



CONTACT:

Jonah Seifer
State of the Rockies Project
jseifer@ColoradoCollege.edu
(719) 227-8145

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 25, 2018

8th Annual *Conservation in the West Poll* Finds Strong Support for Protecting Land and Water; Voters Reject National Monument Attacks

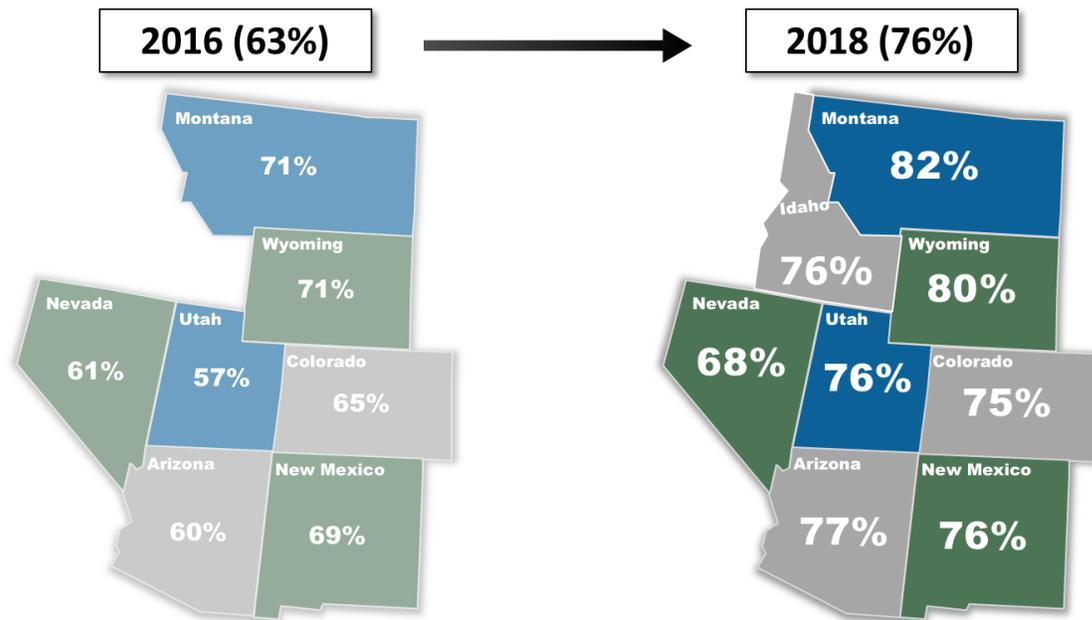
Western voters say protected public lands are critical to state economies, oppose Trump administration efforts to eliminate land, water, and wildlife protections

COLORADO SPRINGS — Mountain West voters weighed in on the Trump administration's priorities for managing the use and protection of public lands in a new Colorado College State of the Rockies Project *Conservation in the West Poll* released today.

The poll, now in its eighth year, surveyed the views of voters in eight Mountain West states on some of the most pressing issues involving public lands and waters, including proposals to eliminate or alter national monuments.

Underpinning the importance Western voters place on protecting public lands, 93 percent of Westerners surveyed view the outdoor recreation economy as important for the economic future of their state. 81 percent view the presence of public lands and their state's outdoor recreation lifestyle as an advantage in attracting good jobs and innovative companies. Western voters are more likely to identify as a conservationist today than two years ago, with significant increases in every Western state.

Percent of voters who identify as a conservationist



Overall, voter approval for President Donald Trump and his administration's handling of issues related to land, water and wildlife sits at 38 percent, with 52 percent disapproving. The administration's approval rating on the issue was below 50 percent in every state surveyed—ranging from 34 percent in Nevada and New Mexico to 47 percent in Utah—with the exception of Wyoming.

Asked where the Trump administration should place its emphasis between protection and development, 64 percent of respondents said they prefer protecting water, air and wildlife while providing opportunities to visit and recreate on national public lands. That is compared to 23 percent of respondents who said they prefer the administration prioritize domestic energy production by increasing the amount of national public lands available for responsible drilling and mining.

Westerners hold national monuments in especially high regard. Eighty-two percent described them as helping nearby economies, 86 percent as national treasures, 90 percent as important places to be conserved for future generations, 90 percent as places to learn about America's history and heritage, and 95 percent as places they want their children to see someday. Twenty-four percent said national monuments hurt the local economy and 27 percent said they tie up too much land that could be put to other uses.

Majorities in every state—and 66 percent overall—view the recent Trump administration's decision to remove existing protections and reduce the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah by 2 million acres as a bad idea. In Utah, voters are

divided on the national monument changes in their state, with a slightly higher percentage of voters (49 percent) saying President Trump's action was a bad idea than those saying it was a good idea (46 percent).

A Trump administration decision to alter or eliminate additional national monuments would be unpopular with 69 percent of respondents across the Mountain West. Locally, 70 percent of Nevadans view changes to Gold Butte National Monument as a bad idea and 68 percent of New Mexicans think the same of changes to two national monuments in their state, Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks and Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.

"Over the eight-year history of the Conservation in the West Poll, a passion for the outdoors and strong support for American public lands have remained constant in the Mountain West," said Dr. Walt Hecox, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Colorado College and founder of the State of the Rockies Project. "Nearly all of the people surveyed said they visited national public lands in the past year and plan to go to a national park in 2018. Public lands drive our economy and define our way of life. A leadership agenda that does not recognize that reality is going to be met with strong disapproval in the West."

Specifically, several actions recently undertaken or currently under consideration by the Trump administration are unpopular with voters in the Mountain West:

- 37 percent of respondents support [**49 percent oppose**] raising fees to enter some of the country's largest national parks during peak season;
- 32 percent of respondents support [**50 percent oppose**] privatizing the management of campgrounds, visitor centers and other services provided at national parks and other national public lands;
- 29 percent of respondents support [**59 percent oppose**] expanding how much public land is available to private companies which pay for the ability to drill for oil and gas on public lands;
- 26 percent of respondents support [**60 percent oppose**] expanding how much public land is available to private companies which pay for the ability to mine for uranium and other metals on public lands;
- 18 percent of respondents support [**70 percent oppose**] allowing mining on public lands next to Grand Canyon National Park, a practice that is currently banned;
- 27 percent of respondents support [**64 percent oppose**] changing current plans to protect habitat for threatened sage-grouse in Western states;
- and, conversely, 75 percent of respondents support [**15 percent oppose**] requiring oil and gas producers who operate on public lands to use updated equipment and technology to prevent leaks of methane gas during the extraction process and reduce the need to burn off excess natural gas into the air—a regulation the Trump administration is seeking to overturn.

With the Outdoor Retailer + Snow Show beginning this week in Denver, after the Outdoor Industry Association ended its 20-year partnership with Salt Lake City as a result of Utah politicians' hostility toward land conservation and U.S. public lands, the impact of the Trump administration's recent actions on local outdoor economies is top of mind for the outdoor recreation business community:

"Protecting public lands is a bipartisan issue with constituents across the West agreeing that public lands and waters should remain open and accessible for all to enjoy," said Travis Campbell, chairman of the board for the Outdoor Industry Association and President of

Smartwool. “Unfortunately, the current administration’s actions are not lining up with voters’ desires. We need people from both sides of the aisle to express their dissatisfaction with their legislators and let their voices be heard.”

The poll showed strong support for cleaner forms of energy in the Mountain West. Respondents in six of the eight states surveyed pointed to solar as the source of energy that best represents the future of energy in their state. Wind was the top choice in Montana and Wyoming, and the second-ranked choice in four other states.

With record-low snowpack in parts of the West, the drought remained a top concern this year, as low levels of water in rivers and inadequate water supplies were identified as serious issues facing their state by 82 percent and 80 percent of respondents respectively. 78 percent of respondents prefer addressing the water shortage by using the current water supply more wisely through conservation, reduction and recycling rather than by diverting more waters from rivers in less populated places to communities where more people live. 75 percent of respondents in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada and Utah view the Colorado River as “at risk.”

This is the eighth consecutive year Colorado College has gauged the public’s sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. Idaho was added to the survey for the first time this year. The 2018 Colorado College *Conservation in the West Poll* is a bipartisan survey 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 eight Western states (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT & WY) for a total 3,200-person sample. The survey was conducted in late December 2017 and early January 2018 and has a margin of error of ± 2.65 percent nationwide and ± 4.9 percent statewide. The full survey and individual state surveys are available on the [State of the Rockies website](#).

###

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 three and a half-week segments. For the past twelve years, the college has sponsored the [State of the Rockies Project](#), which seeks to increase public understanding of vital issues affecting the Rocky Mountain West through annual reports, 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.