Conservation Action Can Win Over the Media and the Public

Photo: Bears Ears National Monument, Bureau of Land Management

Center for American Progress

Center for Western Priorities

Between the Inflation Reduction Act's landmark action to confront the climate crisis; the CHIPS and Science Act's unprecedented strengthening of American manufacturing, supply chains, and national security; and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act's historic investments in community resilience and competitiveness, President Joe Biden has delivered a series of legislative wins. But the president has another ace up his sleeve for tackling the climate crisis that is both popular and bipartisan: bold action to advance his "America the Beautiful" initiative by conserving and designating new public lands and waters for permanent protection.

New analyses of media and public opinion find that executive conservation action is wildly popular, cuts through the public's distrust of Washington, is accessible to broad and bipartisan audiences, and garners incredibly positive media coverage. These studies also suggest that further use of executive conservation action by President Biden would be well-received by the voting public and result in ownership of the media narrative.

Now is the time for President Biden to build on his conservation legacy by designating national monuments such as Camp Hale-Continental Divide, Castner Range, and Avi Kwa Ame; finalizing the protection of critical places such as Bristol Bay; and tightening regulations to conserve intact landscapes. Bold action to conserve our lands, waters, and wildlife is not only necessary to stave off biodiversity loss and climate change, but it also garners nearly universal support in America's increasingly divided political sphere.

Photo: Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Tim Peterson/Lighthawk

Public opinion consistently supports conservation action

According to a comprehensive public opinion analysis by FM3 Research, executive action to conserve public lands is consistently and overwhelmingly popular, and specific conservation actions taken by President Biden—both completed and anticipated—are likewise supported.

The analysis reviewed 30 public opinion surveys on public lands issues conducted within the past eight years. These surveys span a wide range of political and economic contexts, including both Democratic and Republican leadership, various states of the economy, and before, during, and in the declining months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data clearly demonstrate that the public widely, strongly, and consistently holds positive attitudes toward large landscape-level protections, the agencies that manage them, and proposals to increase conservation on public lands. Moreover, these actions' popularity cuts across all major demographic groups within the electorate, receiving support across party lines, including strong support among independents.

Support for increasing conservation on federal public lands—including the president's America the Beautiful initiative—has averaged 76 percent since 2016, with the vast majority of Americans voicing "strong" support. Likewise, support for specific proposals to designate or expand federally protected lands is broad, with 76 percent of voters voicing consistent support since 2014—again, the vast majority of whom list their support as "strong." Specific proposals include actions already taken by the Biden administration, such as restoring protections for Bears Ears National Monument, as well as potential future actions, such as the proposed Caja del Rio and Avi Kwa Ame national monuments.

Federal land management agencies—including the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—are also exceptionally popular, with approval, favorability, and confidence ratings averaging 71 percent since 2016. It's worth noting, however, that positive ratings are reduced somewhat by the sizable number of voters—nearly a quarter—who are not familiar with the BLM. Notably, these approval ratings are significantly more positive than those for Congress and both the Trump and Biden administrations over the same period of time, demonstrating conservation's unique ability to cut through the notable decline in Americans' trust in government.

In short, there is intense, consistent, and bipartisan support for the conservation of public lands. In an era of deep partisan division on most key public policy issues, acting to conserve public lands is one of the most unambiguously positive actions a president can take. Indeed, these findings make clear that bold conservation action by the Biden administration would be met with broad, strong, and durable support from the American public.

Photo: Browns Canyon National Monument, Bureau of Land Management/Bob Wick

Conservation action drives overwhelmingly positive media coverage

According to a comprehensive media analysis conducted by the Center for American Progress and the Center for Western Priorities, executive announcements about national monuments, national parks, and large-scale conservation initiatives consistently drive positive media coverage in outlets across the political spectrum.

The analysis reviewed print and television media coverage of federal public lands conservation, including approximately 3,100 news and opinion pieces from January 2021 to July 2022. Approximately half of the coverage reviewed for tone was neutral, which is standard of environmental reporting. However, positive coverage overwhelmingly outweighed negative by a ratio of 5-to-1. And nearly half of all positive coverage specifically mentioned President Biden or the Biden administration.

Positive coverage of national monument designations

National monument designations, in particular, provide an opportunity for positive news coverage.

In October 2021, President Biden's use of the Antiquities Act to restore the Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts national monuments was a unanimous communications win. Coverage of the decision was overwhelmingly positive, with positive coverage outweighing negative coverage at a ratio of more than 10-to-1 and all positive coverage directly mentioning President Biden or his administration. Much of that coverage noted that President Biden delivered on a promise he made during the 2020 campaign, and only 10 percent of the coverage was neutral—a significant departure from the usual 50-plus percent neutral trend in media analyses. Furthermore, the national monument restorations were responsible for 25 percent of the print coverage identified about public lands during the time period reviewed and more than 50 percent of the positive public lands coverage.

Photo: Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, Bureau of Land Management/Bob Wick

Photo: Yellowstone National Park, National Park Service/Jacob W. Frank

Notably, this positive media coverage was distributed widely on social media, with more than 300,000 engagements from the top three stories alone. Biden's action also received 548 local TV segments in 40 states. Overall, television coverage trended positive, with positive coverage outweighing the number of negative stories. Opinion coverage after the president's announcement also trended positive.

It should be noted that media coverage of conservation and public lands often boosts narratives that are central to the Biden agenda. The primary themes in the coverage include:

1. The positive economic impact of national monuments, national parks, and other public lands on local communities
2. A direct connection between public land protections and combating climate change
3. The public health benefits of nearby nature, including improved access to green spaces for communities of color

CONCLUSION

Both of these analyses highlight that executive conservation action is indisputably popular, bipartisan, and a bright spot at a time when public perception of the government and its operations is increasingly bleak. These findings should bode well for bold future conservation action from the Biden administration. Conserving public lands is a policy option that both speaks to people's values and is central to Western voters' way of life, lifting up the best parts of America's story for the general public.

The authors would like to thank Nicole Gentile, Steve Bonitatibus, Drew McConville, Aaron Weiss, and Lilly Bock-Brownstein for their contributions to this column.

PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS

TO Interested Parties
FROM Dave Metz, Miranda Everitt, and Denny Han, FM3 Research
RE: Voter Support for Conservation of Federal Public Land
DATE September 11, 2022

FM3 Research aggregated more than thirty public opinion surveys on public lands issues conducted within the last eight years to understand prevailing attitudes toward conservation of federal public lands. The analysis focused on polling on four specific subjects: (1) support for specific proposals to designate or expand federally-protected lands, (2) support for the general concept of increasing protections of federal lands, (3) support for removing existing protections from federal public lands, and (4) public perceptions of federal agencies with responsibility for managing public lands. The data unquestionably show that the overall public widely, strongly, and consistently hold positive attitudes towards such protections and agencies.

More specifically:

1. **Specific proposals to designate or expand federal public lands are backed by more than three-quarters of voters (76%) on average;**
2. **The general principle of conserving more federal lands – including in the context of the America the Beautiful Initiative – is just as broadly-supported, averaging 76% backing over a wide range of polls;**
3. **Aligning with the clear preference for conservation, voters consistently reject the idea of rolling back protections for federal lands, with an average of 58% opposing such proposals; and**
4. **Voters consistently express broad and strong favorable views of federal agencies tasked with land management – an average of 71% positive.**

In short, **the breadth, intensity, consistency and bipartisan nature of support for conservation of federal public lands is remarkable**. In an era of deep partisan divisions on most key public policy issues, acting to conserve federal lands is one of the most unambiguously positive actions a President can take.

More specific details and data for each of these findings follow in the next pages.

Support for specific proposals to designate or expand federally-protected lands is consistently broad, with support since 2014 averaging 76% of voters. Most surveys included follow-up questions distinguishing strong support from more tentative backing; the data show that on average, "strong" support accounts for the vast majority of that backing, averaging nearly half (46%) of voters in each poll. Each poll is detailed below in Table 1.

76%

of voters, on average, back proposals to designate or expand federally protected lands.

Table 1: Specific Proposals to Designate or Expand Federally-Protected Lands

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters, Colorado	Designating the Dolores River Canyon Area as a national monument	82% Total Support	43% Strongly Support
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters, Nevada	A proposal to designate existing public lands just east of the Mojave National Preserve in southern Nevada as the Spirit Mountain National Monument	77% Total Support	41% Strongly Support
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters, New Mexico	A proposal to permanently preserve Caja del Rio between the Rio Grande and Santa Fe rivers	80% Total Support	45% Strongly Support
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters; AZ, CO, NV, NM	Restore the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments	81% Total Support	38% Strongly Support
2022/04/04 - 04/10	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	Passing legislation to enhance current protections for the Wilderness Study Area in the Gallatin Range, by maintaining the existing recreation uses, conserving some areas for wildlife migration, protecting the headwaters of the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers and designating some new wilderness areas	77% Total Support	50% Strongly Support
2022/04/04 - 04/10	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	Enacting the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act in western Montana	83% Total Support	48% Strongly Support
2022/01/05 - 01/23	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project in western Montana	79% Total Support	48% Strongly Support

Table 1: Specific Proposals to Designate or Expand Federally-Protected Lands (continued)

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2022/01/05 - 01/23	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Nevada	Designating existing public lands just east of the Mojave National Preserve as the Spirit Mountain national monument	79% Total Support	55% Strongly Support
2020/03/19 - 03/24	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project in western Montana	75% Total Support	36% Strongly Support
2020/03/19 - 03/24	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	Making Badger Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest a National Monument	79% Total Support	58% Strongly Support
2020/03/19 - 03/24	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	The Montana Headwaters Legacy Act to designate segments of seventeen rivers flowing through public lands as Wild and Scenic rivers	79% Total Support	50% Strongly Support
2020/01/11 - 01/19	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Colorado	Designating some existing public lands as wilderness areas in western Colorado, limit future drilling on public lands in the Thompson Divide area, and create a national historic landscape at the former site of the Army's 10th Mountain Division	68% Total Support	41% Strongly Support
2018/04/12 - 04/17	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Montana	The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project in western Montana	73% Total Support	36% Strongly Support
2018/04/12 - 04/17	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Montana	Making Badger Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest a National Monument	76% Total Support	40% Strongly Support
2016/09/01 - 09/08	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Likely voters, Montana	The Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project in western Montana	69% Total Support	40% Strongly Support
2016/08/29 - 09/08	FM3 Research & American Viewpoint	Likely voters, nationwide	Establishment of the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage National Monument	82% Total Support	56% Strongly Support
2016/07/26 - 07/31	Public Opinion Strategies & Benenson Strategy Group.	Voters, Utah	Designating Bears Ears as a National Monument	53% Total Support	N/A
2016/05/11 -05/12, 05/14	Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Utah	Designating Bears Ears as a National Monument	71% Total Support	38% Strongly Support
2016/05/02 - 05/05	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Nevada	Designating Gold Butte as a National Monument	71% Total Support	51% Strongly Support
2016/01/14 - 01/17	FM3 Research	Likely voters, Arizona	Establishment of the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage National Monument	80% Total Support	58% Strongly Support

Support for the concept of increasing conservation on federal public lands is virtually identical to support for specific conservation proposals, also averaging 76% since 2016. Strong support for the idea also averages 46%. As shown in Table 2, the concept of increasing protection of federal lands has been tested in a wide variety of ways, including survey questions about creating or expanding national monuments, national parks, wilderness areas (or just protecting "public lands" broadly) that make no mention of specific areas that would be protected. This polling includes questions testing public attitudes toward the America the Beautiful Initiative (also called the 30x30 Initiative).

In subdividing these proposals by policy type, we find that proposals to designate or restore national monuments average 81% total support and 52% "strong" support; and the America the Beautiful (or 30x30) Initiative averages 76% total support and 45% "strong" support.

These policies consistently receive support that is not only broad and strong, but also bipartisan. For example, over the last three years – spanning both the Trump and Biden administrations – Colorado College's State of the Rockies survey of conservation attitudes in eight western states has shown consistent support across party lines for the America the Beautiful Initiative. It has received the average backing of 91% of Democrats, 79% of independents and 60% of Republicans.

Table 2: Support for Increasing Conservation of Federal Lands in Principle

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters; AZ, CO, NV, NM	Would you support or oppose the president using their executive authority to protect land because of its cultural and historical significance or unique, natural value by designating a national monument?	68% Total Support	34% Strongly Support
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters; AZ, CO, NV, NM	Creating more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities.	83% Total Support	43% Strongly Support
2022/05/19 - 05/27	Benenson Strategy Group	Likely voters; AZ, CO, NV, NM	America the Beautiful Initiative	76% Total Approve	41% Strongly Approve
2022/04/08 - 04/13	New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Nebraska	America the Beautiful Initiative	77% Total Support	41% Strongly Support
2022/04/04 - 04/10	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	Do you support or oppose Presidents continuing to use their ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments?	78% Total Support	43% Strongly Support
2022/03/04 - 03/10	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters, Montana	America the Beautiful Initiative	66% Total Support	36% Strongly Support
2022/01/05 - 01/23	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Setting a national goal of conserving thirty percent of land and inland waters in America, and thirty percent of its ocean areas by the year 2030	77% Total Support	48% Strongly Support
2022/01/05 - 01/23	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Creating new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation	80% Total Support	50% Strongly Support

Table 2: Support for Increasing Conservation of Federal Lands in Principle (continued)

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2021/01/02 - 01/13	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Setting a national goal of conserving 30% percent of land and inland waters in America, and thirty percent of its ocean areas by the year 2030	77% Total Support	49% Strongly Support
2021/01/02 - 01/13	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Restoring national monument protections to lands in the West which contain archaeological and Native American sites, but also have oil, gas and mineral deposits	77% Total Support	48% Strongly Support
2021/01/02 - 01/13	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Creating new national parks, national monuments, national wildlife refuges and tribal protected areas to protect historic sites or areas for outdoor recreation	84% Total Support	55% Strongly Support
2020/07/02 - 07/17	Gottlieb Strategic Research	Likely Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NM, NV	Setting a national goal to conserve 30% of America's lands and ocean areas by 2030 to help protect wildlife and open spaces for future generations	75% Total Support	42% Strongly Support
2020/01/11 - 01/19	FM3 Research & New Bridge Strategy	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Setting a national goal of protecting 30% of America's lands and ocean areas by the year 2030	73% Total Support	49% Strongly Support
2019/02/20 - 02/26	Hart Research	Voters; AZ, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, UT, WY	Setting a national goal of protecting 30% of America's lands and ocean areas by 2030	86% Total Support	54% Strongly Support
2018/05/07 - 05/09	Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy	Voters, Oregon	Do you feel Oregon's Congressional Representatives and Senators should or should not show more leadership and take stronger legislative actions to protect public lands by designating new national parks, recreation areas, and wilderness?	74% Should	N/A
2018/04/12 - 04/17	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Montana	Dedicating additional, existing public lands as wilderness areas in Montana	57% Total Support	38% Strongly Support
2016/09/01 - 09/08	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Likely voters, Montana	Permanently protecting more of Montana's rivers that flow across federal public lands using the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act	67% Total Support	44% Strongly Support
2016/08/29 - 09/08	FM3 Research & American Viewpoint	Likely voters, nationwide	Designating protected lands as national monuments	83% Total Support	52% Strongly Support
2016/01/14 - 01/17	FM3 Research	Likely voters, Arizona	Designating protected lands as national monuments	85% Total Support	61% Strongly Support

Not surprisingly, most voters also oppose attempts to remove or roll back federal protections for public lands. This includes steady opposition to proposals to shift responsibility for conservation and protection of public lands from the federal government to states. Since 2014, 58% of voters on average prefer to maintain federal protections – including an average of 38% who feel that way "strongly." Specific rollback proposals included in Table 3 range from broad devolution of federal control to specific proposals to change the designation, size or protection of individual federal lands (notably Bears Ears National Monument). Looking specifically at proposals to roll back national monuments (7 of the 10 polls listed below), 59% of voters on average prefer to maintain federal protection. An average of 40% feel that way "strongly."

58%

of voters, on average, oppose attempts to roll back federal protections for public lands.

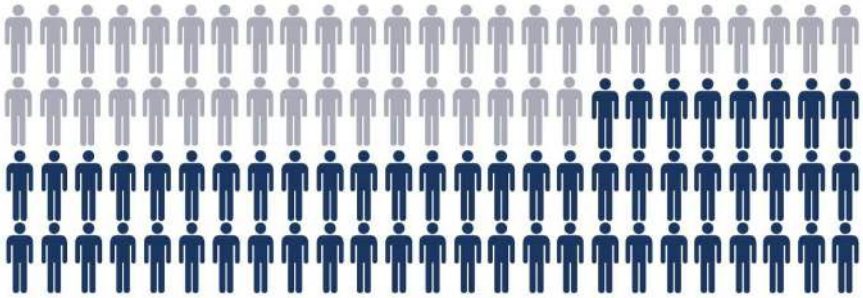


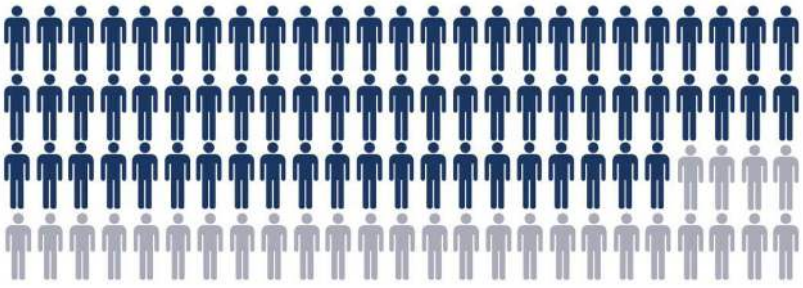
Table 3: Public Opposition to Removing Federal Public Land Protections

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2019/08/11 - 09/01	Gottlieb Strategic Research	Likely voters; AZ, CO, MT, NM, NV	Significantly reducing the size of national monuments, including shrinking Utah's Bears Ears by more than 80 percent and Grand Staircase-Escalante by 50 percent	69% Total Oppose	49% Strongly Oppose
2018/08/08 - 08/13	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Arizona	Giving Arizona state government control over national public lands, such as national forests, national wildlife refuges and Bureau of Land Management lands in its borders	55% Total Oppose	38% Strongly Oppose
2018	Lake Research	Likely voters, nationwide	Transferring control of national public lands to state governments for drilling and mining	52% Total Oppose	34% Strongly Oppose
2017/11/30 - 12/12	Lake Research Partners	Likely voters, nationwide	Transferring control of national public lands to state governments for drilling and mining	53% total Oppose	34% Strongly Oppose
2017/05/13 - 05/16	Public Opinion Strategies	Likely voters, Utah	Keeping Bears Ears as a National Monument and at its current size	64% Total Support	N/A

Table 3: Public Opposition to Removing Federal Public Land Protections (continued)

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2017/05/13 - 05/16	Public Opinion Strategies	Likely voters, Utah	Keeping the current number of Utah National Monuments	68% Total Support	N/A
2017/01/04 - 01/10	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Giving state government control over national public lands, such as national forests, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges in its borders	56% Total Oppose	39% Strongly Oppose
2017	Dan Jones & Associates	Voters, Utah	Reducing the size of the new Bears Ears National Monument	46% Total Oppose	33% Strongly Oppose
2015/12/09 - 12/30	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	Giving state government control over national public lands, such as national forests, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges in its borders	58% Total Oppose	39% Strongly Oppose
2014/06/17 - 06/19	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, Montana	Giving Montana state government control over national public lands, such as national forests, national monuments, and national wildlife refuges in its borders	55% Total Oppose	38% Strongly Oppose

Federal land management agencies are exceptionally popular, with approval, favorability, and confidence ratings averaging 71% since 2016. Of course, these ratings are significantly more positive than those for Congress or either the Trump or Biden administrations over the same period of time. Details are shown in Table 4.



71%

of voters, on average, view federal land management agencies positively.

It is also worth noting that average positive ratings are reduced somewhat by inclusion of polling on the Bureau of Land Management, which is less well-known to voters. BLM is much less well-known to the voting public, and thus its overall positive ratings are lower largely because of the sizable number of voters who do not know enough about it to offer an opinion. Since 2016, positive ratings for the BLM average 54% while "don't know" ratings average 23% - reflecting a two-to-one positive to negative ratio once that lack of familiarity is accounted for.

Excluding BLM, ratings for other national land management agencies average 78% positive.

Table 4: Public Opinion of Public Land Management Agencies

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2019/08/11 - 09/01	Gottlieb Strategic Research	Likely voters; AZ, CO, MT, NM, NV	National Park Service	87% Total Favorable	45% Very Favorable
2019/08/11 - 09/01	Gottlieb Strategic Research	Likely voters; AZ, CO, MT, NM, NV	US Forest Service	86% Total Favorable	40% Very Favorable
2019/08/11 - 09/01	Gottlieb Strategic Research	Likely voters; AZ, CO, MT, NM, NV	The Bureau of Land Management	62% Total Favorable	19% Very Favorable
2017/01/04 - 01/10	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	US Forest Service	76% Total Approve	38% Strongly Approve
2017/01/04 - 01/10	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	National Park Service	82% Total Approve	45% Strongly Approve
2017/01/04 - 01/10	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	US Fish and Wildlife Service	76% Total Approve	33% Strongly Approve
2017/01/04 - 01/10	FM3 Research & Public Opinion Strategies	Voters; AZ, CO, MT, NV, NM, UT, & WY	The Bureau of Land Management	56% Total Approve	16% Strongly Approve

Table 4: Public Opinion of Public Land Management Agencies (continued)

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2016/08/29 - 09/08	FM3 Research & American Viewpoint	Likely voters, nationwide	The Bureau of Land Management	49% Total Approve	17% Strongly Approve
2016/08/29 - 09/08	FM3 Research & American Viewpoint	Likely voters, nationwide	National Park Service	77% Total Approve	38% Strongly Approve
2016/08/29 - 09/08	FM3 Research & American Viewpoint	Likely November 2016 voters, nationwide	US Forest Service	71% Total Approve	32% Strongly Approve
2016/06/11 - 06/11	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Montana	National Park Service	86% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/06/11 - 06/11	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Montana	Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks	84% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/06/11 - 06/11	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Montana	US Forest Service	78% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/06/11 - 06/11	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Montana	The Bureau of Land Management	57% Total Support	N/A
2016/05/02 – 05/05	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Nevada	National Park Service	84% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/05/02 – 05/05	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Nevada	The Bureau of Land Management	53% Total Favorable	N/A

Table 4: Public Opinion of Public Land Management Agencies (continued)

Poll Dates	Pollster	Survey Population	Question or Topic	% Total Positive	% Positive Intensity
2016/04/13 - 04/18	Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, nationwide	National Park Service	63% A great deal/Quite a bit/Some Confidence	18% A Great Deal of Confidence
2016/04/13 - 04/18	Public Opinion Strategies	Voters, nationwide	US Forest Service	56% A great deal/Quite a bit/Some Confidence	15% A Great Deal of Confidence
2016/01/20 - 01/26	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Colorado	National Park Service	90% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/01/20 - 01/26	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Colorado	US Forest Service	83% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/01/20 - 01/26	Purple Insights	Likely voters, Colorado	The Bureau of Land Management	59% Total Favorable	N/A
2016/01/14 - 01/17	FM3 Research	Likely voters, Arizona	The Bureau of Land Management	41% Total Approve	13% Strongly Approve
2016/01/14 - 01/17	FM3 Research	Likely voters, Arizona	National Park Service	75% Total Approve	36% Strongly Approve

In conclusion, this body of data makes clear that **proposals to increase conservation on federal public lands are overwhelmingly and intensely popular with voters across both geography and time**. The time period of the studies considered here reflected a wide range of political and economic contexts: the research was conducted during Democratic and Republican presidential administrations; under Democratic and Republican control of Congress; during both strong and troubled economic times; and before, during, and in the declining months of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings make clear that **any federal administration working to conserve federal public lands can expect broad, strong and durable support from the American public.**

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Nevada Public Lands Survey. n=700 Nevada likely voters. Purple Insights. May 2-5, 2016.

Oregon Poll. n=625 Oregon voters. Mason-Dixon Polling & Strategy. May 7-9, 2018.

Public Lands Issues in the 2020 Election Cycle Survey. n=600 Arizona likely voters, n=600 Colorado likely voters, n=408 Montana likely voters, n=500 Nevada likely voters, and n=600 New Mexico likely voters. Gottlieb Strategic Research. June 2-17, 2020

Public Lands Issues in the 2020 Election Cycle Survey, n=600 Arizona likely voters, n=600 Colorado likely voters, n=500 Montana likely voters, n=500 Nevada likely voters, and n=600 New Mexico likely voters. Gottlieb Strategic Research. August 11-Septeber 1, 2019

State of the Rockies Survey 2022. n=3,440 (at least n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3 and New Bridge Strategy. January 5-23, 2022.

State of the Rockies Survey 2021. n=3,842 (at least n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3 and New Bridge Strategy. January 2-13, 2021.

State of the Rockies Survey 2020. n=3,200 (at least n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3 and New Bridge Strategy. January 11-19, 2020.

State of the Rockies Survey 2019. n=3,204 (at least n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3 and New Bridge Strategy. January 2-9, 2019.

State of the Rockies Survey 2017. n=2,800 (n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3/Public Opinion Strategies. Dec. 20, 2016 – Jan. 10, 2017.

State of the Rockies Survey 2016. n=2,800 (n=400 per state) Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming voters. FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies. December 9-30, 2015.

Utah Statewide Survey. n=500 Utah voters. Public Opinion Strategies. May 11-12, 14, 2016.

Winning the West Survey. n=1,985 Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico likely voters. Benenson Strategy Group. May 19-27, 2022.

MEDIA ANALYSIS

Our review of public lands media coverage included approximately 3,100 news and opinion pieces from January of 2021 through July of 2022. Approximately 2,800 were news stories; the remainder were opinion and editorial pieces.

Public Lands and Conservation Generates Consistently Positive Coverage

Over the time period reviewed, approximately 50 percent of the total coverage (news and opinion) reviewed for tone was neutral. Of the coverage that was identified as positive or negative, positive coverage overwhelmingly outweighed negative. Approximately 45 percent of the positive coverage specifically mentioned President Biden or the Biden administration.

Public Lands Narratives Focus on the Positive Impact of Conservation

Mainstream media outlets routinely present issues related to conservation and public lands as part of the age-old tug of war between the fossil fuel industry and environmentalists, with the environmentalists as the underdog. (The industry has tried repeatedly over the years to create the myth of the "big greens," but it has yet to gain significant traction.) Within that context, the coverage focuses on the positive impact of conservation on local communities, public health, and the climate.

Economic benefits to local communities. The positive economic impact of national monuments, national parks, and public land preservation on local communities is frequently noted in public lands coverage.

Public health benefits. The idea that protecting public lands is both an environmental and public health issue was a frequent narrative when discussing minority communities' access to green spaces before the pandemic. During the pandemic, that narrative expanded to include communities nationwide, with public health experts noting that access to public lands is essential to public health.

Combating climate change. The idea that conservation is an integral part of combating climate change because it preserves the current rate of carbon sequestration and expands the environment's ability to act as a natural carbon sink is a common theme in public lands coverage.

Missouri River Breaks National Monument, Bob Wick/Bureau of Land Management

A Communications WIN: Restoring Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments

On October 8, 2021, President Biden restored full protections to three national monuments that had been slashed in size by former president Donald Trump. Biden used an executive order and his authority under the Antiquities Act to protect 1.36 million acres in Bears Ears in Utah while also restoring the 1.87 million-acre Grand Staircase-Escalante monument. Biden also reimposed fishing restrictions in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of New England that Trump had opened to commercial fishing.

The President's decision to restore protections to these national monuments was covered by every major national outlet and television network. The coverage of the decision was overwhelmingly positive, with positive coverage outweighing negative coverage at a rate of more than 10 to 1, and focused on the following points:

- President Biden's ability to unilaterally reverse the Trump administration's action reducing the size of the monuments;
- The decision protected hundreds of thousands of acres sacred to Native Americans;
- The decision protected these unique public lands from mining and other industrial development.

Overall, 40 percent of the total coverage and 10 percent of the print coverage reviewed for tone was neutral, a departure from the usual trend we see in these analyses. Utah Governor Spencer Cox and Senator Mitt Romney led the opposition to the administration's decision in the press and were quoted in approximately 40 percent of the stories. A number of articles noted that President Biden's action to restore the monuments delivered on a promise he made during the 2020 campaign.

The coverage focused on the environmental benefit of restoring protections for the monuments and provided detailed information about the unique biodiversity and geology of the sites. Approximately 60 percent of the coverage mentioned former President Trump. The majority of the coverage noted the importance of these monuments to Native Americans.

The coverage on the Biden administration's decision to restore protections for Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument was responsible for 25 percent of the coverage identified about public lands during the time period reviewed and more than 50 percent of the positive public lands coverage.

Bears Ears National Monument, Bureau of Land Management

Rock art at Avi Kwa Ame proposed National Monument

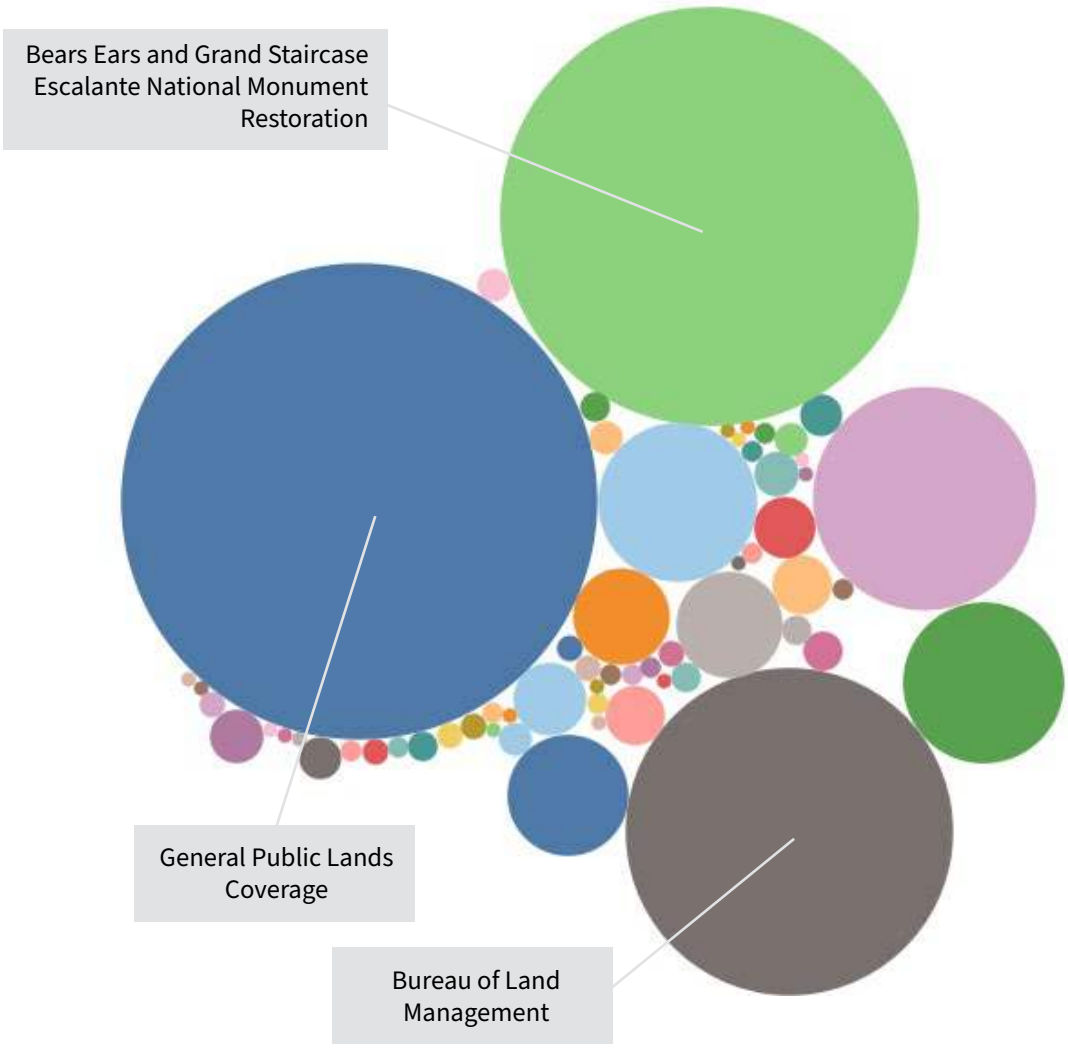
SENTIMENT ANALYSIS: NEWS AND OPINION, ALL COVERAGE

(Based on Stories Tagged for Topic and Tone)

	% Neutral Coverage	Sentiment Ratios	
Print and Online News	**10 percent** of stories reviewed were neutral	People were overwhelmingly more likely to be exposed to positive news coverage than negative	The number of positive stories overwhelmingly outnumbered the number of negative stories
National And Cable TV News	**80 percent** of stories reviewed were neutral	**Coverage trended neutral.**	**Coverage trended neutral.**
Local TV News	**54 percent** of stories reviewed were neutral	People were overwhelmingly more likely to be exposed to positive news coverage than negative	The number of positive stories overwhelmingly outnumbered the number of negative stories

Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante Restoration as a Coverage Driver

January 2021 to June 2021



Examples from the coverage on October 7th and 8th are provided below.

National

The New York Times
Headline: Biden to restore three national monuments in Utah and New England
Key points: The Biden administration acted to protect America's natural treasures

This article focuses on the fact that the President used his executive authority to protect these monuments and notes the unique and pristine nature of the land being protected. Praise from environmental activists was highlighted in the coverage, while the objections of the Utah delegation was noted at the very end of the article. This article received more than 35,000 engagements on social media, almost all of which were on Facebook.

The Washington Post
Headline: Biden expands Bears Ears and other national monuments, reversing Trump cuts
Key points: The Biden administration acted to protect tribal lands, keeping a campaign promise

The article lede notes that the Biden administration's action will restore full protections to lands known "for their stunning desert landscapes and historical treasures of Native American art and settlements." It presents President Biden's executive action as keeping a campaign promise. The objections of the Utah delegation are noted towards the end of the article. This article received more than 140,000 engagements on social media; more than 130,000 of them were on Facebook.

Los Angeles Times
Headline: Biden restores national monuments in Utah, others cut by Trump
Key points: The Biden administration acted to protect tribal lands from industrial development

The article lede notes that the Biden administration's action will protect these lands, which are sacred to Native Americans, from mining and other development. The objections of the Utah delegation are noted towards the end of the article.

The Wall Street Journal
Headline: Biden to Restore Protections for Three National Monuments; White House reverses actions taken by Trump on two monuments in Utah and one off the New England coast
Key points: The Biden administration restored protections for monuments cut by Trump

The article presents the President's executive order as restoring protections when noting the reversal of the Trump administration's decision to reduce the size of the monuments, noted the tribal leaders' support for the decision, and included a supportive quote from House Committee on Natural Resources Chair Raul Grijalva. The objections of the Utah delegation were not noted.

The Washington Times
Headline: Biden to restore 3 national monuments cut by Trump
Key points: The Biden administration restored protections for monuments cut by Trump

This article presents the President's executive order as restoring monuments after they were downsized during the Trump administration; it noted the objections of Utah Governor Spencer Cox as well as the fact that Bears Ears is on land that is sacred to Native American tribes.

NBC News (online)
Headline: Biden restores national monuments protections stripped away by Trump
Key points: The Biden administration restored protections for monuments cut by Trump

This article notes that Biden is restoring protections that were "gutted" by the Trump administration and presents the objections of the Utah delegation from the Biden administration's perspective. This article received more than 8,800 engagements on social media; 7,600 were on Facebook and the remainder were on Twitter.

Fox News (online)
Headline: Biden to overturn Trump on Bears Ears, restore national monuments
Key points: The Biden administration restored protections for monuments cut by Trump

This article notes that President Biden is restoring the monuments after the Trump administration "stripped all three of environmental protections" and quotes the White House press release in the lede. The article does not note the objections of the Utah delegation. This article received more than 13,000 engagements on social media, almost all of which were on Facebook.

The Guardian
Headline: Biden Restores Beloved National Monuments, Reversing Trump Cuts

State Coverage

Coverage in state outlets was primarily driven by the Associated Press. This article was reprinted in more than 170 state outlets, and received more than 130,000 engagements on social media, almost all of which were on Facebook

The Associated Press
Headline: Biden reinstates 2 national monuments sacred to Native Americans, reversing Trump-era decision
Headline: Biden restores Bears Ears, other monuments cut by Trump

Key points: The Biden administration acted to protect tribal lands from industrial development

Approximately 70 percent of the print coverage was linked to the AP article. The article lede notes that President Biden's action protected these lands from "mining and other development [on] hundreds of thousands of acres… sacred to Native Americans." The article noted the objections of the Utah delegation in the bottom half of the article. This article received more than 130,000 engagements on social media, almost all of them on Facebook.

Television

President Biden's decision to restore Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monuments received local television coverage in 40 states. There were 548 TV segments, with the majority airing on local television. FOX and NBC affiliates were responsible for approximately 60 percent of the coverage. Local coverage was the heaviest in Utah, which aired 63 stories in the Salt Lake City media market. Coverage on Fox News was extremely limited, and overall television coverage trended positive. Roughly 70 percent of the total television coverage was aired on October 8th, the day that the announcement was made.

Editorials and Op-Eds

Opinion coverage after the President's announcement was relatively limited, but trended positive. Examples include:

The Seattle Times (Editorial)
Headline: Biden's rescue of national monuments a good first step

The lede states that "America's irreplaceable natural treasures got a well deserved reprieve…Biden should do more to insulate Bears Ears particularly from future threats."

Los Angeles Times (Opinion)
Headline: Biden brings back Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, in all their glory

This piece rebuts the Utah delegation's criticisms of President Biden's decision to restore the monuments in detail.

Boulder Daily Camera (Opinion)
Headline: The Value of National Monuments, National Parks, and Wilderness Areas

This piece notes that "America has unique scenic areas that profoundly impact people who visit, hike and linger" and that the only way to ensure that public land remains a public resource is to ensure that it is protected.

Bangor Daily News (Opinion)
Headline: Restoring Protections To 3 National Monuments Rightly Puts Conservation Before Consumption

This piece praises the Biden administration's decision and notes that land monuments preserve landscapes while marine monuments preserve diverse aquatic life and promote scientific research, making them unique.

The San Diego Union Tribune (Opinion)
Headline: With Bears Ears National Monument restored, I feel hope for Indian Country

This piece posits that protecting public lands is a way to right the generational wrongs committed against Native Americans.

The Time is Now

Our review identified three positive narratives of note that would be amplified in the context of a new national monument designation.

The public sees a direct connection between protecting public lands and combating climate change. Media coverage of public lands and conservation makes a clear connection between public land preservation and climate change, an area where younger voters and progressive activists are anxious for any sign of progress. The administration has also explicitly made this connection, by presenting the America the Beautiful initiative as a key step in combating climate change. Although the Inflation Reduction Act is a significant step towards combating climate change, Senator Joe Manchin has repeatedly done his best to ensure that the Biden administration does not receive any credit for this accomplishment, stating that "President Biden was not involved" in the negotiations around the final package.

- *The Hill (Opinion)*
  Headline: For Biden's climate agenda to succeed, he must start with parks

  This article notes that national parks are "hubs for much larger landscapes and ecosystems" and that this preservation effort is an integral part of the President's effort to slow the impact of climate change.

- *The Nevada Independent*
  Headline: What will a Biden administration mean for public lands in Nevada? It's about climate change

  This article notes that the Biden administration's efforts on conservation are "wrapped inside [President Biden's] climate agenda, demonstrating that the President's "public lands policy is part of his climate change plan."

- *Las Vegas Sun (Opinion)*
  Headline: Public land is ours, not oil speculators

  This article notes that Nevada's "vast, open landscapes are a symbol of pride for residents" and notes that Nevadans "value public lands and understand their vital role in fighting climate change, protecting wildlife, and boosting our economy."

Clearly identified as an executive action that president can take unilaterally. A majority of American voters across nearly all demographics and ideologies believe the government is incapable of initiating progress on the problems facing America today. However, the coverage of national monuments make it clear that the decision to designate a new monument is a decision that the president can take today, on his own, without any interference from Congress. Moving forward on a monument designation is a chance to demonstrate forward progress on a key environmental issue on the administration's own terms, without the complicated politics that surround federal legislation.

- *The Washington Post*
  Headline: Will Biden establish a new national monument in Texas?

  This article notes that "it is within President Biden's authority under the Antiquities Act to take swift action" to designate a national monument.

- *Deseret News*
  Headline: With stroke of his pen, Biden restores Utah's monuments

  The lede of this article notes that "President Biden, as he promised during his campaign" used his executive authority to restore Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante, calling it "the easiest thing I have done as president."

- *The Salt Lake Tribune*
  Headline: Presidential 'superpower': the federal Antiquities act

  This article notes that the Antiquities Act gives the executive branch unilateral authority to create a national monument.

National monuments and public lands are a uniquely American concept that has broad support. The narrative around national parks and monuments is overwhelmingly positive, politically neutral, and a bright spot in an increasingly bleak picture of the government and its operations. Protecting public lands is a policy option that speaks to people's values, is central to Western voters' way of life, and lifts up the best parts of America's story for the general public.

- *Bozeman Daily Chronicle (Opinion)*
  Headline: National monuments embrace our rich, complex history

  The author discusses how a trip to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument demonstrated how cultural sites like Little Bighorn are places where "the full history of our nation can be revealed, revered, and in many cases, mourned."

- ***Billings Gazette (Opinion)***
  Headline: Our national monuments don't hibernate in the winter

  The author discusses how a trip to Big Hole Battlefield brought her closer to her son and that learning about the history of the monument reinforced that history is to "inform our future actions. It's not supposed to define everything about us, but rather help us do better."

- ***The Salt Lake Tribune (Opinion)***
  Headline: Veterans like me need the peace of national monuments

  The author notes that protecting national monuments was one of the President's campaign promises, and that it would "fulfills the administration's push to rebuild our economy, but also honors its commitment to restorative justice, environmental protection and improving the mental health of veterans like me."

Pine Forest Range Wilderness Area in Nevada, Rita Ayers/BLM