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Public Opinion on Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming

WYOMING OPEN SPACES INITIATIVE

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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UW Extension

B-1258B

October 2014



UNIVERSITY
OF WYOMING

2014 Poll

A statewide poll commissioned through a partnership of the William D. Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, the Wyoming Stock Growers Association, the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust, and The Nature Conservancy in Wyoming, gauged public perception of a range of conservation topics in Wyoming. Similar to previous iterations of the survey (conducted in February 2004 and May 2007), the poll results reflected Wyomingites' views that the current and future condition of the state and its resources remains positive. Overall, voters displayed a strong interest in conservation and were in favor of dedicating additional state funds to protect land, air, water, wildlife habitat, and ranchlands in Wyoming.

Wyoming voters viewed the loss of family farms and ranches, availability of water for farming and ranching, and the decline in numbers of big game animals as the top three most serious conservation issues facing the state.

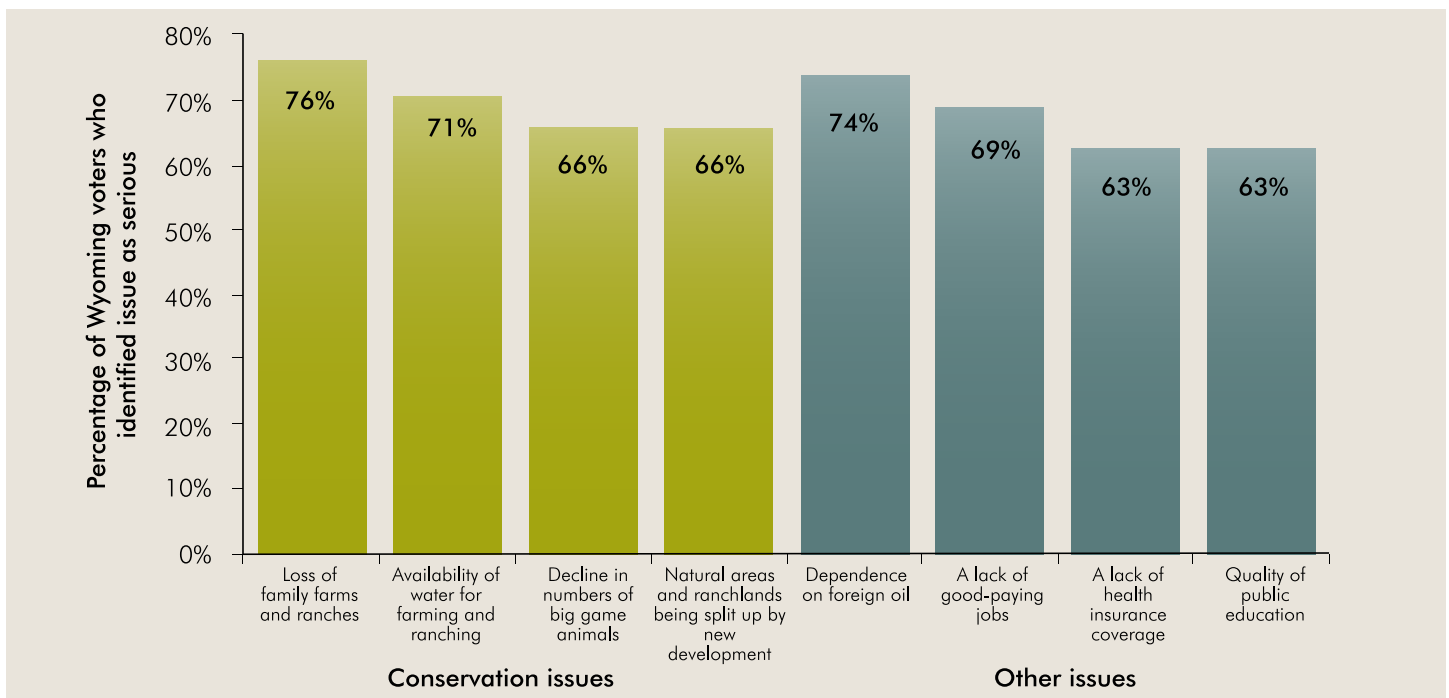
Poll participants were presented a list of issues and asked to rank each as “extremely serious,” “very serious,” “somewhat serious,” or “not a problem.” The issue of greatest concern among Wyomingites was the loss of family farms and ranches, with 76 percent of respondents regarding it as a serious problem. Other conservation issues of serious concern included the availability of water for farming and ranching, declining numbers of big game animals, and fragmentation of natural areas and ranchlands by new housing and commercial development. These findings are consistent with values articulated by respondents, 79 percent of whom agreed with the statement, “I personally benefit from the presence of ranches and farms in Wyoming” and 74 percent of whom agreed with the statement that “wildlife are an important part of my daily life.”

Wyoming voters supported state funding of many conservation projects, including protecting water resources, agriculture, tourism, family farms, and ranches.

Voters identified keeping and storing more water in Wyoming as a top concern, followed closely by maintaining the strength of Wyoming's agricultural and tourism industries, and protecting and restoring the water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams. A majority of voters also gave priority to funding preservation of family farms and ranches, protecting the Greater Yellowstone region, fish and wildlife habitat, open spaces, and Wyoming's western way of life and farming and ranching heritage.

The Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) was created by the Wyoming State Legislature in 2005 to fund projects designed to enhance and conserve wildlife habitat or natural resource values throughout Wyoming. Every dollar spent by the WWNRT is matched, on average, by \$5.00 or more from other sources, and generates an average of over \$3.00 of economic activity in the state. Since it was established in 2005, the WWNRT has funded 446 projects in all 23 counties across Wyoming. For more information, see the WWNRT website, <http://wwnrt.state.wy.us>.*

*“Economic Contributions of the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust” available at: http://www.uwyo.edu/haub/ruckelshaus%2Dinstitute/_files/docs/open-spaces/2011-economic-contributions-wwnrt.pdf



Voters identified conservation issues to be at least as serious, if not more serious, than other concerns.

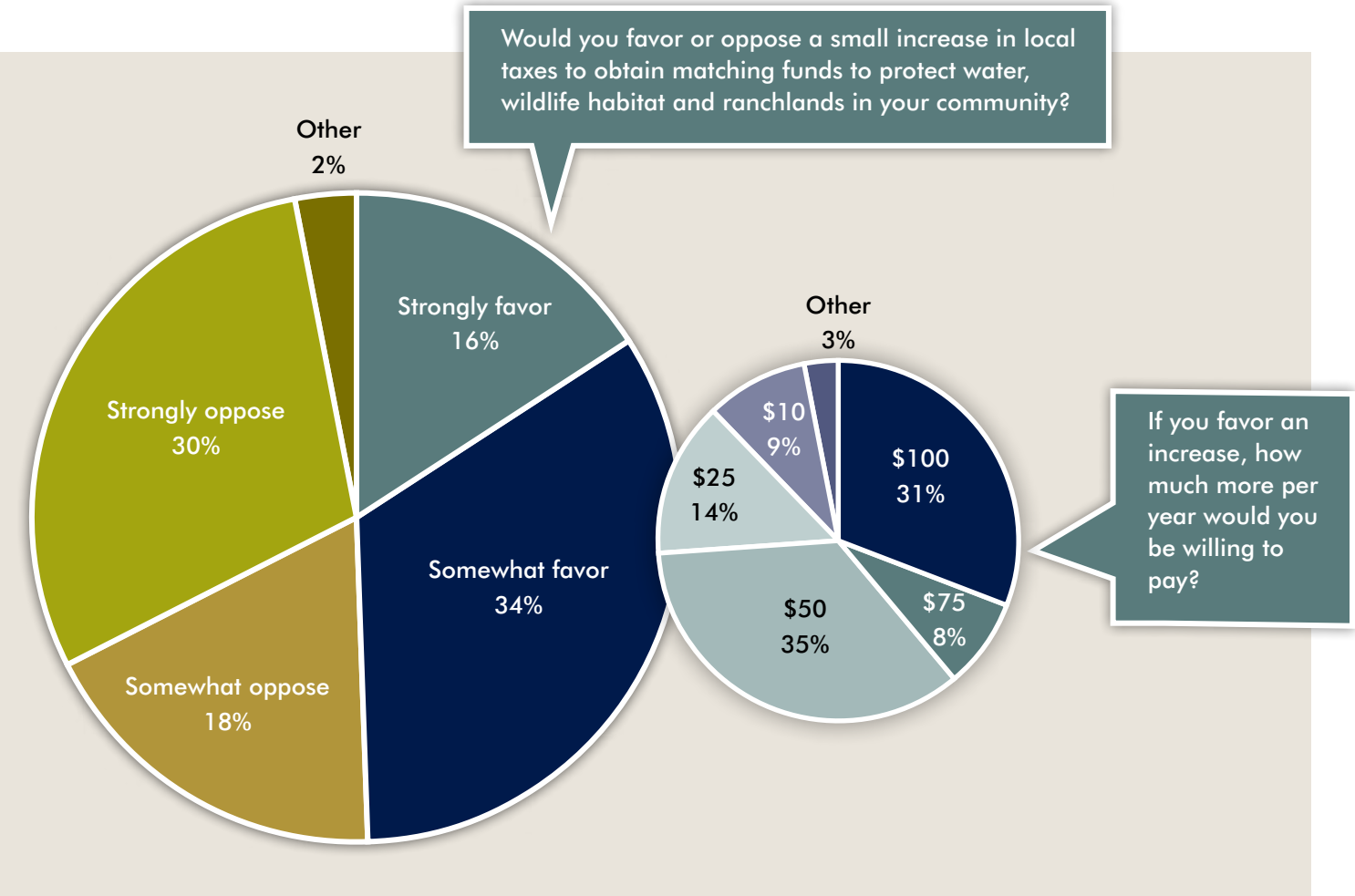


Despite the economic downturn, a strong majority of Wyoming voters favored setting aside more state money to protect land, air, water, wildlife habitat, and ranchlands, and half favor a small increase in local taxes to obtain matching state funds to protect these resources in their communities.

Sixty-nine percent of voters said they favor setting aside more state money to protect land, air, water, wildlife habitat, and ranchlands in Wyoming, including 33 percent who indicated they “strongly favor” this concept. In addition, 50 percent of respondents said they would favor a small increase in local taxes in order to obtain matching state funds to protect water, wildlife habitat and ranchlands in their communities. Among those who would favor a small increase in local taxes, 74 percent said they would be willing to pay an additional \$50 to \$100 annually toward a matching fund program.

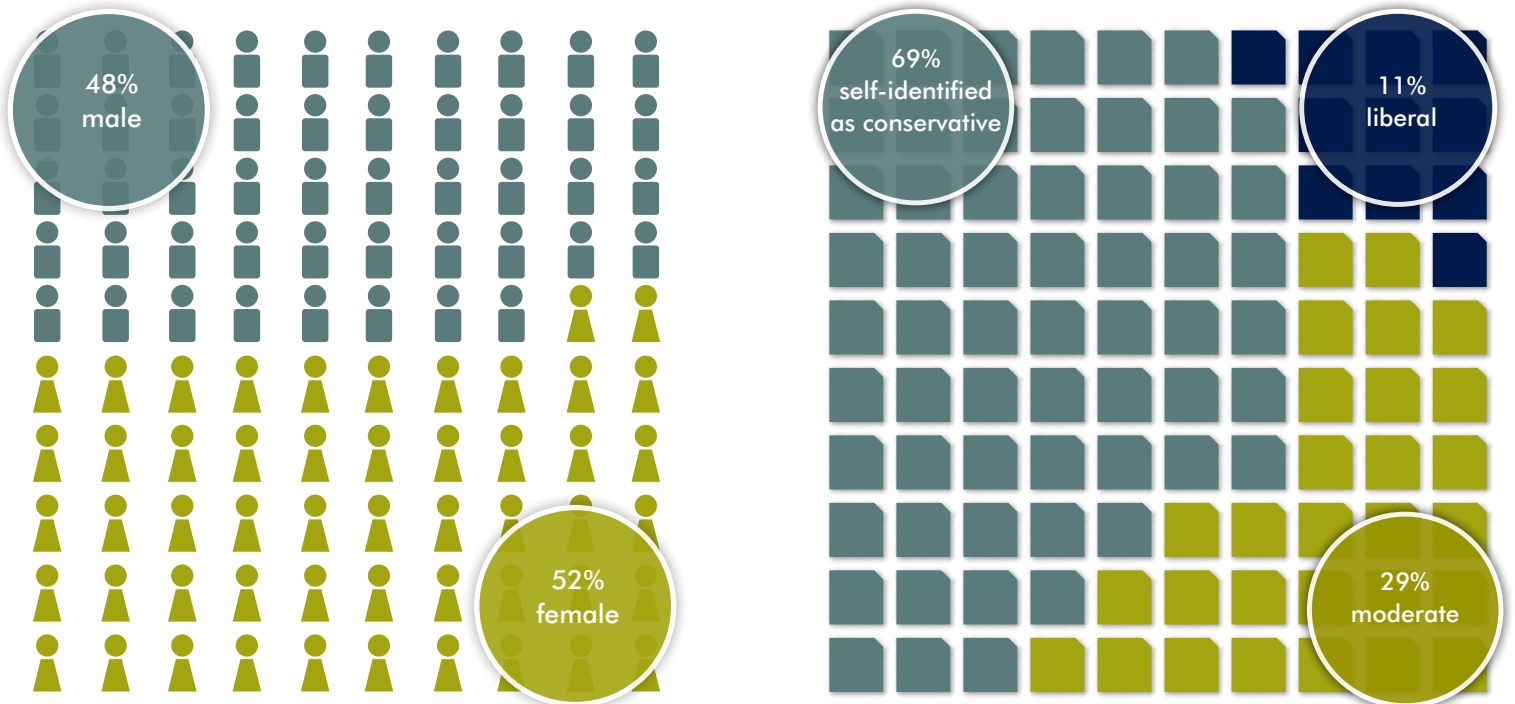
Wyoming voters supported dedicating existing revenues to conservation, including fully funding the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust at the maximum level of \$200 million.

Three-in-five respondents favored fully funding the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) to the maximum \$200 million authorized by law. Support for full funding of the WWNRT was strong among residents statewide and across political affiliations.



This poll was conducted by a bipartisan research team from two independent polling firms: Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, and Public Opinion Strategies. Five hundred telephone interviews were completed in February 2014 with randomly selected registered voters from across Wyoming, with a margin of sampling error of +/- 4.38 percent.

Poll participants at a glance



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Suggested citation:

Freedman, K.S. and N.M. Korfanta. 2014. *Public Opinion on Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming*. Wyoming Open Spaces Initiative. Laramie, Wyoming: Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources.



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