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9th annual *Conservation in the West Poll* shows strong support for public lands protections and unpopularity of Trump administration’s “energy dominance” agenda

Western voters have significant concerns around water issues and the increasingly visible impact of climate change; optimism for benefits of outdoor recreation economy

COLORADO SPRINGS—The ninth annual Colorado College State of the Rockies Project *Conservation in the West Poll* released today shows voters in the Mountain West continue to support efforts to keep public lands protected and accessible, putting them at odds with the Trump administration’s “energy dominance” agenda.

The poll surveyed the views of voters in eight Mountain West states (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) on policies impacting the use and protection of public lands. The role of public lands and the outdoor way of life continued to be of deep importance to Western voters. 70 percent view themselves as “outdoor recreation enthusiasts” and 68 percent label themselves as “conservationists.” For 63 percent of respondents, the ability to live near, recreate on, and enjoy public lands like national forests, parks, or trails are a factor in why they live in the West. An overwhelming majority—87 percent—believe the outdoor economy is important to the future of their state.

“Our state’s mountains, rivers, and prairies are the foundation of the Colorado way of life. Protecting our public lands not only strengthens our local economies by promoting outdoor recreation and tourism, it ensures that future generations will continue to have a vibrant place to live, work, start a business, raise a family, and retire,” said **Colorado Governor Jared Polis**. “This poll once again shows that Coloradans are adamant about protecting our natural spaces, reversing the harmful effects of climate change, and moving to a future of clean, affordable renewable energy.”

When asked about the Trump administration’s agenda for public lands, majorities viewed key actions over the past two years with strong disapproval.

Recent Trump administration action on public lands	Good Change	Bad Change
Removing national monument protections from lands in the West which contain archaeological and Native American sites, but also have oil, gas and mineral deposits	13%	66%
Reducing the amount of time that the public can comment on proposed changes affecting public lands, such as leasing for oil and gas or mining	17%	55%
Removing Clean Water Act protections from smaller streams and seasonal wetlands	17%	60%
Allowing increased oil and gas production on eighty percent of the “critical habitat” that Western states had identified in 2015 in order to try and restore the threatened sage grouse	21%	50%

“Over the history of the *Conservation in the West Poll*, we have consistently seen bipartisan support for protecting public lands and outdoor spaces,” said **Corina McKendry, Director of the State of the Rockies Project and an Associate Professor of Political Science at Colorado College**. “That a leadership agenda out of step with those values is met with disapproval in the West is no surprise, although the rejection of the current administration’s priorities is particularly intense here.”

Looking forward, voters in the Mountain West want the newly elected Congress to challenge the Trump administration’s priorities on national public lands. Just 24 percent want Congress to ensure the production of more domestic energy by maximizing the amount of national public lands available for responsible oil and gas drilling and mining. That is compared to 65 percent who prefer Congress ensures the protection of clean water, air quality, and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities to visit and recreate on national public lands.

Impacts of uncontrollable wildfires and water issues topped the list of voter concerns this year. Those concerns are associated with the impacts of climate change, which 46 percent of voters view as a very serious or extremely serious problem in their state—a steady increase over the duration of the history of the poll. 67 percent of voters believe wildfires are more of a problem than ten years ago, with changes in climate and drought being the top reasons given for the shift. Voters also have significant concerns about water levels in the West; 67 percent view water supplies as becoming less predictable every year.

Solar power and wind power ranked highest among energy sources voters said they would like to see encouraged in their state. Voters also gave strong majority support for a variety of potential efforts at the state level to conserve land, water and wildlife, including migration corridors for species including deer and elk. Notably, 68 percent of voters said they would support a small increase in local taxes to fund those projects.

State conservation effort	Support funding
Protecting and restoring the health of rivers, lakes and streams	81%
Conserving sensitive areas which the state has identified as critical wildlife habitat	71%
Conserving natural areas, such as native prairies or forests	66%
Ensuring opportunities for outdoor recreation like hiking, fishing or camping	64%
Conserving land corridors which wildlife like deer and elk use for migration	68%
Providing incentives for landowners to conserve lands as natural areas rather than develop them	56%
Managing forests to help prevent catastrophic wildfires	84%

"The poll underscores that people living in the West are overwhelmingly outdoor recreationists. Whether they enjoy the outdoors through hiking, biking, fishing, or camping with family and friends, our outdoor recreation lifestyle translates to healthy communities and healthy economies across the West," said **Amy Roberts, executive director of Outdoor Industry Association**. "The poll also shows that most of us want our elected officials to support policies that protect and maintain access to our public lands and waters. We hope they now take an opportunity to build bipartisan support on these issues."

This is the ninth consecutive year Colorado College has gauged the public's sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. The 2019 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 at least 400 registered voters in each of eight Western states (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming) for a total 3,204-person sample. The survey was conducted between January 2-9, 2019 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](#).

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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 2,000 undergraduate students study one course at a time in intensive three and a half-week segments. For the past sixteen 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. The firm's roots are in Republican politics, but staff have 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.