

# The Politics of Conservation

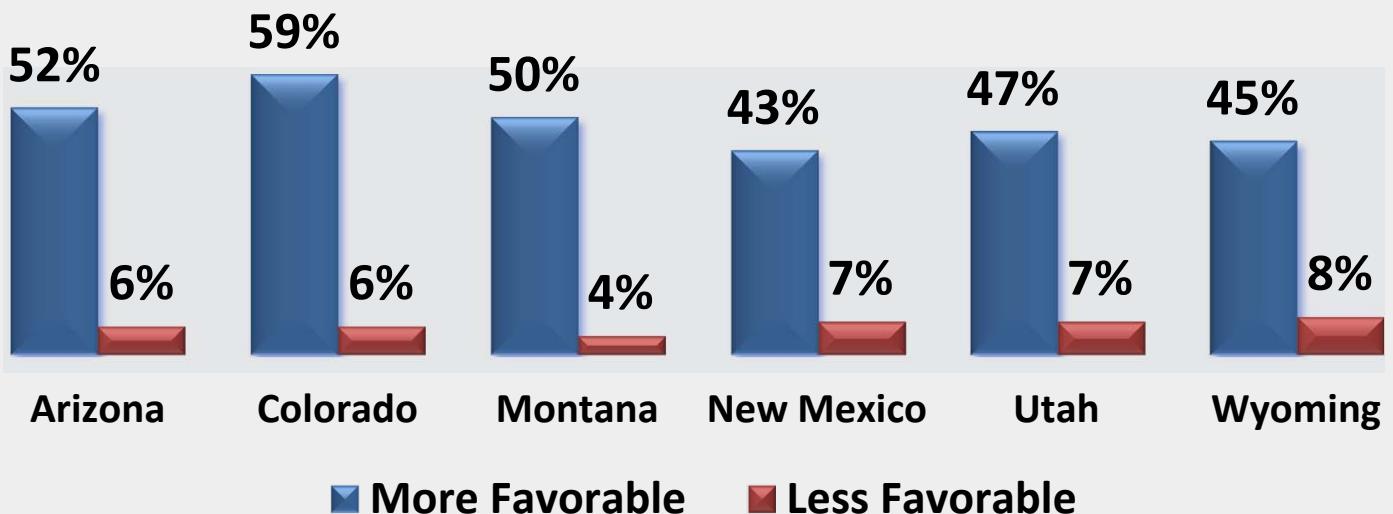
*Majority of Western voters acknowledge not knowing their Representatives' views on conservation; GOP members benefit more from taking a pro-public lands stance.*

This year's Conservation in the West survey once again demonstrates the strong public support for a number of pro-conservation policies. So why do some elected officials in the region have mixed records in voting on these policies?

Most Westerners describe themselves as "conservationist" (63% across the region) and the vast majority engages in outdoor recreation in their state. The outcome of conservation ballot measures in the Western United States has demonstrated that when voters are given an opportunity to support or oppose financing conservation in their community or state, they tend to do so. In fact, voters in four of the survey states (Montana, Utah, Arizona, and Colorado) passed measures benefitting protection of land and water in 2012.

And in fact, voters are inclined to take a positive view of a candidate who espouses pro-conservation positions. For example, when asked about a candidate who supports protecting public lands, a majority of voters say that position alone would give them a "more favorable" impression of that candidate. Moreover, voters are even more positively impressed with a pro-conservation GOP candidate than with a Democratic candidate.

**Perception of Pro-Conservation Republican Candidate By State**



This is particularly true among Independent voters (51% more favorable toward a GOP candidate; 45% toward a Democratic candidate who takes this position).

Moreover, this position is a resounding positive among the respective bases for each party's candidate:

- 50% of Republicans say they would view a GOP candidate more favorably who supports protection of public lands (only 5% less favorably).
- 69% of Democrats say they would view a Democratic candidate more favorably who supports protection of public lands (only 3% less favorably).



Key swing voter sub-groups also tend to be favorably impressed by a candidate who espouses these views\* including...

- 59% of suburban women
- 53% of self-described moderates
- 48% of voters under age 35
- 47% of Latino voters

So why aren't more candidates espousing pro-conservation policies? A lack of focus and attention on the part of voters may in part explain the seeming disconnect.

Most Westerners acknowledge they are unaware of the record of their Member of Congress on protecting land, air and water.

**“Would you say that your Member of Congress probably...”**

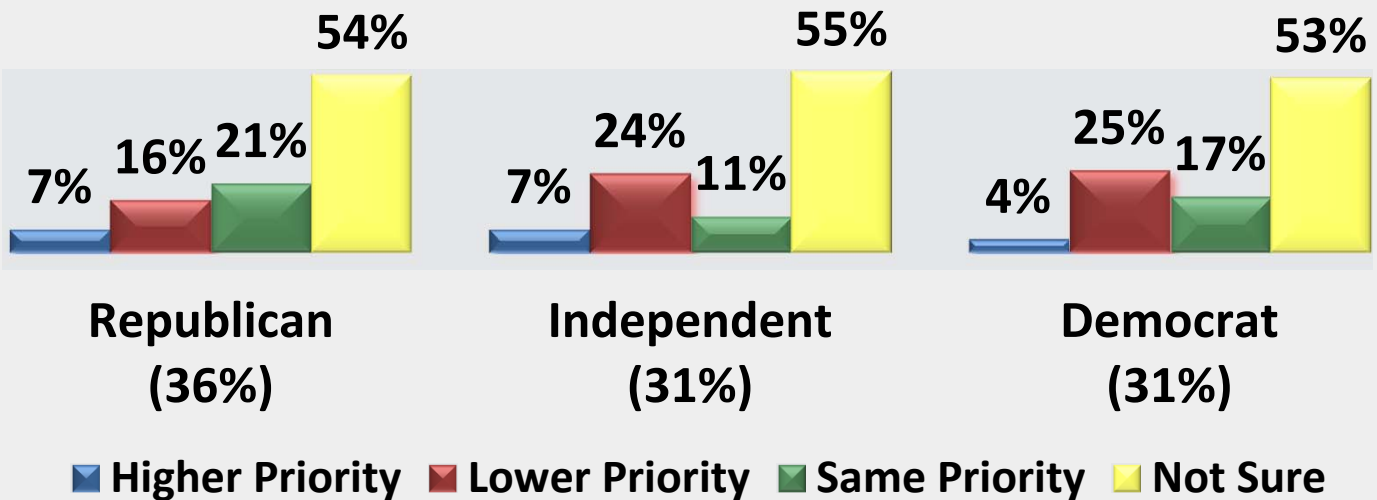
	<i>Total</i>
Places a <b>HIGHER</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>6%</b>
Places the <b>SAME</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>17%</b>
Places a <b>LOWER</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>22%</b>
Not really sure of the positions your Member of Congress has taken	<b>54%</b>

\* Combined Sample

The dynamic is fairly similar in every state ...

	<i>Arizona</i>	<i>Colorado</i>	<i>Montana</i>	<i>New Mexico</i>	<i>Utah</i>	<i>Wyoming</i>
Places a <b>HIGHER</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Places the <b>SAME</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>12%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>31%</b>
Places a <b>LOWER</b> priority on protecting land, air and water than you do	<b>23%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>20%</b>
Not really sure of the positions your Member of Congress has taken	<b>58%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>40%</b>

...and with voters across the political spectrum:



Taken as a whole, the data indicates that voters are not intimately aware with the positions their Representatives are taking on conservation issues. However, pro-conservation positions can be a striking positive for candidates who espouse them, particularly with key swing voter sub-groups.



Moreover, given the positions voters take throughout the survey, it stands to reason that voters could take a less favorable view of an elected official if they were to hear more about their Representative taking positions that are not in line with their own views on these issues. A Western electorate that better understands the positions its elected officials take on conservation issues is likely to reward those who take strong pro-conservation stands.

