



OPINION
RESEARCH
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TO Interested Parties

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RE: American Voter Views of Wildfire and Forest Management

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The bipartisan research team of FM3 Research (D) and New Bridge Strategy (R) recently conducted a nationwide poll to assess American voter views of wildfire and forest management policies.¹ The study found that voters nationwide are highly concerned about wildfires and many have a personal tie to someone impacted by fire and smoke. They see the condition of American forests as worsening, and worry more than in prior years about their personal safety when it comes to fires. These attitudes underlie their **strong sense that government has a major responsibility in reducing the risk of severe wildfires, and extremely broad support for a \$6 billion annual investment in fire risk reduction over the next decade.**

Key findings include:

- **Two in five voters nationwide report knowing someone who has been impacted personally by wildfires (39%) or wildfire smoke (39%).** Those figures are even higher in the Mountain region, where 62% and 63% know someone who has been impacted by fire and smoke respectively, and in the West region, where 55% and 66% know someone who has personally been impacted.
- **Wildfires and drought are top-tier concerns for American voters, just behind such in-the-news issues as inflation, housing and government waste.** Figure 1 on the next page lists the concerns that American voters were most likely to rate as "extremely" or "very serious problems." Notably, more than three in five are

¹ **Methodology:** From Aug. 24-Sept. 15, 2022, FM3 and NBS completed 2,039 interviews (on landlines and cell phones and via email and text message) with American voters, inclusive of an oversample yielding 807 voters in the intermountain West (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico). The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-2.8% at the 95% confidence level and +/-3.5% for the intermountain West; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%. The survey was built upon qualitative research with voters in the Denver metro area, Sevier County TN, Placer and El Dorado counties in CA, and an online discussion board among rural voters throughout the West.

concerned about wildfires and drought -- right alongside concern about taxes and just behind concerns about inflation and housing costs.

Figure 1: Problem Seriousness Rating

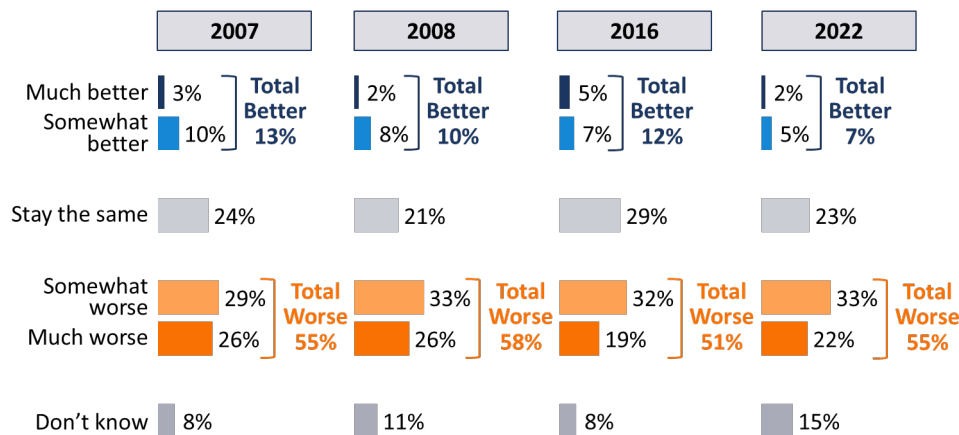
I am going to read you some issues that may be facing your community. Please tell me whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not too serious a problem in your community.

Problem	% Extremely/Very Serious
Inflation	83%
Government waste and inefficiency	78%
The cost of housing	77%
Uncontrollable wildfires that destroy property and forests	63%
Drought	62%
The amount you pay in taxes	62%

- **A majority of voters continues to see the condition of American forests as worsening.** Perceptions of the problem are not limited to wildfire -- the sense that American forests are in worsening condition is a long-standing trend. Figure 2 below shows that a majority (55%) now believes that American forests' condition is worse than a few years before -- and the share who sees forest conditions as improving is at its lowest point in 15 years (7%).

Figure 2: Trend in Condition of American Forests

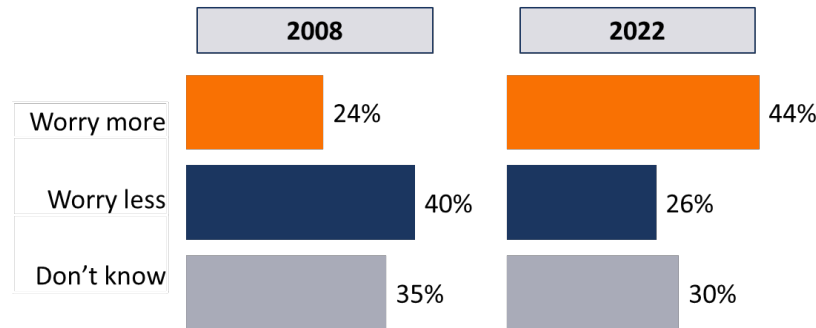
Do you think that in the last few years the overall condition of America's forests has gotten better, worse, or stayed the same?



- **By an 18-point margin, voters say that they worry more about fires than five years ago.** In 2008, most Americans were less worried about fire (40%) than five years before and about one-quarter (24%) were more worried. Those numbers have since essentially flipped, with 44% more worried and one-quarter less worried. Unsurprisingly, voters in the West and Mountain regions are especially concerned -- 69% and 60% in each respective region report worrying more than they did five years ago.

Figure 3: Personal Concern about Fires

Thinking about your own safety, do you personally worry more or less about fires than you did five years ago?



- **Drought and human activity are seen as key causes of more frequent and more severe wildfires.** As shown below, "years of drought" is considered a "major factor" in the worsening wildfire situation by 73%, followed closely by the "careless behavior" of humans starting fires in the first place (71%). Half (54%) see climate change as a contributing factor, though that is a politically polarized position -- 82% of Democrats call it the biggest or a major factor, while just 31% of Republicans do.

Figure 4: Factors Contributing to Increasingly Frequent and Severe Wildfires

Here are some factors that may have contributed to increasingly frequent and severe wildfires. Please tell me if you think it is the single biggest factor, a major factor of wildfires, a minor factor, or not a factor.

Factor	% Biggest/Major Factor
Years of drought that left millions of dead trees, creating dry fuel	73%
Careless behavior by people visiting forests	71%
Lack of adequate forest management	64%
Increasingly extreme weather patterns	60%
Increased development in wildfire-prone areas	60%
Climate change	54%

- **Voters broadly see government at all levels as bearing responsibility for reducing fire risk.** As detailed in Figure 5, voters perceive that a wide range of actors should share responsibility for reducing wildfire risks - but also tend to rank government agencies at the top of the list.

Figure 5: Responsibility for Reducing the Risk of Severe Wildfires

Here is a list of groups of people or organizations who might share some responsibility for reducing the risk of severe wildfires. Please tell me whether you think each one should have a great deal of responsibility, some responsibility, just a little responsibility, or no responsibility.

Organization/Type of Person	% Great/Some Responsibility
State government	91%
Local government	90%
Public landowners such as the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service	88%
People who live in communities at risk of wildfire	83%
The federal government	83%
Everyone	81%
Private landowners	80%

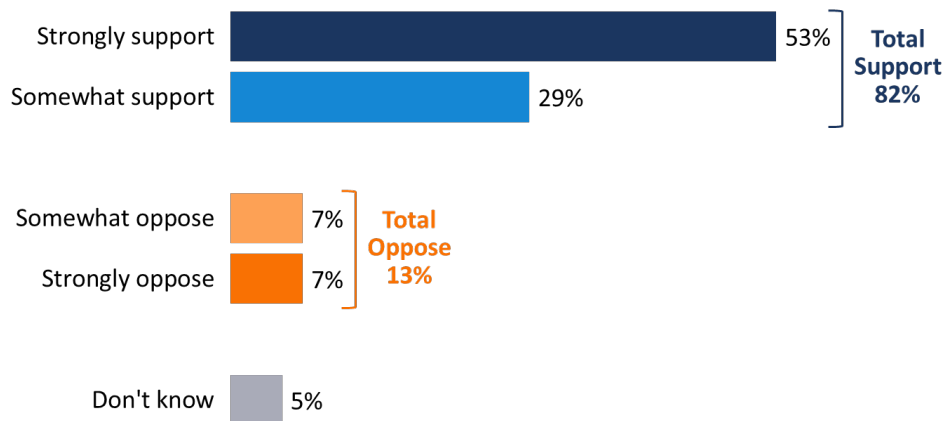
- **More than four in five support the idea of increased federal investment to proactively reduce the threat and intensity of future wildfires – and over half support it “strongly.”** Fully 82% of voters nationwide support the concept of investing in a range of wildfire risk-reduction activities including cutting and removing overgrown brush and trees and allowing trained fire teams to use controlled burns (as shown in Figure 6 on the following page). Notably, fully half (53%) "strongly support" this plan.

This support is extremely broad across major demographic and geographic groups, including:

- 92% of Democrats, 74% of independents and 77% of Republicans;
- 82% of men and women;
- 73% support or higher across every age category -- including 91% support with voters ages 75+; and
- 89% support in the Midwest, 84% in the Mountain region, 82% in the South, 81% in South Central US, 78% each in Northeast and West, and 77% in the Central Plains.

Figure 6: Support for Investments in Forest Management and Wildfire Risk Reduction

National land agencies such as the US Forest Service have been working with state land agencies, Native American tribes, nonprofit conservation organizations, and local governments to create a plan to proactively reduce the threat and intensity of future wildfires. The plan would increase investment in a range of fire risk reduction activities, such as: cutting and removing overgrown brush and trees; and allowing trained fire teams to use controlled burns – intentionally setting and monitoring fires to clear out forest material that could fuel fires—when and where it is safe to do so. These activities would be funded by the federal government, distributing an additional \$6 billion per year for the next 10 years to federal, state, local, and tribal government agencies to carry out the work on their land.



In sum, wildfires are a highly salient issue for American voters, ranking just behind inflation and housing costs as a key concern. Increasing shares see American forest health as declining, and nearly half of voters are more worried about fires than they were five years ago. As a result, **voters overwhelmingly support the idea of investing billions of dollars in improving forest health and reducing fire risk over the next decade.**