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# Survey Shows Voters Near Unanimous in Support for Conservation

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New survey results released on August 23, 2012 find that New Hampshire voters across the political spectrum overwhelmingly support conservation efforts in the state, believe the state should fund such efforts, and want fee revenues intended for the protection of open land and historic sites used only for those purposes.



The survey of 505 registered voters was conducted by the UNH Survey Center, an independent non-partisan academic survey research organization. It was funded by a trio of conservation groups: the New Hampshire chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, and The Trust for Public Land.

The poll finds that *ninety-seven percent* of the New Hampshire voters surveyed agree (76% strongly agree and 21% somewhat agree) with the statement “we must invest in land conservation to protect New Hampshire’s quality of life for future generations.” This support for protecting land cuts across party lines, with 94% of self-identified Republicans, 98% of Independents, and 99% of Democrats agreeing. Support for land conservation was also consistent across every region of the state.

Most voters (86%) say preserving land for water quality protection is a very important part of land conservation, 81% say preserving forest land and working forests is very important, followed by preserving wildlife habitat, farmland, historic and cultural sites and land for recreation (each over 60%).

Voters also see a connection between conservation and the state’s economy. Ninety-five percent of those surveyed agree that “protecting land, water, and wildlife in New Hampshire is critical to our tourist industry and helps create jobs.”

At the same time, most voters disagree with arguments that are used against state funding for land conservation. Only 23% agree that “the legislature has to make hard choices in these tough times, and we just can’t afford land conservation right now,” and 11% agree that “New Hampshire has more than enough forests, farms, and open space, and we do not need to do any more to protect them.”

When it comes to using state funds for conservation, 81% of surveyed voters agree that there should be state funding for land conservation efforts, versus just 13% who think state funds should not be used (6% are neutral or don’t know). Support for state funding again cuts across party lines: state funding for conservation is supported by 76% of self-identified Republicans, 72% of Independents, and 90% of Democrats.

The poll also asked voters about the state’s current conservation funding program, the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP). Established in 2000 by nearly-unanimous votes in the Legislature, LCHIP is a state authority that makes matching grants to protect natural, cultural and historic resources. The program has helped fund the protection of over 263,000 acres of land around the state and save and revive 126 historic structures.

The bad news for LCHIP is that after twelve years, most New Hampshire residents have still not heard of the program. Only 15% of voters surveyed were very or somewhat familiar with LCHIP, while 69% were not familiar with it at all. However, once survey respondents were given a description of what the program actually does, 66% had a favorable opinion of LCHIP, versus just 3% unfavorable (28% said they still didn’t know enough to say).

While they may not know much about LCHIP, the overwhelming majority of voters oppose state lawmaker’s raids on the program’s funds. In 2008 the LCHIP program’s funding was moved out of the state budget to its own dedicated funding source: a \$25 fee collected on the filing of certain documents at the County Registries of Deeds. However, in the five years since the dedicated fee was established, more than half of all the revenues have been diverted by the State Legislature to fund general government. In the state’s current fiscal year, all of the “LCHIP fee” revenues go to the state’s general fund, and nothing to LCHIP.

When asked whether they approve or disapprove of the Legislature’s diversion of LCHIP

funds for other purposes, 79% said they disapprove (65% strongly disapprove), versus just 6% who say they approve of the funding diversions. Yet again, opposition to the diversion of LCHIP's funds cuts across party lines. 79% if those who identify themselves as Republicans oppose the diversions, as do 70% of Independents, and 85% of Democrats.

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