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New Florida Poll Reveals Voter Attitudes on Key Animal Welfare Issues

A statewide survey conducted by Mason-Dixon Polling & Research, Inc. reveals that Florida voters strongly oppose trophy hunting of Florida's recovering black bear population, and support efforts to crack down on puppy mills and stop forcing greyhound tracks to offer excessive amounts of live greyhound racing— three pressing animal welfare issues in the state.

Voters oppose reopening black bear hunting by a three-to-one margin, a proposal that could follow the potential removal of black bears from the state's threatened species list this year. The poll also indicates that an overwhelming majority oppose hunting black bears with dogs, which could be included in a hunting proposal. Voters also overwhelmingly support the state prioritizing non-lethal approaches to dealing with community black bear conflicts.

The poll comes after The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission released the initial results of a biological status review finding that black bears no longer meet the state's newly adopted threatened species criteria. The FWC's draft management plan for bears has drawn controversy for including sport hunting as a potential management tool while the bear population still recovers.

Voters also strongly disapprove, again by a more than three-to-one margin, of a state law that mandates greyhound tracks offer excessive amounts of live dog racing. Racing greyhounds suffer severe injuries and mistreatment. New bi-partisan legislation (SB 1594 / HB 1145 Parimutuel Permit Holders) will stop the government from forcing these facilities to have dog racing and will allow the marketplace to wind down this cruel activity. On Tuesday, HB 1145, sponsored by Rep. Dana Young, R-Tampa, passed the Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee by a wide margin, 14-1, and last week SB 1594, sponsored by Sen. Maria Sachs, D-Delray, passed the Senate Regulated Industries Committee as well.

The poll also documents that Floridians have an unfavorable opinion of puppy mills and want these large scale commercial breeding operations to be regulated and the dogs to receive basic standards of humane care. At puppy mills, the dogs are kept in small wire cages for years on end solely to produce puppies for commercial sale in pet stores and over the Internet.

“Not addressing these issues would mean another year of suffering and abuse for thousands of animals in the puppy mill and greyhound race industries, and the loss of the protection for the threatened black bear,” said Jennifer Hobgood, Florida state director for The HSUS, “This survey confirms that Floridians oppose greyhound racing, puppy mill abuses, and the trophy hunting of the still recovering population of black bears. Voters want common-sense solutions to these pressing animal welfare concerns.”

The survey of 625 Florida voters was conducted statewide from March 3 through March 5, 2011. The margin of error is plus or minus four percent. The questions and results are below.

QUESTION: The Florida black bear is listed by the state as a threatened species and has been protected from trophy hunting for more than ten years. The population has been decimated, largely due to habitat loss. State official are now proposing allowing bear hunting in Florida for the first time in several years. Do you support or oppose the hunting of black bears in Florida?

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
SUPPORT	22%	26%	19%	16%	31%	19%
OPPOSE	68%	62%	73%	77%	54%	73%
UNDECIDED	10%	12%	8%	7%	15%	8%

QUESTION:If the state permits the hunting of black bears, it must also issue rules to regulate the bear hunt. Do you support or oppose permitting the use of packs of dogs to pursue and corner or tree bears where they are killed?

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
SUPPORT	12%	14%	10%	9%	16%	10%
OPPOSE	78%	72%	84%	86%	69%	81%
UNDECIDED	10%	14%	6%	5%	15%	9%

QUESTION: Bears sometimes come into conflict with people. The vast majority of these reported conflicts are nuisance complaints about garbage cans, bird feeders, and simple sightings of bears near urban areas. Many states successfully manage bear populations and reduce conflict through non-lethal measures such as public education, trash management, and game officers using rubber pellets and loud noises to frighten bears away, instead of killing them. Do you support or oppose Florida placing priority on policies that promote non-lethal methods to reduce conflicts between bears and people?

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
SUPPORT	82%	81%	83%	82%	80%	84%
OPPOSE	11%	11%	11%	10%	13%	9%
UNDECIDED	7%	8%	6%	8%	7%	7%

QUESTION: Some people say greyhound racing brings jobs and revenue to the state. Others say greyhound racing is cruel, inhumane and ought to be outlawed. Would you say that you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable impression of the dog racing industry in Florida today?

TOTAL FAVORABLE 38%

TOTAL UNFAVORABLE 49%

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
VERY FAV	8%	10%	6%	10%	6%	9%
SW FAV	28%	40%	17%	21%	39%	23%
SW UNFAV	22%	22%	22%	23%	19%	26%
VERY UNFAV	27%	12%	41%	32%	20%	29%
NO OPINION	15%	16%	14%	14%	16%	13%

QUESTION: Greyhound racing is a dying industry. In the past 20 years, bets on dog racing decreased by nearly 70% and continue to shrink. Years ago, and in an effort to save the dying industry, the state coupled dog racing with slot machines and poker making dog racing mandatory at gambling facilities. Do you approve or disapprove of the state law that requires gambling facilities to offer regular greyhound racing?

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
APPROVE	19%	27%	12%	15%	23%	21%
DISAPPROVE	68%	61%	75%	69%	68%	68%
NOT SURE	13%	12%	13%	16%	9%	11%

QUESTION: Puppy mills are massive commercial dog breeding facilities where the dogs are kept in small wire cages for years on end solely to produce puppies for the pet trade. Currently there are no state laws in Florida that regulate puppy mills or require these dogs to have adequate space, exercise, vet care or even regular access to food and water. Do you support or oppose a law in Florida that would require the regulation of large-scale commercial dog breeders?

	STATE	MEN	WOMEN	DEMS	REPS	IND
SUPPORT	80%	76%	83%	87%	69%	85%
OPPOSE	15%	21%	10%	11%	22%	12%
UNDECIDED	5%	3%	7%	2%	9%	3%

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