

*Fairbank,  
Maslin,  
Maullin,  
Metz &  
Associates*

**FM3**

*Public Opinion Research  
& Strategy*

**TO:** Interested Parties

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

**RE:** Recent Survey Results on Regional Park Funding in Sacramento County

**DATE:** March 6, 2011

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed a survey of 600 registered voters in Sacramento County to assess views on the County's regional parks and reactions to potential ballot measures generating additional revenue for system.<sup>i</sup> The survey found that voters place a high value on County parks and river parkways, with a clear majority rating them "very important" to their quality of life. Given this backdrop, over seven in ten voters expressed conceptual support for a 1/8-cent sales tax to fund local parks. A potential ballot measure to provide such additional funding for parks would require a strong campaign, given the political and economic context and the two-thirds supermajority vote requirement. Nevertheless, the initial survey findings are encouraging.

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

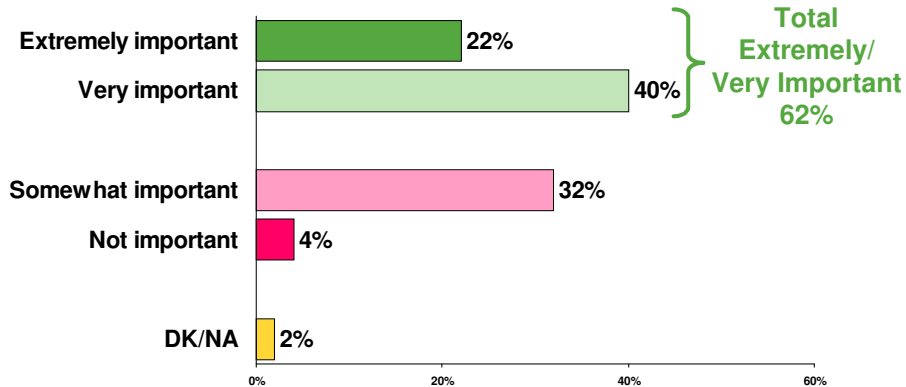
- **A clear majority of voters rate Sacramento County's regional parks as very important to their quality of life.** When asked specifically about the impacts parks have on the County's quality of life, three in five respondents (62%) indicated that the County's regional parks are "extremely" or "very" important (**Figure 1**). Further, virtually all voters surveyed (94 percent) indicated that regional parks were at least "somewhat" important contributors to the local quality of life.

2425 Colorado Ave., Ste. 180  
Santa Monica, CA 90404  
Phone: (310) 828-1183  
Fax: (310) 453-6562

1999 Harrison Street, Ste. 1290  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Phone: (510) 451-9521  
Fax: (510) 451-0384

**FIGURE 1:**  
**Importance of Regional Parks to Sacramento County’s Quality of Life**

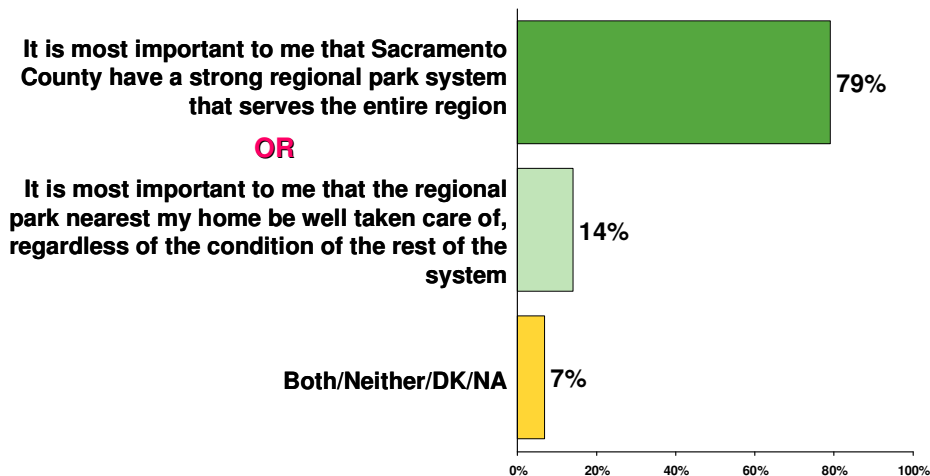
*How important would you say the county’s regional parks are to the quality of life in Sacramento County?*



The importance voters assign to regional parks comes from direct personal experience. Half of local voters say they visit regional parks several times each month, and nearly eight in ten (79%) visit several times each year.

- **Voters want a strong regional park system.** Voters refuse to put the interests of their closest regional park above those of the entire system. As shown in **Figure 2**, when forced to choose, four in five (79%) respondents indicated that maintaining a “strong regional park system that serves the entire region” was more important than simply taking care of the regional park nearest to their homes.

**FIGURE 2:**  
**Prioritizing between the Entire Regional Park System and Voters’ Nearest Regional Parks**



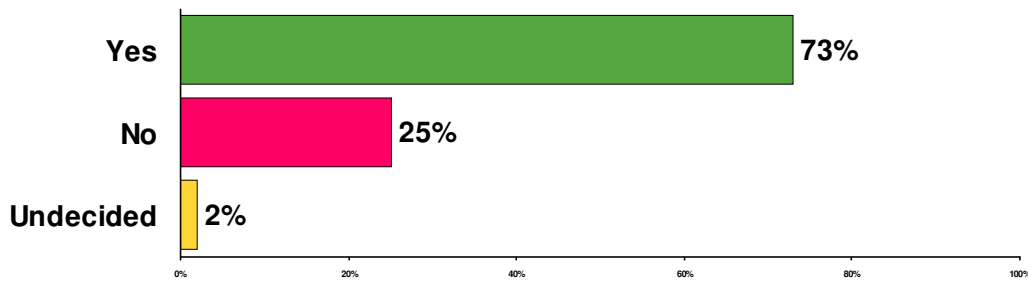
- **Three parks in particular stand out as highly valued parts of the system.** Well over 60 percent of local voters rate the American River Parkway, Sacramento River Parkway, and Discovery Park as “very important” to them – making them clear standouts among the County parks.
- **When it comes to specific park improvements, voters place the highest priority on protecting water quality and wildlife habitat, reducing wildfire risks and addressing security problems.** Respondents were read a list of specific projects that could be undertaken to improve Sacramento County regional parks, and were asked to rate the importance of each. **Figure 3** shows those deemed most important by voters. Respondents saw “maintaining water quality in rivers and streams” as by far the highest priority (86% “extremely” or “very” important). Protecting wildlife habitat and natural areas in general were also seen as valuable expenditures, along with reducing wildfire risks and hiring additional park rangers to improve safety.

**FIGURE 3:  
Specific Regional Park Spending Priorities**

Item	Total Extremely/ Very Important
Maintaining water quality in rivers and streams	86%
Protecting wildlife habitat	66%
Reducing the risk of wildfire on public lands	65%
Protecting land around rivers and streams	62%
Protecting forests and oak woodlands	62%
Preserving natural resources in county parks	62%
Preserving natural areas	61%
Adding more park rangers in the parks and recreation areas that have the most security problems	60%

- **Given a conceptual description, over seven in ten voters initially support a 1/8-cent sales tax increase to fund County parks.** Survey respondents were presented with a conceptual description of a 1/8-cent sales tax, limited to ten years, to fund regional park improvements. As shown in **Figure 4** on the following page, over 70 percent of respondents indicated they would vote “yes” on such a sales tax measure (73%). Only one-quarter of those polled expressed opposition to the sales tax – a very encouraging early indicator of the measure’s support. In addition, the measure received support from well over 60 percent of voters in each supervisorial district, indicating that support is broad as well as deep.

**FIGURE 4:**  
**Support for Sacramento County Regional Park Funding Measures**



Taken together, these results suggest that voters value the County’s parks and are open to increasing local taxes to support them. Further research will need to be done to assess the viability of specific ballot measure proposals, but the initial survey results suggest that the overall prospects for such measures – given a strong campaign – are good.

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<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From February 7-13, 2011, FM3 completed a telephone survey of 600 Sacramento County voters likely to vote in the November 2012 election. The margin of sampling error is +/- 4.0%, though margins of error for subgroups within either sample will be higher. Some specific percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.