



Coloradans Express Strong Support for Wilderness Protection

A May 2007 poll conducted by Talmey-Drake found that a solid majority of Colorado voters favor additional wilderness designation of federal public lands in Colorado. This support is shared widely among Coloradans across geographic, political party affiliation and gender categories, and is nearly identical whether respondents hunt, fish or recreate in other ways. Specific results are highlighted below.

- **Nearly Three-Quarters of Coloradans Statewide Agree Wilderness Quality Lands Are More Important for Recreation, Tourism and Wildlife than for Energy Development and Motorized Recreation.** When read pro-wilderness and anti-wilderness statements, nearly three-quarters (71%) of those surveyed agree with the pro-wilderness argument, versus 24% who align themselves with the anti-wilderness argument. This support was consistent across all geographic regions of the state (ranging from 59% to 76%, with both Denver and West Slope at 76%). There is also majority support for the pro-wilderness statement across all political parties; although support is higher among Democrats (85%) and Independents (76%), Republicans also favor BLM wilderness (52% supporting versus 43% opposed).

Supporters of more wilderness protection say Colorado's population has grown 20 percent in the past eight years and new development uses up about 250 acres every day. They also point out that tourism, recreation and hunting are some of the largest contributors to Colorado's economy, and that this rapid growth, as well as increased drilling of oil and gas on our public lands, is putting intense pressure on Colorado's national parks, wilderness areas and forests. Therefore more of the state's remaining wild places should be protected for recreation, wildlife, and our children before it's too late. Further, they say that we can never drill our way to energy independence and we ought to implement sustainable energy alternatives before we damage these last best wild places.

Opponents of more wilderness protection say there are already enough protected areas in Colorado. They say the state has more than 30 million acres designated as national parks and forests, state parks, and open space, and more than ten percent of this 30 million acres is already locked up as wilderness, where off-road vehicles users and mountain bikers are prohibited. Further, they say that locking up more wilderness areas goes too far by banning oil and gas exploration at a time we need more domestic oil and gas production to provide greater energy independence from the Middle East countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran.

Now, with which do you tend to agree more – the statement in support of more wilderness protection, or the statement opposed to more wilderness protection?

- **Voters Favor Protection of Wilderness-Quality Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands.** About one million out of the eight million acres of public lands managed in Colorado by the BLM meet the criteria for wilderness designation. Nearly two-thirds of Coloradans statewide (64%) support wilderness designation of these BLM lands -- 70% strongly so -- versus 27% who oppose this proposal (55% strongly so). Again, there is majority support for this wilderness proposal across all geographic regions of the state and political parties.

- **West Slopers Strongly Support Additional Wilderness near their Communities.**

Seventy percent of West Slope respondents favor designation of wilderness-quality Forest Service or BLM lands in or near the county where they live, 84% strongly so. Only 23% of those surveyed on the West Slope are in opposition (75% strongly opposed). This support is particularly high among Democrats (78%) and Independents (77%), but less so among Republicans (48% supportive versus 41% in opposition).

- **Coloradans Believe Wilderness is Important to the Economy and their Quality of Life.**

When read statements about wilderness, more than 90% agree that wilderness areas are important economically for the hunting, fishing and tourism they support, versus 9% who disagree. This result is very consistent across political party and geographic region.

Strong support (80%) is also found for the statement that “[t]he presence of nearby wilderness helps define Colorado and is an important reason why I choose to live here.” While high across all geographic regions, this sentiment is highest on the West Slope (89%, with 67% feeling strongly) and lowest on the Eastern Plains at 68%.

- **Coloradans Are Not Swayed by Energy and Motorized Recreation Arguments Against Wilderness.** Only 33% of respondents agree with a statement that wilderness-quality lands are needed for domestic energy development, while 71% support an alternative statement that wilderness-quality lands should not be sacrificed for energy development but clean energy alternatives pursued instead.

Similarly, a statement suggesting that wilderness unfairly restricts off-road vehicles users and mountain bikers from recreation opportunities receives much less support (37%) than an alternative statement arguing that these uses have ample access to the majority of public lands while additional wilderness is necessary for quiet uses (78%). Notably support for this statement is highest on the West Slope and North Corridor (Boulder, Larimer and Weld counties) at 83%.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy, Inc., a public opinion and market research firm in Boulder, Colorado. The results of this survey are based on 617 random telephone interviews with Colorado residents, conducted from May 1st to 14th, 2007. Quotas were established to obtain equal representation for men and women, and an appropriate representation from among certain counties¹. The West Slope was then oversampled to obtain approximately 100 completed interviews on the West Slope. Results were then weighted to reflect the actual population of the West Slope. A random sample of 617 has a worst-case 95% confidence interval of plus or minus 3.9% about any one reported percentage.

The poll was commissioned by Colorado Environmental Coalition, The Wilderness Society and Wilderness Workshop. For more information, please contact: Elise Jones, CEC, 303-534-7066, x1504; Suzanne Jones, TWS, 303-650-5818, x102; or Sloan Shoemaker, WW, 970-963-3977.

¹ Quotas were established for Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo and Weld.