



MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel / Public Opinion Strategies
David Metz/ FM3

DATE: September 23, 2014

RE: Western Voter Attitudes Toward Management of Public Lands

The bipartisan research team of FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies conducted 1,600 telephone interviews (cell and landline) with 200 registered voters in each of 8 states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming¹. The survey finds that voters in these states – including among all key demographic sub-groups and across the partisan spectrum - are likely to reject a proposal to have state government assume full control of and the costs associated with managing public lands currently managed by national government agencies. This preference grows stronger after voters hear viewpoints on both sides of this issue. Their position may in part be grounded in the vast majority’s perception of these places more as “American places,” than as places for their state.

These voters are not unfamiliar with public lands like national forests, BLM lands, and national wildlife refuges – in fact, nearly all have visited such places in the last year and they overwhelmingly (94%) say the experience was positive. Most approve of the job specific resource management agencies are doing in their state, although they tend to disapprove of the job the “federal government” is doing generically.

Among the specific key findings of the survey are:

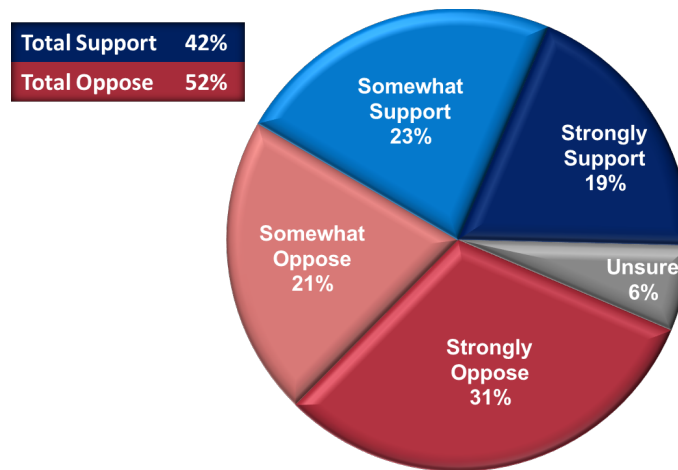
- **A majority opposes having state government assume control and cost of managing public lands; two-in-five offer support.** Respondents were queried as follows:

¹ Bi-partisan research team of Public Opinion Strategies (R) and Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) completed 1,600 telephone interviews (cell and landline) with 200 registered voters in each of 8 states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming. Interviews were conducted September 10-14, 2014. The statistically valid sample has a margin of sampling error + 3.54% at the 95% confidence interval for the total sample; + 6.9% for each state. The total numbers have been statistically weighted to reflect the true geographic distribution of voters throughout the region. Interviews within each state were distributed proportionally by region and each sample is demographically representative of its electorate.

“Thinking about one idea related to national forests, national parks, wildlife refuges, and other national public lands in your state, would you support or oppose having your state government and taxpayers assume full control of managing these public lands, including paying for all related costs, including the cost of preventing and fighting wildfires?”

While two-in-five (42 percent) support this idea, a majority (52 percent) opposes it. As evident in the following graph, the intensity of the opposition exceeds that of the intensity of support (31 percent strongly oppose, while 19 percent strongly support).

**Views of State Government Assuming Control
and Costs of Public Lands Managed by National Resource Agencies**



Opposition exceeds support with most sub-groups of the regional electorate:

- A majority in six of the eight states opposes the measure, with Wyoming divided and a bare majority in Utah in support (52 percent);
- Majorities across most of the political and ideological spectrum oppose this proposal, including two-thirds of moderate to liberal Democrats (67 percent), 50 percent of conservative Democrats, and 53 percent of independents and moderate-to-liberal Republicans. The sole exception is conservative Republicans (54 percent support, 38 percent oppose); and
- Voters who have visited public lands managed by national agencies register opposition to the idea of transferring the responsibility and costs of maintaining these lands to their states. Non-visitors are evenly divided (47 percent support, 44 percent oppose).

- **Voters become stronger in their rejection of this proposal after they hear statements from both supporters and opponents of state management of public lands now maintained by national government agencies.** As the next graph depicts, voters are even more likely (by a 24 point margin) to side with opponents of transferring public lands when they hear arguments for and against the proposal:

**Three-in-Five Voters Side with Opponents of State Government
Assuming Full Control of Managing these Public Lands**

People who oppose having state government and **STATE** taxpayers assume full control of managing these public lands, including paying for all related costs, say it wouldn't be fair to make **STATE** taxpayers pay the full cost of managing lands that rightly belong to all Americans. A single wildfire can cost one hundred million dollars to fight. Our state requires a balanced budget, so we will be forced to raise taxes or sell off lands to the highest bidder to cover these expenses. As a result, we will lose access to places **STATE** families have visited for decades and that we want future generations to enjoy.

59%

People who support having state government and **STATE** taxpayers assume full control of managing these public lands, including paying for all related costs, say that historically these lands were never meant to be held by the U.S. government forever. Besides, the states will manage these lands better than national agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, as they can allow more logging, mining and other resource extraction on these lands to help raise revenues to fund needs in our states.

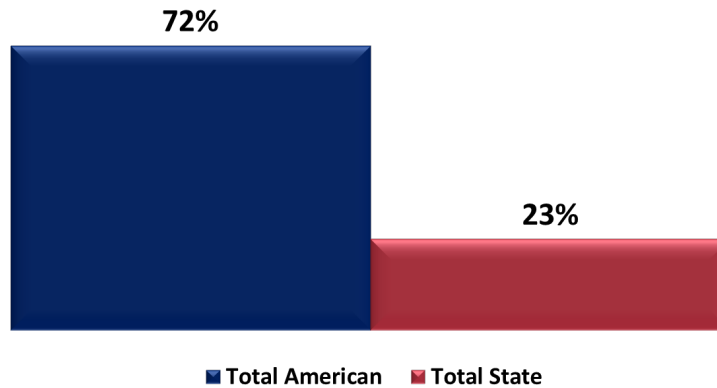
35%

While opposition increases among most sub-groups, it is worth noting the levels it reaches among certain important voter sub-groups:

○ Conservative Democrats	67 percent oppose	+17
○ Women under age 45	65 percent oppose	+15
○ Moderates	67 percent oppose	+14
○ Men under age 45	57 percent oppose	+13
○ Latino voters	58 percent oppose	+11
○ Suburban voters	65 percent oppose	+11

- **These views may in part be grounded in voters' perception of these public lands as "American places," rather than places they associate with their state specifically.** Nearly three-quarters of voters in this region characterize national forests, national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other national public lands more as "American" places than "state" places, as evidenced in the following graph:

Views of Public Lands Managed by National Agencies



In addition, voters say these national public lands *should* belong to everyone in the nation, rather than just those who live in a state (71 percent - should belong to everyone; 24 percent - should belong to a state).

This has other implications for voters that explains in part their opposition to the idea of states assuming control of and costs associated with managing these lands. If these lands are “American places” that everyone can visit and enjoy, then voters do not think it is fair for their state’s taxpayers to shoulder that entire burden. It comes down to a question of fundamental fairness for voters. That sentiment is seen in a number of verbatim comments from voters throughout the region:

“They are for everybody in the country, and the state, especially Utah, has quite a bit to do for public lands. They shouldn't foot the bill for all of it. Just because they are public lands for everybody to use, I think everybody should help maintain them. It would be deterioration, they probably wouldn't be able to afford it.” - Independent Man Age 35-44 (Utah)

“If the lands are for all the people then the people should all pay for it and I don't believe that the state should have to pay for any of it.” - GOP Man Age 65+ (Colorado)

“Because I feel like if everyone is able to visit them, then everyone needs to pay for them or support or whatever. I guess because I don't feel like this state has as much money as others. It might be taking money and resources from other areas that need it as well.” – Independent Woman Age 35-44 (Montana)

“The United States should take care of the lands that are set aside for the public. Because they were set aside back over a hundred years ago as public lands for all Americans to be able to use. I can go visit Zion in Utah... which means that I'm still visiting another state which is not the state where I live.” – Democrat Woman Age 65+ (Nevada)

- **In conclusion**, this survey demonstrates that voters in these eight Western states are more likely to oppose than to support state government assuming full control over, and related costs for, managing public lands currently under the control of U.S. resource agencies. This view is widespread and broad-based, cutting across most demographic sub-groups. This shared perspective on this proposal strengthens after voters hear the views of both supporters and opponents of the idea.