



## COLORADO COLLEGE

# State of the Rockies Project

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## With Spike in Concern Over Drought, Wildfires and Climate Change, Westerners Are Eager for Action to Protect Public Lands, New Poll Finds

*Twelfth annual Conservation in the West Poll reveals strong support for policies to protect more outdoor spaces*

**COLORADO SPRINGS**—Colorado College's 12th annual State of the Rockies Project [Conservation in the West Poll](#) released today showed a spike in concern over issues like drought, inadequate water supplies, wildfires, the loss of wildlife habitats and natural spaces, and climate change among voters in the Mountain West. Those concerns align with continued strong support for pro-conservation policies.

The poll, which surveyed the views of voters in eight Mountain West states (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), found **69 percent** of voters are concerned about the future of nature, meaning land, water, air, and wildlife. That level of concern was a notable jump from 61 percent in last year's poll. Against that backdrop, **86 percent** of Western voters now say issues involving clean water, clean air, wildlife and public lands are important in their decision of whether to support an elected official, up from 80 percent in 2020 and 75 percent in 2016.

"We are seeing a perfect storm of threats that are driving higher levels of concern than ever before for the state of our lands and water in the Mountain West," said Katrina Miller-Stevens, **Director of the State of the Rockies Project and an associate professor at Colorado College**. "Not surprisingly, most voters are aligning behind policies that would help mitigate threats by conserving and protecting more outdoor spaces."

Consistent with prior year results, voters in the Mountain West feel deeply connected to the outdoor landscapes that surround them. **88 percent** of voters surveyed report at least one visit to national public lands like national parks, national forests, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges in the past year. Similarly, **93 percent** report participating regularly in outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, bird and wildlife watching, biking, water sports, snow sports, hunting, and fishing. **74 percent** say the presence of public lands in their state helps the local economy.

At the same time, **48 percent** of voters report making changes to where or when they recreate outdoors because of crowding and **26 percent** adjusted plans because of changes in climate like fires, less snow, or less water. **53 percent** of voters view the loss of natural areas as a very or extremely serious problem, up from 44 percent in 2020 and 36 percent in 2011.

### ***Climate change seen as a threat with voters expressing concern over impacts***

Most voters in the Mountain West, **62 percent**, believe climate change is happening and requires action. Among them, **44 percent** agree climate change is established as a serious problem and immediate action is necessary. Another **18 percent** say there is enough evidence of climate change that some action should be taken. **52 percent** of voters view climate change as a very serious or extremely serious problem, up from 46 percent in 2020 and 27 percent in 2011.

Voters express heightened concern about impacts commonly associated with climate change.

- **79 percent** are concerned about worse air quality due to ozone and smoke.
- **86 percent** are concerned about droughts and reduced snowpack.
- **61 percent** are concerned about extreme weather events like intense storms or floods.
- **69 percent** are concerned about extreme heat.
- **82 percent** are concerned about more frequent and severe wildfires.
- **62 percent** say uncontrollable wildfires that threaten homes and property are a very or extremely serious problem, up from 47 percent in 2020 and 32 percent in 2016.
- **70 percent** say wildfires are more of a problem than ten years ago.

### ***Continued super-majority support for conservation and access efforts***

Westerners' heightened concerns about climate change and its impacts are matched with strong consensus behind proposals to conserve and protect the country's outdoors.

- **77 percent** support setting a national goal of conserving thirty percent of land and inland waters in America, and thirty percent of its ocean areas by the year 2030.
- **80 percent** support creating new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation.
- **91 percent** support addressing the backlog of infrastructure repairs, reducing risk of wildfires, and natural resource protection on national public lands such as national parks by providing jobs and training to unemployed people.
- **81 percent** support providing funding to ensure more communities, especially those that have historically lacked access, have safe and nearby parks and natural areas.

Locally, a variety of proposed conservation efforts are popular with in-state voters. In Arizona, **61 percent** of voters support legislation to make permanent the current ban on new uranium and other mining on public lands surrounding the Grand Canyon. **89 percent** of Coloradans agree with protecting existing public lands surrounding the Dolores River Canyon to conserve important wildlife habitat, safeguard the area's scenic beauty, and support outdoor recreation. **79 percent** of Montanans support enacting the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act to ensure hunting and fishing access, protect stream flows into the Blackfoot River and add eighty thousand acres

of new protected public lands for recreation areas, along with timber harvest and habitat restoration. In New Mexico, **73 percent** of voters want to designate existing public lands in the Caja del Rio plateau as a national conservation area to increase protections for grasslands and canyons along the Santa Fe river and other smaller rivers flowing into the Rio Grande. **79 percent** of Nevadans want to designate existing public lands in southern Nevada as the Spirit Mountain National Monument to ensure outdoor recreation and help preserve sacred Native sites. In Utah, **60 percent** of voters call President Biden's restored protections for over a million acres of the Bears Ears National Monument "more of a good thing."

### ***Spike in water issues viewed as very and extremely serious problems***

The level of concern among Westerners around water issues spiked in this year's poll. Water issues viewed as very serious or extremely serious problems by voters include drought (**73 percent**, up from 52 percent in 2016) low levels of water in rivers (**73 percent**, up from 55 percent in 2020), inadequate water supplies (**71 percent**, up from 45 percent in 2020), and pollution in rivers, lakes and streams (**56 percent**, up from 42 percent in 2011).

Those concerns translate into strong support for water conservation efforts aimed at addressing water shortage situations in the future by voters in Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. **81 percent** prefer using water supplies more wisely by encouraging more water conservation, reducing use, and increasing water recycling. By contrast, **14 percent** would rather divert more water from rivers in less populated areas of the state to communities where more people live.

Asked about remote locations, **87 percent** of voters across the survey support increasing federal funding to extend running water and sanitation services to rural areas and tribal communities that currently lack access.

### ***Voters seeking a cleaner and safer energy future on public lands***

With oil and gas drilling taking place on half of America's public lands, Western voters are familiar with the harmful impacts and want to ensure their public lands are protected and safe. **43 percent** of voters view the impacts of oil and gas drilling on land, air and water as an extremely or very serious problem.

Turning to solutions, **91 percent** of voters support requiring oil and gas companies to use updated equipment and technology to prevent leaks of methane gas and other pollution into the air. **91 percent** of voters support requiring oil and gas companies, rather than federal and state governments, to pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished. On compensating the public for extraction, **65 percent** of voters support increasing the fees that oil and gas companies pay to have the opportunity to drill on national public lands.

Voters in the Mountain West prefer clean sources of energy. **66 percent** of voters support gradually transitioning to one hundred percent of our energy being produced from clean, renewable sources like solar and wind over the next ten to fifteen years. Asked which sources of energy they want encouraged in their state, solar power and wind power top the list at **61 percent** and **37 percent**, respectively.

Given a choice of public lands uses facing lawmakers, **67 percent** of voters prefer ensuring we protect sources of clean water, air quality and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities to visit and recreate on national public lands. By contrast, **28 percent** of voters would rather ensure we produce more domestic energy by maximizing the amount of national public lands available for responsible oil and gas drilling and mining.

Nearly three-fourths of Western voters want to significantly curb oil and gas development on public lands. **55 percent** think that oil and gas development should be strictly limited on public lands and another **15 percent** say it should be stopped completely. That is compared to **28 percent** of voters in the West who would like to expand oil and gas development on public lands.

## ***Black, Latino and Native American voters support conservation at higher levels***

For the second consecutive year the poll examined the intersection of race with views on conservation priorities. Results were separated by responses from Black, Latino, and Native American voters, along with combined communities of color findings. The poll included an oversample of Black and Native American voters in the region in order to speak more confidently about the view of those communities.

The poll found notably higher percentages of Black voters, Latino voters, and Native American voters to be concerned about climate change, pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams, and the impact of oil and gas drilling on our land, air, and water. The poll also found higher levels of support within communities of color for bold conservation policies like protecting 30 percent of the country's lands and waters by 2030, establishing more national public lands and transitioning to one hundred percent renewable energy. Large majorities of Black voters, Latino voters, and Native American voters also believe in climate change and want to see action on it at even higher levels than the overall survey sample.

This is the twelfth consecutive year Colorado College gauged the public's sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. The 2022 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 survey is funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

The poll surveyed at least 400 registered voters in each of eight Western states (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY) for a total 3,400-voter sample, which included an over-sample of Black and Native American voters. The survey was conducted between January 5-23, 2022 and the effective margin of error is +2.4% at the 95% confidence interval for the total sample; and at most +4.8% for each state. The full survey and individual state surveys are available on the [State of the Rockies 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 2,200 undergraduate students study one course at a time in intensive three and a half-week segments. For the past eighteen 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 specializing in public policy and campaign research. New Bridge Strategy is a Republican polling firm that has worked as 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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