

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

*Opinion Research &
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Curtis Below
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates

RE: Key Findings from Recent North Carolina Voter Survey

DATE: April 24, 2009

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a survey of 600 voters in North Carolina to assess their attitudes toward State funding for land and water conservation.¹ Overall, the survey results show that while voters are highly concerned about creating jobs and economy, **they firmly believe the State budget should continue its commitment to funding land and water conservation.** In fact, over seven in ten voters (72%) feel that North Carolina's state government should be spending about the same or more for land and water conservation. Furthermore, many North Carolina voters are more inclined to re-elect their state representatives who support including funding for land and water conservation in this year's State budget.

Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- **Three out of four North Carolina voters believe the State budget should include funding for land and water conservation, even in these difficult economic times.** As shown in **Figure 1**, 76 percent of North Carolina voters agree with the statement, "Even given a decline in state revenues, the North Carolina state budget should include funding for land and water conservation," including 44 percent who

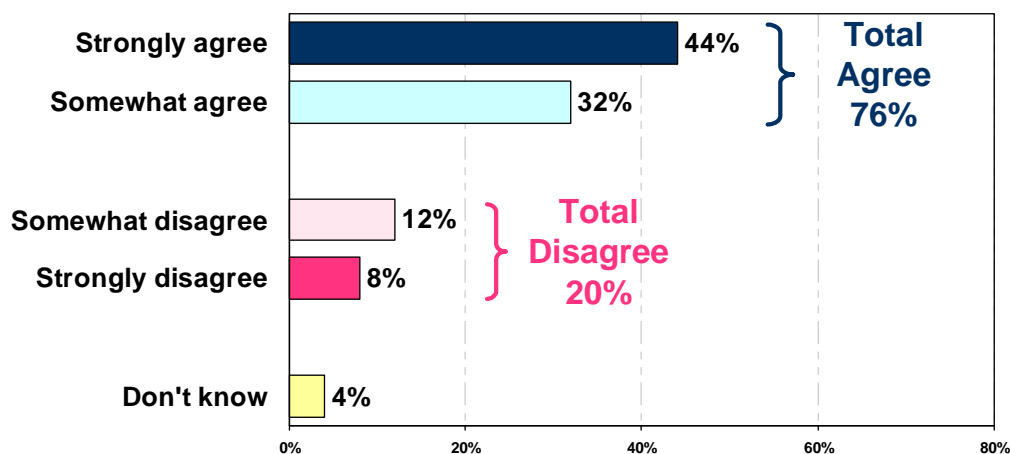
¹ **Methodology:** From April 17-21, 2009, FMM&A completed 600 telephone interviews with North Carolina voters. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 4.0%; margins of error for subgroups within the sample will be higher.

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“strongly” agree. These results suggest an electorate broadly supportive of North Carolina’s state government investing in land and water conservation.

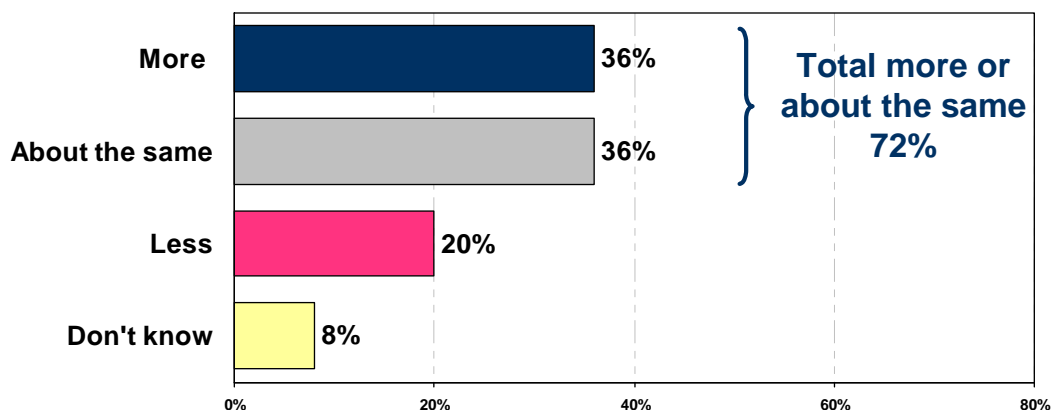
FIGURE 1:
Preferences for the State Budget Including Land and Water Conservation Funding
Even given a decline in state revenues, the North Carolina state budget should include funding for land and water conservation.



Most major subgroups of the North Carolina electorate agree with these sentiments, including:

- 78% of women and 74% of men;
 - 80% of Democrats, 70% of Republicans, and 70% of independents;
 - 80% of voters both under age 50 and 72% of voter age 50 and over;
 - 73% of whites and 89% of voters of color;
 - 71% of voters with household incomes less than \$40,000, 80% with household incomes \$40,000-\$80,000, and 74% of voters with household incomes greater than \$80,000; and
 - 77% of voters in the Charlotte media market, 76% in the Raleigh-Durham market, 75% in the Greensboro market, and at least two-thirds of voters in every other area of the state.
- **In fact, over seven in ten voters feel that North Carolina’s state government should be spending about the same or more for land and water conservation.** When asked if North Carolina’s state government should be spending “more,” “less,” or “about the same” on land and water conservation, 72 percent of voters say “more” or “about the same” (**Figure 2**). This includes roughly one-third of voters (36%) who want the State to spend more than it currently does. Only one in five voters (20%) feels that the State should be spending less.

FIGURE 2:
Preferred Land and Water Conservation Spending Levels
In general, do you think that North Carolina state government should be spending more, less or about the same for land and water conservation?



- A solid majority of voters feels that the State Legislature should spend at least \$95 million dollars on land and water conservation in this year's State budget. Voters were asked the following question about funding for land and water conservation in North Carolina:

"The State Legislature is currently debating what should and should not be funded in the state budget this year. For the past five years, the Legislature has set aside approximately \$150 million per year to protect water quality, natural areas, working farms, and wildlife habitat in North Carolina. This year, with the current economic situation, the legislature has proposed reducing state funding for these purposes to \$95 million. Which statement about this issue comes closest to your own opinion:

- *The Legislature should maintain funding for land and water conservation at approximately \$150 million as it has in past years.*
- *Given the decline in state revenues, it is reasonable to reduce funding for land and water conservation to \$95 million this year.*
- *In these tight economic times, state funding for land conservation should be reduced even further -- \$95 million is still too much."*

As shown in **Figure 3**, two-thirds of voters (66%) either prefer maintaining the historic spending level of approximately \$150 million dollars per year or a reduced amount of \$95 million dollars, given the decline in state revenues. Only one-quarter of voters (26%) believe that the economy is dire enough to reduce spending on land and water conservation below \$95 million dollars.

FIGURE 3:
Preferred State Budget Spending Levels on Land and Water Conservation

Statement	Percent of Voters
The Legislature should maintain funding for land and water conservation at approximately \$150 million as it has in past years.	29%
Given the decline in state revenues, it is reasonable to reduce funding for land and water conservation to \$95 million this year.	37%
In these tight economic times, state funding for land conservation should be reduced even further -- \$95 million is still too much.	26%
All/none/don't know	8%

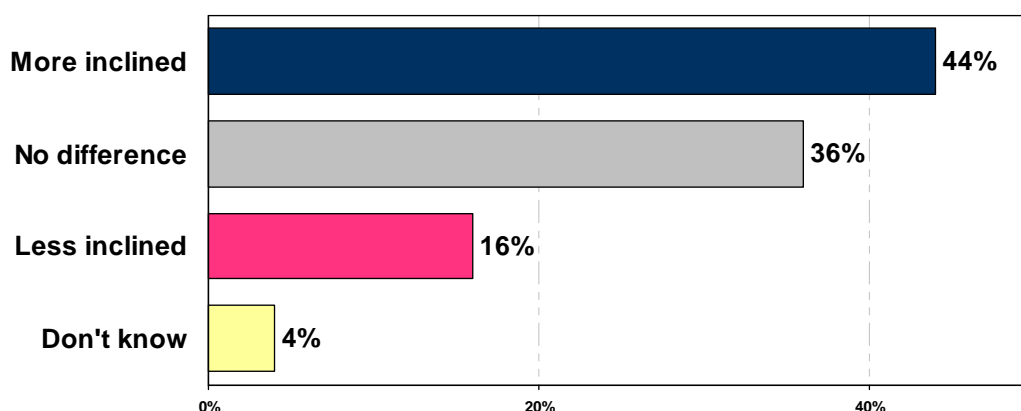
Even after being presented with statements arguing the pros and cons of maintaining the historical level of spending, two-thirds of voters (65%) continue to believe that the State Legislature should spend at least \$95 million dollars on land and water conservation in this year's state budget.

- **By more than a two-to-one margin, voters support the State Legislature setting aside funds for farmland preservation in this year's State budget.** Given the context that there is no permanent source of funding for farmland preservation in North Carolina's State budget – and that the Legislature's current budget does not contain any funds set aside for that purpose – over six in ten voters (64%) support “the State Legislature setting aside funds for farmland preservation in this year's State budget.” In comparison, only one-quarter of voters (27%) oppose setting aside funds in this year's budget for farmland preservation.
- **Support for funding land and water conservation in the State budget is strong despite evident concern about North Carolina's economy.** The broad support for funding on land and water conservation is particularly impressive given North Carolina voters' concern about the economy. Fully 58 percent of voters rank “creating jobs and economic growth” as an “extremely important” issue in North Carolina right now, up from just 37 percent in 2006 and ranking it as the highest of a list of about a dozen potential public policy priorities. Despite this economic climate, however, voters support continued state investment in conservation.
- **North Carolina voters look favorably upon legislators who support funding for land and water conservation.** As shown in **Figure 4**, a plurality of voters (44%) are

more inclined to re-elect their legislative representatives if they support maintaining at least \$95 million dollars in funding for land and water conservation in this year's State budget. For one-third of voters (36%) their representative's positions would make little difference, but only 16 percent of voters would be less likely to re-elect their representatives if they support these funding levels for land and water conservation.

FIGURE 4:

Impact of Support for Conservation Funding on Support for State Legislators
If your members of the North Carolina House and Senate supported maintaining at least \$95 million in funding for land and water conservation, would you be more inclined or less inclined to re-elect them?



Overall, the survey results show that while voters are highly concerned about the economy, they are also highly committed to conserving land and water resources in North Carolina. In fact, **over seven in ten voters (72%) feel that North Carolina's state government should be spending about the same or more for land and water conservation.** And roughly two-thirds support a specific commitment of at least \$95 million in state funding for these goals. North Carolina voters attach a strong value to conservation that is not easily deterred by changes in the economic climate.