



MOORE INFORMATION

OPINION RESEARCH • STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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Idaho Voters and National Forest Roadless Areas

This memo contains results of a telephone survey conducted by Moore Information, among a representative sample of 400 likely registered voters statewide in Idaho. The interviews were conducted January 9-10, 2008. The potential sampling error is plus or minus 5% at the 95% confidence level.

Overview

Idaho voters are widely concerned about the protection of national forest lands in the state.

National Forest Roadless Lands

Idaho voters widely agree with the statement Jim Risch made last year about national forest roadless lands in Idaho. Fully 83% agree "those particular parcels of property in Idaho are some of the most magnificent, outstanding pieces of ground we have." Just 4% disagree, and the remaining 13% have no opinion. There is widespread agreement with Risch's statement throughout the state and among all voter subgroups. Importantly, non-hunters (respondents who have not hunted in the last year) and hunters (respondents who have hunted in the last year) widely agree with Risch's statement (82% and 84%, respectively).

At the same time, we find Idaho voters are concerned about the protections of the national forest roadless lands. A majority (62%) do not believe the federal government should reduce existing protections on national forest roadless lands, while just 27% say the federal government should reduce protections. The remaining 11% are undecided. There is widespread consensus among voters through the state, and among Independents, Democrats and Republican women that federal government should not reduce existing protections on these lands, but Republican men are divided on this issue. Further, Moderates, Liberals and self-described "somewhat" Conservative voters do not believe the federal government should reduce protections, but self-described "very" Conservative voters are divided on this issue. Majorities of non-hunters (63%) and hunters (59%) are in agreement that the federal government should not reduce protections.

Opposition is even more intense when it comes to allowing industrial development on national forest roadless lands. Fully 76% believe the federal government should not allow industrial development (60% feel "strongly" about this), while just 14% believe industrial development should be allowed, and 10% are undecided. There is majority opposition to allowing industrial development on national forest roadless lands throughout the state and among all voter subgroups. Hunters (77%) and non-hunters (74%) agree the federal government should not allow industrial development on national forest roadless lands.

In addition, a majority of voters (58%) believe new road construction should not be allowed inside national forest roadless lands in Idaho, while just 33% believe new road construction

should be allowed and 10% are uncertain. Regionally, voters throughout the state do not believe new road construction should be allowed in these areas, as do Independents, Democrats and Republican women, but Republican men are divided. Philosophically, majorities of self-described “somewhat” Conservative voters, Moderates and Liberals do not believe new road construction should be allowed, but a majority of self-described “very” Conservative voters say new road construction should be allowed inside national forest roadless areas. Interestingly, non-hunters do not believe new road construction should be allowed in national forest roadless areas (29% should allow/60% should not allow), while hunters are divided on this issue (46/51%).

A proposal by Jim Risch to protect roadless lands is supported by nearly six-in-ten voters. Fully 58% favor his “plan to protect 95% of the 9.3 million acres of national forest roadless lands in Idaho from most new roads, logging and industrial development.” The Risch proposal is opposed by 24%, while 18% have no opinion. Majorities throughout the state and among all voter subgroups favor Risch’s proposal. Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike support the Risch proposal. Further, there is wide support among non-hunters (59%) and hunters (54%) when it comes to Risch’s proposal.

However, a proposal by the Bush administration that “would open nearly two-thirds of the national forest roadless areas to new road construction, logging and increased mineral development” is opposed by 65% and favored by just 22%. The remaining 14% have no opinion. There is opposition to the Bush proposal throughout the state and among Republicans, Independents and Democrats alike. Philosophically, self-described “somewhat” Conservatives, Moderates and Liberals are widely opposed to the Bush proposal, but self-described “very” Conservatives are divided. Majorities of non-hunters (67%) and hunters (55%) are opposed to the Bush administration’s proposal.

Phosphate Mining

Idaho voters are concerned about the possibility of phosphate mining in national forest roadless areas. Respondents were presented with two views:

“Opponents of phosphate mining are concerned about the impact of phosphate mining on drinking water quality, due to stream water contamination by selenium and other toxic chemicals, while proponents of phosphate mining claim that this industry has important economic benefits.”

After hearing both statements, just 17% agree phosphate mining should be allowed inside national forest roadless areas in southeast Idaho, while fully 67% disagree. The remaining 17% are undecided. Voters throughout the state and among all voter subgroups side with opponents. Among GOP voters, 56% took the side of opponents, compared to 66% of Independents and 86% of Democrats. There is wide agreement among non-hunters (67%) and hunters (63%) alike that phosphate mining should not be allowed in national roadless areas.

Political Environment

The mood in Idaho is optimistic today. Fully 52% of the state’s voters say things are headed in the right direction, while 33% say things are off on the wrong track and 16% have no opinion. This “mood” question is commonly used as an indicator of the tolerance for change – an optimistic electorate is typically content with the status quo, and less likely to be seeking to shake things up. By contrast, pessimistic voters are generally more likely

to be open to change, and as a result, more likely to be motivated to vote to express their discontent.

Regionally, optimism prevails outside of the Spokane TV market, while residents of the Spokane TV market are divided about the direction of things in the state (42% right direction/38% wrong track). By party, optimism is widespread among Republicans (66/22%), while Independents are divided (42/36%), as are Democrat men (43/43%), but Democrat women are pessimistic today (31/52%).

Today in Idaho, a Republican candidate is preferred over a Democrat candidate for President. A total of 44% favor a GOP candidate, while 30% favor a Democrat candidate. The percentage support for each Republican candidate tested in the survey includes, Romney, 20%; McCain, 14%; Huckabee, 11%, while Democrat support is, Clinton, 14%; Obama, 13%; Edwards, 4%. Another 3% would support some other candidate, 5% would not support any candidate tested, and 18% are unsure.

By region, a Republican candidate for President is preferred outside of Ada County, while Ada County voters are divided (38% GOP/37% DEM). Republicans and Democrats show equal loyalty to their party's candidate today – 70% of Republicans favor a GOP candidate, while 71% of Democrats favor a Democrat candidate for President. At the same time, Independents with an opinion are divided (32% GOP/26% DEM), while 8% would support some other candidate, 5% would not support any of the candidates tested, and 28% of Independents are undecided.

Turning to Idaho's 2008 U.S. Senate race, Jim Risch is favored by 42%, Larry LaRocco by 32%, and the remaining 26% do not support either candidate (4%) or are undecided (22%). By region, Risch leads in the Twin Falls and Idaho Falls/Pocatello TV market areas, but Ada County and Spokane TV market residents are divided. Risch leads LaRocco among men (46/30%), but women are divided (39/34%). As we saw on the Presidential ballot, Republicans and Democrats show equal loyalty in the race for U.S. Senate – 65% of GOPs favor Risch, and 69% of Democrats favor LaRocco. Independents are divided today (32% Risch/28% LaRocco), while fully four-in-ten would not vote for either candidate (5%) or are undecided (34%).

It is interesting to note the party affiliation of those undecided in the U.S. Senate race (26%). These voters are more likely to say they are Republican (41% GOP, 22% DEM, 28% IND), and are also more likely to say they will vote for a Republican candidate in the race for President (36% GOP candidate/22% Democrat candidate). This is good news for the Risch camp, as he has the partisan advantage and the opportunity to educate these voters to support him in the race for U.S. Senate.