



# COLORADO COLLEGE

## State of the Rockies

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## Mountain West Voters Show Growing Concerns Over Public Land Protections Heading into 2026 Elections

*State of the Rockies Project survey shows tension over direction of land management and energy priorities, and desire for conservation of scarce water resources and public lands.*

**COLORADO SPRINGS**—Results from Colorado College's 16th annual State of the Rockies Project *Conservation in the West Poll* released today show widespread concern among Western voters about rollbacks of protections for land, water, and wildlife and cuts to funding for public land management.

The poll, which surveyed voters in eight Mountain West states—Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming—found that Western voters across party lines are prioritizing conservation, recreation, and renewables over fossil fuel development heading into this year's midterm elections.

### Highlights from the Poll

- **84%** of Western voters **say that the rollback of laws that protect our land, water, and wildlife** is a serious problem, a sharp increase from prior years.
- **85%** of respondents say issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are important in deciding whether to **support a public official**.
- **86%** of Western voters deem **funding cuts to public lands** a serious problem, including 76% of Republicans.
- **70% of respondents oppose fast-tracking oil, gas and mining projects** on national public lands by reducing environmental reviews and local public input.
- **72% of Westerners prefer expanding renewable energy over** drilling and mining for more fossil fuels.
- **76%** of Western voters—more Western voters than ever before—say they would prefer their member of Congress to place **more emphasis on conservation and recreation on public lands** over maximizing energy production.
- **74%** of Western voters **oppose selling some national public lands** for oil and gas development.

- **91%** of Western voters say existing **national monument designations should be kept** in place.

As policymakers look ahead to the upcoming midterm elections, **85% of voters in Mountain West states say issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are important in deciding whether to support a candidate.**

“At a time of growing pressure on land and water in the West, the call to action from voters is clear and bipartisan: Westerners want funding and stewardship for public lands and natural resources,” **said Ian Johnson, Director of Strategic Initiatives & Sustainability at Colorado College.**

**Voters want to prioritize renewable energy sources.** When asked to prioritize energy sources, voters across party lines selected solar as their top choice, while coal was the least desired, with only 7% of respondents listing coal as a first or second priority.

**Funding cuts to public land management have proven unpopular with Western voters.** Recent funding cuts have reduced the number of firefighters, park rangers, scientists, and other employees working to protect public lands, water, and wildlife over the last year. These cuts to public land management have 86% of voters across party lines concerned, including 75% of MAGA supporters.

**Western voters also oppose the sale of public lands and the elimination of public land protections.** Even with rising housing costs, 76% of Western voters oppose selling public lands for housing. Additionally, 74% of Western voters oppose selling public lands to private companies for oil, gas, and mining development.

**Scarce water resources continue to be a concern for Westerners,** particularly in states that have experienced droughts. Westerners consider scarce water resources a serious problem, with 87% of Western voters concerned about inadequate water supplies. Accordingly, 83% of voters in states along the Colorado River or its tributaries would support an agreement requiring all states to reduce their use of the Colorado River to preserve its health. This emphasis on water protection is particularly salient, as 80% of Westerners say data centers are a threat to water quality and supply in the West.

This is the sixteenth consecutive year Colorado College gauged the public’s sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. The 2026 Colorado College *Conservation in the West Poll* is a bipartisan survey conducted by Republican pollster Lori Weigel of New Bridge Strategy and Democratic pollster Miranda Everitt 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 3,419-voter sample, which included an over-sample of Black and Native American voters. The survey was conducted between January 2-18, 2026 and the effective margin of error is  $\pm 2.4\%$  at the 95% confidence interval for the total sample; and at most  $\pm 4.9\%$  for each state. The full survey and individual state surveys are available on the [State of the Rockies Project](#) 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 encourages students to conduct interdisciplinary investigations around the region to build on and deepen what we know about the challenges we face living in the Rocky Mountain West, and what to do about them.

### **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 Portland, Oregon—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 a Colorado-based, woman-owned and operated opinion research company specializing in public policy and campaign research. As a Republican polling firm that has led the research for hundreds of successful political and public affairs campaigns, New Bridge has helped coalitions bridging the political spectrum in crafting winning ballot measure campaigns, public education campaigns, and legislative policy efforts.

### **About Hispanic Access Foundation**

Hispanic Access Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, connects Latinos with partners and opportunities to improve lives and create an equitable society. Our vision is that one day every Hispanic individual in America will enjoy good physical health and a healthy natural environment, a quality education, economic success, and civic engagement in their communities with the sum of improving the future of America. For more information visit [www.hispanicaccess.org](http://www.hispanicaccess.org).