

Center for Western Priorities • January 2019

WINNING THE WEST

ELECTION 2018





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ELECTION 2018

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



What does it mean to “Win the West?” In the 2018 midterm election, it meant respecting and protecting public lands. Winning candidates in close Mountain West elections prioritized these issues in order to connect with voters. Advertising, social media, and campaign imagery related to outdoor issues—highlighted in our 2016 report as noteworthy patterns—are now unignorable trends. While other issues like

health care and immigration topped headlines, winning candidates in the Mountain West made concerted efforts to highlight their pro-public lands positions and values.

Pro-public lands candidates won in the West; firm respect for the outdoors is a key voting issue for Westerners.

Public lands—how they are used, their importance to local economies, and the way they define life in the West—were often featured as a distinguishing issue by winning campaigns. In most competitive states and districts across the region, candidates had to be pro-public lands to win. Many candidates leveraged public lands to connect with Western voters not only throughout their campaign, but also in the week leading up to Election Day.

The Center for Western Priorities’ Winning the West campaign examined the views of voters on public lands and how the issue was highlighted in closely-watched elections in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico.

Polls, focus groups, and a social media analysis showed how the growing influence of the outdoor voting bloc played an outsized role in moving Western voters. Voters in Mountain West swing states like Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico told us they supported a balanced approach to managing conservation, recreation, and responsible energy development. They wanted candidates who care about conservation and are willing to take positions that respect the Western way of life. And they overwhelmingly rejected efforts to drill and mine recklessly on public lands or shrink popular national monuments.

Those views turned into votes last November. **Of the 22 races we tracked throughout this election, 20 featured significant pro-public lands advertising or public lands messaging.** Candidates leveraged public lands to gain support while using the mountains and outdoor spaces of the Mountain West to serve as the backdrop of numerous campaign ads and pro-public lands messages on social media.

This report is the culmination of our analysis in the 2018 election cycle. We hope you will learn more and join us online at westernpriorities.org/winningthewest to continue the conversation moving forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer Rokala".

Jennifer Rokala
Executive Director,
Center for Western Priorities



MONTANA:

Public lands remain a prerequisite for success

In Montana, there's an expectation that successful candidates running for public office show strong support for public lands and access to the outdoors for hunting, angling, and outdoor recreation. Seventy-one percent of voters say they oppose opening public lands close to national parks and monuments for oil and gas drilling. Public lands—and access to them—has become a third rail in Montana. In 2018, outdoor issues played a significant role in two races.

MONTANA VOTERS AT A GLANCE

36%
approval rating for then-U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

57%
oppose increasing oil and gas development on public lands.

66%
oppose increasing public land available for oil and gas development by reducing conservation efforts on behalf of potentially endangered wildlife.

91%
think outdoor recreation will be important to the future of their state's economy.

Tester vs. Rosendale:

PUBLIC LANDS TAKE CENTER STAGE

PUBLIC LANDS IN PUBLIC HANDS

Senator Jon Tester, a Democrat, ran for re-election on a pro-public lands platform, prominently featuring the issue in his closing argument to voters in a nationally watched race that was expected to be close.

Initially, Tester was seen as one of the nation's most vulnerable Senate incumbents. President Donald Trump won the state by 21 points in 2016 and U.S. Representative Greg Gianforte comfortably won the state's at-large congressional seat in a recent special election.

Public lands took center stage this election as Tester ran multiple television ads and promoted social media content promising to fight and keep "public lands in public hands." Tester ended ads and speeches with the frequent refrain: "as long as I'm in the U.S. Senate, Montana is not for sale."

Tester used his position and record on public lands as a way to connect with local voters and, by contrast, portray his opponent, developer Matt Rosendale, as an outsider without a grasp on what it means to be a Montanan. Tester confidently discussed his campaign and how Montanans viewed him in an interview with The Associated Press, stating:

"Look, Montanans know who I am: They know I'm a lifetime Montanan, they know I understand rural America, they know I understand public lands and not privatizing them, they know I understand the importance of public education. Matt Rosendale isn't any of that."¹

A "RANCHER" AT HEART

Tester used his support for public lands and outdoor access to buttress against frequent attacks from President Trump, who visited the state four times over the fall and held multiple rallies in support of Rosendale in the closing days before the election.² Tester's campaign spent a reported \$790,000 on internet and television advertising, many targeting voters with a pro-public lands message.³

The race caught the attention of national media and brands like Patagonia. Its endorsement of Tester marked the first political endorsement in the company's history.⁴

Tester's strategy of connecting with voters through the shared value of respecting Montana's public lands was a success. He won a majority of the vote and outpaced his opponent by three percentage points.⁵

“

My family's been farming out here for three generations. Montana is a special place. I've defended our public lands every day that I've been in the Senate, while my opponent supported transferring our federal public lands. Now he says he's seen the light. But just last year he voted against access to tens of thousands of acres. Montanans have long fought off out of state developers. I'm Jon Tester and I approve this message to defend Montana once again.

— JON TESTER CAMPAIGN AD, "Defending Our Public Lands"



Jon Tester 
@jontester

Election day tweet from Sen. Jon Tester

Don't let rain or snow slow you down. Montanans are counting on you to vote today by 8pm. Our public lands, health care, and Montana way of life depend on it.

7:21 AM - 6 Nov 2018

Williams vs. Gianforte:

BIPARTISAN UNITY AGAINST SELLING PUBLIC LANDS

The race for Montana's at-large seat in the U.S. House of Representatives pitted incumbent Congressman Greg Gianforte, a Republican, against Democrat Kathleen Williams. Gianforte won the seat in a 2017 special election to replace former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke.

Gianforte previously ran for governor in 2016, losing to Democrat Steve Bullock. The race focused largely on access to public lands due to a lawsuit that resurfaced involving Gianforte's family-owned company suing Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in an effort to remove an easement that provided public access to the East Gallatin River.⁶

Having learned his lesson in his 2016 loss to Governor Bullock, Gianforte took a

hard stance against the sale or transfer of public lands, putting him at odds with the Republican Party's national platform on the issue.⁷

Gianforte spent nearly \$4.2 million on his statewide campaign, running more television ads than any other candidate running in a statewide election across the country.⁸ Those ads, along with his website, often included Gianforte's promises to "defend our right to hunt, fish and recreate on public lands."

While Williams also promised not to sell "Montana's public lands to the highest bidder," Gianforte's own positioning may have prevented her from creating a more compelling distinction on the issue to voters and ultimately, he went on to win re-election.



Greg Gianforte

@GregForMontana

“Montana's public lands are always worth fighting for, which is why I championed legislation to protect East Rosebud Creek. Montana is our home. I'm proud to defend it.”

11:28AM - 18 Sep 2018



Kathleen Williams

Television Ad

"As a lover of the outdoors I support Kathleen Williams because she's not going to sell off Montana's public lands to the highest bidder."

Television ad from Rep. Greg Gianforte



GREG GIANFORTE

Protecting East Rosebud Creek

TRANSCRIPT:

Television clips: "The 20 mile stretch of East Rosebud Creek in south central Montana would be protected under legislation introduced by Representative Greg Gianforte."

"He has offered up legislation for protecting the East Rosebud river."

"President Trump has signed a new law that protects Montana's East Rosebud Creek."

"East Rosebud Creek now part of the wild and scenic river system."

"Supporters of the bill say it proves the bipartisan nature of protecting healthy rivers."

Narrator: "Greg Gianforte, protecting our public lands."



NEW MEXICO:

Public lands win in a landslide

New Mexico was a closely watched swing state this election. The growing influence of public lands issues and the way candidates highlighted their connection to the lands made the difference in several close contests. Whether voting for New Mexico's governor or Commissioner of Public Lands, New Mexicans voted for their lands.

NEW MEXICO VOTERS AT A GLANCE

70%

of New Mexico voters said they are motivated to get out and vote when public lands are threatened.

68%

said they tend to vote for candidates who align the closest to their point of view on public lands.

76% *of voters oppose*

reducing the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments in Utah, just northwest of New Mexico.

Lujan Grisham vs. Pearce:

A GOVERNOR WHO CHAMPIONS NEW MEXICO'S PUBLIC LANDS

OPPOSING VIEWS ON PUBLIC LANDS

The race between Michelle Lujan Grisham and Steve Pearce for New Mexico's governor featured two candidates with long records and starkly different views on public lands.

While in Congress, serving the state's 2nd Congressional District, Pearce was an advocate for selling and opening more public lands for private development. In 2013, Pearce introduced a bill to "prohibit all future monument designations except those approved by Congress."⁹ In 2015, he voted for an amendment to block the presidential declaration of new national monuments in certain counties.¹⁰ He was also the only member of New Mexico's congressional delegation who did not sponsor legislation that would re-authorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund.¹¹

By contrast, Lujan Grisham, serving in the state's 1st Congressional District,

introduced legislation to enhance protections for national monuments and reinstate the boundaries for Bears Ears National Monument, which was reduced by the Trump administration in 2017.¹²

DEFINING NEW MEXICO'S VALUES

Lujan Grisham spotlighted her commitment to public lands throughout her campaign, using social media as a tool to connect with voters who also shared her pro-public lands sentiment. She leveraged opportunities like National Public Lands Day, to drive a conversation on social media on her plan to grow the outdoor economy and create more jobs if elected as governor. Lujan Grisham also embraced investments in wind and solar energy.

Her positioning on public lands, energy and the outdoor economy aligned with the future New Mexico voters wanted to see. Lujan Grisham won the Governor's race with nearly 60 percent of the vote.¹³



Michelle Lujan Grisham
@Michelle4NM

“Happy #NationalPublicLandsDay, New Mexico! We are incredibly lucky to have so many beautiful public lands throughout our state and as governor, I'll leverage our outdoor economy to grow our tourism sector and create good-paying jobs: [#http://bit.ly/MLG_Build](http://bit.ly/MLG_Build) #nmpol

1:25PM - 22 Sep 2018

Twitter video from Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham



MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM

Creating an Office of Outdoor Recreation

TRANSCRIPT:

“Hello, New Mexico... As governor I will immediately create an Office of Outdoor Recreation inside the Department of Economic Development. Now this drives jobs into the outdoor economy, which is an incredibly green, productive way to bring high paying jobs to New Mexicans statewide... It's an incredible way to bolster New Mexico's incredible natural beauty. Let's go, New Mexico.”

Heinrich vs. Rich vs. Johnson:

A RECORD OF CONSERVATION SUCCESS

AN ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC LANDS

Senator Martin Heinrich stood out in his passion for the outdoors and easily secured re-election, defeating Republican newcomer, Mick Rich, and Libertarian former Governor, Gary Johnson.

Heinrich has worked to cement his record on public lands since taking his seat in 2013. Last year, along with Senator Dean Heller of Nevada, Heinrich introduced a bipartisan public lands bill that would provide a balanced approach to the conservation of public lands in the West by reauthorizing the Federal Lands Transaction Facilitation Act, which had been used to protect some of New Mexico's most iconic lands.¹⁴ Heinrich, along with his fellow New Mexico Senator Tom Udall, joined a bipartisan group of senators urging leadership to reauthorize and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation

Fund.¹⁵ Both senators also introduced the Organ Mountains Desert Peaks Conservation Act, a piece of legislation that would designate 240,000 acres of the national monument as wilderness.¹⁶

As often as he could throughout the campaign, Heinrich emphasized his plans to ensure that public lands will be available for future generations of New Mexicans. He even created a minute-long ad telling voters "wilderness is in my blood" and setting an ambitious agenda for conserving treasured outdoor spaces in New Mexico while maintaining access for responsible use and enjoyment.

As Senator Heinrich's national profile continues to rise, he has an opportunity to elevate public lands issues to a larger audience.



Martin Heinrich

@TeamHeinrich

“We should be draining the swamp and protecting public lands, not the other way around.”



Top interior staffer who backed shrinking national monuments to join BP
[washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

11:30AM - 29 Aug 2018

Television ad from Sen. Martin Heinrich



MARTIN HEINRICH

Wilderness

TRANSCRIPT:

"Wilderness is in my blood. Tell me your favorite mountain range in New Mexico, and if it's public ground, chances are I know it. These lands are our birthright and I'm working to make sure they're part of our future. I fought to designate the Rio Grande del Norte and the Organ Mountains as national monuments, and I stood up to Donald Trump when we needed to protect them. These lands are critical to our economy: a \$10 billion industry with a hundred thousand jobs, and more to come. I envision an outdoor recreation economy that rivals any Western state, a world class trail system in our national forests, outdoor adventure that brings visitors from near and far, and protects our land and water, while creating jobs across New Mexico. If we plan for what we can be, we won't lose who we are."

Torres Small vs. Herrell:

A NEW VOICE FOR NEW MEXICO'S LANDS

TORRES SMALL PAVES THE WAY

The race for New Mexico's open 2nd Congressional District seat was closely contested up to Election Day, with first time candidate Xochitl Torres Small, a Democrat and water rights attorney, defeating Republican State Representative Yvette Herrell by a single percentage point in this historically red district.

Torres Small began the race by highlighting her career "fighting to protect access to the water we all depend on." She emphasized her public lands positions throughout the campaign, directly addressing Washington and promising to fight against any decisions that would harm New Mexico's public lands, water, and national monuments.

Herrell's own record on public lands became a liability. As a state

representative in 2015, Herrell introduced a failed bill to study the transfer of national public lands to the state, tribes, and land grants. She was also state chairperson for a nonprofit that sought to privatize public lands and served as the public chair of the American Legislative Exchange Council, which supports efforts to seize public lands around the country. As a result, Herrell was unable to leverage public lands to connect with voters.

Torres Small's advertising campaign caught national attention.¹⁷ The ads regularly demonstrated her connection to the outdoors, featuring images of her hunting on public lands and also discussing water issues with local farmers. With her win, she showed how a newcomer can establish herself with voters in the West through a shared respect for public lands.



Xochitl Torres Small

@XochforCongress

“New Mexico's public lands drive our economy. Let's work together to protect them. #NM02

2:21PM - 8 Oct 2018



Yvette Herrell

@Yvette4congress

“I have always been an advocate for New Mexico to maintain control over our public lands. Today, National Public Lands Day, I reaffirm that commitment so that we can have a say in the management of our forests and watersheds.

9:01AM - 22 Sep 2018

Television ad from Xochitl Torres Small



XOCHITL TORRES SMALL

Hunt

TRANSCRIPT:

"Out here gives me perspective. We know what we need for a shot at a brighter future, because out here makes the squabbles in Washington seem small. New Mexicans don't care which party gets the credit or the blame, we just want someone to deliver. That's what I've done. That's what I'll do."

Commissioner of Public Lands:

HOLDING INDUSTRY ACCOUNTABLE

GARCIA RICHARD VS. LYONS: FIXING OUR LANDS

New Mexico's Commissioner of Public Lands is responsible for managing nine million acres of state-owned public lands.¹⁸ As one of the most powerful land managers in the country, the Public Lands Commissioner has the authority to regulate oil and gas extraction on state trust lands and revenues generated through leasing.

The race for the open seat pitted Democrat State Representative Stephanie Garcia Richard against Republican, and former Public Lands Commissioner Pat Lyons.

Lyons was backed by the oil industry, including a \$2 million contribution from

Chevron.¹⁹ Lyons used a rancher narrative in his attempt to connect with voters and supporters by asking New Mexicans to “not vote for the politician,” but instead for a “true rancher that cares for education.” However, organizations such as Conservation Voters New Mexico Verde Voter Fund released ads against Lyons, who they believed gave away New Mexico's land to developers during his time as Commissioner of Public Lands.

Garcia Richard received support from the Sierra Club and Conservation Voters New Mexico. She won by taking on Lyons' public lands record and calling attention to his refusal to hold polluters accountable, resulting in illegal dumping across the state.

“

Career politician Pat Lyons played a shell game with our public lands. Lyons tried to cut off New Mexican families' access to our precious outdoor spaces. He took our rich cultural resources and exchanged them for parcels on the side of a highway. Developers love him, but you won't. He gave them our land, flew on their plane, pushed through their deals, and took big campaign money. Say no to Pat Lyons, don't let him sell us out again.

— CONSERVATION VOTERS NEW MEXICO VERDE VOTER FUND, “Pat Lyons Play a Shell Game with Our Public Lands”

Television ads from Garcia Richards and Lyons



STEPHANIE GARCIA RICHARDS

Stopping polluters & investing in renewable energy

TRANSCRIPT:

“Illegal dumping sites like this exist because my opponent refused to hold polluters accountable, but we can fix this while generating millions in renewable energy projects and creating thousands of jobs right here in our state.”



PATRICK LYONS

Vote early for Patrick Lyons for Land Commissioner

TRANSCRIPT:

“Early voting has started. Don't vote for the politician. Vote for a true rancher that cares for education, and that is Patrick Lyons for Land Commissioner.”



COLORADO:

Expanding a public lands legacy

This year, Colorado voters resoundingly rejected the Trump administration's policies. Public lands played an important role in several of the close Colorado elections that contributed to the state's reputation as a reliably purple state which elects pro-public lands candidates at the local, state, and federal level.

COLORADO VOTERS AT A GLANCE

74% *oppose opening public lands close to national parks and monuments for oil and gas drilling.*

86% *of voters believe the presence of public lands and the local outdoor recreation lifestyle are important to attracting good jobs and innovative companies to the state.*

89% *of voters support requiring oil and gas companies to detect and repair natural gas leaks in drilling equipment.*

Polis vs. Stapleton:

KEEPING COLORADO WILD

In the Colorado race for governor, Democratic Congressman Jared Polis took on Republican State Treasurer Walker Stapleton.

Public lands were heavily discussed and elevated during this election cycle after President Trump signed an executive order requiring the Interior Department to review nearly 30 national monuments for potential reduction or elimination in 2017.²⁰ Polis used the executive order as a wedge issue and an example of his willingness to take on the federal government on behalf of Colorado's voters and public lands.

Polis amplified his support for public lands by creating a microsite, titled "Hands Off Our Lands," attacking Stapleton's leadership abilities and calling out his plan to sell Colorado's lands.²¹ He also promised to develop a "Keep Colorado Wild" plan aimed at protecting public lands and open spaces in the state.²² He continued sharing the plan through an in-depth video promoted on social media.

Polis took to Facebook on Colorado Public Lands Day, sharing a video declaring he will "stand up to Trump and special interests." He also drew a contrast with his opponent's

positions on public lands in an interview with the Colorado Springs Gazette:

"To me, this election is very much about keeping our public lands public," Polis says. "I think there's a big difference with Walker Stapleton, who has aligned himself with Utah-style policies of transferring ownership and privatizing public lands, and my desire to protect our great areas, and even working with different stakeholder groups to expand protection when we can."

In the final days before the election, Polis penned a column extolling the importance and impact of Colorado's public lands on local communities and Colorado's secure water future. Polis wrote, "I believe that threats to sell off our public lands are also threats to harm our local businesses and communities."²³

Unlike Polis, Stapleton did not heavily rely on public lands as a way to connect with Colorado voters and was largely silent on outdoor issues.

In the end, the race was not close, with Polis outpacing Stapleton by more than 10 percentage points.²⁴



STEAMBOAT
PILOT & TODAY
October 28, 2018

“

As governor, I'll make sure that our public lands stay in public hands. I believe that threats to sell off our public lands are also threats to harm our local businesses and communities, which is why one of my first policies in my campaign was the Keep Colorado Wild plan: a comprehensive policy to protect our public lands, open spaces and wildlife in Colorado.

— **JARED POLIS OP-ED**,
"Thriving public lands today,
stronger water security tomorrow"

Rep. Jared Polis uses public lands as a wedge issue

JARED POLIS' 'Hands Off Our Lands' microsite



TAKE ACTION

Donald Trump, Ryan Zinke, and Walker Stapleton want to auction off Colorado to polluting special interests. Take a stand and tell them: **Colorado can't be bought and sold.**

JARED POLIS FACEBOOK AD

Colorado Public Lands Day!

TRANSCRIPT:

Constituent Wendy Kahn: "Donald Trump is waging war on our public lands. That's why I live here. That's the definition of this part of the country, of this state, is to really preserve and take care of those public lands."

Jared Polis: "I'm Jared Polis and as governor I'll stand up to Trump and the special interests to protect our Colorado way of life."

Crow vs. Coffman:

CONSERVATION IN A SUBURBAN DISTRICT

Democrat Jason Crow used public lands and the environment as key parts of his message to defeat Republican incumbent Mike Coffman in Colorado's 6th Congressional District, turning the seat blue for the first time since it was created 36 years ago.

Mike Coffman's advantage in this election was his familiarity with Colorado's voters, having represented the diverse suburban district near Denver in Congress for 10 years. However, his campaign rarely touched on access to or protection of

public lands. Instead, Coffman invested in numerous attack ads on Jason Crow on issues like gun control.

Taking a different approach to winning Western voters, Jason Crow routinely employed outdoor imagery and messaging to align himself with local values. He often addressed the Trump administration's roll back of public land conservation in the West and promised that if elected to Congress, he would work to protect Colorado's lands so future generations can call Colorado home.



Jason Crow
@JasonCrowCO06

“Happy Public Lands Day, Colorado! Get out and enjoy our beautiful state. Colorado is a leader in protecting our public lands and I promise to be an ally in this fight when I'm elected to Congress! #copubliclandsday #publiclands

8:00AM - 19 May 2018

Jason Crow's National Public Lands Day message to voters

TRANSCRIPT:

“Like many Coloradans, my family and I love the outdoors. But without our public lands, like the national forest that surrounds me here, we wouldn't have access to hike, camp, ski, bike, and do all the things that we love. Colorado is a national leader with our Public Lands Day because Coloradans have always loved the land, regardless of our political affiliation. For over a hundred years, Americans have preserved these lands for future generations. It's now our responsibility to do the same so they are here a hundred years from now. These lands are the legacy we leave our children and grandchildren, but the Trump administration has decided to roll back protections for public lands in the West to appease oil and gas and a few extreme voices. In Congress I will work to protect these special places so that future generations of Colorado kids can also enjoy the incredible place that we all call home.”



Mitsch Bush vs. Tipton:

PUBLIC LANDS NARROW THE GAP

Since first winning his seat in 2010, Republican Congressman Scott Tipton has enjoyed a series of double-digit re-election victories. Tipton's opponents, as seen in the 2016 race against Democrat Gail Schwartz, have used public lands as a central platform to outline the distinct differences between their and Tipton's position on public lands.

That trend continued this year. Tipton managed to retain his seat, but not without a fight from Democrat Diane Mitsch Bush.

Mitsch Bush used public lands policies in

a way Tipton did not, by making them a focus of her campaign. Mitsch Bush made promises to seek regulations on oil and gas leasing on national public lands and "seek re-designation of national monuments in the West decimated by the Trump Administration," which was mapped out on her website. Mitsch Bush also used social media to support public lands and promote her endorsement from the League of Conservation Voters.

Although Mitsch Bush did not win, her message on public lands narrowed the gap in a once safe seat.

“

When it comes to standing up for Colorado, Diane Mitsch Bush has a proven record. As a county commissioner and a state House representative, Diane fought to protect our environment, our public lands, and our water.

—DIANE MITSCH BUSH AD,
"Diane Mitsch Bush for Colorado"



Election week tweet from Diane Mitsch Bush

CD3's economy depends on our public lands. Protecting public lands is an economic priority. #Vote | 12:49 PM - 5 Nov 2018

Diane Mitsch Bush

@RepDMB



Colorado Attorney General:

STANDING UP FOR OUR LAND

WEISER VS. BRAUCHLER: DEFENDING PEOPLE AND LANDS

Democrat Phil Weiser defeated Republican George Brauchler to become Colorado's chief legal officer as the state's new Attorney General.

Brauchler never used public lands in his message to Colorado voters like Weiser did throughout his campaign. Weiser addressed public lands in several television advertisements and his website which said:

"As our next Attorney General, I am committed to protecting our land, air, and water, addressing the reality of climate change, and standing out against efforts by our federal government to undermine protections of clean air, clean water, and public lands. Conservation Colorado has endorsed me to do just that."

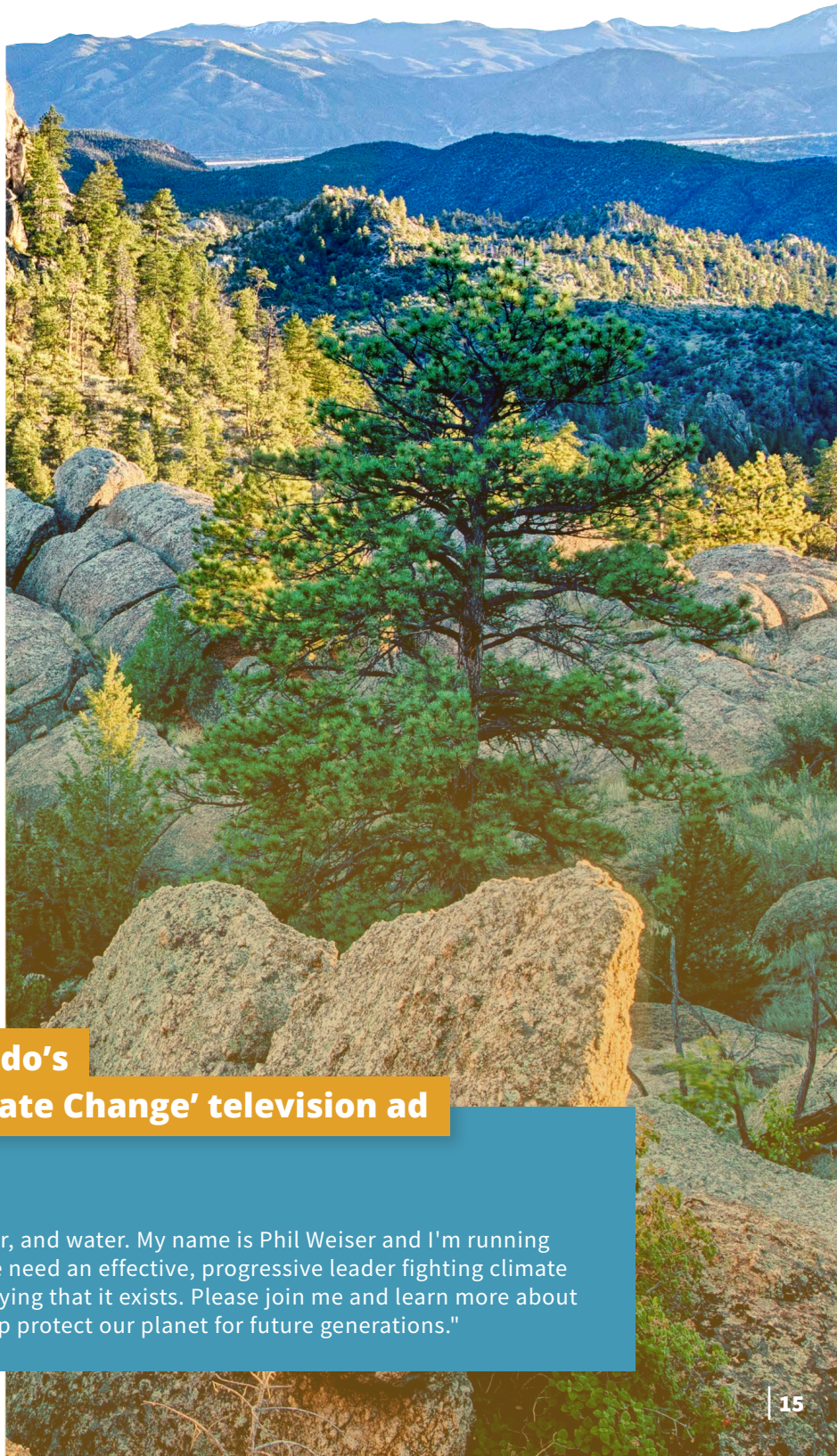
Western voters took note of his pro-public lands sentiment and elected Weiser to be Colorado's chief legal officer.



'Phil Weiser Will Protect Colorado's Air, Land, and Water from Climate Change' television ad

TRANSCRIPT:

"We're at a make-or-break moment for our land, air, and water. My name is Phil Weiser and I'm running to be Colorado's next Attorney General because we need an effective, progressive leader fighting climate change, not someone who joins Scott Pruitt in denying that it exists. Please join me and learn more about my plan to protect our land, air, and water and help protect our planet for future generations."





ARIZONA: Conservation in a changing state

Home to famous national parks such as the Grand Canyon, Saguaro, and Petrified Forest, public lands help define Arizona. From outdoor recreation to energy development, Arizona is no stranger to debates on how best to use the land, some of which came into sharper focus this election.

ARIZONA VOTERS AT A GLANCE

77%
of voters
think outdoor
recreation will
be important
to the future
of their state's
economy.

Arizona voters
oppose removing
restriction on
uranium mining
by the Grand
Canyon by a
2 to 1
margin.

57% of voters will vote for a
Democrat and **58%** for a Republican
who say conservation is key to the
success of the economy in the West.

Sinema vs. McSally:

CLOSE ELECTION, BIG WIN FOR PUBLIC LANDS

DESERT LANDS AS A BACKDROP

Two U.S. Representatives faced off in the race to fill Arizona's open U.S. Senate seat. The contest between Congresswoman Martha McSally, a Republican representing the state's 2nd Congressional District, and Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat representing Arizona's 9th Congressional District, was one of the most closely watched competitive midterm races.

Sinema established a history of defending public lands, voting to protect more public lands and opposing efforts to limit safety reviews of oil and gas pipelines.²⁵ On the campaign trail, Sinema often addressed outdoor issues and emphasized her own connection to the land as a native Arizonan.

In advertisements, Sinema highlighted the state's bond with the desert, saying "Arizonans are strong and independent. We have the desert in our blood."

Understanding the power of outdoor imagery to voters, Sinema used Arizona's desert lands as the backdrop for multiple campaign advertisements and on her website.

McSally's record on public lands was less consistent. In Congress she introduced a bipartisan bill in partnership with the late Senator John McCain to help complete deferred restoration projects on public lands, including in Saguaro National Park.²⁶ Yet on the campaign trail, McSally repeatedly supported the Trump administration's efforts to undo national monument protections and supported the privatization of public lands for profit.

Arizona voters selected the candidate with the stronger record on public lands, as Sinema defeated McSally in a close election. However, McSally will have the opportunity to align herself more consistently with the state's outdoor voters, having been recently appointed to fill Arizona's other U.S. Senate seat.



Kyrsten Sinema
@SenatorSinema

“Arizona's public lands and our outdoor economy depend on the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We're working with @AZTRAIL and Arizona Wildlife Federation to #SaveLWCF and protect our public lands.

5:35PM - 15 Sep 2018

“As Arizonans and Westerners, we treasure our public lands and the role they play in our special way of life. Grateful to have @LCVoters Action Fund's support. #AZSen

1:40PM - 19 Apr 2018

A desert backdrop for Sen. Kyrsten Sinema's television ads



KYRSTEN SINEMA

Go Forward

TRANSCRIPT:

"I was born in the desert. When you wake up each day and you hear those doves and you smell that desert sand, at least for me, I'm overwhelmed by how lucky I am to be born in the best state in the country. Arizonans are strong and independent, we have the desert in our blood. The world we live in is really complex, and so we're all going to have slightly different opinions as we go forward. I know Arizonans deserve a senator who just solves the problems—not in a Republican way or a Democratic way, but just solves the problems—so they can focus on taking care of their family and living their lives and getting that shot at the American dream. It will only work if we can work across the aisle, and that's why I know that I will get stuff done for Arizonans in the U.S. Senate."

O'Halleran vs. Rogers:

CONSERVING ARIZONA'S CANYONS

CANYONS, DESERTS, AND FORESTS

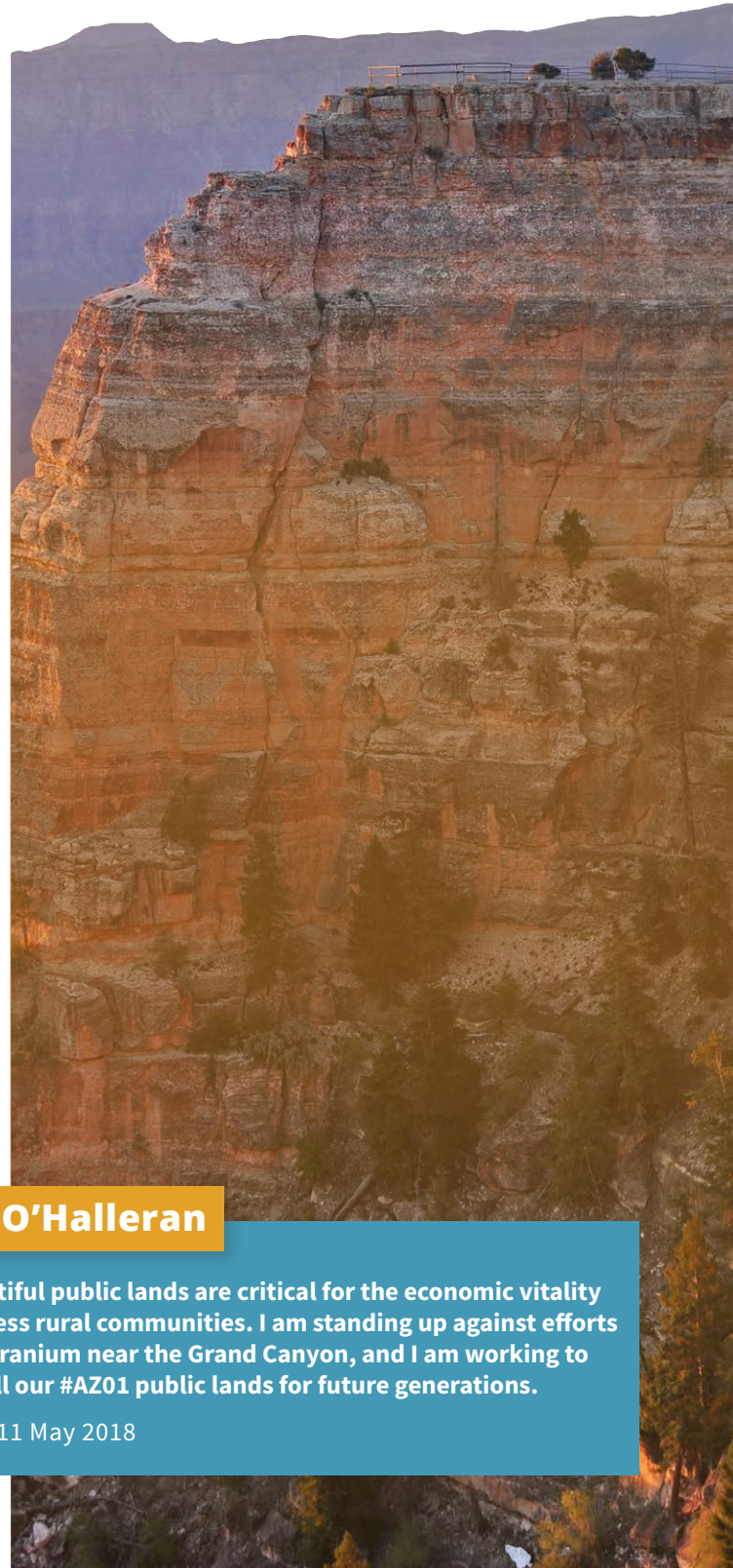
Arizona's 1st Congressional District holds vast expanses of low deserts and forests, and more Native American residents than any district in the country. It's no surprise that outdoor issues are central in this toss-up seat that President Trump won by one percent in 2016.

A proposal by the Trump administration to lift a 20-year uranium mining ban on 1 million acres of land around the Grand Canyon, which buttresses the district, caused local controversy. In response, incumbent Congressman Tom O'Halleran, a Democrat, joined four other members of the state's congressional delegation in a letter to former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke seeking a formal commitment to maintaining the ban.^{27, 28}

During his two years in Congress, O'Halleran advocated for mining on public lands to be limited and safer. He supported the Grand Canyon watershed mining withdrawal and pushed for Congress to pass legislation to study the longstanding health issues of mineral development in the region.^{29, 30}

Republican Wendy Rogers, by contrast, welcomed the Trump administration's energy agenda, supporting Trump's decision to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling and the Keystone XL pipeline project. She highlighted these two projects on her campaign website, stating: "In Congress I will support the siting of new domestic oil refineries, investment into the latest advances in nuclear energy, and proper investment into solar and wind power."

In a close election, O'Halleran's locally-focused messaging of keeping the Grand Canyon free of uranium mining was among the difference makers as he retained the seat.



Tweet from Rep. Tom O'Halleran

**Tom
O'Halleran**
@TomOHalleran

Our beautiful public lands are critical for the economic vitality of countless rural communities. I am standing up against efforts to mine uranium near the Grand Canyon, and I am working to protect all our #AZ01 public lands for future generations.

9:16AM - 11 May 2018



NEVADA:

Public lands for future generations

In 2016, public lands were a spotlight issue in Nevada. This year was no different, as outdoor issues continued to play a role in some notable races.

With public lands making up 80 percent of Nevada, issues involving the outdoor recreation economy and land development are especially important.³¹ As the home of anti-government extremist Cliven Bundy, Nevada is also a hotbed for anti-public lands activity. Bundy's son, Ryan Bundy, ran an unsuccessful independent campaign for governor in 2018. Successful candidates took notice of voters' support for public lands and made efforts to engage with them on the topic, resulting in some major wins for public lands.

NEVADA VOTERS AT A GLANCE

60%

of voters oppose rolling back environmental regulation on oil and gas development.

70%

oppose significantly reducing the size of national monuments.

82%

of voters favor investments in the development of renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and geothermal.

Sisolak vs. Laxalt:

A VISION FOR NEVADA'S ENERGY FUTURE

The competitive race between the Democratic Clark County Commissioner Steve Sisolak and Republican Attorney General Adam Laxalt to be Nevada's next governor offered voters a stark contrast on outdoor issues.

Sisolak staked out his position early, releasing a video promoting his “bold environmental vision,” highlighting the need for Nevada’s governor to invest in conserving natural resources and the state’s clean energy future. Sisolak campaigned on a future where Nevadans can “breathe unpolluted air, drink clean water, and enjoy our natural treasures.” He pledged to protect public lands and conserve water resources in places like Lake Tahoe, Red Rock Canton National Conservation Area, and the Ruby

Mountains. Sisolak’s proactive approach to setting a pro-outdoors agenda may have been a lesson learned in the primaries, when he found himself on the defensive against attacks from his opponent, Chris Giunchigliani, for supporting a housing development in Red Rock.

Taking an opposite approach, Laxalt applauded Senator Dean Heller and Congressman Mark Amodei for introducing legislation that would undermine the intent of the Antiquities Act by requiring congressional approval for national monument designations.³²

Voters sided with Sisolak in the race, and he defeated Laxalt by a margin of four percent.³³

“

President Obama’s executive action designating two national monuments in Nevada and Utah is another example of a unilateral federal land grab before he leaves office.

This action, pushed by left-wing activists and extreme environmentalists, will only damage Nevada’s economy and cost our state jobs.

— **STATEMENT FROM ATTORNEY GENERAL ADAM LAXALT** following President Obama’s designation of Gold Butte National Monument

Television ads from Sisolak and Giunchigliani



STEVE SISOLAK

Sisolak’s bold environmental vision

TRANSCRIPT:

“Nevada’s next governor needs to think big. That’s why I have a bold environmental vision for our state. It’s more important than ever to elect a governor who will protect our natural resources and invest in the clean energy future. As governor, I pledge to protect our public lands, like Gold Butte, Tahoe, Red Rock, Ruby Mountains, and many more.”

CHRIS GIUNCHIGLIANI

Red Rock

TRANSCRIPT:

“We all love Red Rock. I’m Chris Giunchigliani, or ‘Chris G,’ and we need to protect our environment and public lands, because climate change is real. It’s why I lead the fight against building thousands of houses at Red Rock. Steve Sisolak took \$10,000 from the Red Rock developer then voted for the development, robbing the next generation of open space. Steve puts developers first. I’m ‘Chris G’ and as governor I’ll put the environment first.”



Rosen vs. Heller:

FIGHTING TO PRESERVE NEVADA'S OUTDOORS

MAKING PUBLIC LANDS ACCESSIBLE

Two In the nationally-watched race for Nevada's Senate seat, congressional newcomer Democrat Jacky Rosen took on incumbent Dean Heller, who had never lost an election in his 30-year political career.

While both candidates focused on different national issues like healthcare, education, and the economy, public lands messaging found its way into each campaign as a result of the impact recent Trump administration's decisions would have on Nevada's public lands.

In 2017, former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke recommended scaling back Gold Butte National Monument. It was a controversial idea that Heller welcomed and vocally supported in his race.³⁴

Rosen used the proposed shrinking of Gold Butte to go on the offensive. Her response: "Secretary Zinke's process to review our

national monuments has been a sham from the start, failing to listen to local advocates and tribal communities in Nevada who care deeply about preserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Gold Butte."³⁵

Rosen connected with her constituents and supporters through an ongoing conversation on social media. Rosen celebrated National Public Lands Day and called out her opponent's support for shrinking Gold Butte National Monument. For Rosen, the fight to preserve Gold Butte became the environmental focus of her campaign and she even highlighted the issue prominently on her campaign website.

Rosen used an opportunity to connect with voters in a way Heller did not. Through the Gold Butte debate, she was able to vocalize a broader support for preserving Nevada's natural beauty and the outdoors. Rosen's alignment with Nevada's voters on outdoor issues contributed to her expectations-beating win.



Jacky Rosen
@RosenforNevada

“70 percent of Nevada voters oppose scaling back or eliminating protections for Gold Butte. However, @SenDeanHeller has been vocal in his support for shrinking Gold Butte” #ProtectPublicLands



Maite Arce: Heller must fight to protect Nevada's public lands
rgi.com

10:04AM - 11 Apr 2018



Jacky Rosen makes an appearance at Patagonia



Jacky Rosen
@RosenforNevada

Had a great conversation about protecting our public lands and fighting for clean air and clean water at @Patagonia in Reno today! #NVSen

5:30PM - 21 Oct 2018

Lee vs. Tarkanian:

BATTLE FOR NEVADA'S LANDS

NEVADA'S PARKS AND WILDERNESS

In a battleground race for Nevada's 3rd Congressional District, an environmental consultant, Democrat Susie Lee ran an environmentally-focused campaign against perennial Republican candidate Danny Tarkanian and five others. Public lands made a noticeable appearance in a race that became one of the most expensive in the country.

Lee described herself as a conservation advocate with a deep appreciation for "Nevada's natural resources and public lands."³⁶ Lee's method for communicating her message was on her social media channels, noticeably engaging her online supporters with public land focused messages. Lee made promises to fight for public lands resources after funding issues delayed work for more than 49 million acres of Nevada's parks and wilderness areas in the past year.

Lee and Tarkanian had drastic differences in their campaigns, with Tarkanian running a less environmentally focused campaign and consistently supporting the Trump administration's agenda. In an interview with Nevada Public Radio, Tarkanian stated:

*"Some land should absolutely be released to the state, if it's in an area that we can build industrial, commercial, or residential use out of it. It absolutely should go back and there is no reason to argue against that."*³⁷

In this heated race that gained national attention, public lands gained another advocate in Lee who won the race by more than nine percentage points.³⁸



#PublicLands tweet from Susie Lee

Susie Lee
@SusieLeeNV

It is vital that we protect our #publiclands, and in Congress, I will fight to make sure they are fully funded! @SierraClub @LCVoters

5:56PM - 9 Jun 2018



Horsford vs. Hardy:

MONUMENTAL REMATCH

OLD RIVALS, SAME LANDS

Democrat Steven Horsford and Republican Cresent Hardy faced each other once again in a rematch for Nevada's 4th Congressional District. Since the seat was created in 2012, it has changed hands every two years. Hardy, who defeated then-incumbent Horsford in 2014, went on to lose his re-election contest in 2016. Now open, the two former congressmen faced-off to regain their old seat. Along the way, both candidates' past records on public lands came into sharp focus.

Horsford used different mediums to declare his support. On his website, Horsford listed conservation and the environment as key issues, outlining his efforts to protect Nevada's parks and public lands as reflected in the multiple bills he led in the past. On his social media platforms, Horsford called attention to the bill he sponsored that

created Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument and designated 49,000 acres as Wovoka Wilderness.³⁹ Horsford, along with other Nevada representatives, introduced legislation in 2013 to permanently protect Gold Butte before former President Obama intervened in 2016 to preserve it as a national monument.⁴⁰

Hardy's record on public lands stood in stark contrast. He introduced bills that would prohibit the Interior Department from acquiring new public lands unless the federal budget is balanced and co-sponsored legislation that would have weakened the Antiquities Act.⁴¹

In another close election, when given a clear choice, voters chose the candidate who demonstrated support for public lands. Horsford comfortably defeated his old rival with 52 percent of the vote.

“

Steven will fight to protect our air, water, land, and wildlife and address the climate crisis. In Congress, Steven led on legislation to protect our parks and public lands, including bills that designated the Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument and the Wovoka Wilderness.

— STEVEN HORSFORD'S WEBSITE, "On the Issues"



National Public Lands Day tweet from Steven Horsford



Steven Horsford

@StevenHorsford

From Tule Springs, Gold Butte, and Basin and Range to Great Basin, the Wovoka Wilderness and more, #NV04 has some of the best places to celebrate National Public Lands Day. I'll fight to preserve these amazing landscapes, artifacts, and resources. My opponent won't. #NPLD

7:21 AM - 6 Nov 2018

An aerial photograph of a desert landscape in Utah. A light-colored dirt road winds through the terrain, which is covered with low-lying green and brown shrubs. A small dark-colored car is visible on the road, moving away from the viewer. The background shows more of the same landscape, with some rocky outcrops visible.

UTAH:

An unexpected win for public lands

Though public lands have long been a flashpoint for Utah's elected officials, access to outdoor recreation is a draw for visitors and locals alike. Much of that activity occurs on national public lands, which make up nearly two-thirds of the state. In recent years, with the recreation and tourism economy playing a bigger role in the state's economy, public lands conservation has gained significance in the political discourse, clashing with anti-conservation views long held by many Utah elected officials.

As a result of Utah elected officials' hostility toward national public lands in the state, the Outdoor Industry Association moved its bi-annual Outdoor Retailer convention to Denver, leaving Salt Lake City after 20 years—a \$45 million annual hit to the local economy.

Ahead of the 2016 elections, the legally-questionable decision by the Trump administration to reduce the size of Grand Staircase Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments thrust public lands into the spotlight in an unexpectedly close congressional race and a historic county commissioner election.

McAdams vs. Love:

A BALANCED APPROACH

FIGHTING MONUMENT SHRINKAGE

Republican Congresswoman Mia Love lost her re-election to Salt Lake City Mayor and Democrat Ben McAdams by less than 700 votes after a two-week vote count.⁴²

Love supported the controversial Trump administration order to shrink Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments. She went even further, co-sponsoring legislation to reaffirm the reduced national monuments, creating a much smaller national park in their place. The same legislation would have transferred important public land decision-making to local authorities and opened thousands of previously protected lands to oil and gas

development. However, knowing that a growing number of Utah voters support the protection of public lands, Love made an election-year pivot and partnered with her former opponent, Democrat Doug Owens, to form a group that aimed to “take politics out of public lands.”

McAdams, known as a bipartisan legislator, opposed the Trump administration’s reduction of national monuments in Utah. Instead, McAdams took a more balanced approach, proposing “a custom-tailored solution to preserving public lands that both accomplishes the goals of protecting national treasures and minimizes any negative local input.”⁴³

“

WHAT BEN WILL DO: *Utahns’ health and Utah’s economy are stronger with clean air, clean water and solutions to address climate change. Ben supports an all-of-the-above energy portfolio, which ensures affordable, reliable energy for Utah homes and businesses. This approach emphasizes increasing the supply of renewable energy, along with research and development of new technologies.*

— **BEN MCADAMS’ WEBSITE,**
“Energy & Environment”



San Juan County Commissioner:

HISTORIC VICTORY

PRIORITIZING BEARS EARS NATIONAL MONUMENT

With the election of Willie Grayeyes, Navajo leaders now hold a majority of commissioner seats in San Juan County—home to Bears Ears National Monument—for the first time in more than a century, a noteworthy political breakthrough given the historical voter suppression of Navajo communities in the county.⁴⁴

Winning the seat was an uphill battle for Grayeyes. During his campaign, Grayeyes sued San Juan County and won after being removed from the ballot over debunked allegations that he resided in Arizona rather than Utah.⁴⁵ The seat itself only became contested after a judge ordered the commission's district lines redrawn, ruling that San Juan County's "racial gerrymandering" violated the Voting Rights Act and the Constitution.⁴⁶

The new national monument boundaries created a competitive seat in the district previously held by Phil Lyman, who strongly supported eliminating Bears Ears

and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments while serving as commissioner. It was not the first time Lyman's anti-public lands message took center stage. He once violated the law and damaged ancient cultural sites by leading a 200-person ATV protest ride through a protected area of Utah's Recapture Canyon.⁴⁷

Grayeyes, by contrast, had a long record as a public lands advocate as a member of Utah Diné Bikéyah, a Native American-led organization focused on the protection of Bears Ears National Monument. In an interview with the *Navajo Times*, Grayeyes emphasized his goal of uplifting Navajo voices in Utah not only to support the protection of Bears Ears, but other public lands in the state. For him, the Native American perspective on natural resources differs on "how they understand them, how they interpret them."⁴⁸

In what is arguably the county most impacted by a Trump administration decision on public lands, local voters' decision to swing to a pro-Bear Ears National Monument majority in San Juan County is not without significance.



Willie Greyeyes
San Juan County Commissioner





IDAHO:

Public lands extremism rejected

In Idaho, public lands issues played an outsized role in the competitive Republican primary race for Governor.

Little vs. Jordan:

IDAHO REJECTS EXTREME VIEWS ON PUBLIC LANDS

Idahoans had the opportunity to vote in an incumbent-less governor's race for the first time since 2006.

The general election was not competitive in the conservative-leaning state. Republican Lieutenant Governor Brad Little defeated Democratic State Representative Paulette Jordan by more than 30 percentage points.⁴⁹

However, the state's Republican primary was a competitive referendum against extreme positions on public lands. That race matched Little against Congressman Raul Labrador, one of the most anti-public lands representatives in the U.S. Congress. While in office, Labrador upset local sporting groups by voting against an amendment to prohibit the transfer of public lands private owners.⁵⁰ He also introduced legislation to create a pilot program to turn over four million acres of national forest lands to states.

Labrador's positions on public lands were the subject of opponents' advertising against him.

By contrast, Little ran in the primary as a more centrist Republican candidate and publicly expressed his support for national public lands during a forum sponsored by the Idaho Wildlife Federation in which Labrador, who did not attend, was booed.⁵¹

Though not electorally competitive, Jordan's race against Little in the general election was historic. Had her long-shot effort been successful, the two-term legislator and leader of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe would have been the first Native American governor elected in the United States. During her race, Jordan put public lands at the forefront, telling *Pacific Standard Magazine*: "It is a top-tier political issue here. People are not only thinking about health care, education, and jobs, but also about public lands."⁵²





WYOMING:

Striking a balance between energy and conservation

Gordon vs. Throne:

A BALANCED PUBLIC LANDS PLATFORM

TWO CANDIDATES SHARE A BALANCED APPROACH IN LINE WITH THEIR STATE

Issues around conservation, access, and development intersect on public lands in Wyoming and spill-over into the voting booth. In the race to become Wyoming's next governor, Republican State Treasurer Mark Gordon and Democrat Mary Throne shared relatively moderate and comparable views on public lands.

Gordon won the conservative state handily, running on a balanced public lands platform that earned him the endorsement of the influential Wyoming Hunters and Anglers Alliance.⁵³ Gordon, who previously served on the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust Board, was familiar with the public lands issues that concern voters in the state, particularly access for outdoor recreation, hunting, and angling. His ads used outdoor settings and highlighted his ranching background.

Gordon also opposed transfer of national public lands to the state and favored policies aimed at fostering a balanced approach to land management decisions, stating:

*"I'm a lifelong sportsman. As a habitat provider myself, I am an active advocate for landowners, sportsmen, and wildlife. It is critical to me that we enhance access to our public land and protect private property rights. As Governor, I will maintain a strong commitment to multiple-use land management. I will be a fierce advocate for Wyoming sportsmen, recreationists and all those who enjoy the wildlife, waters, and scenic vistas of our own backyard."*⁵⁴

Gordon's positions on public lands aligned with Wyoming's voters. In polling, Wyomingites routinely express a desire for candidates to strike a balance between the central role of energy development in the state's economy and the importance of the outdoors in the Wyoming way of life.

“

Growing up here in Wyoming, I've seen firsthand the strength, talent, and sheer grit of Wyoming people. I grew up on a ranch in Kaycee and when we had a problem, we didn't look to the government to solve it—we rolled up our sleeves, banded together, and got the job done. My wife Jennie and I raised our children here, built businesses here, and still ranch here. We appreciate the freedoms our wide open spaces provide us....

I know what it takes to unite people, to tackle problems, keep our schools on track, and protect our Wyoming way of life.



— MARK GORDON CAMPAIGN AD, "Mark Gordon for Governor Announcement"



OPINION RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The Center for Western Priorities partnered with national bipartisan polling firm Gottlieb Strategic Research to conduct large sampled surveys in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico. The polling produced voter models that provide a closer look at the groups who make up an outdoor voting bloc that is gaining influence in close Mountain West elections.

Gottlieb Strategic Research also conducted online focus groups and a first-of-its-kind social media analysis that revealed how Western voters incorporate public lands into their online conversations and how issues involving public lands, parks, and wildlife influence their support for candidates.



THE GROWING OUTDOOR VOTING BLOC

The 2018 Winning the West Poll showed large groups of persuadable voters in swing states like Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico support a balanced approach to managing conservation, recreation, and responsible energy development. They want candidates who care about conservation and are willing to take positions that respect the Western way of life. And they overwhelmingly reject efforts to drill and mine recklessly on public lands or shrink popular national monuments.

Mountain West voters place a heightened importance on supporting the outdoor recreation economy. 81 percent of voters think outdoor recreation will be important to the future of their state's economy. 80 percent believe the presence of public lands and the local outdoor recreation lifestyle are important to attracting good jobs and innovative companies to the state.

When it comes to energy development, 84 percent of voters — including a majority of Republicans, Democrats and independents — favor investments in the development of renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and geothermal. 55 percent oppose increasing oil and gas development on public lands. Where energy development does occur on public lands, voters want to see common sense safety protections. On public lands, strong majorities support requiring mining companies to pay taxpayers a royalty for extracting minerals (76 percent), increasing the royalties that companies pay to taxpayers for extracting oil, gas, and coal (72 percent), and requiring oil and gas companies to detect and repair natural gas leaks in drilling equipment (89 percent).

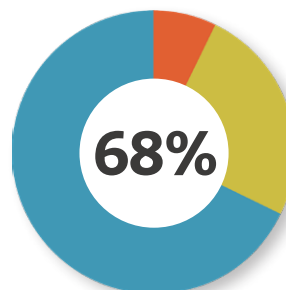
By contrast, Mountain West voters give the Trump administration a 27 percent approval rating on handling public lands issues in our poll. The Trump administration's agenda for public lands was also deeply unpopular. 74 percent of voters — including a majority of Republicans, Democrats and independents — oppose reducing the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments. 70 percent oppose opening public lands close to national parks and monuments for oil and gas drilling. 67 percent oppose increasing public land available for oil and gas development by reducing conservation efforts on behalf of potentially endangered wildlife, like the sage-grouse. 64 percent oppose rolling back environmental regulations on oil and gas development.

First identified in 2016 as public lands and the outdoors became a wedge issue in several competitive races, the Mountain West's growing "outdoor voting bloc" played an even more decisive role in the 2018 elections.

POLL RESULTS

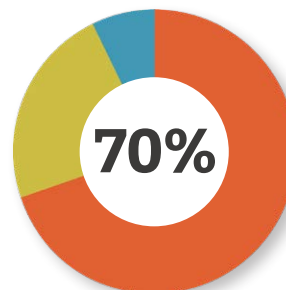


Western voters place a **heightened importance** on public lands and the outdoor economy.



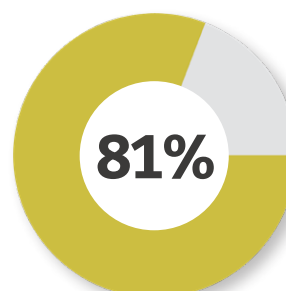
*I tend to vote for candidates who align the **closest to my point of view on public lands**, even though their positions may not be perfect.*

68% agree
25% disagree



*I'm **motivated** to get out and vote when public lands are threatened.*

70% agree
23% disagree



*When you think about the economic future of your state and the Western US, how important do you think the **outdoor recreation economy** will be?*

41% say very important
40% say somewhat important

MEET THE OUTDOOR VOTERS

This year's Winning the West poll modeling gave a closer look at the growing outdoor voting bloc of people who are motivated to vote on the issue and seek out candidates who share their values.

Seven groups of persuadable voters—millennial parents, empty nesters, dedicated anglers and hunters, casual outdoor recreation enthusiasts, cable news watchers, social media users, and ticket splitters—showed especially strong outdoor voting tendencies. Because the voters in these groups are also typically less partisan than traditional party-preference breakdowns, they are exactly the people who candidates looking to win elections in Mountain West states need to connect with. **Let's get to know them.**

MILLENNIAL PARENTS are voters ranging in age from 22 to 36, with kids. They make up about 6 percent of our overall voter sample but are a group that continues to grow. Every year, a million new sets of parents are added to this group. They are especially focused on the future when it comes to public lands.

EMPTY NESTERS are baby boomers with no kids left at home. Their numbers are substantial, as they make up half of our voter sample. They are typically nearing retirement or already retired, and outdoor recreation is an important part of what draws them to the Mountain West.

HUNTERS AND ANGLERS are the most conservative of the seven groups we identified. In fact, they narrowly supported President Trump in the 2016 election. For them, hunting and fishing is not a hobby, it's a way of life. They care deeply about conserving wildlife populations and maintaining access to public lands.

CASUAL OUTDOOR ENTHUSIASTS make up two-thirds of the Western electorate. They regularly participate in the type of outdoor activities that anyone can do, like nature walks, hiking, camping, picnicking and bird watching. But don't let these weekend warriors fool you—their passion for the outdoors is full-time.

CABLE NEWS WATCHERS are defined as voters who say they get their news primarily from major cable news outlets. They are a little older and slightly more conservative than the Western electorate generally. Candidates looking to advertise and reach these voters know exactly where to find them.

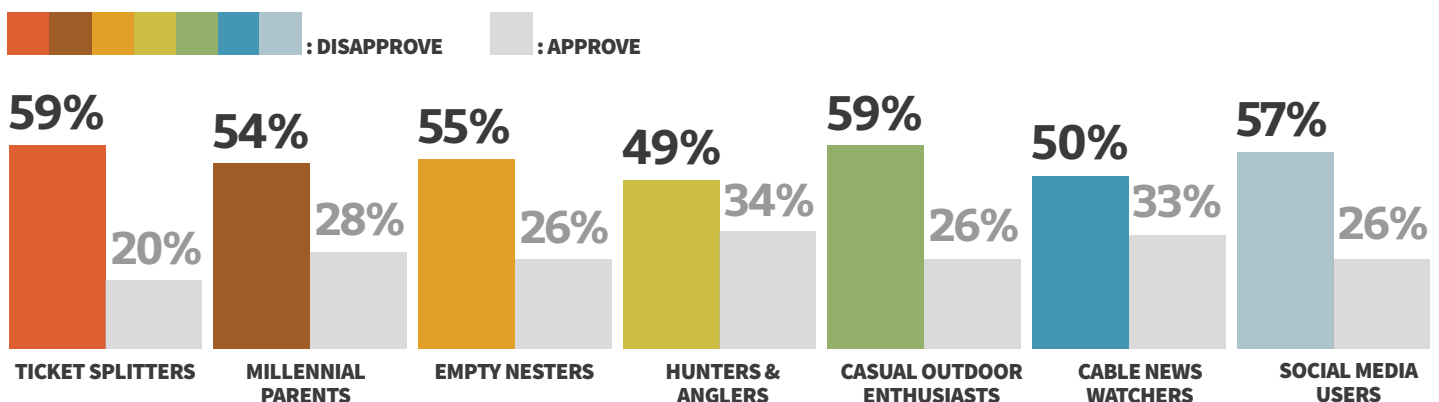
SOCIAL MEDIA USERS are made up of any voter who uses social media platforms on a regular basis, the most common being Facebook. This group makes up around three-quarters of the Western electorate. They are learning about and engaging with outdoor issues in new ways online.

TICKET SPLITTERS are voters who regularly vote for candidates of different parties on the same ballot. Between a quarter to a third of Western voters are ticket splits. While they often switch between voting “blue” and “red,” they consistently vote the outdoors. Candidates in the West cannot ignore the ticket splitters. If you win the ticket splitting vote, chances are good that you'll win the election.

While different in many ways—and in some cases strange bedfellows—these seven groups of outdoor voters are united in their strong support for public lands and their motivation to seek and support candidates who agree.

POLL RESULTS

Do you **approve or disapprove** of the job Donald Trump and his administration is doing on public lands issues?



A background image showing three people in conversation. On the left, a man with short brown hair and a beard, wearing a grey shirt and a teal tie. In the center, a woman with dark curly hair, wearing a blue top. On the right, a woman with long dark curly hair, wearing a teal top. They are all looking towards the center, engaged in conversation. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green trees.

HOW WESTERN VOTERS TALK ABOUT THEIR PUBLIC LANDS

The Winning the West public opinion research included online focus groups with three sets of voters in Mountain West state: hunters and anglers, ticket splitters, and Latino voters. Here's what they had to say when asked: **"If you could send one message to our leaders in Washington about public lands in the West, what would it be?"**

"When it's gone, it's gone. At the present time, politicians may make money destroying it and using it for oil and drilling and whatever else they want to use it for but once it's destroyed, it's destroyed and you can't get it back."

— Hunter/angler from Parker, Colorado

"I would want them to remember those public lands are for public good. And to keep that in mind when they're making decisions about them. They're not for their corporate buddies to necessarily get rich off of, if it's not good for the public as a whole then they're making a bad decision."

— Ticket splitter from Henderson, Nevada

"I would just say to think more creatively, think about different ways and options for accomplishing what it is that you want to accomplish without disrupting the public lands."

— Latino voter from Phoenix, Arizona

THE ONLINE CONVERSATION

The Center for Western Priorities produced a first-of-its kind analysis providing a detailed look at how Westerners are using social media to talk about public lands.

From January 2016 to today, there were more than two million mentions from the five targeted Western states—Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico—relating to public lands. Each quarter saw a growth in the volume of conversation.

What were they talking about?

Western voters increasingly used social media to vocalize their support for public lands, engaging in online public lands conversations by responding to the administration's policy decisions and by sharing their reflections on and photos of visits to scenic and recreation areas.

Out of two million online mentions, 66 percent of conversations were geared toward the Trump administration, with most social media users focused on the administration's proposals to remove protections, making public lands easier to sell or develop.

In the past year alone, there was a significant spike in social media conversations on several public lands-related policy proposals, including increasing the amount of public land available for oil and gas development, cutting regulations and safeguards for drilling and mining operations, expanding uranium mining near the Grand Canyon, and reducing the size of Utah's national monuments. Reactions online were overwhelmingly negative.

Voters were not the only ones to use social media to vocalize their opinions and support for public lands. Several large brands have gotten involved in the social media conversation through the use of influencers or their own channels, according to the analysis. Patagonia, in particular, has been especially successful in driving conversations in opposition to the Trump administration's public lands proposals, generating approximately 60,000 posts since 2016.

Candidates running for office also leveraged social media as a tool to demonstrate their connection to public lands and outdoor issues.



Patagonia tweet following Trump's cuts to Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante

Patagonia 
@patagonia

Yesterday, the president didn't just reduce the boundaries of your public lands. He revoked two national monuments.

5 Dec 2017



A LOOK AHEAD

Results from the 2018 election proved that support for public lands is now a consensus position for voters in the Mountain West. While not necessarily the singular decisive issue, it can be no coincidence that a striking majority of winning candidates in competitive elections highlighted their connection to the outdoors throughout their campaign messaging and imagery. Candidates who demonstrated their commitment to the outdoors and emphasized public lands issues frequently and consistently won in the West.

Looking ahead, we expect public lands issues to play an even greater role in the 2020 elections.

The Trump administration's agenda on public lands is antagonistic to most voters in the Mountain West—especially the growing outdoor voting bloc of swing-voters whose support is critical in close elections. Voter backlash against the efforts to shrink national monuments and open more public lands to mining and drilling, and the damage done to our national parks during an extended government shutdown could be severe in 2020.

It will be worth watching to see if incumbents in expected competitive elections like Senator Cory Gardner in Colorado and Senator Steve Daines in Montana continue

their support for the Trump administration's public lands agenda or seek a more moderate position in line with their voters' priorities. Across the aisle and down the map, will New Mexico Senator Tom Udall expand his record of protecting public lands and supporting conservation policies? In the House of Representatives, will all those newly elected Congress members, who ran and won on an outdoors platform, build records to match their rhetoric ahead of their re-election campaigns?

Turning to state elections, public lands will undoubtedly be featured in the open races for the governor's seat in Montana and Utah. Nationally, a few presidential candidates may launch campaigns based on a record of balancing the economic opportunities and conservation responsibilities that come with leading Mountain West states rich with public lands.

If candidates highlighting their support for public lands and outdoor issues was an unignorable trend in 2018, it may become a prerequisite for victory in 2020.

The Center for Western Priorities is excited to continue expanding our Winning the West campaign as the next election nears and looks forward to sharing what we learn.



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