AUBURN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR GOVERNMENTAL SERVICES

Assessment of Customer Satisfaction of Alabama Forestry Commission Services

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Submitted To:

Alabama Forestry Commission
513 Madison Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130-2550

Submitted By:

Center for Governmental Services
Survey Research Lab
2236 Haley Center
Auburn University, AL 36849

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Executive Summary

The Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) commissioned a customer satisfaction survey from the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University in July 2008. The purpose of the study was to assess customer satisfaction among Alabamians who have requested or received services from the Alabama Forestry Commission within the 2007-2008 fiscal year. The Alabama Forestry Commission identified approximately 3,800 customers who had requested or received services. These customers were mailed survey instruments and 1,184 completed surveys were returned. Below is a summary of the key findings.

The survey revealed that the Alabama Forestry Commission's customers have a high opinion of the agency and the services it provides to the public. Clients expressed high levels of satisfaction in all areas. Customers were very satisfied overall and with the timeliness and quality of the responses they were provided.

- 95% percent of customers rate their overall satisfaction with the services they were provided as "satisfactory" or "excellent" (see figure 7).

- 96% percent of customers felt the services they were provided were "somewhat" or "very timely" (see figure 5).

- 94% percent of customers felt that the response they received met their needs (see figure 6).

The most common reason that customers cited for contacting the Alabama Forestry Commission was to request prescribed burn assistance (40%), followed by assistance with a specific forestry program, fire prevention/control training, stand management recommendations/improvement plans, and land management assistance (see figure 2). These contacts were typically made by phone (see figure 3).

Thirteen percent of customers who were surveyed had visited the new Alabama Forestry Commission's web site (see figure 8). Of those who had visited the website, their primary reason for their visit was to find out about services offered by the agency (see figure 9).

- 98% of customers who had viewed the Alabama Forestry Commission's website thought it was "easy" or "very easy" to obtain the information they needed (see figure 10).

Survey respondents were asked to consider several options to address declining funding. Customers indicated their preference would be for the AFC to continue to seek additional funding sources rather than decrease services. Fire mitigation/suppression was identified to be the most preferred service, followed by forest management services, and then education services (see figure 11).

About one-quarter of respondents indicated they had current needs they would like the Alabama Forestry Commission to address (see figure 12). The most common need they mentioned was for assistance with prescribed burn (37%). Yet only 8% indicated they had a need to be contacted by Alabama Forestry Commission (see figure 14).

Introduction

The Alabama Forestry Commission was established as a state agency in 1924. The Commission is charged with protecting Alabama's forests and helping landowners carry out responsible forest management on private property. The Alabama Forestry Commission is governed by a seven member Board of Commissioners that is appointed by the Governor of Alabama. This study reflects the Commission's commitment to evaluating and continuously improving the quality of services.

The Center for Governmental Services (CGS) at Auburn University contracted with the Commission to conduct a customer satisfaction survey. The Survey Research Lab (SRL) at the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University was established in 1994. The SRL provides state-of-the art survey research services. Projects are designed to provide government officials, policy-makers and researchers with objective and scientifically valid information.

This study determined the nature of services requested and/or received from the Alabama Forestry Commission, assesses satisfaction with the delivery of these services and evaluates the overall satisfaction of customers with the Alabama Forestry Commission personnel. Additionally, the study reveals new services desired by customers and additional ways that the Alabama Forestry Commission can meet customer needs.

Research Objectives

1. Determine the nature of services requested and/or received from the Alabama Forestry Commission, including: how services are requested and the nature of interaction(s) with the Alabama Forestry Commission.

2. Assess satisfaction with the delivery of services, including: timeliness of services provided, appropriateness of services provided, overall satisfaction with services provided, and overall satisfaction with interactions with Alabama Forestry Commission personnel.

3. Assess additional services desired by customers and additional ways that the Alabama Forestry Commission can meet customer needs.

Survey Methods

The two-page survey consisted of 23 questions and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. The survey questionnaire was developed jointly by the Alabama Forestry Commission and the Center for Governmental Services at Auburn University. The questionnaire was constructed by subject matter experts and was based upon previous survey questionnaires conducted with similar research objectives.

The survey instrument was mailed to Alabama Forestry Commission contacts who had requested or received services within the 2007-08 fiscal year. The survey included a cover letter explaining the reason for the survey and provided instructions about how the survey should be completed and returned. An electronic version of the survey was also available on request via e-mail. Three weeks after the first mailing date, a second mailing was prepared and mailed out to individuals on the contact list who had not responded to the first survey request. All completed surveys returned to the Center for Governmental Services were entered into a database by employees trained on proper data entry and data collection techniques. Throughout the study, CGS professional staff monitored, supervised and evaluated survey data entry in order to maintain survey quality.

Sample

The initial survey was mailed to approximately 3,788 Alabama Forestry Commission contacts who had requested and/or received services within the 2007-08 fiscal year. A total of 1,184 completed surveys were returned resulting in a response rate of 31%.

Statistical Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used to analyze and test the data. A profile of the respondents was prepared using descriptive analysis. Analysis included summary statistic frequency tables and a comparative analysis of the citizen satisfaction with services requested and/or received by the Alabama Forestry Commission. Due to rounding, some charts reporting mean scores may not total to one-hundred percent.

Study Findings

Customer Characteristics

Major Points:

Finding 1

Almost all survey respondents were homeowners or landowners (see figure 1). Four percent were businesses and the remaining 4% were Civic or Community Organizations, Government Agencies, K-12 School Colleges/Universities, Emergency Response Agencies, or Landowner Associations. The geographic distribution of respondents was wide spread across the state with at least 61 out of 67 Alabama counties represented (see table 1).

Figure 1: First, are you a:

Customers who contacted the Alabama Forestry Commission were almost all homeowners or landowners.

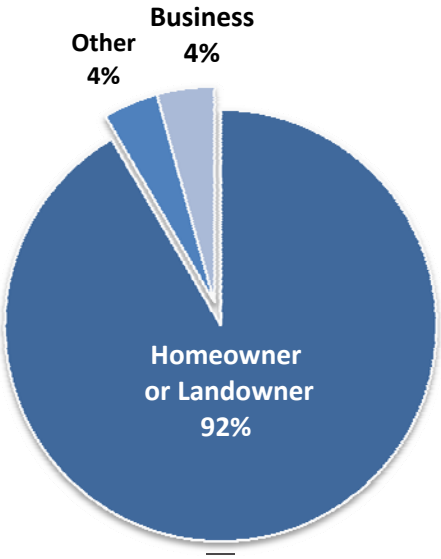


Table 1: Through which county office did you contact the Alabama Forestry Commission?

County	Number	County	Number
Autauga	21	Henry	19
Baldwin	14	Houston	24
Barbour	15	Jackson	6
Bibb	8	Jefferson	4
Blount	14	Lamar	7
Bullock	10	Lauderdale	9
Butler	30	Lawrence	5
Chambers	17	Lee	15
Cherokee	6	Lowndes	14
Chilton	14	Macon	16
Choctaw	12	Marengo	24
Clarke	22	Marion	9
Clay	17	Marshall	7
Cleburne	14	Mobile	12
Coffee	31	Monroe	35
Colbert	10	Montgomery	13
Conecuh	10	Morgan	6
Coosa	24	Perry	9
Covington	47	Pickens	13
Crenshaw	5	Pike	12
Cullman	19	Randolph	17
Dale	23	Russel	8
Dallas	34	Shelby	12
Dekalb	10	Talladega	8
Elmore	8	Tallapoosa	11
Escambia	26	Tuscaloosa	20
Etowah	7	Walker	10
Fayette	18	Washington	6
Franklin	5	Wilcox	28
Geneva	13	Winston	10
Hale	4	Others	31

Major Points:

Covington, Monroe, Dallas and Butler counties had the largest numbers of survey participants.

Service Requests and Inquiries

Major Points:

Finding 2

The largest proportion of survey respondents contacted the Alabama Forestry Commission to request prescribed burn assistance (40%), followed by assistance with a specific forestry program (27%), fire prevention/control training (24%), stand management recommendations/improvement plans (21%), and land management assistance (21%). These contacts were typically made by phone or in person (see figure 3).

Figure 2: What was the nature of your request of contact (please check all that apply)?

The most common request made by customers was for prescribed burn assistance.

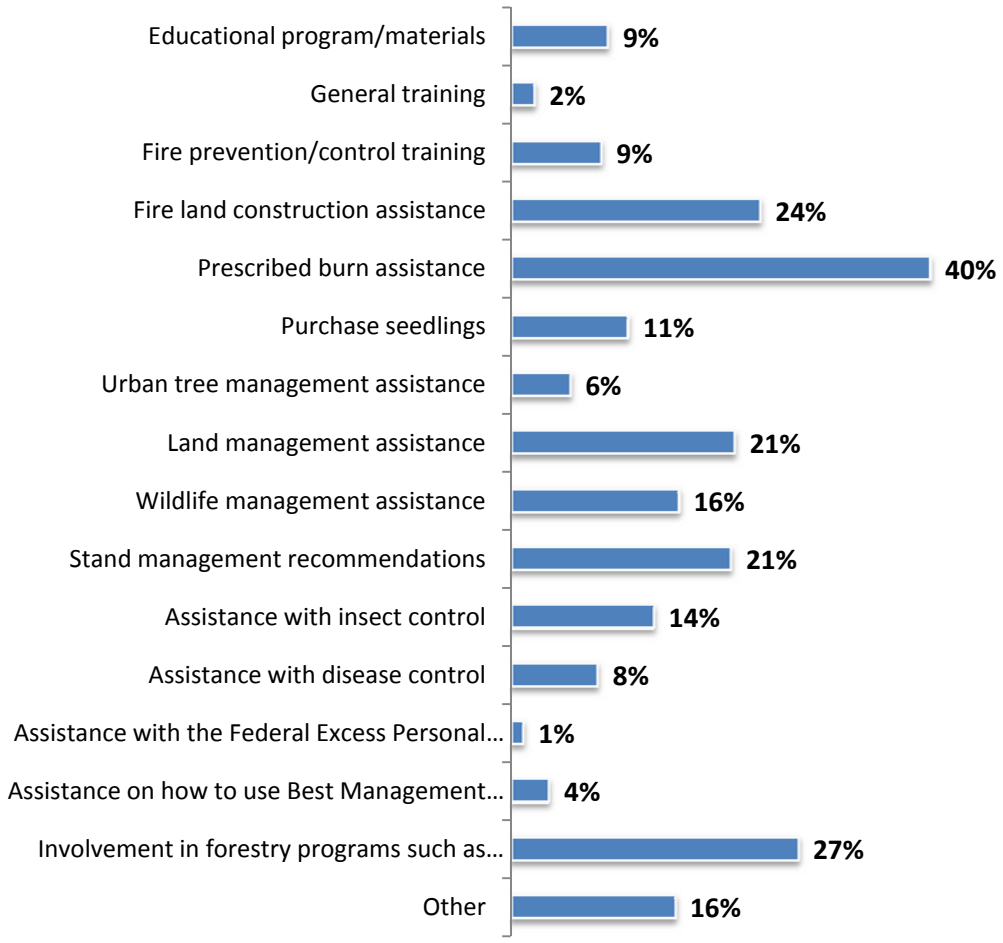
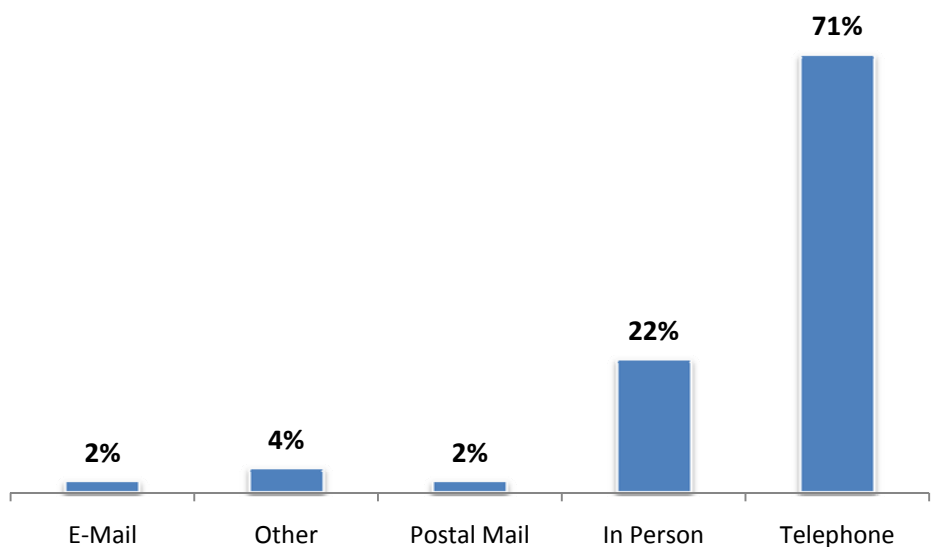


Table 2: Other common reasons why survey respondents contacted the Alabama Forestry Commission included:

Response Request	Number of Responses
Burn Permit	3
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	6
Cogon Gas Control	3
Wild Fire Assistance	6
Replanting After Hurricane Ivan	3
Planting Trees	4
Trees Dying	3
Invasive Plants	2
Burning Timber	1
Insect Infestations	3
Thinning / Harvesting	4
Other / Unidentified	12

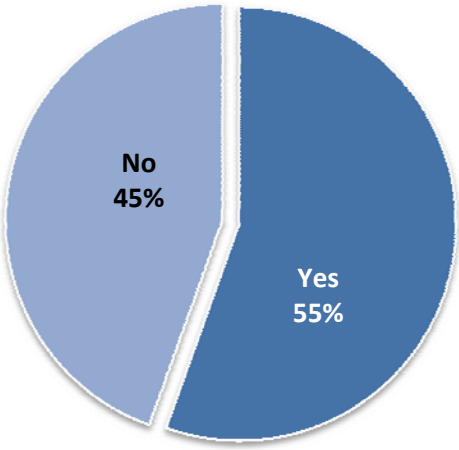
Major Points:

Figure 3: How did you initiate contact with the Alabama Forestry Commission?



Almost all customers contact the Alabama Forestry Commission by phone or in person.

Figure 4: Prior to your last request for assistance from the Alabama Forestry Commission, have you had prior contact with the agency?



Major Points:

Over half of all people who contacted the Alabama Forestry Commission were repeat customers.

Satisfaction

Major Points:

Finding 3

Overall, Alabama Forestry Commission customers were very satisfied with timeliness and quality of responses they were provided (see figure 5). Ninety-six percent felt that services were somewhat or very timely and 94% felt that the response met their needs (see figure 6). Ninety-five percent of survey respondents rated their overall satisfaction with the services they were provided as satisfactory or excellent (see figure 7).

96% of customers received a timely response to their requests from the Alabama Forestry Commission.

Figure 5: How would you rate the timeliness of the response to your request?

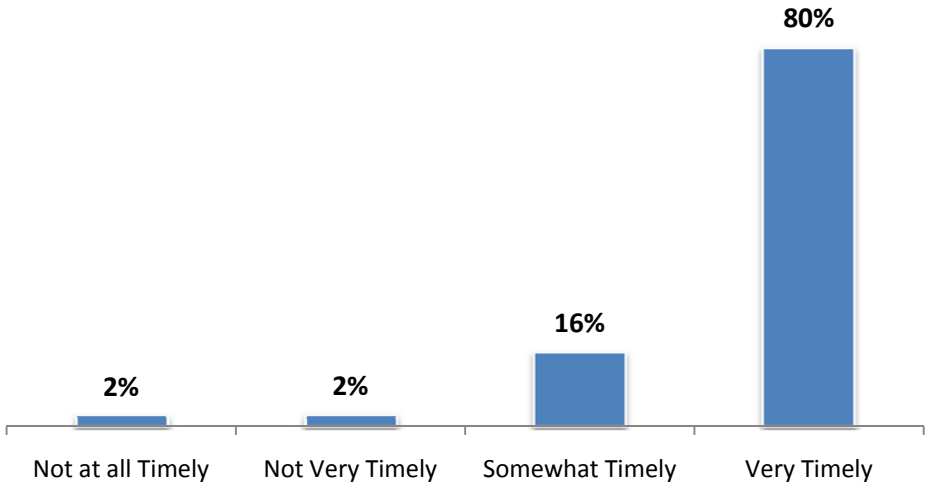
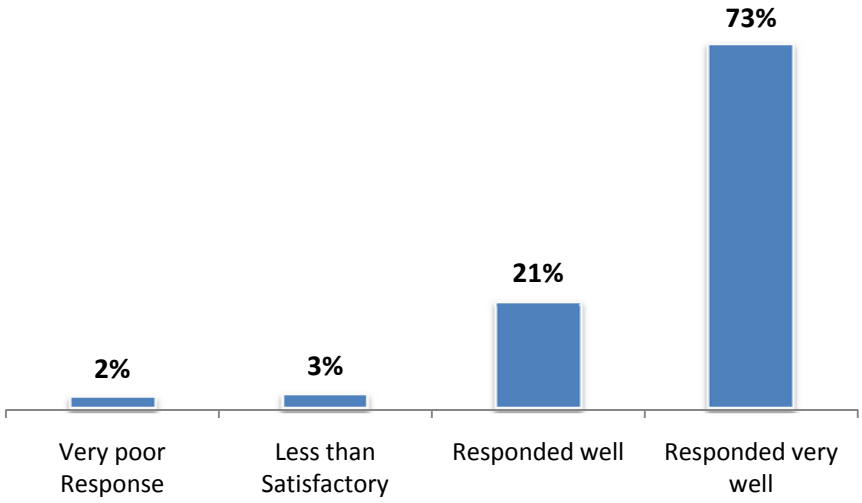


Table 3: If you responded not timely, please explain:

Explanation	Number
Agency was unable to meet request at local level	1
Difficult to get in touch with someone	3
Received no response or call back	2
Contacted quickly, but action taken took too long	3
Action that was promised never happened	1

Figure 6: How well do you think that the Alabama Forestry Commission responded to your request (did the response meet your needs)?



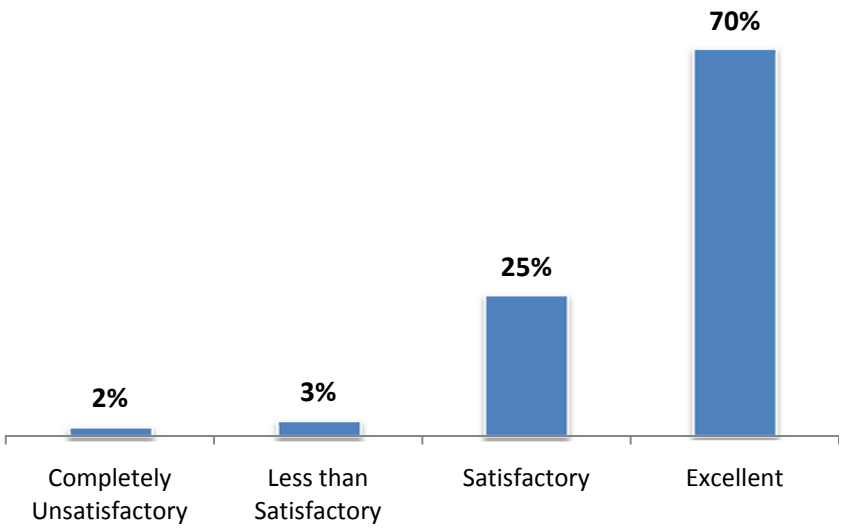
Major Points:

95% of customers said the Alabama Forestry Commission had responded well or very well to their requests.

Table 4: If you responded not satisfactory, please explain:

Explanation	Number
No progress was made after first visit	3
Too long between first contact and action taken	1
Disappointed with outcome of action taken	5

Figure 7: Please rate your overall satisfaction with the Alabama Forestry Commission and services provided.



Major Points:

95% of customers rated their satisfaction with the Alabama Forestry Commission as satisfactory or excellent.

Table 5: If you responded not satisfactory, please explain:

Explanation	Number
No follow-up after first contact	1
Project was never completed	1
Information was not helpful	1
Disappointed in outcome	4
No response or too slow	3
Local office was unable to make decision	1

Table 6: Do you have any suggestions about how the Alabama Forestry Commission could make improvements to increase customer satisfaction?

Suggestion	Number
Nothing needs to be improved - service is excellent	17
Improve the website	2
Get better equipment	2
Expand/train staff	4
Communicate better	7
Simplify the process	1
More outreach/education	4
Expand services	8
Respond in a timely fashion	2

Major Points:

A large majority customers said the Alabama Forestry Commission had nothing to improve upon an was providing excellent services.

Website

Major Points:

Finding 5

About 13% of survey respondents had visited the new Alabama Forestry Commission's website. Their primary reason to visit the website was to find out about services offered (see figure 9). Ninety-eight percent of survey respondents said it was easy or very easy to obtain the information they needed (see figure 10).

Most customers had not visited the Alabama Forestry Commission's website.

Figure 8: The Alabama Forestry Commission has a recently updated website. Have you ever visited the new website?

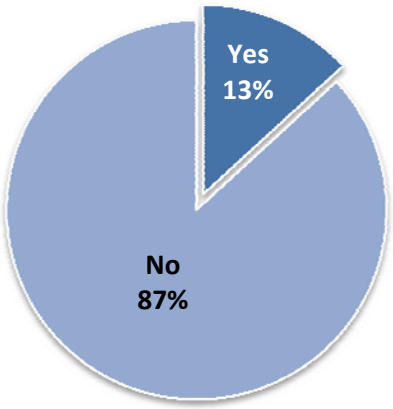
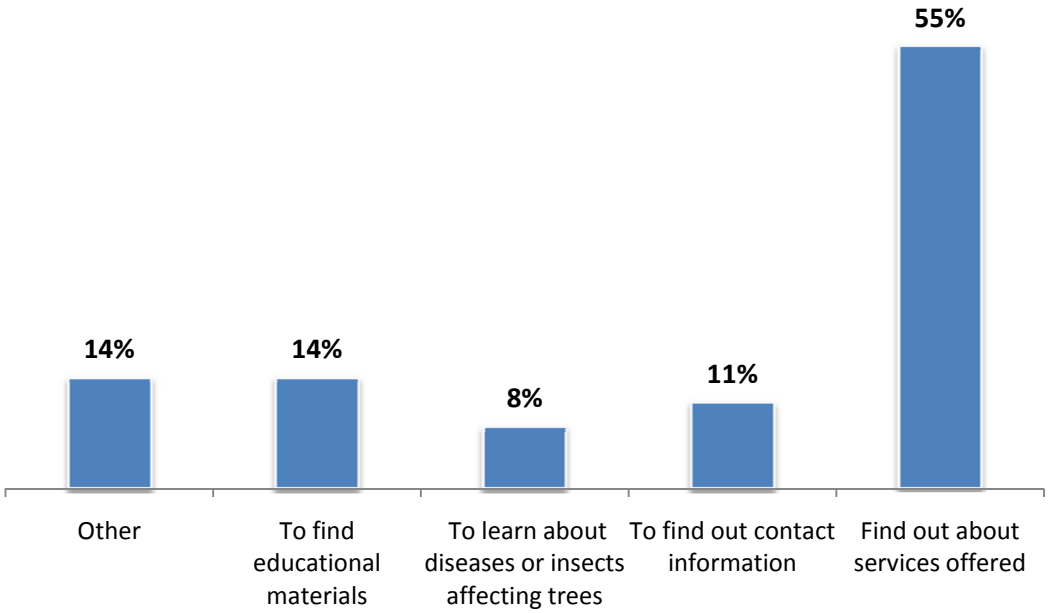
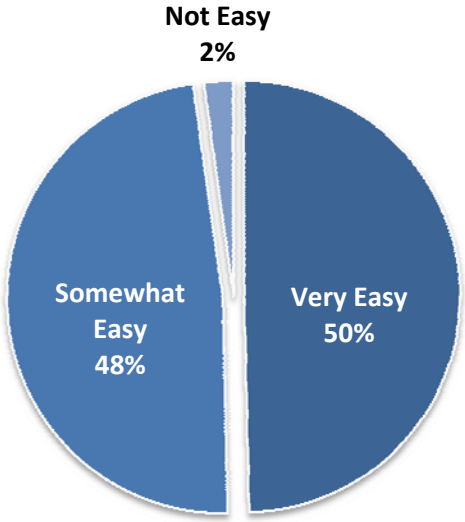


Figure 9: If you visited the website, did you visit to:



Those customers who had visited the Alabama Forestry Commission's website were primarily using the website to find out about services offered.

Figure 10: How easy did you find it to obtain information from the website?



Major Points:

Nearly all customers who had viewed the Alabama Forestry Commission's website thought it was easy or very easy to obtain the information they needed.

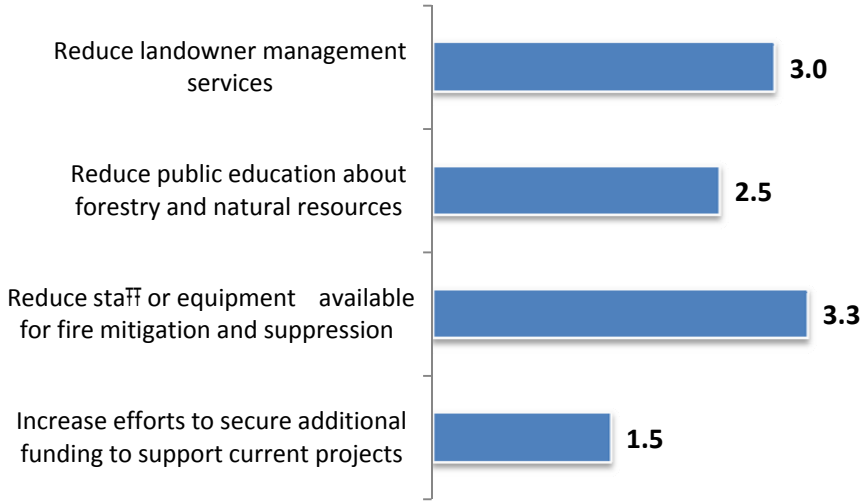
Service Priorities

Major Points:

Finding 6

Survey respondents were asked to consider several options to address declining funding. Customers indicated their preference would be for the AFC to continue to seek additional funding sources rather than decrease services. Fire mitigation/suppression was identified to be the most preferred service, followed by forest management services, and then education services (see figure 11).

Figure 11: Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following options (lower score indicates more appealing):



For the most part, customers would like to see the Alabama Forestry Commission increase efforts to raise more funds to address declining funding concerns.

Current Concerns

Major Points:

Finding 7

About one-quarter of respondents indicated that they had current need that Alabama Forestry Commission could help them with (see figure 12). The most common need they mentioned was for assistance with prescribed burn (37%). The survey offered them the opportunity to provide their contact information and 8% indicated that they would like to be contacted (see figure 14).

A large proportion of customers continue to have unmet needs they would like the Alabama Forestry Commission to help with.

Figure 12: Do you currently need any services from the Alabama Forestry Commission?

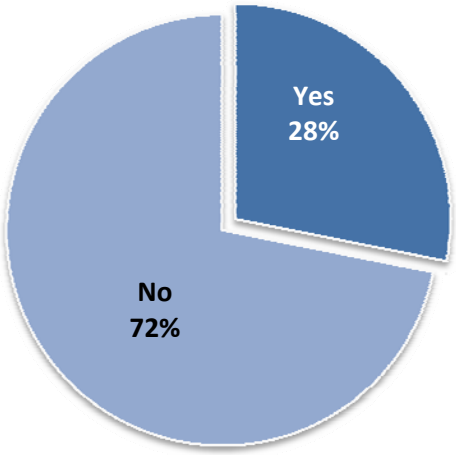


Figure 13: If yes, please explain.

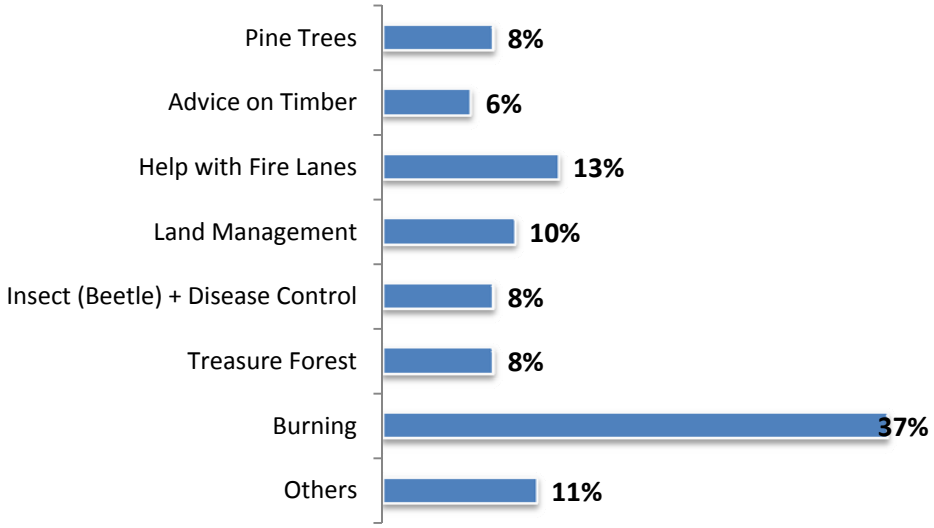
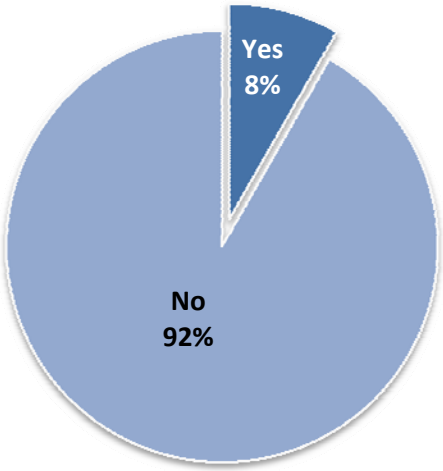


Figure 14: Are there any concerns that you have about which you would like the Alabama Forestry Commission to contact you?



Major Points: