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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Survey of New York State Voters on Conservation

DATE: September 22, 2015

The Democratic polling firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and the Republican polling firm of Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently partnered to complete a statewide survey of New York voters to assess their support for various proposals to enhance funding for land, water, and wildlife conservation in the state.¹ The results show that **New York voters overwhelmingly support enhanced conservation funding, both through a bond measure and by fully funding the existing Environmental Protection Fund.** Fully 70 percent of voters said they would vote “yes” on a \$5 billion bond act to protect clean air and water in the state. Among an array of potential uses of conservation funding, protecting water quality and rebuilding failing infrastructure are top priorities for New York State voters. More than seven in ten voters also back providing full funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) at \$300 million per year.

Other key specific findings from the survey include:

- **Water quality and infrastructure rank among residents’ top concerns.** As shown in **Figure 1** on the next page, given a list of issues affecting New York State, more than three in five judged *pollution of rivers and streams* and *deterioration of dams, levees, pipelines, and other infrastructure to provide water supplies* as “extremely” or “very serious” problems – far more than said the same for issues like *the amount you pay in state taxes* or *traffic congestion*.

FIGURE 1
Problems Affecting New York State

Now I will mention a few things some people say could be a problem or issue affecting New York State today. After I mention each one, please tell me whether you personally think it is an extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious problem or not a problem at all for residents of New York State.

Issue	Extremely/ Very Serious Problem
Waste and mismanagement in state government	80%
Deteriorating roads, highways, and bridges	77%
The cost of health care	75%
The quality of public education	74%
The economy and unemployment	68%
Pollution of rivers and streams	64%
Too much government spending	63%
Deterioration of dams, levees, pipelines, and other infrastructure to provide water supplies	60%
Global warming	57%
The amount you pay in state taxes	55%
Cuts in funding for vital local services	51%
Climate change	50%
Air pollution	48%
Loss of farmland	47%
Traffic congestion	46%
Severe storms and extreme weather	44%

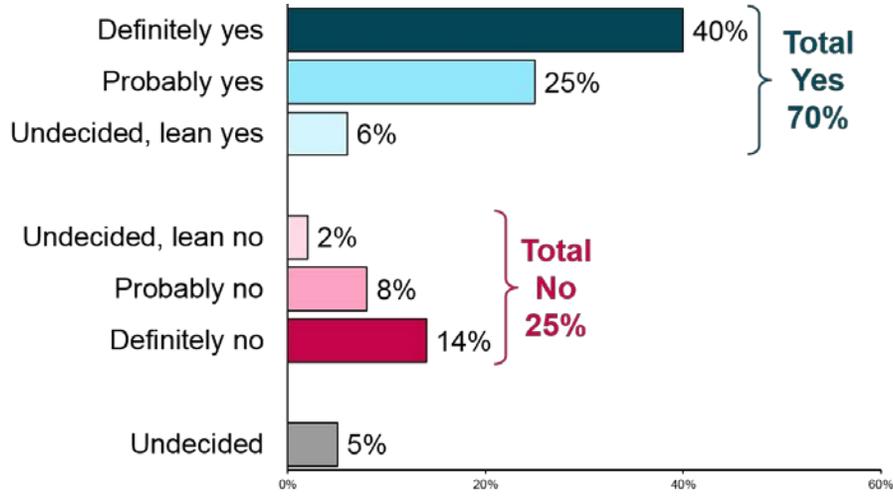
- **Voters overwhelmingly support a conservation bond measure for New York State.** As shown in **Figure 2** on the next page, seventy percent said they would vote for a bond measure to fund clean water, clean air and infrastructure projects – 40 percent saying they would “definitely” vote “yes.” Significantly, there are nearly three times as many “definitely yes” as “definitely no” voters, a reliable predictor of passage.

Shares of “yes” voters were robust across a variety of demographic groups, such as:

- ✓ Majorities in each party: 81 percent of Democrats, 51 percent of Republicans, and 68 percent of independents;
- ✓ Three-quarters (76%) of women, and nearly two-thirds (65%) of men;
- ✓ More than four in five (83%) voters of color, and 66 percent of white voters; and
- ✓ Twice as many Upstate voters said they would vote “yes” (61 percent) as “no” (32 percent), while New York City voters were also strongly in favor at 77 percent “yes.”

FIGURE 2
Support for Conservation Bond Measure

The Clean Water and Clean Air Bond Act of 2016. Shall Chapter 412 of the laws of 2016 known as the Clean Water and Clean Air Bond Act of 2016, authorizing the creation of state debt to provide monies for the preservation, enhancement, restoration, and improvement of the quality of the state’s water, air, farmland, parks, environment and natural resources; for the construction of projects to ensure a reliable supply of clean water and to treat wastewater; and for the restoration of natural areas that provide protection against floods and storms; in the amount of \$5 billion, be approved?



- **Water and disaster preparedness are voters’ clear top priorities – but they label a wide array of conservation funding projects as important.** As shown in **Figure 3**, New York voters are by far most supportive of conservation spending on water quality, especially infrastructure: more than three quarters name *protecting sources of drinking water; cleaning up our rivers, lakes and streams; improving our public infrastructure so it can withstand natural disasters; and rebuilding infrastructure* as at least “very important.” In fact, all but one priority are seen as “very important” by a majority of voters.

FIGURE 3
Priorities for New York State Conservation Funding

Project	Extremely/ Very Important
Protecting sources of drinking water	88%
Cleaning up our rivers, lakes, and streams	77%
Improving our public infrastructure so it can withstand natural disasters	77%
Rebuilding infrastructure to provide a reliable supply of water	76%
Preserving Adirondack and Catskill forests that filter drinking water and protect wildlife habitat	74%

Project	Extremely/ Very Important
Replacing leaking and undersized local sewer or septic systems	74%
Protecting roads and public transit from the impact of extreme weather disasters	73%
Protecting forests to improve air quality	68%
Protecting fish and wildlife habitat	68%
Ensuring a supply of locally-grown food for communities in New York State	67%
Keeping parks open and well-maintained	66%
Protecting communities from the impact of extreme weather	61%
Providing funds to replace polluting boilers in residential buildings and improve air quality	54%
Providing public access to the waterfront, including beach and river areas	52%
Restoring wetlands, creating trails, and building playgrounds in cities that also reduce polluted stormwater	48%

- New York voters also strongly support fully funding the Environmental Protection Fund.** Voters were offered a description of the state’s Environmental Protection Fund, which was created to provide reliable funding to protect clean drinking water, natural areas, state parks and farmland, and to protect public health. Voters also heard the following:

“Funding comes primarily from existing taxes on the sale of real estate. However, over the years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been diverted from the environmental protection fund to unrelated purposes. In 2007, the state legislature committed to restoring funding for the environmental protection fund to 300 million dollars per year. So far this amount of funding has not actually been provided.”

More than seven in ten (73%) voters said they support fully funding the Environmental Protection Fund. As shown in **Figure 4** on the next page, this is notably higher than in 2011, when just over half (53%) supported this proposal. In addition, opposition has shrunk by 10 points, from 32 percent opposed in 2011 to just 22 percent opposed.

FIGURE 4
Support for Fully Funding the Environmental Protection Fund
Would you support providing the full committed annual funding for the Environmental Protection Fund on an ongoing basis, at a level of \$300 million per year?



- **Majorities also favor a variety of specific mechanisms to fund the EPF.** As shown in **Figure 5**, about two-thirds of voters support dedicating funding from the financial firm settlement (67%) or from the state sales tax on outdoor gear (65%). A narrower majority, 53 percent, supports raising money by increasing the amount dedicated by the existing tax on real estate sale or transfer.

FIGURE 5
Environmental Protection Fund Mechanisms
Here is a list of ways that money might be raised to help provide dedicated, ongoing funding for the Environmental Protection Fund – in addition to current funding from the existing state tax on the sale or transfer of real estate. Please tell me whether you would favor or oppose each one.

Mechanism	Total Support	Total Oppose
Dedicating <i>existing</i> funding from the State of New York’s legal settlement with financial firms	67%	24%
Dedicating funding from the <i>existing</i> state sales tax on the sale of sporting goods for hunting, fishing or outdoor recreation	65%	32%
<i>Increasing</i> the amount of money dedicated from the <i>existing</i> state tax on the sale or transfer of real estate	53%	41%

Taken together, the survey results indicate that a \$5 billion Clean Water and Clean Air Bond Act has an excellent chance at winning approval from New York State voters. More than two-thirds support protecting drinking water sources; rebuilding infrastructure so it can deliver clean drinking water and withstand natural disasters; and cleaning up rivers, lakes and streams. New Yorkers across a variety of demographic groups also strongly support fully funding the existing Environmental Protection Fund, and support a variety of mechanisms to ensure that the State can do so. In addition, voters show a clear interest in conservation more generally, ranking water supply and deteriorating water infrastructure as among their top concerns.

ⁱ **Methodology:** Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) conducted a statewide telephone survey, on landline and wireless phones, of 800 New York voters likely to cast ballots in November 2016. The survey was conducted from Aug. 30 to Sept. 4, 2015. The margin of sampling error for the full study is +/- 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups will be higher. Due to rounding, some percentages may not sum to 100%.