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Poll: N.C. Voters Want Environment Protected

RALEIGH -- A new poll of N.C. voters seems to offer a warning to state legislators and the new governor as they pursue policies they say will create more jobs: Don't run roughshod over the environment while doing it.

Seventy percent of those polled said protecting the state's environment is at least as important as economic development. Many of those voters – almost 40 percent -- said Gov.-Elect Pat McCrory's track record on protecting the environment will be very important when they again cast ballots for governor in 2016.

The N.C. Coastal Federation commissioned the telephone poll, which was conducted Dec. 11-12 by Public Policy Polling in Raleigh. It surveyed 500 voters who cast ballots in this year's gubernatorial election, which McCrory, a Republican, won handily over Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton, a Democrat.

The poll results were published today on the federation's Web site, www.nccoast.org. "The poll clearly indicates that many voters want the environment to be well managed," said Todd Miller, executive director of the N.C. Coastal Federation. "Only 26 percent of people who voted for Pat McCrory in the last election said that the governor's future track record on protecting the environment would not be important to them."

More than two-thirds of those who voted for Dalton and more than half of the McCrory voters think environmental protection is equally as important as economic development. Almost 60 percent of Dalton voters said McCrory's record over the next four years for protecting the environment will be very important when they decide who to vote for in

2016. Only a quarter of McCrory voters felt that way. Forty-four percent of those voters, however, said McCrory record will be “somewhat” important.

A desire to protect the environment seems to cross party lines. Seventy-seven percent of registered Democrats, 69 percent of independents and 61 percent of Republicans said environmental protection is at least as important as economic development. They differ, though, when asked how important McCrory’s environmental track record will be if he runs for re-election. More than half of the Democrats said that it will be a very important factor when deciding how to vote, while only 23 percent of Republicans felt that way. Less than half of the Republicans polled -- 47 percent -- said that McCrory’s record will be “somewhat” important to them. Independents fell somewhere in the middle. Thirty-eight percent will consider McCrory’s record very important, while 40 percent said it will be “somewhat” important.

Miller said the poll is a reminder that voters in N.C. want their political leaders to safeguard the environment. “We look forward to working with the new governor as he tackles environmental challenges and opportunities,” Miller said. “We will applaud his accomplishments, and work hard to draw attention to environmental management decisions that are good, bad and ugly.”

Miller said he is under no illusion that the environment will sway a huge number of voters in the next election. “However, this poll indicates that some voters will pay attention to the governor’s environmental decision-making, and in a hotly contested election his track record could swing enough votes to make a difference in the race.”