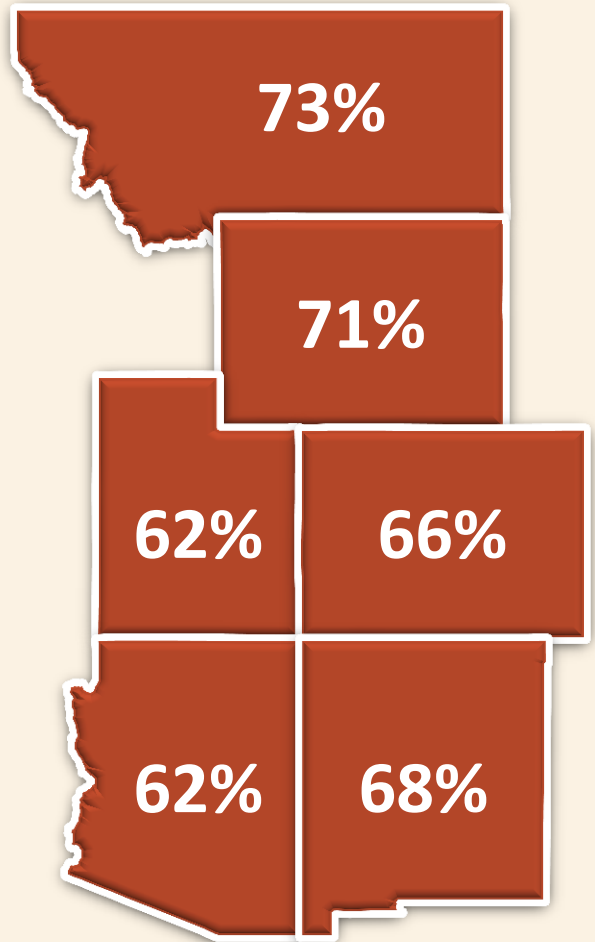




*Given the importance they place on the outdoor aspect of their communities, it is not surprising to see Westerners embrace a conservation ethic.*

Majorities of residents in every state consider themselves to be conservationists. This attitude crosses political boundaries, with even 70% of tea party supporters identifying as conservationists.

***“Do you consider yourself to be a conservationist?”***



**And they want to protect what makes their state special.**

Given a choice of two views, 63% say “we ought to continue to protect natural areas and wildlife habitat from poorly planned development and industrial activities that can pollute our air and water,” while only 28% say “we have gone too far imposing unnecessary restrictions on land use that holds back our economy and cost us jobs.” The conservation approach is more popular than the idea of removing restrictions on land use in every state in the West.



**Protections Position By State**

