



THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY



West Virginia Wilderness Coalition

Wilderness: Keeping the Wild in Wonderful West Virginia!

The Importance of Wilderness in West Virginia: A Brief Review of Economic and Public Opinion Data

Protected forest ecosystems are of great importance to human well being in West Virginia. Wild forest areas provide numerous services and economic opportunities for our local and regional communities. Wild, roadless forests are becoming increasingly rare and valuable. They have benefits that roaded, impacted forests cannot provide. They offer a high quality water supply, numerous and popular forms of outdoor recreation, climate regulation, wildlife habitat and clean air, as well as other economic benefits. Without protection through wilderness designation, these values could eventually be lost. Public opinion seems to lean heavily towards protecting more wilderness. As our world becomes more urban and industrial, it is increasingly important that people have, or at least know exists, wild, untouched land to experience and enjoy.

Economics

What is the value of water from natural, wild forests?

- Wild forests are crucial for maintaining and restoring watersheds and providing high water quality.
- In 2000, the US Forest Service estimates that more than one fifth of the US population (around 60 million) get their water from National Forest sources. The estimated worth annually of this water is a minimum of \$3.7 billion. (Sedell, et al, 2000, TWS 2001)
- This is especially relevant on the Monongahela National Forest which was actually created to protect watersheds and control flooding.
- Water quality is easily degraded when headwaters areas are subject to clear-cut logging and road building. (Tombulak, Frissel 2000).
- Protecting the forest is an economically sound way to protect our water. A good example of protecting water quality by preserving forest land can be found in New Jersey. They chose to spend \$55 million to protect the Sterling Forest Watershed rather than spending an estimate of \$160 million in filtration costs (TWS 2001 by Krieger).

Just as important as water, air pollution is a serious public concern. Good air quality and carbon sequestration benefits are provided by our wild, intact forests.

- The U.S Forest Service estimates that our National Forests yield annually \$3.4 billion annually as benefits of carbon sequestration (TWS 2001 by Krieger)
- In Washington, D.C, trees remove annually 878,000 pounds of pollutants. The annual value of trees with respect to air pollution is \$2.1 million (American Forest Organization).
- For Atlanta, GA metro, trees remove 19,000,000 pounds of pollutants annually. Trees are valued at \$47 million with respect to air pollution. (American Forest Organization)
- With carbon credits already exchanging for between \$1 and \$20 per ton around the world, \$300 to \$600 per acre could be realized through protected forests (TWS 2001).
- In a more recent study focused on wilderness in the lower 48 states, Loomis and Richardson estimate \$150 per acre per year for carbon storage, climate regulation and waste treatment (filtering air and water).

In addition to clean water and air, West Virginia's wild forest heritage brings recreation and tourism that contribute to the development of our local and regional economy.

- Eastern wilderness produces about \$44 worth of recreation per acre each year. And visitors to wilderness generate an additional \$44 per acre per year of spending in nearby communities. That spending translates into support for one job for every 550 acres of wilderness. A National Sporting Goods Association survey estimates that participation in wilderness camping and hiking by residents increased 47.5 percent from 1990 to 1998. (Loomis and Richardson)
- According to Costanza, et al. (1998) temperate forests like West Virginia's provide ecosystem services that are valued in \$122 per acre per year. **Agriculture and forestry raw material production is responsible for less than one tenth of this.** On the other hand, all direct uses, including recreation count for about one third. So, it can be said that natural, untouched forests offer in excess of \$80 per acre per year (The Wilderness Society 2001)
- In 1996, spending related to recreation in West Virginia topped \$1 billion dollars (West Virginia Highlands Conservancy 1998). During that year, State residents and non-residents spent \$589 million on wildlife-associated recreation in West Virginia (US Fish and Wildlife Service 1996)
- According to a study conducted by GAI Consultants, Inc. and Marshall University's Center for Business and Economic Research, West Virginia State Parks produce \$105-Million Economic Impact and is responsible for nearly 2,700 West Virginia jobs directly (West Virginia Division of Natural Resources 1999).

- During 1997, West Virginia State Parks produced a \$96 million in visitor spending, from that, \$36 million was spent by out-of-state visitors (West Virginia Division of Natural Resources 1999).
- For the year 2001, the four National Parks in West Virginia earned \$76.1 million. (National Park Service 2001)
- While state and national parks are not the same as designated wilderness, they benefit greatly by having additional attractions such as wilderness areas nearby for visitors to enjoy. Wilderness areas are part of a well known, national system that is a proven tourist attraction.

Number of Participants per State for Wilderness Related Activities

	WV	VA	OH	MD	KY	PA	Total
Backpacking	112,063	293,060	325,213	294,145	180,193	659,191	1,863,865
Bird watching	34,751	326,237	852,584	224,694	148,580	630,109	2,216,955
Camping	186,287	436,825	791,058	253,291	199,161	833,683	2,700,305
Canoeing	186,287	619,297	887,753	551,521	180,193	940,317	3,365,368
Climbing	37,840	71,883	61,527	110,304	60,064	232,656	574,274
Fly Fishing	224,127	182,471	360,371	110,304	148,580	630,109	1,655,962
Hiking	372,575	1,675,419	3,357,600	1,691,332	894,643	135,716	8,127,285
Kayaking	1,455	110,589	35,158	73,536	9,484	416,841	647,063
XC Skiing	2,911	38,706	430,687	183,840	60,064	77,552	793,760
Snowshoeing	14,554	110,589	96,685	73,536	6,323	184,186	485,873
Trail Running	224,127	691,180	887,743	73,536	537,418	1,337,770	3,751,774
Total state:	1,396,977	4,556,256	8,086,379	3,640,039	2,424,703	6,078,130	26,182,484

(Outdoor Industry Foundation 2003)

- According to a survey done by the Outdoor Industry Foundation in 2003, over 26 million people who live in West Virginia and surrounding states participate in wilderness and wild land related activities. It stands to reason that states offering more opportunities to participate in these activities stand to benefit economically.

How else do protected wild lands contribute to the economy?

- **Real Estate Enhancement Value:** Protected land can enhance the value of nearby private property. In the area surrounding the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont, land prices are higher in towns that contain wilderness, while land price decreases with distance from a wilderness boundary (Phillips 2000).
- In Boulder, Colorado, housing prices declined an average of \$4.20 per foot of distance from a greenbelt up to 3,200 feet. As high as \$10.20 decline for each foot of distance was

observed in one of the neighborhoods. Considering other variables being equal, property near a protected area will increase in value by 32% compared to those 3,200 feet away (Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance National Park Service 1995).

- **Lower Public Service Costs:** Though many towns may express a concern about the impact of public lands on local tax revenues, it is *net revenues* that really matter. Open space typically generates more local tax revenue than the cost of the public services it requires – cows and moose don't ride school buses (TWS 2001).
- Recent studies in Maine and the Adirondacks reveal that towns with more open space have lower tax rates (Brighton 1997) and that amount of protected land is not associated with higher or lower tax bills (Ad Hoc Associates 1996).
- **Passive Use Values:** These include option value (what it's worth to preserve the option of future use), bequest value (what it's worth to pass a resource unimpaired to future generations) and existence value (what it's worth to preserve a resource that one has no expectation of using in the future). Loomis and Richardson estimate the passive use value of wilderness in the eastern U.S. as about \$4/acre/year. Again, this value is produced before the first hiker puts on her backpack.

How important is the Timber Industry to West Virginia's Economy?

- According to the USDA forest Service, only 3.2% of the State's timber is supplied by the Monongahela National Forest (TWS 2001)
- In 1998 only 1.6% of all jobs in West Virginia were provided by forest products manufacturing (TWS 2001).
- The industries employing the most people in the state are: Services with 259,016 jobs, or 29.3 percent of total employment; Retail trade (158,622 jobs and 18.0 percent), and Government and government enterprises (149,802 jobs and 17.0 percent) (BEA, 2001).
- The service sector includes a wide range of industries, from "hotels and lodging places" to "engineering and management services." These industries employ many professionals, from engineers to doctors and architects, whose positions would be neither low-wage nor dead-end as is sometimes assumed (TWS 2001).
- Designated wilderness greatly enhances the natural resource recreation segment of West Virginia's economy. Wilderness areas are an attraction, within a national system that draws visitors to the state for the type or recreation that they provide. Wilderness designation gives an area **name recognition**.

But won't increased timber harvest lead to more forest products manufacturing jobs?

- No. Due to increased use of labor-saving technologies, cutting more trees does not necessarily translate into employing more workers.
- In Maine, timber harvest increased by 38 percent from 1977 to 1992, but jobs in the industry declined by 12 percent during the same period. Phillips (1996) found that, statistically, there is no relationship between timber harvest and forest products manufacturing employment.
- Examples from other regions support the same conclusion. Between 1970 and 1990, 1.8 million roadless acres within three Montana national forests were developed for timber harvest. During the same period, 2,310 timber jobs were lost in the six-county region surrounding these forests (a 31 percent drop) (Rasker 1994).
- Nationwide, Rasker, Gorte and Alkire (1996) conclude that, with some short-term exceptions, "there is very little predictable connection between employment and public timber harvesting".

Public Opinion

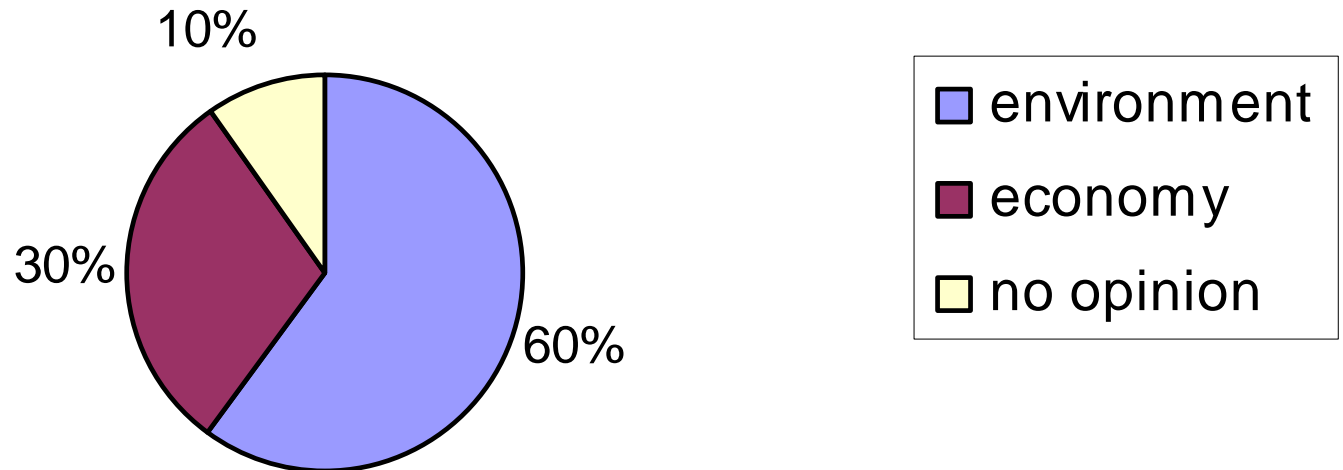
The benefits mentioned above are not the only reason why it protecting our forests is important. In West Virginia and the national as a whole, the public has a positive attitude toward environment and protected lands and they feel it is an extremely important issue that needs attention.

- In *A Different Shade of Green: West Virginian's Attitudes and Perceptions towards the Environment*, respondents were asked "Which is usually more important, economic development or environmental protection?" 60% of those asked felt that environmental protection was more important (Table 1)
- A study done in 1998 showed that a large majority (80%) of West Virginians believe the state should be doing more to purchase lands for outdoor recreation (West Virginia Division of Natural Resources 1999) (Table 2)
- An overwhelming 75% of West Virginia residents said public lands are very important, 19% said that are somewhat important and only 6% said they are not important at all (Responsive Management 1997)
- Respondents are more than three times as likely to favor (65%) than oppose (20%) designating more public land in their own states as wilderness. (Zogby International 2003) (Table 5)
- According to a national survey done by the Mellman group in 1999, 48% of US residents think the US has protected too little (not enough) wilderness, 35% said about right, 8% too much and 9% did not know.

- In the same study, after hearing that 18% of the land in the US National Forests is permanently protected from logging and other development, 63% thought it was not enough, 23% said was about right, 6% said too much and 85 did not know (Mellman group 1999)
- In 2001, a Los Angeles Times poll found that when asked “How important is it to you personally that wilderness and open spaces are preserved?” 51% of respondents stated that it was extremely important and 41% thought it was somewhat important. (Table 4)
- National Survey on Recreation and the Environment data shows that when polled, 69.8% of respondents favored designating more federal land as Wilderness in their own state. 42.5% of these strongly favored more Wilderness. This poll was conducted in 2000 and 2001. (Table 7)
- In a nationwide 1999 Responsive Management poll, licensed hunters and anglers registered near-consensus (91% of hunters and 92% of anglers) that it was important to them to have “places for solitude and natural experiences.” Nearly seven in ten said places for solitude and natural experience were “very important”. (Table 3)
- Following a nationwide public input process and the largest public response in the history of federal rulemaking, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was signed in January 2001, giving the promise of protecting 58.5 million acres of roadless land on national forests and national grasslands. A nationwide Los Angeles Times poll asked “Do you approve or disapprove of the ban on logging and road building in about 30 percent of the national forests?” By nearly two to one (58% to 32%) Americans supported the Forest Service action to protect this valuable natural resource.
- In a 1999 Melman Group poll, 60% of Americans thought that protecting pristine forests was more important than protecting timber and forest product jobs. 24 % thought timber and forest product jobs were more important and 16% did not know. (Table 6)
- 57 % of poll respondents in West Virginia had ‘Extremely Serious’ or ‘Very Serious’ concerns about the loss of open space and natural areas compared to 46% nationwide (Fraser, R, Hollenhorst, S, Collins) (Table 8)
- 59 % of West Virginians polled thought that laws to protect “wild or natural areas” were not restrictive enough (Fraser, R, Hollenhorst, S, Collins) (Table 9)

West Virginians, economy vs. environment

Which is usually more important economic development or environmental protection?



West Virginians: More places for Outdoor Recreation?

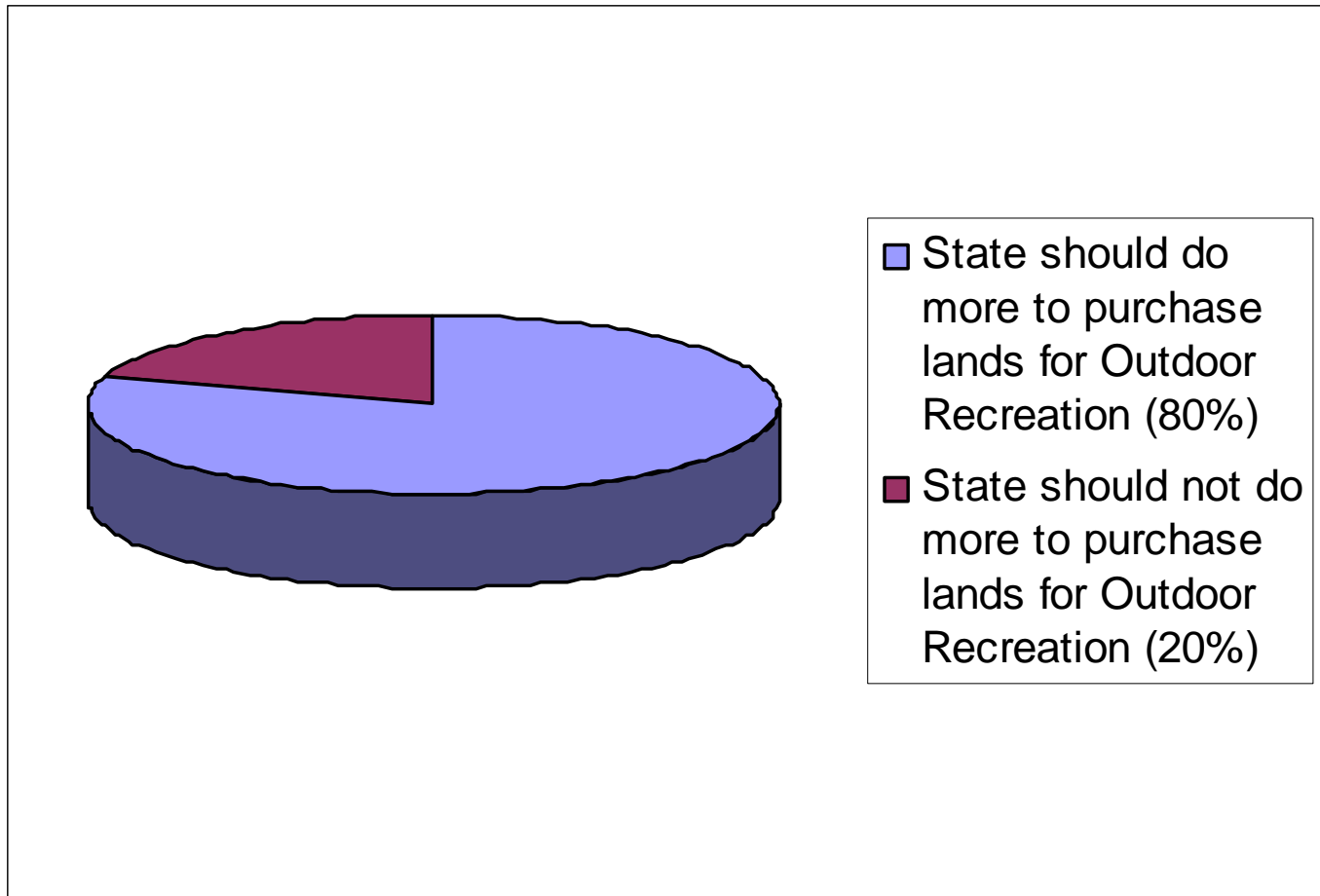
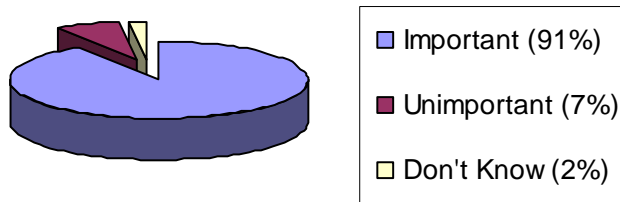


Table 2

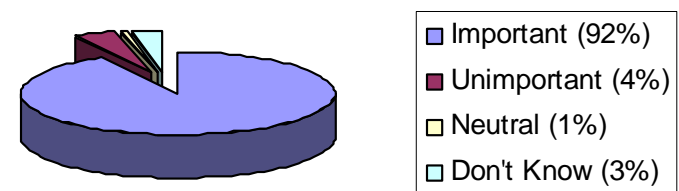
(West Virginia Division of Natural Resources 1999)

Importance of Places for Solitude and Natural Experiences: Hunters & Anglers

Hunters



Anglers



(Responsive Management Poll 1999)

Personal Importance of Preserving Wilderness: National Opinion



(Los Angeles Times Poll, April 2001)

Table 4

National Poll on Wilderness

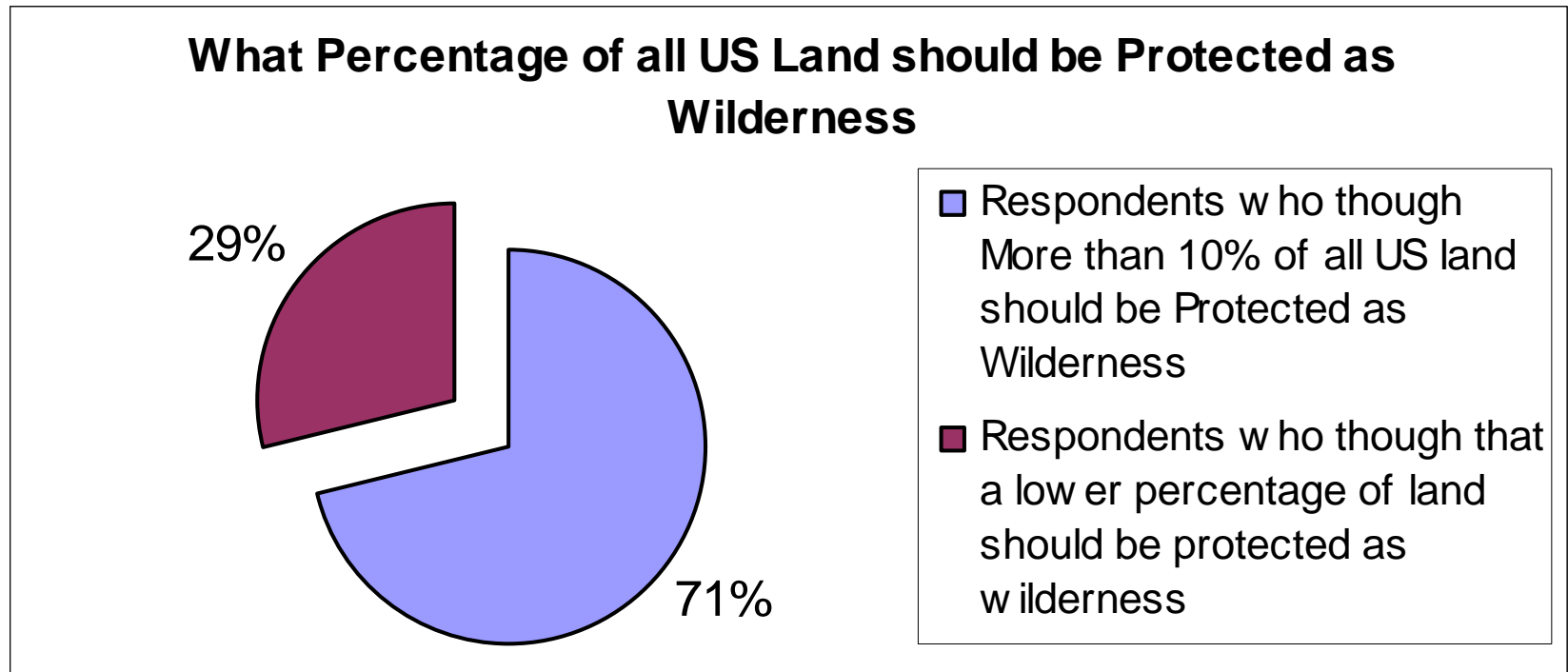
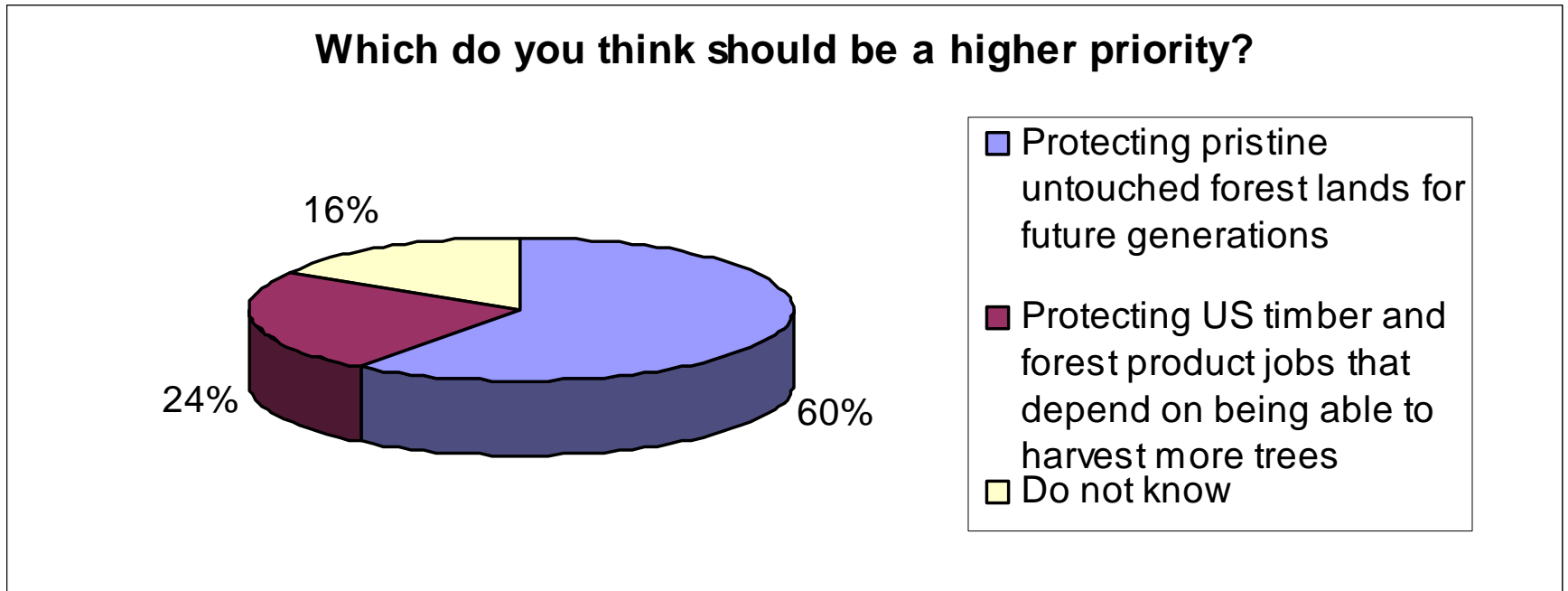


Table 5

(Zogby International 2003)

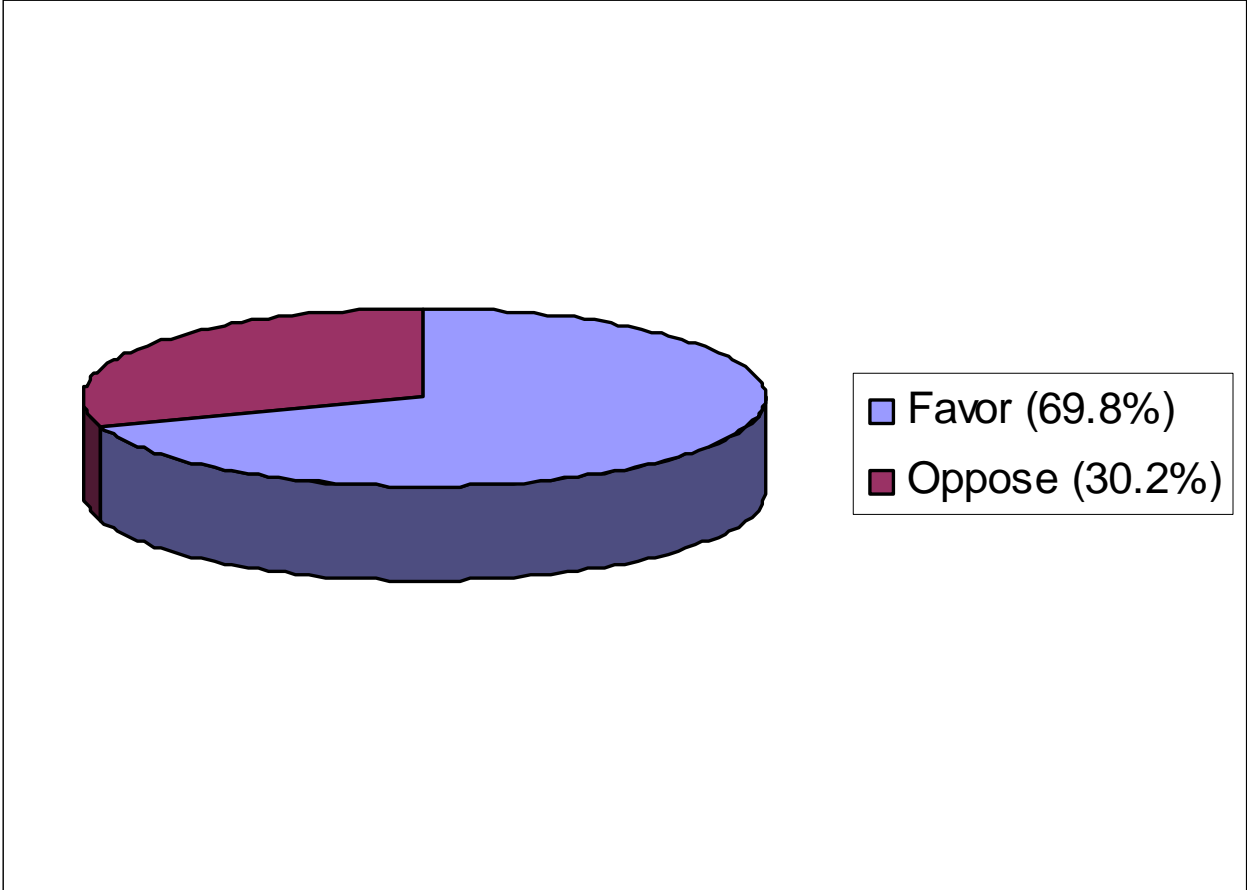
Protecting Forests vs. Timber Production



(Mellman group 1999)

Table 6

Opinions on designation of more wilderness on federal lands in respondents *own* state



(National Survey on Recreation and Environment, 2001)

Table 7

Percent of respondents with 'Extremely Serious' or 'Very Serious' concerns about the loss of open space and natural areas

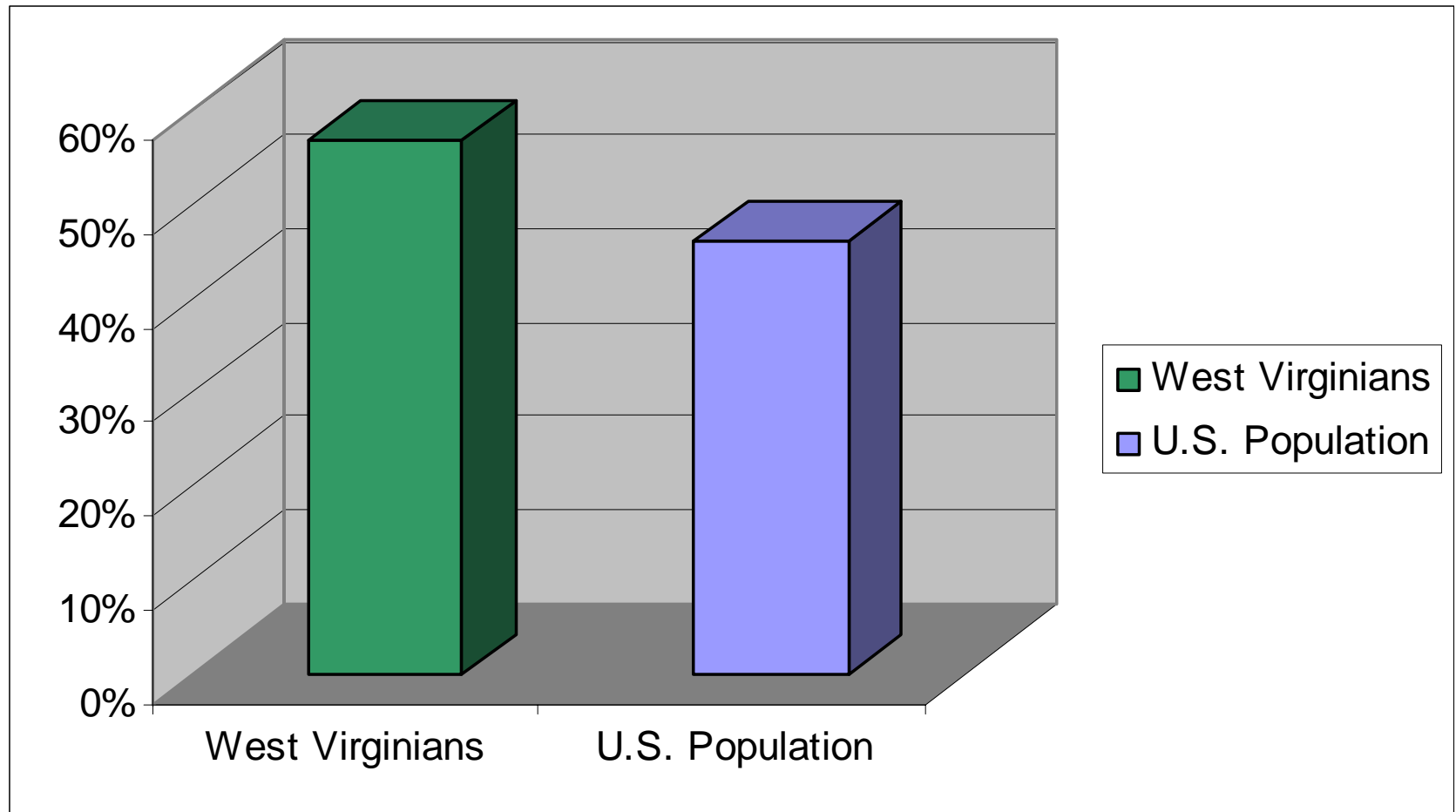
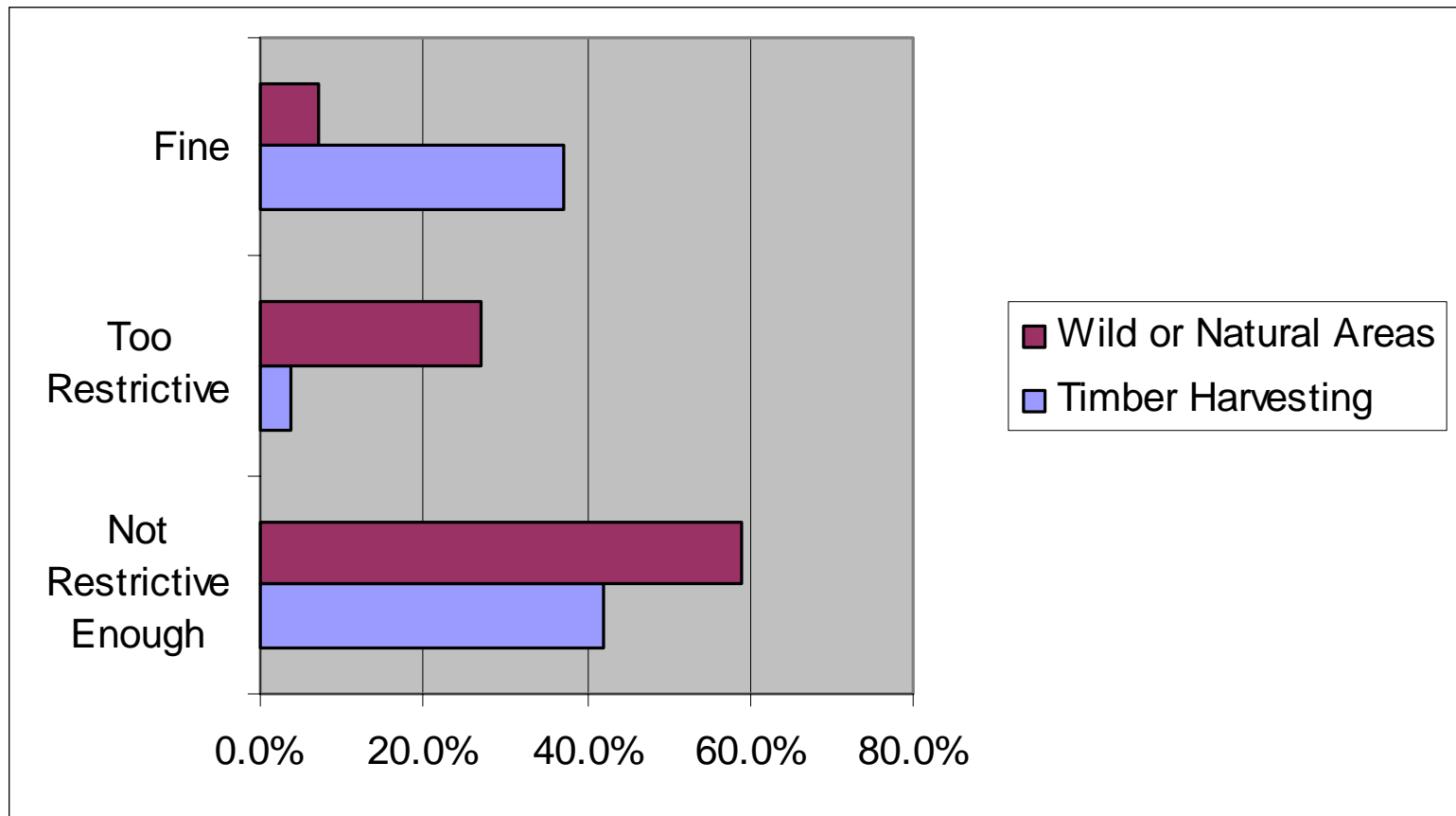


Table 8

(Fraser, Hollenhorst, Collins 1999)

Percentage of West Virginians who believe current environmental protection laws in the state are too restrictive, fine as they are, or not restrictive enough



(Fraser, Hollenhorst, Collins 1999)

Table 9

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