



COLORADO COLLEGE
**State of the
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Western Voters Demand Ambitious Agenda to Protect Public Lands

10th annual Conservation in the West Poll shows significant spike in concern about impacts of climate change and energy development on public lands and outdoor lifestyles

COLORADO SPRINGS—The tenth annual Colorado College State of the Rockies Project Conservation in the West Poll released today shows voters in the Mountain West are calling for an aggressive agenda to protect more public lands in the face of threats from climate change impacts and energy development.

The poll, which surveyed the views of voters in eight Mountain West states (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), found that public lands and the outdoor way of life continue to be of deep importance to Western voters. 69 percent label themselves as “conservationists,” and that perspective informs their votes. 80 percent of voters consider an elected official’s stance on issues involving water, air, wildlife, and public lands “important” when deciding whether to support them. Nearly half of all voters—44 percent—say those issues are a “primary factor” in their decision, a marked increase from 31 percent in 2016. Conservation issues were also deemed important by many of the most critical “swing” voter sub-groups in the West, including Latinos, millennials, sportsmen, moderates, and suburban women.

“Support for conservation on public lands has remained consistent and strong over the decade-long history of our poll,” said **Corina McKendry, Director of the State of the Rockies Project and an Associate Professor of Political Science at Colorado College**. “The urgency and demand for action behind those feelings is now intensifying as voters in the West increasingly believe their lands and lifestyles are coming under attack from the impacts of climate change and energy development.”

Western voters expect their elected officials to advance policies reflecting the predominant conservationist perspective across the region.

- 73 percent of voters favor a national goal to protect 30% of America’s land and ocean areas by 2030, with majority support across party lines for the ambitious conservation goal. The proposal is especially popular with Latino voters, receiving 82 percent support.
- 67 percent want their member of Congress to protect national public lands over allowing more drilling and mining.

- 70 percent agree that private companies should not profit from using public lands when it limits the public's enjoyment of the area.
- 79 percent say the lack of resources to properly maintain public lands is a serious problem.
- 70 percent support fully funding the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with strong majority approval for the program across party lines.

“Folks out West have a special appreciation for our public lands, and we know our public lands are our heritage, our birthright, and our great equalizer,” said **Montana Governor Steve Bullock**. “In this age of polarization, our return to shared values and our work to conserve our region’s natural heritage and public lands is precisely what we need to chart a path forward.”

Growing fears about the impacts of climate change

Voters view climate change as the first or second most important environmental problem in each state surveyed. Climate change as a top concern has increased dramatically over ten years of the poll from 5 percent in 2011 to 32 percent today.

Overall, 67 percent of voters across the region see climate change as a “serious problem” and 60 percent say the evidence of climate change requires action. When the survey began in 2011, those findings were 55 percent and 48 percent, respectively. The increase in concern about climate change is reflected across the political spectrum.

Western voters are alarmed about the impacts of climate change, with 62 percent believing the effects over the past ten years have been significant and 64 percent agreeing they will continue to be significant over the next decade—a finding mirrored in every state surveyed except for Wyoming. Women and people of color are especially likely to say there will be significant impacts from climate change felt in their state.

The feared impact of climate change includes more severe wildfires, which are viewed as a serious problem by 82 percent of voters, reflecting a 5 percent increase over the past four years. To deal with the impacts, 74 percent of voters expect their congressional representatives and state governors to have a plan to reduce carbon pollution that contributes to climate change. Reducing carbon pollution is seen as an important objective for public officials by a majority of Democrats, Republicans, and independent voters.

Concerns about energy development and a push for clean, renewable sources

When it comes to energy development, Western voters want to make sure public lands are protected and safe.

- 69 percent of voters view the impacts of mining on land and water as serious problems.
- 63 percent say the impacts of oil and gas drilling pose a serious problem.
- 69 percent of voters support increasing royalty fees for drilling on public lands.
- 84 percent want to see mining companies pay a fee for their operations on public lands.
- 88 percent support requiring oil and gas companies to use updated equipment to prevent methane gas pollution.

Western voters want to see the expansion of clean, renewable sources of energy. In every state except Wyoming, a majority of voters are behind gradually increasing the use of renewable energy sources to 100

percent. Asked about the desired percent of electricity coming from renewable sources, Western voters give an average score of 63 percent. As in previous years, solar power and wind power rank the highest by a long shot

among energy sources voters said they would like to see encouraged in their state.

“Policy-makers in Washington have our marching orders: public support for conservation and climate action is stronger than ever. A movement is growing from the ground up, with Westerners of all political stripes clamoring for action to save our way of life, starting with a national conservation goal of protecting 30 percent of our natural land by 2030 to stave off a looming extinction crisis,” said **New Mexico Senator Tom Udall**. “Elected officials ignore the will of Western voters not just at the peril of the planet—but also at the peril of their own political futures.”

Continued support for protecting water and wildlife

Water is among the top environmental concerns of voters in the West. Additionally, voters are disappointed with the current administration’s actions in regards to water.

- 69 percent say water supplies are becoming more unpredictable every year.
- 80 percent of Western voters view water supplies and low levels in rivers as a serious problem in their state.
- 84 percent of voters say pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams is a top concern.
- 79 percent say microplastics in their drinking water supplies are a top concern.
- 71 percent of voters view removing Clean Water Act protections as a “bad change.”

Wildlife also remains a top concern for Westerners and the administration’s policies towards wildlife are largely rejected by voters in the West.

- 77 percent believe loss of habitat is a serious problem.
- 64 percent say allowing more drilling instead of protecting sage-grouse habitat was a “bad change.”
- 67 percent of Western voters view the administration’s decision to reduce protections for threatened species under the Endangered Species Act as a “bad change”
- 76 percent of voters support policies like designating portions of public lands where wildlife migrate each year as areas closed to oil and gas drilling.

This is the tenth consecutive year Colorado College has gauged the public’s sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. The 2020 Colorado College Conservation in the West Poll is a bipartisan survey conducted by Republican pollster Lori Weigel of New Bridge Strategy 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 between January 11-19, 2020 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 seventeen years, the college has sponsored the [State of the Rockies Project](#), which seeks to enhance public understanding of and action to address socio-environmental challenges in the Rocky Mountain West through collaborative student-faculty research, education, and stakeholder engagement.

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 New Bridge Strategy

New Bridge Strategy is an opinion research company with roots in Republican politics. The firm specializes in public policy and campaign research. NBS has been members of bipartisan research teams and led coalitions across the political spectrum in crafting winning ballot measure campaigns, public education campaigns, and legislative policy efforts. New Bridge Strategy helps clients bridge divides to create winning majorities.

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