



NATIONWIDE SURVEY:

America's Hunters & Anglers Oppose Major Administration Conservation Policies But Praise Several Funding Initiatives

WASHINGTON, DC -- "A majority of America's hunters and anglers, while praising specific Bush Administration's wildlife funding initiatives, say the administration's priorities are wrong on major conservation policies," Larry Schweiger, president of the National Wildlife Federation, said here today at a press conference presenting the findings of a first of its kind survey of the nation's sportsmen.

"Hunters and anglers give the administration credit where it is due, particularly on its funding programs," Schweiger said. "But on several crucial issues, hunters and anglers say the administration is listening to the wrong people, especially the oil and gas industry, in making policy decisions.

"America's sportsmen, who helped elect President Bush, are sounding a clarion call that his administration is on the wrong track with several of its major wildlife and conservation policies."

The National Wildlife Federation commissioned Bellwether Research & Consulting of Alexandria, Virginia, to conduct the nonpartisan survey. From June 8 to 20, 752 hunters and anglers were polled, chosen from state lists of individuals holding hunting and fishing licenses. The proportion of hunters and anglers was designed to correspond to the most recent (2001) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service *National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*. The poll has a sampling error of plus or minus 3.6 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

More than 40 million Americans hunt and fish, generating some \$70 billion in annual expenditures from their sports. The membership of the National Wildlife Federation and its 47 state and territorial affiliates includes nearly 750,000 hunters and anglers.

Schweiger explained that over the past two to three years, a considerable amount of anecdotal evidence has accumulated that sportsmen are dissatisfied with some of the administration's leading conservation and wildlife policies. Late last year, the administration backed-off plans to rewrite Clean Water Act rules following an outcry from sportsmen and conservationists. However, administration guidelines that will end protections for millions of wetland acres remain in place. Hundreds of sportsmen's groups, including many National Wildlife Federation affiliates, have signed letters urging the administration to adopt a stronger approach to reducing mercury pollution. Hunters

and anglers have been in the forefront of those opposing administration plans for oil and gas drilling on prime public lands wildlife habitat including Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, New Mexico's Otero Mesa and Wyoming's Red Desert.

"We decided on this poll as a way to quantify where sportsmen say the administration is doing a good job, and where they say it isn't on several specific issues and to get a clear picture of their major concerns," Schweiger said.

The poll finds that a majority of sportsmen, including majorities of hunters and anglers who voted for the president in 2000, say that the loss of wildlife habitat and of wetlands and streams are among their top concerns. On issues directly tied to those concerns, majorities of sportsmen, including majorities of those who voted for the president, say they oppose the administration policies on wetlands, public lands energy development and dealing with mercury pollution.

"It's a matter of values," Schweiger said. "When the administration says yes to rolling back wetlands protections – as developers want – hunters and anglers say no. When the administration says yes to adopting a weak mercury rule – as industry wants – hunters and anglers say no. When the administration says yes to putting a priority on oil and gas drilling on public lands, including prime wildlife habitat – as industry wants – hunters and anglers say no."

The administration's funding initiatives for Everglades restoration, and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Forest Legacy programs receive strong support in the poll. "Again, it's a matter of values," Schweiger said. "When the administration says invest in conservation and wildlife, it gets full support from sportsmen."

The poll also gauged sportsmen's opinions on global warming. Nearly two-thirds say that global warming is already, or will in the future impact hunting and fishing conditions. "When a majority of the people who know the land best express this level of concern about global warming, you are hearing first hand the harbingers of a tidal shift in public opinion on this issue," Schweiger said.

The poll results, as presented by Bellwether Research & Consulting owner Christine Matthews, include:

68 percent of those polled say they voted for George Bush in 2000; 66 percent identified themselves as conservatives; 42 percent as Republicans and 91 percent as male.

71 percent, including 66 percent of those who voted for the president in 2000, say coal-fired power plants should clean up mercury emissions within the decade rather than be given two decades, even given cost considerations.

73 percent of hunters and anglers prefer alternatives to oil and gas drilling as solutions to America's energy needs, including 42 percent who favor expanding development of renewable fuels and 31 percent who favor conserving more and developing more fuel-efficient cars.

68 percent, including 66 percent of those who voted for the president in 2000, say that wetlands should be protected in most cases because manmade wetlands cannot replicate natural ones.

64 percent global warming is already impacting hunting and fishing (27 percent) or will in the future (36 percent); and 34 percent say it will have little or not impact and concern about it is overblown.

The poll asked hunters and anglers whose voice they think counts most in the administration in forming conservation and wildlife policy. 49 percent say the oil and gas industry; 15 percent say hunters and anglers; 8 percent say conservation groups; 8 percent say scientists and 7 percent say developers.

The poll then asked sportsmen whose voice they think should count most with the administration in forming conservation and wildlife policy. 38 percent say hunters and anglers; 25 percent say scientists; 23 percent say conservation groups; 4 percent say the oil and gas industry and 2 percent say developers.

87 percent say they favor the administration's expansion of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program; 78 percent favor the doubled funding for the Forest Legacy Program, and 75 percent favor the administration's support for full funding to restore Florida's Everglades.

69 percent, including 66 percent of those who voted for the president in 2000, say they oppose the administration proposal to give coal-fired power plants flexibility to meet a national goal to reduce mercury pollution even though that may result in higher mercury pollution in many communities.

58 percent, including 55 percent of those who voted for the president in 2000, say they oppose the administration's new Clean Water Act guidelines that will, by the government's own estimate, eliminate protections for up to 20 million acres of wetlands.

57 percent, including 52 percent of those who voted for the president in 2000, say they oppose the administration's endorsement of exemptions to the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act for the oil and gas industry in an effort to expedite oil and gas development on public lands, including prime wildlife, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation areas.

86 percent say wildlife and conservation issues will be very (36 percent) or somewhat (50 percent) important in deciding their vote for president in 2004.

Protecting wildlife through education and action since 1936, the [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's conservation organization creating solutions that balance the needs of people and wildlife now and for future generations.

Complete Poll Results Available At:

www.nwf.org/news

Immediate Release: July 14, 2004

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