



*Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates - FM3*

*Public Opinion Research & Strategy*

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TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz and Miranda Everitt  
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

Lori Weigel and Karoline Richardson McGrail  
Public Opinion Strategies

RE: Regional Voters' Views of the Gulf Coast and the RESTORE Act

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The bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) recently partnered to complete a survey of registered voters along the Gulf Coast about their attitudes toward the Gulf and the after-effects of the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.<sup>1</sup> Overall, the survey found little change from results of a similar poll in 2013: **voters place a high value on the Gulf and its contribution to the region's economy and quality of life; remain very concerned about pollution in the Gulf; and overwhelmingly support using the fines resulting from the BP oil spill on Gulf restoration and conservation projects.** Each of the specific restoration projects we tested was seen as “extremely” or “very important” to more than two-thirds of voters, with those related to water quality and wildlife habitat ranking highest.

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

- **Gulf Coast voters still see the BP oil spill as a serious problem for the region.** More than three in five voters (61 percent) say that the “after-effects of the BP oil spill on natural areas and wildlife along the Gulf Coast” are an “extremely” or “very serious” problem for the region. When the same question was asked of Gulf Coast voters in 2013, 57 percent named it an “extremely” or “very serious” problem. As demonstrated in **Figure 1** on the following page, this places voter concern about the Gulf in the same range as the economy (67 percent) and education (66 percent).

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Gulf Coast Voters’ Views of the Top Problems for the Region**

*Now I am going to read you a list of issues facing the Gulf Coast region that other people have mentioned as problems. Please tell me whether you personally consider it to be an extremely serious problem, very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, or really not much of a problem at all. (Split Sample)*

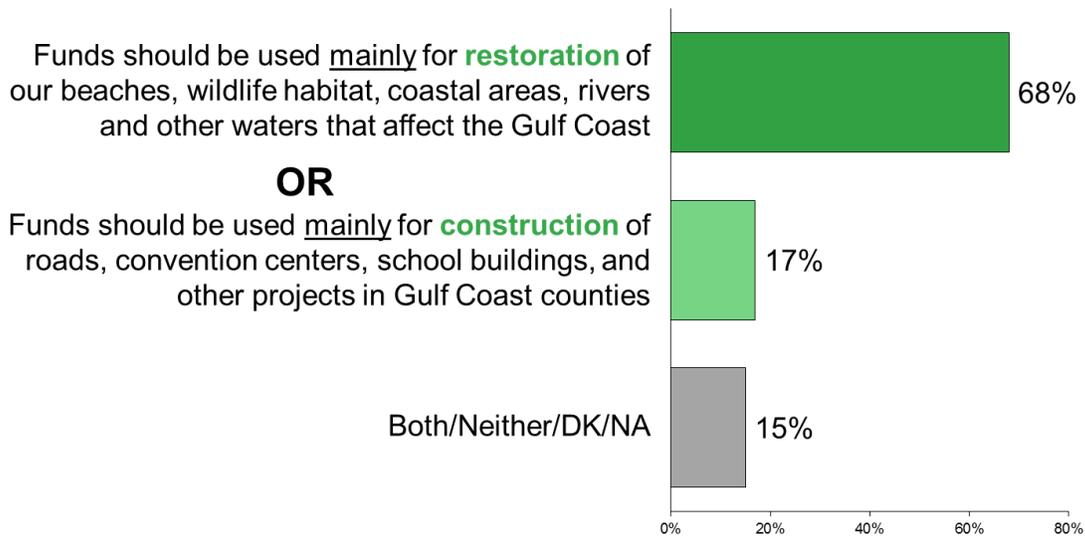
Problem	Total Extremely/ Very Serious Problem
The economy and unemployment	67%
The quality of public education	66%
Crime	62%
The after-effects of the BP oil spill on natural areas and wildlife along the Gulf Coast	61%
Pollution of rivers, lakes and streams	60%
Pollution of coastal waters	59%
Pollution harming crabs, shrimp, oysters and native fish	57%
The threat of hurricanes	57%
Loss of habitat for wildlife	54%
Loss of wetlands and marshes	52%
The amount you pay in taxes	49%
Rising sea levels	38%
Global warming	37%
Loss of tourism	34%

- Gulf Coast residents overwhelmingly describe its land and waters as important to their community and culture.** Voters were asked to rate how well certain words or phrases described the land and waters of the Gulf Coast, with seven meaning “very well” and one meaning “does not describe the Gulf well at all.” Fully three-quarters (75 percent) said *very important to people in my community* describes those land and waters well, and nearly as many (73 percent) say the same for *important to our region’s culture*. Other traits commonly associated with the lands and waters of the Gulf Coast are *provide habitat for abundant fish and wildlife* (74 percent) and *offer excellent locations for hunting and fishing* (69 percent).
- Voters prefer using RESTORE Act funding for natural restoration to construction projects by more than three to one.** As shown in **Figure 2** on the following page, after a brief explanation of the RESTORE Act, voters were asked to choose between two statements about their spending priorities for the fines resulting from the BP oil spill. Nearly seven in ten (68 percent) choose “*Funds should be used mainly for restoration of our beaches, wildlife habitat, coastal areas, rivers and other waters that affect the Gulf Coast.*” Just 17 percent preferred that “*Funds should be used mainly for construction of roads, convention centers, school buildings, and other projects on the Gulf Coast.*”

Support for natural restoration is high across party, and especially high among those who hunt and fish. Republicans (71 percent) and independents (75 percent) are more likely than Democrats (60 percent) to favor restoration. Hunters and anglers favor restoration to construction in the same shares as voters overall (68 percent for restoration, compared with 17 percent for construction).

**FIGURE 2.**  
**Preferred Use of RESTORE Act Funds**

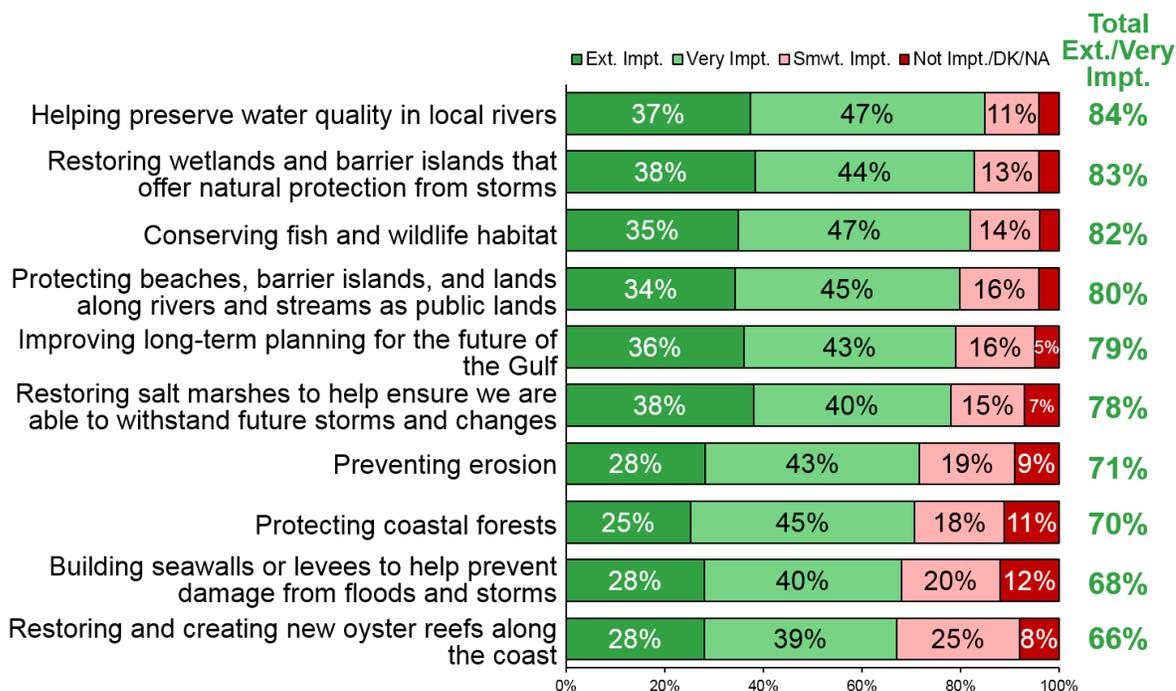
*Which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view about how these funds should be spent?*



- **Among potential uses of RESTORE Act funds, protection of water quality, wildlife habitat, and beach and wetland restoration score high.** Voters were offered a list of specific conservation projects for which RESTORE Act funding could be used. As shown in **Figure 3** on the following page, each item was rated as “extremely” or “very important” to at least two-thirds of Gulf Coast voters. At the same time, a number of priorities stood out: more than four in five labeled *helping preserve water quality in local rivers, restoring wetlands and barrier islands that offer natural protection from storms, conserving fish and wildlife habitat, and protecting beaches, barrier islands, and lands along rivers and streams as public lands* as at least “very important” priorities. Republicans, Democrats and independents vary little in what they value; the priorities of anglers and hunters are also quite similar to those of voters overall.

**FIGURE 3.**  
**RESTORE Act Funding Priorities**

*I am going to read you a list of more specific ways that money from the RESTORE Act might be used. After I read each one, please tell me how important it is to you that some of these funds be spent on that purpose: extremely important, very important, somewhat important or not important. (Split Sample)*



Taken together, the results indicate that Gulf Coast residents are still perceiving the effects of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, and continue to be concerned about pollution and environmental damage along the Gulf of Mexico. **These voters – including hunters and anglers – value the health of the region’s lands and waters, and strongly support investment in projects to restore and protect the Gulf.**

<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From June 24 – July 2, 2015, FM3 and POS completed 800 telephone interviews (on landlines and cell phones) with coastal county voters in states bordering the Gulf Coast – Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas – a total of 160 in each state. The margin of sampling error is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.