



NEWS

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ILLINOIS VOTERS STRONGLY SUPPORT LAND PROTECTION

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Despite their worries about the economy, Illinois voters strongly support spending more money to protect land and water, according to a new poll.

A total of 79% of the voters surveyed voiced support for dedicating \$350 million in a state capital budget to conserve land and water, and the support cuts across all major parts of the electorate.

The poll was released by Partners for Parks and Wildlife, a coalition of conservation organizations seeking support for increasing the state funding for land conservation. Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates conducted the telephone poll of 600 voters from May 12-14 on behalf of the coalition.

“Even in these difficult economic times, people in Illinois want to protect the places which make this such a wonderful place to live. We need to act now and make these kinds of investments,” said State Senator Susan Garrett.

State Senator Pam Althoff agreed. “This is about the long-term and making the kinds^o of investments in our land and water which future generations will appreciate and enjoy. Certainly we need to deal with today’s problems, but we also have to think about the future of Illinois, and these results show voters are doing just that.”

The key finding is that when asked if they support a \$350 million capital investment in land and water protection, 79% voiced support for that level of investment.

The increases won the support of:

- 77% of women and 80% of men;
- 85% of Democrats, 70% of Republicans, and 74% of independents;
- 81% of voters under age 50 and 76% of voters age 50 and over;
- 78% of whites and 81% of voters of color; and
- 80% of Chicago residents, 80% of those in the Cook County suburbs, 76% of voters in the collar counties, 82% of those in the northern part of the downstate region, and 73% of those in southern Illinois.

While the State of Illinois currently spends very little on land acquisition, a large majority of voters want state spending on land and water conservation to be increased. Setting aside the specific issue of the capital budget, a 76-percent plurality of Illinois voters believe that state spending on land and water conservation should either be increased (40%), or at least be kept at the same level (36%). Fewer than one in five (14%) believe that it should be scaled back.

“For the last decade and across the country, local ballot measures for land and water conservation funding have won by landslide margins. There is an opportunity here in Illinois and voters know it. We are experiencing record low land prices and if we don’t act now to conserve the vital lands of Illinois we will look back at this as a great opportunity lost,” said Beth White, Chicago Region Director, The Trust for Public Land.

Voters support funding for land conservation funding despite their concerns about the economy. 91% of voters surveyed said state budget deficits were a problem and 86% said they were worried about the economy.

But 73% of the voters polled agreed with the statement that “*Even though state revenues are down, the Illinois state budget should include funding for land and water conservation.*” A separate question, “*We can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, without having to choose one over the other,*” won 83% agreement.

“We are encouraged by the results of this poll. It clearly demonstrates strong support for land conservation. The fact that folks are concerned about the economy and the state’s budget is no surprise. What some might find surprising, though, is that a large majority (over 70%) of Illinois citizens recognize the contribution that conservation makes to the economic vitality of our state generating \$4 billion and 30,000 jobs annually.” said Susan Donovan, Director of Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois.

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Established in 2004, **Partners for Parks and Wildlife** is a grassroots coalition that aims to secure and increase funding for open space and park acquisition, natural area preservation, wildlife habitat protection and recreational opportunities in Illinois.

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) has specialized in public policy-oriented opinion research since the company was first organized in 1981. With permanent offices in Los Angeles, Oakland, and Madison, Wisconsin, the firm conducts research for political candidates, for ballot measure campaigns, and for businesses, non-profits, and government agencies across all fifty states and also in other countries.

FMM&A has conducted literally thousands of focus groups and surveys throughout its three-decade history. The firm conducts research for candidates at all levels of the ballot – from Presidential candidates like Howard Dean and Bill Richardson to races for City Council. FMM&A has also provided research and strategic guidance to well over 100 successful statewide ballot measure campaigns, including statewide conservation finance campaigns in New Jersey, Minnesota, Ohio, California, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Washington and upcoming campaigns in Iowa and New York.

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

*Opinion Research &
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Curtis Below
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

RE: Key Findings from Recent Illinois Voter Survey

DATE: May 21, 2009

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a survey of 600 voters in Illinois to assess their attitudes toward the concept of making a significant state capital investment in land and water conservation.¹ Overall, the survey results show that while voters are highly concerned about the condition of the Illinois economy, they are strongly supportive of making substantial investments in land and water conservation. More than three-quarters would like to see state spending for land conservation kept the same or increased, and fully 79-percent back dedicating \$350 million from the state's capital budget to land and water conservation programs. To a remarkable degree, support for this investment cuts across all major subgroups of the Illinois electorate.

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

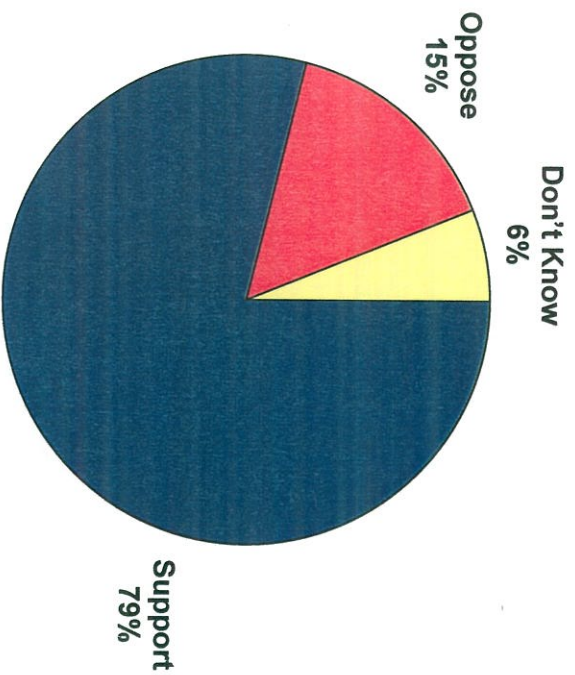
- **Eight in ten Illinois voters support a \$350 million capital investment in land and water conservation.** As shown in **Figure 1** on the following page, when voters are asked whether they support or oppose dedicating \$350 million (or 1.3%) of the proposed \$26 billion Illinois capital investment budget to land and water conservation, they offer overwhelming support. Nearly eight in ten (79%) back the idea, more than five times the number who oppose it (15%).

¹ **Methodology:** From May 12-14, 2009, FMM&A completed 600 telephone interviews with Illinois voters. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 4.0%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher.

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FIGURE 1:
Support for \$350 Million in State Capital Budget for
Land and Water Conservation in Illinois



As impressive as the overall level of support for this concept is the degree to which it cuts across demographic subgroups of the Illinois electorate. The idea is supported by:

- 77% of women and 80% of men;
 - 85% of Democrats, 70% of Republicans, and 74% of independents;
 - 81% of voters under age 50 and 76% of voters age 50 and over;
 - 78% of whites and 81% of voters of color; and
 - 80% of Chicago residents, 80% of those in the Cook County suburbs, 76% of voters in the collar counties, 82% of those in the northern part of the downstate region, and 73% of those in southern Illinois..
- **Support is nearly as strong for a larger \$700 million capital investment in land and water conservation.** Illustrative of an electorate committed to investing in conservation, more than seven in ten voters (71%) support dedicating an even larger \$700 million (or 2.7%) of the proposed \$26 billion Illinois capital investment budget to land and water conservation.
 - **A large majority of voters want state spending on land and water conservation to be increased.** Setting aside the specific issue of the capital budget, a 76-percent plurality of Illinois voters believe that state spending on land and water conservation

should either be increased (40%), or at least be kept at the same level (36%). Fewer than one in five (14%) believe that it should be scaled back.

- **Voters offer strong support for these investments despite evident concern about the economy.** The survey results make clear that voters have significant concerns about the economy and the overall direction of the state. A 54-percent majority of voters believe that Illinois is “pretty seriously off on the wrong track,” and issues related to the economy and government finances are among voters’ top concerns: 91 percent rate “state budget deficits” as an “extremely” or “very serious” problem, while 86 percent say the same for “the economy” and 79 percent for “waste and inefficiency in state government” – making them easily voters’ top concerns.

The reason these economic concerns do not deter voter support for investments in conservation is that voters see no conflict between the issues. Specifically:

- 73 percent of voters agree that “*Even though state revenues are down, the Illinois state budget should include funding for land and water conservation.*” and
- 83 percent agree that “*We can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, without having to choose one over the other.*”

Furthermore, voters see continued funding for land conservation as vital to the state economy. Over seven in ten find the fact that fishing, hunting and wildlife-associated recreation generate \$4 billion in economic activity annually and over 30,000 jobs in Illinois as convincing reasons to support the General Assembly dedicating \$700 million of the Illinois capital investment budget to land and water conservation.

Overall, the survey results show that while voters are highly concerned about the economy, they are also highly committed to additional state funding for land and water conservation in Illinois. Voters see dedicating a small portion of the state’s capital budget to that goal as highly reasonable, and believe that it is an important investment even when state revenues are down. Ultimately, Illinois voters are highly confident that the state can enjoy a strong economy while still protecting its vital land and water resources.