

Memo

To: The Wilderness Society
From: Nancy Belden, John Russonello and Emma White
Re: Findings from August omnibus
Date: August 21, 2008

The most recent Belden Russonello & Stewart national survey for The Wilderness Society, conducted from August 14-19, reveals that a majority of the public believes drilling offshore is not worth the risk of oil spills damaging the nation's beaches, and that a majority continues to support protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas drilling. While overall the public is divided about whether or not to drill in protected areas, those who feel strongly against drilling outnumber strong proponents of drilling. And when informed of the acreage already available to oil companies, a majority of Americans agrees that further drilling is unnecessary.

These are among the key findings of a nationally representative telephone survey of 819 adults conducted by Belden Russonello & Stewart on an omnibus questionnaire for The Wilderness Society between August 14 and August 19, 2008. The margin of sampling error for a sample of this size is ± 3.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Key Findings

1. Americans say offshore drilling not worth the risk of oil spills

A majority of Americans (57%) agrees that "oil drilling in currently protected ocean areas is not worth the risk of oil spills that could pollute the beaches from Florida to Maine and San Diego to Washington State," while only a third (35%) disagrees.

Without information about the risk of oil spills, Americans are evenly divided between support and opposition to offshore drilling. After the explanation that "for decades, the government has prohibited drilling for oil off of the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts in order to protect the ocean and beaches" and that "some in

Congress believe we should overturn that ban to explore for oil,” nearly half (47%) say “Congress should open these areas to oil drilling,” while almost the same number (46%) say “Congress should continue to protect them.” Strong support for protection (40%) is greater than strong support for opening these areas to drilling (31%).

2. Continued support for protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

When informed that “currently, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is a protected wildlife habitat where oil and gas drilling are off limits,” a majority of Americans (54%) agrees that Congress should “continue to protect this wildlife refuge,” while only 41% agree that Congress should “open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling.” Those who feel strongly in favor of protection (45%) greatly outnumber those who feel strongly in favor of drilling (28%). Six percent are unsure.

Attitudes on this question are little changed from June, when 55% supported protection (45% strongly) and 36% favored opening the area to drilling (27% strongly).

3. Majority agrees that current leases make new ones unnecessary

When presented with a statement that “opening more acres of protected lands and waters to oil drilling is not necessary because the oil and gas industry already has access to 91 million acres of public lands and waters,” a majority of Americans (57%) agrees, only a third (33%) disagrees, and 11% are unsure.

4. Divided on drilling’s impact on gas prices

Fewer than half of Americans (48%) agree that “allowing the oil companies to begin drilling for oil in protected lands and waters will lower gasoline prices for consumers,” and a similar number disagrees (46%).

5. Length of time to produce oil has little impact

Upon hearing that “the U. S. government says that it would take at least 10 years to produce any new oil from public lands and waters if new drilling were approved,” a majority (55%) says that statement “makes no difference” to their views of “opening more protected lands and coastal waters to oil drilling.” Two in ten Americans (21%) say the statement makes them less likely to favor drilling, and a similar number say it makes them more likely (19%).

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Open to Drilling or Protect

1. Currently, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska is a protected wildlife habitat where oil and gas drilling are off limits. In your opinion, ROTATE: (should Congress open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling, OR should Congress continue to protect this wildlife refuge?)

	Protect (net)	Open (net)	Protect strongly	Protect somewhat	Open somewhat	Open strongly	DK/REF
Total	54%	41	45%	9	13	28	6
Men	43%	51	38%	5	17	34	7
Women	63%	31	51%	12	9	22	6
Democrats	60%	33	51%	9	12	21	7
Independents	61%	33	51%	10	14	19	6
Republicans	28%	69	21%	7	13	56	2
18-34	70%	26	59%	11	9	17	5
35-44	48%	46	42%	6	16	30	6
45-54	49%	40	42%	7	8	32	11
55-64	48%	48	37%	11	21	27	4
65+	35%	60	27%	8	15	45	5

Protected Ocean Areas: Open to Drilling or Protect

2. For decades, the government has prohibited drilling for oil off of the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts in order to protect the ocean and beaches. Some in Congress believe we should overturn that ban to explore for oil. In your opinion, (ROTATE: should Congress open these areas to oil drilling, OR Should Congress continue to protect them?)

	Protect (net)	Open (net)	Protect strongly	Protect somewhat	Open somewhat	Open strongly	DK/REF
Total	46%	47	40%	6	16	31	7
Men	38%	58	34%	4	21	37	4
Women	53%	36	46%	7	11	25	10
Democrats	59%	35	52%	7	10	25	6
Independents	43%	46	40%	3	22	24	11
Republicans	24%	74	15%	9	16	58	1
18-34	60%	36	54%	6	13	23	5
35-44	44%	50	40%	4	20	30	6
45-54	45%	46	37%	8	10	36	8
55-64	40%	53	34%	6	27	26	8
65+	25%	66	19%	6	16	50	8

Impact on Gas Prices of Opening Public Lands and Offshore Areas

3. Allowing the oil companies to begin drilling for oil in protected lands and waters will lower gasoline prices for consumers.

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	48%	46	7
Men	50%	46	4
Women	45%	45	9
Democrats	42%	52	6
Independents	41%	51	8
Republicans	71%	25	5
18-34	48%	44	8
35-44	54%	44	3
45-54	41%	55	4
55-64	49%	46	5
65+	50%	39	11

Drilling not Worth the Risk Oil Spills will Harm Beaches

4. Oil drilling in currently protected ocean areas is not worth the risk of oil spills that could pollute the beaches from Florida to Maine and San Diego to Washington State.

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	57%	35	8
Men	48%	45	6
Women	65%	26	9
Democrats	69%	21	10
Independents	57%	35	8
Republicans	35%	62	3
18-34	61%	27	12
35-44	64%	34	2
45-54	59%	37	4
55-64	45%	46	8
65+	47%	43	10

Oil Industry Access to 91 million acres makes drilling unnecessary

5. Opening more acres of protected lands and waters to oil drilling is not necessary because the oil and gas industry already has access to 91 million acres of public lands and waters.

	Agree	Disagree	DK/REF
Total	57%	33	11
Men	54%	38	8
Women	60%	27	13
Democrats	68%	19	13
Independents	55%	35	10
Republicans	36%	58	6
18-34	62%	30	8
35-44	66%	26	8
45-54	55%	35	10
55-64	50%	42	8
65+	48%	34	18

Impact on Support for Drilling of Taking 10 Years to Produce

6. The U. S. government says that it would take at least 10 years to produce any new oil from public lands and waters if new drilling were approved. Does this statement make you more or less likely to support opening more protected lands and coastal waters to oil drilling or does it make no difference to you?

	More likely	Less likely	No difference	DK/REF
Total	19%	21	55	4
Men	21%	19	58	3
Women	17%	24	53	6
Democrats	19%	27	50	3
Independents	11%	21	63	5
Republicans	30%	10	55	5
18-34	15%	20	60	5
35-44	23%	21	56	*
45-54	18%	30	48	4
55-64	20%	17	61	2
65+	22%	18	47	13
