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New Survey: Conservation Could Impact 2014's Ballot Box

Candidates' positions on public lands could sway voters this year

COLORADO SPRINGS – Conservation and land use issues could have the power to sway how westerners vote in 2014 elections, according to the new Colorado College State of the Rockies Project [Conservation in the West Poll](#).

“The West is a major political battlefield this year, and the poll tells us congressional candidates would be wise to consider their position on conservation and land use issues carefully,” said Colorado College economist and State of the Rockies Project faculty director Walt Hecox, PhD. “Westerners want their air, water and land protected, and where a candidate stands on these issues could potentially sway votes.”

This year's bipartisan survey of 2,400 registered voters across six states looked at voter attitudes on a list of issues, including land use, water supplies, air quality and public lands' impact on the economy. The results show overwhelming - 85 percent - agreement that when the government closes national parks and other public lands, small businesses and communities' economies in the West suffer. In a follow up message to elected officials and land managers, 83 percent believe funding to national parks, forests and other public lands should not be cut, as it provides a big return on a small investment.

“The Rocky Mountain region is politically diverse, with communities running the spectrum from red (predominantly) to purple to blue,” said Colorado College McHugh Professor of Leadership and American Institutions and regular Colorado political commentator Tom Cronin. “These poll results reinforce that a love for protected lands ties western voters together. Westerners across the political spectrum support the work of public land managers and expect conserved public lands to remain that way.”

Other public sentiments expressed in the survey include that:

- 72 percent of Westerners are more likely to vote for a candidate who wants to promote more use of renewable energy sources like wind and solar power.

- 69 percent of Westerners are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports enhancing protections for some public lands, like national forests.
- 58 percent of Westerners are more likely to vote for a candidate who votes to increase funding for land-managing agencies like the U.S. Forest Service.

The survey also holds warning signs for candidates, including that:

- 72 percent of Westerners are less likely to vote for a candidate who supports selling public lands like national forests to reduce the budget deficit.
- 67 percent of Westerners are less likely to vote for a candidate who reduces funding for agencies like the U.S. Forest Service.
- 54 percent of westerners are less likely to vote for a candidate who voted to stop taxpayer support for solar and wind energy companies.

“Hispanics view the protection of our public lands as a moral obligation. It’s natural that this community would be drawn to candidates who support conservation,” said Maite Arce, president and CEO of the Hispanic Access Foundation. “With the tremendous growth of the Latino voter bloc, especially in the Western states, we’re going to see engagement in environmental policy and advocacy for our public lands at levels we’ve never seen before.”

The results reflect the strong connection Westerners feel to their public lands, with 95 percent saying they have visited public lands in the last year. More than two-thirds of those surveyed said they would recommend an out-of-state visitor visit the outdoors, like a national park, rather than an attraction in town.

The government shutdown’s effects on Westerners are ongoing. When asked how they felt about the resulting closure of public lands, 89 percent responded with a negative emotion like annoyed, angry, concerned or upset. Potentially as a result of seeing what happens when public lands are no longer available, opposition to the sale of public lands increased from last year’s poll, with 74 percent now rejecting this idea.

The 2014 Colorado College Conservation in the West survey is a bipartisan poll conducted by Republican pollster Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies and Democratic pollster Dave Metz of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates. The poll surveyed 400 registered voters in each of six western states (AZ, CO, NM, UT, WY, MT) for a total 2,400-person sample. The survey was conducted from January 7 through 13, 2014, and yields a margin of error of +/-2.9 percent nationwide and +/-4.9 statewide. The full survey and individual state surveys are available [here](#), on the Colorado College website

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About Colorado College

Colorado College is a nationally prominent, four-year liberal arts college that was founded in Colorado Springs in 1874. The college operates on the innovative Block

Plan, in which its 2,000 undergraduate students study one course at a time in intensive 3½-week segments. For the past ten years, the college also has run the [State of the Rockies Project](#), which seeks to increase public understanding of vital issues affecting the Rockies through annual report cards, free events, discussions and other activities.

About Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) – a national Democratic opinion research firm with offices in Oakland, Los Angeles and Madison, Wisconsin – has specialized in public policy oriented opinion research since 1981. The firm has assisted hundreds of political campaigns at every level of the ballot – from President to City Council – with opinion research and strategic guidance. FM3 also provides research and strategic consulting to public agencies, businesses and public interest organizations nationwide.

About Public Opinion Strategies

Public Opinion Strategies is the largest Republican polling firm in the country. Since the firm's founding in 1991, they have completed more than 10,000 research projects, interviewing more than five million Americans across the United States. Public Opinion Strategies' research is well respected, and prestigious media outlets such as The Wall Street Journal, NBC News, and CNBC rely on Public Opinion Strategies to conduct their polling. The firm conducts opinion research on behalf of hundreds of political campaigns, as well as trade associations, not-for-profit organizations, government entities, and industry coalitions throughout the nation.