



# New Mexico Attitudes Toward Wildfire and Water Source Protection

*Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates – FM3*

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH & STRATEGY

The Nature Conservancy   
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RIO GRANDE  
**WATER FUND**  
A Wildfire and Water Source  
Protection Project

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# Survey Methodology

- 600 telephone interviews with residents in New Mexico
- Conducted January 11-14, 2016 via landline and cell phones
- Margin of sampling error +/-4.0% at the 95% confidence interval
- Due to rounding, some percentages do not add up to 100
- Two focus groups with urban and rural residents



# In focus groups, residents identified strongly with New Mexico's natural resources.

- Along with the state's unique natural features, respondents said New Mexico is characterized by its cultural richness and slower pace.
- Crime, too much growth and unemployment were top concerns.

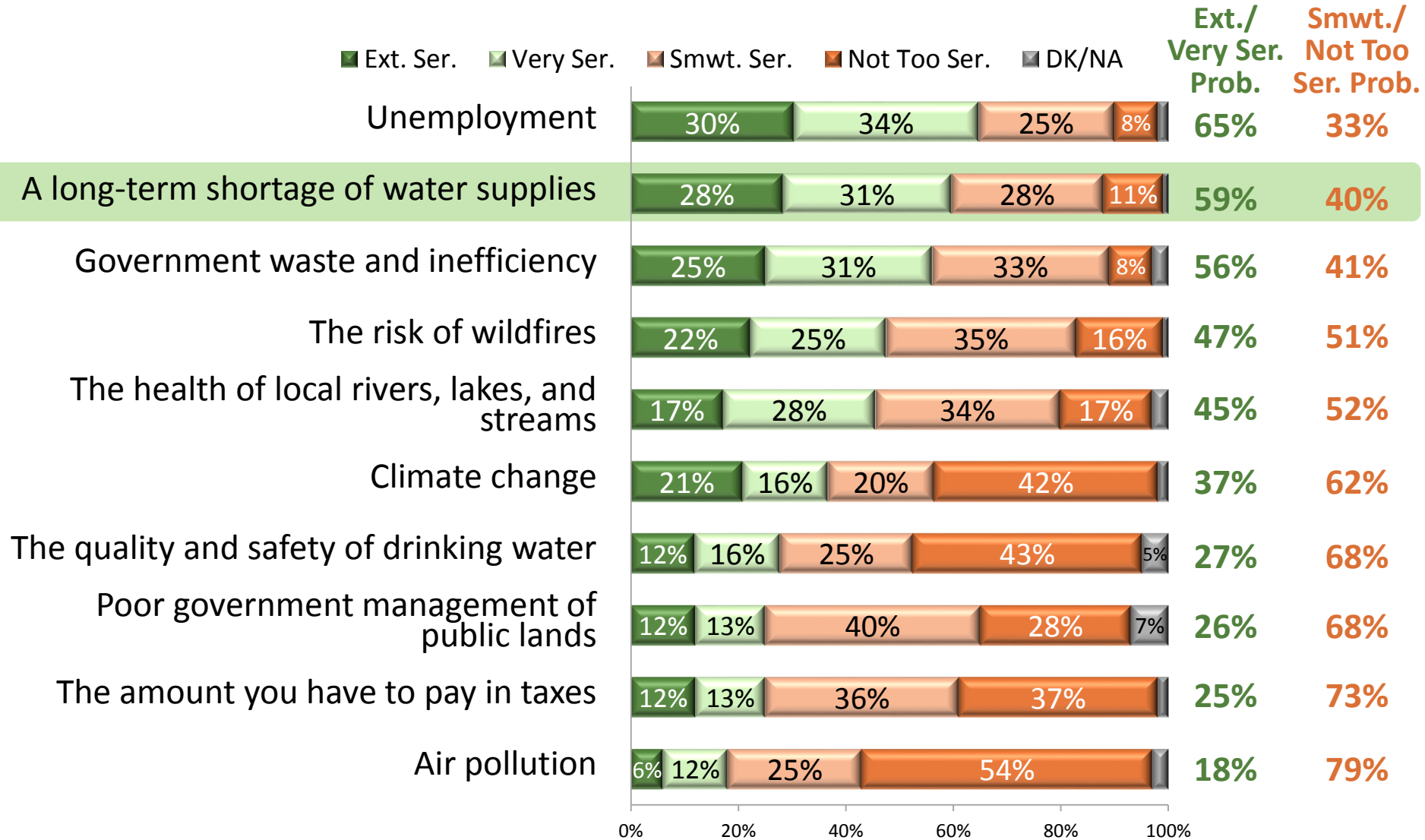
*But there is something about being able to get in my car and in ten minutes I can be as alone as I've even been, and I can stay alone for as long as I want to be alone.*  
– **New Mexico Man**

*These blue skies are just unreal, so that really is very important to me.*  
– **New Mexico Woman**

*For me, I think it's the desert. You drive around, and you can see for miles. You go back east and it's great to see a bunch of trees and everything, but it is kind of enclosed. You are driving down the freeway and you can drive for hours and not see or know where you're at. Here, you can look out and see for miles.* – **New Mexico Man**

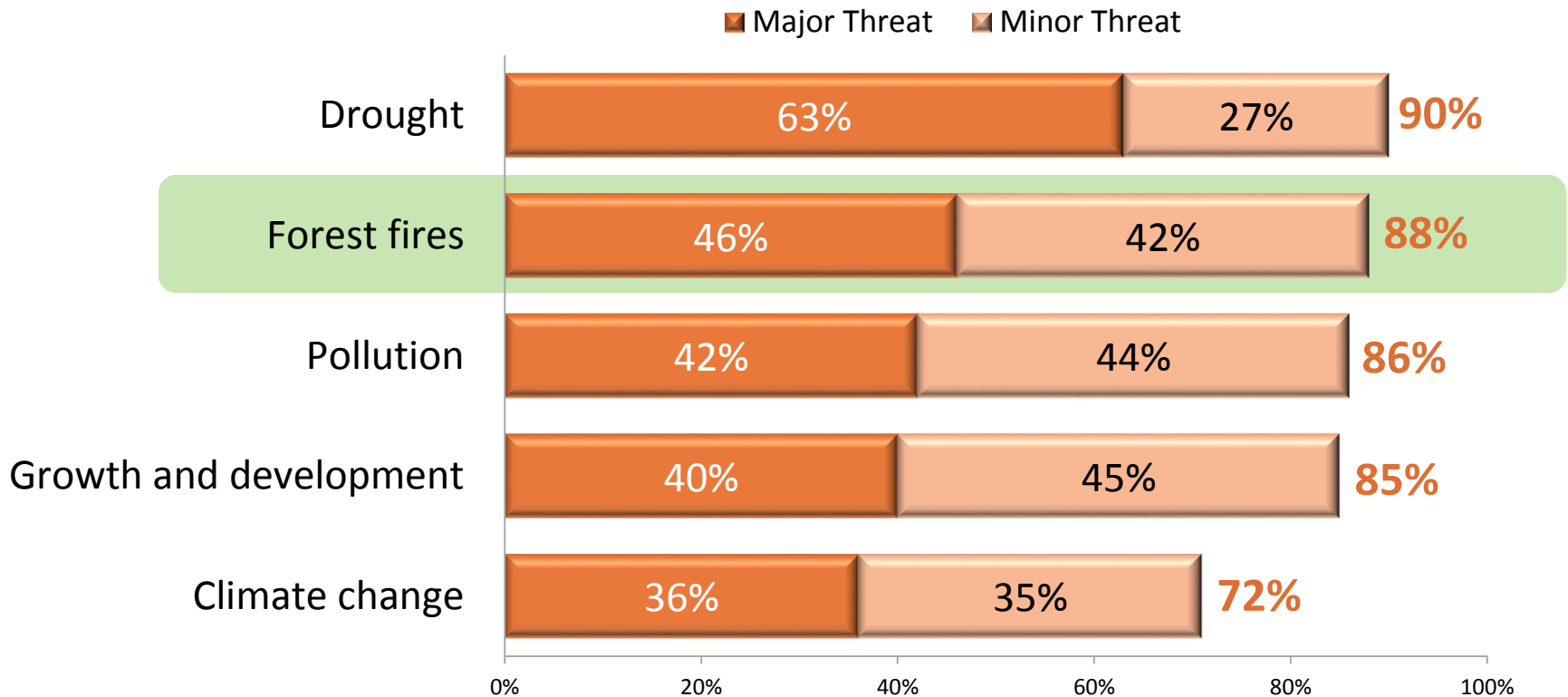
*We have the City of Rocks, the state parks. We have quite a bit of, in my opinion, pretty nice natural wonders in this state. You get a little bit of everything. You get some water, we have some high mountains, we have some desert, some volcanoes. It's a pretty impressive landscape.* – **New Mexico Man**

# Long-term water supply ranks in the top tier of problems concerning New Mexicans.



# Drought is near-universally seen as the biggest threat to water supply, followed closely by fire.

*I am going to read you a list of potential threats to New Mexico's water supply. Please tell me whether you think it poses a major threat to the state's water supply, a minor threat, or does not pose a threat to the state's water supply.*

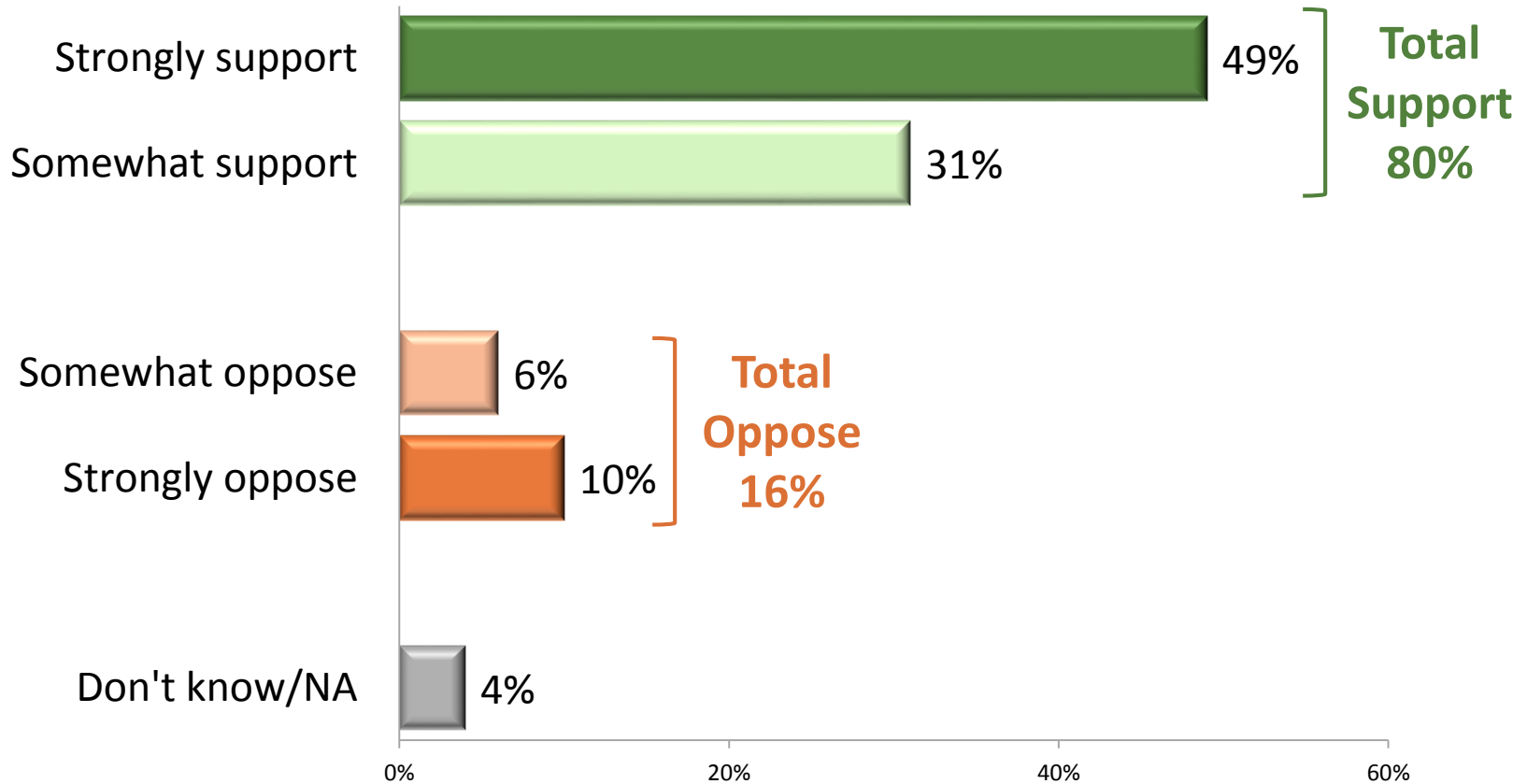


# Wildfire and Water Source Protection Fund Description

Major forest fires pose a significant risk to New Mexico's water supplies. After a major fire, deeply rooted trees do not hold the soil, and debris and ash pour down mountains, clogging streams, rivers, and lakes. As severe fires become more frequent, the risk of this kind of damage grows. Cutting overgrown brush and trees and using controlled, prescribed fires can remove fuel that could lead to a severe wildfire. In New Mexico, the lands that need to be treated in these ways cut across federal, state, and local boundaries. The US Forest Service carries out these activities on federal lands in New Mexico, but a lack of funding means they are not keeping up with the need.

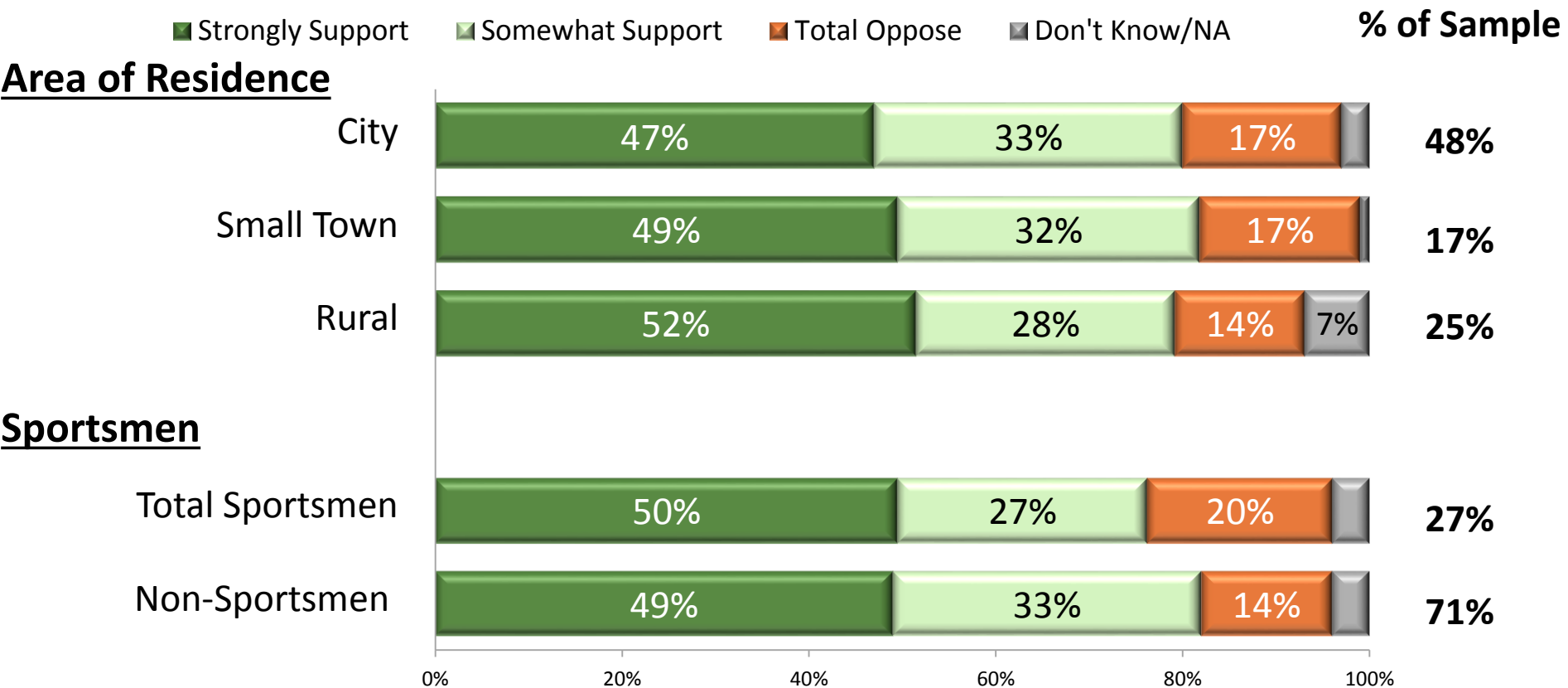
Some people have proposed bringing together private and public partners in a project to better protect forests and water sources in New Mexico. The project would fund a 20-year program of large-scale restoration of forests, and other lands around water sources - including thinning overgrown forests, restoring streams, and rehabilitating areas that flood after wildfires. These projects will reduce the threat and intensity of future wildfires, improve wildlife habitat, and protect rivers which supply drinking water to one million New Mexicans. It will require \$20 million per year in state funding – a state investment that will bring in additional federal dollars.

# Four in five respondents support the establishment of such a fund.



# Strong majorities of rural, city, suburban, and sportsmen voters support the plan.

*By Type of Area & Sportsmen*





# Verbatim Responses from Supporters

*Look, we got one planet – if we keep raping it and taking the natural things then we'd be pretty bare. I realize we have a lot of undergrowth in the really heavy forest. I think all of our problems are going to take a partnership to fix.*

*It will generally keep the water clean for everybody for both drinking and sporting activities.*

*I've seen the actions of wildfires. I've seen results.*

*In my area I do see how thick the forests are. All it would take is just a little spark to start a huge fire. Those are resources for the community. They cut wood for firewood and those who sell it, rely on it for income. Economically a forest fire would be bad for our county.*

*When we have a fire we always have floods and mudslides and stuff.*

*Forests make New Mexico beautiful, feed the recreation and outdoor life. We should protect it at all costs.*

*My town is having serious water problems and our single source of water is a river that is seriously at risk from forest fires.*

*It helps the future.*

# A variety of elements of the plan yield substantial support.

