



Lake Snell Perry Mermin Meadow Gotoff Ulibarri

## Memorandum

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To: Interested Parties  
From: *Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting*  
Subject: Poll Shows Strong Opposition to Repeal of Stream Buffer Zone Rule  
Date: October 23, 2008

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A recent nationwide survey of 1000 likely voters conducted by Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting shows overwhelming opposition to the Bush administration's eleventh hour effort to repeal the Stream Buffer Zone Rule – the landmark federal environmental protection that prohibits coal companies from conducting mountaintop removal, and dumping their waste, within 100 feet of the nation's streams. Voters' opposition to this rule change stands against the backdrop of broad public concern about the deterioration of the environment in the U.S. and a strong sense that environmental protections *help* the economy.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary of Findings

- **A majority of American voters believes the environment in the United States is deteriorating.** Fully 55% say the quality of the environment has gotten worse in recent years. Another quarter believes the environment has stayed about the same and only 18 percent believe the environment has improved.
- **By more than a 2:1 margin, voters believe environmental protections are good for the economy.** Voters categorically reject the argument that environmental protections are bad for jobs and business – a common refrain of the Bush administration, as well as oil and mining companies. A plurality (47%) believe environmental protections are *good* for the economy and another 23% believe such protections have no impact on the economy. Only 20% of Americans believe environmental protections are bad for the economy.
- **Two-thirds of American voters oppose the Bush administration's effort to repeal the Stream Buffer Zone Rule** (text of question on following page). Fully 66% oppose repeal, including roughly half (49%) who "strongly oppose" repealing the rule, which for 25 years has protected our nation's water resources from toxic debris caused by mountaintop removal coal mining. Only two in ten (20%) support the Bush administration's effort to gut this critical safeguard (just 8% support it strongly), and another 14% are unsure.

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<sup>1</sup> Lake Research Partners and Bellwether Research and Consulting designed and administered this survey of 1000 likely 2008 General Election voters nationwide. The survey was conducted from October 11-16, 2008. The margin of error for this poll is +/-3.1%.

- **Opposition to Bush’s effort to repeal the Stream Buffer Zone Rule is both broad and deep, transcending traditional demographic and regional divides.** Strong majorities of men (62%) and women (69%) oppose repealing the rule, as do both college-educated and non college-educated voters (65% for each), and voters in all four corners of the country (74% in the Northeast, 64% in the Midwest, 64% in the South, and 64% in the West).
- **Public sentiment about mountaintop removal coal mining is largely negative.** Over half have heard about mountaintop removal mining, and by roughly a 2:1 margin these voters have an unfavorable impression of the practice (34% unfavorable, 18% favorable). Furthermore, voters oppose strongly the practice. Without any description of mountaintop removal mining, voters oppose it by more than a 2:1 margin (39% to 15%). After giving voters a basic description of the practice, opposition spikes to 61%, with virtually no change in the level of support (16%). Public sentiment against mountaintop removal mining is also broad, with opposition outweighing support in every region of the country.
- **Finally, voters also report high levels of concern over water quality and take a firm stand against further destruction of America’s streams.** Upon hearing that “more than 1,200 miles of streams in Appalachia have already been buried or destroyed by mountaintop removal coal mining, with another 1,000 miles projected for burial and destruction in the next ten years,” fully 86% of voters say they are concerned about the effects of mountaintop removal, including a 60% majority who are very concerned.<sup>2</sup>

**The Bottom Line:** American voters flatly oppose repealing the protections outlined in the Stream Buffer Zone Rule. The Bush Administration – and public officials across the country – should take note, and understand that voters’ opposition to repealing this law is strong and considered, stemming from the sense that removing environmental protections would pose a threat not only to the quality of our environment but also to the health of our economy.

Text of Question: “As you may know, the Bush Administration is now proposing repealing the Stream Buffer Zone Rule. For 25 years, this rule has prohibited mountaintop removal coal mining within 100 feet of streams unless it can be done in a way that does not adversely affect the water quantity or quality or other environmental resources of the stream. The change would allow coal companies to conduct mountaintop removal and dump their waste in streams as long as they try to minimize the damage to the streams. Do you favor or oppose these changes, or are you unsure?”

Favor:	20% (8% strongly favor)
Oppose:	66% (49% strongly oppose)
Undecided	14%

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that this question was asked *after* the question about support or opposition to repealing the Stream Buffer Zone Rule.