

National Forest Lands in New Mexico: Roadless Survey Summary of Results

The Federal Government recently overturned a policy prohibiting road building in National Forest lands that were designated as roadless areas. The overturning of this policy will in-effect open these designated areas to commercial activities including logging, mining, and oil and gas drilling. Individual states have the option of petitioning the Federal Government to prevent logging, mining and drilling by prohibiting road building in these designated roadless areas. In New Mexico there is strong voter support for such a measure. In total, 71% of voters statewide say they either strongly support (50%) or somewhat support (21%) a petition that would stop logging, mining and drilling by prohibiting roads designed for these activities on the approximately 1.5 million acres of National Forest lands that are designated as roadless areas. Support cuts across party lines as the majority of both Democrats (79%) and Republican voters (60%) support the petition.

On a related matter, the plurality of New Mexico's voters (45%) believe that too little of the National Forest land in New Mexico is currently being protected from logging, mining and drilling. In comparison, just 8% of voters feel too much of our forest lands are protected from such activities (37% feel about the right amount of these activities are taking place).

Most Important Issues or Problems Currently Facing New Mexico

(Top 8 Unaided Responses)

	<i>Total Sample (N=400)</i>
Gas prices too high and rising	17%
Educational system is poor	16%
Water shortages/reserves/drought	16%
Illegal immigration/undocumented workers	15%
Government/political leadership is incompetent	11%
Illegal drug use	7%
Crime rate is high	7%
Low wages	7%

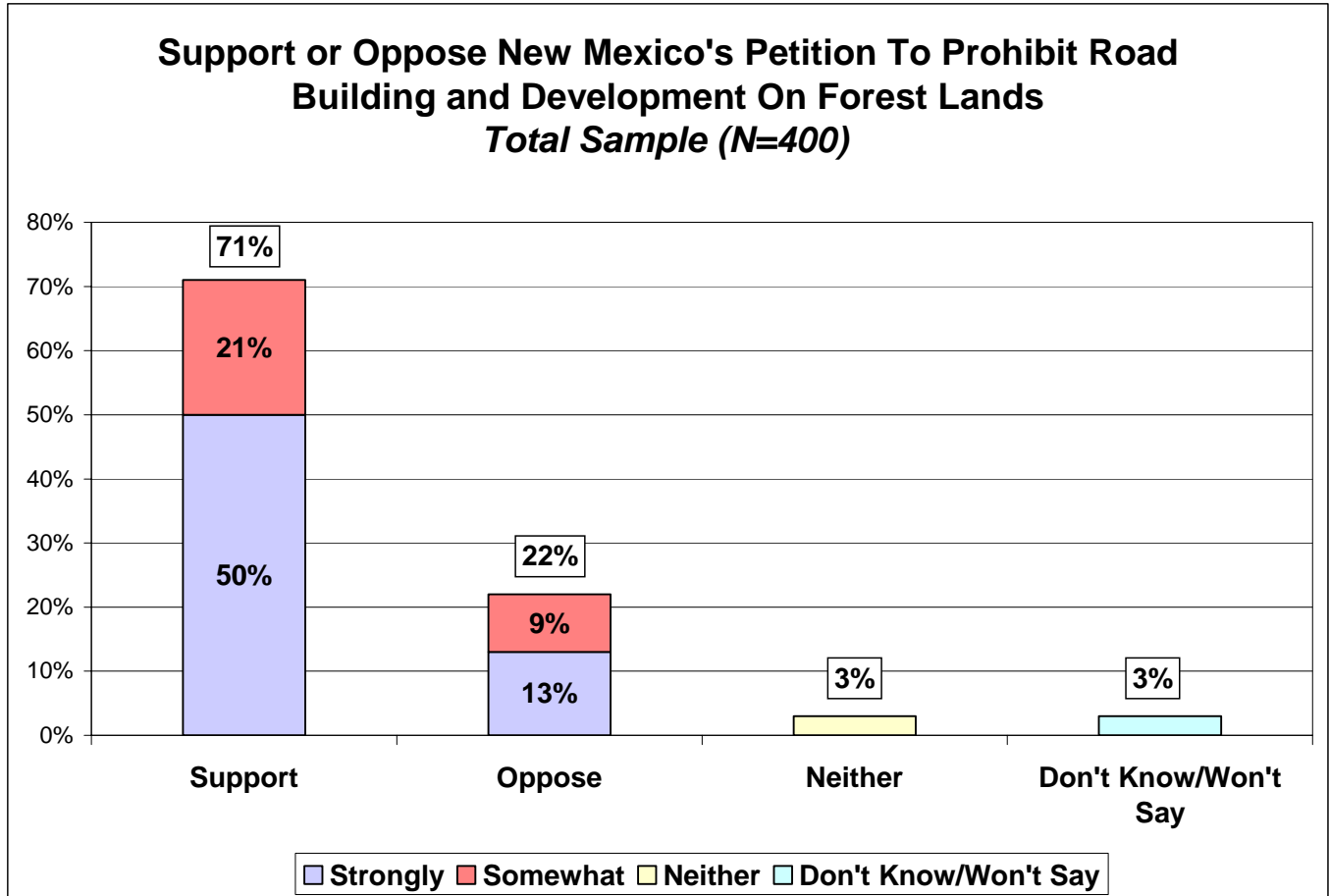
New Mexico Environmental Issues That Are of Greatest Concern

(Top 7 Unaided Responses)

	<i>Total Sample (N=400)</i>
Water supply/water shortage	30%
Drought/lack of rain	16%
Air quality/pollution	13%
Water conservation	11%
Water quality	9%
Oil industry/oil resources	8%
Nothing/don't know/won't say	20%

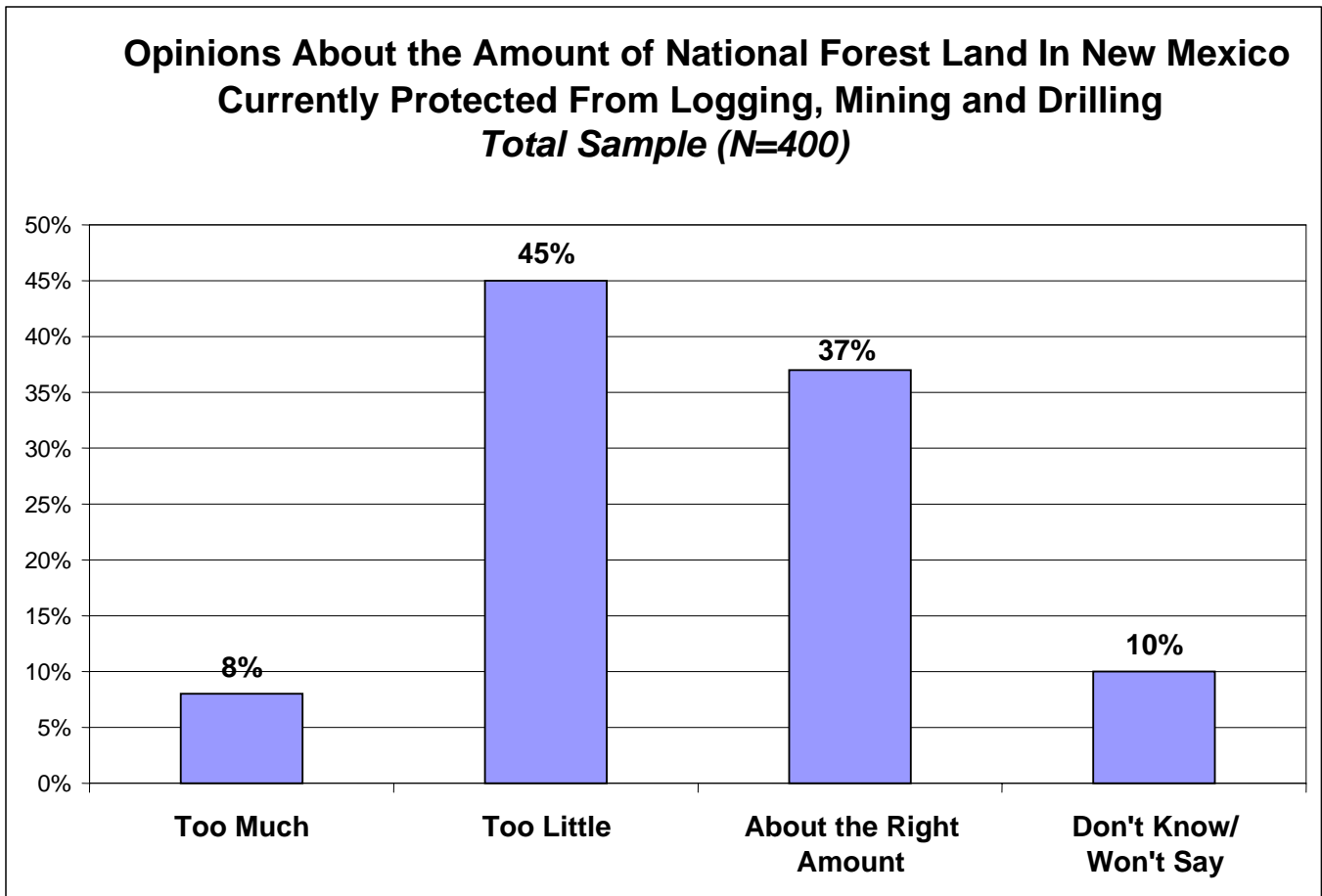
Voters were asked in an unaided, open-ended manner what they feel are the most important issues or problems facing New Mexico at this time and what environmental issues concern them most. As shown above, 17% of voters feel the biggest issue facing the state is gas prices, while 16% say the education system is poor, another 16% mention either water shortages or the drought, and 15% mention illegal immigration.

When asked what are the biggest environmental issues facing New Mexico, nearly one-in-three voters (30%) mention the water supply/shortage, while another 16% say it is the drought and 13% mention air pollution. It should also be noted that 11% mention water conservation and 9% cite water quality. The perceived seriousness of water related issues are bound to become more acute if New Mexico continues to receive below average rainfall in the coming months and more water restrictions are put in place.



Voters were also informed there are currently over 1.5 million acres of National Forest land in New Mexico that are roadless areas, representing approximately 17% of all the forest land in New Mexico and that the federal government has recently repealed a rule that prevented road building on the these lands, opening them up for commercial uses such as logging, mining and drilling. Voters were also informed that the state of New Mexico is petitioning the Federal Government to stop the development of these roadless areas by prohibiting activities such as logging, mining and drilling, but keeping them open to the public for activities such as hiking, camping, hunting and fishing.

As shown above, just over seven-in-ten voters say they either *strongly support* (50%) or *somewhat support* (21%) New Mexico's petition to prohibit road building and development in the roadless areas. In comparison, less than one-in-four voters (22%) say they are opposed to New Mexico's petition. There is broad based support for the petition with 79% of Democrats and 60% of Republican voters saying they are at least somewhat supportive of the idea. The majority of voters in each region of the state support the petition with those living in the North Central (81%), Albuquerque Metro (72%), and South/Southwestern (72%) regions showing the highest levels overall. Over three-fifths of those living in the Eastern (63%) and Northwestern (62%) regions of the state support the petition.



As shown above, the plurality of New Mexico voters (45%) generally believe that too little of the National Forest land in New Mexico is currently protected from logging, mining and drilling activities, as compared to 8% who believe there is too much of these lands being protected. Thirty-seven percent of voters believe there is currently about the right amount of National Forest land being protected from logging, mining and drilling.

It should also be noted that voters were informed there are approximately 9 million acres of National Forest lands in New Mexico and that approximately 17% of these lands are currently protected from logging, mining and oil drilling activities. They were then asked if they believe more, less or about the same amount of these activities should be allowed on forest lands in the state. Overall, two-fifths of voters statewide believe that more oil and gas drilling should be allowed on the National Forest lands in New Mexico, though 31% believe there should be less oil and gas drilling and 22% feel it should be kept at the current level. With rising concerns about the cost of oil and gas, some voters may be growing increasingly receptive to the idea of allowing more oil and gas drilling in some areas of the National Forests.

The plurality of voters (40%) believe less logging should be allowed on the state's National Forest lands, while 35% feel about the right amount of logging is taking place. Less than one-fifth (18%) of voters feel more logging should be allowed on the National Forest lands in New Mexico. Similar results are observed for mining as 39% believe there should be less mining activities and 35% feel it should be kept at about the current levels, while 15% feel more mining should be allowed.

Seriousness of Various New Mexico Issues (Summary Table) <i>Ranked by Highest Percentage "Very Serious Problem"</i> <i>Total Sample (N=400)</i>							
	Very Serious Problem 5	4	3	2	No Problem At All 1	Don't Know/ Won't Say	Mean †
The availability of future water supplies	70%	16%	9%	3%	2%	1%	4.5
Wildfires	58%	21%	13%	4%	3%	1%	4.3
The loss of rivers and streams	52%	20%	15%	7%	4%	3%	4.1
The loss of forest lands	38%	18%	23%	10%	10%	1%	3.7
The strength of the New Mexico economy	30%	24%	27%	11%	5%	3%	3.7
The loss of habitat for fish and wildlife	27%	20%	28%	12%	11%	2%	3.4

† The mean score is derived by taking the average score based on the 5-point scale. The *Very Serious Problem* response is assigned a value of 5; the *No Problem At All* response is assigned a value of 1. The *Don't Know/Won't Say* responses are excluded from the calculation of the mean.

Voters were asked to rate the seriousness of various issues facing New Mexico using a 5-point scale where 5 is a *very serious problem* and 1 is *no problem at all*. Of the issues listed, the availability of future water supplies is perceived as being the biggest problem in New Mexico as 86% give a rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. In fact, 70% of voters say the availability of future water supplies is a *very serious problem*.

Relating to the drought and low snow pack, nearly four-in-five voters (79%) feel wildfires are a serious problem facing the state, with 58% saying this is a *very serious problem*. Again, the perceived seriousness of this issue is bound to rise if major wildfires break out this spring or summer. It should also be noted that nine-in-ten voters in the North Central region of the state express concern about wildfires with 74% saying this is a *very serious problem*.

Approximately three-quarters (72%) of voters believe the loss of rivers and streams is a serious problem in New Mexico and the majority of voters (56%) believe the loss of forest lands is a serious problem. On a related note, nearly half (47%) the voters statewide believe the loss of habitat for fish and wildlife is a serious problem, twice the number who feel this is only a minor problem or no problem at all (as indicated by a score of 1 or 2). Finally, the majority of voters (54%) believe the strength of the New Mexico economy is a serious problem.

Methodology

This study was conducted by Research & Polling, Inc., to assess the attitudes and opinions of New Mexico voters as they relate to environmental issues. A random sample of 400 registered voters statewide were interviewed by telephone between April 19th and April 26th, 2006. A sample size of 400 provides a maximum margin of error of plus or minus 4.9%.