

Poll finds a majority of Marylanders say climate change is having major impacts on shorelines, wildlife, weather

By: Scott Dance

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A majority of Marylanders believe climate change is having major impacts — inducing more extreme weather events, harming wildlife and raising sea levels — according to a new poll from Goucher College.

While groups including Democrats, younger people and people of color were most likely to call the impact “major,” even vast majorities of Republicans, people over age 55 and people without college degrees agreed that climate change is having at least “minor” tangible impacts on the planet.

But there were some areas in which all respondents were less likely to assign “major” impacts from climate change, including on human health, fishing and agriculture industries, and on air quality.

Previous polling showed that a majority of Marylanders believe climate change is happening, said Mileah Kromer, director of the Sarah T. Hughes Center for Politics at Goucher College, who oversees the poll. But the poll released Tuesday shows people see climate change more greatly affecting their lives and their environment.

“Across party lines, people recognize there’s impact from climate change,” Kromer said. “There might be some disagreement from Republicans and Democrats on the causes of climate change. But I think on the impacts, at least to some extent ... there’s some broad bipartisan support.”

Kim Coble, executive director of the Maryland League of Conservation voters, said she was not surprised to see so many Marylanders acknowledging the consequences of climate change. So many people have personal stories or connections to loved ones affected by extreme storms or wildfires, for example, she said.

The poll results suggest more education is needed to help more people understand the urgency of dealing with climate change, she added. She said she has seen the need for that the past couple of years as the

General Assembly has debated climate legislation, including a major bill that passed in the Senate on Monday.

“The cost of inaction is health. It is the economy. It is fishing,” Coble said. “If you’re not responding with urgency, there is something missing.”

The poll found 55% of Maryland voters agreed there have been major climate impacts when it comes to rising sea levels and retreating shorelines as well as wildlife and ecosystems. Nearly as many, 54%, saw major impacts regarding extreme weather, including hurricanes, floods and heat waves.

On health, 81% of voters saw some impact, but were about evenly divided on whether that impact was minor or major.

Voters were more likely to assign greater impacts to climate change if they were younger, were not white, had college education, and lived in the Washington, D.C., suburbs.

With all of the questions, respondents suggesting no climate impacts whatsoever were in a distinct minority. Overall, only 16% said climate change had no impact on human health, including one in three Republicans, 23% of people aged 55 and over, and 21% of white people, for example.

Climate change is indeed causing shorelines to recede, and rapidly in some parts of Maryland and the world, and research has shown an increase in extreme weather disasters is not just anecdotal. On human health, climate change impacts include increases in heat-related illnesses and deaths, which research shows tend to be undercounted, and challenges to food security.

Goucher also asked respondents about their thoughts on COVID-19 and pandemic-related restrictions. As counties move to end many restrictions, including ending mask mandates, 44% of respondents said those changes are “about right,” while 28% said restrictions are being lifted too early and 25% said they’re being lifted too slowly.

Marylanders are divided in their concern about themselves or a loved one contracting COVID-19 — 53% are “very” or “somewhat” concerned and 47% are “not at all” or “a little” concerned. That compares with 71% who were “very” or “somewhat” concerned at this time last year, and 29% who were “not at all” or “a little” concerned.

The poll is based on a survey of 635 Maryland adults via landlines and cellphones, and has a margin of error of 3.9 percentage points. It was conducted from March 1 to March 6.

Results released Monday found a 2-to-1 majority of Maryland voters support legalizing marijuana.