



Poll: New Mexico Sportsmen Say Major Bush Policies Wrong on Conservation

Protect Wetlands, Don't Drill Otero Mesa, Hunters and Anglers Say

ALBUQUERQUE, NM - A New Mexico Wildlife Federation-National Wildlife Federation poll released today reveals that most New Mexico hunters and anglers - who voted for President Bush by better than a three to one margin in 2000 - oppose major administration policies that open pristine public lands to energy development and roll back key environmental protections.

The nonpartisan poll finds that nearly two thirds of New Mexico's hunters and anglers favor protecting wildlife habitat and groundwater in Otero Mesa, while nearly three fourths feel that, contrary to administration policy, New Mexico's playa lakes and other isolated waters should remain protected under the Clean Water Act.

"New Mexico's sportsmen have something to say to the White House," said Oscar Simpson, president of the New Mexico Wildlife Federation. "Mr. President, some of your major policies clash with the conservation values of New Mexico's hunters and anglers, and we're not happy about it."

Larry Schweiger, the president of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) and an avid hunter and angler, yesterday unveiled the results of a similar poll conducted by NWF at the national level.

"Hunters and anglers helped to elect the president," Schweiger said. "Nationwide, they give his administration credit and blame where it is due. Where the administration has funded individual conservation programs, they are supportive. But hunters and anglers feel that on major policies that affect our nation's land, water and air quality, the administration's priorities are wrong."

"Hunters and anglers say that the administration listens to the wrong people, particularly the oil and gas industry, on matters of conservation," Schweiger added. "It's a question of values. A conservation policy should reflect the values of people closest to the land, including hunters and anglers."

The New Mexico poll was conducted by Bellwether Research and Consulting, an Alexandria, Va.- based polling firm, from June 10 - June 20, 2004. The poll scientifically sampled 301 New Mexico hunters and anglers, all registered voters.

Since taking office, the Bush administration has made energy development the top priority for America's public lands, including public lands in New Mexico. A broad

coalition of conservationists, ranchers, sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts have opposed the administration's proposals to open the scenic and wildlife-rich Otero Mesa and Valle Vidal areas to the scarring and polluting effects of energy development.

The poll finds that:

- 64 percent of New Mexico hunters and anglers favor Gov. Bill Richardson's proposal to increase protection for wildlife habitat and groundwater before permitting oil and gas drilling in Otero Mesa. The Otero Mesa is a rich habitat for pronghorn antelope and other game and non-game species.
- 63 percent of New Mexico hunters and anglers say they oppose, and 47 percent say they **strongly** oppose, opening the Valle Vidal to energy drilling. The Valle Vidal provides wintering and spring calving range for some 2,500 elk as well as habitat for many other game and non-game species.
- Only 18 percent of New Mexico hunters and anglers feel that drilling for more oil and gas in the United States is the best way to increase the nation's domestic energy supply. One-fourth say that we should conserve more and waste less, while 44 percent say the answer lies in renewable sources of energy like wind, solar and ethanol.
- 55 percent of New Mexico hunters and anglers oppose, and 38 percent **strongly** oppose, the administration's push to grant the oil and gas industry exemptions from the Clean Water Act and Safe Water Drinking Act as part of its energy policy. Those exemptions could allow poisons like tar and diesel to contaminate streams and groundwater around drilling infrastructure.

In contrast, New Mexico hunters and anglers give the administration high marks in areas where it has chosen to support conservation programs. For example, 81 percent favor, and 52 percent **strongly** favor, the administration's decision to double funding for the Forest Legacy Program. The program is a partnership among the Forest Service, states and land trusts that protects and ensures public access to forest areas threatened by development.

The poll finds that the administration's full funding of the Florida Everglades restoration and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program garnered similar levels of support.

The poll finds that among the least favored of the administration's policies is its directive to federal agencies to cease enforcement of Clean Water Act protections on "isolated" wetlands, ponds and streams. The policy has effectively removed pollution restrictions from valleys in New Mexico that comprise more than 20 percent of the state and contain 84 miles of perennial and 3,900 miles of intermittent waters. Nationally, the policy would, by the administration's own estimates, lead to the loss of 20 million acres of wetlands.

The poll shows that 73 percent of New Mexico hunters and anglers favor, and 49 percent **strongly** favor, protecting so-called "isolated" wetlands, ponds and streams under the Clean Water Act – in direct contrast to the administration's policy.

The impact of the administration's rollback of the Clean Water Act on sporting in the Southwest will be the main agenda topic for a National Wildlife Federation summit to be held this Friday and Saturday in Santa Fe. The "Hunter and Angler Summit on Protecting Aquatic Habitats for Fish and Wildlife" will bring together NWF affiliates from throughout the region, combining educational seminars with activist training. (For more information, contact Vinay Jain, 202-360-6791).

The administration's proposal to give coal-fired power plants more time and flexibility in meeting mercury reduction targets is also unpopular among New Mexico's sportsmen, according to the poll.

The poll finds that 64 percent of New Mexican hunters and anglers oppose, and 42 percent **strongly** oppose, the administration's mercury proposal.

Mercury can accumulate in the fish people catch and eat and, in excessive amounts, has been associated with birth defects.

The National Wildlife Federation's national hunter/angler poll affirms the existence of a widespread feeling among hunters and anglers that the energy industry holds the Bush administration's ear on matters of conservation.

Nationally, 49 percent of hunters and anglers said the oil and gas industry has the "most say" with the administration when deciding on matters of conservation, hunting and fishing. When asked who *ought* to have the most influence with the administration on these issues, 38 percent said hunters and anglers, 25 percent said scientists, and 23 percent said conservation groups.

The poll results are notable because hunters and anglers are a traditionally conservative constituency, a characterization supported by the data: 72 percent of those surveyed said they are somewhat or very conservative, 71 percent said they voted for Bush in 2000, and 44 percent said they are Republican.

"The fact that you have an important part of President Bush's base telling him some of his major policies are wrong on conservation is significant," Simpson said. "We hope it makes the administration reconsider those policies."

The poll finds that 86 percent of New Mexico sportsmen say that conservation issues will be somewhat or very important to them as they cast their vote this fall.

The New Mexico poll has a sampling error of plus-or-minus 5.7 percent at a 95 percent confidence level.

For complete information about the poll, including the national and state-based results and methodology statements, www.nwf.org/news.

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