



COLORADO COLLEGE

# State of the Rockies Project

**CONTACT:**

Cyndy Hines  
State of the Rockies Project  
[chines@coloradocollege.edu](mailto:chines@coloradocollege.edu)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Jacob Hay  
[jhay@wearerally.com](mailto:jhay@wearerally.com)  
(310) 855-2640

## Westerners Who Prefer Public Land Conservation Over Energy Development Reaches All Time High

*Fifteenth annual Conservation in the West Poll reveals there is no mandate from voters in the West to roll back public lands protections or expand oil and gas development*

**COLORADO SPRINGS**—Colorado College's 15th annual State of the Rockies Project [Conservation in the West Poll](#) released today shows Western voters continue to support strong conservation and protection policies as a new presidential administration takes power, promising rollbacks, budget cuts, and expanded energy development.

The poll, which surveyed the views of voters in eight Mountain West states (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming), found Westerners prefer public land conservation over oil and gas development at the highest margins measured in the poll's 15-year history.

Western voters continue to express concern about issues related to land, water, and wildlife. Strong majorities of Western voters – including self-identified “MAGA” voters – support policies that focus on the protection and conservation of public lands and oppose policies that would open public lands up to drilling, mining, or other development.

Given a choice between protection and development, **72 percent** of Westerners prefer their elected officials to place more emphasis on protecting clean water sources, air quality, and wildlife habitat while providing opportunities to visit and recreate on public lands. By contrast, only **24 percent** prefer their elected officials to prioritize the production of more domestic energy by maximizing the amount of national public lands available for responsible oil and gas production. Self-identified MAGA voters are split on the question, with **51 percent** favoring an emphasis on protecting public lands and **44 percent** wanting to maximize oil and gas production on public lands.

The first Trump administration reduced the size of national monuments, an unpopular decision in the West at the time. Reducing or removing national monument protections are even more unpopular now,

with **89 percent** of voters opposing the idea, compared to **80 percent** when the question was asked in January 2017.

Similarly, proposals to give state governments control over national public lands are more unpopular now, with **65 percent** of Westerners in opposition, compared to 2017 when **56 percent** were opposed.

“The consensus favoring public lands conservation remains consistent and strong in the West,” said **Katrina Miller-Stevens, Former Director of the State of the Rockies Project and an Associate Professor at Colorado College**. “Westerners do not want to see a rollback of national monument protections and there is no mandate for oil and gas development. Voters from all political ideologies are united in support of public land conservation in the West.”

Proposals to reduce protection and expand energy development on public lands are deeply unpopular in the West:

- **72 percent** oppose removing protections for parts of existing national public lands to allow more drilling, mining and other development.
- **63 percent** oppose reducing protections for some of the rare plants and animals under the Endangered Species Act.
- **60 percent** oppose expanding the amount of national forest and other public lands available to private companies for logging.

Instead, Westerners are supportive of initiatives to protect public lands and natural resources from the impacts of development:

- **92 percent** support keeping the requirement that oil and gas companies, rather than taxpayers, pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished.
- **88 percent** support continuing to require oil and gas producers that operate on public lands to use updated equipment and technology to prevent leaks of methane gas during the extraction process and reduce the need to burn off excess natural gas into the air.
- **71 percent** support only allowing oil and gas companies the right to drill in areas of public lands where the likelihood of actually producing oil is high.
- **84 percent** support maintaining or increasing the royalty rates that oil companies pay for producing oil and gas on national public lands.
- **89 percent** support managing public lands to ensure there are more outdoor places free of light pollution to see the stars at night.
- **86 percent** support ensuring Native American Tribes have greater input into decisions made about areas within national public lands that contain sacred or culturally significant places to their Tribes.

With hiring freezes and a reduction of the federal workforce underway, Westerners are clear about who they prefer to make decisions about public lands, water, wildlife and other natural resources. **87 percent** prefer these decisions be made by career professionals such as rangers, scientists, fire fighters, and other specialists in the field, compared to just **9 percent** who prefer decisions be made by new political appointees.

Overall, voters gave positive marks – ranging from **61 percent** approval to **86 percent** approval – for the federal agencies charged with protecting public lands and the environment, including the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management. **Three-quarters** of Western voters – including bipartisan majorities – are

opposed to reducing funding to these agencies. More than two-thirds (**69 percent**) of MAGA voters oppose funding reductions for these federal agencies as well.

Despite **81 percent** expressing serious concern about the rising cost of living, Westerners do not want to sacrifice public lands to build more housing. **82 percent** of Westerners prefer building more housing within or close to existing communities, compared with **14 percent** who favor selling off public lands to develop housing on natural areas.

Westerners value the natural beauty of their states, with more than **three-in-ten** naming nature as the thing they like most about living in the West. **67 percent** of Westerners report visiting national public lands three or more times in the past year, and **24 percent** visited them more than 10 times.

That connection translates into concern around the loss of habitat and natural areas, wildlife declines, pollution, and inadequate water supplies. All the land, water, and wildlife issues tested in the poll are viewed as extremely or very serious problems by **more than half** of Western voters, with a level of concern that is consistent with prior years.

Against that background of concern, voters support a variety of efforts to reduce or mitigate the impacts of climate change.

- **72 percent** support the federal government taking action to reduce the carbon pollution that contributes to climate change.
- **71 percent** support the federal government taking action to ensure the reliability of water supplies that may be threatened by climate change.
- **91 percent** support allowing private landowners the ability to conserve their lands as working farms, ranches, natural areas, and wildlife habitat through voluntary land conservation easements.
- **92 percent** support promoting nature-based solutions to improve water quality, such as conserving forests and lands along rivers, lakes, and streams.
- **94 percent** support allowing trained fire teams to use controlled burns to remove growth in forests that could fuel wildfires when and where it is safe to do so.

This is the fifteenth consecutive year Colorado College gauged the public's sentiment on public lands and conservation issues. The 2025 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 3,316-voter sample, which included an over-sample of Black and Native American voters. The survey was conducted between January 3-17, 2024 and the effective margin of error is  $\pm 2.46\%$  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.

###

### **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 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).