

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Jan. 30, 2012

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WESTERN VOTERS ACROSS POLITICAL SPECTRUM AGREE: PUBLIC LANDS ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR ECONOMY

**NEW SURVEY FINDS VOTERS IN KEY WESTERN STATES BELIEVE U.S. DOES NOT HAVE TO
CHOOSE BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY; SUPPORT PROTECTIONS FOR AIR, WATER,
AND PARKS**

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO – The results from the 2012 Colorado College State of the Rockies Conservation in the West poll find that western voters across the political spectrum – from Tea Party supporters to those who identify with the Occupy Wall Street movement and voters in-between – view parks and public lands as essential to their state’s economy, and support upholding and strengthening protections for clean air, clean water, natural areas and wildlife.

The survey, completed in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming by Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies (a Republican firm) and Dave Metz of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (a Democratic firm), found that **swing voters across the west** – who will be key to deciding the outcome of a number of U.S. Senate and governors’ races, and possibly the presidential race – **nearly unanimously agree that public lands such as national parks, forests, monuments, and wildlife areas are “an essential part” of the economies of these states.** Four in five western voters view having a strong economy and protecting land and water as compatible.

Two-thirds of Western voters say America’s energy policy should prioritize expanding use of clean renewable energy and reducing our need for more coal, oil and gas. Even in states like Wyoming and Montana, which are more often associated with fossil fuels, voters view renewable energy as a local job creator.

Survey results are a sharp contrast to the energy and environmental debates currently happening in Washington, and in many state capitals. “Western voters consistently believe that conservation helps create and protect jobs for their states,” said Dave Metz. “In fact, by a 17 point margin, voters are more likely to say that environmental regulations have a positive impact on jobs in their state rather than a negative one.”

Seven in 10 Western voters support implementation of the Clean Air Act, and updating clean air standards. They see regulations designed to protect land, air, water and wildlife as having positive impact on public safety (70 percent), the natural beauty of their state (79 percent) and their quality of life (72 percent).

The survey also found strong approval ratings for most governors in the region, and an electorate divided in hotly-contested U.S. Senate races in Montana and New Mexico. Key swing voters in these contests often express pro-conservation views.

“What we read in the press and what politicians say about an ever-sharpening trade-off between environment and jobs in a deep recession do not square with views of many western voters,” said Colorado College economist and State of the Rockies Project faculty director Walt Hecox, PhD. “Instead, those stubborn westerners continue to defy stereotypes, by arguing that a livable environment and well-managed public lands can be -- in fact must be -- compatible with a strong economy.”

The survey results echo the sentiments of more than 100 economists, including three Nobel Laureates and Dr. Hecox, who recently sent a letter to President Obama urging him to create and invest in new federal protected lands such as national parks, wilderness and monuments. Studies have shown that together with investment in education and access to markets, protected public lands are significant contributors to economic growth.

Similarly, western voters voiced support for continued funding of conservation, indicating that even with tight state budgets, they want to maintain investments in parks, water, and wildlife protection. When specific local issues were tested with voters in some states – such as increasing the state’s renewable energy standard in Montana, establishing national monument protections for the Arkansas River canyon in Colorado, and updating energy standards for new homes in Utah – voters want to actually strengthen protections.

While there are geographic and partisan distinctions on a number of key issues, such as energy development on public lands, the data show that the broad conservation values uniting westerners are much more prevalent than the occasional issues that divide them.

“The depth and breadth of the connection between westerners and the land is truly remarkable - when people are telling us that public lands are essential to their economy, and that they support continued investments in conservation, even in these difficult economic times,” said Lori Weigel. “Westerners are telling us that we've got to find a way to protect clean air, clean water, and parks in their states.”

The 2012 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 2,400 registered voters in six western states (AZ, CO, NM, UT, WY, MT) January 2 through 5 & 7, 2012, and yields a margin of error of + 2.0 percent nationwide and +4.9 statewide.

The full survey and individual state surveys are available [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 nine 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, CNBC, and National Public Radio rely on Public Opinion Strategies to conduct their polling. The firm conducts polling on behalf of hundreds of political campaigns, as well as trade associations, not-for-profit organizations, government entities and industry coalitions throughout the nation.

About the Polling Partnership of FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies

FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies have conducted bipartisan research on a wide range of issues over the last several years, in particular on conservation-related initiatives and policies. Together, the two firms have jointly conducted research on behalf of political campaigns, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and public agencies in 38 states and nationally. In these five states, the two firms have conducted 650,000 interviews among voters and consumers.