

Conservation and Public Lands

Western voters express overwhelming and bipartisan support for protecting national public lands and want to send a message to their Member of Congress asking them to prioritize conservation and keeping these places public. They view issues involving public lands as issues where people should be able to find common ground. Large majorities favor keeping national monument designations in place, oppose selling public lands, and want to continue to invest in conserving lands near existing public lands.



Western voters want their Member of Congress to protect public lands and keep them in public hands. When asked what message they would send to their Member of Congress about the future of national public lands, Western voters most often emphasize preserving and protecting public lands for future generations and keeping public lands in public hands. Other frequently mentioned priorities include protecting wildlife and their habitats, maintaining or increasing funding for national parks and public lands, limiting development on public lands, protecting water supply and quality, addressing climate change, and restricting drilling or resource extraction on public lands.

Preserve/protect public lands for future generations	19%
Keep public lands public	13%
Protect wildlife and their habitats	13%
Maintain/increase funding for national parks and public lands	9%
Stop/limit development and building on public lands	5%
Protect water resources and water quality	4%
Take action on climate change/environmental protection	4%
Stop drilling/mining/resource extraction on public lands	4%

“Once they are gone, they are gone for good. We need to preserve them for future generations to enjoy, just as our ancestors did for us.”

Male, Age 65+, DEM, MT

“I live in Idaho because of the vast amount of nature. It’s beautiful here and I would hate to see it disappear. Hunting is a way of life for my family.”

Female, Age 25-34, IND, ID

“Public lands need to remain in public hands. They belong to we the people and should not be sold to private interests.”

Female, Age 35-44, GOP, WY

Westerners believe bipartisan cooperation is achievable on issues related to public lands. Nearly two-in-three voters (64 percent) say issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are areas where people have more in common rather than more partisan differences. Perspectives on this issue are consistent across party lines, with roughly two-thirds of Republicans, independents and Democrats (65 percent, 65 percent, and 63 percent, respectively) expressing that common ground exists on these issues.



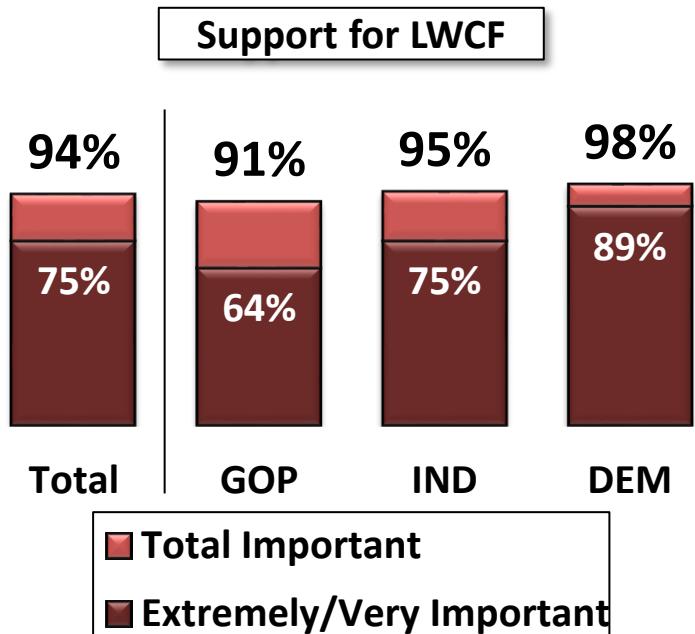
Issues where people have more in common and we should be able to find common ground in order to get things done

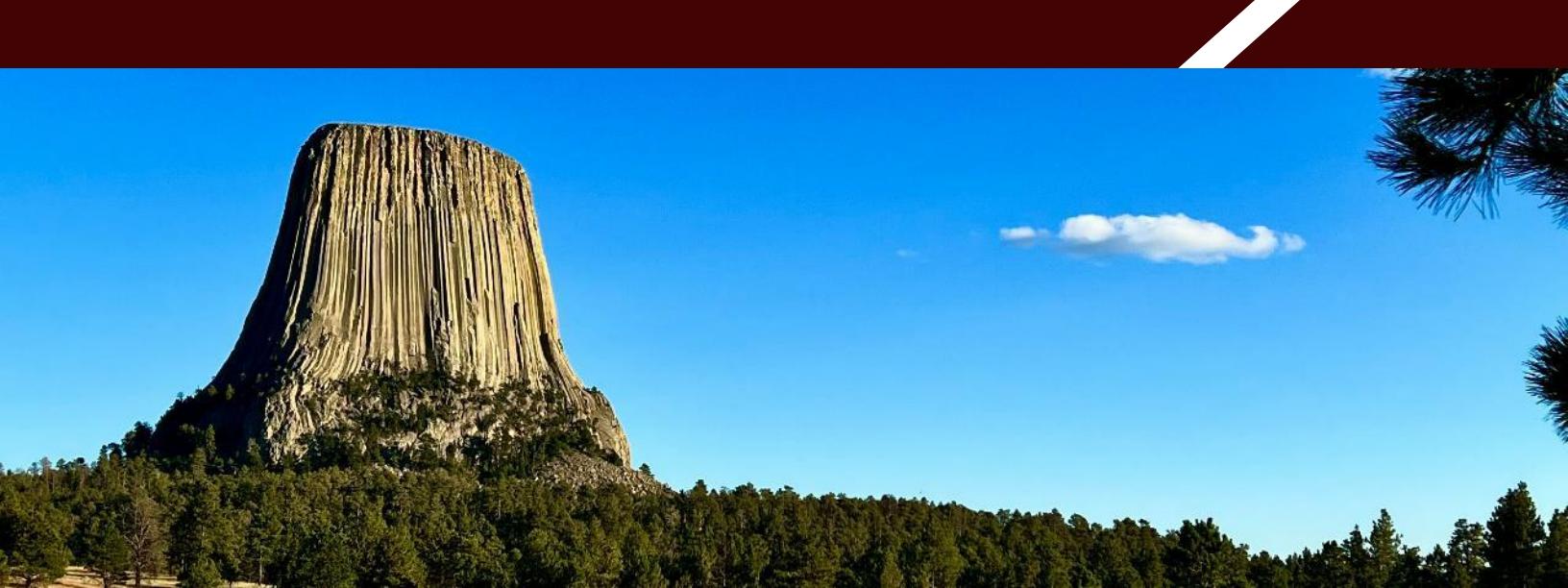
65% 65% 63%

Issues where there are more partisan or other differences that will make it very hard to get things done

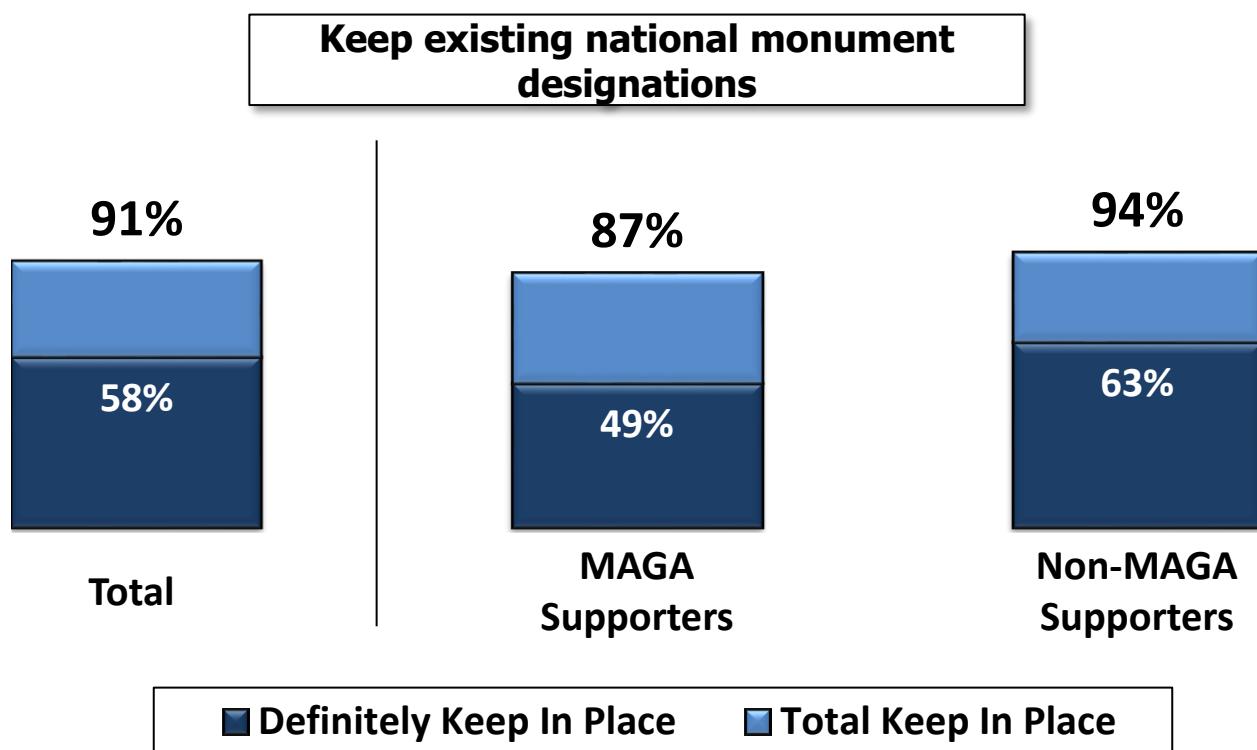
33% 33% 36%

Support for continued investment in public lands is also nearly unanimous. More than nine-in-ten Westerners (94 percent) say it is important to continue dedicating Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) dollars to protecting inholdings within the boundaries of national parks and public lands. This support extends across party lines, as shown below.

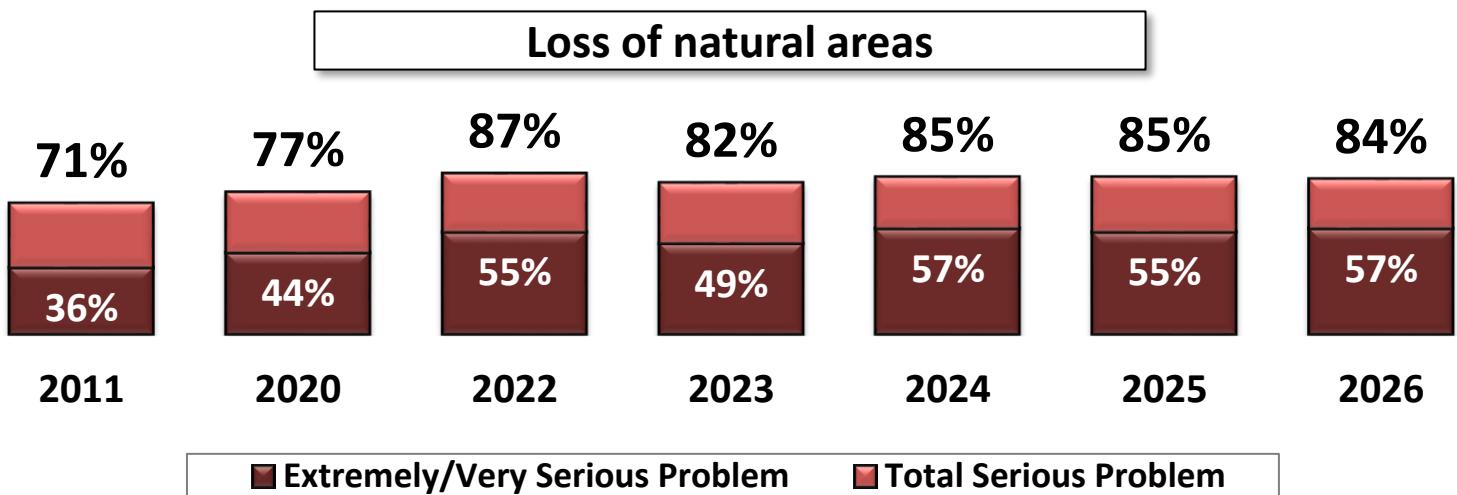




Western voters across the political spectrum support keeping national monument designations in place. More than nine-in-ten Western voters (91 percent) say national monument designations for some public lands protected over the last decade should be kept in place – not removed. In fact, nearly three-in-five (58 percent) say they should “definitely” be kept in place. Strong majorities from all parties support keeping the existing designations in place, including four-in-five self-identified MAGA supporters, as seen below.



Support for these policies may be grounded in a long-standing concern about the loss of natural areas in their states. Overall, more than four-in-five voters (86 percent) say the loss of natural areas is a serious problem. Among the five states where this issue has been tracked since 2011 (Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), the share of voters who consider the loss of natural areas an “extremely” or “very” serious problem has increased steadily over time and has held relatively steady since 2022. Today, 57 percent of Westerners in these five states say it is an “extremely” or “very” serious problem, up 23 points from 2011.



Preserving dark skies above public lands is another area of strong agreement among voters. Almost nine-in-ten Westerners (89 percent) support “managing public lands to ensure there are more outdoor places free of light pollution to see the stars at night.” Every single state supports this “dark skies” proposal by 79 percent or more, and there is deep agreement across party lines, with 83 percent of Republicans favoring it alongside 90 percent of independents and 95 percent of Democrats.