

Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates

*Opinion Research &
Public Policy Analysis*

TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Key Findings from Recent Deschutes Greenprint Survey

DATE: May 22, 2009

Fairbank, Maslin, Maulin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a survey of 400 Deschutes County residents to assess their attitudes toward conditions in the county and its quality of life.¹ Overall, the survey results show that although residents are highly concerned about the economy, they are very satisfied with the overall quality of life of their community and attribute much of this to the area's natural environment. Additionally, while there are some mixed feelings about the impact of recent population growth and the general rate of development, residents uniformly place a high value on conserving natural areas and protecting water resources and wildlife habitat.

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

- **Deschutes County residents enjoy a high quality of life, attributing much of it to the community's natural environment.** A remarkable 83 percent of survey respondents rated the overall quality of life in Deschutes as "excellent" or "good" (36% "excellent" and 47% "good") and only 16 percent rated it as "only fair" or "poor." When asked to explain in their own words what they like most about living in Deschutes County, the most commonly cited reasons dealt with the County's natural environment, including outdoor recreation, open spaces and natural beauty,

¹ **Methodology:** From May 12-15, 2009, FMM&A completed 400 telephone interviews with Deschutes County registered voters. The margin of sampling error for the full sample is +/- 4.9%, margins of error for other subgroups within the sample will be higher.

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and the local weather (**Figure 1**). Additionally, three-quarters (75%) indicated that they have “generally positive” feelings about the “condition of land, air and water” in Deschutes County.

FIGURE 1:
Top Reasons Residents Like Living in Deschutes County
(Open-End; Responses Grouped; Top Categories Shown)

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Outdoors Recreation / Variety of Activities	27
Outdoors Topography / Open Spaces / Scenic Beauty	20
Weather / Climate	20
Small Town / Low Population Density / Quiet / Rural	9
People / Friendly Community	5
Air/Water Quality / Clean Environment / Low Pollution	4

Keeping in mind that very few expressed negative opinions about the local quality of life, respondents were also asked to explain in their own words what they like least about living in Deschutes County. As shown in **Figure 2**, responses were more varied, though jobs and economy are clearly more top of mind concerns than other issues. Interestingly, a significant percentage (15%) couldn’t identify anything that they disliked about living in Deschutes County.

FIGURE 2:
Top Reasons Residents Dislike Living in Deschutes County
(Open-End; Responses Grouped; Top Categories Shown)

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Nothing / Don’t Know	15
Growth / Development Rate / Population Increase	12
Economy / High Cost of Living	10
Jobs / Unemployment Rate	10
Politics / Local Government/Laws	7
Location Too Far From Stores/Other Cities / Lack of Transportation	5
Traffic Congestion Too High	5
People / Community Attitudes	4

The importance of the natural environment was further highlighted when survey respondents were presented with a list of factors that contribute to the quality of life in Deschutes County and asked to indicate whether each one is a “major factor, a minor factor, or not a factor” in the community’s high quality of life. As shown in **Figure 3**, enjoyment of the natural environment ranked at the top, along with the friendliness of local residents.

**FIGURE 3:
Factor Contributing to Deschutes County’s Good Quality of Life**

Factor	Contribution to a Good Quality of Life in Deschutes County (%)			
	Major Factor	Minor Factor	Not a Factor	DK/NA
Year round outdoor recreational opportunities	83	11	4	1
Beauty of the natural environment	79	11	9	1
Friendly people	74	21	4	1
Easy access to outdoor recreational opportunities	73	14	13	0
Clean air and water	73	17	9	1
Easy access to natural areas	69	17	13	2
Good weather	65	24	8	2
Small town feel	54	29	15	1
Good quality public schools	54	25	14	6
Availability of good-paying jobs	53	23	19	5
Safety from crime	52	32	14	2
Affordable cost of living	51	32	13	3
Ready availability of affordable homes	43	33	21	3
A community of diverse kinds of people	41	37	19	3
Sense of community history	40	36	21	3

- Deschutes County residents are unquestionably concerned about the economy.** Fully 81 percent of survey respondents rate “jobs and the economy” as an “extremely” or “very serious” problem in Deschutes – ranking it as the clear top concern facing the community (**Figure 4**). Most other issues – including the loss of natural areas, population growth, taxes, education, crime and traffic – are seen as far less serious problems. Notably – and consistent with respondents’ thoughts on what they like most about living in Deschutes County – three-quarters (74%) indicated that “poor access to the outdoors and natural areas” is “not a problem.” When asked

specifically about this question of access later in the survey, nearly all respondents (94%) agreed with the statement “I have good access to the outdoors and natural areas in Deschutes County.”

**FIGURE 4:
Problems Facing Deschutes County**

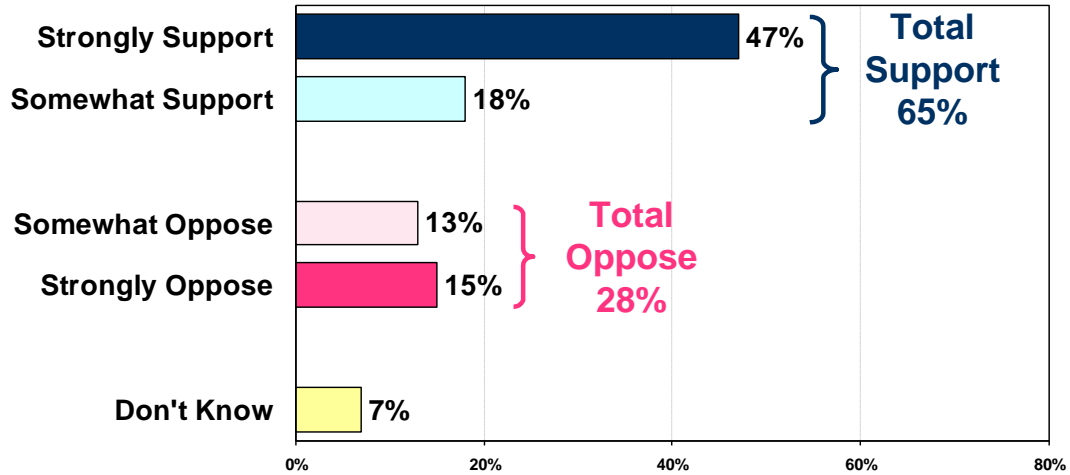
Problem or Issue	Level of Problem (%)				
	Ext. Serious	Very Serious	Somewhat Serious	Not a Problem	DK/NA
<i>Jobs and the economy</i>	44	37	12	6	1
The cost of healthcare	34	25	16	21	4
Too much development	21	25	33	21	0
Too much government spending	19	23	22	25	11
Loss of private property rights	19	14	24	25	17
Loss of wildlife habitat	17	25	26	30	2
Maintenance of local roads and highways	16	23	35	24	1
Global warming	16	17	20	38	8
Loss of farmlands	15	19	25	34	6
Wildland fires	15	23	35	23	4
Local population growth	14	15	30	40	1
The amount you pay in local taxes	13	17	30	38	2
Loss of open space	13	25	27	35	0
The quality of education in local public schools	12	18	23	35	12
Crime	10	21	37	30	2
Traffic congestion	9	14	30	46	0
The quality of drinking water	5	9	11	74	1
<i>Poor access to the outdoors and natural areas</i>	5	10	10	74	2

While these concerns about the local economy run deep, Deschutes County residents appear to view their own economic position more positively. In fact, a majority (57%) of respondents expressed “generally positive” feelings toward their own “personal financial situation,” while only one-quarter (25%) felt negative (the remainder felt neutral). Furthermore, nearly one-half of respondents (48%) conjectured that their personal financial situations would actually “be better” in the next twelve months, while only 17 percent thought they would be worse.

- **Opinions about the rate of growth and development are mixed, but residents are more likely to view it as “too fast” rather than “too slow.”** While 43 percent of respondents expressed that the rate was “about right,” 47 percent indicated it was “too fast” in comparison to 10 percent suggesting it was “too slow.” Reflecting this ambivalence towards the rate of growth and development, 37 percent of respondents saw the current rate as “positive” for Deschutes County, while 48 percent saw it as “negative.” Perhaps not surprisingly, 67 percent of those who saw the rate of growth as “too fast” also viewed the current rate negatively.
- **At the same time, residents feel that growth has been – and can be in the future – managed to protect the natural environment.** Seven in ten respondents (71%) agreed with the statement “Deschutes County strikes a good balance between allowing reasonable development and protecting the natural environment.” This sentiment is rooted in perceptions that residents have great access to the natural areas, but also that some of this growth has been beneficial for the local economy. In fact, seven in ten (72%) agreed that “Growth of the outdoor recreation and resort industries has been good for Deschutes County.” Residents appear to be optimistic that this balance between growth and the environment can be maintained in the future, but there is a little more uncertainty. While 61 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that “We can still accommodate additional population growth in the Deschutes County without damaging its character or the natural environment,” this is a slightly smaller proportion than the 71 percent who felt that the County currently strikes a balance between development and the environment.
- **Opinions are more mixed on the impact of the recent influx of new residents to the County.** While a slim majority of respondents (52%) disagreed with the statement “Deschutes County has changed for the worse with so many people moving in from outside the state,” nearly as many (46%) agreed with this sentiment. These ambivalent feelings were also evident when respondents nearly evenly split on the statement “There is too much tension between long-term and more recent residents of the county” (44% agreed and 47% disagreed).

- **Support is strong for dedicating more public funding for land conservation, parks and recreation in Deschutes County.** As shown in **Figure 5**, nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents supported the concept of “dedicating more public funding for land conservation, parks and recreation in Deschutes County,” including almost one-half (47%) who “strongly” support the idea.

FIGURE 5:
Support for Dedicating Public Funds for Land Conservation, Parks and Recreation



- **Protecting and preserving water quality is seen as the most important goal of conservation efforts.** Respondents were presented with a list of types of projects that could be goals of conservation efforts in Deschutes County, and asked to indicate how important to them it is that each project be undertaken. As shown in **Figure 6**, projects related to water quality were at the top of the list, followed by projects intended to protect wildlife habitat and natural areas.

**FIGURE 6:
Importance of Potential Conservation Projects**

Project	Level of Importance (%)		
	Ext. Important	Very Important	Ext./Very Important
Protecting water quality in rivers, creeks and streams	54	34	88
Protecting and improving drinking water quality	48	33	81
Protecting wildlife habitat	47	32	79
Preserving natural areas	41	38	79
Protecting natural watersheds	45	34	79
Protecting and improving drinking water supplies	45	31	76
Preserving forests	47	29	76
Protecting farmland	34	35	69
Planting more trees and protecting forests to help reduce global warming	40	29	69
Preserving habitats for recreational fishing	35	32	67
Repairing and improving community parks	29	34	63
Reintroducing salmon and steelhead to the upper Deschutes basin	36	25	61
Improving access to the outdoor and natural areas	29	28	57
Creating hiking, biking and walking trails	30	27	57
Improving access to rivers, streams and lakes	30	26	56
Repairing and improving urban parks	30	26	56
Connecting regional trails	21	27	48
Expanding urban parks	24	22	46
Making existing trails more bicycle-friendly	21	22	43
Making existing trails more horse-rider friendly	18	17	35

In a follow-up question respondents were asked to indicate which of five different categories of conservation projects they felt to be the most important to undertake. As shown in **Figure 7**, respondents were asked to indicate both their first and second choices. Again, water quality was the clear top priority, followed by “protecting wildlife habitat.” It is interesting to note how recreational projects rated in comparison to other conservation projects, particularly in light of how much respondents indicated they value the outdoor recreational opportunities afforded to them in Deschutes County. It could be that they are high because they are so satisfied with the existing outdoor recreational opportunities that they simply assign a lower

sense of urgency for future investment. Also, protecting the natural environment may be seen as a prerequisite for providing high quality outdoor recreational opportunities.

**FIGURE 7:
Prioritization of Potential Conservation Project Categories**

Category of Projects	Priority (%)		
	First Choice	Second Choice	First or Second Choice
Protecting and improving water quality	37	14	51
Protecting wildlife habitat	21	23	44
Protecting natural areas	14	20	34
Protecting farmland	10	20	30
Repairing, improving and expanding access to existing trails, parks and outdoor recreation	12	12	24

Overall, the survey results show that Deschutes County residents are very happy with the overall quality of life in the County, with much of their positive feelings owing to the beauty of the natural environment and the availability of outdoor recreational activities. That being said, residents are extremely worried about jobs and the local economy, though many are hopeful that it will improve in the near future. While most residents believe Deschutes has done a good job balancing development pressures with environment protection – and recognize how important new outdoor recreation and resort industries have been to the local economy – many still believe that the rate of development has been too fast and some harbor concerns that the influx of new residents has made things worse in the County. While these results suggest a population that is conflicted on the impact of its recent growth, they are unified in their love of the natural beauty and amenities of Deschutes County and are deeply committed to conserving the environment to maintain their high quality of life.