

# Public Opinion on Natural Resource Conservation in Wyoming – 2018

WYOMING OPEN SPACES INITIATIVE

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**Nine out of ten Wyoming voters said conservation issues involving public lands, waters, and wildlife are as important, if not more important, than other issues related to the economy, health care, and education, when deciding whether to support an elected official.**

A statewide poll organized by the William D. Ruckelshaus Institute of Environment and Natural Resources at the University of Wyoming, in partnership with Wyoming Conservation Legacy (a collaboration between Wyoming Wildlife Federation and Rocky Mountain Farmers Union), The Nature Conservancy in Wyoming, Wyoming Stock Growers Association, and Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust, surveyed public attitudes on several conservation topics in Wyoming. As in previous iterations of the poll conducted in February 2004, May 2007, and February 2014, results showed that Wyomingites value conservation of the state’s water, open spaces, and wildlife, and continue to support a variety of funding mechanisms to protect those resources.

**Wyoming voters viewed loss of family farms and ranches; low levels of water in rivers; and pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams, as the top three most serious conservation issues facing the state.**

When asked to characterize several issues as “extremely serious,” “very serious,” “somewhat serious,” or “not a problem,” survey respondents identified loss of family farms and ranches as the top conservation concern in the state, with 82 percent of participants saying it is a serious problem (Figure 1). Additional concerns included low levels of water in rivers (78 percent), and pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams (77 percent).

**Concerns related to water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, and development impacts have increased among Wyoming voters over the last four years.**

Compared to 2014 poll results, findings from the 2018 survey indicate that several conservation concerns are on the rise with Wyoming voters (Table 1). Wyoming voters showed the greatest increase in concern for water quality and loss of fish and wildlife habitat.

**Wyoming voters’ top three conservation funding priorities**

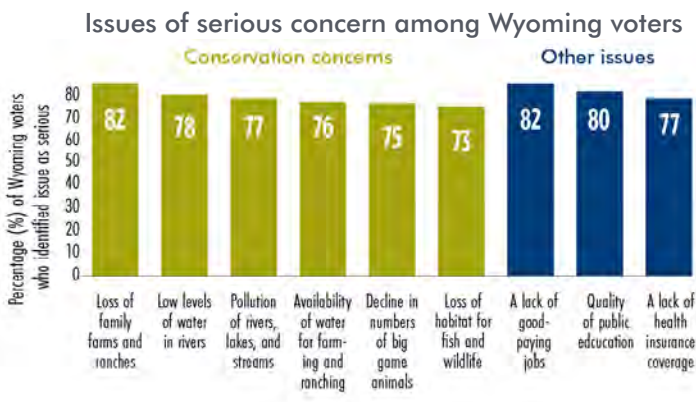
- Protecting and restoring water quality of rivers, lakes, and streams
- Protecting fish and wildlife habitat
- Conserving land corridors that wildlife like deer and elk use for migration

**Wyoming voters hunt, fish, and participate in outdoor recreational activities at far-higher rates than voters nationally.**

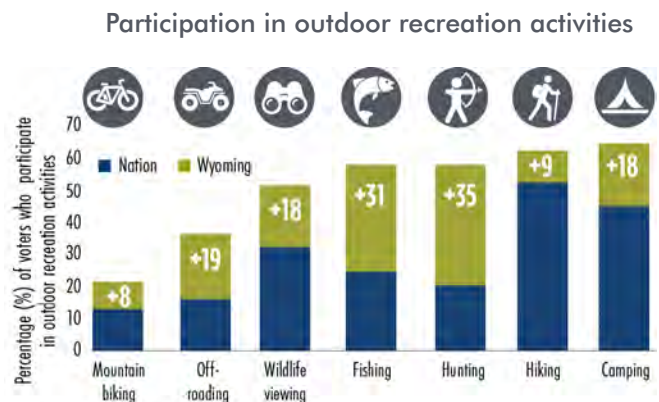
Over half (54 percent) of Wyoming voters identify as either a hunter or an angler, compared to just 19 and 23 percent (respectively) of voters nationally (Figure 2). Wyomingites also said they participate in outdoor recreation activities like camping, hiking, mountain biking, wildlife watching, and off-roading at substantially higher rates than voters nationally.

**A majority of Wyoming voters supported setting aside more funding for conservation, including support for local tax increases and funding the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resources Trust at the maximum level.**

Consistent with findings from the 2008 and 2014 polls, Wyomingites continue to show strong support for increased investment in conservation. In 2018, more than three-in-five



**Figure 1.** Conservation issues of serious concern compared to other issues.



**Figure 2.** Wyoming voter participation in outdoor recreation activities compared to voters nationally.

**Table 1.** Voter concerns about water, wildlife, and open spaces have increased since 2014.

Conservation issue	2014 (% Extremely/ Very serious)	2018 (% Extremely/ Very serious)	Change in conservation concern
Pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams	18%	41%	+23%
Loss of fish and wildlife habitat	24%	40%	+16%
Availability of water for wildlife and recreation	16%	29%	+13%
Decline in numbers of big game animals	31%	41%	+10%
Natural areas being split up by oil and gas development	24%	34%	+10%
The impact of oil and gas drilling on our land, air, and water	22%	32%	+10%
Availability of water for farming and ranching	34%	42%	+8%
Natural areas being split up by new housing and commercial developments	27%	35%	+8%
Loss of family farms and ranches	35%	41%	+6%

respondents said they favored fully funding the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust (WWNRT) to the maximum \$200 million authorized by law (Figure 3). That support was evident statewide, including in every type of community (i.e., city, small town, rural) and political party, and was especially strong among voters who hunt, fish, or participate in other outdoor recreation activities. Voters also showed the highest level of support for local tax increases to fund conservation since 2007 (Figure 4). A majority of voters across the political spectrum said they would support a local tax increase to fund conservation.

**A majority of Wyoming voters opposed states taking over management of national public lands.**

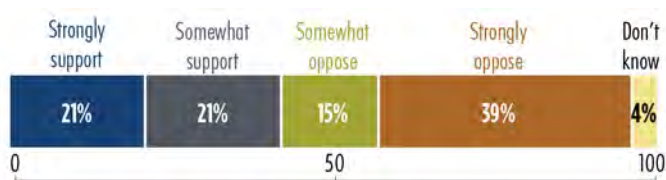
When asked if they would support or oppose a proposal that would give state governments authority to decide the future management of public lands, 54 percent of respondents said they would oppose the proposal (Figure 5). Moreover, a large percentage of voters said they perceived positive impacts of national public lands, including providing opportunities for children to explore and learn about nature (86 percent), supporting wildlife (84 percent), protecting clean water (80 percent), and adding to the overall quality of life in Wyoming (80 percent).

Would you support or oppose the State Legislature fully funding the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust to preserve wildlife habitat, ranchlands, and water in the state?



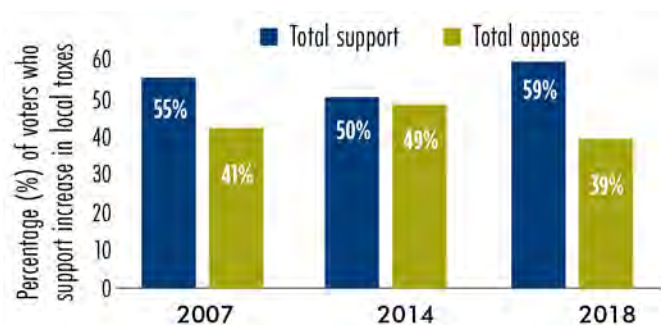
**Figure 3.** Wyoming voter support for funding WWNRT at the maximum \$200 million level.

Would you support a proposal to transfer management of public lands to the states?



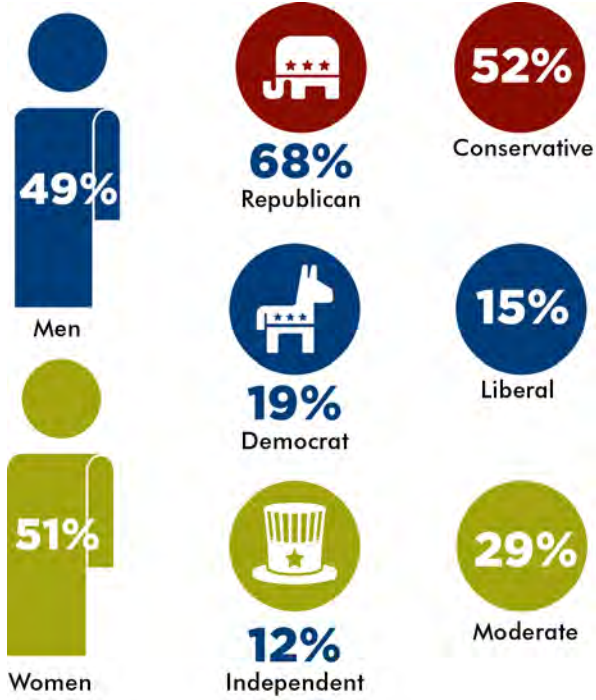
**Figure 5.** A majority of voters opposed transferring management of federal public lands to the states.

Support for increasing local taxes to fund conservation, 2007–2018



**Figure 4.** Voters showed the highest level of support for local tax increases to fund conservation in eleven years.

Poll participants at a glance.



*This poll was conducted by Public Opinion Strategies, which completed 600 telephone interviews in October 2018 with randomly selected, likely voters from across Wyoming (margin of sampling error was +/- 4.0 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval).*

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