



PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates - FM3

Public Opinion Research & Strategy

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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Key Findings from Recent Survey Regarding San Francisco Bay Restoration

DATE: February 12, 2014

The bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently completed a survey of 1,800 voters in the nine-county Bay Area to assess opinions about the San Francisco Bay and reactions to a potential regional measure to fund Bay restoration.ⁱ The survey results show that the measure continues to appear viable for the November 2014 ballot, with a consistent two-thirds of local voters in support.

Among the key findings of the survey are the following:

- **The overall public mood is continuing to show signs of improvement.** From a low point in 2011, an increasing number of Bay Area voters say that the region is headed in a positive direction. Fifty-seven percent feel the Bay Area is headed in the “right direction,” with optimism greatest among upper-income and highly educated voters. Only conservative Republicans express any significant pessimism.
- **A consistent two-thirds of Bay Area voters indicate support for a regional measure to fund Bay restoration.** Given draft ballot language for a potential Bay restoration parcel tax, 67 percent of voters initially indicate they would support such a measure. Demographically, support is strongest among Democrats, independents, liberals, women, renters, and well-educated voters. Support is comparatively lower among Republicans, conservatives, men, homeowners, less well-educated voters, and African Americans. Age, income and union

affiliation did not appear to play a significant role in support. Support is lowest in Napa, Solano and Contra Costa counties, though majorities of voters in those counties still expressed support for a measure.

- **Support does not appear to be sensitive to the amount or duration tested.** Using split samples, the poll tested support for taxes in the amounts of nine or fourteen dollars, and durations of ten or twenty years. Levels of support generally held within the margin of error at both the nine and fourteen dollar price points, and for either 10-year or 20-year durations.
- **Support for a regional Bay Restoration parcel tax has steadily risen over time.** Surveys testing similar regional measure concepts were conducted in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013. Support in the 2010 and 2011 surveys generally fell in the mid-to-upper 50's, while support in this most recent survey was at 67 percent.
- **While opposition to a measure is largely driven by anti-tax sentiment, support is more diffuse and general in nature.** Measure supporters expressed a wide variety of reasons for voting “yes,” including its environmental benefits, a desire to preserve the Bay for future generations, support for improving water quality, and their perception that the measure’s costs were reasonable. Opponents generally did not question the merits of investing in Bay restoration, but were opposed to an increase in local taxes.
- **Support increases modestly with positive messaging and criticisms have only a marginal impact.** Survey respondents were presented first with a series of arguments in favor of the measure, and then arguments against the measure. Collectively, the impact of these pro and con messages was limited, though support did increase in the low 70's after only positives. However, the intensity of support – the proportion stating they would “definitely” vote “yes” – did increase ten points. These findings suggest that there exists a ceiling of support, likely not far above the two-thirds vote threshold.
- **Nearly two-thirds of voters say they would like to see money spent where it can be used most effectively.** Survey respondents were asked to choose which of two positions came closer to their own opinion: whether money raised in their county should be spent in the county, or whether it should be spent where it could most effectively help the Bay. Nearly two-thirds express a preference for spending it where it can be used most effectively (65%) – up from 58 percent in 2010.
- **The top tier of messages focus on future generations, fish contamination, and the diverse ways that people experience the Bay.** Over 80 percent found arguments in favor of the measure focusing on leaving a legacy for future generations, on the many ways residents connect with and appreciate the Bay, and on preventing contamination of fish to be “convincing” reasons to vote “yes.” Furthermore, these themes also generated the most intensely positive reactions, with more than two in five finding them to be “very” convincing reasons to vote for the measure.

- **The greatest vulnerabilities for the measure are assertions that money will be wasted; that the cost of living is too high to support an additional tax; and that it is unfair to require the same payment from voters living further from the Bay.** While these criticisms – even the most compelling ones – tested at levels far below the best positive messages, they were still seen as convincing reasons to vote “no” by more than two in five voters, a proportion that exceeds the one-third threshold necessary to defeat the measure.

Taken together, the results show that it is clearly possible for a Bay restoration measure to win approval from voters this November, but that it will require a substantial public education effort to demonstrate the benefits of the measure to local voters.

ⁱ **Methodology:** From January 22 – February 1, 2014, FM3 and POS completed 1,800 telephone interviews (on landlines and cell phones) with voters in the nine-county Bay Area likely to cast a ballot in the November 2014 statewide election. 900 interviews were conducted across the Bay Area in a natural geographic distribution, while another 900 interviews were distributed equally between the nine Bay Area counties (i.e., 100 in each county). The margin of sampling error for the results across the entire Bay Area is +/-2.7% at the 95% confidence level, while the margins of sampling error ranged from +/-5.5% to +/-9.2% in each county. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.