

Public Attitudes on Issues Affecting American Forests

Presentation given on 1/26/2017 to staff of The Nature Conservancy's Restoring America's Forests as part of monthly educational webinar series

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Public Attitudes on Issues Affecting American Forests

*Key Findings from a National Voter Survey
Conducted July 31-August 10, 2016*

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates – FM3

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH & STRATEGY

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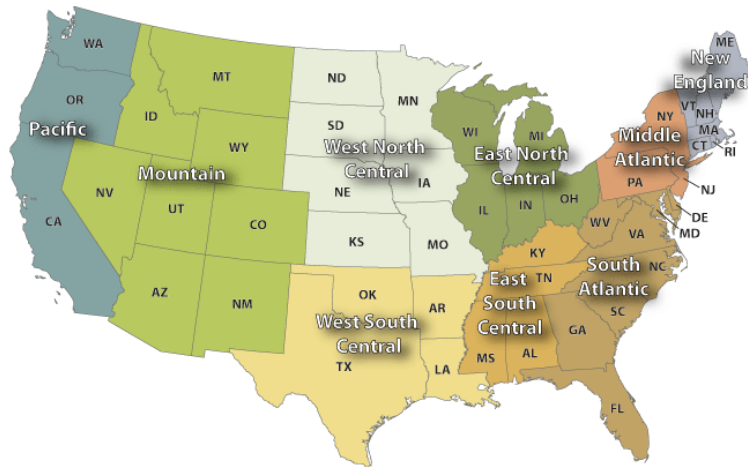
Methodology

- 1,223 telephone interviews with American voters
- Conducted July 31-August 10, 2016 and via landline and cell phones
- Margin of error of +/-4.7% at the 95% confidence interval
- Due to rounding, some percentages do not add up to 100%
- Selected comparisons to nationwide surveys conducted in 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2010

Dates of Prior Surveys	Sample	Margin of Error
Sept. 22-27, 2010	1,400 voters nationwide	+/-2.7%
Feb. 23-26, 2008	800 voters nationwide	+/-3.5%
Feb. 20-26, 2007	1,001 voters nationwide	+/-3.2%
Dec. 3-13, 2005	817 voters nationwide	+/-3.5%

Census Divisions

U.S. Census Divisions



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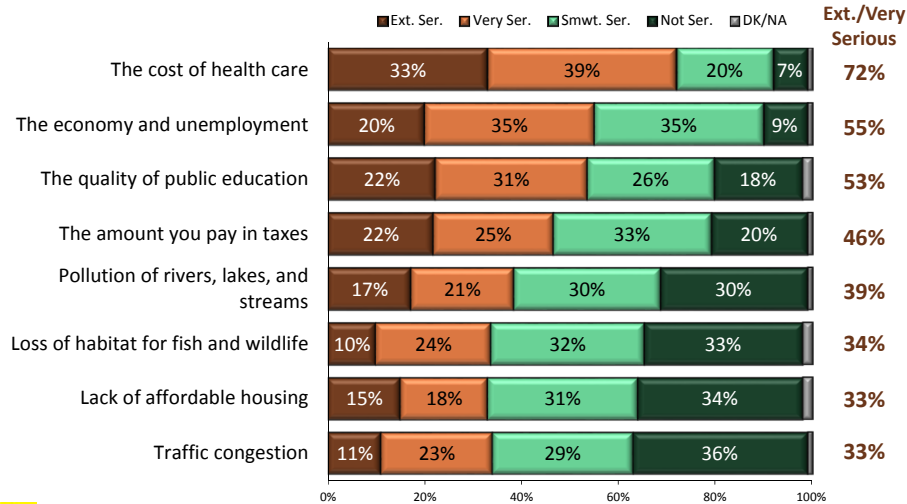
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Context for Attitudes on Forest Issues

3

Economic issues are seen as much more serious than environmental concerns.

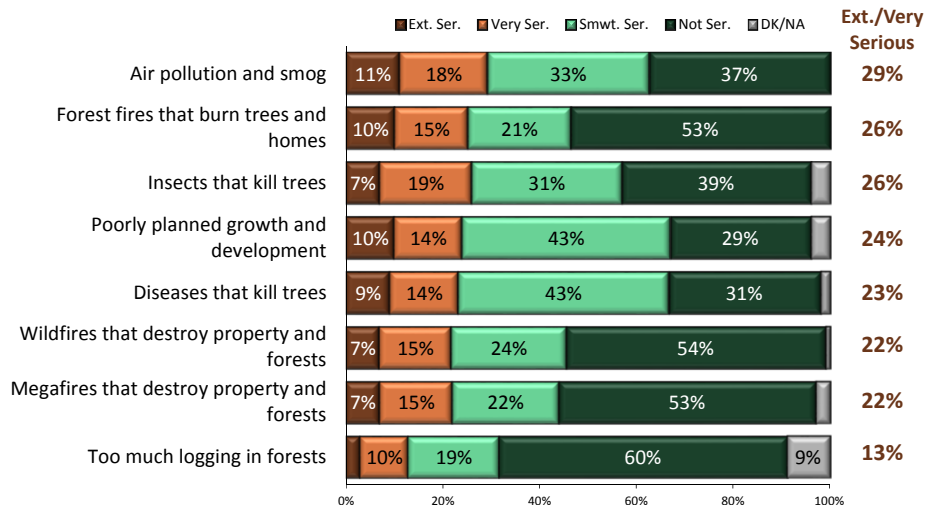


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Q1. I'm going to read you a list of issues, and I'd like you to tell me how serious a problem you think each one is in your area. Please tell me whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a serious problem. Split Sample

4

Comparatively, issues affecting American forests are not seen as equally urgent.



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Q1. I'm going to read you a list of issues, and I'd like you to tell me how serious a problem you think each one is in your area. Please tell me whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a serious problem. Split Sample

5

Concern about forest issues has largely been stable over the past few years.

(Extremely/Very Serious)

Issues	2005	2007	2008	2010	2016	Difference
The cost of health care	78%	80%	--	74%	72%	-2%
The economy and unemployment	52%	44%	--	83%	55%	-28%
The quality of public education	55%	55%	--	53%	53%	--
The amount you pay in taxes	62%	53%	--	52%	46%	-6%
Pollution of rivers, lakes, and streams	43%	50%	--	34%	39%	-5%
Loss of habitat for fish and wildlife	40%	39%	28%	29%	34%	-5%
Lack of affordable housing	42%	47%	--	35%	33%	-2%
Traffic congestion	42%	44%	--	36%	33%	-3%
Air pollution and smog	39%	39%	--	29%	29%	--
Insects that kill trees	25%	--	--	22%	26%	+4%
Poorly planned growth and development	39%	42%	27%	34%	24%	-10%
Diseases that kill trees	32%	--	--	27%	23%	-4%
Uncontrollable wildfires that destroy properties and homes*	29%	22%	22%	24%	22%	-2%
Too much logging in forests	24%	--	18%	17%	13%	-4%

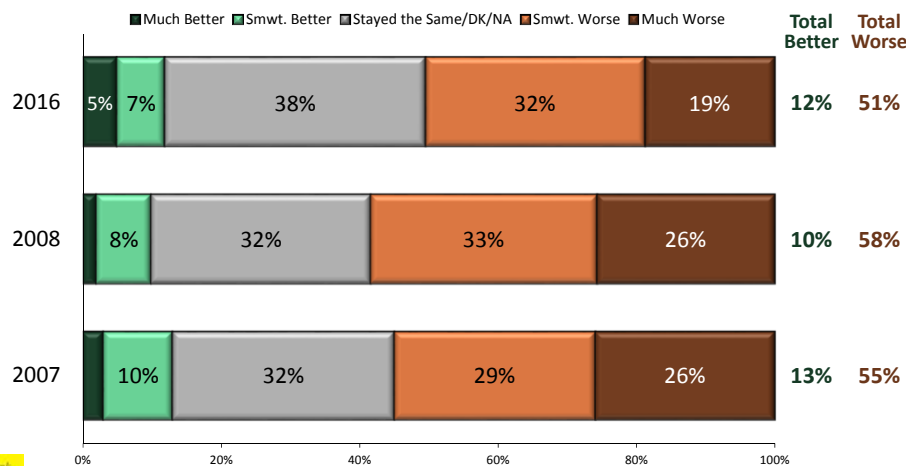
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Q1 a-g. I-o. I'm going to read you a list of issues, and I'd like you to tell me how serious a problem you think each one is in your area. Please tell me whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a serious problem. Split Sample *Wording changed in 2016 to "Wildfires that destroy property and forests"

6

A majority still feels the condition of American forests has declined in the past 10 years or so.

In general, over the past ten years or so do you think the overall condition of America's forests has gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?



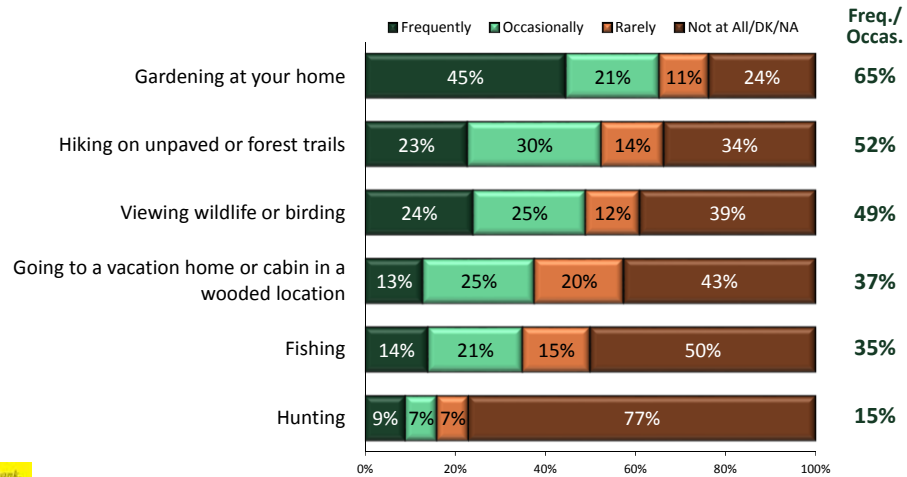
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Q2.

7

Gardening, hiking and wildlife viewing are among Americans' most popular outdoor activities.

I am going to read you a list of recreational activities. Please tell me how often you participate in each activity: frequently, occasionally, rarely, or not at all?



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Q25

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8

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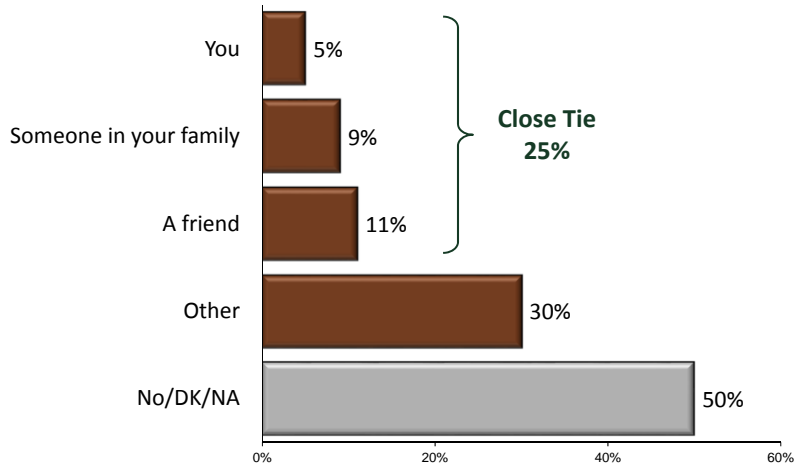


Fire

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One-quarter have a personal tie to someone who has been affected by wildfire.

Do you know someone who has been affected by a wildfire?



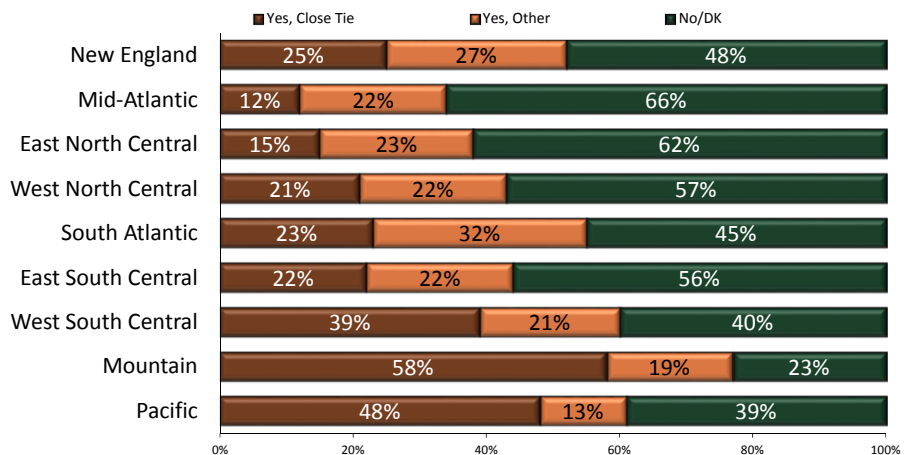
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Q9

10

About half in the Mountains and West have a close tie to someone affected by wildfire.

By Census Division



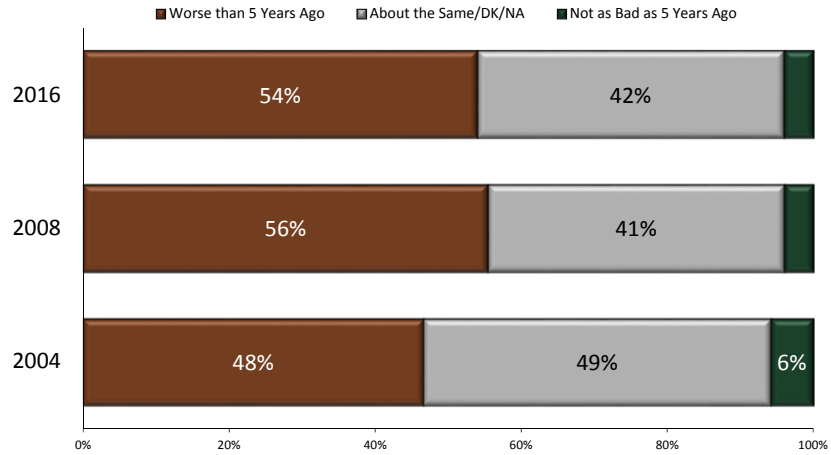
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Q9

11

A majority continues to believe that forest fires are getting worse.

Do you think forest fires in this country are worse than they were 5 years ago, not as bad as 5 years ago, or about the same?



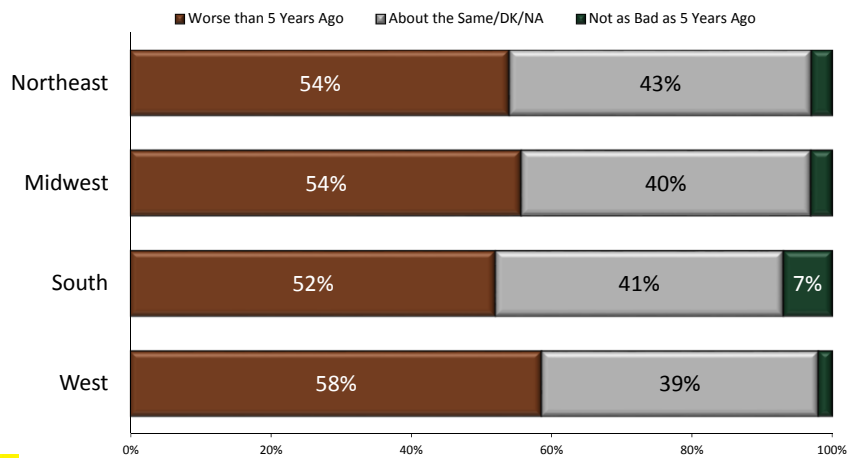
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Q3.

12

This perception is slightly stronger in the West.

Do you think forest fires in this country are worse than they were 5 years ago, not as bad as 5 years ago, or about the same?

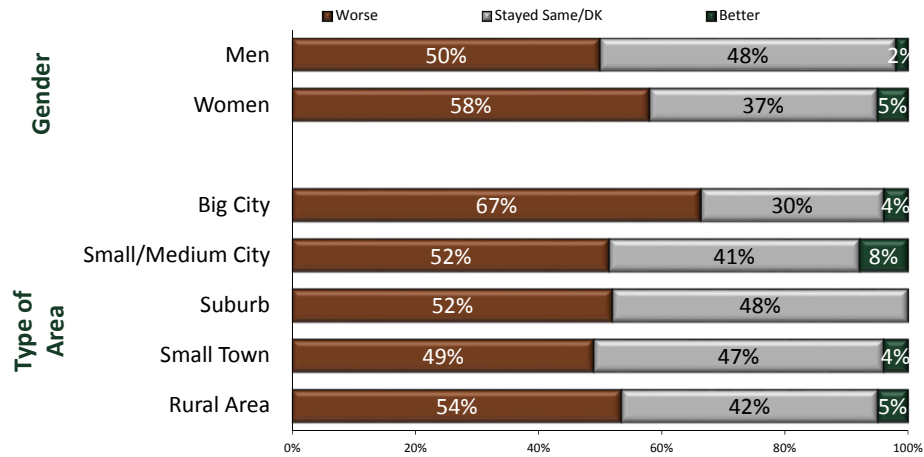


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Q3.

13

Two-thirds of big-city voters and nearly three in five women feel forest fires have gotten worse.



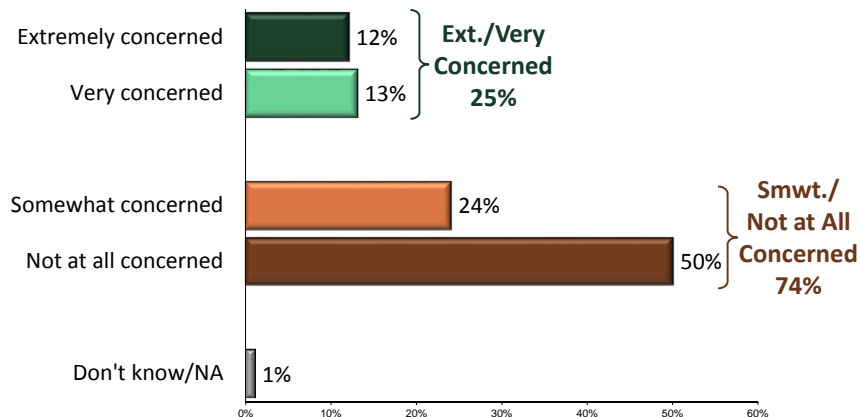
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Q9 Do you think forest fires in this country are worse than they were 5 years ago, not as bad as 5 years ago, or about the same?
By Gender and Type of Area

14

One-quarter are very concerned about the risk to their water supply as a result of bigger fires.

How concerned are you that your water supply could be damaged or affected by a forest fire?

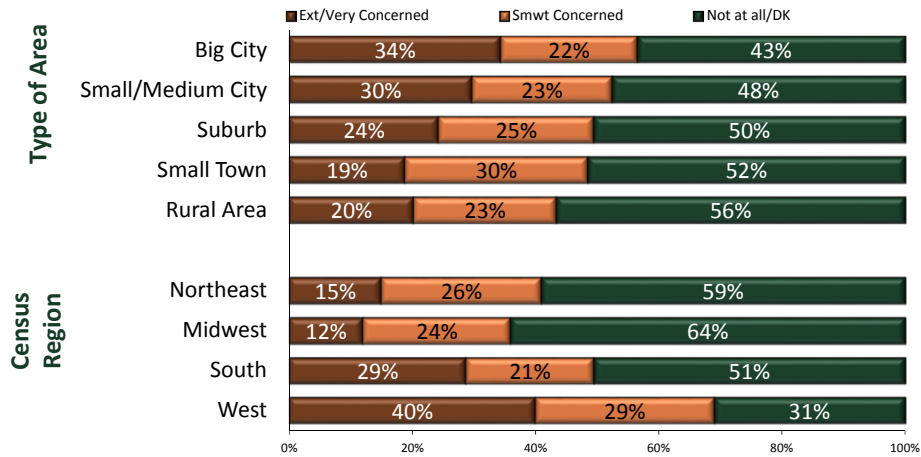


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Q4.

15

The danger to water supply is of greatest concern to urban and Western voters.



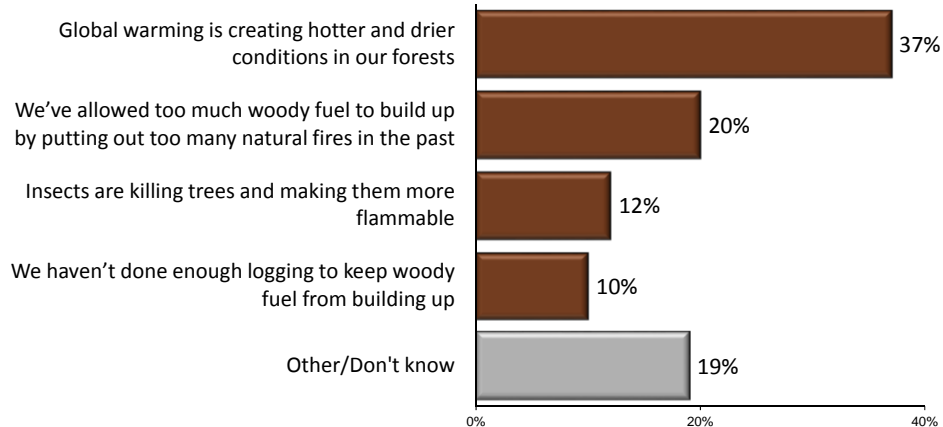
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Q4. How concerned are you that your water supply could be damaged or affected by a forest fire?
By Q26 and Census region

16

More than one-third attribute more severe forest fires to global warming.

Over the past decade or so, the United States has been experiencing bigger and more severe forest fires than in previous decades. Which ONE cause do you think best explains why that is occurring?



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Q6.

17

Younger women and Northeastern voters are most likely to attribute bigger fires to climate.

Statement	Men 18-49	Men 50+	Women 18-49	Women 50+	North east	Mid west	South	West
Global warming	35%	29%	53%	34%	43%	35%	37%	36%
Putting out natural fires	26%	24%	15%	18%	20%	21%	17%	24%
Insects killing trees	8%	14%	11%	13%	4%	12%	11%	18%
Not enough logging	13%	10%	7%	11%	15%	13%	10%	4%
Other/DK	18%	22%	13%	24%	19%	18%	28%	17%

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Q6. Over the past decade or so, the United States has been experiencing bigger and more severe forest fires than in previous decades. Which ONE cause do you think best explains why that is occurring?

18

A stable majority believes forest fires are dangerous and should be fought.

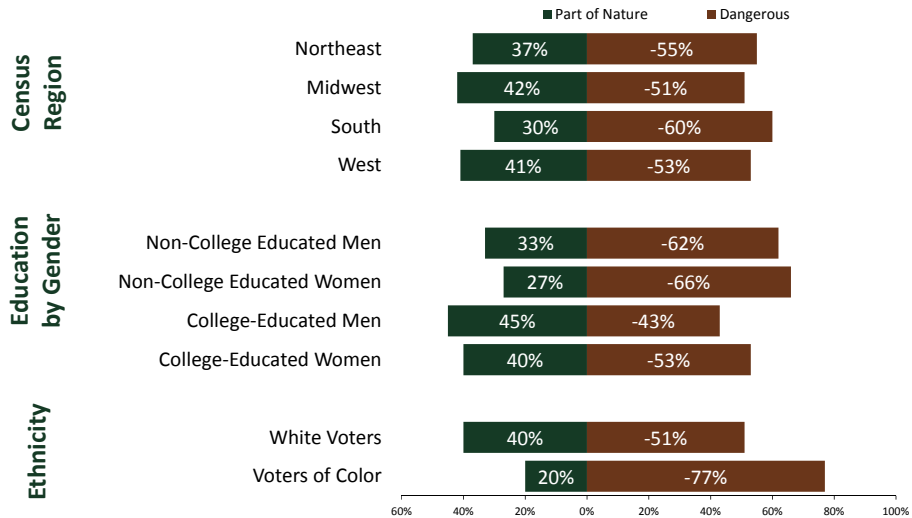
Statement	2004	2008	2016
Forest fires are unpredictable and dangerous. We need to contain and extinguish fires as soon as they are discovered.	56%	53%	55%
Forest fires are a part of nature. We need to protect communities from fires, but in remote areas we should let fires burn and let nature take its course.	40%	44%	37%
Other/Don't know	3%	4%	8%

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Q5. Let me read you a pair of statements and please tell me which one comes closer to your own view.

19

Voters with less formal education, as well as voters of color, are more likely to see fires as dangerous.



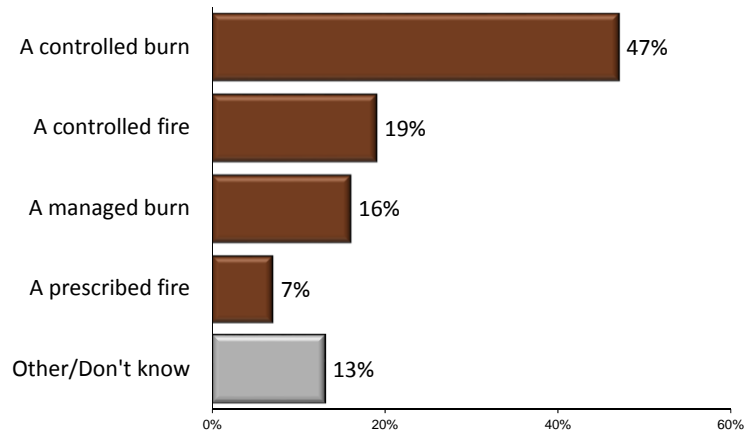
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Q5. Let me read you a pair of statements and please tell me which one comes closer to your own view.

20

Given the choice among several terms, "controlled burn" is the clear leader.

There are a number of terms used to describe the practice of setting small, intentional fires when doing so will safely reduce the amount of fuel that might lead to a dangerous wildfire in the future. Which ONE would give you a more favorable impression?



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Q7.

21

The preference for “controlled burn” is strongest in rural areas, the Midwest and West.

Statement	Big City	Small/ Med City	Suburb	Small Town	Rural Area	North east	Mid west	South	West
Controlled burn	36%	49%	45%	48%	52%	37%	52%	46%	50%
Controlled fire	17%	24%	22%	19%	15%	18%	15%	23%	17%
Managed burn	27%	12%	14%	14%	14%	17%	15%	17%	14%
Prescribed fire	6%	2%	8%	8%	9%	11%	6%	6%	7%
Other/DK	14%	12%	10%	12%	10%	16%	12%	10%	12%

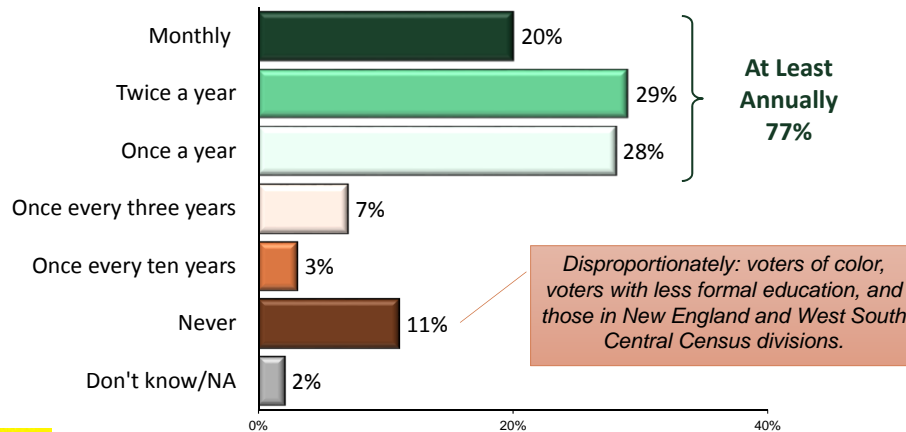
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Q7. There are a number of terms used to describe the practice of setting small, intentional fires when doing so will safely reduce the amount of fuel that might lead to a dangerous wildfire in the future. Which ONE would give you a more favorable impression?

22

More than three-quarters are willing to tolerate intentional fires at least annually.

How often would you be willing to tolerate some smoke in your area from small fires intentionally set by fire professionals, in order to potentially avoid a future out-of-control fire that would create a great deal of smoke?



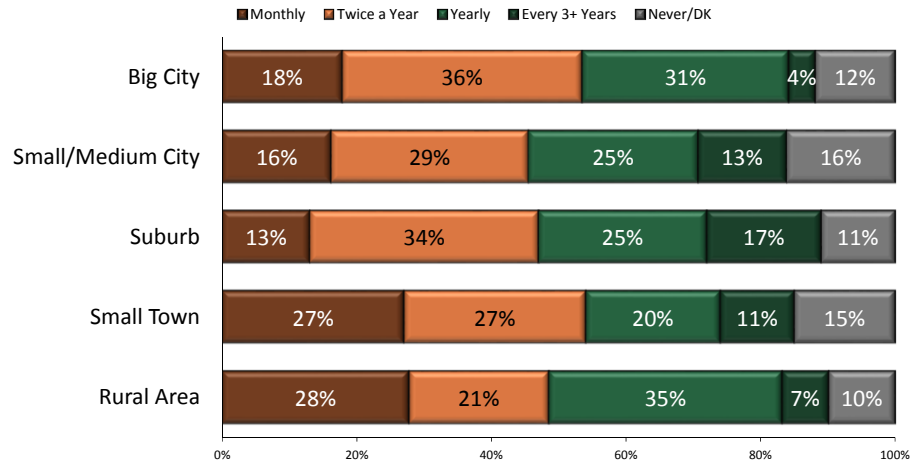
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Q8.

23

Small-town and rural voters say they would tolerate intentional fires with the most frequency.

By Type of Area



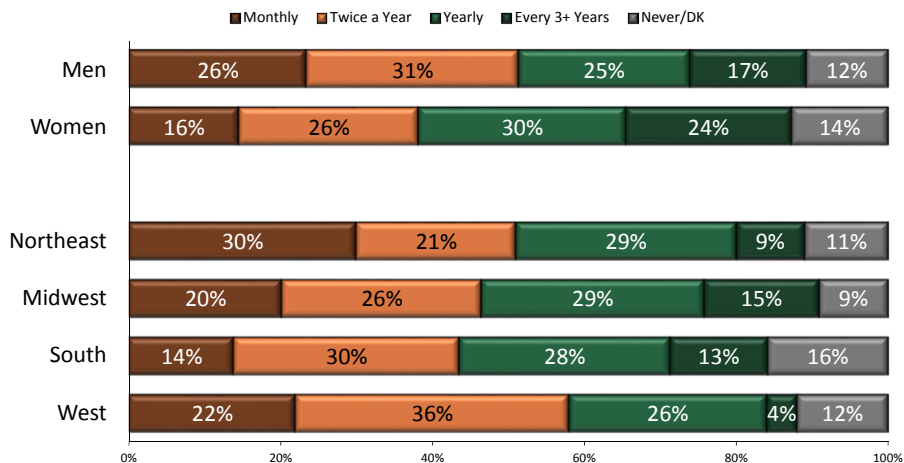
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Q8: How often would you be willing to tolerate some smoke in your area from small fires intentionally set by fire professionals, in order to potentially avoid a future out-of-control fire that would create a great deal of smoke?

24

Two in five or more men, Northeastern and Western voters say they would tolerate monthly fires.

By Census Region and Gender



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Q8: How often would you be willing to tolerate some smoke in your area from small fires intentionally set by fire professionals, in order to potentially avoid a future out-of-control fire that would create a great deal of smoke?

25



Firewood as a Messaging Example

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The slogan that professions think is most effective is "Don't Move Firewood."

**BUY IT WHERE
YOU BURN IT.**

**DONTMOVE
FIREWOOD.org**



Buy It Where You Burn It

28%

Don't Move Firewood

46%

Buy Local, Burn Local

26%

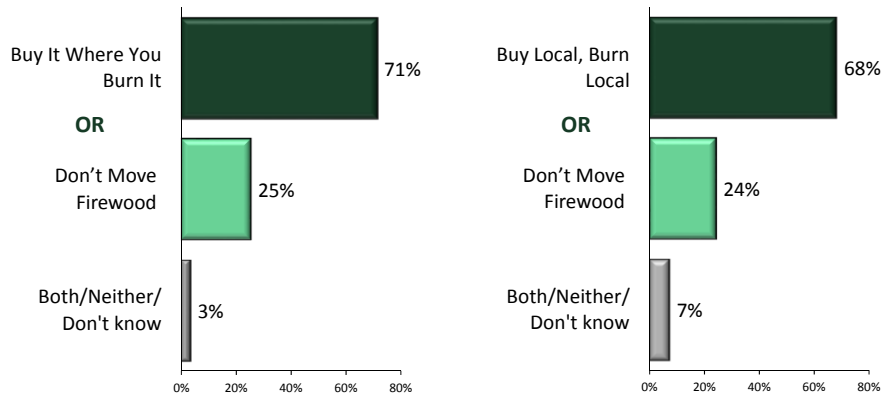
0% 20% 40% 60%

27

"Don't Move Firewood" is rated less effective than two other slogans.

**BUY IT WHERE
YOU BURN IT.**

**DONTMOVE
FIREWOOD.org**

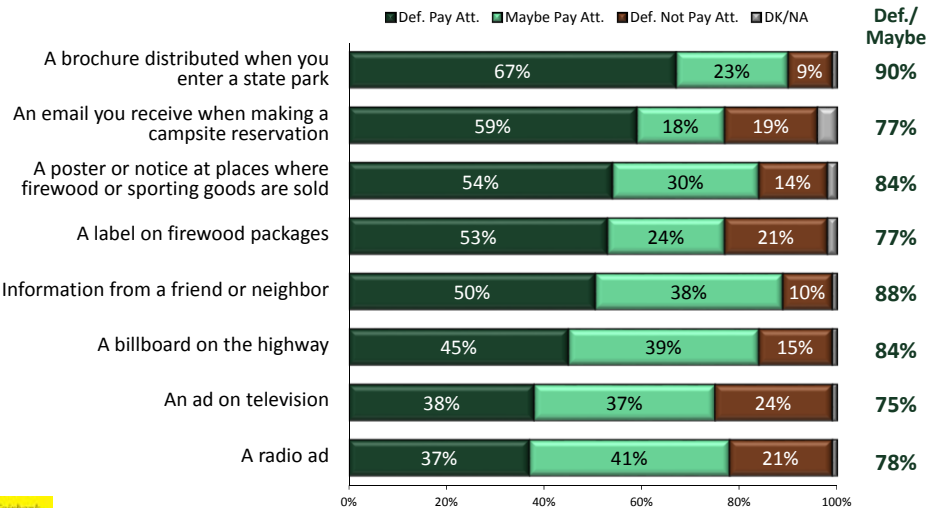


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Q23. I am going to read you two different phrases you may hear in a discussion of this issue. Please tell me which of these two is MORE effective as a slogan on an educational poster or billboard.

28

A brochure at park entry is most likely to capture attention.

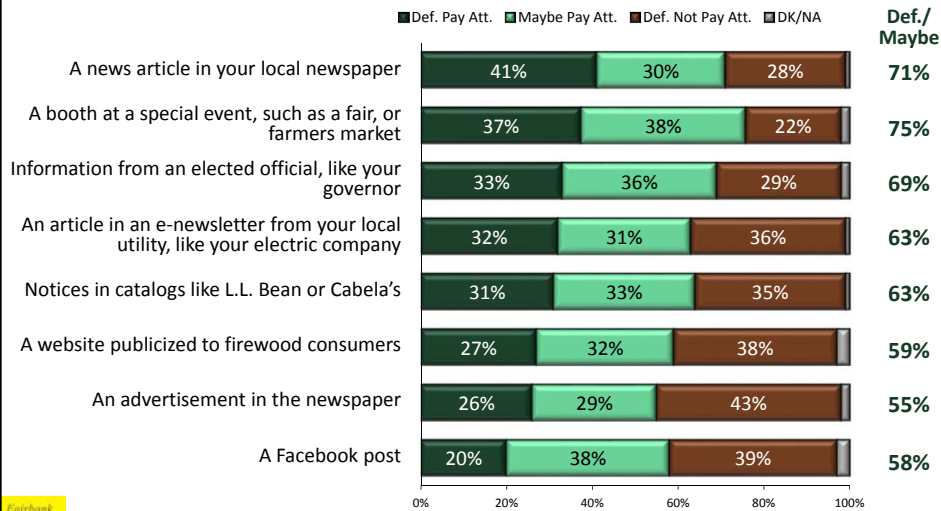


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Q24. I am going to read you a list of ways to present information about not moving firewood to the public. Please tell me whether you would definitely pay attention, maybe pay attention, or definitely not pay attention to information about not moving firewood if it were presented to you in that way. Split Sample

29

Facebook posts or newspaper ads are less likely to attract attention.

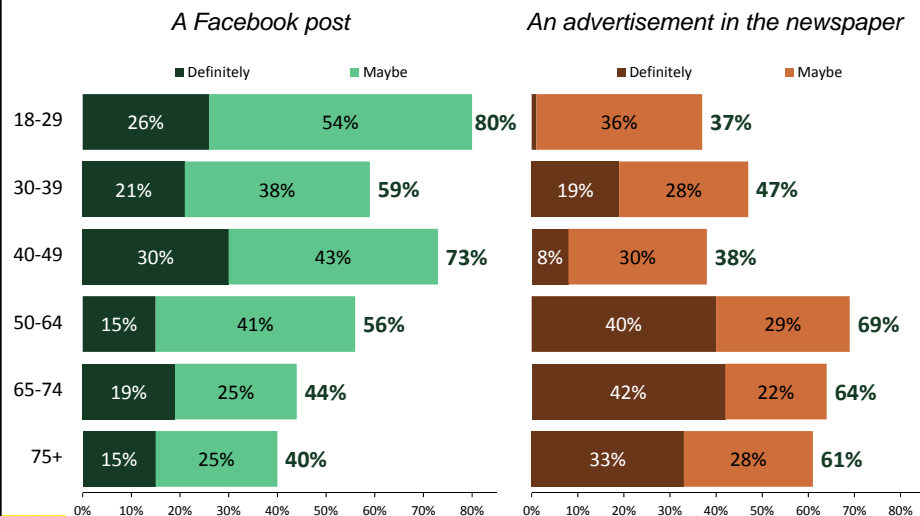


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Q24. I am going to read you a list of ways to present information about not moving firewood to the public. Please tell me whether you would definitely pay attention, maybe pay attention, or definitely not pay attention to information about not moving firewood if it were presented to you in that way. Split Sample

30

Age is strongly correlated with preferred communication methods.

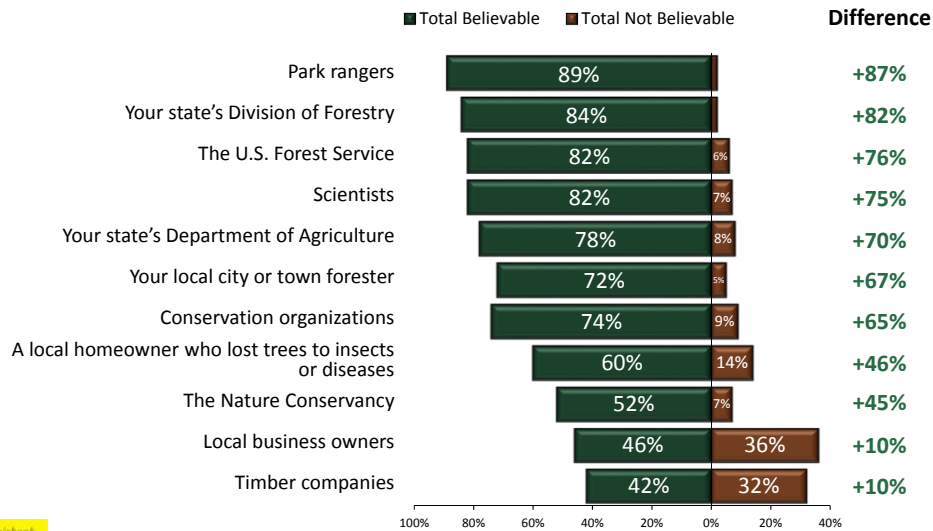


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Q24h/j. I am going to read you a list of ways to present information about not moving firewood to the public. Please tell me whether you would definitely pay attention, maybe pay attention, or definitely not pay attention to information about not moving firewood if it were presented to you in that way.

31

Park rangers, foresters and scientists are most trusted on issues of forest health.



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Q13. I'm going to read the names of some people and organizations that might speak out about issues relating to forest health. Please tell me whether you would consider that person or organization a believable source of information about forest issues. If you have never heard of the person or organization, or have no opinion about it, please tell me that too. Split Sample

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Conclusions

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Conclusions

- Forest and fire issues are not in the topmost tier of voter concerns; concern has held largely stable over the past decade.
- However, most voters also continue to believe that forest health is declining.
- Voters continue to express concern that forest fires are worsening, and a modest plurality attributes the change to global warming.
- About half in the Pacific and Western regions know someone personally affected by a wildfire.
- A majority continues to express a desire to see forest fires extinguished immediately; they are willing to accept impacts from smoke as part of controlled burns to address the issue.
 - “Controlled burn” remains the public’s preferred term for talking about “prescribed fire.”
 - Most voters are willing to accept impacts from smoke on at least an annual basis to accommodate such activity.
- While a packaging label, park brochure or billboard would catch the attention of Americans broadly, other methods (such as Facebook or print advertising) are only appropriate to certain age groups.
- Park rangers, scientists, and public agencies tasked with forest management have very high credibility.

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