



*Fairbank,  
Maslin,  
Maullin &  
Associates*

*Opinion Research &  
Public Policy Analysis*

**TO:** Interested Parties

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**RE:** Key Findings from National Voter Survey on Conservation

**DATE:** September 25, 2009

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The Democratic polling firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) and the Republican polling firm of Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently partnered to complete a national survey of registered voters to assess public attitudes toward conservation, and to gauge support for increased investments in the protection of land, water and wildlife.<sup>1</sup> The survey results show that – not surprisingly – American voters are deeply concerned about the economy. However they are also highly committed to conservation, and three out of four believe that we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time. Even more strikingly, the survey results show that three in five voters support increased public investments in conservation at the state, local, or federal levels – and are willing to pay a small increase in taxes to support them. Together, the data provide ample evidence that American voters have a strong and undiminished desire to conserve the nation’s land, water, and wildlife.

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- **American voters continue to offer strong support for public investments in conservation – and that support has held steady despite the economic downturn.** Survey respondents were asked whether they would favor public investments in conservation, described as follows:

*“In general, would you support or oppose programs through which your STATE OR*

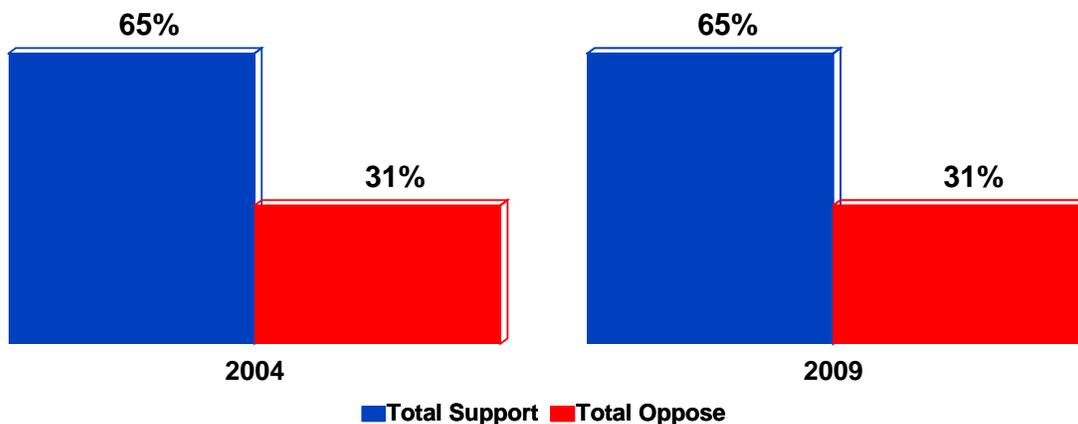
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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From September 8-13, 2009, FMM&A and POS completed 800 telephone interviews with registered voters nationwide. The sample included 700 voters with landline telephones, as well as 100 voters who mostly or entirely use cell phones. The margin of sampling error for the full national sample is +/- 3.8%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be larger.

*LOCAL government would purchase land to protect water quality; natural areas; lakes, rivers or beaches; neighborhood parks; and wildlife habitat if it required a small increase in taxes?”*

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, nearly two-thirds of American voters (65%) support this idea. This broad support is remarkable, given that 1) the proposal explicitly calls for a “small increase in taxes” at a time when economic concern is high and trust in government is low, and 2) support has not dropped at all since 2004, despite the dramatically worsened economic environment.

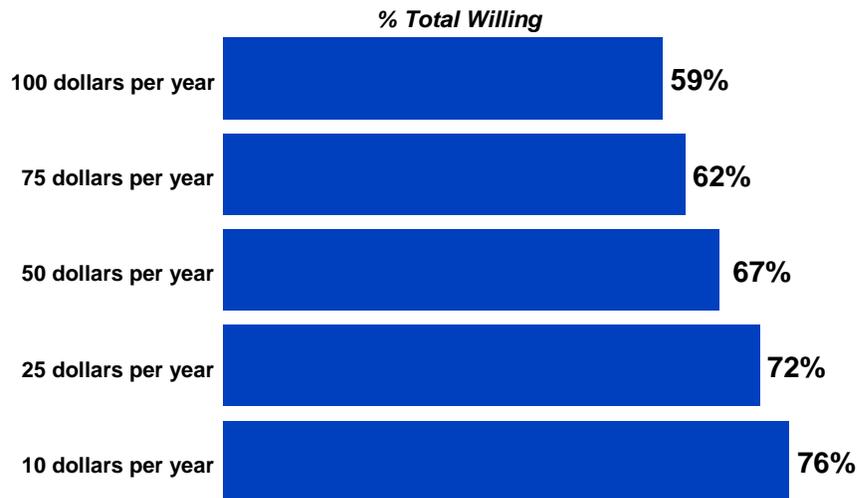
**FIGURE 1:**  
**Support for Increased Investment in State and Local Land Conservation,**  
**2004 and 2009 (Split Sampled)**



It is also striking that voters offer a nearly equal level of support (60%) for an identical set of conservation investments, again described as requiring a “small increase in taxes” at the *federal* level. Together, the data make clear that voter support for public investments in conservation has not diminished at all over the course of the past five years.

- **American voters are also willing to commit their own money in support of conservation; solid majorities would be willing to pay as much as \$100 more in annual taxes to support conservation.** Figure 2 on the following page highlights a question in which respondents were asked to indicate how much in additional taxes they would be willing to pay to support the types of conservation programs described in the previous questions. Nearly three in five would be willing to pay \$100 per year, and even larger majorities would be willing to pay smaller amounts.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Willingness to Pay Additional Taxes for Conservation**



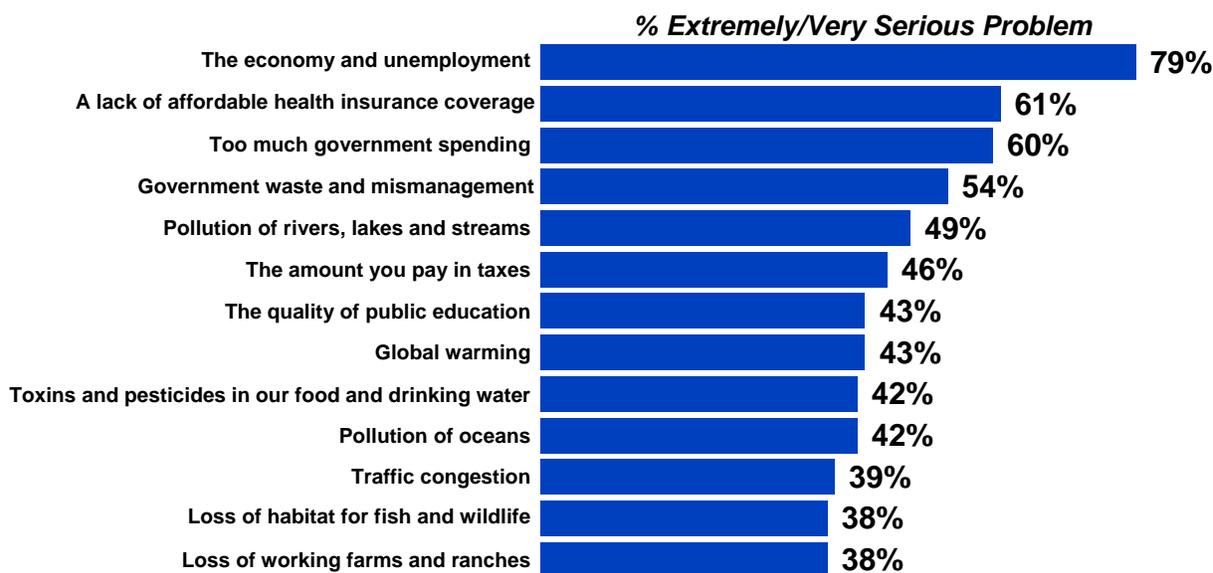
Voters' expressed willingness to pay additional taxes for conservation has been substantiated by their consistent support for state and local ballot measures that dedicate additional revenue to conservation programs. In last November's election, six weeks after the Wall Street meltdown, voters nationwide approved 62 of the 87 conservation finance ballot measures placed before them – a 71% approval rate – yielding over \$7 billion more for conservation.

- **Support for investments in conservation stems from voters' strong personal connections to the environment.** Voters' concern about the environment grows from their strong sense of identification with America's lands and waters, and their high degree of personal contact with them. Consider the following:
  - ✓ 70 percent of all voters nationally identify themselves as a "conservationist;"
  - ✓ More than four in five (81%) say they have visited a state or local park in the past year;
  - ✓ A majority of American voters (52%) report having visited a national park in the past year, with a similar majority (53%) indicating that they intend to visit a national park in the year to come;
  - ✓ Nearly one-third (32%) have had a hunting or fishing license in the past three years; and
  - ✓ Small but still significant proportions have donated money to an environmental organization in the past year (36%) or volunteered their time (21%) – proportions that have remained statistically unchanged since 2004, despite the economic downturn.
- **Even though the economy is a dominant national concern, voters see a number of conservation issues as pressing problems.** The survey results confirm that the economy and jobs are the foremost concerns on voters' minds. **Figure 3** on the following page shows responses to a question that asked respondents to evaluate a variety of issues as "extremely," "very," "somewhat," or "not serious" problems, and the economy was overwhelmingly rated as the most pressing problem with four in five labeling it at least a "very serious" problem. Other issues related to money and finances also scored high – a lack of affordable health

insurance and government spending and waste.

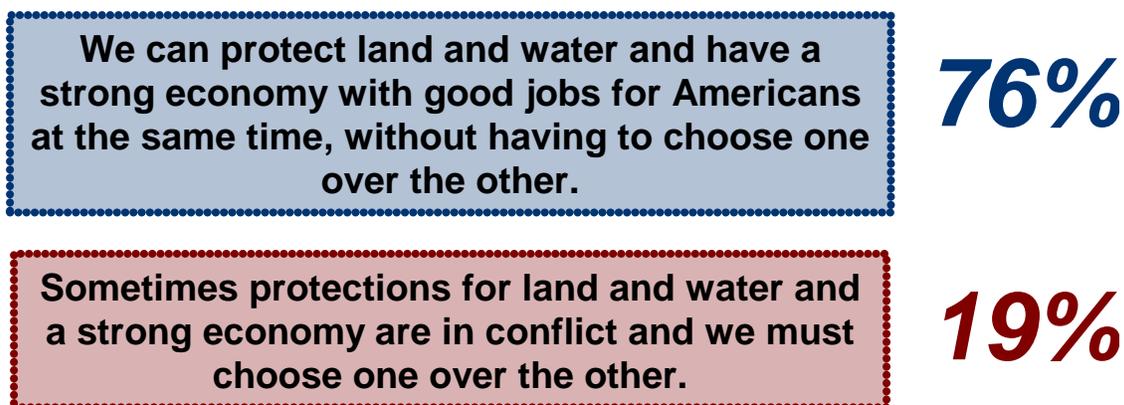
But a number of conservation-related concerns also rank high in voters' estimation: at least two in five see pollution of rivers, lakes and streams; global warming; contamination of drinking water; and pollution of oceans as “very serious” problems – placing them on a par with issues like taxes and education. And almost as many express concern about loss of fish and wildlife habitat or working farms and ranches. Sizable proportions of Americans continue to see these issues as pressing concerns.

**FIGURE 3:**  
**Evaluation of the Seriousness of Problems Facing the Country**



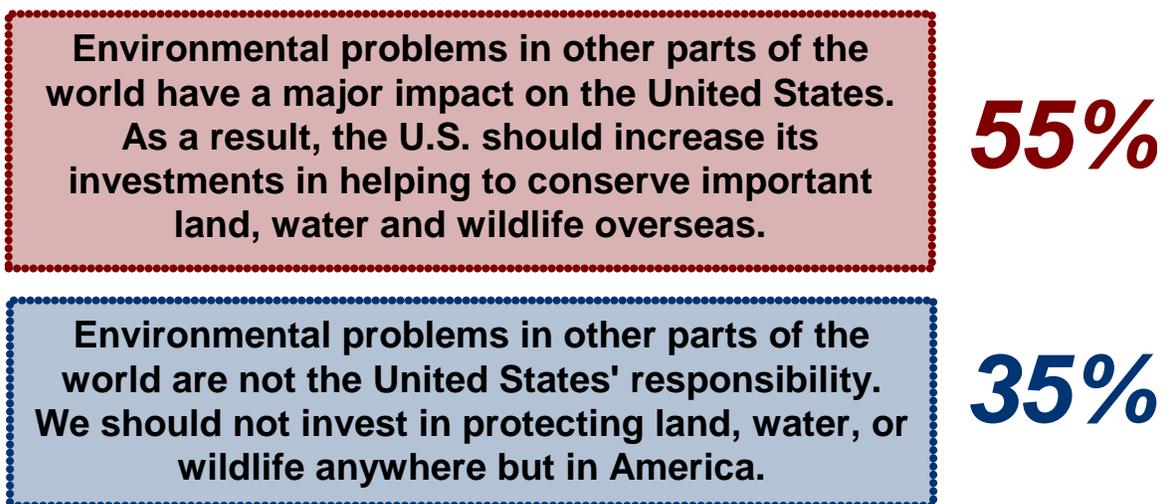
- **The overwhelming majority of American voters believe that we can continue to protect our environment while strengthening our economy.** While voters may express a higher degree of concern about the economy than about conservation issues, it does not indicate that they view those issues as being in conflict. In fact, most voters see no reason why we cannot continue to protect land and water while maintaining the country's economic strength. As shown in **Figure 4** on the following page, more than three-quarters of voters (76%) believe we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, while fewer than one in five believe that those concerns are even “sometimes” in conflict.

**FIGURE 4:**  
Choice of Statements About the Relationship Between the Environment and the Economy



- **Voters also see an important role for investment in global conservation efforts.** The survey also asked voters how they felt about investing in conservation projects outside American borders. As shown **Figure 5** below, a 55-percent majority see such investments as a critical way of reducing the impact of environmental problems on the United States. Only about one-third (35%) believe that America should confine its conservation investments within US borders.

**FIGURE 5:**  
Choice of Statements About Investment in International Conservation



Overall, the survey results provide compelling evidence that despite a recession of historic depths and significant concerns about government spending, American voters remain strongly committed to investments in the protection of the nation's land, water and wildlife. Most voters think of themselves as conservationists and make regular visits to parks, and sizable minorities hunt or fish or give time or money to environmental organizations – personal connections which

lead them to value the natural environment, and to have confidence that it can be protected at the same time as the economy recovers. A sizable majority of voters call for increased government investment in conservation – at the federal, state or local levels – and are willing to support those investments with increased tax payments of their own.