



**WINNING
THE WEST**

ELECTION 2020



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WESTERNPRIORITIES.ORG

CONTENTS

2	ELECTION 2020 — FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
3	POLLING RESULTS
5	A NATIONAL LENS — THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
6	PUBLIC LANDS PROGRESS ON THE BALLOT
7	ARIZONA: PUBLIC LANDS SEE BIG WINS
8	McSally vs. Kelly: Climate action on the ballot in Arizona Senate race
9	O’Halloran vs. Shedd: Outdoor issues remain critical to voters in AZ’s 1st District
10	Kirkpatrick vs. Martin: Strong conservation record rewarded with re-election
11	Schweikert vs. Tipirneni: Outdoor issues take center stage
12	COLORADO: HIGH PRIORITY ON PUBLIC LANDS
13	Gardner vs. Hickenlooper: Candidates square off over public lands bona fides
14	Mitsch Bush vs. Boebert: Newcomer counters statewide trends
15	Crow vs. House: New representative wins reelection on public lands record
16	MONTANA: OUTDOOR ISSUES SPUR HOT DEBATE
17	Williams vs. Rosendale: Re-writing a record on public lands
18	Daines vs. Bullock: A clash between outdoor messages and records
19	Gianforte vs. Cooney: Moderating an anti-public lands record to win
20	NEVADA: LANDS PLATFORM MAKES FOR A WINNER
21	Lee vs. Rodimer: Pro-public lands representative wins close reelection race
22	Horsford vs. Marchant: Frequently flipping district reelects conservationist incumbent
23	NEW MEXICO: CONTINUING A PUBLIC LANDS LEGACY
24	Luján vs. Ronchetti: Heated Senate race brings outdoor issues to forefront
25	Haaland vs. Garcia Holmes: Public lands remain top of agenda in NM’s 1st District
26	Torres Small vs. Herrell: A cautionary tale for pro-conservation candidates
27	Leger Fernandez vs. Johnson: Strong conservation record brings success
28	UTAH: A CHANGE OF DIRECTION IN THE BEEHIVE STATE
29	Peterson vs. Cox: A move towards balance in the Governor’s office
30	McAdams vs. Owens: Close loss for Utah’s only pro-conservation Congress member
31	PUBLIC LANDS IN THE STATE HOUSE
32	LOOKING AHEAD: THE OUTDOOR VOTER AGENDA
34	PHOTO CREDITS & REFERENCES



ELECTION 2020

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Over the past several election cycles, the Center for Western Priorities' Winning the West project has documented public lands conservation as a winning campaign issue due to a growing bipartisan number of Westerners who vote to keep the West's national public lands protected and accessible. During

the COVID-19 pandemic, the outdoor voting bloc's connection to the outdoors has only heightened, resulting in public lands issues playing an even more decisive role in the outcome of close Mountain West races in 2020 than in previous election cycles we've analyzed. Regardless of who won any given race, public lands won as an issue in the 2020 election. The extent to which it was used as a key differentiator in campaigns was unprecedented.

Of the 21 races we tracked throughout this election, 19 featured significant pro-public lands advertising or messaging. In debates, op-eds, and other campaign communications, candidates frequently appealed to their voters through public lands—speaking to how they are managed, their importance to local economies, and the way they define life in the West. Campaigns used the mountains and outdoor spaces of the Mountain West as backdrops for numerous campaign

ads and pro-public lands messages on social media. Candidates in the West campaigning on public lands issues also became part of a national media narrative.^{1, 2}

Extreme anti-public lands positions, such as selling off national public lands to private interests or turning them over to state control, were notably absent in competitive races.

Indeed, the importance of outdoor issues has solidified to the extent that candidates with consistently pro-public lands positions have prevailed in most close elections in the Mountain West in recent elections. This fact has never been more true than it was in the 2020 election cycle. We saw candidates who boldly champion public lands issues and others who moderated their public lands platforms to better match the priorities of outdoor voters. In all cases, voters will be watching to ensure that their newly elected officials have the legislation to match their campaign messages.

This report is the culmination of our analysis in the 2020 election cycle. We hope you join us online at WinningTheWest2020.org to learn more.³

Jennifer Rokala
Executive Director,
Center for Western Priorities



POLLING RESULTS

The Center for Western Priorities' *Winning the West 2020* poll found that in the midst of a global pandemic, voters in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico had a connection to the outdoors that has never been deeper, and support for public lands conservation is growing.⁴

The poll underscores what research from the past several election cycles has shown: public land conservation is a winning campaign issue.

2 MILLION OUTDOOR VOTERS IN THE WEST

The intensity of support for public lands and outdoor issues has only solidified over the three election cycles the Center for Western Priorities has conducted public opinion research and analyzed competitive races. Over time, we have identified a group of voters in the ideological middle who regularly participate in outdoor recreation—the “outdoor voting bloc.”

The outdoor voting bloc is composed of outdoor enthusiasts who care about keeping the West's public lands protected and accessible, and make their voices heard at the polls.⁵ Because the voters in these groups are also typically less partisan than

traditional party preference breakdowns, they are exactly the people who candidates need to connect with in order to win elections in Mountain West states like Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada and New Mexico.

We estimate the outdoor voting bloc to be 2 million voters strong across the Mountain West. From the results of our recent *Winning the West 2020* poll, we identified that 26 percent of voters meet all of the following conditions:

- Identify as being active outdoors by participating in activities such as hiking, fishing, camping and recreational sports,
- Visit public lands 3+ times a year,
- Believe public lands are an important factor in deciding who to vote for, and
- Are “ticket splitters” who vote for candidates of different parties.

When overlaid with the voters in the swing-states of Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico who turned out to vote in the 2016 presidential election, the total comes to more than 2 million voters—a number we expect to continue to rise in coming years.



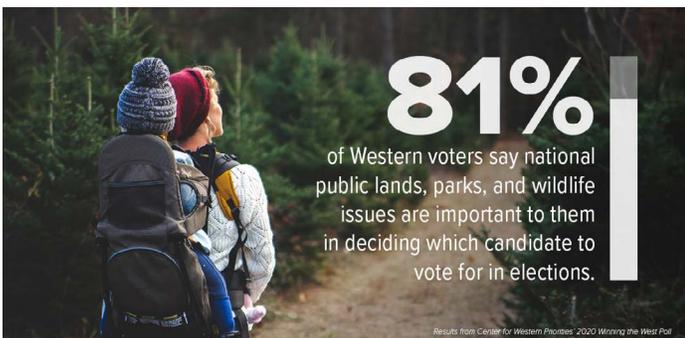
VOTER PRIORITIES ON PUBLIC LANDS AND OUTDOOR ISSUES

We saw early evidence that 2020 would be a big election year for public lands. Our 2020 Winning the West poll—conducted in June 2020 in Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, and New Mexico—found voters are more passionate than ever about the landscapes and lifestyles that make the West a special place to live.⁶ As this report will show, our election analysis found that candidates took to heart the views of voters in how they strategized for their campaigns.



Public lands bring people together in the West at a time when most other important issues divide and polarize the electorate. Deeply valuing their access to parks and public lands for hiking, hunting, fishing, and camping, 90 percent of voters agree the mountains and outdoors are what makes living in their state special.

These issues define Western voters' way of life—and cut across partisan lines. In an increasingly divided political environment, it is particularly noteworthy that the John D. Dingell Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act and the Great American Outdoors Act are among the few pieces of non-COVID-19-related legislation to be passed by large bipartisan margins and signed into law recently.^{7, 8} Across the Mountain West, candidates from both sides of the aisle routinely and prominently highlighted their support for the Great American Outdoors Act in their 2020 campaigns.



Eighty-one percent of Western voters say national public lands, parks, and wildlife issues are important to them in deciding which candidate to vote for in Presidential and Congressional elections. The importance of public lands, parks, and wildlife issues increased during the COVID-19 pandemic for 34 percent of voters, while remaining durable for the rest.





A NATIONAL LENS

Public lands and outdoor issues played a leading role on the national stage this year. We saw the bipartisan passage of the Great American Outdoors Act, a historic victory for conservation; national outrage over the Trump administration's appointment of William Perry Pendley to the Bureau of Land Management; and public outcry over the Trump administration's attack on Bears Ears.⁹ Voters across the country made clear to candidates and elected leaders that defending outdoor issues is a high priority.

THE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

Voters were provided a stark contrast on public lands and outdoor issues in the race for the White House between **Donald Trump** and **Joe Biden**.



One of Joe Biden's boldest campaign pledges was to ban "new oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters."¹⁰ At a town hall in New Hampshire in February, he said he opposed drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, given the impacts of climate change on Alaska, before adding, "And by the way, no more drilling on federal lands, period. Period, period, period."¹¹

Furthermore, in Biden's Climate Plan outlining his day one executive actions, he commits to:¹²

- Protecting biodiversity, slowing extinction rates, and helping leverage natural climate solutions by conserving 30 percent of America's lands and waters by 2030 (also known as the 30x30 Goal),¹³
- Requiring aggressive methane pollution limits for new and existing oil and gas operations,

banning new oil and gas permitting on public lands and waters, and modifying royalties to account for climate costs,

- Protecting America's natural treasures by permanently protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and other areas impacted by President Trump's attack on federal lands and waters and establishing national parks and monuments that reflect America's natural heritage, and
- Establishing targeted programs to enhance reforestation and develop renewables on federal lands and waters with the goal of doubling offshore wind by 2030.



Meanwhile, over the past four years, the Trump administration disregarded science and the need to address climate change and moved aggressively to expand oil and gas drilling across the country.

The administration offered more than 100 million acres in onshore and offshore leases and, under the leadership of former oil lobbyist David Bernhardt and former Congressman Ryan Zinke, the Interior Department finalized sweeping policy changes:

- Eliminating rules to reduce methane emissions from drilling on public lands,¹⁴
- Rolling back regulations to increase the safety and transparency of hydraulic fracturing,¹⁵
- Watering down offshore drilling safety rules enacted after the Deepwater Horizon explosion,¹⁶
- Dramatically shrinking national monuments in Utah, and¹⁷
- Weakening enforcement of the Endangered Species Act.¹⁸

PUBLIC LANDS PROGRESS ON THE BALLOT

Across the country, voters passed a variety of local measures and statewide ballot initiatives aimed at protecting the environment and wildlife, and funding public lands.⁵⁷ In total, voters approved more than \$3.7 billion in funding for parks, climate resiliency, and public lands.⁵⁸ Voter-passed initiatives in the Mountain West include:

Proposition 114 in Colorado to require the reintroduction of gray wolves into the wild.

Initiative 190 in Montana to use tax proceeds from legal marijuana purchases to provide \$360 million for land and water conservation programs.

Question 6 in Nevada to enact a constitutional amendment that sets a 50 percent renewable energy standard by 2030.

In the 2016 election, Trump took a more moderate approach to public lands issues, expressing his support for good stewardship of public lands, refusing to support state takeovers of national public lands, and repeatedly mentioned that his sons are sportsmen.

Once in office, the Trump administration's public lands agenda was at odds with the values of the Mountain West's outdoor voting block. Biden made notable gains in his margin of victory over Trump in Colorado and New Mexico when compared to the 2016 presidential results. He also closed the margin of Trump's victory in Montana from the previous election. Central to the overall outcome of the 2020 presidential election was the flip of Arizona from "red" to "blue" and the emergence of a Western wall of outdoor voters.



ARIZONA

Public lands see big wins

Amid a historic year for wildfires and high temperatures in Arizona—the home of the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, and the Sonoran Desert—it's no surprise that outdoor issues played a central role in the outcome of the state's elections. Arizona is surging towards Colorado in consistently electing pro-public lands candidates. Furthermore, one of the state's leaders, Rep. Raúl M. Grijalva has taken on a national profile as a champion of public lands as the Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources.

ARIZONA VOTERS AT A GLANCE



of Arizonans said public lands, parks, and wildlife continue to be very important factors when deciding who to vote for.



say public lands issues are more important to them now than prior to the pandemic.



agree environmental protections matter more than ever, and we must enforce current environmental laws.



support setting a goal to conserve 30% of America's land and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations.

Climate action on the ballot in Arizona senate race

There may be no better example of the decisive role outdoor issues play in elections in the West than Martha McSally and Mark Kelly's campaigns to represent Arizona in the United States Senate. Incumbent Sen. Martha McSally, a Republican appointed to fill the late John McCain's seat in 2019, lost her election to retired astronaut Mark Kelly, a Democrat who positioned his campaign around climate action. Signalling a significant stride towards flipping control of the Senate and making outdoor issues a national priority, McSally and Kelly's race was one of the most closely watched in the 2020 general election.

Positioning himself as a centrist (he emphasized climate change, but didn't embrace the Green New Deal), Kelly framed climate change as a threat to Arizona's economy and advocated for investment in renewable energy and the creation of green jobs. Kelly also harshly criticized Trump's Bureau of Land Management nominee, William Perry Pendley, writing in a public statement that the nomination is "clearly a threat to the goal of protecting Arizona's public lands and keeping them accessible for everyone."¹⁹ When speaking on outdoor issues, Kelly commonly refers to his experience as an astronaut as having given him perspective on the urgency of conservation.

Martha McSally, too, spoke to outdoor issues throughout her campaign.

Since her appointment to the Senate, she used her post on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee to shore up federal water supply infrastructure and increasing funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund through the Great American Outdoors Act. She also introduced the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act, legislation aimed at improving public lands; and touted her support (alongside Kelly) for the Four Forest Restoration Initiative which has the goal of promoting sustainable timber harvest across the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab, and Tonto national forests.

However, during her time in office McSally voted repeatedly against protecting public lands from being sold off, consistently voted against clean air and clean energy (despite her state having some of the worst air pollution in the country), supported a provision that would make it easier for President Trump to end protections for national monuments, and voted to confirm Trump pick and coal-industry lobbyist Andrew Wheeler as head of the Environmental Protection Agency.²⁰

Ultimately, Arizona voters picked the candidate who took stronger pro-conservation positions on public lands and outdoor issues. In the Senate, Kelly will join Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema, who won her close election in 2018 also by highlighting public lands.



Martha McSally
@SenMcSallyAZ

“Arizona's public lands are meant to be enjoyed by all. I introduced legislation to enhance the visitor experience by increasing access to recreational concessions such as mountain bike rentals, paragliding, & horseback riding.

Jan 18, 2020



“I think one thing that's critical is that we come up with policies to help fight climate change, because that puts public lands at risk and it also puts our outdoor recreation economy at risk.

—Mark Kelly

Outdoor issues remain critical to voters in AZ's 1st District

Arizona's 1st Congressional District is one of the largest and most diverse in the country, with more Native American residents than any district in the nation. In the district's congressional race, Democratic incumbent and outdoor issue advocate Rep. Tom O'Halleran won reelection against Republican challenger Tiffany Shedd, a farmer, lawyer, and small-business owner who overlooked her district's priority on outdoor issues and rarely spoke about them.

In office, O'Halleran has been a champion for protecting clean water and natural resources for tribal nations and across Arizona. Past legislation includes relieving drought in Arizona, giving the Hualapai Tribe access to water from the Colorado River, protecting the Grand Canyon from toxic uranium mining and Chaco Canyon from oil and gas development, assisting sovereign tribal nations in transitioning toward clean fuel sources, and incentivizing electric companies in rural communities to invest in more renewable energy technologies. Additionally, O'Halleran signed onto a letter to congressional

leadership urging full and permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and voted to pass a package of public lands bills that permanently reauthorized the LWCF and protected over two million acres of public lands and waters, among other provisions.

Conversely, Shedd showed little interest in outdoor issues throughout her campaign. While rarely commenting on it in her campaign, Shedd did speak on the campaign trail on her opposition to government funding for the development of renewable energy, a commitment to "work with President Trump to identify and eliminate unnecessary job killing [environmental] regulations," and harshly criticized O'Halleran's vote against a farm bill that he opposed due to its nearly \$800 million in cuts from conservation programs and \$500 million in cuts from rural development programs over the next 10 years.^{21, 22}

O'Halleran demonstrated his alignment on outdoor issues with the views of his diverse district and was awarded a third term in Congress.



Rep. Tom O'Halleran
@RepOHalleran

“Our national parks and public lands are critical for land and water conservation and preserving the rich history of #AZ01. Last week, I voted for measures that preserve our natural resources and the rural communities that depend on them.”

Jul 5, 2019

Fighting for AZ-01 Natural Resources
Rep. O'Halleran Secured:

- ✓ over \$500 million for the Land and Water Conservation Fund
- ✓ over \$65 million in water and waste water grant funding for rural communities to develop infrastructure to provide clean water and treat waste effectively
- ✓ over \$5 billion for wildfire management
- ✓ \$3 million for the Southwest Ecological Restoration Institutes, including the Ecological Restoration Institute at ASU

www.tomohalleran.com



Strong conservation record rewarded with re-election

In Arizona's 2nd district, which spans from borderlands to ranching towns in Wildcat Country, Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick stood out in her public lands record and easily secured re-election, defeating Republican newcomer Brandon Martin.



Ann Kirkpatrick

@Ann_Kirkpatrick

“@JoeBiden is right — the Grand Canyon is a major economic engine in AZ, generating \$1 billion+ for AZ's economy + 12K+ jobs to the region. Uranium mining COST the area billions in clean up in the past.

Aug 7, 2020

In office, Kirkpatrick finalized the Four Forest Restoration Initiative; cosponsored the Climate Change Now Act, which will cut greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 25% by 2025; and voted to pass the Great American Outdoors Act. She, too, supported a bill to protect the Grand Canyon from toxic uranium mining and Chaco Canyon from oil and gas development and voted to reverse a 2017 tax bill provision that mandated the sale of oil and gas leases in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. As a member of the House Appropriations' Energy and Water subcommittee, Kirkpatrick is an advocate for the development of alternative energy sources in Arizona.

Focusing on economics, national defense, and immigration, outdoor issues took a back seat in Martin's campaign for Congress. With Kirkpatrick remaining in office, Arizona voters can expect public lands and outdoor issues to remain a priority.



Ann Kirkpatrick Campaign Website

“...Arizona offers its residents a special connection to our environment. It is our duty to protect and preserve these places for our children and for generations to come. Arizona's natural resources are also key economic engines — particularly in rural areas — and bring much-needed jobs to our state.

Outdoor issues take center stage

Republican Rep. David Schweikert has represented Arizona’s 6th congressional district in the U.S. House of Representatives since 2011. Despite a record on public lands that was out of alignment with the views of most Arizona voters, Schweikert won re-election in a race against Democratic challenger Dr. Hiral Tipirneni. In a traditionally red district, Schweikert carried a strong advantage—but his opponent made it a tighter than expected race, in part based on public lands issues. Both candidates effectively spoke to outdoor issues as a high priority.

Throughout her campaign, Tipirneni positioned herself as a bold advocate for action on climate change and environmental justice. Her positions on outdoor issues included incentivizing the transition to renewable and clean energy initiatives and protection of Arizona’s water, air, and public lands.

During Schweikert’s time in office, he has supported efforts to limit new

national monument designations and opposed limits on public lands transfers, permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, sage-grouse conservation, and efforts to reduce methane emissions. Understanding his constituents’ passion for the outdoors, however, Schweikert supported the Great American Outdoors Act, centered renewable energy in his campaign, and utilized social media to show his outdoorsy side.

In his statement on the Great American Outdoors Act, Schweikert is quoted saying, “As someone who regularly hikes and actively enjoys public lands with my family throughout our beautiful state, I am pleased to help ensure we can all continue to enjoy these local treasures.”²³ While this action on outdoor issues contrasts with Schweikert’s record, it was effective in signaling to his constituents an understanding of the importance of action on outdoor issues.



Rep. David Schweikert
@RepDavid

“Happy 100th Birthday @GrandCanyonNPS! Arizona is so fortunate to have had you for 100 years of great hikes, views, and exploring with the family. #100YearsOfGrand

Feb 26, 2019



COLORADO

High priority on public lands

This year, outdoor issues played an outsized role in one of the most closely watched U.S. Senate races in the country while voters resoundingly rejected the Trump administration's public lands policies in a reliably pro-conservation state. In an exciting win for conservation, CO-02 Rep. Joe Neguse—champion of the 30x30 Resolution to Save Nature and the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act—was re-elected by wide margins and unanimously elected co-chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, the No. 8 position in House leadership.

COLORADO VOTERS AT A GLANCE



of Coloradans said public lands, parks, and wildlife continue to be very important factors when deciding who to vote for.



say public lands issues are more important to them now than prior to the pandemic.



agree environmental protections matter more than ever, and we must enforce current environmental laws.



support setting a goal to conserve 30% of America's land and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations.

Candidates square off over public lands bona fides

Colorado's U.S. Senate race, one of the most closely watched in the nation, was a prime example of the importance of public lands and outdoor issues, which were regularly highlighted by both campaigns.²⁴

Former Governor John Hickenlooper, the Democrat, won the race in part by touting his record as governor addressing climate change, which included setting the state on a path towards 100% renewable energy and curbing methane emissions. He also campaigned on a "COnservation" Agenda that opposed selling off federal lands and prioritized the passage of the CORE Act to protect 400,000 acres of Colorado public lands.²⁵ Hickenlooper also connected issues of public lands conservation to the resilience of mountain economies.²⁶

Incumbent Senator Cory Gardner tried to counter by showing his outdoor side, including releasing a video ad called "Get Outside" that showed he and his family getting ready for a day of recreating on public lands in order to call attention to his co-sponsorship of the recently passed Great American Outdoors Act.

Hickenlooper kept Gardner on the defensive over voting to confirm

unpopular anti-public lands nominees to the Interior Department, voting against protecting clean air and water, and being the first Colorado senator in more than 50 years to not sponsor a single piece of wilderness designation legislation. Senator Gardner's record came under fire in local media coverage, which contrasted his public support for public lands with his refusal to oppose the nomination of William Perry Pendley as the head of the Bureau of Land Management over Pendley's controversial anti-public lands positions.²⁷

Ultimately, Coloradans believed Hickenlooper to be the most sincere public lands champion, and elected him by a wide margin for what was expected to be a close race. Exit polling on the race showed that more than 70% of Colorado voters who considered "protecting the environment and combating climate change" as important to their votes, supported Hickenlooper.²⁸ In addition, 60% of voters believed Gardner "pretends to care about the environment in Colorado but votes with corporate polluters in Washington," despite the candidate spending millions to advertise his support for the Great American Outdoors Act and other conservation positions.²⁹



Cory Gardner

@CoryGardner

“For decades, Congress ignored our National Parks and stole the maintenance money. I made it my job to stop it so millions of Coloradans can enjoy our great outdoors...”

Jul 7, 2020



John Hickenlooper

@Hickenlooper

“Washington is bulldozing through our national monuments, carving up our public lands, and auctioning them off to the highest bidder.”

As a Coloradan, I am fed up.

Today, I released an aggressive plan to protect our outdoors. We must protect what makes Colorado so special.

Feb 10, 2020

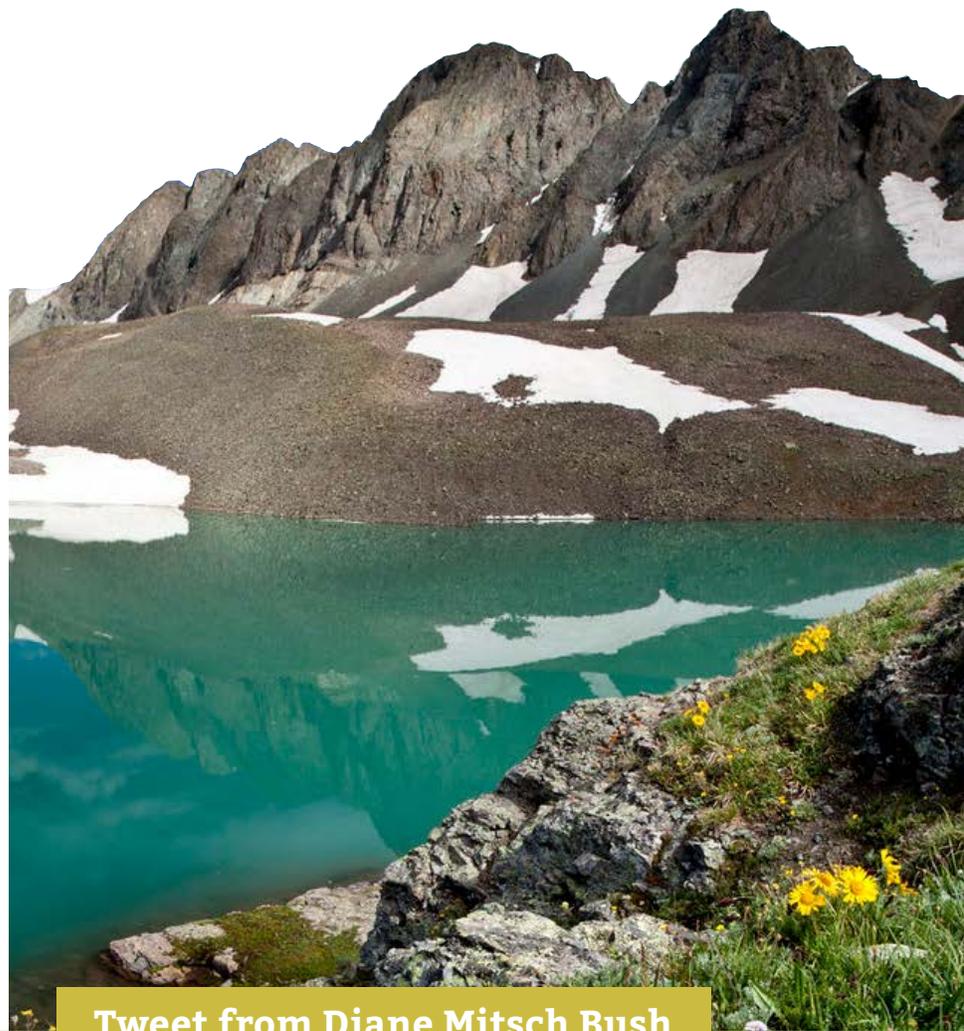
Newcomer counters statewide trends

In a congressional district that consistently leaned Republican in pre-election analysis, Democrat Diane Mitsch Bush lost to newcomer Lauren Boebert who upset former Representative Scott Tipton in the Republican primary. It was the only competitive race across the Mountain West in which the winning candidate took an overtly anti-public lands position.

Boebert advertised herself as “pro-energy” and took issue with federal land use policies on public lands. In a campaign press release she claimed members of Colorado’s congressional delegation “believe cities can tell rural America what to do with land in our backyard without our input” and criticized what she described as a federal “land grab” in a pending defense reauthorization bill.

Mitsch Bush campaigned as a champion for public lands conservation, releasing a video ad titled “Diane = Public Lands Protector” and highlighted her support for conservation in her earned media strategy and outreach to voters.

While Mitsch Bush outperformed previous Democratic challengers, Boebert prevailed.



Tweet from Diane Mitsch Bush



**Diane Mitsch Bush
for Congress**

@RepDMB

“Public lands create more than 500,000 jobs in Colorado, and I’ll always stand up for the small businesses that rely on our public lands. #NationalPublicLandsDay

Sept 26, 2020



New representative wins reelection on public lands record

After winning his traditionally Republican seat in 2018 as a challenger who aligned with voters on outdoor issues, Democratic Representative Jason Crow took the opportunity to showcase his public lands record in his race for reelection.

Crow told voters he is “fighting to ensure that our public lands are not sold off to the highest bidder or destroyed by irresponsible drilling and mining, and I will continue to do so if reelected.” He regularly touted his work to pass the Colorado Outdoor Recreation and Economy (CORE) Act to protect 400,000 acres of public lands in the state along with his co-sponsorship of the Great American Outdoor Act.

Crow easily defeated his opponent, Republican Steve House, who campaigned on his support for “an all-of-the-above energy policy and keeping the nation at the forefront of energy research and development.”



Tweet from Jason Crow



Rep. Jason Crow
@RepJasonCrow

“Tomorrow, the House will vote on the Colorado Outdoor Recreation & Economy Act, which will establish new wilderness areas and protect our outdoor recreation economy. Protecting 400,000 acres of our public land will be a big win for Coloradans!

Oct 30, 2019

The CORE Act will protect 400,000 acres of Colorado’s public lands



MONTANA

Outdoor issues spur hot debate

In the Big Sky state with vast public lands and an economy heavily dependent on recreation tourism, outdoor issues are regularly top of voters' minds in Montana. Despite being a typically red state—especially in national politics—protecting public lands has been a hot topic and area of bipartisan consensus. Candidates from both sides of the aisle knew this going into their races and took it into account in how they campaigned.

MONTANA VOTERS AT A GLANCE

88%

of Montanans said public lands, parks, and wildlife continue to be very important factors when deciding who to vote for.

69%

say public lands issues are more important to them now than prior to the pandemic.

59%

agree environmental protections matter more than ever, and we must enforce current environmental laws.

74%

support setting a goal to conserve 30% of America's land and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations.

Re-writing a record on public lands

In the race for Montana’s at-large House seat, Republican Matt Rosendale defeated Democratic candidate Kathleen Williams.

Throughout his campaign, Rosendale was critiqued for his record—which included supporting major rollbacks to public lands protections, ties to the notorious anti-public lands Wilks brothers, calling for land transfers that would make it easier for public lands to be sold off, voting against amending the Keogh Ranch Conservation easement which would have protected more than 7,000 acres of land in Southwest Montana from encroaching residential development, and voting to obstruct the Horse Creek Conservation Easement, which would provide permanent public hunting access to 20,000 acres in Eastern Montana.^{30, 31}

Rosendale also denied the science behind climate change’s serious threat to his state, once saying that “climate change is another example of the government trying to control the people.”³² In the state senate, he voted for a bill that would prohibit any enforcement of limits on greenhouse gases.

To appeal to outdoor voters, Rosendale’s campaign had to rewrite the narrative on his public lands record. Despite his record, throughout Rosendale’s campaign, he touted “protecting public lands” as a campaign priority, running ads highlighting that while on the State Land Board, he supported opening up more than 45,000 acres of land to public access. His campaign website read, “Matt opposes a federal lands transfer and will continue to fight every day to protect our public access to public lands and will always keep them in public hands.”³³

Williams, on the other hand, dedicated her career to protecting the outdoors, with a history working in conservation in the public, non-profit, and private sectors. As a state legislator, she served on the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees, where she was a leader on water policy issues. She was a lead negotiator in quantifying the water rights of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and served as Vice Chair of the Water Policy Interim Committee.

Williams’ pro-public lands positions were not enough to overcome her opponent’s advantages in a congressional seat that has elected Republican candidates for decades.

Matt Rosendale Twitter Ad



“While Washington fights, Matt Rosendale goes to work... he opened up public lands...”



A clash between outdoor messages and records

Understanding their voters' deep ties to the outdoors, public lands played an outsized role in the race for Montana's U.S. Senate seat.

Republican incumbent Sen. Steve Daines pointed to his co-sponsorship of the Great American Outdoors Act and support of bills that blocked mining on public lands near the north entrance to Yellowstone National Park and protected part of East Rosebud Creek. He also highlighted his help to pass legislation adding 67,000 acres of wilderness along the Rocky Mountain Front in northwest Montana.

Daines' opponent, Governor Steve Bullock, made supporting public lands a centerpiece of his campaign message and in his criticisms of Daines.

Bullock filed a successful lawsuit to remove William Perry Pendley—who previously advocated for the selling off of national public lands—from his position as acting director of the Bureau of Land Management and he criticized Daines' support of Pendley. Bullock campaigned on his own record

of creating conservation easements that provide access to lands for hunting and fishing, preserving stream access, restoring funding for the Habitat Montana program, establishing Montana's Office of Outdoor Recreation, and being a vocal advocate for the state's outdoor economy and businesses.³⁴ He also pointed to Daines' record of voting to strip protections from hundreds of thousands of acres of public lands in Montana and casting the deciding vote to enable the sale, transfer, or exchange of lands in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, and other wilderness areas, wildlife refuges, national forests, and conservation lands in the U.S.

Bullock's outdoor-centric message was not enough to win in a year in which Montana voted consistently Republican, but it was enough to outperform the Democratic side of the presidential race by nearly five percentage points.



Steve Bullock
@GovernorBullock

“Where I come from, 18 holes might be relaxing, but it's not the same as sleeping under the stars, watching a herd of elk at 5:30am, or feeling the tug of a trout on your line.

That's why we're going to keep #publiclands in public hands.

Nov 18, 2019

Steve Bullock Ad

Cam Bullock

“He was by my side when I got my first buck.

Steve Bullock

“And you know what's great? Every one of us owns these public lands.



Moderating an anti-public lands record to win

The nation's only competitive governor's race this election was in Montana, where two-term Representative and Trump-aligned Republican Greg Gianforte successfully ran against Democratic Lieutenant Governor Mike Cooney.³⁵

Gianforte attempted to moderate his public lands positions in his race for governor, with his campaign website stating: "As your Congressman, Greg introduced legislation to protect our public lands, and President Trump signed it into law. As your Governor, Greg will ensure our public lands are accessible and stay in public hands."³⁶

However, Gianforte's record in Congress raised questions about his commitment to public lands conservation. He repeatedly opposed full and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and introduced legislation that would remove protections from nearly 700,000 acres of wilderness in Montana, opening them to logging and mining. He sued the State of Montana to block public fishing access through his waterfront property and took \$200,000 in campaign contributions from the oil and gas industry. Gianforte, too, introduced a federal bill

that would have amended the U.S. Endangered Species Act and delisted the grizzly bear. He also pledged to "review, roll back, and repeal" regulations on extractive industries that he deems excessive or unnecessary, and is a proponent of exporting Montana coal and undoing emissions limits on power plants.

Cooney had an eight-pronged plan to protect public lands and access to them in Montana. The plan included priorities for protecting Montana's existing public land and stream access laws; increasing access to landlocked public land through easements; and strengthening Habitat Montana, the state's premier access and conservation program. He has also said he would "help unlock the over 3.5 million acres of public land that is currently inaccessible" to Montanans and strengthen the leadership of the Office of Outdoor Recreation.³⁷

Despite an anti-public lands record, Gianforte's moderating of his rhetoric may have helped dissuade the concerns of outdoor voters in Montana and he comfortably won the race for governor.

Mike Cooney Attack Ad

"We measure Montana's quality of life acre by acre, and politicians like Greg Gianforte action by action. On protecting public lands, Gianforte's selfish, greedy, like when he sued to block access to a stream near his riverfront mansion. Greg Gianforte tried privatizing our national forests and selling our public lands to the highest bidder.



NEVADA

Lands platform makes for a winner

With public lands making up 80 percent of Nevada, issues involving the outdoor recreation economy and land development are especially important—and 2020’s election results marked a significant advancement in the state’s commitment to outdoor issues.³⁸ More than ever, successful candidates in 2020 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 was also one of the most closely contested battleground states in the presidential election.

NEVADA VOTERS AT A GLANCE



of Nevadans said public lands, parks, and wildlife continue to be very important factors when deciding who to vote for.



say public lands issues are more important to them now than prior to the pandemic.



agree environmental protections matter more than ever, and we must enforce current environmental laws.



support setting a goal to conserve 30% of America’s land and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations.

Pro-public lands representative wins close reelection race

Democratic Representative Susie Lee retained her competitive seat by continuing the environmentally focused campaign that won the Southern Nevada district for her in 2018.

During her reelection campaign, Lee touted her support for legislation to permanently fund the popular Land and Water Conservation Fund, championing it as “so important to the conservation of public lands and waterways throughout our country.”^{38, 39}

Of her effort to stop the Pentagon takeover of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, Lee said “My commitment to environmental causes runs deep. Being an avid outdoorswoman, I have come to love the desert here in Nevada and to see that this national treasure was under attack, it was really important to me

to join our delegation and fight for it. The testing range and wildlife services have cohabitated for a long time and we are still going to have to find ways to compromise, but when someone from completely outside came with this, we had to draw a line in the sand. We had to protect this important place, not just for Nevada, but for our entire country.”⁴⁰

Besides her public lands record, Lee’s campaign materials and social media platforms regularly showed her enjoying Nevada’s outdoor opportunities.

By contrast, Lee’s opponent Daniel Rodimer, a lawyer and former professional wrestler, missed an opportunity to connect with outdoor voters by placing little emphasis on public lands issues during the campaign and lost by three points in the competitive district.



Rep. Susie Lee
@RepSusieLee

“The evidence is clear that the climate crisis is exactly that: a crisis. Our children will suffer if we continue to not take it seriously. bit.ly/31gHnR”

Aug 17, 2019



Frequently flipping district reelects conservationist incumbent

Democratic Representative Steven Horsford won reelection in a competitive district that previously changed parties every two years since its formation in 2012.

As a member of Congress, Horsford made the fight against climate change central to his policy agenda, introducing bipartisan legislation to combat its effects.⁴¹ He campaigned on policies to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund and expand access to outdoor recreation opportunities to underserved communities. Horsford also highlighted the importance of outdoor recreation for generating jobs and economic activity across the state.

In voting to protect the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, Horsford said, “Public lands truly do make up the fabric of Nevada’s identity. These lands are critical to our state and deserve to be protected from any attempts to diminish their impact. We are working to ensure that any federal decisions to reserve public lands for development maintain the

best interest and health of the people and wildlife that live on that land. Nevadans have been strong in their efforts to protect and preserve public lands and I’m proud that collectively we have worked to make sure that Nevada’s voices were heard in the halls of Congress.”⁴²

Horsford’s Republican opponent, former Nevada Assembly Member Jim Marchant, made some efforts to stake out a moderate position on public lands—stating in a TV interview, “I want to preserve our public lands for the people. I’m not for blocking people from going on them... I don’t want to sell it... I don’t want to take these lands away from people who want to use them.” However, overall he tended not to emphasize his positions on public lands or outdoor issues throughout the campaign.

In the end, Horsford won reelection by nearly 5 percentage points, becoming the first incumbent to retain the seat in its history.

Tweet from Steve Horsford



Rep. Steven Horsford
@RepHorsford

“Now, more than ever, we need to invest in the restoration economy to stimulate economic growth amid the pandemic.

With record-high unemployment at nearly 30%, Nevada would uniquely benefit from good-paying jobs while fighting the climate crisis.

Jul 7, 2020

THE RESTORATION ECONOMY: EXAMINING ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Panelists

- Mr. Brent Keith
Senior Policy Advisor - Lands
The Nature Conservancy
- Ms. Mary Ellen Spreenkel
President & CEO
The Corps Network
- Mr. Dwayne LeftHand
Taos Pueblo Conservation Program Coordinator
Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, New Mexico
- Dr. Holly Bamford
Chief Conservation Officer
The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Steven Horsford
Representative, Nevada

NEW MEXICO

Continuing a public lands legacy

With over 5.4 million acres of public land, the New Mexico way of life in the state is defined by the outdoors. This year, with public lands champion Sen. Tom Udall retiring, the outcome of campaigns across the state continued New Mexico's legacy of electing conservation leaders.

NEW MEXICO VOTERS AT A GLANCE

73%

favor protecting Native American sacred land over opening it up to oil and gas development.

82%

of New Mexicans said public lands, parks, and wildlife continue to be very important factors when deciding who to vote for.

59%

say public lands issues are more important to them now than prior to the pandemic.

64%

agree environmental protections matter more than ever, and we must enforce current environmental laws.

79%

support setting a goal to conserve 30% of America's land and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations.

Heated Senate race brings outdoor issues to fore

Representative Ben Ray Luján, a Democrat in New Mexico’s Third Congressional District, defeated Republican meteorologist Mark Ronchetti to win the U.S. Senate seat vacated by retiring Democrat Sen. Tom Udall. In this heated race, the candidates clashed on outdoor issues, with Luján accusing rival Ronchetti of engaging in “irresponsible and dangerous climate denialism.”⁴³

Serving in the House since 2009, Luján supported the Great American Outdoors Act, and in June joined the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis to unveil a comprehensive Climate Crisis Action Plan to address climate change and put the nation on a path toward net-zero carbon pollution by 2050 or sooner. He also worked to increase funding for conservation projects on public lands, introduced legislation to give land grant communities greater access to land within their historical boundaries, and advocated for the prohibition of oil and gas extraction leases on the federal land around Chaco Canyon. Luján frequently touted his conservation record in his Senate campaign.

Luján’s campaign made national news when he highlighted a video clip from a Republican online forum in which Ronchetti says that “fires aren’t caused by anything other than a spark or a lightning strike. ...Climate change doesn’t cause fires, come on.”⁴⁴ Ronchetti later responded to Luján’s criticism, stating: “I’ve been studying weather my entire professional life and so let me be perfectly clear – climate change is a real phenomenon that needs to be addressed... Wildfires in the West are caused by a variety of factors including lightning and human activity. These fires are made far worse by poor forest management in addition to drought conditions.”

In addition, Ronchetti advocated in his campaign for the federal leasing of public lands for oil, gas, and mineral development.⁴⁵

Luján won the seat by more than five percentage points. Now the highest-ranking Latino in the House, Luján will be just the fifth current Latino Senator in office.

Tweet from Ben Ray Luján



Ben Ray Luján

@repbenraylujan

“2020 is shaping up to be the warmest year on record – and time is running out to #ActOnClimate.”

That’s why I joined the @ClimateCrisis Committee to announce a comprehensive Action Plan to address climate change and put America on a path to net-zero carbon pollution.

Jun 20, 2020



Public lands remain top of agenda in NM's 1st District

In New Mexico's 1st District, Representative Deb Haaland secured a second term in Congress in a race against Republican candidate Michelle Garcia Holmes.

Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, made history when she took office in 2018 and became one of the first Indigenous women members of Congress. With a deep understanding that public lands in the U.S. are lands that Native people have inhabited or used for material and spiritual purposes, Haaland made outdoor issues a central pillar in her platform and campaign.

When she joined Congress in 2018, Haaland was made the Vice Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee, a key legislative body focused on environmental legislation with jurisdiction over critical issues like climate change.⁴⁶ She engaged almost immediately in the fight over Bears Ears, denouncing the national monument's downsizing during hearings on Capitol Hill and co-sponsoring bills that would restore protections to Bears Ears and prevent the executive branch from shrinking or abolishing national monuments in the future.

Haaland introduced the 30x30 Resolution to Save Nature to set a goal for the United States

to conserve at least 30 percent of the nation's water and land by 2030. She also introduced The Environmental Justice in Recreation Permitting Act as well as the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation (SOAR) Act, both of which aim to increase access to public lands. Haaland campaigned on her support for the Natural Resources Management Act, also known as the Public Lands Package, and introduced the Antiquities Act of 2019 which has a goal of fighting climate change by protecting land from extraction, honoring sacred sites, and ensuring public lands are protected for future generations.

Notably, Haaland supported bold environmental reforms such as the Green New Deal and a ban on fracking, despite being a representative from one of the nation's biggest oil-producing states.⁴⁷

Haaland's opponent failed to recognize the passion voters in the district have for outdoor issues and conservation and did not prioritize outdoor issues in the campaign. Haaland handily won reelection in a race expected to be closer than it turned out. In addition to helping her on her way to reelection, Haaland's outdoor issues record has put her in consideration for Secretary of the Interior Department under the incoming Biden administration.

Deb Haaland Facebook Ad



Deb Haaland for Congress

"I know just how important our public lands and open spaces are to New Mexicans. It's part of who we are... I'm running for reelection to continue fighting for our public lands and open spaces."



A cautionary tale for pro-conservation candidates

In New Mexico’s second district, which encompasses the entire southern half of the state, Republican candidate Yvette Herrell defeated incumbent Rep. Xochitl Torres Small. It was a rematch from 2018 when Torres Small narrowly defeated Herrell by just under 4,000 votes.

Before being elected to Congress in 2018, Torres Small worked as an attorney on clean water access and other environmental issues in New Mexico and later as an aide to the outgoing Sen. Tom Udall. She highlighted her background and routinely showed her connection to the land in her advertising on the way to an upset win in the traditionally conservative district.

In Congress, she serves on the powerful House Homeland Security and Agriculture committees. Her record on outdoor issues includes support for the Great American Outdoors Act, bills that protect the Grand Canyon and Chaco Canyon from oil and gas development, and a public lands conservation package known as the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act (which included the Every Kid Outdoors Act, which she co-sponsored). In her campaign, Torres Small centered the idea that protecting public lands is essential for economic development in New Mexico.⁴⁸

Herrell—who formerly served as a state chairperson for the Koch-backed American Legislative Exchange Council, a nonprofit that has aggressively sought to privatize public lands—campaigns on a platform that starkly contrasted with Torres Small’s on outdoor issues. Herrell aligned herself with the Trump administration’s deregulatory agenda and said she supports bringing the timber industry back to New Mexico and streamlining permitting for the oil and gas industry.⁴⁹

While the question over fracking in the presidential debates did not impact most races in the West, it did become an issue in this district. Throughout her campaign, Herrell attacked Torres Small in ads and social media content with misleading statements on her position towards the oil and gas industry in the state. Torres Small was pulled into the dynamics of the national energy debate and made statements in favor of oil and gas development that may have undermined her public lands credentials with outdoor voters.⁵⁰ Despite a strong record on outdoor issues, she lost reelection in one of most closely watched congressional races in the country.



Rep. Xochitl Torres Small
@RepTorresSmall

“Beautiful weekend for a hike to Achenbach Canyon in the Organ Mountains with @FriendsOMDP! Protecting our public lands continues to be a priority of mine to make sure generations to come have the change to enjoy our district’s natural resources. #NMTrue

Jan 6, 2020



Yvette Herrell
@Yvette4Congress

“My opponent opposes the development of oil & gas as the most efficient #energy source. The oil and gas industry is a cornerstone of NM’s economy. I fully support New Mexico’s energy-driven economy and look forward to working on policies that ensure its continued growth. #NMpol

Oct 11, 2018

Strong conservation record brings success

Democrat Teresa Leger Fernandez beat Republican candidate Alexis Johnson for the open seat in the House of Representatives for New Mexico's 3rd Congressional District. Throughout the race, both candidates talked about the urgency of action on outdoor issues but differed on their platforms.

Before campaigning, Leger Fernandez had a long history of on-the-ground environmental advocacy. She worked for 30 years as counsel for tribes and their business entities, in which she lobbied in support of community solar and environmental reform. She also served as Commissioner of Las Acequias de Chupadero, where she successfully defeated a developer's attempt to take the local Acequias' water out of the Chupadero Valley. Recently, Fernandez worked on renewable energy legislation at the New Mexico state legislature on behalf of the All Pueblo Council of Governors and helped secure over \$70 million to rebuild contaminated and dilapidated water and wastewater infrastructure for low income villages and communities.⁵¹ In a crowded primary election, Leger Fernandez' work on public lands and tribal issues made her stand out on her way to victory.

Leger Fernandez campaigned on her support of the Green New Deal and is intent on reducing carbon pollution, rejoining the Paris Climate Accord, and investing in renewable energy resources. On public lands, she stated: “[public lands are] one of our most valuable resources and we need to protect [them] into the future for all Americans, and for all people who live here—or come to visit... we need to recognize that we cannot have very short term gains and sacrifice our long-term values, whether it's something like sacrificing the importance of Chaco Canyon to all of humanity for very short gains of a few oil and gas wells.”⁵²

Republican challenger Alexis Johnson, an environmental engineer and rancher, approached outdoor issues with an emphasis on advocacy for continued fossil fuel extraction using new technologies to reduce emissions. On public lands she stated, “I do not promote extreme government control. I know that the gentlemen and the women in New Mexico know how to utilize their [public] land and keep it for their children and their children's children.”⁵³

Johnson's positions put her on the wrong side of outdoor voters in New Mexico and she lost to Leger Fernandez by a significant margin.

Quote from Teresa Leger Fernandez



“ [Different agencies] don't always have a unified mission. And I think that mission should be that these lands are public, they are common good, they belong to every American citizen, and they must be protected into the future. This is one of our most valuable resources and we need to protect it into the future for all Americans, and for all people who

live here—or come to visit. People are drawn to our beautiful natural beauty. And we need to recognize that we cannot have very short term gains and sacrifice our long-term values, whether it's something like sacrificing the importance of Chaco Canyon to all of humanity for very short gains of a few oil and gas wells.



UTAH

A change of direction in the beehive state

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.

A move towards balance in the Governor's office

In what was ultimately a non-competitive contest, Republican Spencer Cox, Utah's Lt. Governor, chartered a different path for Republicans in the state on public lands and climate issues in his successful race for Governor.

Republican leaders in Utah had a track record of being so hostile to public lands that the Outdoor Industry Association moved its bi-annual Outdoor Retailer convention to Denver, leaving Salt Lake City after 20 years—a \$45 million hit to the local economy.

Cox took a more balanced approach. His campaign website said, "Utah is blessed with some of the world's most breathtaking natural wonders. We're proud of our natural resources

and should continue to be the premier recreation destination for people around the globe. Public lands are central to what makes Utah different, and they're a big part of what makes us great." Cox said he is "committed to keeping Utah's public lands public—and will take steps to involve our citizens in the creation and implementation of public lands policies."

Cox broke ranks with state Republicans and the Trump administration by acknowledging "clear evidence" of a changing climate in wildfires.⁵⁴ He previously said Republicans had "done a terrible job" talking about public lands and called for an "understanding on public lands" across ideological differences.^{55, 56}



“We are a public lands state, we have always been a public lands state, and we will always be a public lands state. It's one of the things that makes Utah so incredible.

—Spencer Cox

Chris Peterson Facebook Ad



Chris Peterson For Utah Governor

“Utah's public lands are some of the most incredible in the world and they are an important historical and cultural cornerstone of our lifestyle. Utahns deserve a governor who

will fight for their right to experience these beautiful landscapes. The current administration repeatedly puts the interests of politicians in Washington D.C. and their corporate donors ahead of ordinary Utahns. That's not okay. It's time for change.



Close loss for Utah's only pro-conservation Congress member

Democratic Representative Ben McAdams narrowly lost his reelection bid despite staking out bold public lands positions in a conservative state and district that was reliably Republican until he won it by less than 700 votes in 2018.

His victory followed the legally-questionable decision by the Trump administration to reduce the size of Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments which thrust public lands into the spotlight in the unexpectedly close congressional race.

McAdams was the only member of Utah's congressional delegation to oppose a bill to restrict a president's ability to designate new national monuments through the Antiquities Act. He was also the only Utah congress member to support the Great American Outdoor Act.

The Republican challenger in the race, former professional football player Burgess Owens, spoke minimally on public lands or environmental issues in the campaign and instead relied on other issues to carry him to victory in the traditionally conservative district.



Tweet from Ben McAdams



Rep Ben McAdams

@RepBenMcAdams

“As Utah families prepare for summer trips to the national parks, I signed onto this bill. The bipartisan #RestoreOurParksAct invests in much needed infrastructure improvements in Utah's beloved national parks. #utpol

May 22, 2019

PUBLIC LANDS IN THE STATE HOUSE

A SURVEY OF STATE LEGISLATIVE RACES WHERE PUBLIC LANDS PLAYED AN OUTSIZED ROLE

Colorado State House, 27: Brianna Titone won by focusing on renewable energy, water conservation, and climate.

Colorado State Senate, 3: Chris Hansen won by focusing on climate impacts on outdoor tourism/economy, transition for communities dependent on fossil fuels, methane regulation, and water conservation.

Idaho State Senate, 26: Michelle Stennett won against Eric Parker, a participant in the Bundy Ranch standoff.

Idaho State Senate, 5: David Nelson won against climate change denier Dan Foreman.

Nevada State Senate, 7: Roberta Lange won by focusing on public land protection, climate change, and setting a 50 percent renewable energy goal by 2030 and 100 percent by 2050.

New Mexico State Senate, 38: Carrie Hamblen, who helped to designate Organ Mountains Desert Peaks National Monument, won by focusing on renewable energy, protection of, and access to public lands.

New Mexico State House, 42: Kristina Ortez, who has worked with Sierra Club and Taos Land Trust and has worked to expand outdoor recreation and learning opportunities for kids, won her election.

New Mexico State House, 35: Angelica Rubio, who passed a bill to create New Mexico's Office of Outdoor Equity, won her election.

New Mexico State House, 26: Georgene Louis, who introduced wildlife corridors legislation, won her election.

Arizona State Senate, 4: Lisa Otondo won by focusing on water conservation and management and green jobs in rural areas.

Arizona State House, 2: Andrea Dalessandro, Ranking Democrat member of the Senate Natural Resources, Energy and Water Committee, won her election.

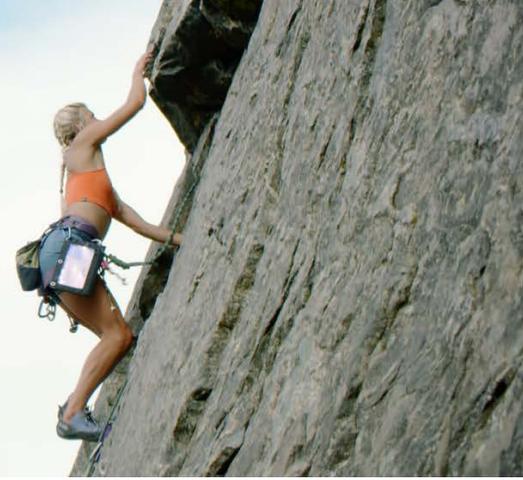
Montana State Senate, 31: Chris Pope won by focusing on protecting public land access, clean air and water, energy conservation, and renewables.

Montana State House, 90: Marilyn Marler won by focusing on conservation and clean energy.

Montana State House, 16: Tyson Running Wolf, an outdoor recreation guide, won by focusing on protecting public land access, particularly for protection of the Badger Two Medicine area and Native American rights.



LOOKING AHEAD: THE OUTDOOR VOTER AGENDA



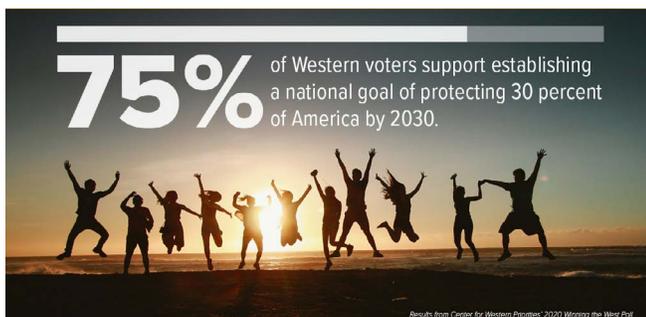
As newly elected officials step into office, voters will be looking for campaign messages to be translated into legislative action on public lands. Outdoor voters are eager to see a proactive agenda to expand and protect national public lands, namely around access, oil and gas leasing, and the impacts of climate change on outdoor recreation.

PROTECTING AND FUNDING PUBLIC LANDS

A love for the land is part of Westerners' regional heritage that connects them across generations. Protecting public lands makes that legacy permanent. But while Western voters believe their government should never reverse progress when it comes to protecting nature, habitats and treasured places, the Mountain West's lands, waterways and wildlife have become vulnerable:

Western voters are eager to see a proactive agenda to expand and protect national public lands.

- 75 percent of voters support establishing a national goal of protecting 30 percent of America's land and waters by 2030.



- 79 percent of Western voters support increasing funding for maintenance and infrastructure on public lands and parks to ensure public access, provide needed upkeep, and stimulate the economy in the West.

REINING IN UNREGULATED OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT

The outdoor activities Western voters love depend on keeping energy development away from the places it should not be. Responsible energy development requires taking the maximum steps to ensure oil and gas extraction is safe, deferential to the surrounding environment and wildlife, and provides the public with a fair return for the use of publicly owned resources.



Western voters show strong support for a variety of common sense regulations and restrictions on energy development on public lands.

- 67 percent of Western voters believe oil and gas should be kept in the ground on public lands or allowed within strict limitations and regulations to ensure that the land, wildlife, water, and public safety are protected first and foremost.
- 74 percent of Westerners support increasing royalties for oil, gas, and coal extraction on public lands, while 88 percent support requiring oil and gas companies to detect and repair gas leaks in equipment.

ADDRESSING THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

Mounting impacts of climate change are being felt across the country, and research shows that many Western public lands are being impacted more rapidly than the rest of the country. Climate change is driving longer and more intense wildfire seasons, decreased snowpack and water retention, drought, impacts on wildlife, extreme weather events, heat waves, and sea-level rise, all of which impact public lands such as national parks.



With drought, wildfires, mudslides and unpredictable weather, climate change has made it clear to Western voters that it's more important than ever to protect natural resources, public lands, and open spaces.

- Nearly two-thirds of Westerners support making public lands a net-zero source of carbon pollution to help combat the threat of climate change.

LOOKING TO 2022

Across the West, 2020's elections solidified the influence of the outdoor voting bloc, centering public lands and conservation issues as integral to winning campaigns. Voters made their priorities clear by supporting candidates who campaigned on public lands and conservation, across political parties and different states.

The outdoor voting bloc will likely continue to grow, influencing campaigns across the West. As a result, we expect to see campaigns focus even more on public lands issues in coming election cycles. 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.

To learn more about our Winning the West 2020 poll, or view previous polls and reports, visit WinningTheWest2020.org. Visit OutdoorVoter.org to learn more about the outdoor enthusiasts who care about keeping our public lands protected and accessible.



PHOTO CREDITS

Cover: Las Cienegas National Conservation Area

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Red Peak Wilderness Study Area

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Bike riders in Moab

Dave Jeppeson, Bureau of Land Management

“Mailboxes” Ad [1]

Center for Western Priorities

Outdoor Voter Website

Center for Western Priorities

Child fishing

Vision Picnet, Pexels

Outdoor Voter Website

Center for Western Priorities

“Voting Booth” Ad

Center for Western Priorities

Shenandoah National Park

N. Lewis, National Park Service

Bike rider

Andrea Piacquadio, Pexels

Juan Bautista De Anza National Historic Trail

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Grand Canyon DEIS Aerial, Colorado River Geikie Peak, Grand Canyon

National Park Service

Bright Angel Trail, Plateau Point View, Grand Canyon

Michael Quinn, National Park Service

Sonoran Desert National Monument

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Great Sand Dunes National Park

Patrick Myers, National Park Service

Alpine Loop National Backcountry Byway

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Deep Creek, Colorado

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

St. Mary Valley, Glacier National Park

Jacob Frank, National Park Service

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Bowman Lake, Glacier National Park

Jacob Frank, National Park Service

National Bison Range

United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Basin and Range National Monument [2]

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Basin and Range National Monument [2]

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Pine Forest Range Wilderness

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Organ Mountains National Monument

Patrick Alexander

Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Carrizo Plain National Monument

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Soaptree Yucca, White Sands National Park

National Park Service

Glen Canyon National Recreation Area

Ken Xu

Tony Grove, Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest

Kelly Wickens, Intermountain Forest Service

Courthouse Wash, Arches National Park

Kait Thomas, National Park Service

Native Quamash Cover Cropped

Oregon Metro

“Mailboxes” Ad [2]

Center for Western Priorities

Sunset jump

Belle Co, Pexels

People in the park

Leah Kelley, Pexels

Bike rider on mountaintop

Dorothy Castillo, Pexels

“Mailboxes” Ad [3]

Center for Western Priorities

Wedge Overlook, Utah

Bob Wick, Bureau of Land Management

Politician headshots

Twitter, Facebook

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