

NEW LWCF POLL: Western Business Owners Overwhelmingly Favor Saving Land and Water Conservation Fund

LWCF, other public lands programs, cited as benefit to local business and state economies

Business owners in four western states say that public lands, and programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) that expand access to public lands, help in their business success. In fact, according to a new poll conducted and released today by research firm Strategies 360, 8 in 10 businesses asked fully support the reauthorization of LWCF.

“LWCF is arguably the most successful conservation program in our nation’s history to protect the great outdoors, whether we are talking about wilderness areas, mountain ranges, fishing access sites, or a city park,” said **Marne Hayes, Executive Director of Business for Montana’s Outdoors**. “We know that protected public lands are a big reason people come to live and work in Montana, and that the outdoors either directly or indirectly shapes their businesses. In the West, we have our outdoors as an economic advantage over other regions in attracting talent, and this poll shows that business owners count on programs like LWCF to keep those assets protected.”

For more than 50 years, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has been the premier source of funding for the acquisition and management of federal, state, and local public lands nationwide so that all Americans can enjoy access to the outdoors. It is the only federal program devoted to the continued conservation of our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, wilderness, civil war battlefields, and the development and preservation of state and local parks. The program is funded by a small portion of royalty fees paid by oil and gas companies to drill offshore, at no cost to taxpayers. But without Congressional action by September 30, this treasure chest for outdoor experiences will expire.

“Like our western neighbors, New Mexico has greatly benefited from LWCF funds, with \$312 million being invested here to support 12,000 projects. There’s no other program that could provide this kind of benefit in our state – especially without costs to tax payers,” said **Alexandra Merlino, Executive Director, Partnership for Responsible Business**. “This program is protecting well known areas like the Rio Grande Del Norte National Monument and the Gila National Forest, as well as parks and community spaces across our state that are great benefits to our state.”

The poll assessed attitudes of 822 businesses in Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico about the impact of public lands on their state’s economy and attracting high-

level employees, the impact of LWCF on business and industry statewide and attracting talent, and reauthorization and full funding of LWCF. Respondents were business owners, partners, or senior managers in charge of hiring and operations, at businesses with at least two full-time employees. *Notably, 51% of respondents in total identified as Republican, and 32% Democrat.*

Key findings include:

- **Eighty-two percent (82%) believe Congress should reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund** and provide ongoing, long-term funding. Support is high across all four states with Colorado at 85%, Montana 79%, Nevada 84%, and New Mexico 81%.
- Extending across all four states, **nearly eight in ten business owners believe programs like LWCF help their state's economy** including 81% in Colorado, 74% in Montana, 81% in Nevada, and 78% in New Mexico.
- **73% of business owners believe** public lands and the increased access provided by **LWCF** and other programs that expand access to public lands **help their business recruit and retain high-level employees.**

“In Nevada, LWCF has provided around \$102 million in the past five decades to protect our outdoor assets. Places like Lake Mead National Recreation Area and Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area are perennially a huge draw for visitors and locals,” said **Mauricia M.M. Baca, Executive Director, Get Outdoors Nevada**. “In addition, LWCF grants for hundreds of projects across Nevada’s state and local parks sustain places like Springs Preserve in Las Vegas and Valley of Fire State Park. This funding on both the federal and state sides plays an important role in growing Nevada’s \$12.6 annual outdoor recreation economy.”

"From constructing bike paths that help parents get their kids outside and to school safely to protecting the public lands that attract so many people to our state, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has made every community in Colorado more attractive to businesses and the workers they want to hire," said **Beau Kiklis, Organizer, Colorado Outdoor Business Alliance**. “LWCF promotes healthy environments, healthy economies, and healthy communities, all of which are vital factors to large and small businesses setting up shop and thriving in Colorado.”

The Strategies 360 poll was commissioned by Business for Montana’s Outdoors, Colorado Outdoor Business Alliance, Get Outdoors Nevada and Partnership for Responsible Business. A minimum of 200 interviews were completed in each state. Surveys were administered between July 26 and August 7, 2018 by telephone and online. Telephone respondents were reached at the respondent’s place of business by professional interviewers. Online respondents were drawn from the Research Now panel of business owners. The margin of error within each state is $\pm 6.9\%$ at the 95% confidence interval.

In sum, the poll shows business owners’ recognition of the economic benefits of public lands protection and access, and their corresponding broad and intense support

for renewing the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The majority of businesses polled see LWCF as a key driver of access to recreation, better enabling innovative companies in their respective states to recruit the best and brightest employees.

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