



# PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel, Public Opinion Strategies

RE: California Voters Call for Protection of Desert Areas as National Monuments; Place High Importance on Protecting Wildlife Habitat and Natural Areas for Family Recreation and Veteran Recovery

DATE: November 11, 2015

The Republican polling firm Public Opinion Strategies recently completed a survey of California voters, with an oversample of voters residing in the “desert region.”<sup>1</sup> The survey results show that **voters both statewide and in the affected area of the state overwhelmingly support the President designating Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow and Castle Mountain areas as National Monuments**, thereby protecting these areas from development, mining and other resource extraction activities. Support is significant among all demographic, geographic and partisan sub-groups in the state.

Support may in part be due to Californians’ high rates of outdoor recreation and visiting national public lands. Residents place a high level of importance on ensuring that these public lands are protected as wildlife habitat, for family recreation, for children to explore nature, and as places where veterans from recent wars can come to “recover and heal in nature.” Even after hearing arguments both for and against this National monument designation, **a majority of voters statewide and in the desert region side with supporters of the designation proposal.**

What is also striking is the impact that learning about veterans’ organizations support for this Monument proposal has on public opinion. More than two-thirds statewide and in the desert region say they are more likely to support the proposal after hearing about veterans use of these lands and how nature has been shown to help veterans recover from the mental and physical wounds of war.

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

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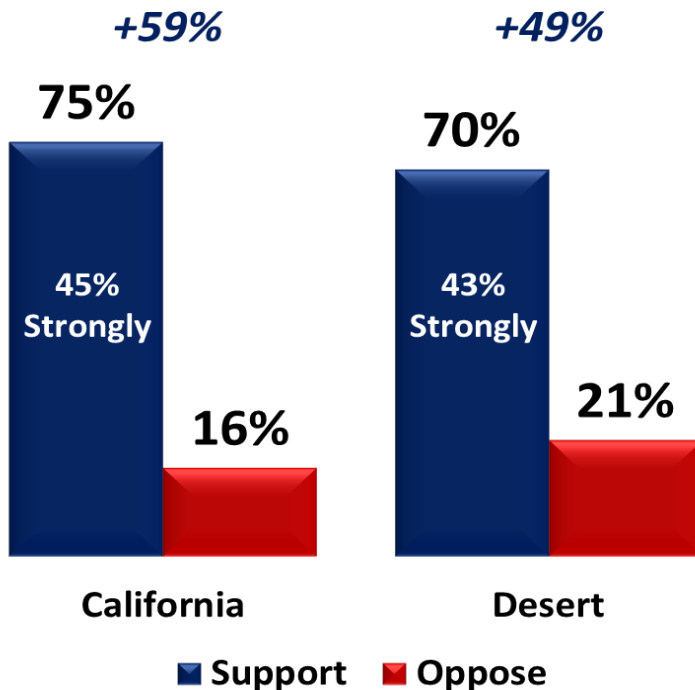
**Methodology:** From November 1-4, 2015, Public Opinion Strategies completed 600 telephone interviews with registered voters in California who are likely to vote in the November 2016 presidential election. A total of 300 voters in the “desert region” consisting of Riverside, San Bernardino, and Inyo counties were also interviewed. The margin of sampling error for the full statewide sample is +/-4.0%, and for the desert region sample is +/-5.7%; Margins of sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Some percentages may sum to more than 100% due to rounding.

- **Three-quarters of California voters (75 percent) support the President designating three National Monuments in the California desert, with comparable levels of support among residents in the desert region itself (70 percent).** As just 21 percent of voters statewide and 28 percent in the desert region indicated having heard something about the proposal, survey respondents received a brief explanation of the proposal in order to ensure all respondents had the same level of information on the topic:

*“As you may know, some of the public lands in California are designated as national monuments, with protections for natural areas and water similar to those in national parks. The public can also view unique natural and historic sites in California’s national monuments, can camp, hike, hunt, ride ATV’s and enjoy other recreation there, and the lands are protected from development, mining and other kinds of resource extraction.*

*There is currently a proposal that would have the President designate existing public lands in the California desert - Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains areas - as National Monuments. These lands stretch from Joshua Tree in the eastern desert to the San Bernardino Mountains further west. The proposal, developed with community input, has been supported by many California elected officials who worked for almost a decade to secure Congressional approval.”*

Again, the overwhelming majority of California voters support the proposed protection of these desert lands, with nearly half strongly in support both statewide and in the desert region, as one can see in the following graph. Opposition is fairly minimal.



- **Support for designating these public lands as National Monuments is widespread and broad-based.** Majorities of all key subgroups of the electorate statewide express this sentiment, including:
  - 78 percent of women and 72 percent of men;
  - 72 percent of Latinos, 79 percent of Asian Americans, 81 percent of African Americans, and 76 percent of White/Anglos;
  - 85 percent of voters under age 25, 78 percent of 25-34 year olds, and 73 percent of all older voters including 73 percent of seniors;
  - 85 percent of Democrats, 72 percent of independents/Decline to State voters, and 62 percent of GOP voters; and
  - 73 percent of military or veteran households.

These same dynamics are evident among desert region voters, with majorities of all key subgroups in support.

Notably, support is strongest among the one-in-five residents (21 percent statewide) who indicate having heard something about the proposed National Monument designations prior to the survey. Among those already aware of the proposal, fully 81 percent express support for the idea, with a significant 59 percent strongly in support.

- **Voters offer a wide range of rationales for their support for National Monument designation for these public lands in the desert region.** We provided respondents with the opportunity to tell us the reasons they support the proposal. Most focused on outdoor recreation and a sense that the land, wildlife and natural resources need to be protected for future generations.

*"I used to go hiking in the mountain desert area. Being out in the desert sounds like a desolate place where it's hot and dry, but there are things out there, like they say, an oasis. There are turtles, roadrunners, coyotes, and tarantulas, a lot of things out there; Birds that live in the Yucca Trees. I know a lot of people who hike up these trails and post themselves hiking in the desert every day to me and it's awesome. Yes, I would highly support it for them." GOP Hispanic woman in Riverside County*

*"My family has always been outdoors people. As we know, land owners and investors want it just for the money, but it should just be used for family." – Democratic African American woman in Monterey County*

*"I live on the edge of the national forest. We live in the wilderness basically. I appreciate the wilderness, I appreciate that it gets to be protected but still gets to be used because that's where I live, that surrounds me. I appreciate it and want it protected. I don't want it messed up." – GOP White woman in Inyo county*

*"It's keeping undeveloped land from being developed for profit. Basically, it's something that I could pass on to my kids and grandkids down the line." – Democratic White man in San Bernardino County*

*"People like to go out into the desert and be by themselves to ride their bikes and ride their dune buggies and they have a right to do that. They pay a lot of California taxes and registrations fees.*






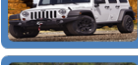




*Everybody needs to have a place to go and have their weekend.* – Decline-to-State Man in Alameda County

*"I guess so my children and grandchildren will be able to see what California used to be all about."*  
– GOP White Woman in Orange County

*"It's good for the economy and it's good for jobs and it's good to protect public land for our children."*  
– Democratic White Man in Riverside County

- **Californians do in fact express a strong affinity for the outdoors by reporting high rates of outdoor recreation and visiting national public lands.** More than three-quarters statewide (78 percent) and in the desert region (77 percent) say they have visited public lands in the last year. Notably, Republican voters are more likely to say they have visited national public lands than their independent or Democratic counterparts, dispelling some of the myths about users of these areas.

In addition, the overwhelming majority of voters in the state report regularly participating in at least one of the following outdoor recreation activities (74 percent statewide, and 70 percent in the desert region). Just look at the reported rates of participation:

|  | California | Desert |
|--|------------|--------|
|  Hiking  | 42%        | 34%    |
|  Camping  | 26%        | 23%    |
|  Bicycling  | 24%        | 15%    |
|  Swimming and surfing                                     | 16%        | 19%    |
|  Bird watching and viewing wildlife                       | 10%        | 11%    |
|  Driving jeeps or other four wheel vehicles on back roads | 8%         | 8%     |
|  Riding an off-road vehicle or dirt bike                  | 7%         | 10%    |
|  Sports   | 3%         | 3%     |
|  Hunting/fishing  | 2%         | 3%     |
|  Boating  | 1%         | 1%     |

- **Voters are more likely to side with supporters of National Monument designation for these desert areas than they are with critics of such a plan.** We provided survey respondents with rationales both for and against the monument proposal, but this does little to affect how voters perceive this idea as one can see in the next graph.

**SUPPORTERS** say that increasing protections for these existing public lands in the California desert will safeguard natural, historic, recreational and wildlife areas from industrial development. It will also ensure that these public lands remain open to outdoor recreation, hunting, grazing, and traditional uses, as well as improve visitors experience with better services and facilities.

| <u>California</u> | <u>Desert</u> |
|-------------------|---------------|
| <b>78%</b>        | <b>75%</b>    |

**OPPONENTS** say that this proposal is really just a federal land grab, we should resist as locals know their own needs best. It will spread across millions of acres of land and allow unelected government bureaucrats to have the power to make decisions that may not be in line with local communities' priorities and needs.

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
| <b>17%</b> | <b>18%</b> |
|------------|------------|

- **Voters see a wide-range of benefits to increasing protections for these desert lands, particularly as wildlife habitat, for family recreation, for children to explore nature, and as places where veterans from recent wars can come to “recover and heal in nature.”** As the following graph highlights, the top-tier benefits in importance for California and desert region voters are ones linked to the key themes of family/children, of recovery, and elements like wildlife or the unique historic and cultural areas in these lands.

|  | Extremely/Very Important |
|--|--------------------------|
| Provide opportunities for children to get outside and explore nature   | 80%                      |
| Protect habitat for threatened animals, such as mountain lions, bighorn sheep, eagles and dozens of other types of birds | 80%                      |
| Protect desert natural areas and wildlife habitat that are threatened by development                                     | 78%                      |
| Provide places for veterans from the Afghanistan and Iraq wars to recover and heal in nature                             | 72%                      |
| Provide families with affordable places to spend time together, and relax  | 72%                      |
| Protect historic areas on public lands such as pioneer ruins, petroglyphs and other unique sites                         | 70%                      |

- **Providing a more thorough explanation of how veterans benefit from having this access to pristine desert areas has a significant impact.** More than two-thirds statewide and in the desert region say they would be more likely to support Monument designation after hearing that...

*“Some of the groups that are supporting this proposal to increase protections for these public lands in the California desert are veterans’ organizations, especially those that work with veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. They point to psychological studies that demonstrate that spending time in nature is one of the best tools to help veterans recover from the mental stresses they faced overseas, and want to ensure that veterans can spend time at natural lands like those in the desert to heal from the mental and physical wounds of war.”*

Given this, 69 percent statewide and in the desert region say they are more likely to support the proposal. Just 26 percent statewide and 23 percent in the desert say the issue makes no difference in their vote choice, and almost no one says it would make them less likely to support this proposal (1 percent and 3 percent respectively).

- **Finally, it is worth noting that voters solidly reject a proposal to allow mining on these public lands.** Two-thirds say they oppose a proposal to “allow new mining operations on 100,000 acres of existing public lands in this area” (67 percent statewide and 66 percent in the desert region). Fewer than one-in-four support this proposal. A majority of most key sub-groups express support for the proposal.

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