



Turning Questions Into Answers.

*Fairbank,
Maslin,
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Associates*

*Opinion Research &
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Results of Recent Wisconsin Voter Survey

DATE: June 7, 2007

Public Opinion Strategies (POS) and Madison-based Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently completed a survey of Wisconsin voters to assess their attitudes on key conservation issues and their support for renewing and increasing investments in the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund.¹ The results show that **Wisconsin voters strongly support protecting the state's land, water and wildlife habitat by extending and increasing investments in the Fund.** In fact, more than three in five voters (63%) specifically back increasing investment in the fund to \$105 million per year – a level of support that *increases* as voters hear pro and con arguments on the issue. This level of support is not surprising given some of the other findings of the survey, which show that Wisconsin voters see land, water and wildlife conservation as critical to the state's economy and quality of life.

Among the key specific findings from the bipartisan survey are the following:

- **By nearly a three-to-one margin, voters support reauthorizing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund with an increased level of funding.** Survey respondents were offered the following brief description of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and the proposal to extend it and increase its level of funding:

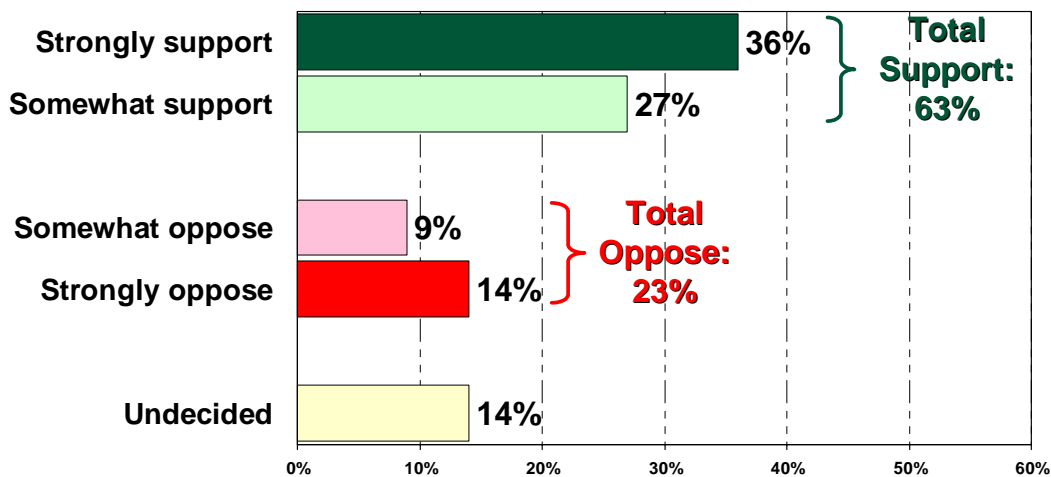
¹ **Methodology:** From May 21-24, 2007, the bipartisan research team of FMM&A (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) completed a telephone survey of 600 registered voters in Wisconsin who are likely to cast ballots in the November 2008 election. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 4.0%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher. Numbers may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

“Established in 1990 and renewed in 2000, the Fund is a State program that protects natural areas, water quality, wildlife habitat, parks and recreational lands through voluntary agreements with willing landowners. The State invests \$60 million per year in the Fund, and has protected over 470 thousand acres of important natural areas, wildlife habitat, and parks in Wisconsin. The Fund will expire in the year 2010.

There has been a proposal to renew the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund for an additional ten years, and increase the annual investment in the fund from \$60 million to \$105 million. In general, does this sound like something you would support or oppose?”

Given this description, over 60 percent of voters (63%) backed the proposal, while less than one-quarter (23%) opposed it, as shown in **Figure 1** below. Just as striking is the relative level of “strong support” (36%) to “strong opposition” (14%), with the strong supporters of the idea outnumbering its strong opponents by over a two-to-one margin.

**FIGURE 1:
Support for Renewing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund**



Support for this idea is very broad-based. Majorities of almost every major demographic and geographic subgroup of the Wisconsin electorate support it, including:

- ✓ 65% of women and 60% of men;
- ✓ 70% of voters under 50 and 59% of those age 50 and over;
- ✓ 72% of college-educated voters and 57% of those without a college education;
- ✓ 67% of sportsmen, and 59% of those without a hunting or fishing license
- ✓ 66% of independents, 73% of Democrats, and a 43% plurality of Republicans; and
- ✓ At least 58% of voters in every major media market in the state.

- **After hearing pro and con arguments, support for extending the Fund increases.** Survey respondents were offered a series of arguments in favor of increasing investments in the Fund (acting before land prices increase further, preserving land for future generations, supporting jobs that depend on the state’s landscape, etc.), as well as a series of arguments against it (enough land is already protected, additional investments will take money away from other services, etc.). As shown in **Figure 2**, the net effect of those statements was to generate additional support for the proposal. The proportion saying they would “strongly support” it increased by nine percent.

FIGURE 2:
Changes in Support for Renewing the Stewardship Fund After Messages

Position	Initial	After Pro/Con Messages	Difference
Strongly support	36%	45%	+9%
Somewhat support	27%	24%	-3%
TOTAL SUPPORT	63%	69%	+6%
Strongly oppose	14%	16%	+2%
Somewhat oppose	9%	8%	-1%
TOTAL OPPOSE	23%	24%	+1%
UNDECIDED	14%	7%	-7%

- **Support for the Stewardship Fund stems from broad-based concern about land and water conservation among Wisconsin voters.** Survey respondents were offered a series of statements about conservation issues in Wisconsin, and were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each, as shown in **Figure 3** on the following page. More than nine out of ten agreed that land and water conservation play a critical role in the state’s economy and quality of life. And 89 percent agreed that even when faced with tight budgets, the state should make a priority of investing in land, water and wildlife conservation. On the other hand, a majority of voters (68%) rejected the idea that we do *not* need to do any more to protect natural areas and open space in Wisconsin.

FIGURE 3:
Agreement with Statements About Conservation in Wisconsin
(Split Sampled)

Statement	TOTAL AGREE	Strongly Agree	Smwt. Agree	Smwt. Disag.	Strongly Disag.	DK/ NA
Protecting water quality and land in Wisconsin is critical to keeping the state’s economy strong	94%	68%	26%	3%	1%	2%
Having undeveloped open space and natural areas close-to-home improves our quality of life	91%	68%	23%	5%	2%	1%
Even when the state budget is tight, we should still find the money to invest in protecting Wisconsin’s land, water and wildlife.	89%	64%	25%	5%	5%	2%
The loss of farmland poses a serious threat to Wisconsin	83%	52%	31%	8%	4%	4%
Wisconsin has more than enough natural areas and open space, and we do not need to do any more to protect them	27%	8%	19%	23%	45%	4%

- **Voters rank water quality, wildlife habitat, forests, farms, and natural areas as particularly high priorities for conservation.** Figure 4 below highlights responses to a question which asked voters to evaluate the importance of various potential uses of money from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, on a scale ranging from “extremely important” to “not important.” At least three-quarters of voters rated protecting water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, forests, natural areas, working farms and neighborhood parks as at least “very important.”

FIGURE 4:
Evaluating the Importance of Conservation Projects That Could Receive Funding From the Stewardship Fund

Project	TOTAL EXT./ VERY	Ext. Imp.	Very Imp.	SW Imp.	Not Imp.	DK/ NA
Protecting sources of drinking water*	93%	64%	29%	5%	2%	1%
Protecting water quality in rivers and streams*	92%	55%	37%	7%	1%	0%
Protecting fish and wildlife habitat	82%	41%	41%	14%	3%	1%
Protecting forests	77%	39%	38%	18%	3%	1%
Preserving natural areas*	76%	40%	36%	18%	4%	1%
Preserving working farms	75%	38%	37%	17%	5%	2%
Protecting neighborhood parks	75%	32%	43%	19%	5%	1%
Protecting land for state parks*	72%	38%	34%	19%	8%	1%
Preventing overdevelopment	71%	38%	33%	18%	8%	3%
Preserving open space*	67%	35%	32%	26%	5%	3%

Project	TOTAL EXT./ VERY	Ext. Imp.	Very Imp.	SW Imp.	Not Imp.	DK/ NA
Repairing and improving state parks*	65%	28%	37%	28%	6%	2%
Restoring wetlands	64%	29%	35%	26%	8%	2%

*Split Sample

Overall, the survey results show strong support from Wisconsin voters for extending and expanding the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund to conserve Wisconsin’s land, water and wildlife. A sizable majority of voters, coming from a wide variety of demographic and geographic groups, see the Fund as an excellent way to enact their desire to protect the state’s environment.