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Associates*

**FM3**

*Public Opinion Research  
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Dave Metz & Miranda Everitt  
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RE: Results of a Survey of New Mexico Voters on Water Source and Wildfire  
Protection

DATE: January 25, 2016

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed 600 telephone interviews with registered New Mexico voters likely to participate in the November 2016 election to assess their support for efforts to improve forest health in order to protect water quality and reduce the risk of wildfires.<sup>1</sup> **The survey results show that New Mexico voters offer broad and consistent support for a state investment of \$20 million per year in a Wildfire and Water Source Protection Fund.** Four in five voters, from nearly all segments of the electorate, support such a plan – and that support remains consistent after voters hear a series of pro and con arguments.

Among the key specific findings of the survey were the following:

- **The need for reliable long-term supplies of water is a major concern for New Mexicans.** Survey respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of a number of problems facing the state, as shown in **Figure 1** on the following page. In fact, concern about “a long term shortage of water supplies” is second only to unemployment on the list of issues concerning New Mexico voters. In addition, fewer than one-quarter of voters statewide say that they are “very confident” that their “community has an adequate supply of clean water to meet the area’s future needs.”

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From January 11-14, 2016, FM3 completed 600 telephone interviews (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2016 voters in New Mexico. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-4.0% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Evaluation of the Seriousness of Problems Facing New Mexico**  
*(% Extremely/Very Serious)*

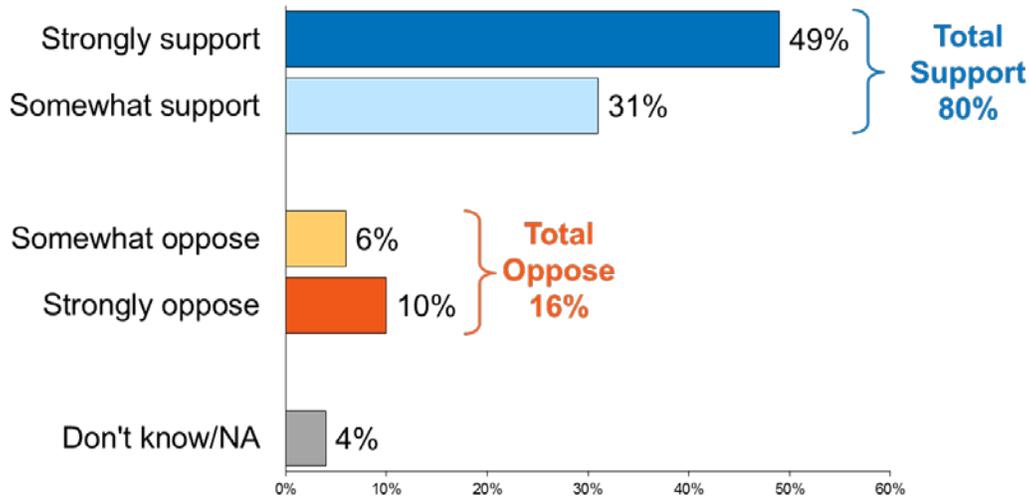
Issue	% Ext/Very Serious
Unemployment	65%
<b>A long-term shortage of water supplies</b>	<b>59%</b>
Government waste and inefficiency	56%
The risk of wildfires	47%
The health of local rivers, lakes, and streams	45%
Climate change	37%
The quality and safety of drinking water	27%
Poor government management of public lands	26%
The amount you have to pay in taxes	25%
Air pollution	18%

- New Mexico voters overwhelmingly support state funding for wildfire and water source protection.** Survey respondents were offered a brief description of what such a policy might entail, as shown below in **Figure 2**. Voters offered overwhelming support for this idea, with 80 percent indicating support and nearly half (49%) offering “strong support.” Fewer than one in five New Mexico voters (16%) expressed any opposition to the idea.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Support for State Investment in Wildfire and Water Source Protection**

*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 dollars per year in state funding – a state investment that will bring in additional federal dollars.*



Support for the plan was not only broad, but also cut across demographic subgroups. For example, the proposal is backed by:

- ✓ 84% of women and 77% of men;
- ✓ 86% of Democrats, 83% of independents, and 71% of Republicans;
- ✓ 82% of voters under age 50 and 79% among those age 50 and over;
- ✓ 80% of college-educated voters and 81% of those without a college degree;
- ✓ 81% of Hispanics and 83% of white voters; and
- ✓ At least 73% of voters in each of the state’s three Congressional Districts.

- **In addition, voters back a wide range of individual elements of the proposed Wildfire and Water Source Protection Fund.** As shown in **Figure 3** below, at least three-quarters of voters back each of a number of specific elements of the proposal, from *investing state tax dollars in federal lands* (78% support) to *restoring areas that are likely to flood after wildfires* (91%). There was no individual element of the policy that even one in four voters opposed.

**FIGURE 3:  
Support for Potential Plan Elements**

*Now I am going to read you a list of potential provisions or elements of this plan. After you hear each one, please tell me if that is something you generally support or oppose.*

Proposal Element	Total Support	Total Oppose
It will restore areas that are likely to flood after wildfires	91%	7%
The U.S. Forest Service will continue to be responsible for carrying out restoration activities on national forest lands	89%	10%
It will use controlled, prescribed fires to thin forests and reduce undergrowth that could provide fuel for a major forest fire	88%	11%

Proposal Element	Total Support	Total Oppose
It will focus funding on those areas that scientists have determined pose the greatest risk of future fires	88%	11%
It will bring together city, county, state, federal and tribal governments to develop a comprehensive plan to protect lands that are managed by different owners	86%	12%
It will invest state tax dollars in restoring federal forest lands	78%	20%

- **Support for the concept is very resilient in the face of messaging.** Survey respondents were offered a series of pro and con arguments on the proposal, and they had only minimal impact on support. As shown in **Figure 4**, positive messaging nudged support up to 81 percent, while opposition messaging dropped it down only to 75 percent.

**FIGURE 4:**  
**Progression of Support for a Wildfire and Water Source Protection Fund**

Position	Initial Position	After Positive Messages	After Negative Messages
Strongly support	49%	52%	47%
Somewhat support	31%	29%	29%
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>75%</b>
Strongly oppose	10%	9%	11%
Somewhat oppose	6%	7%	10%
<b>TOTAL OPPOSE</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>UNDECIDED</b>	4%	4%	4%

**Overall, these findings demonstrate the strong and broad appeal of increasing state wildfire and water source protection funding in New Mexico.** New Mexicans overwhelmingly support such a plan; that support cuts across all major subgroups of the electorate; and it is remarkably durable in the face of pro and con arguments.