

Energy Development

*Strong preference for renewable energy production still evident;
Sizable majority wants some public lands permanently protected from
energy development*

As was evident in last year's survey, Westerners vastly prefer that renewable energy be encouraged in their state, rather than traditional fossil fuels. Even with an additional option for nuclear energy included in this year's survey, voters are quite consistent in their desire to see more emphasis placed on solar and wind production. Though the Wyoming electorate is more mixed in its views, everywhere else voters' top two preferred energy sources are renewable.

Combination of Top Two Responses By State

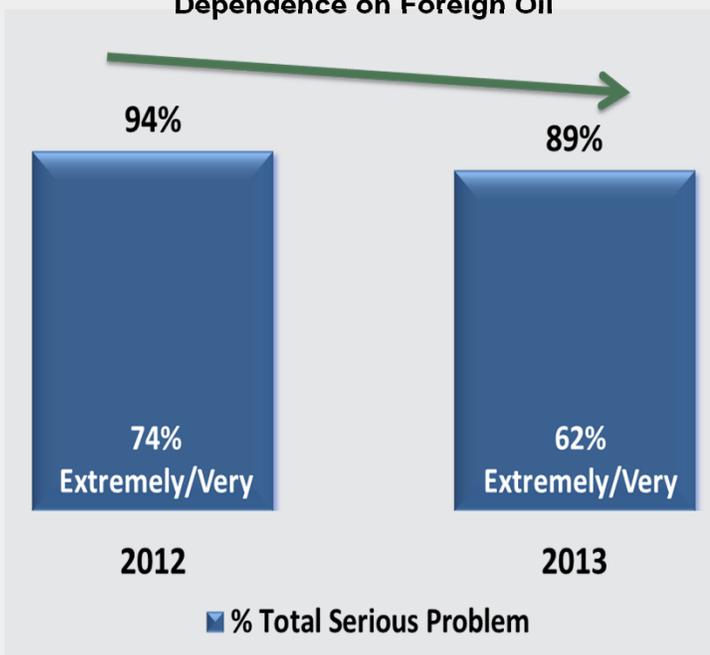
	<i>Solar Power</i>	<i>Wind Power</i>	<i>Natural Gas</i>	<i>Energy Efficiency Efforts</i>	<i>Oil</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	<i>Coal</i>
Arizona	74%	43%	20%	18%	8%	15%	6%
Colorado	56%	56%	24%	19%	13%	10%	8%
Montana	29%	53%	33%	17%	19%	5%	28%
New Mexico	56%	43%	31%	15%	18%	11%	8%
Utah	39%	47%	39%	14%	17%	15%	16%
Wyoming	21%	44%	42%	11%	21%	6%	41%



Conversely, nuclear and coal are the two energy sources voters in every state most want to *discourage* the use of (51% would discourage use of coal and 49% the use of nuclear). But few would close the door on the use of natural gas at the same time (just 8%).

It is worth noting that concern about “dependence on foreign oil” remains significant (62% in the region say it is an extremely or very serious problem), albeit lower than a year ago when 74% said the same.

Dependence on Foreign Oil



Most Westerners do not view regulation and oversight of oil and gas drilling as a serious problem in their state. While more tend to think “too much government regulation” is a very serious problem (36%) than say the same for “not enough oversight and monitoring” (24%), neither one inspires a sizable level of concern. Again, the survey provides a potential explanation: Westerners tend to believe that drilling is already highly regulated and monitored. A plurality of voters in every state says that “there is very careful oversight of oil and gas drilling by the federal government,” while the remainder are not really sure.

Likewise, energy production on public lands has flown under the radar of most Westerners. Only 34 percent of those interviewed know with certainty that oil and gas drilling is occurring on some public lands. Nearly twice as many think this is not true, and significant proportions in every state simply say they don’t know enough to say one way or the other.

While voters may not have a firm handle on all of the particulars, they do instinctively want some limits on drilling. Once informed that oil and gas drilling does take place on public lands, voters tend to call for a balanced approach to any energy development taking place in these areas. A majority of 56% says that environmentally sensitive public lands should be permanently protected from this type of activity.

Some public lands should be drilled, while environmentally sensitive places should be permanently protected.

56%

Oil and gas drilling on public lands should be strictly limited.

25%

Public lands should generally be open to oil and gas drilling.

17%

- This desire to set aside some public lands holds true even in states in which there is a perception that oil and gas drilling is “booming” – Montana (where 67% say oil and gas is “booming” in their state), Wyoming (66%) and Colorado (48%).
- Far fewer believe there is a boom in New Mexico (37%), Utah (36%) or Arizona (6%).



In order to assess how strong these views are, the survey also simulated some of the dialogue occurring on this issue in the public debate. When provided two viewpoints about increased drilling on public lands, more voters side with setting aside some types of areas and ensuring strong standards are in place before more drilling occurs on public lands over increased energy development in these areas. And this dynamic holds true even in traditional energy producing states like Colorado (62% set aside/stronger standards; 33% increase energy development), Montana (56% set aside/stronger standards; 36% increase energy development) and Wyoming (49% set aside/stronger standards; 43% increase energy development).

More than 38 million acres of public lands - including land in six national parks - are currently leased by oil and gas companies, and oil production on public lands has been steadily climbing. Public lands that are drilled are often closed for other uses - like hunting or hiking - and the effects of contamination on the land can linger for generations. We need to ensure strong standards are in place and that drilling is not allowed in critical locations near recreation areas, water sources, and wildlife.

59%

Bureaucratic red tape, burdensome federal regulations, and government policies that block access to federal lands have stood in the way of the West reaching its full energy and jobs potential and our country gaining energy independence. Energy production on public lands has declined, while increasing by double digits on private lands. We need to allow more public lands to be opened to responsible energy development.

35%



Taken as a whole, the survey points to a desire for a balanced approach to energy production – one that recognizes voters’ preference for renewable energy development and their desire to ensure some public lands are permanently protected, but also allows for responsible energy development in the West.