

Memorandum

To: The Wilderness Society
From: Stephen Clermont/Third Eye Strategies
Re: Taos Poll Results

A recent poll of Taos County residents shows broad and strong support for continued access and protection of New Mexico’s public lands. The importance of public lands, wilderness, and the Pecos Wilderness brings nearly all of voters in Taos County together. They believe public lands are important to the quality of their lives and to preserve for future generations. More than four-fifths say the Pecos Wilderness is important to them.

Table with 3 columns: Importance, Total Important, Very Important. Rows include questions about public lands, wilderness, and Pecos Wilderness.

These findings are based on a poll of 300 registered voters in the county in late August. Interviews were conducted between August 22nd through 25th, 2016 and the sample has a margin of error of ± 6.7 percent. The following describes key findings from the survey:

- Of great significance, voters in Taos County are active on public lands. In the last three years, 74% have camped or hiked on public lands and 43% have fished. Small numbers of voters have mountain biked (28%), hunted (21%), and have gone horseback riding (21%). Nearly four-fifths (79%) have done at least one of these activities.
After hearing some background information, a solid majority support legislation to protect the wilderness areas surrounding the existing Pecos Wilderness. A majority (57%) strongly favor this. This includes both Hispanics and Anglos, and those who identify as Democratic, Republican, or Independent.

**Support for Legislation to Protect the Wilderness Areas Surrounding the Pecos**

**(Exact Wording)** Since 2001, the Forest Service has given several of the areas surrounding the Pecos Wilderness a higher level of protection called “Inventoried Roadless Areas.” In these areas the forest is protected to remain intact without new roads or commercial logging. Congress can make these protections permanent by passing a law designating these areas as official “Wilderness.” Would you favor or oppose legislation to protect the wilderness areas surrounding the Pecos?

<b>Total Support</b>	<b>Total Oppose</b>	
<b>72%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>All Voters</b>
66%	29%	Hispanics
81%	14%	Anglos
77%	18%	Democrats
72%	23%	Independents
64%	32%	Republicans

- **Voters find various arguments persuasive as reasons to protect the wilderness areas surrounding the Pecos.** The strongest involve preserving land as a legacy for future generations, protecting watersheds, and opposing heavy commercial development.

**Persuasiveness of Arguments in Favor of Wilderness Protection**

<b>Total Persuasive</b>	<b>Very Persuasive</b>	
<b>89%</b>	<b>63%</b>	Wilderness preserves land as a legacy for future generations to inherit and enjoy the same way current generations use them.
<b>88%</b>	<b>69%</b>	Wilderness areas like the Pecos contain many rivers, lakes, and streams. Protecting wilderness will help protect the prime watersheds that supply water for Taos.
<b>84%</b>	<b>66%</b>	Heavy commercial development that would harm water quality is not appropriate on our public lands OR in wilderness areas.
<b>82%</b>	<b>56%</b>	New Mexico’s protected public lands, such as wilderness areas, improve local economies. Tourism brings six billion dollars a year into New Mexico and half of all overnight visitors engage in outdoor activities.
<b>82%</b>	<b>52%</b>	Protecting wilderness means conserving the places wildlife call home and preserving access to the land where people hunt and fish. More than two-thirds of hunters use public lands. Hunting and fishing provides twenty-three million dollars a year in spending for Taos County.
<b>81%</b>	<b>53%</b>	When remote wilderness areas are allowed to burn and regrow in their natural rhythm, it can reduce the severity and cost of wildfires. But wildfires can be fought in wilderness areas when necessary.



- **Voters express strong concern that access to public lands could be restricted by local and state governments selling them off to private developers.** More than four-fifths (86%) say this concerns them with 72% indicating they are *very concerned*. This includes 90% of Democrats and Independents along with 83% of Republicans.
- **After hearing more about the proposal to expand wilderness protection in the Pecos, support deepens.** Support swells to 78% while just 13% oppose it. Nearly two-thirds (64%) strongly favor this proposal. Democrats (85%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (73%) concur on this.

A vast majority of voters in Taos County use public lands, find them important to their quality of life, and support expanding wilderness protection in the Pecos. Public officials should find this important when making decisions about public lands issues.

