

Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative

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University of Montana 2018 Public Lands Survey Results

Results find growing support for public lands and policies that protects them

(MISSOULA) – A [University of Montana survey](#) of likely Montana voters released today found growing support for public lands across the state and for policies that protect and expand them. This includes the Land and Water Conservation Fund, new wilderness designations, and a new National Monument designation near Glacier National Park.

That's according to the third biannual Public Lands Survey commissioned by the University of Montana's Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative (COCGYI) which surveyed 500 registered Montana voters. The goal according to the Program's director, Rick Graetz, is a better understanding of where Montanans align on current issues and policies that impact the state's public lands and the people who use them.

"Regardless of the policy we tested Montanans are more often on the side of enhancing public lands not removing protections," said Rick Graetz, Director of the COCGYI and member of the University of Montana's Geography Department. "This support seems to be intensifying and is driven by our frequent use of public lands and the positive economic benefits associated with them."

The poll was conducted by Republican pollster Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies and Democratic pollster Dave Metz of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates. The pollsters say findings are similar to past surveys, but new data shows growing support for specific policies that protect public lands.

For instance, Montanans are more likely to support new Wilderness destinations than they were when the question was first asked in 2014. Support for federal wilderness jumped to 57 percent this year and climbs to 65% when Montanans learn that 3% of the state's lands are currently protected as Wilderness.

Montanans are also more likely to reject current legislative policy that proposes to eliminate protections for 29 Wilderness Study Areas across the state, with the majority (54%) wanting to keep the areas the way they are. Only 11% of voters surveyed agree that the existing protections should be eliminated.

"Compared to our survey four years ago, we see even stronger support for maintaining or adding to wilderness in Montana," said Lori Weigel of Public Opinion Strategies. "The majority of Montanans either want to keep things

the way they are or designate new lands as wilderness. They also definitely feel the process should be informed by local communities and stakeholders,” she said.

Voters are also more likely to support the Land and Water Conservation Fund than they were four years ago. Seventy-six percent of Montanans support the Land and Water Conservation Fund which is four points higher than in 2014.

New public lands issues surveyed this year include the Antiquities Act and its potential use in Montana.

According to the survey, Montana voters overwhelmingly support the President’s authority to declare a National Monument. Support for this authority is bipartisan but is strongest among the state’s GOP voting block.

Seventy-six percent of voters also support a recommendation by the Trump administration to declare the Badger-Two Medicine region near Glacier National Park a National Monument. When asked to prioritize management considerations for a potential National Monument, Montanans are more likely to say a Monument should protect existing recreation, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for community input.

The survey also asked Montana voters to weigh in on the following issues regarding public lands in the state:

- 73 percent support the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project, which strengthens protections for 80,000 acres of land in western Montana while opening new areas for motorized recreation and timber harvest;
- 72 percent of Montanans would support a proposal to feature less visited public lands in the state’s tourism promotion efforts.
- 82 percent of Montanans say public lands help the economy. The economic impact of public lands is far more likely to be realized today than it was four years ago.
- 87 percent of Montanans say conservation issues are important considerations in their voting decisions.

Graetz says his program doesn’t take positions, but he hopes the results enable more discussion as public lands debates around wilderness protection, conservation funding, and National Monuments unfold in the Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystems.

“We are in the midst of several policy discussions right now about the long-term protection of various public lands and I think it’s a good thing to understand how voters are reacting,” he said. “I would encourage all of Montana’s elected officials to take these results to heart.”

A summary of the results and the full survey is available for [download at 2018 Voter Survey](#).

The 2018 Public Lands Survey was conducted by telephone from April 12-17th, with a margin of error of **+/- 4.38 percent**.

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