PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES

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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Perceptions of Groundwater: Key Findings from a Recent Survey of California Voters

DATE: July 16, 2014

The bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) recently completed a survey of 1,201 telephone interviews with California voters to assess their opinions about California's groundwater supplies and how groundwater is managed in the state.[i] While a majority of voters are generally familiar with groundwater, nearly all voters (97%) view groundwater as important to California's overall water supply. However, many perceive that a variety of issues are contributing to problems with the State's groundwater supplies, including a lack of conservation, agricultural demand, a lack of state/local planning, insufficient investment in storage, and climate change. Consequently, strong majorities of voters – across the partisan, ethnic and geographic spectrums – all prefer that steps be taken now to address groundwater management, rather than maintaining the status quo. Voters reacted enthusiastically to a comprehensive proposal establishing a groundwater management plan and approach for California, with 78 percent expressing support for the overall proposal and at least two-thirds expressing support for each of the proposal's individual elements.

Among the key findings of the survey are the following:

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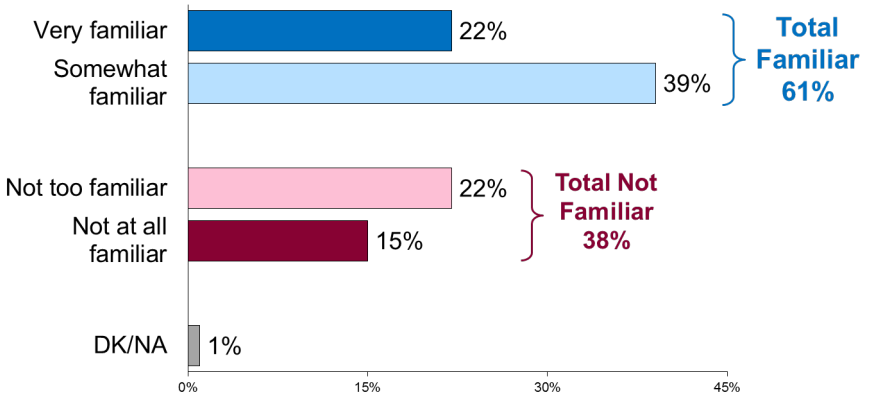
- **A majority of California voters considers themselves at least "somewhat" familiar with groundwater.** Three in five (61%) voters indicated they were at least "somewhat" familiar with the concept of groundwater, including 22 percent asserting they are "very" familiar (**Figure 1**). Nearly two in five (38%) admitted to knowing little to nothing about groundwater.

FIGURE 1
Familiarity with Groundwater

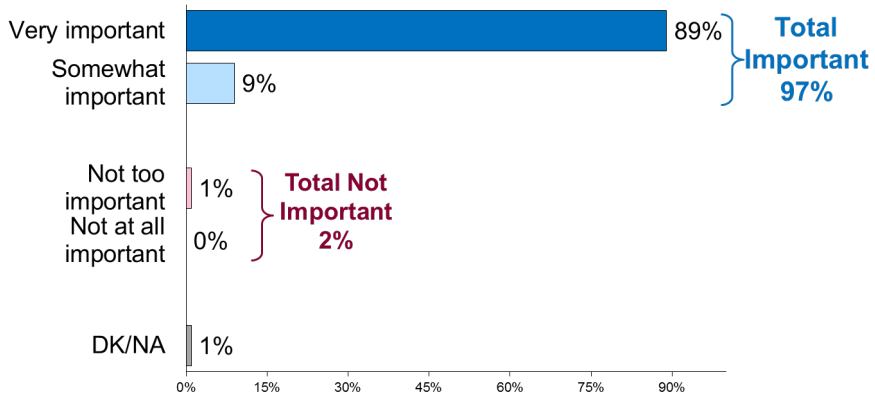
In general, how familiar would you say you are with the concept of groundwater?



- **Nearly all voters agree that groundwater is important to California's overall water supply.** Survey respondents were read a short description of groundwater and how it is used, and then asked how important they feel it is to California's overall water supply. As shown in **Figure 2**, voters overwhelmingly see groundwater as an important water supply in California, with nine in ten (89%) viewing it as "very" important.

FIGURE 2
Importance of Groundwater

How important do you think groundwater is to California's overall water supply?



- **Voters see a wide range of facts they think contribute to groundwater problems**. As shown in **Figure 3**, more than eight in ten voters feel that a lack of conservation, agricultural demand, a lack of state/local planning, insufficient investment in storage and climate change are contributors to California's problems with groundwater. Notably, more than three in five feels that a lack of conservation (68%), agricultural demand (66%), a lack of state planning (64%) are "major" causes to the State's groundwater problems.

FIGURE 3
Causes of Problems with Groundwater in California

I am going to read you a list of items that may be a cause of problems with groundwater in California. After I read each one, please tell me whether you think it is a major cause, minor cause, or not a cause of California's problems with groundwater.

Cause	Cause of Problem (%)		
	Major	Minor	*Major/ Minor*
Too few people doing enough to conserve water	68%	24%	92%
Demand for water for use in agriculture	66%	23%	89%
A lack of state planning to manage groundwater supplies	64%	20%	84%
A lack of local planning to manage groundwater supplies	59%	25%	84%
Climate change	52%	27%	79%

- **Majorities of voters have heightened levels of concern about the negative impacts of groundwater management in California.** Survey respondents were presented with a list of problems that may result from the way groundwater is managed in California and asked to indicate how concerning they consider each potential impact to be. As shown in **Figure 4** on the following page, solid majorities found taking groundwater from neighbors (59%), negatively impacting drinking water quality (57%), sinking land (57%), and costly litigation (57%) as "extremely" or "very" concerning.

FIGURE 4
Problems Created by Groundwater Management in California

I'm going to mention some problems that may result from the way groundwater is managed in California. After I read each one, please tell me whether you are extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not concerned about that issue.

Problem	Level of Concern (%)		
	Extremely	Very	*Extremely / Very*
Some farmers and other property owners are drilling more and deeper wells, which takes water from their neighbors and drives up costs	26%	33%	59%
Digging deeper wells to reach new groundwater supplies results in lower quality drinking water for families	26%	31%	57%
Over-pumping of groundwater is causing the land to sink – falling as much as 28 feet in some places in California	25%	32%	57%
In areas where local groundwater is disappearing, currently the only way to resolve disputes among consumers of groundwater is long and costly lawsuits	23%	33%	57%

- **Within this context, California voters are strongly supportive of taking immediate action to improve the management of the State's groundwater supplies.** Survey respondents were presented with two pairs of opposing points of view on groundwater management in California, and were asked to select the statements that most closely reflect their own opinions (**Figure 5** on the following page). In one of these pairs, nearly four in five (78%) indicated major changes are needed to improve the management of groundwater supplies, rather than not needing major changes. In the other pair, three-quarters (74%) indicated the current drought has highlighted the necessity to better manage groundwater supplied for future generations, rather than allowing current users to use as much groundwater as they need. In both cases, voters appear to prefer that steps be taken now to address groundwater management, rather than maintaining the status quo.

FIGURE 5
Perceptions on Whether Action needs to be Taken to Groundwater Management

Which of the following statements about this issue comes closest to your opinion.

Statement	(%)
Water availability is so important to our state's future that we need to make major changes now in the way we manage groundwater supplies	78%
California has managed its water supplies for decades without new regulations on groundwater, and we do not need to make major changes	16%
Both/Neither/Don't Know	7%

Statement	(%)
Because of the current drought, we need to act now to ensure we are managing groundwater supplies carefully to address the needs of future generations	74%
Despite our current drought, we should continue allowing farmers and residents to use as much groundwater as they currently need	20%
	5%

One of the striking findings from the survey was how consistent the preference was for changing the status quo among different partisan, geographic and ethnic subgroups of the electorate. For example, 85 percent of Democrats, 66 percent of Republicans, and 80 percent of independents all agreed that major changes are needed to the way California manages its groundwater supply. Additionally, 81 percent of Democrats, 63 percent of Republicans and 78 percent of independents also agreed that management is needed now to protect groundwater supplies for future generations, rather than continue allowing farmers and residents to use as much as they need. Similarly strong majorities of white, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islander voters, as well as voters from all major regions of the state, also agreed with these sentiments.

- **Majorities of voters support the major planks of a comprehensive groundwater management plan for California.** Four individual elements of a comprehensive plan to better manage California ground water supplies was supported by at least two-thirds of survey respondents (**Figure 6** on the following page). These elements include increasing underground storage (91%), setting state standards for local groundwater management (82%), reducing the risk of permanent damage to groundwater quality of supplies (82%), and providing local communities with the tools to manage local groundwater supplies (80%). The most popular element – "strongly" supported by 73 percent – was increasing underground storage during wet years for future use during dry years.

FIGURE 6
Reactions to Elements of a Groundwater Management Proposal

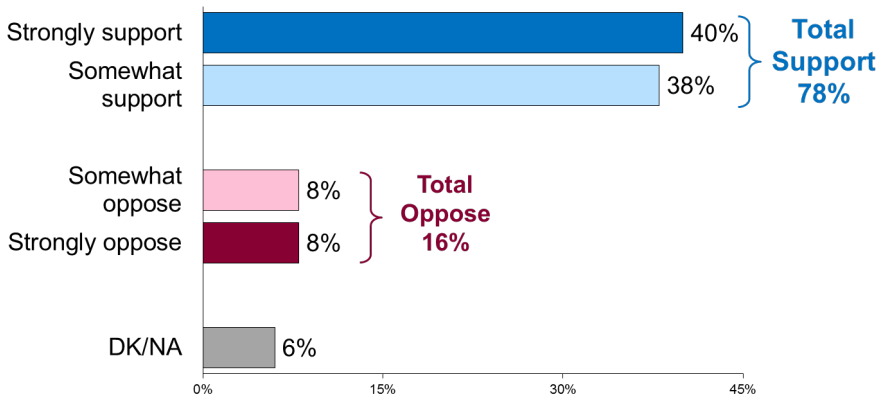
Now I would like to ask you about a proposal that has been made for improving the way California manages its groundwater. I am going to read you a brief description of the several key elements of this proposal. After I read each one, please tell me whether it sounds like something you would support or oppose.

Proposal Element	Level of Support (%)		
	Strongly	Somewhat	*Total Support*
Storing more water underground when we are not in a drought, so that it will be there in years when we need it	73%	18%	*91%*
Setting a clear state standard for how local groundwater supplies should be managed	53%	28%	*82%*
Focusing state groundwater management efforts on those areas most at risk of permanent damage to water quality or supplies	51%	30%	*82%*
Giving local communities increased ability to manage their local groundwater	44%	36%	*80%*

- **Voters overwhelmingly support a comprehensive groundwater management proposal for California.** Respondents were asked to consider a comprehensive groundwater reform package, including the items listed in **Figure 6**, and were asked to indicate whether it was something they would support or oppose. Consistent with the popularity of the proposal's core elements, nearly four in five (78%) expressed support for the overall proposal, including two in five (40%) who expressed "strong" support (**Figure 7** on the following page). Only 16 percent indicated they would oppose the proposal.

FIGURE 7
Overall Support for a Comprehensive Groundwater Management Plan

Now that you have heard the elements of this proposal to manage groundwater in California, does the overall proposal sound like something you would support or oppose?



Support for this comprehensive groundwater management proposal cut across all major demographic and geographic subgroups of the electorate, including:

- 87 percent of Democrats, 67 percent of Republicans, and 76 percent of independents;
- 75 percent of white voters, 90 percent of Latino voters, 86 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander voters, and 87 percent of all voters of color; and
- 85 percent Bay Area voters, 81 percent of Los Angeles County voters, 78 percent of San Diego voters, 77 percent of voters from the counties surrounding Los Angeles County, 73 percent of Central Valley voters, and 64 percent of voters from the Sacramento area and further north.

Taken together, these survey results reveal that voters perceive groundwater to be a critical component of California's water supplies, though a source of water currently at risk due to lax management practices at the state and local level. Undoubtedly, the current drought is playing a role in these perceptions, but, nonetheless, voters clearly want action to be taken now to safeguard the State's groundwater supplies for future generations and in anticipation of future droughts. Voters support a management plan that sets clear standards at the state level, but empowers local communities to work within those guidelines to do what is best for their unique circumstances.

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[i] **Methodology:** From July 6-9, 2014, FM3 and POS completed 1,201 telephone interviews (on landlines and cell phones) with California voters likely to vote this November. Interviews were conducted on landline and wireless phones. 800 interviews were conducted statewide and an oversample of 400 interviews were conducted in the Central Valley; data has been statistically weighted to reflect the true geographic distribution of likely voters across the state. The margins of sampling error for the statewide sample is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level and +/-4.6% for the Central Valley sample; margins of error for population subgroups within each sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.