



*Fairbank,
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FM3

*Public Opinion Research
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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: National Voter Attitudes Toward America's Forests

DATE: April 27, 2011

Commissioned by the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), the bi-partisan polling team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) recently partnered to complete a nationwide survey of voters to assess key public perceptions and values related to forests.¹

The new results reveal a striking consensus among Americans:

- Voters strongly value the nation's forests, especially **as sources of clean air and water.**
- Voters have an increased appreciation for the **economic benefits provided by forests** – such as good-paying jobs and essential products – than they were in previous years.
- Voters also recognize a **variety of serious threats** facing America's forests, like wildfires and harmful insects and diseases.

Given these factors, seven out of ten voters support maintaining or increasing efforts to protect forests and trees in their state.

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

- **Voters continue to value the nation's forests highly, particularly as sources of clean air and water and places for wildlife to live.** The survey found most voters are personally familiar with the nation's forests: two-thirds of voters (67%) say they live within ten miles of a forest or wooded area. Voters also report engaging in various recreational activities that may bring them to forests. These include: viewing wildlife (71% of voters say they do this "frequently" or "occasionally"), hiking on outdoor trails (48%), fishing (43%), overnight camping (38%), hunting (22%), using off-road vehicles (16%), snow-shoeing or cross-country-skiing (15%), and mountain biking (14%).

¹ **Methodology:** From January 17-24, 2011, the bipartisan research team of FM3 and POS completed 1,011 telephone interviews with registered voters across the country. The margin of sampling error for the full statewide sample is +/- 3.1%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be larger.

Taking all of this into account, it should be no surprise that voters value the many benefits forests provide. As shown in **Figure 1**, 92 percent of voters surveyed believe that helping to keep the air clean is at least a “very” important benefit of forests, including 58 percent who believe it is “extremely” important. A nearly identical 91% of voters assign similar importance to forests’ role in filtering water to keep it clean. Solid majorities of voters found other benefits of forests to be “very important” as well, including providing a place for wildlife to live (86%), providing a source of good-paying jobs (73%), supplying products like wood and paper (73%), providing a place for recreation (71%), and reducing global warming (60%).

FIGURE 1:
Voter Appreciation of Benefits Provided by Forests and Wooded Areas

| Benefit of Forests | 2011 | 2007 |
|--|------------|------|
| Helping to keep the air clean | 92% | N/A |
| Filtering water to keep it clean | 91% | N/A |
| Providing a place for wildlife to live | 86% | 90% |
| Providing a source of good-paying jobs | 73% | 47% |
| Supplying essential products like wood and paper | 73% | 60% |
| Providing a place for recreation | 71% | 65% |
| Reducing global warming | 60% | N/A |

- **Appreciation of the economic benefits of forests has increased sharply in recent years.** Most likely due to the economic downturn, voters appear to have a more acute awareness of the good-paying type of jobs provided by forests. Only 47 percent of voters considered this to be an “extremely” or “very” important benefit of forests in a 2007 national survey, a proportion which rose to 73 percent this year. There were also gains in the proportions viewing it as important that forests supply essential products and provide a place for recreation.
- **At least three in five voters see major threats to forests from wildfire, development, and insects and diseases.** American voters recognize that the nation’s forests face a variety of significant threats. As shown in **Figure 2**, 73 percent of all voters consider wildfires to be a “major” threat to forests. Three in five voters believe the same about insects and diseases that harm trees (62%) and development (62%).

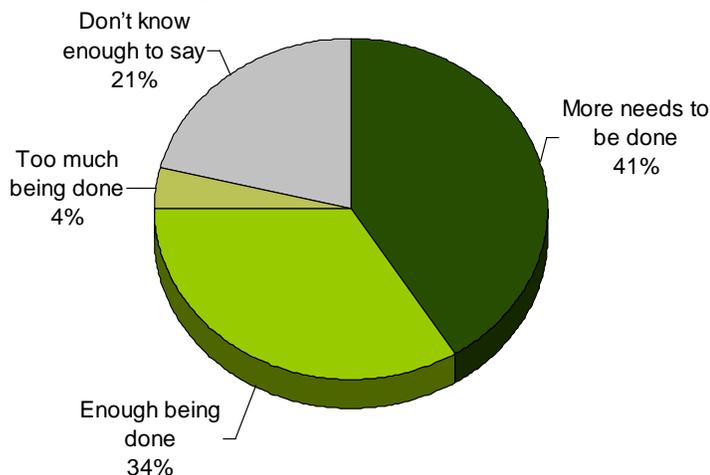
FIGURE 2:
Voter Perceptions of Threats Facing Forests

| Item | % Rating a “Major Threat” |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Wildfires | 73% |
| Insects and diseases that kill trees | 62% |
| Development | 62% |
| Irresponsible recreation in forests | 48% |
| Global warming | 39% |

- **Three-quarters of voters want to see efforts to protect and manage forests maintained or increased.** In total (as shown in **Figure 3**), 74 percent of voters say they are either comfortable with the current level of forest management and protection (34 percent) or say it needs to be increased (41 percent).

FIGURE 3:
Perception of Whether More Needs to be Done to Manage/Protect Forests

Would you say more needs to be done to manage and protect forests and trees in your state, enough is being done, too much is being done, or do you not know enough to say one way or the other?



As a whole, the survey results make clear that voters across the country view America's forests and wooded areas as vital assets for the economy, the environment, and personal recreation. With an understanding of the many factors that threaten forest health, voters continue to voice strong support for efforts to manage and protect the nation's forests to ensure that future generations can enjoy their many benefits the same way Americans do today.