

To: 2023 Montana Municipal Candidates and Interested Parties
From: Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund
Date: September 2023
RE: Background and Messaging on Conservation in Montana



Conservation in Montana is a backbone of our way of life, and ensuring continued stewardship of our lands has never been more important. Our state constitution just celebrated its 50th anniversary, and one of its most significant elements is our right to a “clean and healthful environment.” This provision was key in the recent *Held v. Montana* ruling that found the state was not properly upholding this right by protecting corporate polluters. Protecting this right is key to protecting Montana’s clean air, clean water, public lands, and democracy.

With staff across the state, the mission of the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund is to engage all Montanans and their communities by empowering them to protect our clean air, clean water, public lands and voting rights through education, mobilization and the power of grassroots advocacy.

In this memo, you will find information on the landscape of conservation in Montana, what environmental and conservation issues matter to Montanans, ways to best talk about those issues with voters and ideas for incorporating those issues into your campaigns. One thing that continues to be true when talking to voters about conservation issues, is that talking about local issues matters. While this memo does not include issues local to each community, we encourage you to use the guiding principles in this document to personalize and localize how you talk about various conservation issues.

We look forward to developing our relationship with you, partnering to make conservation issues a centerpiece of your campaign and ensuring that Montana’s elected leaders are committed champions for conservation. The MCV Education Fund has expertise in policy, politics, field organizing and communications, and we look forward to being a resource for you.

I. Investments in our Communities from The Affordable Clean Energy Plan

On August 16, 2022, President Joe Biden signed into law the country’s most ambitious climate related legislation in history, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). IRA has meant new jobs in agriculture, investments in clean energy, and even caps on prescription drug costs. The bill was designed to create clean energy jobs, reduce pollution and encourage businesses to move away from fossil fuel consumption. It has also provided new funding for agriculture conservation programs, bolstering soil health and water quality on Montana farms and ranches.¹

Examples of investments that IRA has made in Montana are:

- \$26 million in public lands investments for the Blackfoot/Clark Fork Valley, Missouri Headwaters/Big Hole Valley, and the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge area.²
- \$1.3 million for Rural Montana Renewable Energy Development Projects. IRA increased Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant amounts and increased program funding by \$820 million through Fiscal Year 2031. The program helps farmers, ranchers, and rural small businesses install renewable energy infrastructure or improve their energy efficiency.³

¹ Inflation Reduction Act Investments in USDA Loan and Conservation Programs, Farmers.gov, www.farmers.gov/loans/inflation-reduction-investments.

² Tester, Jon. 31 May 2023 “Tester Secures \$26 Million for Montana Public Lands Projects,” [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-26-million-for-montana-public-lands-projects/

³ 31 Aug 2023. “Tester Secures more than 1.3 million for rural montana renewable energy development projects.” [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-more-than-1-3-million-for-rural-montana-renewable-energy-development-projects/

- This grant funding has been used by ranchers to add solar panels to their ranch to offset energy costs,⁴
- And has been used by Discovery Ski Area to power one of its main chairlifts with solar.⁵

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) was signed into law on November 15, 2021. In combination with IRA, these two bills make up the Affordable Clean Energy Plan and provide the biggest investments in pollution reduction and job creation, as well as expanding America's clean energy economy. IIJA provides investments to modernize United States infrastructure and has already been making an impact in Montana. Examples include:

- More than \$5 million for water conservation and efficiency projects including a project in northern Montana (Pondera County Canal and Reservoir Project), northwestern Montana (Greenfields Irrigation District), southwestern Montana (East Bench Irrigation District), and two in eastern Montana (Lower Yellowstone Irrigation District),⁶
- \$6 million to clean up brownfield pollution sites across Montana,⁷
- \$26 million to upgrade and repair critical water infrastructure to ensure communities across the state have access to clean drinking water,⁸
- \$1.7 million to the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation for critical wildfire prevention work in Missoula county,⁹ \$6 million for wildfire prevention in Lincoln County,¹⁰ \$1.6 million in southwest Montana,¹¹ and \$117,648 in Treasure County,¹²
- More than \$25 million for the Musselshell- Judith Rural Water System,¹³ \$77.5 million for the Rocky Boy's/North Central Montana Regional Water System,¹⁴
- \$4 million for zero emission electric school buses in Bigfork, Clinton, and Fairfield,¹⁵
- \$14 million to strengthen Montana's energy infrastructure against fire and other extreme weather events through the Grid Resilience State and Tribal Formula grants program,¹⁶
- \$565,000 to remove lead from drinking water sources in schools and childcare facilities,¹⁷

⁴ Pavkovich, Anthony. 16 Aug 2023. "Melville ranch adds solar, joins growing number in Montana taking advantage of federal grants." montanafreepress.org/2023/08/16/melville-ranch-adds-solar-joins-growing-number-in-montana-taking-advantage-of-federal-grants/

⁵ Eggert, Amanda. 11 Sept 2023. "Discovery Ski Area goes solar." montanafreepress.org/2023/09/11/discovery-ski-area-goes-solar/

⁶ 03 May 2023. "Tester Secures more than 5 million for water conservation and efficiency projects in Montana." [press release] www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-more-than-5-million-for-water-conservation-and-efficiency-projects-in-montana/

⁷ Tester, Jon. 30 May 2023. "Tester secures nearly \$6million to clean up brownfield pollution sites across Montana." [press release]. www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-6-million-to-clean-up-brownfield-pollution-sites-across-montana/

⁸ 20 Sept 2022. "Tester secures \$26 million from his bipartisan infrastructure law to deliver clean water to Montana communities." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-26-million-from-his-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-to-deliver-clean-water-to-montana-communities/

⁹ 21 March 2023. "Tester secures nearly \$1.7 million for wildfire prevention in Missoula County." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-1-7-million-for-wildfire-prevention-in-missoula-county/

¹⁰ 21 March 2023. "Tester secures nearly \$6 million for wildfire prevention in Lincoln County." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-6-million-for-wildfire-prevention-in-lincoln-county/

¹¹ 21 March 2023. "Tester secures nearly \$1.6 million for wildfire prevention in southwest Montana." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-1-6-million-for-wildfire-prevention-in-southwest-montana/

¹² 21 March 2023. "Tester secures \$117,648 for wildfire prevention in Treasure County." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-117648-for-wildfire-prevention-in-treasure-county/

¹³ 14 Feb 2023. "Tester secures more than \$25 million for rural water infrastructure in central Montana." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-more-than-25-million-for-rural-water-infrastructure-in-central-montana/

¹⁴ 14 Feb 2023. "Tester secures more than \$77.5 million for rural water infrastructure in north central Montana." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-more-than-77-5-million-for-rural-water-infrastructure-in-north-central-montana/

¹⁵ 26 Oct 2022. "Tester secures nearly \$4 million for new school buses for Montana school districts." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-4-million-for-new-school-buses-for-montana-school-districts/

¹⁶ 06 Sept 2023. "Tester secures \$14 million to strengthen Montanas energy grid against wildfires and extreme weather events." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-14-million-to-strengthen-montanas-energy-grid-against-wildfires-and-extreme-weather-events/

¹⁷ 03 Aug 2023. "Tester secures \$565,000 from bipartisan infrastructure law to remove lead from drinking water sources in Montana." [press release]

www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-565000-from-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-to-remove-lead-from-drinking-water-sources-in-montana/

- \$45 million for infrastructure upgrades in several Montana communities including \$1 million for upgrades to downtown Hamilton,¹⁸ \$25 million for upgrades in downtown Missoula,¹⁹ and \$19 million for the Anaconda- Deer Lodge Mill Creek Road Project,²⁰
- \$3.6 million for the Mountain Line in Missoula to work towards its goal of zero tailpipe emissions by 2035.²¹

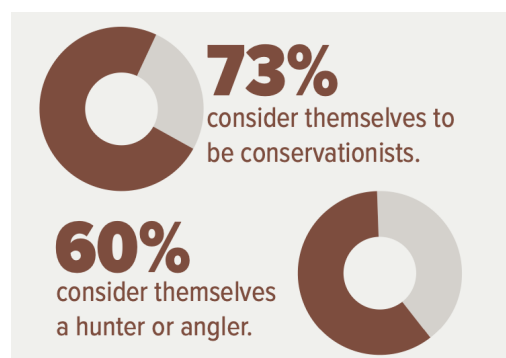
The Affordable Clean Energy Plan is the best tool for local governments to address the impacts of a changing climate. By utilizing grants and direct pay options that upgrade infrastructure, improve clean water access, provide jobs, and reduce pollution through electrification and expanding energy freedom, local communities can be on the front lines of investing in current and future generations. This is already a popular idea with 55 percent of Montanans supporting a gradual transition to 100 percent renewable energy over the next 10-15 years.²² With local governments becoming experts in celebrating what this transition means for Montana jobs, the Montana economy, and Montana’s environment, we will likely see increasing support for the transition.

Montana has already seen major investments coming from the Plan and it is essential to be able to share what that means for everyday Montanans. Localizing the benefits that your community has seen and talking about less pollution, better health, and energy independence is key when communicating about the Plan.

II. Conservation Issues that Matter to Montanans

Montanans have a deep connection to our state’s land and water; it’s part of our identity and our way of life, and it also fuels Montana’s robust tourism and outdoor recreation economies. In a state that boasts some of the most beautiful public lands, forests, rivers and wildlife in the world, Montanans know firsthand just how important it is to protect and conserve our outdoor spaces for future generations.

We are continually reminded of just how important access to outdoor spaces are in our state, for residents and visitors alike. 92 percent of Montanans visited state lands in 2022– up from 89 percent in 2020, such as Montana wildlife management areas, state parks and fishing access sites.²³ 93 percent of Montanans visited national public lands in 2022, and in both cases more than 1/3 of Montanans visited public lands more than 20 times. Montana also has the second highest percentage of individuals that identify as hunters and anglers in the nation with 60 percent saying they hunt and fish, and 73 percent self identifying as conservationists.²⁴ This makes clean air, clean water, and public lands among the most unifying issues in our state.



¹⁸ 22 June 2023. “Tester secures nearly \$1 million for infrastructure upgrades in Hamilton.” [press release] www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-1-million-for-infrastructure-upgrades-in-hamilton/

¹⁹ 22 June 2023. “Tester secures nearly \$25 million for infrastructure upgrades in downtown Missoula.” [press release] www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-nearly-25-million-for-infrastructure-upgrades-in-downtown-missoula/

²⁰ 22 June 2023. “Tester secures more than \$19 million for Anaconda- Deer Lodge Mill Creek Road Project.” [press release] www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/tester-secures-more-than-19-million-for-anaconda-deer-lodge-mill-creek-road-project/

²¹ 21 June 2021. “Tester secures \$3.7 million for Missoula’s Mountain Line Transit System.” [press release] <https://www.testersenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/pr-8410/>

²² Colorado College, “Colorado College’s State of the Rockies Project 2023 Conservation in the West Poll Montana,” Feb. 2023, issuu.com/coloradocollege/docs/2023_conservation_in_the_west_presentation.

²³ University of Montana Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative, “2022 University of Montana Statewide Survey,” April 2022, crown-yellowstone.umt.edu/voter-surveys/2022/22018-university-of-montana-survey-interview-schedule.pdf

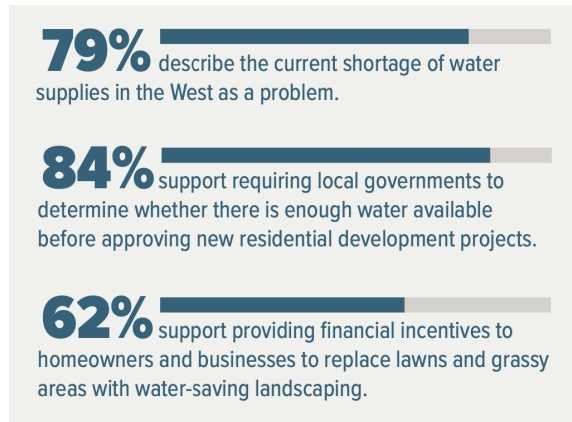
²⁴ Colorado College 2023

In fact, according to the latest University of Montana Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative Poll, 85 percent of Montanans say that an elected official's stances on clean air, clean water, open spaces, and public lands are important considerations in voting.²⁵ While voters in the UM poll and the 2023 Colorado College Conservation in the West poll overwhelmingly support conservation of fish, wildlife, clean air, clean water, and open spaces, there are a few areas that stand out.

For example, 85 percent of Montanans say that development sprawling into what were once ranches or open lands are serious issues and 77 percent of Montanans say that the changing character of the state is a serious issue.²⁶ In a time where we are seeing rapid population growth and housing crises, it is important to ensure that solutions to these problems do not create other problems for fish, wildlife, agriculture, open spaces, and the quality of life Montanans know and love.

Water continues to be a serious concern for many Montana voters and many support solutions from their local governments. For example, 84 percent of Montanans support requiring local governments to determine whether there is enough water available before approving new residential development projects and 62 percent support financial incentives for homeowners and businesses to replace lawns and grassy areas with water-saving landscaping.²⁷

Montanans know that our state is special and residents support policies and investments that will protect our way of life. Montanans understand that protecting our outdoor spaces protects and grows our robust outdoor recreation economy. From a survey by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis for 2020, Montana topped the list for the largest outdoor recreation economy per capita, accounting for 4.3 percent of the state's GDP or \$2.2 billion.²⁸ But the money extends across all aspects of the state's economy; for every \$1 million spent in conservation activities, between 17 and 31 Montana jobs are supported.²⁹ Those investments support jobs in a wide range of industries, from retail to hospitality to high tech and countless others. Protecting our outdoor spaces makes dollars and sense for our small businesses.



III: Talking About Conservation Issues

While Montana voters are deeply connected to their environment and outdoor spaces, it's important to talk about these issues with voters in the right way. In this section, we discuss a compilation of environmental messages that have been tested (including guidance as to what to "say/not say") and directions for discussing specific issues.

Environmental issues and how to discuss them with voters and "the public" have been a long-researched topic. Here is a compilation of some of those findings, including concepts, phrases, and words to use or avoid.

DO:

1. Evoke Future Generations

²⁵ University of Montana 2022

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2020," Nov. 2021, www.bea.gov/news/2021/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2020

²⁹ MT Office of Outdoor Recreation, "The Montana Business Landscape," 2020, business.mt.gov/Outdoor-Recreation

This concept “is one that voters volunteer organically as a reason for supporting conservation; moreover, voters who hear it consistently rate it as compelling. The economic downturn has done nothing to diminish the resonance of this time-honored rationale for conserving nature.”³⁰

2. Focus on Public Health and Safety

Voters’ hierarchy of needs starts with health and safety, not ecosystems or “the environment.”³¹

3. Use Specific Examples of Things that Could Harm Us

“Case studies remain a powerful part of successful strategies.”³²

e.g., “The federal government is trying to undermine or eliminate safeguards like the Clean Air and Water Acts that protect our health and, instead, allowing power plants to spew unlimited amounts of toxic pollutants like mercury, arsenic, and sulfur dioxide in our air and water.”³³

4. Emphasize the Solutions

People are far more likely to support action if they think it can make a difference.

“Explaining how voters will benefit from a policy beats describing how they will be threatened by its absence every time.”³⁴

5. Use Phrases that Imply Ownership, Inclusion and Shared Responsibility

Think “our” & “we” to attach personal meaning

6. Use Powerful Validators and Show Local Effects

e.g., “Last year, ranchers faced one of the worst droughts in years – putting their livelihoods at risk and impacting Montana’s economy.”

7. Invoke a Moral Imperative

Be aspirational and future-oriented while avoiding being harsh or judgmental.

8. Use a Villain When Needed

“Corporate polluters” consistently tests well

DONT:

1. Get Trapped in “Economy vs. Environment” Debate

Instead, “voters see no reason why we cannot continue to protect land and water while maintaining the country’s economic strength...73 percent of business owners believe we can protect land and water and have a strong economy at the same time, while fewer than one in five believe that those objectives are even ‘sometimes’ in conflict.”³⁵

³⁰ Andrew Bauman, Global Strategy Group, “Messaging on Climate, Energy and the Environment in the Era of Trump,” April 2017, <http://www.globalstrategygroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Climate-March-Memo-F04.26.17.pdf>

³¹ David Metz, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Lori Weigel, Public Opinion Strategies, “The Language of Conservation,” April 15, 2013, <http://www.elkhornsloughctp.org/uploads/files/13824621782013%20Language%20of%20Conservation%20Memo.pdf>

³² Celinda Lake, Lake Research Partners, “Regulatory Enforcement: Winning the Debate,” 2016 <https://stateinnovation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/LRP-Report-Enforcement-Working-Group-Public-Subset-121616.pdf>

³³ Bauman 2017

³⁴ Metz et al. 2013

³⁵ Public Opinion Strategies, Montana Business Survey, 2013, [static1.squarespace.com/static/592f175df7e0abbb80a1a4ce/t/59925136f14aa1d24631b734/1502761271761/2013.9.MT .business-survey.pdf](http://static1.squarespace.com/static/592f175df7e0abbb80a1a4ce/t/59925136f14aa1d24631b734/1502761271761/2013.9.MT_business-survey.pdf)

2. **Focus on Conserving Nature for Nature’s Sake**
Even if this is what compels you to prioritize conservation, “voters are increasingly telling us that the best reasons to engage in conservation are people-centric...a majority now say that benefits to people are the best reason to conserve nature.”³⁶
3. **Use the Word “Ban”**
This is counter to voters’ feelings of having freedom and independence.
4. **Debate Whether Environmental Issues Should Be Our Top Priority**
Instead, the question should be, how do we fix them?
5. **Use the Word “Federal”**
The federal government is viewed negatively. Refer to specifics, like national parks or national forests. Specific agencies are also popular, so “referring to ‘lands overseen by the National Park Service or U.S. Forest Service’...is also a positive.”³⁷
6. **Don’t Talk About “Regulations,” Use “Enforcement”**
“The call for tougher, fairer and increased enforcement (with penalties) beats their message of [regulations] killing jobs, increasing costs, and hurting small business”³⁸
7. **Talk About Benefits of Nature or “Nature’s Values”**
“Few voters spend time visiting “ecosystems” – they visit forests, wetlands, rivers, deserts and mountains.”³⁹

IV. Specific Conservation Issues

The following is an overview of and guidance on how to talk about specific environmental and conservation issues in Montana.

Clean Energy in Montana

Montana ranks among the top 10 states with the largest share of electricity generated from renewables, about 53 percent.⁴⁰ Montana's renewable portfolio standard (enacted in 2005) requires retail electricity suppliers to acquire at least 15 percent of the electricity they sell in-state from renewable energy sources starting in 2015.⁴¹ Montana has consistently surpassed that goal.⁴²

Support for renewable energy is growing in Montana. In fact, a 2023 survey found that 58 percent of Montanans support expanding clean energy over extractive energy sources.⁴³ This support for renewable energy sources comes despite attacks at the legislature to limit municipalities’ abilities to

³⁶ Metz et al. 2013

³⁷ David Metz, Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Lori Weigel, Public Opinion Strategies, “How to Communicate Effectively to Stop Takeovers of Public Lands,” 30 Jul. 2015, www.public.sharepoint.com/Documents/Messaging%20Recommendations%20PLT.pdf

³⁸ Lake 2016

³⁹ Metz et al. 2013

⁴⁰ U.S. Energy Information Administration, “U.S. Energy Information Administration Independent Statistics and Analysis Montana,” www.eia.gov/state/?sid=MT#

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Colorado College 2023

enact solar ready stretch codes,⁴⁴ and failure to pass legislation that would allow community solar programs with their public utilities.⁴⁵

Despite attacks at the Legislature, Montana voters recognize the many job and economic opportunities that come with the state's transition to clean energy. In December 2021, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) announced more than \$1.1 million for grants in the Fast Charge Your Ride program. The grants are paired with approximately \$450,000 in matching funds that will put 27 new charging stations across 13 Montana counties. The funding comes from a multibillion-dollar settlement between the U.S. Department of Justice and Volkswagen. In addition to the charging stations, a portion of the Volkswagen funding (\$7.3 million) will be made available for replacing diesel vehicles (e.g. dump trucks and transit buses) with electric vehicles.

Additionally, funding from the Affordable Clean Energy Plan provides ample opportunity for local governments to accelerate the transition to clean energy. Grant and direct pay opportunities for local governments include technical assistance for the adoption of building energy codes, charging and refueling infrastructure grant programs, clean heavy-duty vehicle grant and rebate programs, qualified commercial clean vehicle tax credits, environmental justice block grants, climate pollution reduction grants, clean energy investment tax credits, clean electricity production tax credits, energy efficiency upgrades, and air pollution monitoring and screening grants.⁴⁶

The Solar for All grant program through the EPA provides opportunities for municipalities to receive grant funding to enhance solar usage in their communities. Given that Montana's residential sector has the highest per capita energy consumption of any state, these types of programs and transitioning to clean energy at the local and residential levels are key.⁴⁷

According to pollster Andrew Bauman:

There is a broad and intense cross-partisan desire for a move toward renewable energy. While the issue of climate change is polarizing, government support for renewable energy is not. According to a post-election survey by Public Opinion Strategies, 86% of voters support action (59% strongly) to "accelerate the development and use of clean energy in the U.S.," including 72% of base Republicans.⁴⁸

MESSAGE GUIDANCE:

- Never use the term "green jobs," it's too vague and unknown by voters.⁴⁹
- "Clean energy" or "renewable energy" are stronger terms to use than "alternative energy" or "green energy."⁵⁰
- Focus on jobs, innovation and growing our economy. For example, a report entitled "Montana Wind Jobs" found that Montana ranked 48th out of the 50 states for the number of jobs in wind energy production, despite being fifth in the nation for land-based wind potential.⁵¹ Additionally, the median wages in wind energy are 34 percent higher than those in coal mining and are comparable to those in fossil fuel electricity generation.⁵²

⁴⁴ State of Montana. "An act providing that the state and local governments cannot require that buildings be constructed to have solar panels, batteries, or electric vehicle chargers; and amending sections 7-1-111 and 50-60-203, mca."

leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/sesslaws/ch0578.pdf. 2023 Legislative Session, HB 241, passed.

⁴⁵ State of Montana. "An act establishing community solar and utility requirements; providing for transmission interconnection for community solar energy facilities; distinguishing community solar customers from net metering customers; providing rulemaking authority; providing definitions; and providing an immediate effective date." leg.mt.gov/bills/2023/billpdf/SB0399.pdf. 2023 Legislative Session, SB 399, died.

⁴⁶ "Explaining the Affordable Clean Energy Plan." League of Conservation Voters. www.lcv.org/clean-energy/policymaker-resources/

⁴⁷ U.S. Energy Information Administration www.eia.gov/state/?sid=MT#

⁴⁸ Bauman 2017

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Renewable Northwest, "Montana Wind Jobs," June 2021,

[https://renewablenw.org/sites/default/files/Reports-Fact%20Sheets/MT%20Wind%20Jobs_JUN2021%20\(Final\).pdf](https://renewablenw.org/sites/default/files/Reports-Fact%20Sheets/MT%20Wind%20Jobs_JUN2021%20(Final).pdf)

⁵² Ibid

Climate Change

The vast majority of Montanans, 70 percent, believe climate change is happening, that it's a serious problem, and that we must take action.⁵³ And the numbers of voters regardless of political affiliation, who said they were worried about environmental problems worsened by climate change jumped significantly in the last decade.⁵⁴ Despite the shared concerns by many, the issue is still incredibly polarizing, both in Montana and across the country. As pollster Andrew Bauman summarizes:

*A recent Gallup poll shows that Americans' belief that climate change is already happening (62%) and is caused by human activity (68%) is at an all-time high. The percentage who worry "a great deal" about the issue is also at a record high, up 8 points in the last year. However, the issue remains deeply polarizing. Concern about climate change has increased significantly among Democrats and independents, but Republicans remain less concerned, resulting in the largest partisan gap among any issue tested by Gallup.*⁵⁵

MESSAGE GUIDANCE:

- Focus on the actual effects. 94 percent of Montanans say that wildfires that threaten homes and property are a serious problem, 90 percent see smoke during fire season as a problem, and 79 percent describe water shortages in the west as a problem.⁵⁶
- Use "carbon pollution" instead of "climate pollution," as the latter terminology drops support with voters.⁵⁷
- Highlight the health benefits of reduced pollution – with a focus on specific pollutants and diseases.⁵⁸
- Don't just talk about jobs, also emphasize the impact on American innovation and the economy broadly.⁵⁹

Public Lands and Water

Montanans are highly aware of and deeply connected to our public lands and waters. With 30 million acres of public lands, 170,000 miles of rivers, 3,200 named lakes, 55 state parks, 15 wilderness areas, eight National Park Service units, ten national forests and three national monuments, our access to the outdoors is unparalleled.

Montana's public lands and waters support \$7.1 billion in consumer spending, add \$2.6 billion annually to the state's GDP, and nearly 30,000 jobs accounting for \$1.7 billion in outdoor recreation wages.⁶⁰ More than one-quarter of business owners in Montana said that outdoor recreation, parks, and open spaces are the top reason they do business in Montana.⁶¹ And 89 percent of Montanans recognize the importance of public lands to our state's economy.⁶² In 2020, the state had 20.6 million visitors to public lands, which created 16,548 jobs.⁶³ Between 2020 and 2021, the state's outdoor recreation economy grew by 29%.⁶⁴

Montanans value our outdoors for business, jobs, and quality of life. Public lands and public lands access are consistently bipartisan issues amongst voters. Despite attempts by some Legislators and

⁵³ Colorado College 2023

⁵⁴ Missoula Current, "Poll: Climate Change, Water Loss, Habitat Top Concerns of Montanans, Western Voters," 21 Feb. 2022, <https://missoulacurrent.com/outdoors/2022/02/habitat-western-voters/>

⁵⁵ Bauman 2017

⁵⁶ Colorado College 2023

⁵⁷ Bauman 2017

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Business for Montana's Outdoors. "By the Numbers: Montana's economy and future depend on our outdoor assets." <https://businessformontanayoutdoors.com/research/>

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² University of Montana 2020

⁶³ MT Office of Outdoor Recreation 2020

⁶⁴ Business for Montana Outdoors 2023

politicians to limit public lands access, this is not popular amongst Montanans with 70 percent saying that a loss of access to national forests, lakes, and other public lands is a serious issue.⁶⁵ 90 percent of Montanans say public lands have a positive impact on clean water, children’s education on nature and overall quality of life.⁶⁶

MESSAGE GUIDANCE:

- By wide margins, Montana voters believe that public lands are important to the economy and way of life, so focus on these values.⁶⁷
- They also strongly oppose privatizing or selling off public lands, so paint the opposition in this frame and stand against these efforts.
- **Be specific.** Talk about hiking, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, viewing wildlife and enjoying nature. “The more vivid the language, the more likely voters are to see themselves using these lands and enjoying their benefits.”⁶⁸
- Emphasize the importance of “access” to public lands and waters.
- Stress the need for children to spend more time outdoors. As two pollsters said, of 18 conservation-related problems tested in a recent national survey, ‘kids not spending enough time outdoors and in nature’ rated the most serious problem.⁶⁹

Oil, Gas, and Extractive Industries

As we transition to clean energy, oil and gas leasing of public lands continues to be a polarizing issue. While the majority of Montanans (73 percent) support stopping or limiting oil and gas development on public lands, it remains at the forefront as gas prices continue to rise.⁷⁰ Messaging on this can be difficult.

Montana’s relationship with the fossil fuel industry has been front and center for many voters this summer with the historic Held v. Montana case. The 16 youth plaintiffs were successful in suing the state for their role in the climate crisis by continuing to permit and encourage growth of the oil, gas, coal, and mining industries. The decision in this case also struck down two laws that limited the state’s ability to consider greenhouse gas emissions when conducting environmental reviews of mining and other state approved permits. The provision in our state constitution that allowed this lawsuit to be successful grants every Montanan the right to a “clean and healthful environment.” Some Legislators were prepared to attack this right during the 2023 Legislative Session, but never did so because of the strong opposition from the public.

72% support only allowing oil and gas companies the right to drill in areas where there is high likelihood to actually produce oil and gas.

66% prefer that leaders place more emphasis on protecting water, air, wildlife habitat and recreation opportunities over maximizing the amount of land available for drilling and mining.

96% support requiring oil and gas companies, rather than federal and state governments, to pay for all of the clean-up and land restoration costs after drilling is finished.

MESSAGE GUIDANCE:

- Stress the need for “SOLUTIONS,” not “bans.”

⁶⁵ University of Montana 2022

⁶⁶ University of Montana 2020

⁶⁷ Headwaters Economics, “Montana’s Economy, Public Lands, and Competitive Advantage,” August 2017, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/montanans-economy-and-protected-lands>

⁶⁸ Metz 2013

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Colorado College 2022

The industry has spent millions of dollars on a PR campaign regarding how safe and beneficial oil and gas is for Montana and has subsequently softened its image. Focusing on our ability to move towards a clean energy future with safe and healthy communities is key.

- Solutions supported by Montanans include only allowing oil and gas companies to drill in areas of public land with a high likelihood to actually produce oil and gas (72 percent support), requiring oil and gas companies to use updated equipment to prevent leaks of methane and other pollutants (94 percent support), requiring oil and gas companies to pay for clean up and land restoration costs post drilling (96 percent support).
- Note that well over a majority (71 percent) of Montana voters support increasing the royalty fee that oil and gas companies pay for drilling on public lands to 25 percent.⁷¹
- Focus on the fact that we need a level playing field, and the oil and gas industry currently has too many advantages and is working only for itself, not for the people of Montana - the Held v. Montana case is a concrete example of how Montanans have felt that the oil and gas industry has had unfair advantages to continue polluting our state.
- Focus on "enforcement" against polluters and the lack of resources to adequately do so.
- Cite health and safety issues with oil and gas drilling first.

Lead Pipes in Schools

In 2020, a new administrative rule passed by the Montana Department of Health and Human Services requires accredited schools to test for lead in water at least every three years. Per the requirements, schools were to submit water samples to the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) by the end of 2021. As of early March 2023, only about three-quarters of Montana's 561 accredited schools have submitted samples despite a 2021 deadline. Of those that have submitted samples, approximately 74% have found at least one drinking fountain or faucet with high lead levels, many schools are struggling to find the source of contamination beyond the one or few contaminated faucets/drinking fountains.⁷² Children absorb lead at higher rates than the average adult and exposure may lead to brain, red blood cell, or kidney damage, and result in reduced IQ, hearing impairment, reduced attention span and poor classroom performance.⁷³ We recommend you use [DEQ's portal](#) to search for schools in your district. So far, the state has received half a million dollars in federal funding from IJA to clean up the lead in drinking water, but is eligible for more money.

V: How to Incorporate Conservation Issues into Your Campaign

There are several ways conservation issues could be incorporated into your campaign:

- Release policy platforms on key conservation issues.
- Tie conservation issues directly to economic issues, make the connection undeniable and dependant.
- Add sections on your websites outlining your platforms and plans on clean energy jobs, climate change, public lands and water.
- Think about ways to incorporate conservation issues into your stump speech when knocking doors or hosting a fundraiser.
- Visit sites that lend themselves to talking about environmental issues that affect those specific areas.
- Attend events held by the conservation community, and connect with those groups' members.
- Tell stories about environmental issues. These issues have powerful validators (e.g., firefighters on climate change, nurses on public health, blue-collar solar installers, etc). Find ways to incorporate these messengers into your campaign and various messages.

⁷¹ Colorado College, "Conservation in the West," 2020, www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/conservationinthewest/2020/2020-conservation-in-the-west-poll-data/2020%20Western%20States%20-%20Interview%20Schedule_COMBINED.pdf

⁷² Houghton, Kathryn, "Montana Schools Struggle with Lead in Water While Awaiting Federal Relief," Montana Free Press, 03 March 2023. <https://montanafreepress.org/2023/03/03/montana-schools-struggle-with-lead-in-water-while-awaiting-federal-relief/>

⁷³ DPHHS School Administrative Rules, "Montana School Health Rules 37.111.801," Jan. 2020, <https://dphhs.mt.gov/schoolhealth/schoolrules/index>

- At a time when many Montanans have property taxes, housing affordability, and population growth top of mind, stress that these issues can be solved in a conservation friendly way. Stress the importance of responsible development and infill to avoid taking over public outdoor spaces and agricultural land while also stressing the job and wage benefits of public lands, and the clean energy economy.