



How to Talk the Public about Southern Forests

February 25, 2021

Forestrywebinars.net

Keeping Forests

Southeast Region Research

Methodology

New Bridge Strategy conducted qualitative and quantitative research in late summer/early fall of 2020 on behalf of Keeping Forests.

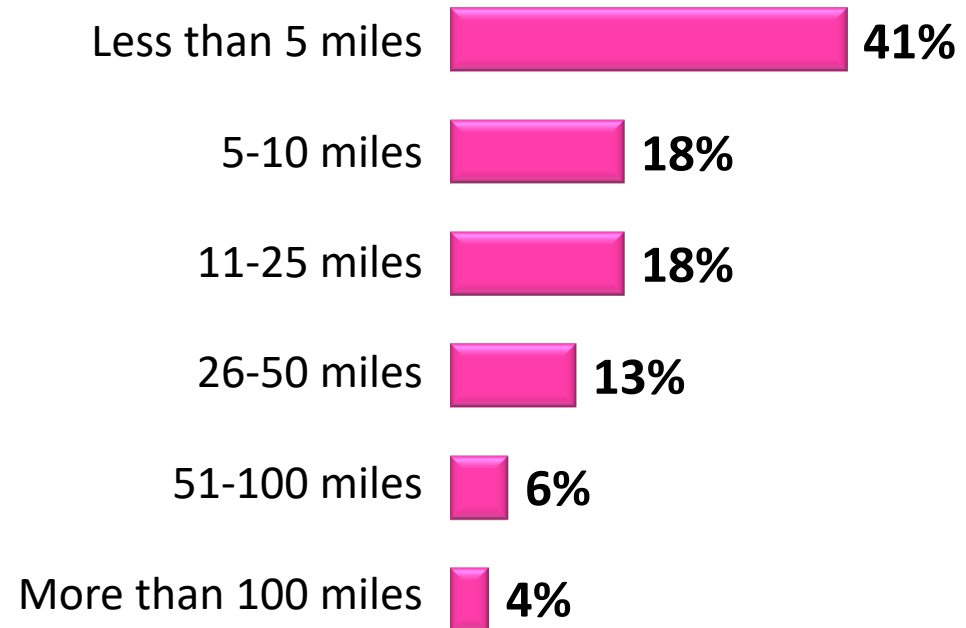
In August 2020, we conducted an online “Qualboard” (focus group) among more environmentally focused residents in the South from August 25-27, 2020.

In September/October 2020 we conducted an online survey among N=1,011 registered voters in the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. In Florida, Oklahoma, and Texas, interviews were conducted in specific counties that are either in or near forested areas. Interviews were conducted September 23 – October 2, 2020. The credibility interval (analogous to margin of error) is $\pm 3.51\%$ for the overall sample. The credibility interval will vary for sub-groups.



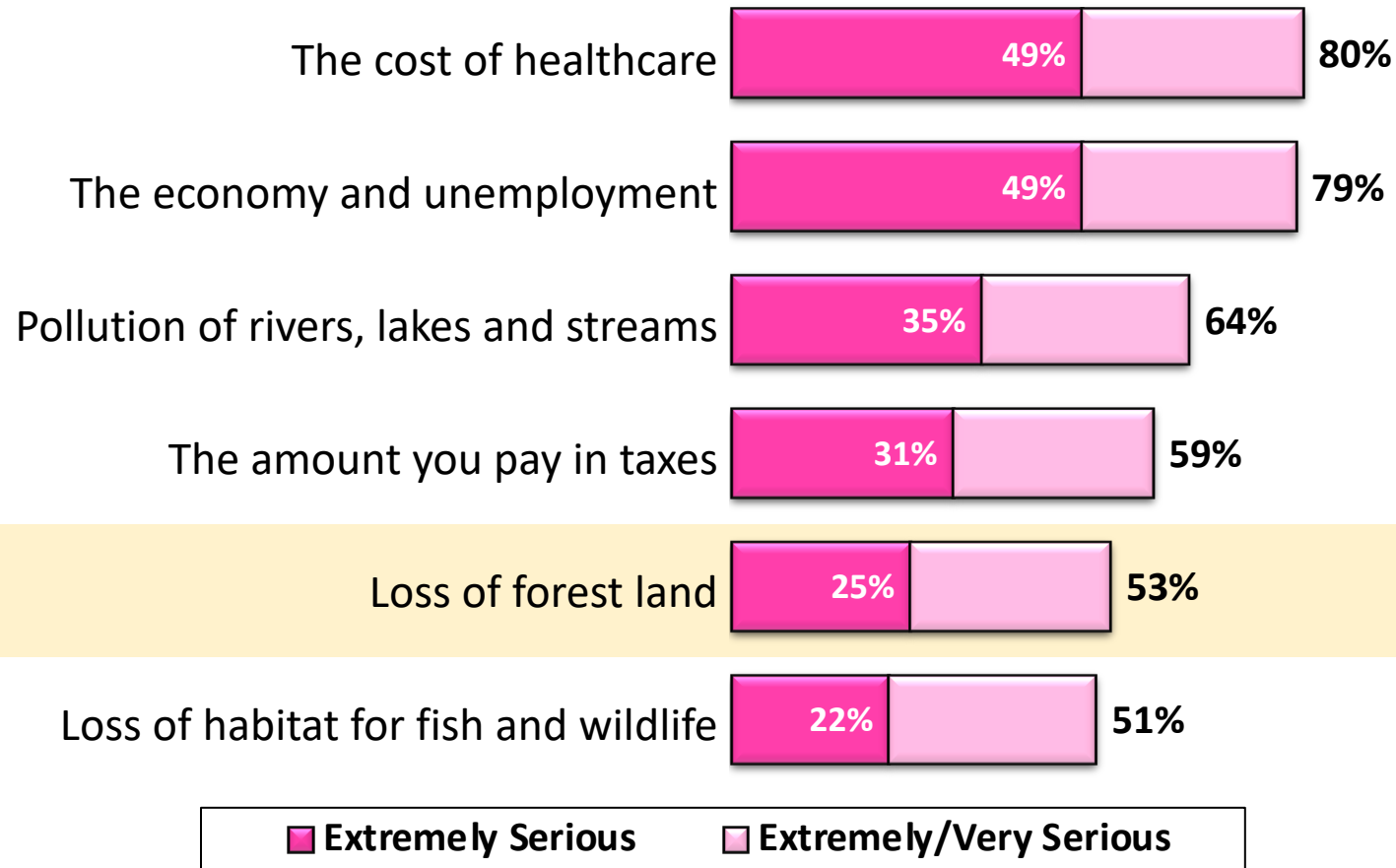
Voters' Views of Forests

Most Southerners live fairly close to a forested area.



How close would you say you live to a forested area?

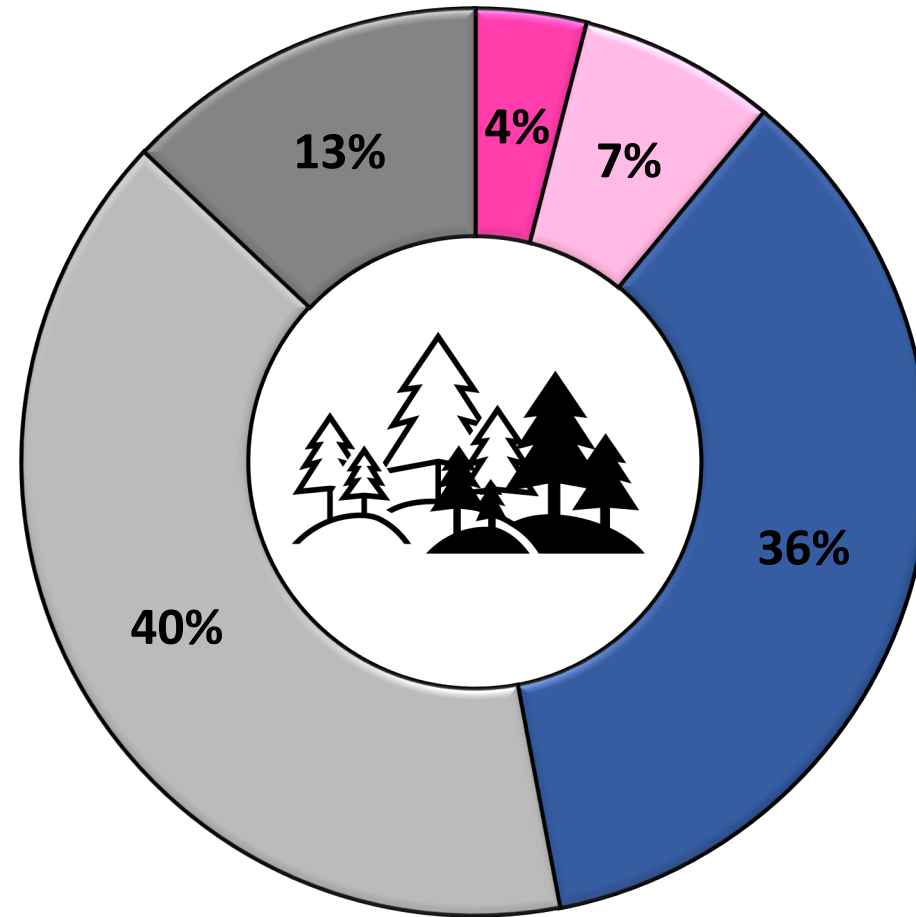
While loss of forest land is not deemed the top problem facing their state, a majority of voters do believe it is a very serious issue.



The following are some specific issues facing STATE. For each one, please indicate whether you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, somewhat serious problem, or not a problem for the state.

Voters believe the condition of forests have gotten worse over the last ten years.

53%
Total Worse



Over the past ten years or so, do you think the overall condition of forests in your state has gotten... much better, somewhat better, stayed about the same, somewhat worse, or much worse?

Most think the forest land is owned by the government, not individual landowners.



44%

The Government



28%

Individuals & Family Landowners



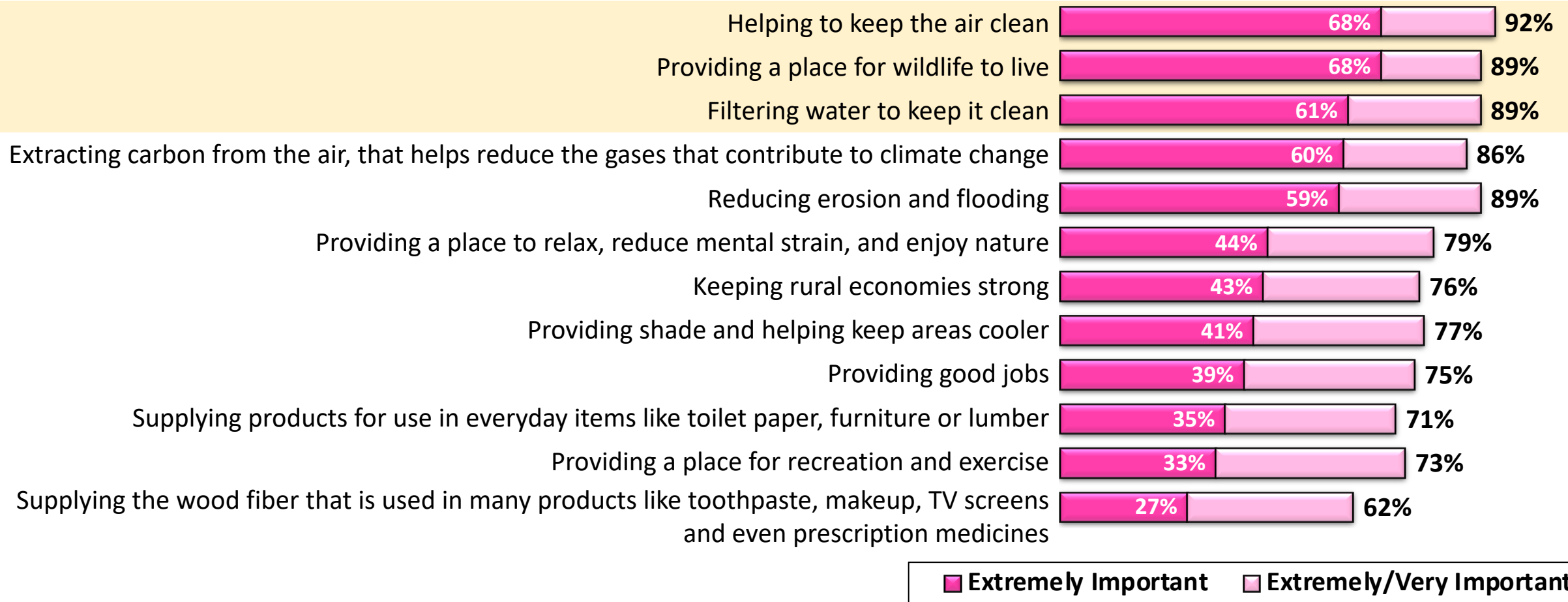
27%

Private Companies

2011 National: 62%	15%	13% Timber Companies
2007 National: 60%	10%	19% Timber Companies

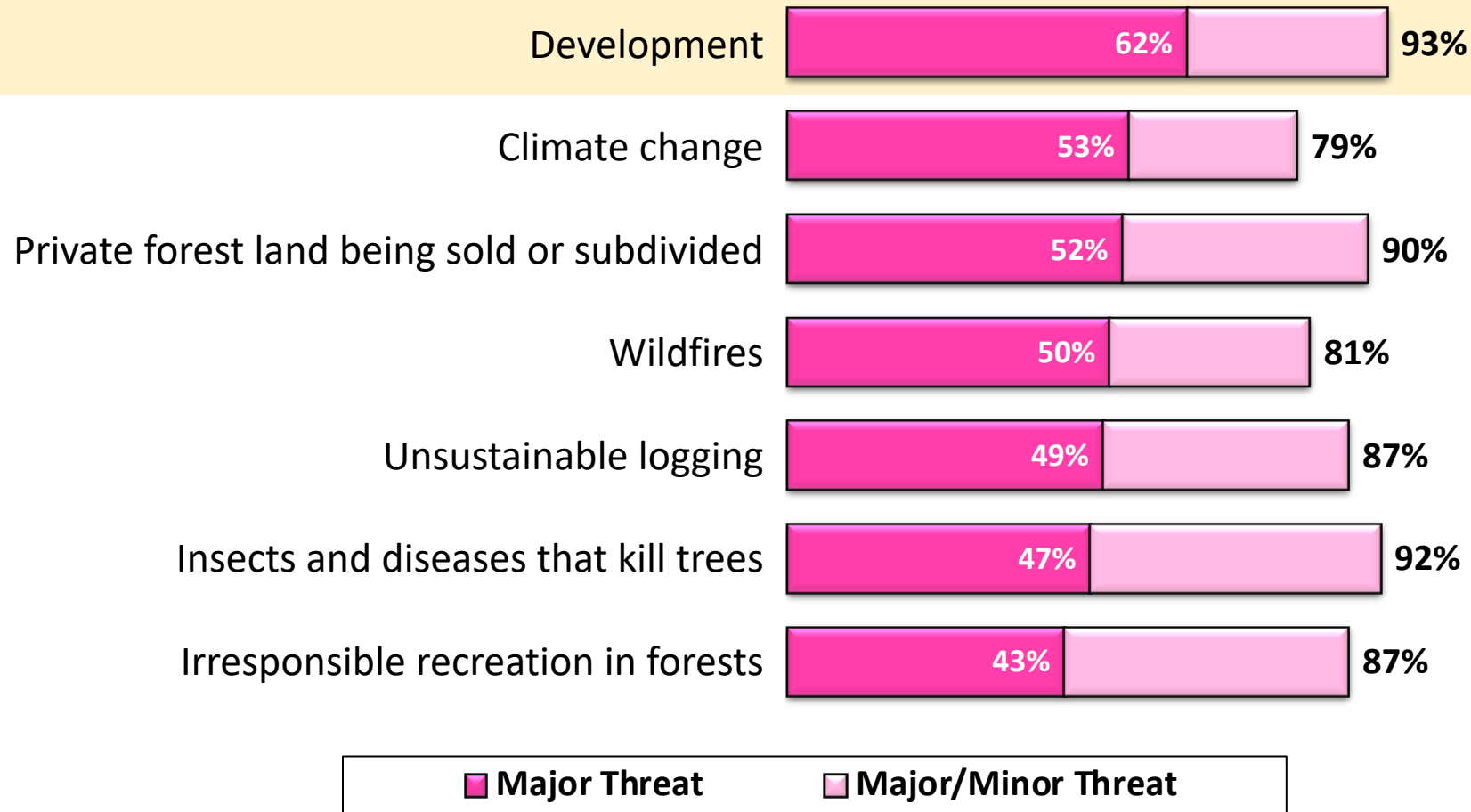
From what you know, which of the following do you think owns most forest land in your state – the government, private companies, or individual and family landowners?

All the forest benefits are very important to voters, particularly producing clean air and water and providing a home for wildlife.



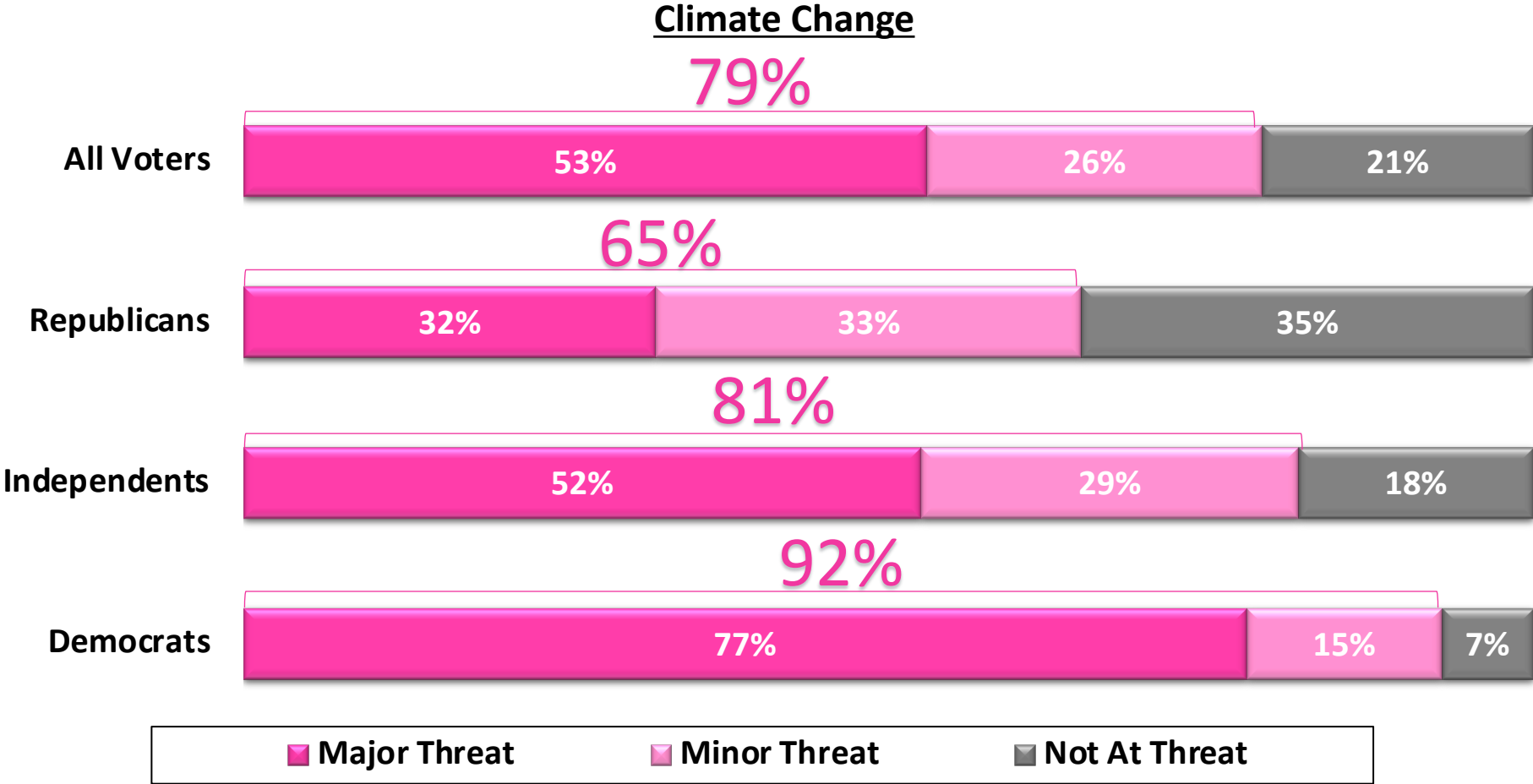
There are a number of benefits that forests have for the public. For each of the following please indicate how important that item is to you personally.

As we saw in the online focus group, Southeastern voters perceive development as the biggest threat to forests.



There are a number of things which can affect forests in your state. For each of the following, please indicate whether you think that is a major threat, minor threat or not really a threat to forests in your state.

While climate change is considered a threat, the severity of the danger evokes a partisan response.



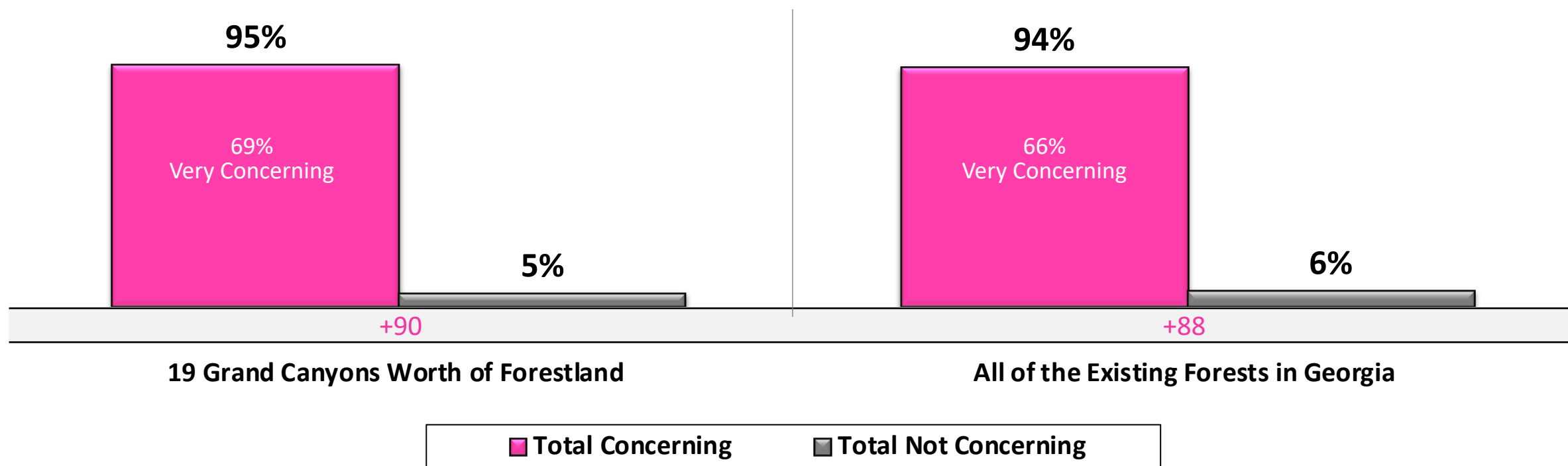
There are a number of things which can affect forests in your state. For each of the following, please indicate whether you think that is a major threat, minor threat or not really a threat to forests in your state.
Climate Change

In the online focus group, we gave participants four statements about potential loss of Southern forests and then asked them to rate their concern. The comparison to the Grand Canyon or all of Georgia's forests seem to resonate more strongly than expressing the loss in terms of the daily impact.

<i>Top Concern</i>	<i>Participants</i>
That is equal to losing 19 Grand Canyons worth of forestland over the next 40 years	16
That is equal to losing all of the existing forests in Georgia over the next 40 years	11
That is equal to losing over 1,190 football fields of forestland a day for the next 40 years	6
That is equal to losing nearly two and a half square miles of forestland every day for the next 40 years	6

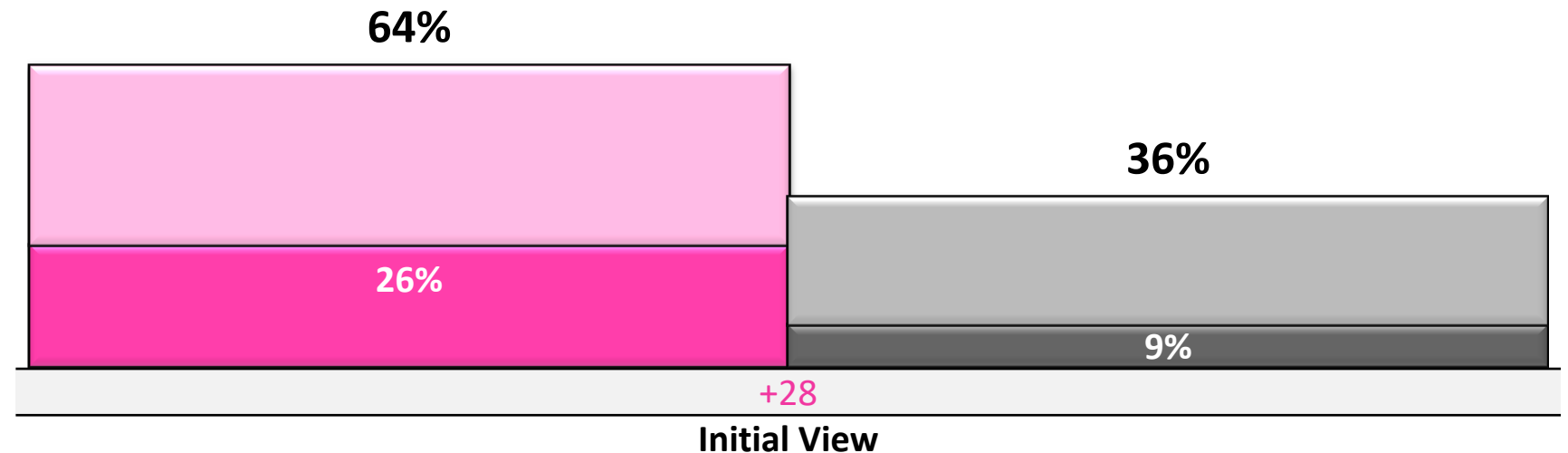
Based on these reactions, we asked participants about two of these statements in the survey. The massive loss of forests over the next 40 years is very concerning to voters, no matter how the size of loss is described.

It is projected that about 23 million acres of southern forests will be lost by 2060, primarily as a result of increased population and development if the South continues to develop at its current rate. That is equal to losing 19 Grand Canyons worth of forestland / all of the existing forests in Georgia over the next 40 years. How concerning would you say that loss of southern forests would be?



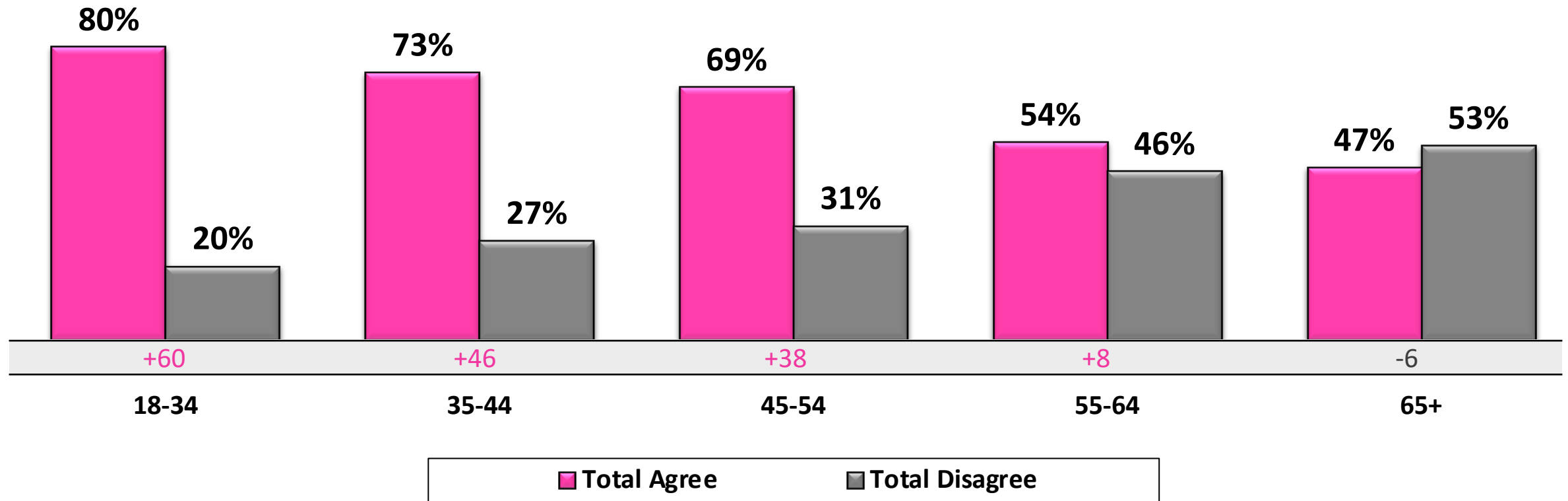
Nearly two-thirds of voters say cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.

Cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.



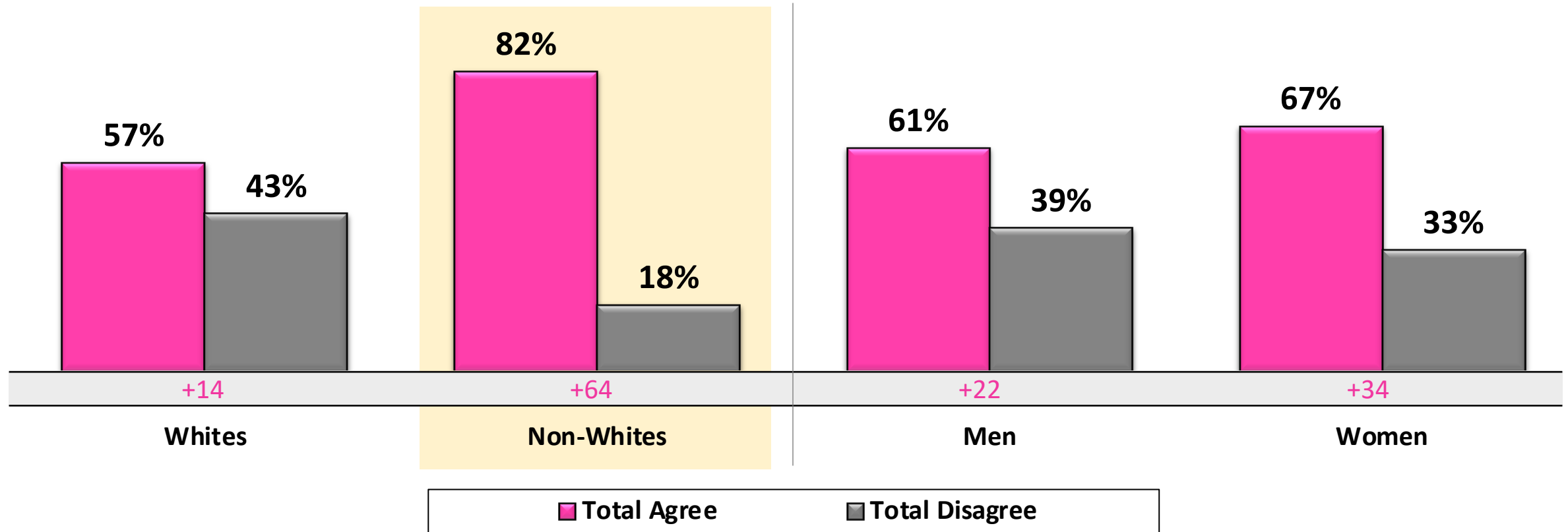
And do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

The younger a voter is the more likely they are to agree that cutting down trees in forest should be avoided.



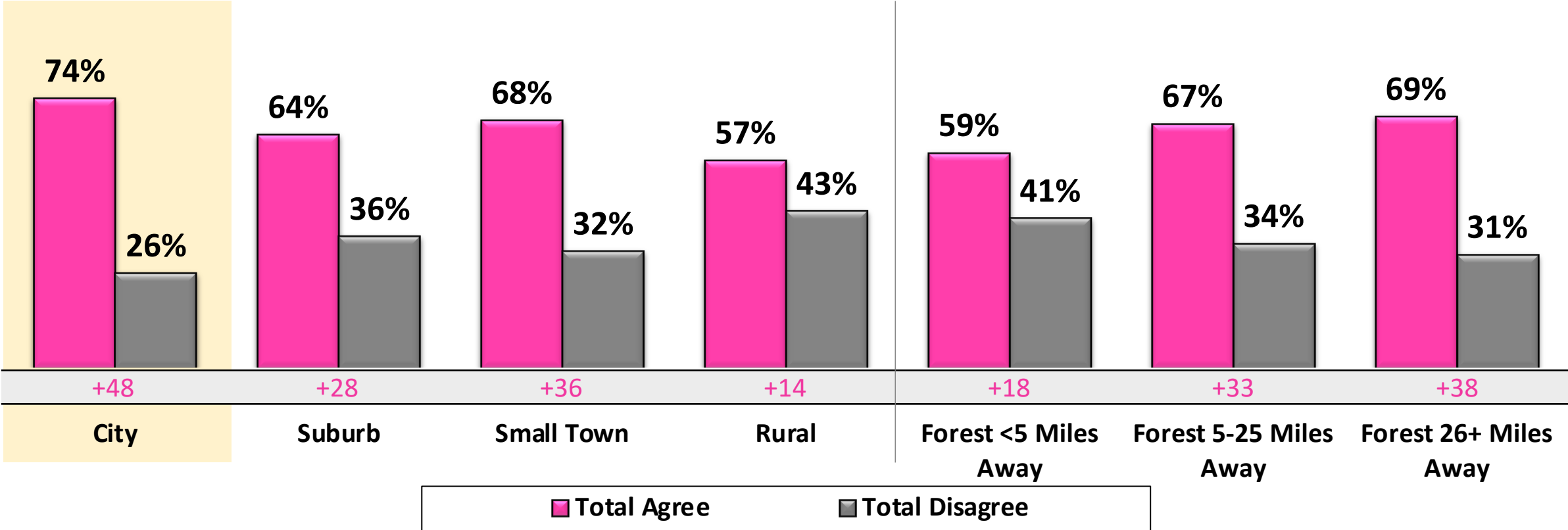
And do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.**

Non-white voters are far more apt to agree that cutting trees should be avoided. Women are more apt to agree than men.



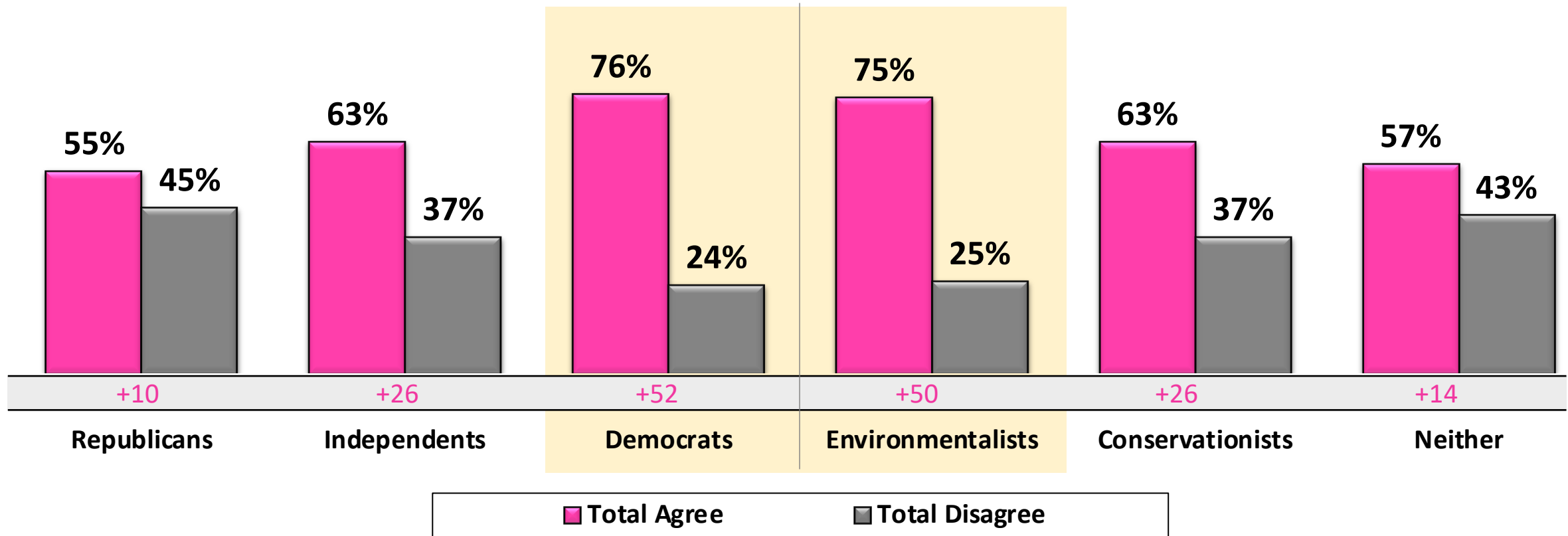
And do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.**

The further away a voter lives from a forest, especially city residents, the more likely they are to agree with avoiding cutting trees.



And do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.**

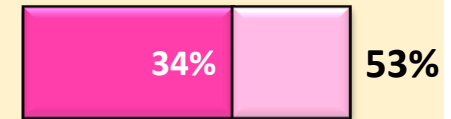
This issue is also political, as three-quarters of Democrats and environmentalists prefer to avoid cutting down trees.



And do you agree or disagree with the following statement? **Cutting down trees in forests should almost always be avoided.**

Voters have a favorable impression of families that work with a state forestry association to properly manage their forests.

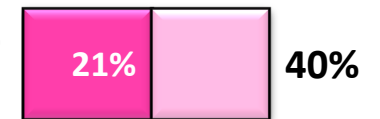
Foresters and state forestry **associations work closely with individuals** and families who own forests to help them adhere to a set of best management practices that help prevent erosion on their land, and ensure harvesting of trees does not hurt water quality in streams or rivers on their land. This also ensures the sustainability of their forests.



Families and individuals who own forestland **may only harvest selected trees** or ones in specific areas. They may harvest the trees in regular twenty-year cycles, or only after decades to cover unexpected/significant costs. They do not clear cut all their land and they replant trees that are harvested to maintain the long-term health of the forest.



Many families **hold forestland that has been in their family for generations**. They value the land not just as a way to help earn a living, but as an important part of their heritage to pass on to future generations.



Surveys of individuals who own forest land show they **value their land for its natural** beauty, wildlife, and recreation as much as they **value their forests for the economic benefits**.



Trees are harvested on these family-owned forests as a way to **help offset the cost of land ownership** (like taxes or the cost of caring for trees on their land), while also ensuring that the land is replanted and continues to be a forest.



■ **First Choice** ■ **First/Second Choices**

In the Southern United States, there are 245 million acres of forests, 85 percent of which is owned by individuals and families. The following are some things you might learn about these family-owned forests. Please indicate which one or two give you the most favorable impression of these forests.



Communicating about Managed Forests

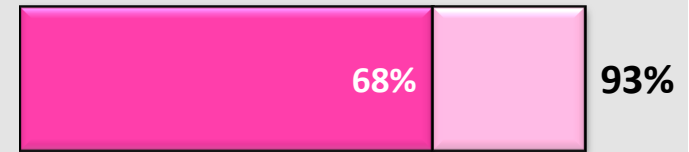
In the online focus group, we asked participants to respond to various phrases that the Keeping Forests coalition might use to convey their mission and the importance of Southern forests. They are in rank order in terms of the most favorable reaction below.

- Plays on words and softer reference to harvesting of trees resonated more.
- Implying benefits to people - especially water and oxygen – and not just economic ones helps.
- Supporting the planet’s hardest workers tends to resonate more with some of the more strident environmentalists we had in the discussion. They seem to like the recognition of trees’ benefits but also being partners with the forests.
- The word “cut” is a turn-off and “using” the forest was confusing.

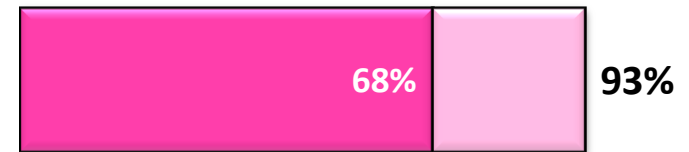
Q. Forests Are Every Fiber Of Our Being
S. Support Our Planet’s Hardest Workers
P. Our Forests Demand A Hand
O. Thank Your Southern Forests
R. Our Economy Grows With The Forest
N. Wood Works For You
U. Inaction Won’t Cut It
T. To Save A Forest, Use It

The top messages align with the top benefits of forests – clean air and water, home for wildlife, and legacy.

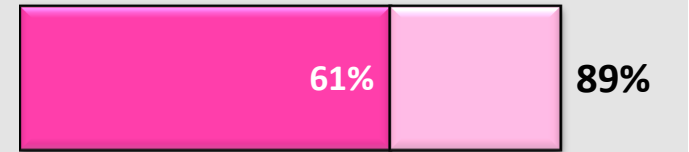
Forests are **critical to our public health**. Our forests provide natural filters that give us clean air and are also sources of much of what ends up in the nation’s clean drinking water supply.



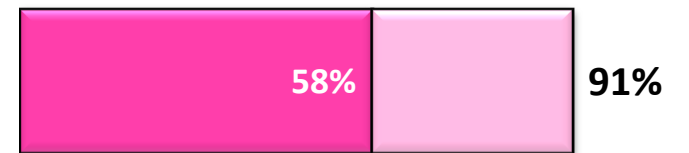
Southern forests are **home to thousands of species of wildlife** from bald eagles, bears, turkeys, deer, to bobwhite quail. As more and more of our forest lands are lost, many of these species are at risk.



We have a **responsibility to take care of our land, water, and wildlife for future generations**. Conserving managed forests will provide a legacy of healthy forests for our children and grandchildren.



Nothing is more important than having clean water to drink. Healthy managed forests naturally filter water better than any other land use. They reduce runoff and toxins in the lakes, rivers, and streams that bring us clean drinking water. Some of the water supply for more than 55 million Southerners comes from state and family-owned forests.

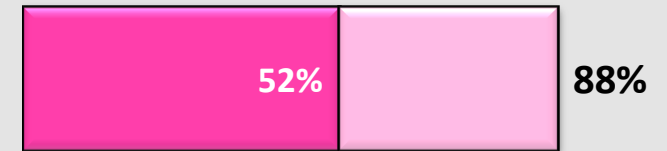


■ Very Convincing ■ Total Convincing

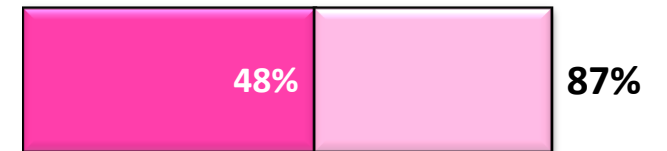
The following statements are reasons some people have provided for why we need to support family landowners in managing their forests. For each one, please indicate if that is a very convincing reason, a somewhat convincing reason, not very convincing or not at all convincing.

Second tier messages focus on the recreational and economic benefits of forests.

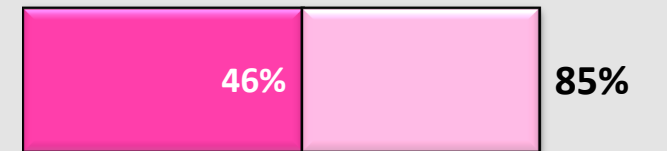
Our forests **improve our quality of life** by providing places to hike, camp, hunt and fish, view wildlife, and enjoy the peace and beauty of nature.



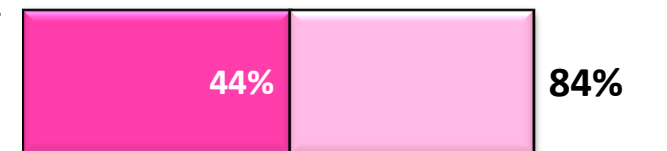
The families and individuals who own forestland harvest wood in a sustainable way to preserve the environment of the forests. Most **use best management practices** developed by state foresters to protect water quality, avoid soil erosion, and sustain fish and wildlife habitat, when they harvest timber from their land.



Forestry supports over 1.3 million jobs in the South, with most of those coming from family-owned managed forestland. Unless we act now to protect the future of our forests, those jobs and a significant part of the economy in our state are at risk.



Southern forests, rivers, and natural areas are economic engines, providing hundreds of billions of dollars in value each year from the clean drinking water, outdoor recreation opportunities, and health benefits that they supply.

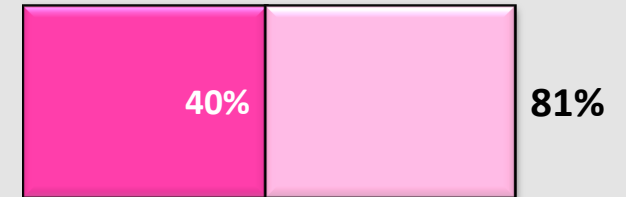


■ Very Convincing
 ■ Total Convincing

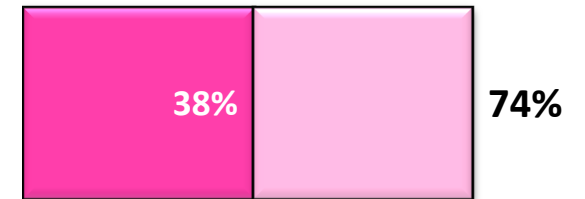
The following statements are reasons some people have provided for why we need to support family landowners in managing their forests. For each one, please indicate if that is a very convincing reason, a somewhat convincing reason, not very convincing or not at all convincing.

Lower tier messages address climate change/carbon emissions, and mentioning the harvesting of the land.

Younger forests, such as the ones that are managed by individuals and families on their land, **extract more carbon** from the air than older trees according to scientific studies. That helps to avoid some of the consequences of climate change.



If 85 percent of Southern forests are in the hands of individuals and families, then it makes sense that we need to **ensure that they keep the land as forests**, whether or not they are occasionally harvested.



Carbon is locked away when wood is used in products such as cabinets, furniture, flooring or framing for a building. That is important as scientists now believe that we not only have to reduce emissions that contribute to climate change, but also create ways to store carbon.



■ Very Convincing ■ Total Convincing

The following statements are reasons some people have provided for why we need to support family landowners in managing their forests. For each one, please indicate if that is a very convincing reason, a somewhat convincing reason, not very convincing or not at all convincing.

The fact that forests are family-owned is the biggest takeaway.

Family / privately owned	18%
People rely on trees (e.g. oxygen)	12%
Preservation and management	12%
Clean air and/or water	11%
General environment	10%
Protect Wildlife	10%
Carbon/ Climate Change	8%
Forests will disappear/ cutting down forests	7%
Need for environment	5%
Provides jobs / economy	4%
Future Generations	3%
Younger trees absorb more carbon	2%

“That most of the forests in the South are owned by individual families who aren't willing to turn over their land for development.” – Kentucky woman, 65+, Republican

“The individual families own 85 percent of the forests in the south. That they have been doing the right thing in the way they harvest their land, or we would not have that much left.” – South Carolina man, 55-64, Republican

“That our forest provide a natural filter to carbon in our air quality. And without our trees, we can expect bad air quality and pollution in our water.” – North Carolina man, 25-34, Democrat

“That in 2060 most of our forest will not be because of the growth in the population.” – Mississippi female, 18-24, Democrat

Thinking about these statements, what specifically stood out? In other words, what do you think you would be most likely to remember one week from today?

What we did:

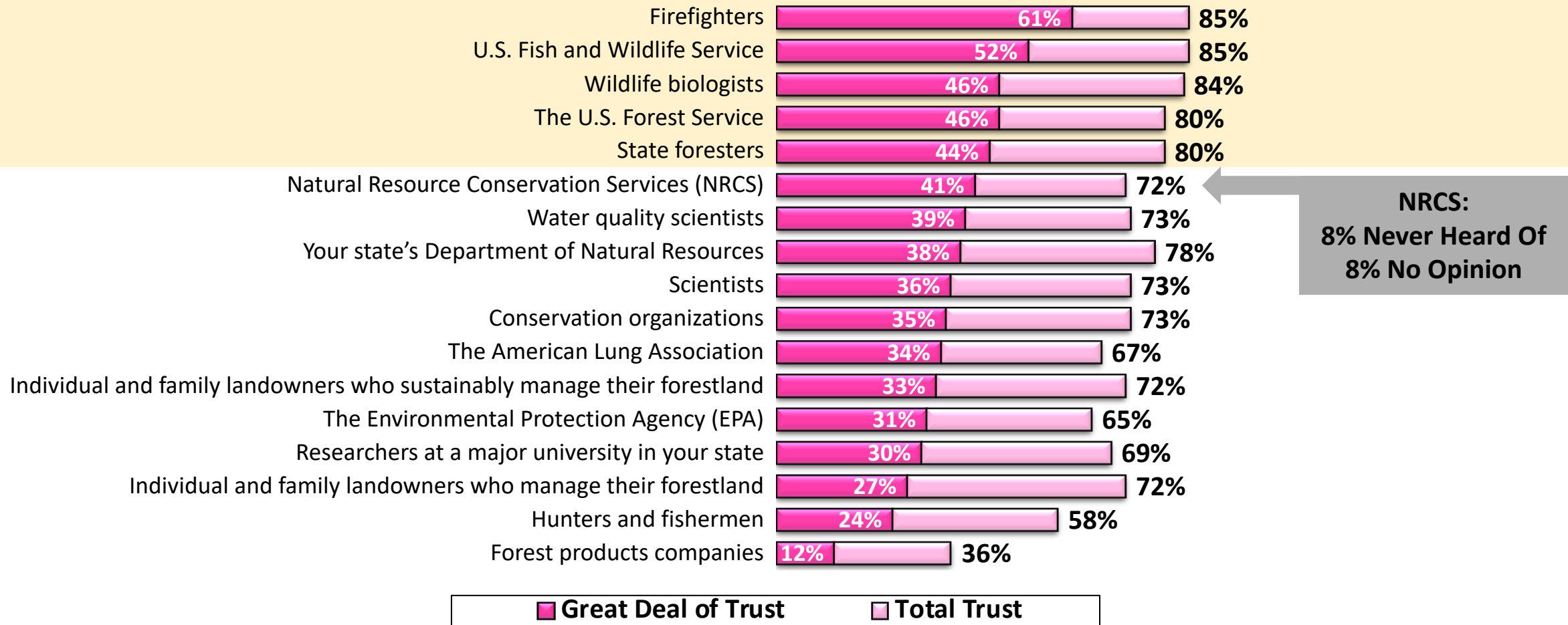
In addition to showing respondents messages in the online focus group, respondents were shown photos that someone might share in thinking about working forests. They were asked to tell us which one or two gave them the most positive impression of working forests.



The less compelling images are those of products made from harvesting trees and the removal of trees from a forest using machinery.



Top messengers are firefighters, federal agencies, wildlife biologists, and state foresters. NRCS is the least known group.



The following is a list of people and organizations that may speak about issues related to managed forests in your state. Please indicate if you would generally trust each person or organization's opinion, or if you would be suspicious of it. If you have never heard of the person or organization, or do not have an opinion, you can indicate that instead



Questions?



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