

MEMORANDUM

TO: Center for American Progress
FROM: Hart Research Associates
DATE: November 14, 2013
RE: Voters' Views on the Government Shutdown and Investments in National Parks and Public Lands

On behalf of the Center for American Progress, Hart Research conducted a quantitative research study on public opinion about federal investments in public lands and how the government shutdown affected perceptions of public lands issues. The survey was conducted by telephone from October 31 to November 4, 2013, among 1,005 adults nationwide who voted in the 2012 presidential election, and included both landline and cell phones.

1) Voters say that the closing of national parks and public lands during the shutdown was a big problem. There is widespread agreement that the shutdown highlighted the importance of national parks and public lands, including their contribution to local economies.

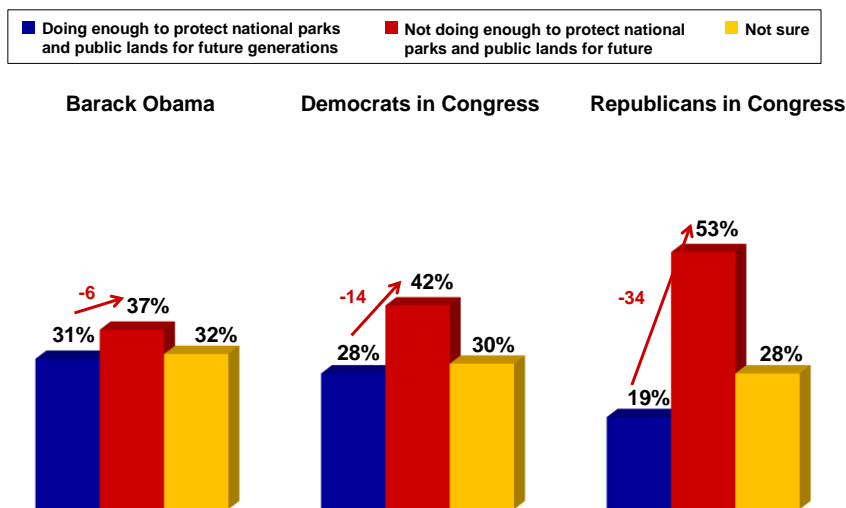
- 52% of voters say that it was a very or a pretty big problem that most national parks and public lands were closed to visitors during the shutdown, and an additional 38% say that it was somewhat of a problem. Closing parks to visitors during the shutdown was a big problem for comparable proportions of voters across the country, including 47% of voters in the Northeast, 52% in the South, 53% in the Midwest, and 55% in the West. Similarly, about half of voters in cities (54%), suburbs (52%) and rural locations (53%) say the same.
- Voters overwhelmingly agree (82%, including 62% who strongly agree) that the closing of national parks during the government shutdown was a good reminder of how important the national parks are and why we need to keep them open. This is a broadly shared and unifying view, with agreement among strong majorities of Democrats (90%), independents (77%), and Republicans (74%) alike.
- Voters believe that closing national parks during the shutdown was not just a simple inconvenience to visitors but had important negative ramifications on local communities. Three in four (76%) voters agree that the federal government shutdown had a serious impact on local economies near shuttered national parks and public lands.
- Voters overwhelmingly reject the argument that the national parks were closed by the administration to make the government shutdown as painful as

possible for the American public (31%) and instead believe that parks were forced to close because Congress could not agree on a budget (57%).

2) Obama is more trusted on public lands than Republicans in Congress but voters do not believe either party is doing enough to protect national parks and public lands.

- A majority (53%) of voters say that Republicans in Congress are not doing enough to protect national parks and public lands for future generations, whereas only 19% (a difference of 34 points) say that Republicans in Congress are doing enough. Although they do not evaluate Democrats in Congress as negatively on the issue of public lands, more voters believe Democrats are not doing enough (42%) than believe Democrats are doing enough (28%, a difference of 14 points) to protect national parks and public lands. President Obama receives the most favorable evaluations, with 31% saying he is doing enough and 37% saying is not doing enough (a difference of six points).

Voters don't believe either party, especially Republicans in Congress, is doing enough to protect national parks and public lands.



- Obama is more trusted (37%) to deal with issues involving national parks and other public lands than Republicans in Congress (29%). However, independents trust no one; 45% say they trust neither President Obama nor Republicans in Congress to deal with national parks and public lands. Just one in four (24%) independents say they trust Republicans in Congress, and the same proportion say they trust President Obama.

3) Most voters feel the sequester went too far in cuts to funding for national parks. Overwhelming majorities across parties oppose additional cuts to budgets for parks and public lands.

- A majority (55%) of voters feel the across-the-board federal spending cuts known as the sequester went too far in cuts to funding for national parks. Fewer than one in 10 (9%) say the funding cuts to national parks did not go far enough. This is the consensus opinion across the country, in the Northeast (54% say cuts went too far), South (51%), Midwest (57%), and West (62%).
- Furthermore, voters overwhelmingly oppose additional cuts to parks' budgets. Thinking about where Congress should cut federal spending in order to reduce the budget deficit, three in four (74%) say that there should be no additional cuts in spending that goes to protect and maintain national parks and other public lands. Solid majorities across party lines agree that Congress should not cut funding for national parks and public lands in order to reduce the deficit, including 82% of Democrats, 75% of independents, and 64% of Republicans.

4) The strongest arguments for protecting funding for public lands center on safeguarding their natural beauty for future generations and preserving economic benefits to local economies.

- The survey tested a series of arguments to protect funding for national parks and public lands, all of which majorities of voters say are very or fairly convincing. The most compelling messages listed below are rated as convincing to large majorities of voters across party lines.

As Americans, we all own our national parks. They are gifts from previous generations and are a legacy we pass on to our children and grandchildren. It is our responsibility to protect our parks now so we can guarantee that future generations can enjoy the beauty of our parks, learn about nature, and experience their heritage just like we did (*83% very/fairly convincing*).

National parks provide us with some of the most beautiful, majestic, and awe-inspiring places on Earth, but funding for our national parks has not been keeping up with what is required to maintain the park system adequately. National parks should be honored, cherished, and cared for, not left to crumble into disrepair (*76% very/fairly convincing*).

We need to protect funding for national parks and public lands because continued cuts and closures hurt small businesses, local communities, and America's tourism economy (*70% very/fairly convincing*).

Our public lands and natural resources are huge economic engines for the nation, supplying everything from the energy that powers our economy to the icons that attract tourism and outdoor recreation. But to harness these benefits, we need to invest the necessary resources

to keep our parks healthy, conserve wildlife, and manage energy and mineral production safely (69% very/fairly convincing).

5) The marching order to Congress is clear: voters want Washington to create new parks and expand outdoor opportunities, not make more cuts and closures.

- 70% of voters say that Congress should find a way to prevent additional automatic spending cuts for national parks and other public lands from going into effect (including 55% who feel this way strongly). Voters want Congress to prevent further cuts regardless of whether they trust President Obama (84%) or Republicans in Congress (60%) to deal with issues related to public lands.
- Instead of cuts to federal spending on national parks and public lands, voters want more places protected for outdoor recreation. Two in three (65%) agree that instead of closing parks and cutting their budgets, Washington should be creating new parks and expanding opportunities for Americans to get outdoors. Further reinforcing the idea that federal support for national parks and public lands is a bipartisan issue, majorities of Democrats (75%), independents (63%), and Republicans (54%) agree.

BOTTOM LINE: Majorities of voters across parties want to see increased support for new parks and public lands, not cuts to parks' budgets.

"Instead of closing parks and cutting their budgets, Washington should be creating new parks and expanding opportunities for Americans to get outdoors."

