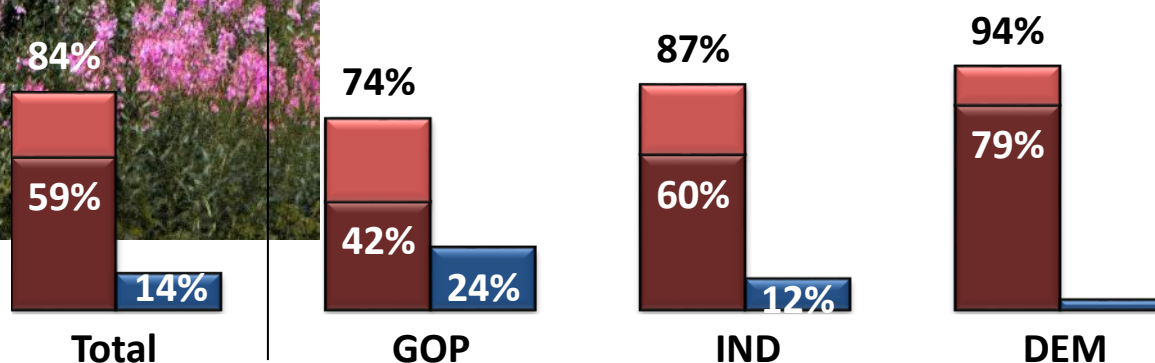


# Conservation in the West

*Western voters continue to place strong importance on protecting land, water, wildlife, and public lands. Large majorities view rollbacks of the environmental protections and cuts to public lands management as serious problems, oppose selling public lands for private development or resource extraction, and say conservation issues matter when deciding whom to support for public office.*

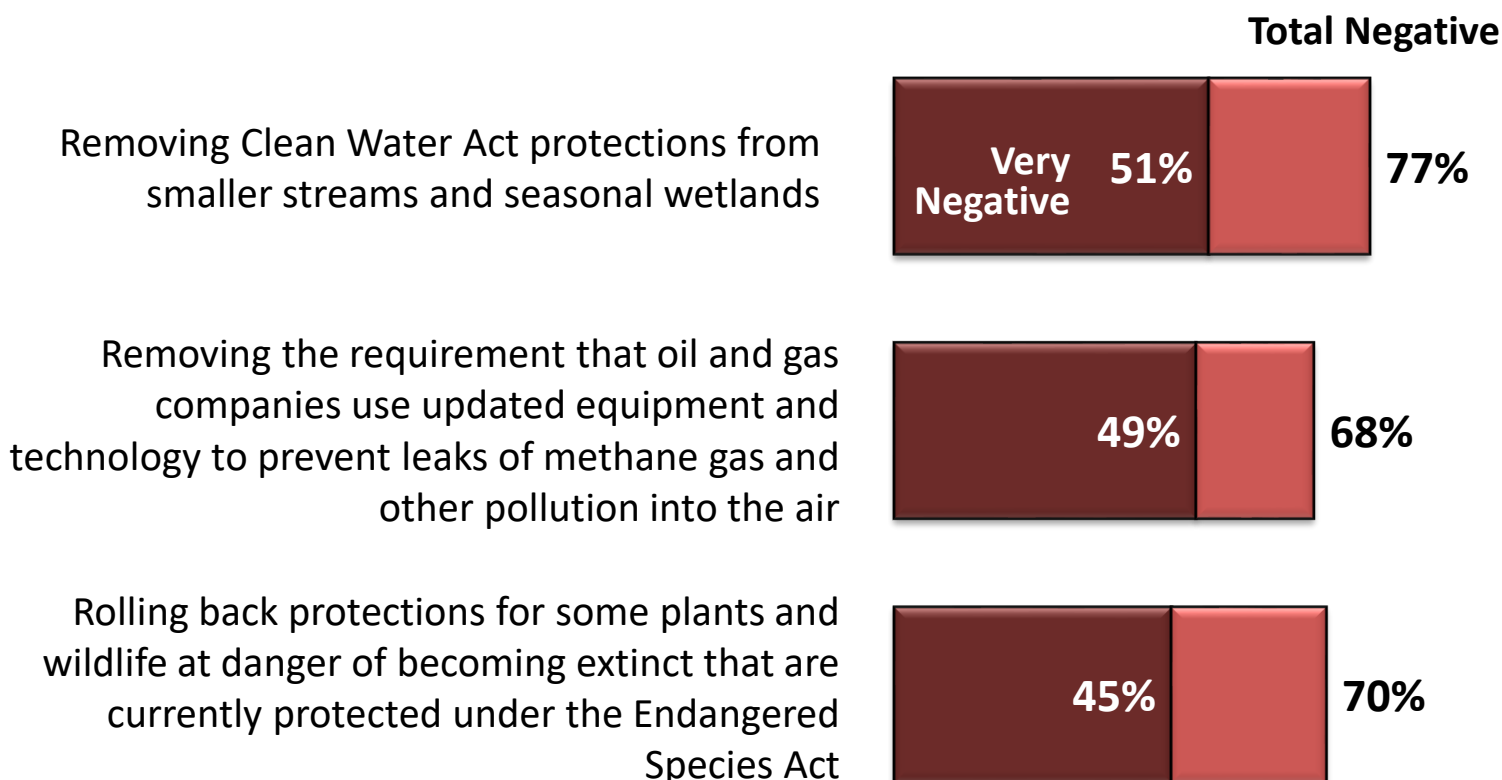
Concern about rollbacks of laws that protect land, water, and wildlife has increased markedly in recent years. More than four-in-five Westerners (84 percent) now say such rollbacks are a serious problem, including nearly three in five (59 percent) who describe them as extremely or very serious. This represents a significant increase from 2018, when 68 percent viewed rollbacks as a serious problem and just two-in-five rated them as an extremely or very serious problem. As shown below, strong majorities across the political spectrum characterize the rollbacks of laws that protect our land, water, and wildlife as a serious problem.

## Rollbacks of laws that protect our land, water, and wildlife



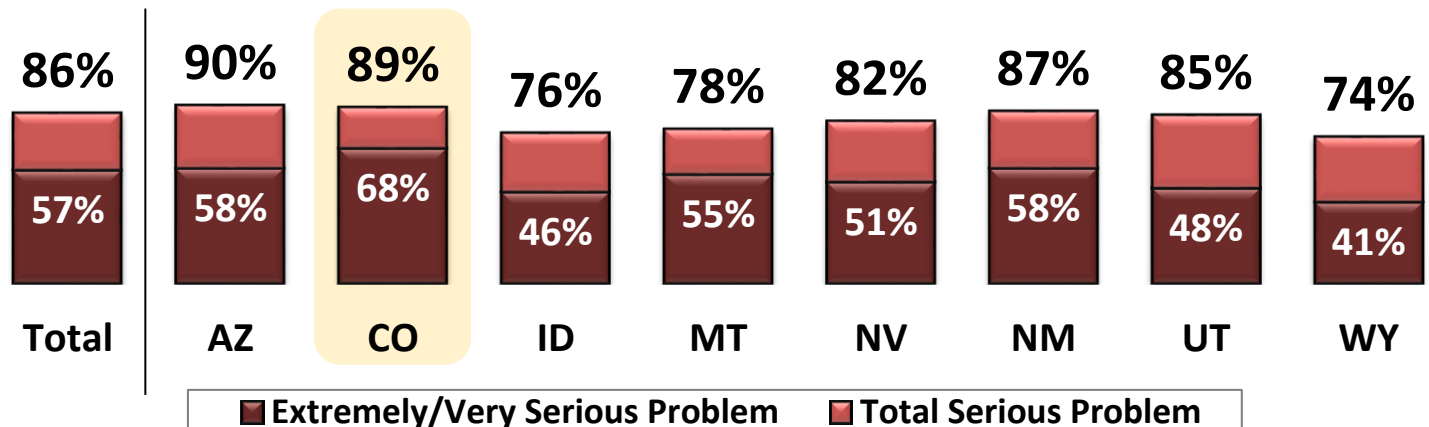
■ Extremely/Very Serious   ■ Total Serious Problem   ■ Not a Problem

**More specifically, Westerners express an overwhelming sense that recent changes in environmental rules and standards will have a negative impact on the West.** Three policies that were tested elicited pessimism among voters in the region, including majorities across party lines and in every state. Not a single sub-group was more apt to view these changes as having a positive impact on the West.



Westerners are also highly concerned about funding cuts to management of national parks, forests and other public lands. More than four-in-five voters in the region (86 percent) say these funding cuts are a serious problem, with a majority (57 percent) describing them as extremely or very serious. Concern over this issue is widespread across all states in the region, with particular intensity in Colorado.

#### Funding cuts to management of national parks, forests and other public lands



The funding cuts and layoffs of thousands of public employees who work for the benefit of national public lands have provoked strong concern among Western voters. More than four-in-five voters express concern about having too few of three major categories of workers on national public lands, including:

- **91 percent** are concerned that “fewer wildland firefighters and support staff are reducing the risk of and fighting fires that threaten national public lands and nearby communities” (fully 64 percent are very concerned)
- **83 percent** are also concerned about “fewer park rangers and other employees providing visitor services and maintaining national public lands” (46 percent are very concerned)
- **82 percent** express concern that “fewer scientists and wildlife biologists are monitoring and caring for fish and wildlife on national public lands” (45 percent are very concerned)

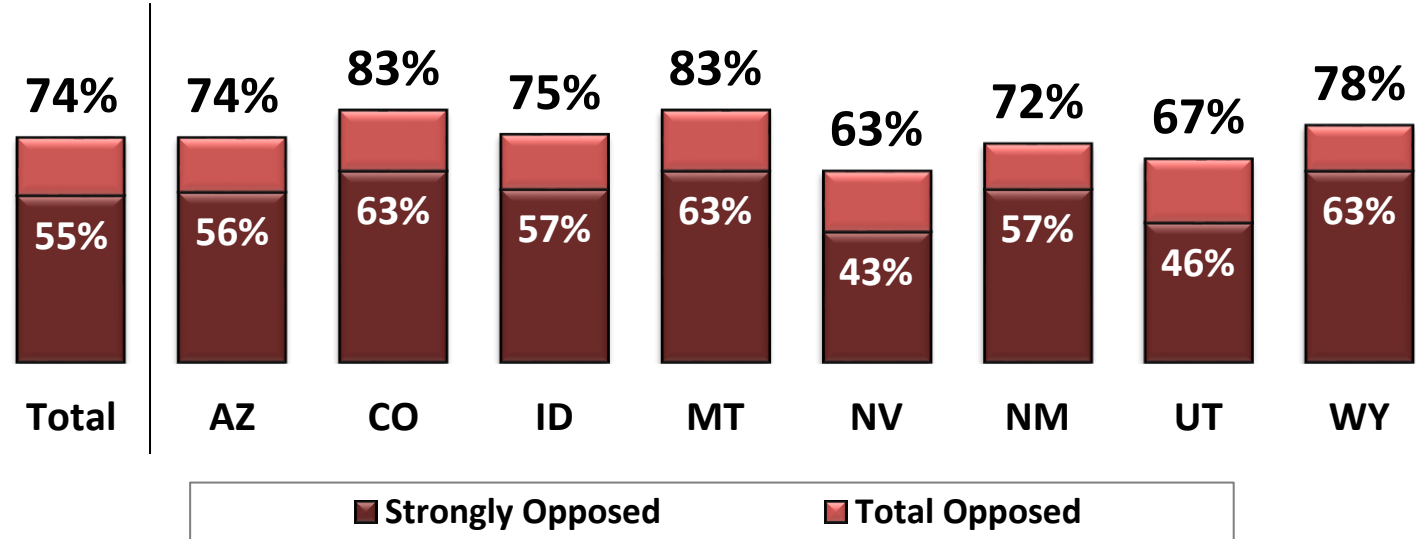
Majorities in every state say they are very or somewhat concerned about having fewer of each of these types of workers supporting public lands.



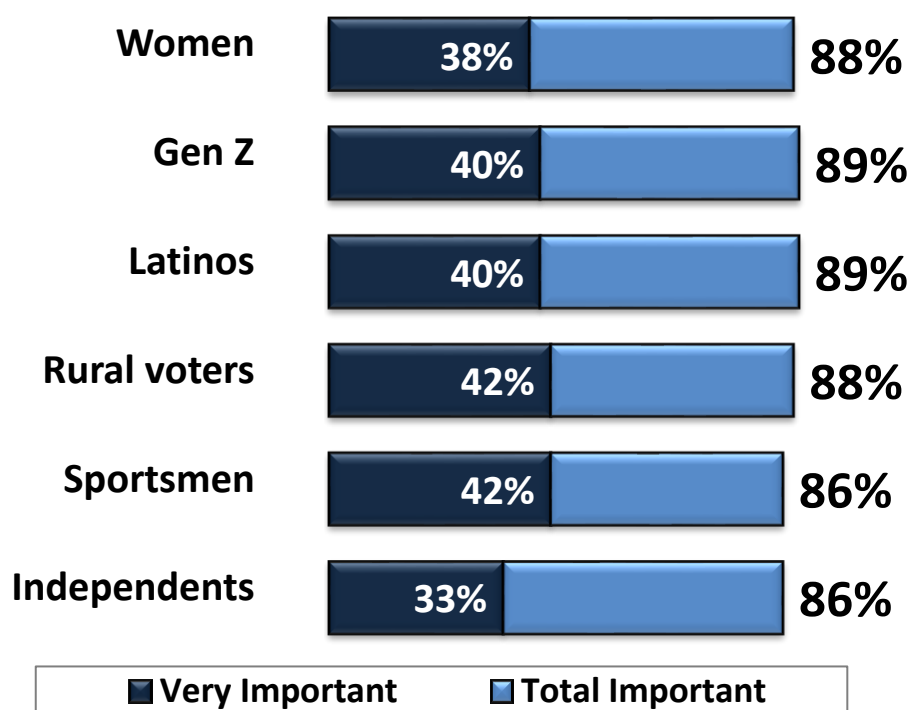


**Voters across the West are opposed to selling national public lands.** More than three-in-four Westerners (76 percent) oppose selling some national public lands to private companies for housing development, with majorities opposed in every state. Opposition is particularly strong in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming, where seven in ten voters say they are strongly opposed. Similarly, nearly three in four Westerners (74 percent) oppose selling public lands for oil, gas, or mining development, including more than half (55 percent) who say they are strongly opposed.

**Selling some national public lands to private companies for oil, gas and mining development**



Conservation issues remain politically salient across the region, even when juxtaposed with perennial concerns like the economy, education and health care. More than four-in-five Westerners (85 percent) say issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are important in deciding whether to support an elected public official, and more than one-in-three (36 percent) say they are very important considerations. These issues carry particular weight among voters of color, with 40 percent of Latino voters, 42 percent of Black voters and 57 percent of Native American voters saying conservation issues are very important in their electoral decisions.



This is especially noteworthy given that voters in the region are nearly unanimous in identifying the rising cost of living as a serious problem. Nearly all Westerners (98 percent) say the rising cost of living is a serious problem, and more than four-in-five (85 percent) consider it extremely or very serious. The share of voters expressing this highest level of concern has increased significantly over the past several years, underscoring the broader economic context in which other policy priorities are evaluated.