



MEMORANDUM

TO: NANCY HALL, FRIENDS OF GOLD BUTTE
JOHN WALLIN, NEVADA WILDERNESS COALITION

FROM: GLEN BOLGER

RE: KEY FINDINGS OF CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA LAND USE SURVEY

DATE: MAY 12, 2008

Summary

Voters in Clark County take advantage of Nevada's public lands for outdoor activities such as hiking, camping, and fishing, with nearly two-thirds (64%) participating in an at least one outdoor activity. Voters overwhelmingly favor protecting additional lands in Nevada as wilderness. Moreover, a plurality say that the current 5% of Nevada lands protected as wilderness is too little. Majorities favor proposals to create a National Conservation Area in the Gold Butte region and a land transfer involving Gold Butte and Mesquite.

Key Findings

- 1. Voters agree that additional public lands should be protected as wilderness, and they agree that natural resources should be protected.***

We read voters the following question about public lands designated as wilderness:

As you may know, most of the federal public lands in Nevada are managed for a variety of public uses. Some of the lands are designated as wilderness. Wilderness lands can be used for hiking, camping, livestock grazing, horseback riding, and hunting. However, mining, oil and gas development, the use of motorized vehicles, such as jeeps and dirt bikes, and mountain biking are not allowed in wilderness lands. Would you favor or oppose protecting ADDITIONAL public lands as wilderness in Nevada?

Two-thirds (66%) of Clark County voters favor protecting additional public lands in Nevada as wilderness. While Democrats are most likely to be in favor of this proposal, support crosses party lines. In fact, the only voters who do NOT support the expansion of public lands protected as wilderness are very conservative voters and voters who participate in off-roading activities.

Just before the demographic questions at the end of the survey, we also asked voters whether they agreed with the following two statements about natural resources and the wilderness:

- 89% agree that “given the current rate of population growth and development in southern Nevada it is important that we do everything we can to protect our natural, cultural and archeological resources.”
- 65% agree that “irresponsible off-road vehicle use is a major problem in southern Nevada and is damaging important natural resources and important wildlife habitat.”

2. Support is high for a National Conservation Area in Gold Butte.

We read voters the following proposal regarding the Gold Butte region:

A proposal is being considered to change the way some public lands are managed in the Gold Butte region south of Mesquite. The Gold Butte region has significant cultural resources important to Native Americans and sensitive plant species. The proposed changes in management include conserving the most pristine areas in the region as wilderness. The proposal would also create a National Conservation Area surrounding these wilderness areas. The non-wilderness lands within the broader National Conservation Area would be managed primarily for conservation but would allow for a wider range of uses such as mountain biking and continued off-road vehicle use.

Two-thirds (66%) of voters favor the proposal, and support crosses every demographic group. Support is especially high among Independents, voters under the age of 45, women (especially women under the age of 55), somewhat conservative voters, and voters who use public lands for recreational activities. Three-quarters (74%) of self-identified off-road vehicle users and 63% of hunters/fishermen support the Gold Butte conservation proposal.

3. A majority favor the proposal to combine protection for Gold Butte and the Mesquite land transfer, albeit at a lower level.

We also asked voters their opinion of the following proposal for a land transfer:

Nevada's congressional delegation is considering a proposal that would combine conservation efforts in some parts of Southern Nevada while allowing for increased development in others. Similar land use packages have occurred in Clark County in 2002, in Lincoln County in 2004, and in White Pine County in 2006. The current proposal would designate some public lands in the Gold Butte region south of Mesquite as wilderness within a broader National Conservation Area, to be managed primarily for conservation efforts. The proposal would also transfer some public lands to the city of Mesquite and the Virgin Valley Water District, which would allow for increased development and economic activity in the Mesquite area.

Fifty-one percent (51%) of Clark County voters favor the proposal, while 40% are opposed. Attitudes about the land transfer are not being driven by party: Republicans, Independents, and Democrats are all relatively divided. Voters who are most likely to support this proposal include men (especially younger men and men in North Clark County), voters under the age of 45, liberals, and outdoor enthusiasts.

Although support for the land transfer is not as high as support for the Gold Butte conservation efforts, it is important to recognize that there is majority support. It appears that voter hesitation on this proposal is being driven by concern about additional growth in the Mesquite area, NOT opposition to conservation efforts.

4. Clark County voters use Nevada's public lands for a variety of activities.

We asked voters how often they use Nevada's public lands for the following activities:

- off-road motorized vehicle riding such as jeeping or dirt bike riding
- fishing and hunting
- hiking or camping
- mountain biking
- horseback riding

More than six in ten Clark County voters (64%) say they either frequently or sometimes use Nevada's public lands for at least one of these activities, including 41% who participate in multiple activities. The most popular activities are hiking or camping (54% frequently/sometimes) and fishing and hunting (29%). The least popular are off-road vehicle riding (20%), mountain biking (16%), and horseback riding (14%).

Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted a survey of 400 likely voters in Clark County, Nevada. The survey was conducted April 29-May 1, 2008 and has a margin of error of $\pm 4.9\%$ in 95 out of 100 cases.