

Poll: Most Oregonians want environmental preservation

Oregon Wild hopes results will be a wake-up call for lawmakers on public policy

BY EMILY GREEN
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Results of a cross-sectional survey conducted across Oregon in early May reveal the majority of both Republicans and Democrats within the state agree on several pertinent environmental policy issues affecting regional habitats.

Protections for wolves and wildlife refuges, along with sustainable forestry, garnered overall, wide-margined support in the public opinion poll conducted by Florida-based Mason-Dixon Polling and Strategy on behalf of Oregon Wild.

Oregon Wild spokesperson Arran Robertson said he hopes this poll will serve as “a wake up call for policy makers.”

That’s because, like similar polls his organization has commissioned in the past, Robertson said issues broached do not appear to be highly partisan or controversial, with results showing more than 60 or 70 percent of voters in agreement on the environmental issues pollsters raised.

“But when we propose policy solutions – whether they be about forests or public lands or wolves – those decisions become for leaders, much more controversial,” he said. “The public is far beyond our representation on strengthening environmental protections for wildlife and public lands, and there is this disconnect between us and some of our political leadership.”

Pollsters conducted landline and mobile telephone interviews of 625 randomly selected registered voters representing the state’s political, demographic and rural/urban makeup.

The poll found 86 percent of Democrats and 68 percent of Republicans are either strongly or somewhat supportive of requiring that wood products used in mass timber come from “locally, sustainably-sourced forests that restrict steep slope clear cutting.”

Steep-slope clear cutting is allowed under the Oregon Forest Practices Act and accounts for much of the clear cutting that takes place across the state. This can lead to erosion and landslides



Grey wolf

WIKICOMMONS

that negatively impact waterways and fish habitat, Robertson said.

The majority of Republicans, Democrats and Independents in Oregon also agreed the federal government should not siphon large amounts of water from wildlife refuges to irrigate crops during drought.

This question was posed to voters as it relates to Southern Oregon’s Klamath Basin, which contains six wildlife refuges and has been used as a source of water for nearby agriculture during droughts

over the past two decades.

“The wildlife refuge, which is supposed to be a refuge for wildlife, ends up becoming this holding tank for water for industrial agriculture,” Robertson said.

An Oregon governor has declared a drought in the basin during 10 of the past 16

years, and Gov. Kate Brown declared another drought in March. The frequent water shortages have greatly strained farmers and cattle ranchers in the area. Their reliance on the use of refuge water has in turn taxed the health of salmon and other wildlife, numerous studies show.

Sixty seven percent of the poll’s respondents – 71 percent Democrat and 54 percent Republican – indicated they do not support farming within the boundaries of these wildlife refuges, as is currently practiced.

Robertson said upon visiting Klamath Basin, he’s seen where farmers have hung life-size eagle replicas near their

crops, “designed to scare wildlife off the wildlife refuge.”

While more than half of Republicans voiced support of conservation measures, support was stronger among Democrats and voters who registered as Independent or other. Support was also stronger in the Portland metro and Willamette Valley areas than in rural areas, generally stronger among women than men, and stronger among people younger than 50 than people older than 50.

But Republicans were not in majority support of every conservation measure.

When asked if they were supportive of the Trump administration’s move to open up the Cascade Siskiyou monument in Oregon to logging and energy extraction, 56 percent of Republicans said they support it, while 88 percent of Democrats said they oppose the move.

Robertson said when issues become national talking points they turn partisan.

“But then when we come back with the next question, which is ‘Do you think congressional representatives should be more strident in designating public lands as parks as wilderness and refuges?’ you see the numbers go back up,” he said.

The poll also sought to take the pulse of Oregonians’ perceptions of how seriously wolves threaten Oregon’s cattle industry.

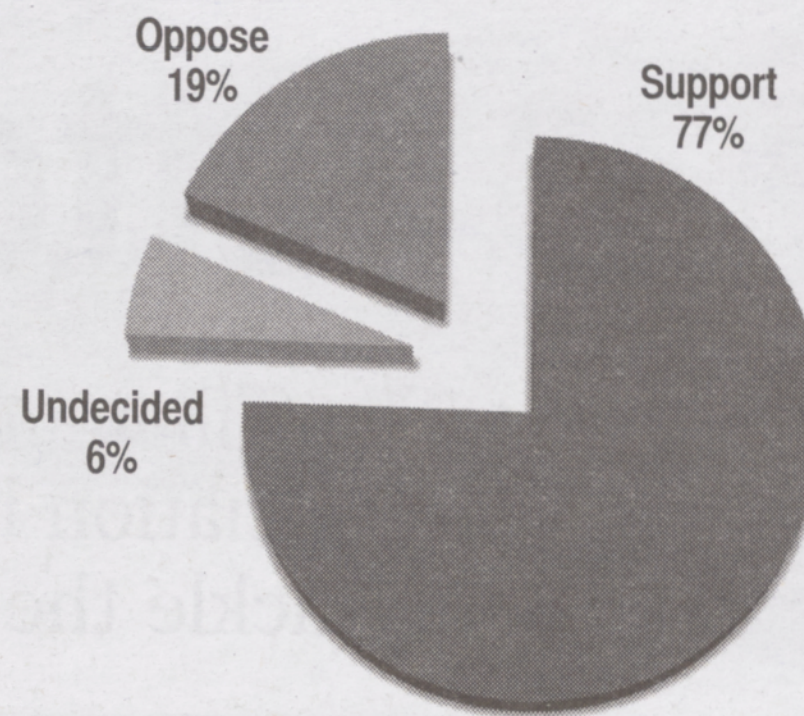
More than half of respondents over-estimated the number of cattle killed by wolves in 2017 (there were 11 cattle deaths that were confirmed as wolf kills), but 79 percent of Democrats and 54 percent of Republicans said they “do not” believe wolves pose an economic threat to the cattle industry. Additionally, 73 percent of Democrats and 56 percent of Republicans said they support continued protections for Oregon’s wolves, with 63 percent of respondents overall in support.

Oregon Wild hopes these poll results will, in part, influence Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife commissioners as they rewrite the state’s Wolf Plan. Changes under consideration include loosening regulations on wolf hunting and lowering the bar for using lethal control of wolf populations to protect cattle.

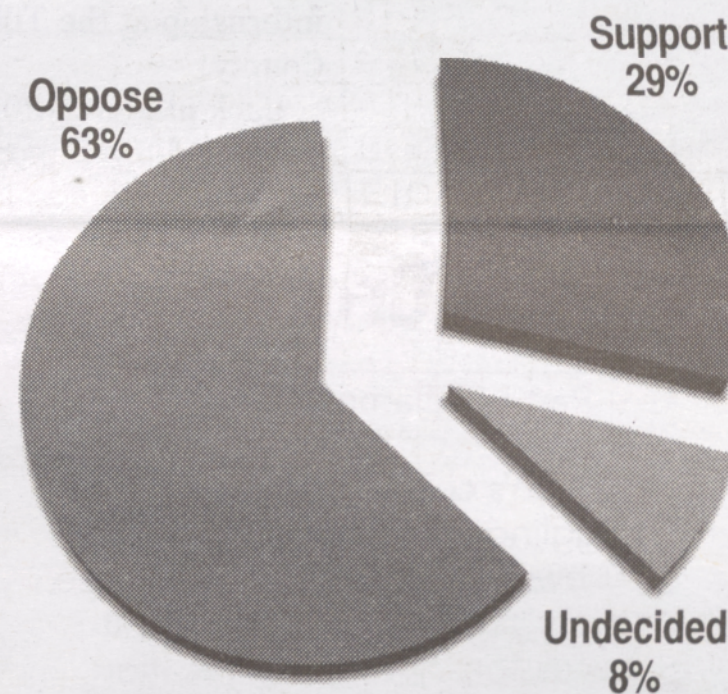
The update was initially slated for completion in 2015, but has been ongoing and could be voted on as early as August.

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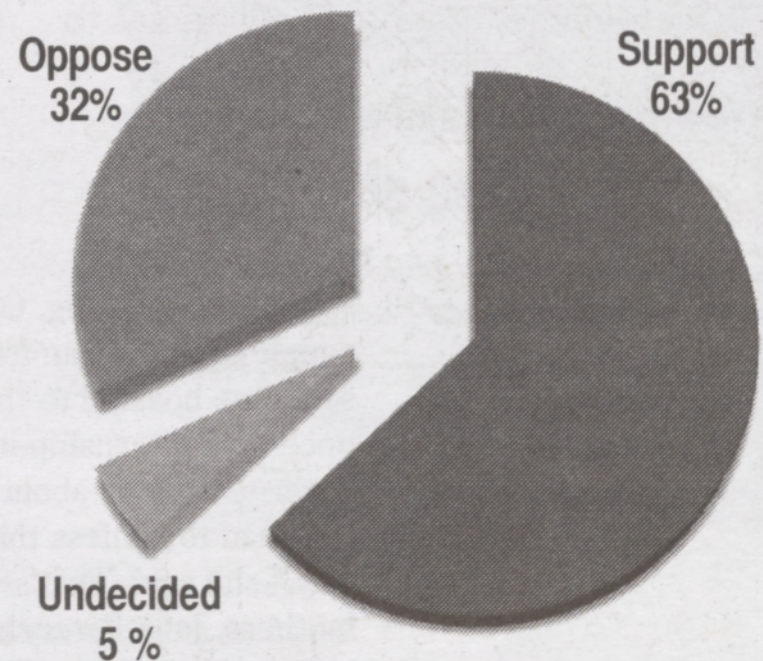
Do you support or oppose requiring wood products used in mass timber projects to come from local, sustainably managed forests that restrict steep slope clear-cutting?



Generally, do you support or oppose the Trump administration opening up the Bears Ears and the Cascade-Siskiyou monuments in Oregon to logging and energy extraction?



Do you support or oppose continued protections for Oregon’s wolves?



Source: Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy
Margin for error is no more than ±4 percentage points



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