

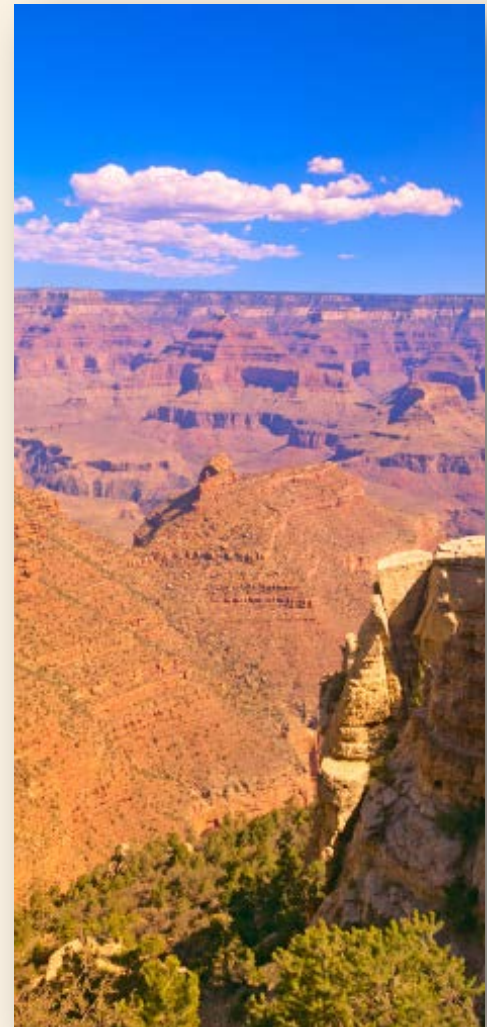
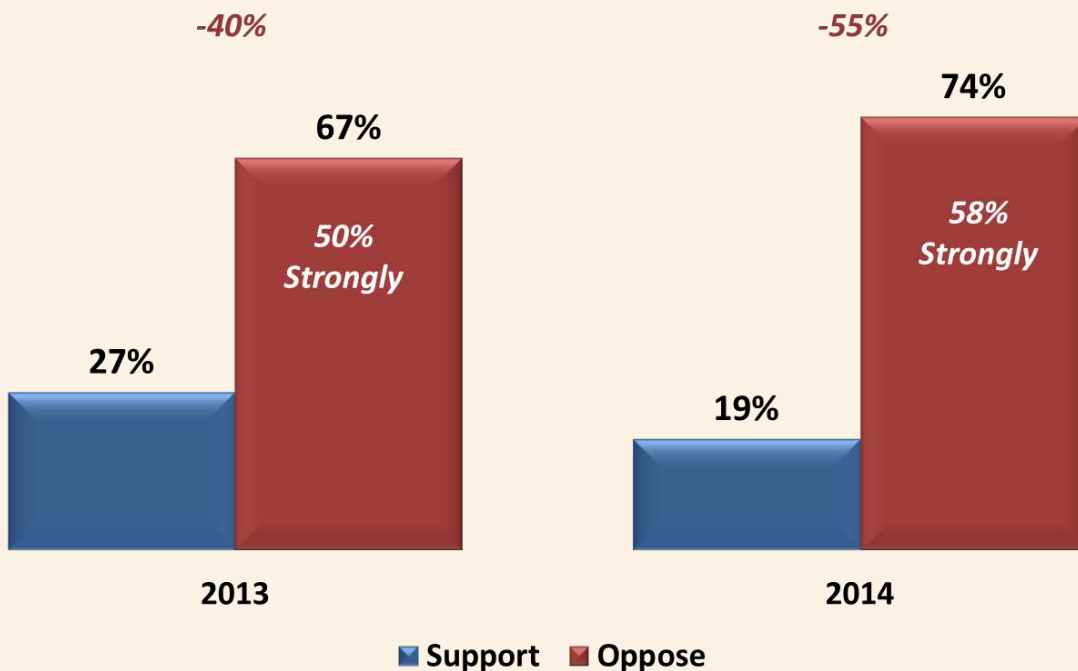
Public Lands

Throughout the last four years of polls, Western voters have told us they value public lands for a number of reasons – from places to recreate to drawing tourists to their state. That leads voters to providing clear direction on policies affecting public lands.

There is strong opposition to selling public lands – even when framed as a way to help reduce the budget deficit, and that opposition has increased since 2013.

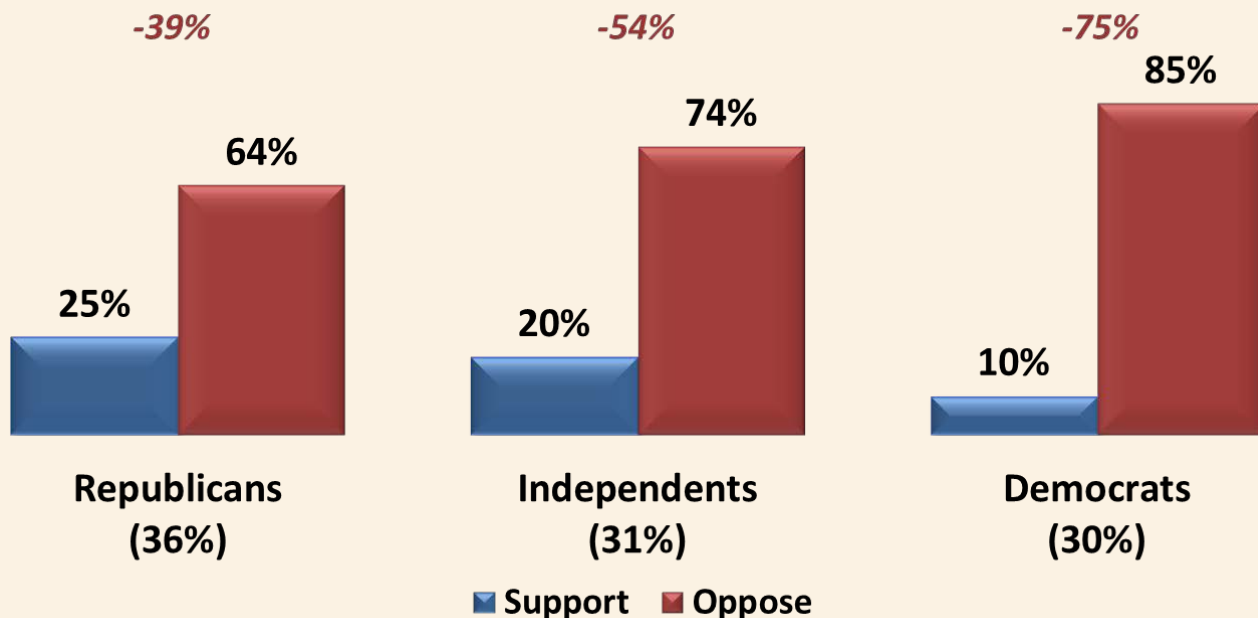
Three-fourths (74%) of voters are now opposed to selling off public lands as a way to reduce the budget deficit, while just 19% of voters support this. Intensity is strongly against it, as 58% say they are strongly opposed to selling off public lands. As the graph indicates, this is a significant increase from 2013. Opposition has increased the most among rural residents, Latinos, and sportsmen.

Selling Public Lands to Reduce Deficit



Opposition to selling off public lands cuts across party lines, as significant majorities of every political persuasion oppose this idea.

Selling Public Lands to Reduce Deficit By Party



And last year, voters continued to overwhelmingly side with opponents of selling public lands even after hearing both viewpoints.

Those who oppose selling off public lands say that public lands are essential to the strength of our state's economy. Public lands in your state generate billions of dollars from attracting tourists; hunters and anglers; high quality businesses, and skilled workers. Selling off these public lands to corporations for development will hurt our economy and quality of life.

71%

Those who support selling off public lands in your state say government should not be in the business of owning and managing land. We can sell millions of acres of these publicly owned lands to private corporations and individuals, raising millions of dollars to bring more money to the government to fund vital services.

23%

Voters are much more likely to vote for a candidate who supports enhancing protections for public lands like national forests and much LESS likely to vote for a candidate who supports selling public lands.

The disdain voters have for selling public lands extends to a candidate – more than three-in-five voters in every single state and the vast majority of voters across the West say they would be less likely to vote for that candidate – with striking negative intensity (72% less likely and 52% much less likely to vote for that candidate). In contrast, the vast majority are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports enhancing protections for public lands (69% more likely, 33% much more likely).



Why this strong response to protecting public lands?

Nearly all – 95% – of Western voters say they have visited public lands in the last year, with more than half exploring these places frequently.

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of voters say they visit public lands more than five times per year, with 35% visiting more than 10 times per year. Sportsmen, Republican men, Montana and Wyoming residents are the most frequent visitors to public lands.

Voters continue to perceive public lands as a main attraction in their area, and overwhelmingly say their closure during the federal shutdown hurt small businesses and the economies of communities in their state.

By more than a three-to-one margin, voters say they would recommend out-of-state visitors go to a natural area such as a national park rather than visit a site in a city (68% natural area; 14% a museum, restaurant or shopping location in a city). In fact, the vast majority of these Westerners say that the closure of public lands during the federal shutdown was “harmful to small businesses and local economies” near these sites.

The closing of national parks and public lands to visitors and recreation during the recent government shutdown hurt small businesses and the economy of communities.

**Agree
85%**
**Disagree
13%**

With direct personal connections and this perception of public lands as the key attractions in their state, no wonder then that Westerners were upset over the closures. They tell us a range of negative emotions that sum up their feelings that they were annoyed (29%), angry (27%), concerned (19%) and upset (14%). Only 9% were indifferent and virtually no one was happy (1%).

A majority of voters support state land conservation efforts to avoid the listing of sage grouse as an endangered species.

Given recent developments, the survey also explored the potential for states to fund natural areas as a way to avoid issues related to the sage grouse.

“As you may know, large parts of sagebrush areas throughout the West have been developed in recent years. That has affected wildlife like mule deer, antelope, and especially the sage grouse. Some states have proposed conserving more of this wildlife habitat to help ensure that sage grouse do not become even more rare. They want to avoid the bird being listed by the federal government as an endangered species, which would trigger more federal regulation and could stop certain development like oil and gas production on public AND private lands.”

There is solid support for this concept across these states, as the following graph depicts, with key swing groups such as Independents (57% support), younger voters (65% support), and Latinos (75% support) even more enthusiastic.

State Funding for Habitat By State

