



To: 2024 Montana Federal Candidates and Interested Parties
From: Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund
Date: March 2024
RE: Background and Messaging on Conservation and Democracy in Montana

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INTRODUCTION

Conservation in Montana is the cornerstone of our way of life, and ensuring the continued stewardship of our lands has never been more critical. Our state constitution recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, with one of its most significant elements being our right to a “clean and healthful environment.” This right continues to safeguard Montanans' access to clean air, clean water, and public lands.

With staff across the state, the mission of the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund is to educate, engage, and empower all Montanans to protect our clean air, clean water, public lands, and democracy.

In this memo, you will find information on the landscape of conservation in Montana, the conservation and democracy issues that matter most to Montanans, effective ways to discuss those issues with voters, and ideas for incorporating them into your campaigns. One consistent truth when engaging with voters is the significance of discussing local issues. While this memo does not address issues specific to each community, we encourage you to personalize and localize how you discuss various conservation issues using the guiding principles in this document. It's crucial for people to understand how statewide policies will impact them, their friends, and families.

We look forward to nurturing our relationship with you, collaborating to prioritize conservation and democracy issues in your campaign, and ensuring that Montana's elected leaders are steadfast champions for conservation. The MCV Education Fund offers expertise in policy, politics, field organizing, and communications, and we are eager to serve as 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 and reduce pollution. 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
 - 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 IRA & MT
The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA): a new policy that will save Montana money!

STATEWIDE
★ ★ ★

- The average household in Montana can receive **\$11,309** in IRA benefits to fully electrify.
- All **428K** households in Montana are eligible for an average of **\$5,741** in tax credits and **\$240** in performance rebates.
- The **197K** low- and moderate-income households in Montana are eligible for an average of **\$11,567** in electrification rebates.
- Electrifying space and water heating would reduce energy bills across every fuel type by an average of **\$274** per year.
- If Montana fully electrifies, **\$3B** will have been invested in residential benefits and **18,874** total new jobs will have been generated.

SCAN HERE TO FIND OUT WHAT TAX CREDITS YOU MAY QUALIFY FOR!

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/

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/

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 massive 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
- \$45 million for infrastructure upgrades in several Montana communities including \$1 million for

⁶03 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/

⁸20 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/

⁹21 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/

¹⁰21 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/

¹¹21 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/

¹²21 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/

¹³14 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/

¹⁴14 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/

¹⁵26 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/

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 shift Montana towards a clean energy future. 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 over half of Montanans supporting a gradual transition to 100 percent renewable energy over the next 10-15 years.²²

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 to each community and talking about less pollution, better health, and energy independence is key when communicating about the Plan.

II. Conservation and Democracy Issues that Matter to Montanans

Montanans have a profound connection to our state's land and water; it's part of our identity, our way of life, and it fuels Montana's robust tourism and outdoor recreation economies. In a state boasting some of the most beautiful public lands, forests, rivers, and wildlife in the world, Montanans understand the importance of protecting and conserving our outdoor spaces for future generations.

We are continually reminded of the importance of outdoor access in our state, for residents and visitors alike. In 2022, 92 percent of Montanans visited state lands such as Montana wildlife management areas, state parks, and fishing access sites at least once,²³ up from 89 percent in 2020. Additionally, 93 percent of Montanans visited national public lands in 2022, with more than one-third visiting public lands more than 20 times. These figures solidify what we already know: Montanans love public lands and value strong access laws for public lands and waters, which are crucial to our way of life in the Treasure State.

Montana also boasts the second-highest percentage of individuals identifying as hunters and anglers in the nation, with 61 percent saying they hunt and/or fish²⁴, and 73 percent self-identifying as

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/2022/2018-university-of-montana-survey-interview-schedule.pdf

²⁴ Colorado College. (2024). 2024 Western States Interview Schedule STATES Combined [PDF file]. Retrieved from

<https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/documents/2024-poll-data/2024%20Western%20States%20Interview%20Schedule%20STATES%20Combined.pdf>

conservationists.²⁵ This makes clean air, clean water, and public lands among the most unifying issues in our state.

According to the latest Colorado College Conservation in the West poll, 87 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, with nearly half identifying it as *the most important* factor.²⁶ While Montana voters overwhelmingly support the 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 is a serious issue, and 77 percent say that the changing character of the state is a serious issue.²⁷ In fact, 97 percent of Montanans think that the loss of family farms and ranches is a problem.²⁸ In a time of rapid population growth and housing crises, it is important to ensure that solutions to these problems do not create additional challenges for fish, wildlife, agriculture, open spaces, and the quality of life that Montanans cherish.

Water continues to be a serious concern for many Montana voters, with 90 percent saying that low levels of water in rivers are a problem.²⁹ In a year where all of Montana is experiencing record-low snowpack, water issues are likely to be heightened, making it essential to know how to communicate with voters about these issues.

Montanans understand that our state is unique, and residents support policies and investments that protect our way of life. Montanans recognize that protecting our outdoor spaces also safeguards and grows our robust outdoor recreation economy. According to 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.³⁰ But the money extends across all aspects of the state's economy; for every \$1 million spent on conservation activities, between 17 and 31 Montana jobs are supported.³¹ 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.

Maintaining a stable and robust democracy is essential for ongoing protections for clean air, clean water, and public lands. In Montana, our state constitution is highly protective of our natural environment, giving each Montanan a right to a "clean and healthful environment." This constitution guides lawmakers and the courts, ensuring that laws passed will not harm Montanans' abilities to enjoy clean air, water, and public lands. Attacks on our independent judiciary threaten this right by attempting to limit the power of this co-equal branch of government. Keeping our courts independent will ensure they continue to interpret the law to protect our constitutional rights.

²⁵ Colorado College. (2023). 2023 FINAL Western States Interview Schedule STATES COMB [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/documents/2023-poll-data-and-graphics/2023%20FINAL%20Western%20States%20Interview%20Schedule%20STATES%20COMB.pdf>

²⁶ Colorado College 2024

²⁷ University of Montana 2022

²⁸ Colorado College 2024

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ 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

³¹ MT Office of Outdoor Recreation, "The Montana Business Landscape," 2020, business.mt.gov/Outdoor-Recreation

Public Lands - Access and Funding

Overview: 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, over 300 public fishing access sites, 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.³² More than one-quarter of business owners in Montana stated that outdoor recreation, parks, and open spaces are the top reasons they do business in Montana.³³ Furthermore, 89 percent of Montanans recognize the importance of public lands to our state's economy.³⁴ In 2020, the state had 20.6 million visitors to public lands, which created 16,548 jobs.³⁵ Between 2020 and 2021, the state's outdoor recreation economy grew by 29 percent.³⁶

Montanans value our outdoors for business, jobs, and quality of life. Public lands and public lands access are consistently bipartisan issues among voters. Despite attempts by some state legislators and other politicians to limit public lands access, this is not popular among Montanans, with 70 percent saying that a loss of access to national forests, lakes, and other public lands is a serious issue.³⁷ Ninety percent of Montanans say public lands have a positive impact on clean water, children's education on nature, and overall quality of life.³⁸ In fact, Montanans participate in all outdoor activities at a higher rate than residents of almost any other western state.³⁹

Montanans also value the protection of wildlife habitat and migration routes with 93% of Montanans saying those are important conservation efforts.⁴⁰ Legislation that protects those values and also protects opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation are much more popular among voters, particularly when such policies are based on community input, such as the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act, a bill supported by 84% of Montanans.⁴¹ In contrast, policies that remove protections for public lands are incredibly unpopular amongst the public, especially considering that 91% of Montanans say that it's important to provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

Message Guidance:

- By wide margins, Montana voters believe that public lands are essential to the economy and way of life, so focus on these values.⁴²
- Montanans also strongly oppose privatizing or selling off public lands, so when possible and relevant, frame the opposition in this context and stand against these efforts.

³² Business for Montana's Outdoors. "By the Numbers: Montana's economy and future depend on our outdoor assets."

<https://businessformontanasoutdoors.com/research/>

³³ Ibid

³⁴ University of Montana 2020

³⁵ MT Office of Outdoor Recreation 2020

³⁶ Business for Montana Outdoors 2023

³⁷ University of Montana 2022

³⁸ University of Montana 2020

³⁹ Colorado College 2024

⁴⁰ Colorado College 2023

⁴¹ Colorado College 2023

⁴² Headwaters Economics, "Montana's Economy, Public Lands, and Competitive Advantage," August 2017, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/economic-development/montanas-economy-and-protected-lands>

- Be specific. Discuss hiking, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, and viewing wildlife etc. The more vivid the language, the more likely voters are to envision themselves using these lands and enjoying their benefits. Avoid generalizations such as “being in nature” because this means different things for different people.
- Montanans genuinely care about fish and wildlife. However, avoid vague references to “habitat.” Instead, specifically relate this to fish and/or wildlife habitat by discussing stream health, large landscape protection, protection of big game winter range and migration corridors, etc.
- Emphasize the importance of “access” to public lands and waters.
- Stress the need for children to spend more time outdoors. According to a recent Colorado College poll, 92% of Montanans believe that spending more time outdoors would help address increased rates of anxiety, depression, and mental health problems in children and young people, and 84% say that children not spending enough time outdoors is a problem.⁴³

Clean Energy in Montana

Overview: Montana ranks among the top 10 states with the largest share of electricity generated from renewables, at about 53 percent.⁴⁴ 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 2015.⁴⁵ Montana has consistently surpassed that goal.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ Montana’s clean energy portfolio is continuing to grow, particularly in wind power. Currently, Montana wind projects produce over 1,100 megawatts of electricity, providing significant benefits to the state. Due to Montana’s large potential for wind energy, there is significant economic opportunity to provide this energy to neighboring states like Washington and Oregon, which have much less potential and much higher demand.⁴⁸

Montana also has significant untapped solar energy potential. According to a report from Renewable Northwest, Montana has potential similar to Minnesota, which is already producing over 1,600 megawatts of electricity from solar. For comparison, Montana is producing 17 megawatts.⁴⁹

Even as Montana’s wind and solar economies are just getting off the ground, these projects provided \$101 million in revenue to state and local governments between 2006 and 2021. The vast majority of these payments came from Montana’s growing wind industry. These funds help offset local property taxes and are used to support local schools and critical county and city services.⁵⁰

Montanans are overwhelmingly supportive of expanding our clean energy economy, with 70%

⁴³Colorado College 2024

⁴⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration, “U.S. Energy Information Administration Independent Statistics and Analysis Montana,” www.eia.gov/state/?sid=MT#

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Colorado College 2023

⁴⁸Renewable Northwest. (n.d.). Renewable Northwest: Montana Factsheet [PDF file]. Retrieved from https://renewablenw.org/sites/default/files/Reports-Fact%20Sheets/RNW_MT_Factsheet_Final-web.pdf

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid

expressing concern over the impact of oil and gas drilling on our land, air, and water.⁵¹ Further, 76% of Montanans think that we can increase both the production of clean energy while also preserving natural areas, wildlife habitat, and the character of communities, rather than having to choose between the two.⁵²

The Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Affordable Clean Energy Plan) provide unprecedented new provisions that will enable tax-exempt and governmental entities, such as states, local governments, Tribes, territories, rural electric cooperatives, and nonprofits, including places of worship, to take an active role in building the clean energy economy, lowering costs for working families, and advancing environmental justice.

Additionally, funding from the Affordable Clean Energy Plan provides ample opportunity for state and local governments to accelerate the transition to clean energy. Grant and direct pay opportunities for state and 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.⁵³

For example, the Solar for All grant program through the EPA provides opportunities for states to receive grant funding to enhance solar usage. 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 to reducing costs and pollution.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵ Messaging on this can be difficult.

Message Guidance:

- Stress the need for “SOLUTIONS,” not “bans.”
 - 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 (65 percent support), requiring oil and gas companies to use updated equipment to prevent leaks of methane and other pollutants (94

65% support only allowing oil and gas companies the right to drill in areas where there is high likelihood to actually produce oil and gas.

67% 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.

93% support requiring oil and gas companies, rather than federal and state governments, to pay for all of the

⁵¹Colorado College 2024

⁵²Ibid

⁵³ “Explaining the Affordable Clean Energy Plan.” League of Conservation Voters. www.lcv.org/clean-energy-policy-maker-resources/

⁵⁴ U.S. Energy Information Administration www.eia.gov/state/?sid=MT#

⁵⁵Colorado College. (2022). 2022 Combined Western States Interview Schedule [PDF file]. Retrieved from <https://www.coloradocollege.edu/other/stateoftherockies/documents/2022/2022%20Combined%20Western%20States%20Interview%20Schedule%20.pdf>

percent support), requiring oil and gas companies to pay for clean up and land restoration costs post drilling (93 percent support).

- The oil and gas 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.
- 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.⁵⁶
- 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.
- Voters are supportive of clean energy. However, when discussing a transition to clean energy, it is consistently better to discuss *moving toward* clean energy rather than discussing *moving away* from fossil fuels.
- Focus on “enforcement” against polluters and the lack of resources to adequately do so - a majority of voters view the term “corporate polluters” unfavorably.
- Cite health and safety issues with oil and gas drilling first - 70% of Montanans think the impact of oil & gas drilling on our land, air, and water is a problem.⁵⁷
- Never use the term “green jobs,” it’s too vague and unknown by voters - “clean energy jobs” is a much more favorable and concrete term.
- “Clean energy” or “renewable energy” are stronger terms to use than “alternative energy” or “green energy.”⁵⁸
- 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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰

Climate - Water, Wildfire

Overview: The vast majority of Montanans, 72 percent, believe climate change is a serious problem, with 64% saying that the effects they’ve seen in the last 10 years have been significant.⁶¹ Among the most significant impacts that concern Montanans are clean air, clean water, and wildfires. This winter, we have seen record low snowpack in all parts of the state, sparking fears about water availability and wildfire season during summer 2024. Recent polling shows that 67% of Montanans feel worried about the future of land, water, air, and wildlife, with 73% indicating that inadequate water supplies in our state are a problem.⁶² Water supplies impact agriculture, municipalities, and Montana’s vast outdoor recreation economy, making this a statewide issue.

⁵⁶ 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

⁵⁷ Colorado College 2024

⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹ 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)

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Colorado College 2024

⁶² Ibid

An additional statewide issue is wildfire season. Montana has experienced its fair share of catastrophic wildfires in recent years from the mountains to the prairies, which is represented in the fact that 92% of Montanans say that uncontrollable wildfires that threaten homes and property are a problem.⁶³ Legislation supporting forest management, support for wildland firefighters, and ensuring communities and homes are prepared have gained traction in recent years. Investments from the Affordable Clean Energy Plan have provided funding to prevent and fight forest fires. For example, Montana received \$8.4 million in funding for wildland fire management in fiscal year 2023. Additionally, the Department of Interior is investing \$1.5 billion over five years from the IJJA to support the firefighting workforce and increase the resilience of communities and lands facing the threat of wildfires.⁶⁴

Broadly, 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.⁶⁵ Despite the shared concerns by many, the issue is still incredibly polarizing, both in Montana and across the country.

Message Guidance:

- Emphasize the impacts. 92 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.⁶⁶
- Address the costs of inaction in terms of damage to homes and infrastructure, public health, and the economy.
- Use terms like “clean energy future” or “energy independence” rather than “climate change” or “global warming.” Additionally, use “carbon pollution” instead of “climate pollution,” as the latter terminology drops support with voters.⁶⁷
- Highlight Montana’s outdoor way of life and economy. 71 percent of Montanans believe that reducing greenhouse gas emissions would help protect Montana’s outdoor heritage.
- Focus on impacts to health, clean air, clean water, and outdoor recreation. The outdoor industry relies on predictable and stable seasons for skiing, snowmobiling, and other winter activities, as well as clean air and water, and healthy landscapes.
- Highlight local and state solutions. Montanans are more supportive of solutions at the state and local levels rather than federal solutions. They feel that they can have a more direct impact at these levels.

Access to Democracy

Overview: Montana has faced numerous challenges to its democratic processes, ranging from legislative measures to local government actions. In the 2021 Legislative Session, 18 bills aimed at restricting voting access were introduced, with some successfully passed, including those limiting

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ U.S. Department of the Interior. (n.d.). Biden-Harris Administration Announces \$185 Million for Wildfire Mitigation and Management. Department of the Interior.

<https://www.doi.gov/wildlandfire/news/biden-harris-administration-announces-185-million-wildfire-mitigation-and#>

⁶⁵ 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/>

⁶⁶ Colorado College 2023

⁶⁷ 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>

mail-in voting. Although courts overturned the most egregious bills, ongoing assaults on democracy persist, targeting not only voting rights but also the independence of the judiciary and redistricting commission.

Further democratic challenges emerge from partisan gerrymandering attempts. Montana's independent redistricting commission provides a nonpartisan, public way to draw fair election maps and 81 percent of Montanans think that it should maintain its current level of independence from the legislative and executive branches. Despite this, there were numerous attempts to change the makeup of the commission or the way commissioners were appointed during the 2023 legislative session. Outside of the jurisdiction of the redistricting commission are the maps for the Public Service Commission. The Legislature passed maps for these districts during the 2023 legislative session that split interest groups, large communities, and counties in order to maintain a one party majority. These gerrymandered maps were found as likely anti-democratic and must be redrawn during the 2025 State Legislature.

Federally, legislation to combat these issues nationwide have moved forward with the 2023 introduction of the Freedom to Vote Act.⁶⁸ This bill would address issues related to voter registration and voting access, election integrity and security, redistricting, and campaign finance - rectifying many democracy issues nationwide. As we see more attempts at election interference and voter intimidation in Montana and across the nation, it is critical to provide protections that make voters feel safe, and make them trust in the election process.

Message Guidance:

- Stress the importance of access to democracy and the integrity of our elections.
- Highlight the threat that dark money and partisan attacks on nonpartisan election administration pose to our democracy.
- Emphasize the need for transparency and accountability in our elections.
- Focus on the importance of protecting the right to vote and ensuring that every eligible Montanan has the opportunity to participate in our democracy.
- Frame attacks on access to democracy as attacks on the fundamental principles of our democracy and the rights of all Montanans.
- Highlight the bipartisan support for protecting access to democracy and the need for elected officials to work together to strengthen our democracy.

III. Effective Communication Strategies

Speak to Shared Values

Montanans care deeply about our clean air, clean water, and public lands. When communicating with voters, it's essential to speak to these shared values and emphasize the importance of protecting our natural resources for future generations. By framing conservation issues in terms of our shared values, we can build support across party lines and inspire action to protect Montana's environment.

⁶⁸ Congress.gov. (n.d.). H.R.11 - Protecting the Right to Organize Act of 2021. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/11>

Tell Personal Stories

Personal stories are a powerful way to connect with voters and illustrate the importance of conservation issues. When talking to voters, share personal anecdotes about your own experiences in Montana's great outdoors and how these experiences have shaped your views on conservation. Encourage voters to share their own stories and experiences as well, creating a sense of shared identity and purpose around conservation.

Provide Clear Information

When discussing conservation issues with voters, it's essential to provide clear and accurate information about the challenges we face and the solutions that are available. Avoid jargon and technical language, and instead, use simple and straightforward language that everyone can understand. Provide concrete examples and data to support your arguments, and be prepared to answer any questions voters may have.

DO:

Evoke Future Generations

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."⁶⁹

Focus on Public Health and Safety

Voters' hierarchy of needs starts with health and safety, not ecosystems or "the environment."⁷⁰

Use Specific Examples of Things that Could Harm Us

"Case studies remain a powerful part of successful strategies."⁷¹

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."⁷²

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."⁷³

Use Phrases that Imply Ownership, Inclusion and Shared Responsibility

Think "our" & "we" to attach personal meaning

Use Powerful Validators and Show Local Effects

⁶⁹ Bauman 2017

⁷⁰ 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>

⁷¹ 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>

⁷² Bauman 2017

⁷³ Metz et al. 2013

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

Invoke a Moral Imperative

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

Use a Villain When Needed

“Corporate polluters” consistently tests well

DON'T:

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.”⁷⁴

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.”⁷⁵

Use the Word “Ban”

This is counter to voters’ feelings of having freedom and independence.

Debate Whether Environmental Issues Should Be Our Top Priority

Instead, the question should be, how do we fix them?

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.”⁷⁶

Don’t Talk About “Regulations,” Use “Enforcement” of “Safeguards”

“The call for tougher, fairer and increased enforcement (with penalties) beats their message of [regulations] killing jobs, increasing costs, and hurting small business”⁷⁷

Talk About Benefits of Nature or “Nature’s Values”

⁷⁴ Public Opinion Strategies, Montana Business Survey, 2013, static1.squarespace.com/static/592f175df7e0abbb80a1a4ce/t/59925136f14aa1d24631b734/1502761271761/2013.9.MT_business-survey.pdf

⁷⁵ Metz et al. 2013

⁷⁶ 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,

twsorg.public.sharepoint.com/Documents/Messaging%20Recommendations_Stopping%20PLT.pdf

⁷⁷ Lake 2016

“Few voters spend time visiting “ecosystems” – they visit forests, wetlands, rivers, deserts and mountains.”⁷⁸

IV: How to Incorporate Conservation and Democracy Issues into Your Campaign

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

- Release policy platforms on key conservation and democracy 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 voting access, democracy, clean energy jobs, climate change, public lands and water.
- Think about ways to incorporate conservation and democracy issues into your stump speech when knocking doors or hosting a fundraiser.
- Visit sites that lend themselves to talking about conservation issues that affect those specific areas.
- Attend events held by the conservation community, and connect with those groups’ members.
- Tell stories about conservation 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.
- 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.

V. Conclusion

Conservation is a fundamental part of Montana’s identity, and protecting our clean air, clean water, and public lands is essential for our state’s future. By engaging with voters on conservation and democracy issues, we can build support for policies that protect our environment and ensure that Montana remains a great place to live, work, and play for generations to come.

Thank you for your commitment to conservation, and we look forward to working with you to protect Montana’s environment and democracy.

⁷⁸ Metz et al. 2013