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*Public Opinion Research & Strategy*

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TO: Interested Parties

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RE: Results of Survey of Maryland Voters on Program Open Space

DATE: February 9, 2016

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The Democratic polling firm of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and the Republican polling firm of Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently partnered to complete a statewide survey of Maryland voters to assess their support for the state's land and water conservation program, Program Open Space. <sup>i</sup> The results show that **Maryland voters overwhelmingly support Program Open Space, and that they also strongly back legislation that would prevent its funds from being diverted to unrelated programs.** Fully 87 percent of voters support Program Open Space – including a majority (55%) that “strongly support” it. More than seven in ten (73%) voters also back providing full funding for Program Open Space, ending the state's history of diversions for other uses.

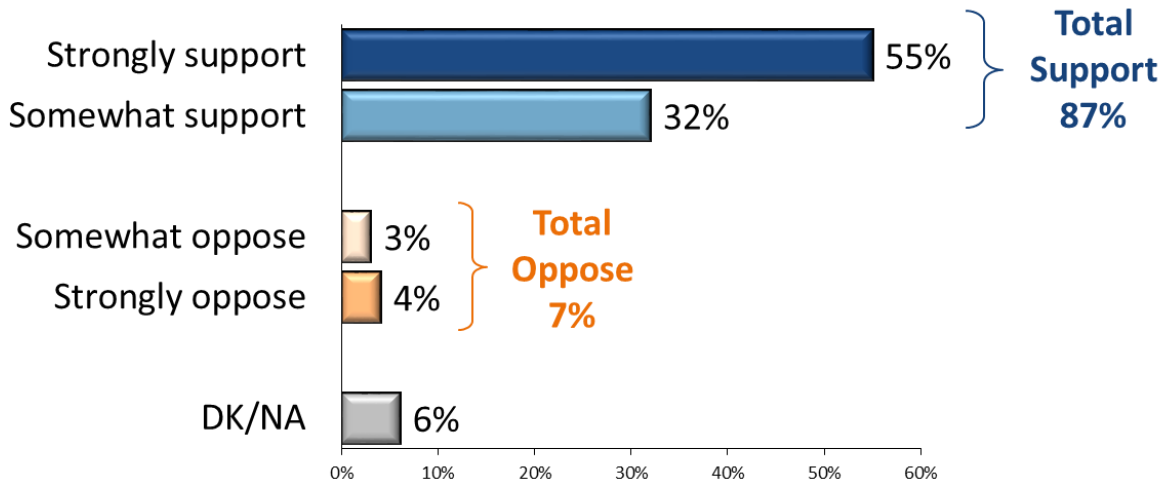
Among the key specific findings of the survey are the following:

- **Support for Program Open Space among Maryland voters is nearly universal.** After a brief description of the program, 87 percent of Maryland voters said they support Program Open Space – 55% “strongly support” it (as illustrated in **Figure 1** on the next page). Fewer than one in ten oppose the program. This pattern of overwhelming support is consistent across demographic groups, including:
  - ✓ 93% of Democrats, 90% of independents, and 77% of Republicans;
  - ✓ 92% of women and 82% of men;
  - ✓ 91% of voters under age 50, and 85% of voters over age 50;
  - ✓ 91% of African-Americans and 89% of whites; and

- ✓ *Sizable majorities of voters in every region of the state, including 80% of Eastern Maryland voters, 87% of Western Maryland voters, and 88% of voters in Central and Southern Maryland.*

**Figure 1:  
Support for Program Open Space**

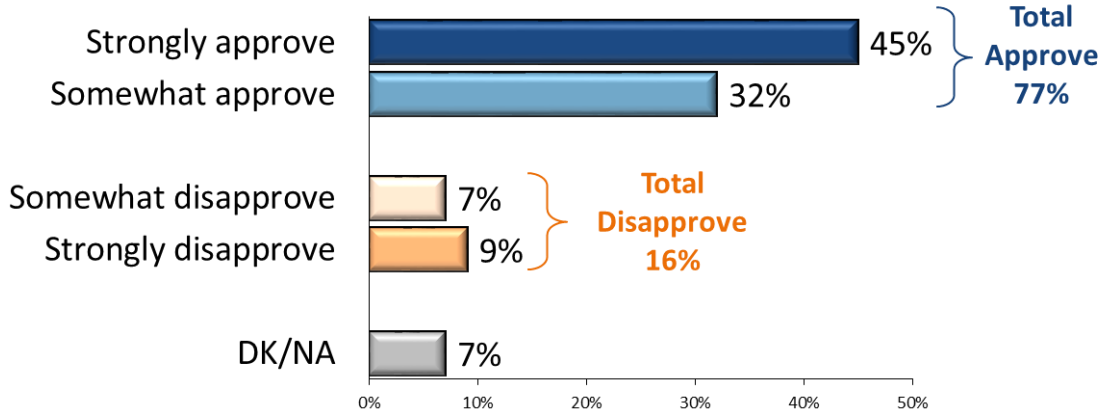
*Established in 1969, Program Open Space sets aside money to build parks; protect land around rivers, streams, and the bay; preserve fish and wildlife habitat; conserve forests, natural areas, and open space; and protect farmland throughout Maryland. Funding for the program comes from an existing tax charged each time a piece of property is sold, equal to one-half of one percent of the price paid for the property. Over the years, Program Open Space has helped Maryland keep 800,000 acres of land from being developed, and has created over 4,000 state parks and recreation areas, and thousands of local neighborhood parks, playgrounds, historic sites and battlefields. Based on this description, would you say that you generally support or oppose Maryland's Program Open Space?*



Support has also been very consistent over time. A 2005 survey of Maryland voters that we conducted showed support at a statistically-identical 88%.

- **More than three-quarters approve of the current mechanism for funding Program Open Space.** Asked about the 0.5% real-estate transfer tax that funds the program, and informed that it means that new development is taxed to fund conservation, 77 percent said they support it as a mechanism for funding Program Open Space (see **Figure 2** on the following page). Fewer than one in six (16 percent) disapprove.

**Figure 2:**  
**Approval of Real-Estate Transfer Tax as the Funding Mechanism of Program Open Space**



- Voters’ top priorities for funding from Program Open Space are clean water and wildlife habitat.** More than half of Maryland voters say *protecting sources of drinking water* (57%), *protecting water quality in rivers and streams* (53%), *protecting water quality in Chesapeake Bay* (53%) and *preventing polluted runoff from contaminating local streams* (52%) are “extremely important” projects for Program Open Space. A range of other projects shown in **Figure 3** also rated as “extremely” or “very important” to more than seven in ten Maryland voters.

**Figure 3:**  
**Program Open Space Funding Priorities**

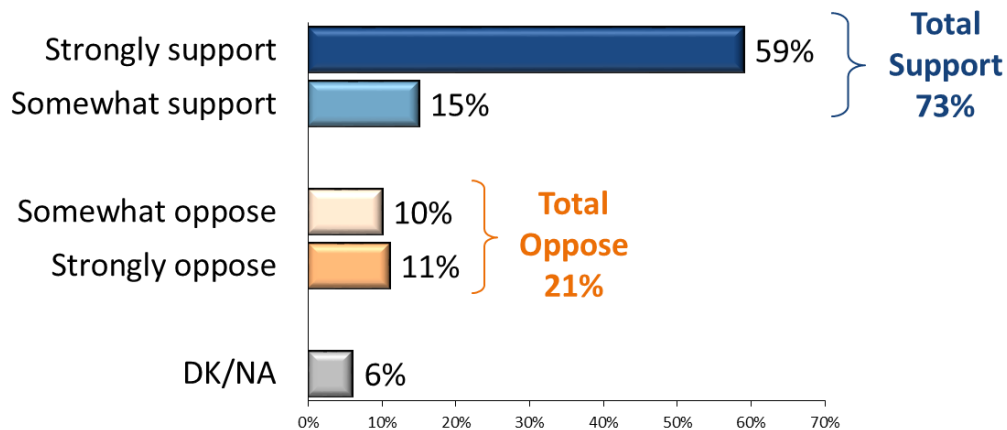
*Next, I am going to read you a list of specific types of projects that might be funded through Program Open Space. Recognizing that there frequently is not enough funding for all such projects, please tell me how important it would be to you that each type of project be funded: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.*

Project	% Ext / Very Important
Protecting sources of drinking water	92%
Protecting water quality in rivers and streams	89%
Preventing polluted runoff from contaminating local streams	86%
Protecting water quality in Chesapeake Bay	85%
Protecting fish and wildlife habitat	81%
Protecting forests	77%
Protecting beaches and shorelines	76%
Repairing and maintaining state parks	76%
Protecting land along the Chesapeake Bay	75%
Protecting agricultural land for locally grown food	72%
Preserving farmland	71%

- **Nearly three-quarters of Maryland voters support a proposal to prevent state diversions of Program Open Space funding.** Given a brief description of the state’s history of diversions of Program Open Space funding (as shown in **Figure 4**), 73 percent of voters say they would support a law ending this practice – 59 percent “strongly.” Only about one in five would oppose such a law. Once again, support for a law preventing diversions from Program Open Space has broad demographic support, including:
  - ✓ 72% of Democrats, 74% of independents, and 75% of Republicans;
  - ✓ 76% of women and 71% of men;
  - ✓ 69% of voters under age 50, and 77% of voters over age 50;
  - ✓ 57% of African-Americans and 80% of whites; and
  - ✓ Sizable majorities of voters in every region of the state, including 75% of Eastern Maryland voters, 82% of Western Maryland voters, and 72% of voters in Central and Southern Maryland.

**Figure 4:**  
**Support for Preventing Diversions from Program Open Space**

Next, let me give you a little bit more information about Program Open Space. For many years, the Governor and the State Legislature have diverted money from Program Open Space to fund other unrelated state programs. Since its inception, \$1 billion of the money meant for Program Open Space has been used for these unrelated state programs. Some people have proposed a law to require that all money designated for Program Open Space be used as it was originally intended: for land conservation programs, including those that protect state and local parks, water quality, farmland, open space, natural areas, wildlife habitat, and historic sites and battlefields. This law would limit the governor and state legislature from using Program Open Space funds for any other purpose.



Taken together, the survey findings indicate that **Maryland voters strongly support Program Open Space – particularly projects conserving clean water and wildlife habitat.** This support cuts across all segments of the electorate, and has been remarkably durable over time. In addition, voters across the political spectrum and across different regions of the state are consistent in backing a proposed law to prevent the Governor and State Legislature from diverting Program Open Space funds to unrelated purposes.

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<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) conducted a statewide telephone survey, on landline and wireless phones, of 704 Maryland voters likely to cast ballots in November 2016. The sample included 502 voters statewide, plus oversamples of 101 additional voters each in Eastern Maryland and Western Maryland. The survey was conducted from Jan. 31 to Feb. 2, 2016. The margin of sampling error for the full study is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups will be higher. Due to rounding, some percentages may not sum to 100%.