

# A Study of 2008, 2009, and 2010 Forest Legacy Program (FLP) Project Ratings

Completed at the request of  
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## Introduction

For FY 2010, 2009, and 2008, 225 project proposals were submitted for consideration to receive Forest Legacy Program funds. This study was proposed to look at the trends between 2008, 2009, and 2010. Projects were scored on three National Core Criteria: Importance (0-30 points), Threatened (0-30 points), and Strategic (0-30 points).

The following can be found in the Forest Legacy Program Project Scoring Guidance:

**Importance:** “The environmental, social, and economic public benefits gained from the protection and management of the property. More points will be given to projects that demonstrate multiple public benefits at the national or multi-state scale. This criterion reflects the ecological assets and the economic and social values conserved by the project and the scale of people’s interest in its protection. It is meant to assess the attributes to be conserved and who is receiving those benefits.”

**Threatened:** “This criterion estimates the likelihood for conversion and considers the following:

- The degree of legal protections that currently exists on the property (e.g. current zoning or existing easements) and if these protections remove the threat of conversion.
- Landowners circumstances (e.g. good land steward interested in conserving land, property held in an estate, aging landowner and future use of property by heirs is uncertain, property is up for sale or has a sale pending, landowner has received purchase offers, etc.)
- Adjacent land use changes (rate of development growth and conversion, rate of population growth, rate of change in ownership, etc).”

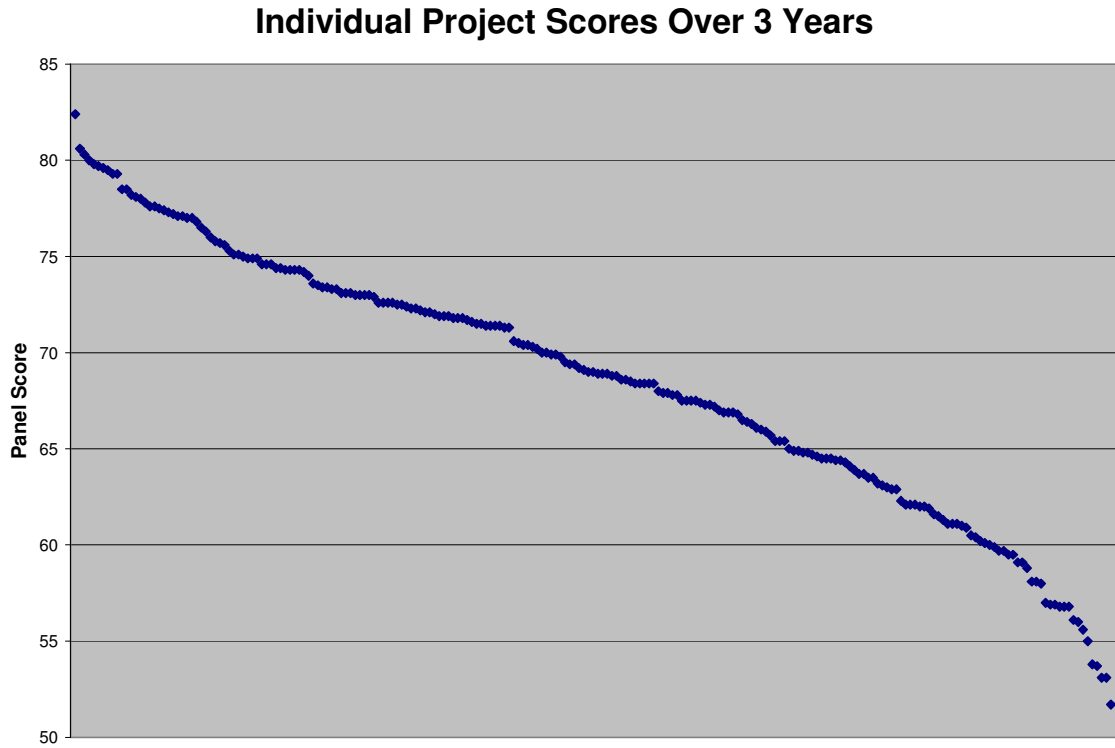
**Strategic:** “The project fits within a larger conservation plan, strategy, or initiative as designated by either a government or non-governmental entity and is strategically linked to enhance previous conservation investments (either FLP or other investments). This considers reflects the project’s relevance or relationship to conservation efforts on a broader perspective. (FLP Strategic Direction 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3).”

With the broadly defined categories resulting in opinion-laden evaluation of the criteria, project prioritization is a subjective process. Since information related to the actual prioritization is embargoed, a stand-in for the panel process was used. Ten independent reviewers rated the 2010, 2009, and 2008 projects. The project scores were combined and then averaged, with a maximum possible project score of 90 points. For the 225 projects submitted for funding, average project scores ranged from 49.4 to 82.4 points.

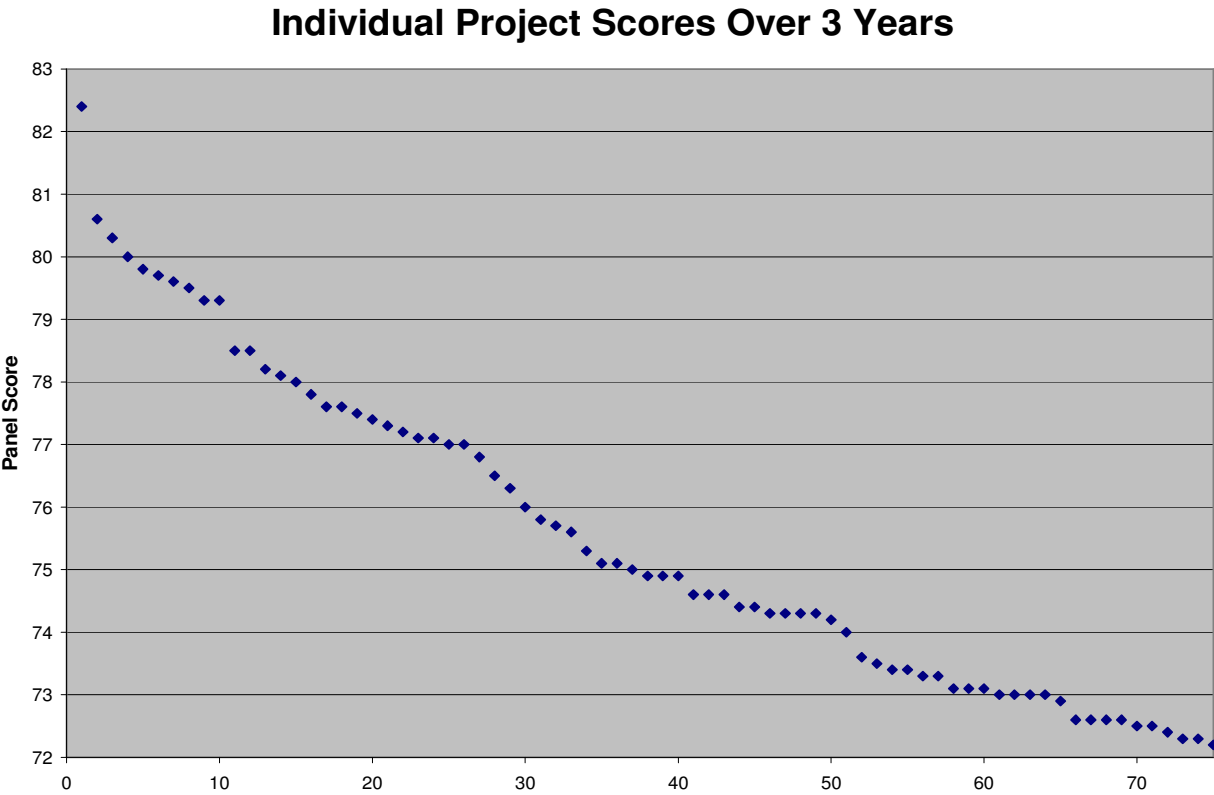
In a cursory review of the projects, certain factors appeared to have a direct relationship with the relative scores of the projects. The aim of this analysis was to discern if indeed there is a relationship between specific factors of the project proposal and average total scores that these projects received within the last three years. The specific factors studied are listed and analyzed in the next section.

### Range of Individual Scores for Each Project

The range of individual scores for each project shows how even a 1 point score change can improve a project's rating over quite a number of other projects. The second graph is a closer look at the range of individual scores from Group I.



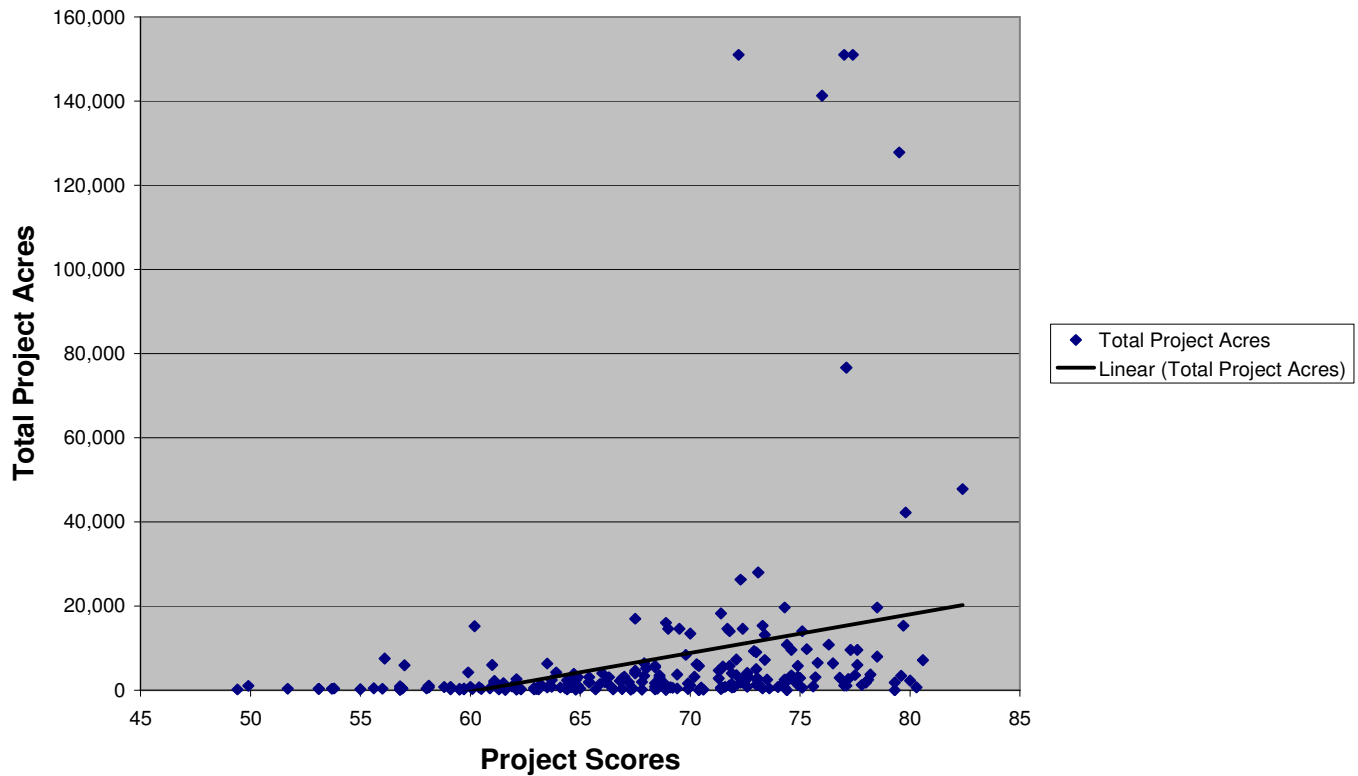
**This is Closer Look at the Top Third Project Score Range.**



### Total Project Acres

The total number of acres making up the projects varied widely among groups. This graph indicates a direct relationship between a higher number of acres in a project and a high rating for the project. However, there were outlying points that show project size is not a significant factor in establishing a high-scoring project.

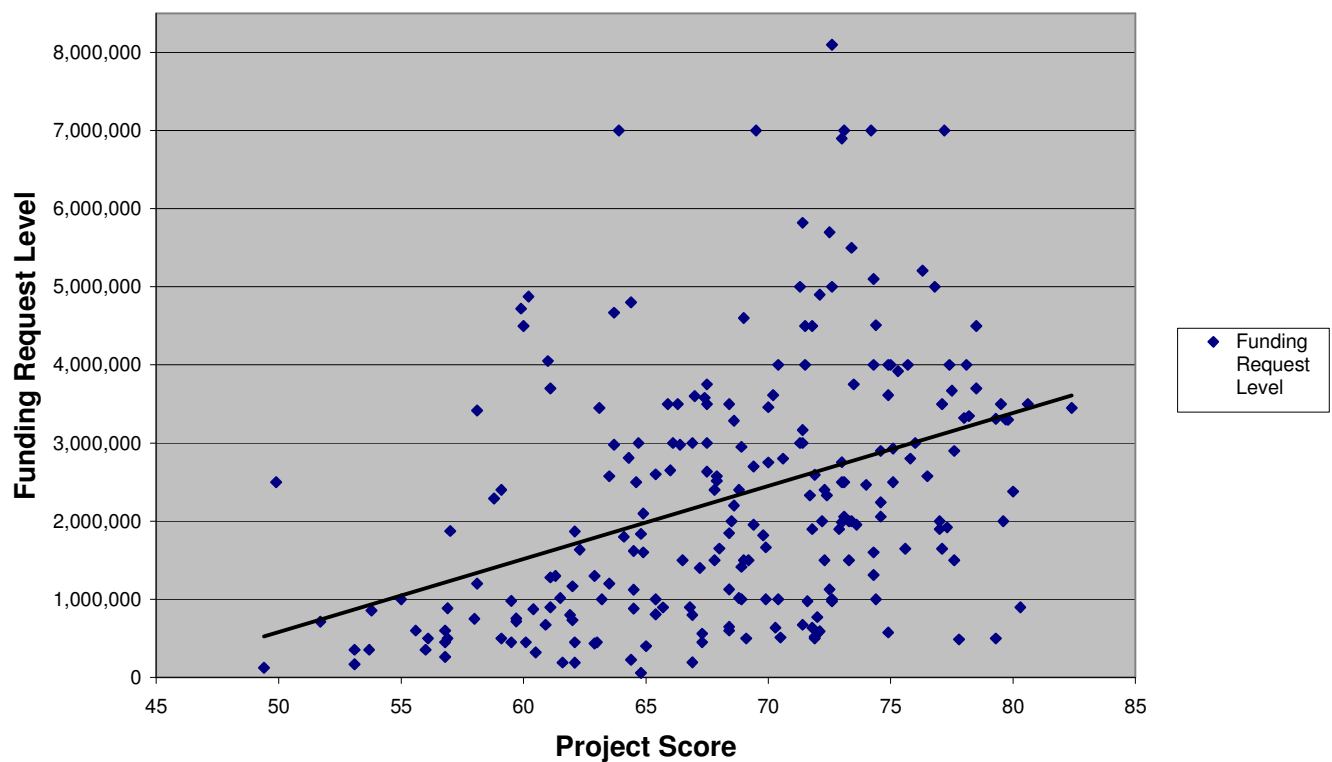
### Total Project Acres vs. Project Score



### Funding Request Level

States requested a wide range of funds in these project proposals. This graph indicates a direct relationship between the funding request level in a project and a high rating for the project. That the lower third of the scores was a significantly lower mean could be related to the potential area that is proposed to be protected. In other words, where a relatively small tract is being proposed for funding a search of the area for other tracts to show a larger effort may be appropriate.

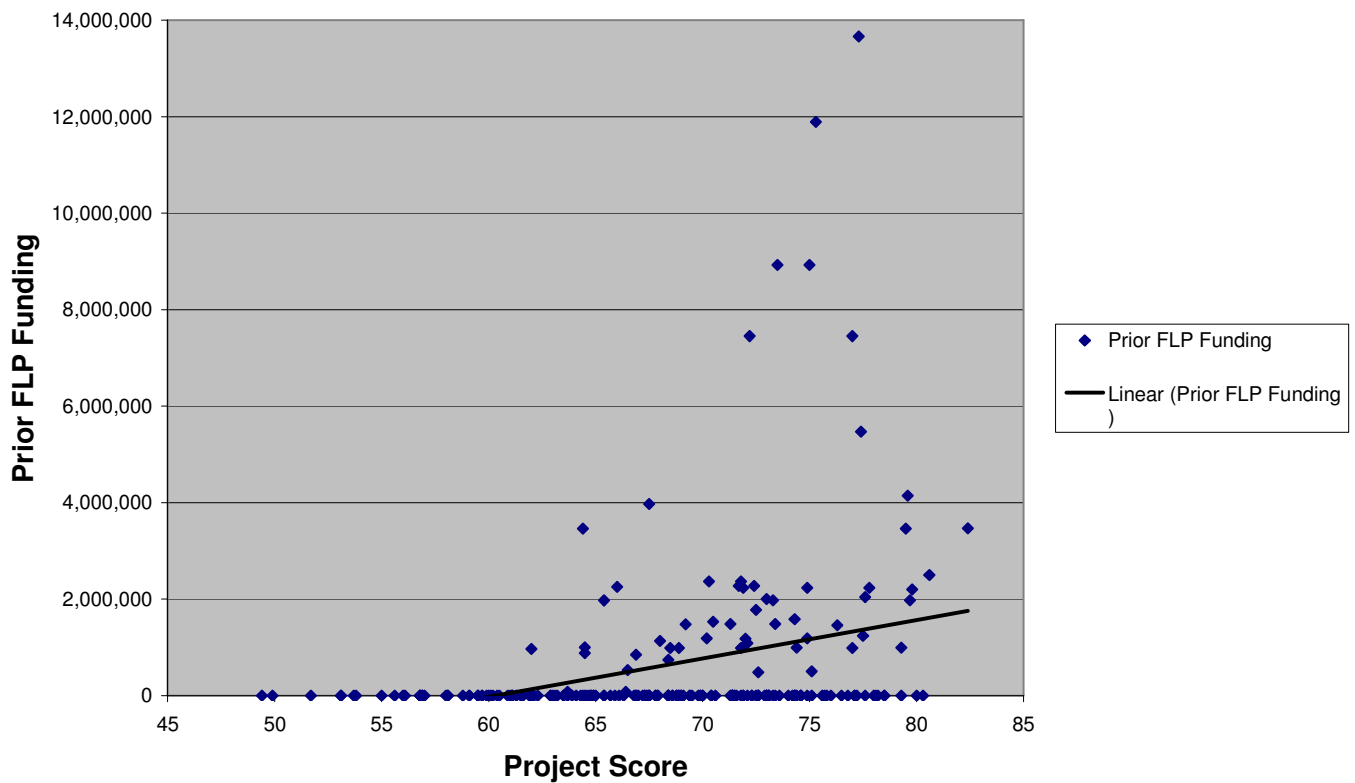
### Funding Request Level vs. Project Score



### Prior Forest Legacy Program Funding

The level of prior Forest Legacy Program funding was assessed. Of those that had received FLP funding in the past, mean levels of funding differed among groups. Of the 56 projects that had received FLP funding prior to FY2009, 30 fell within the first third of the scores. Overall, projects that had received prior Forest Legacy funding achieved much higher total scores than those that did not. It should be noted, however, that several high-scoring projects had not received FLP funding in the past.

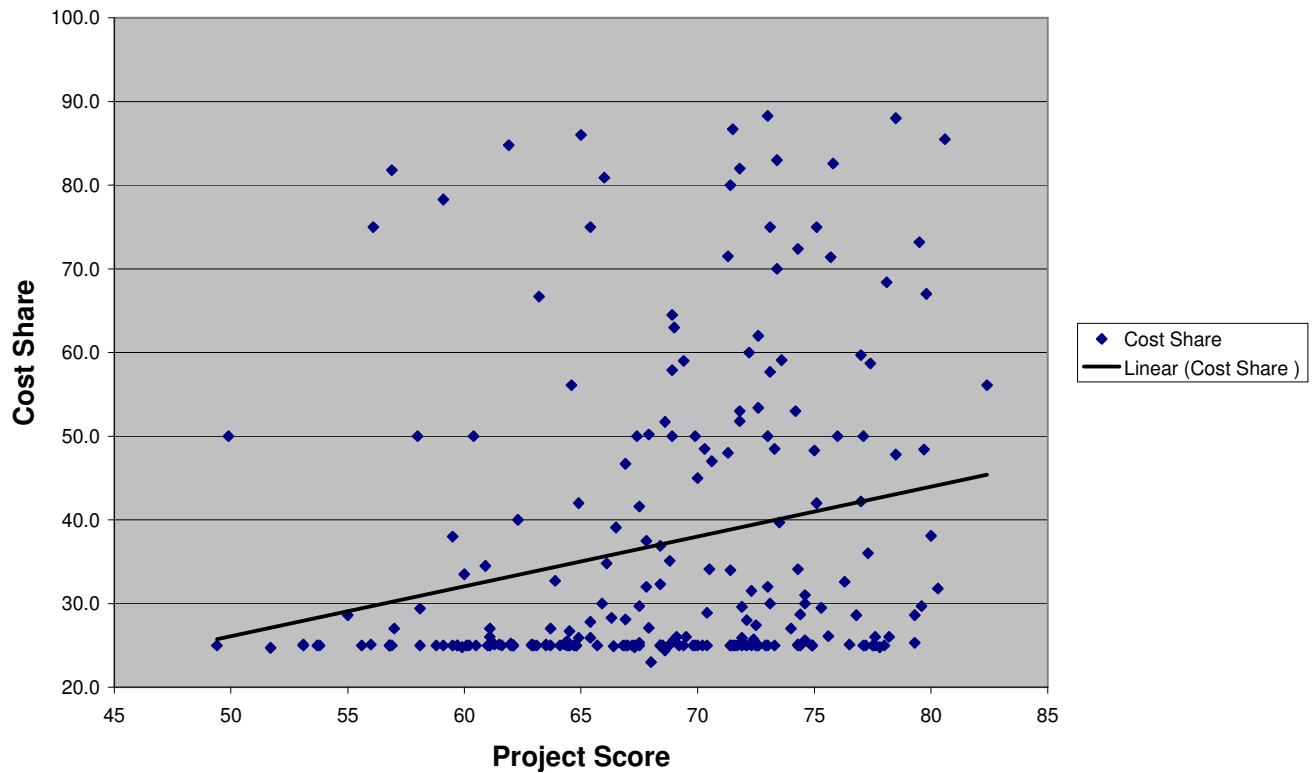
**Prior FLP Funding vs. Project Score**



### Percent Cost Share

According to federal law, projects were required to obtain a minimum of 25% of total project costs from a non-federal source. The projects that did not make this were very close to the 25%. This indicates a direct relationship between percent cost share and project score.

**Cost Share vs. Project Score**

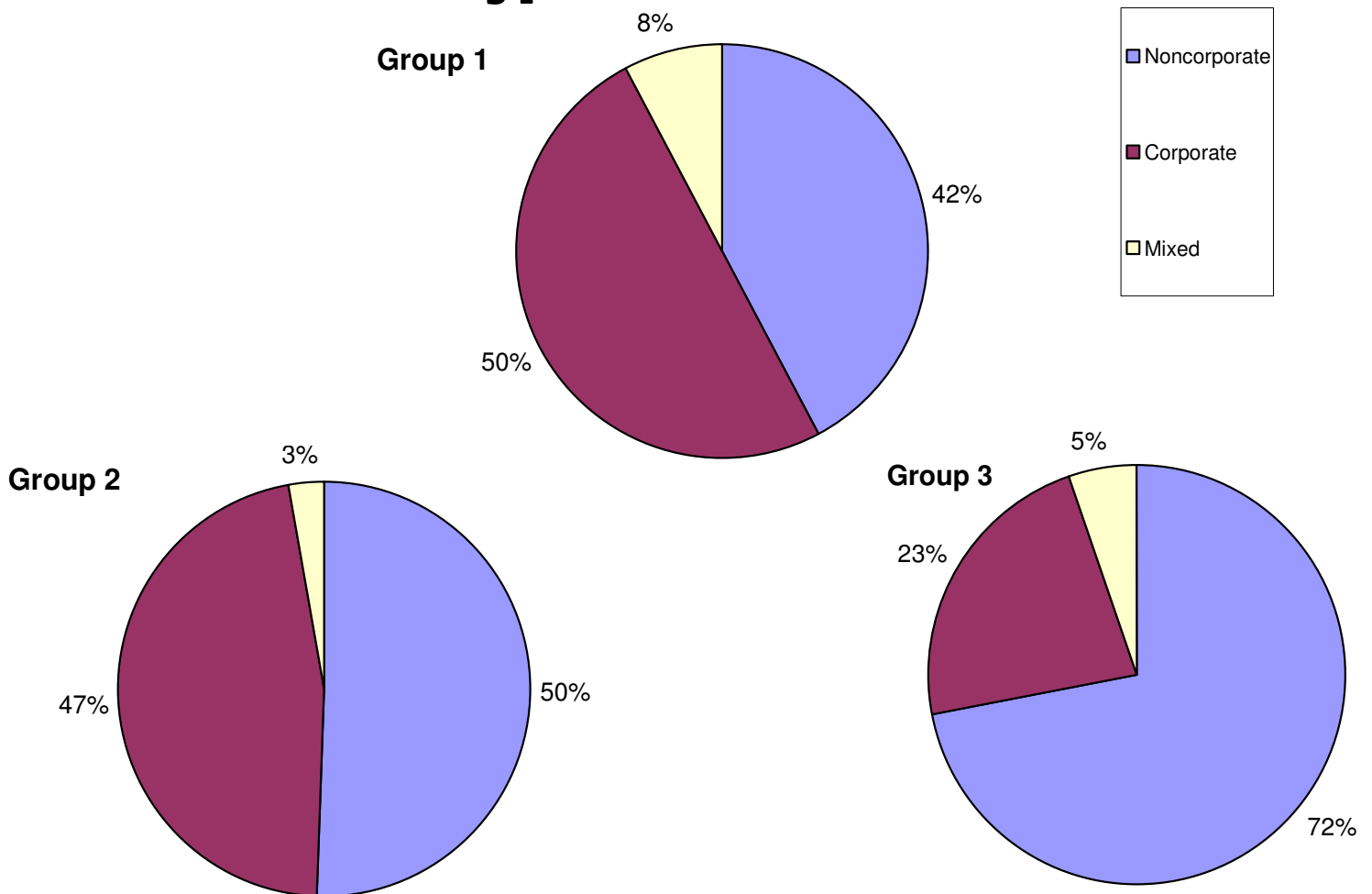




## Landowner

States were asked to provide information related to the landowner of each project tract. For projects in the first third, 42% of landowners were noncorporate, 50% were corporate and 8% of projects have some sort of mixed landownership. In Group II 50% of the projects were owned by noncorporate entities while 47% were owned by corporations and 3% were mixed. In Group III, however, 72% of projects had noncorporate landownership, while 23% are under corporate ownership and 5% were mixed. The breakdown between noncorporate and corporate landownership is roughly the same in both Groups I and II, this shows that there is not a significant relationship between project score and the type of landownership.

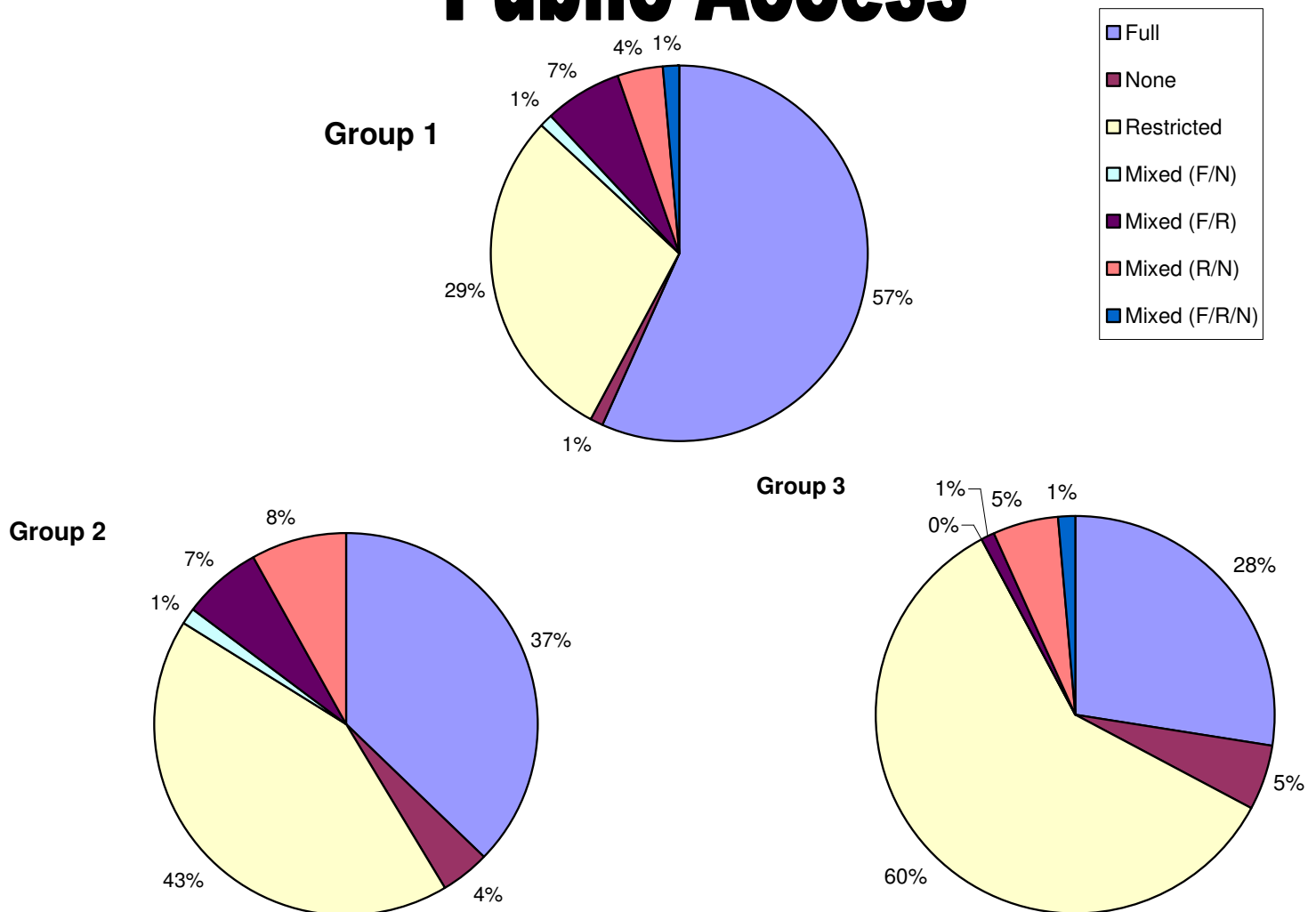
## Type of Landowner



## Public Access

The level of public access offered by the projects was assessed, within Group I projects, 57% reported full access, 29% had restricted access and 13% were mixed (project tracts reported varying levels of access). 1% of the tracts did not grant any access on all of their tracts. Group II projects were slightly less open to the public with 37% full access, 43% restricted access, 16% mixed access and 4% no access. The least accessible tracts could be found in Group III, where 28% of projects had full access and 60% of projects had restricted access, 7% mixed access, and 5% had no access at all. These findings indicate that there is a direct relationship between public access and project score.

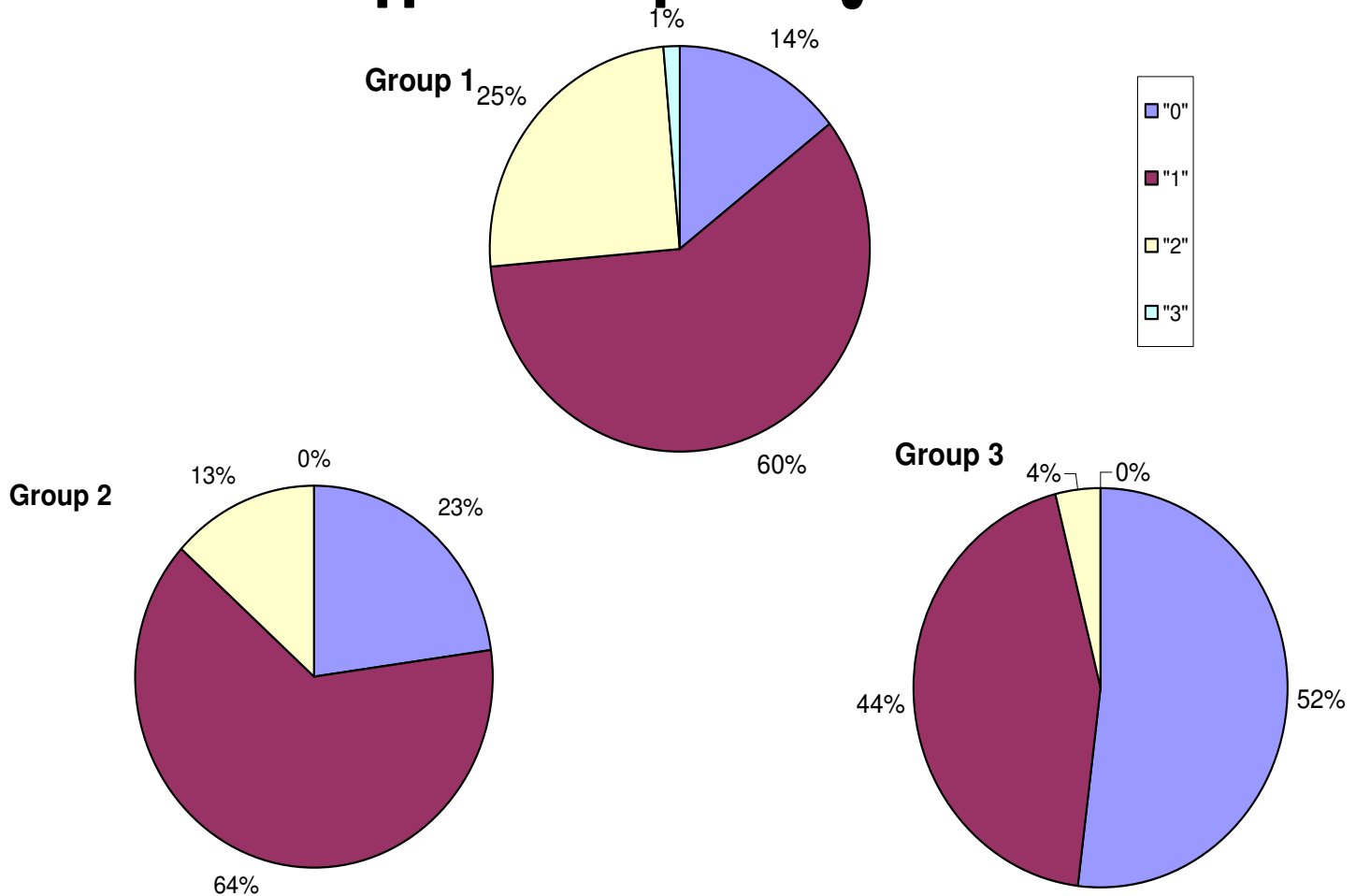
# Public Access



### Support of Non-Profit Organizations

Whether or not a project listed a non-profit organization as a supporting party appeared to be related to the score that project received. The three non-profit organizations that were counted for the analysis were The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Lands and The Conservation Fund. In Group I, 14% of projects lacked any NPO support, compared with 23% in Group II and 52% in Group III. In Group I, 60% of projects had the support of one of the non-profit organizations, 25% had two non-profits as supporters, 1% had the support of all three, and 14% did not have any support. Meanwhile, in Group II, 60% of projects were supported by one NPO, 13% had the support of two NPOs, and 23% had the support of none. In Group III, 44% of the projects had the support of one NPO, 4% of the projects had multiple NPO support, and 52% had the support of none. The data suggests that the support of an NPO, specifically the three previously mentioned has a direct relationship with increased scores.

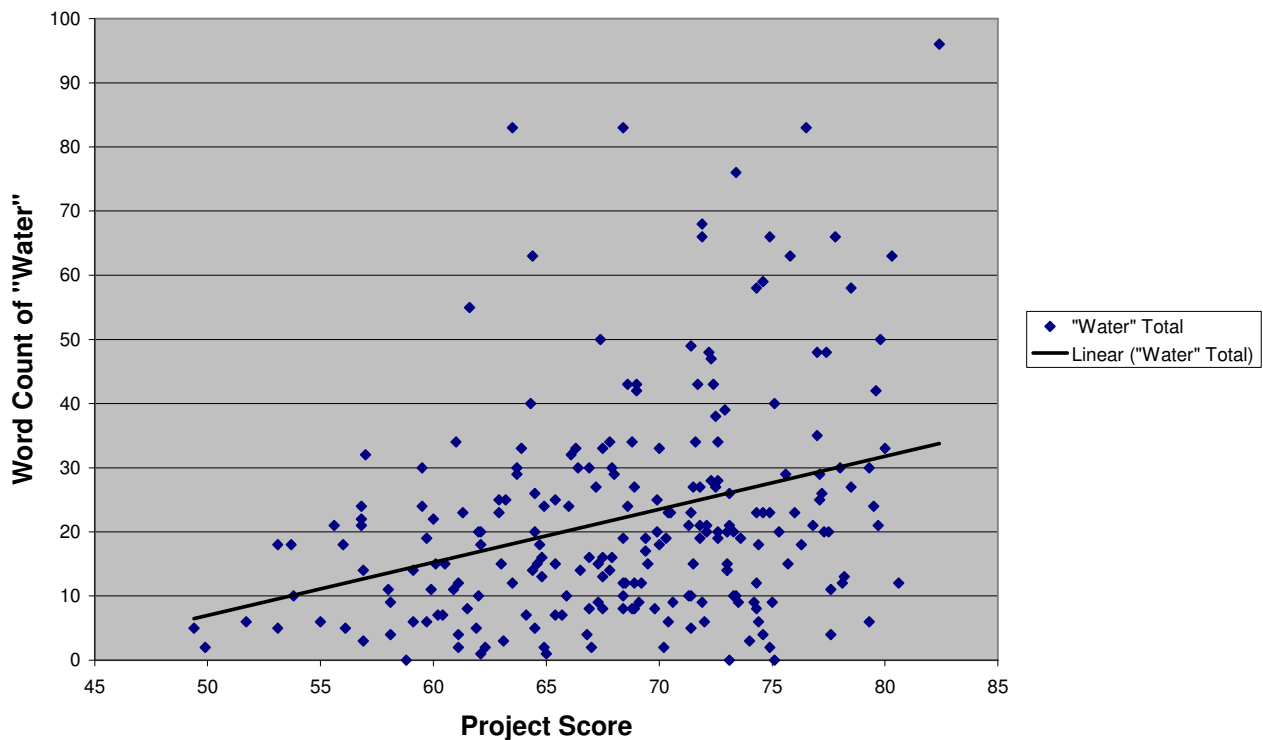
## Support of Nonprofit Organizations



### **“Water” Frequency**

The number of times the word “water”, and other “water” related words such as: “wetland”, “river”, “lake”, and “stream”, appeared in each project proposal was counted and recorded. This was done to determine if the use of the word water had any effect on project score. The use of the water words would signify that in the report there was at least a mention about the protection of water resources. When the word appeared as part of a title, such as in Water Supply Protection, the usage was not included. The word “water” appeared in a range from never being used to 96 uses per project proposal. This graph below shows that there is a direct relationship between the usage of the word “water” with the project score. This shows that is also important to include the project’s potential influence on the water resources in the area as part of the project write-up.

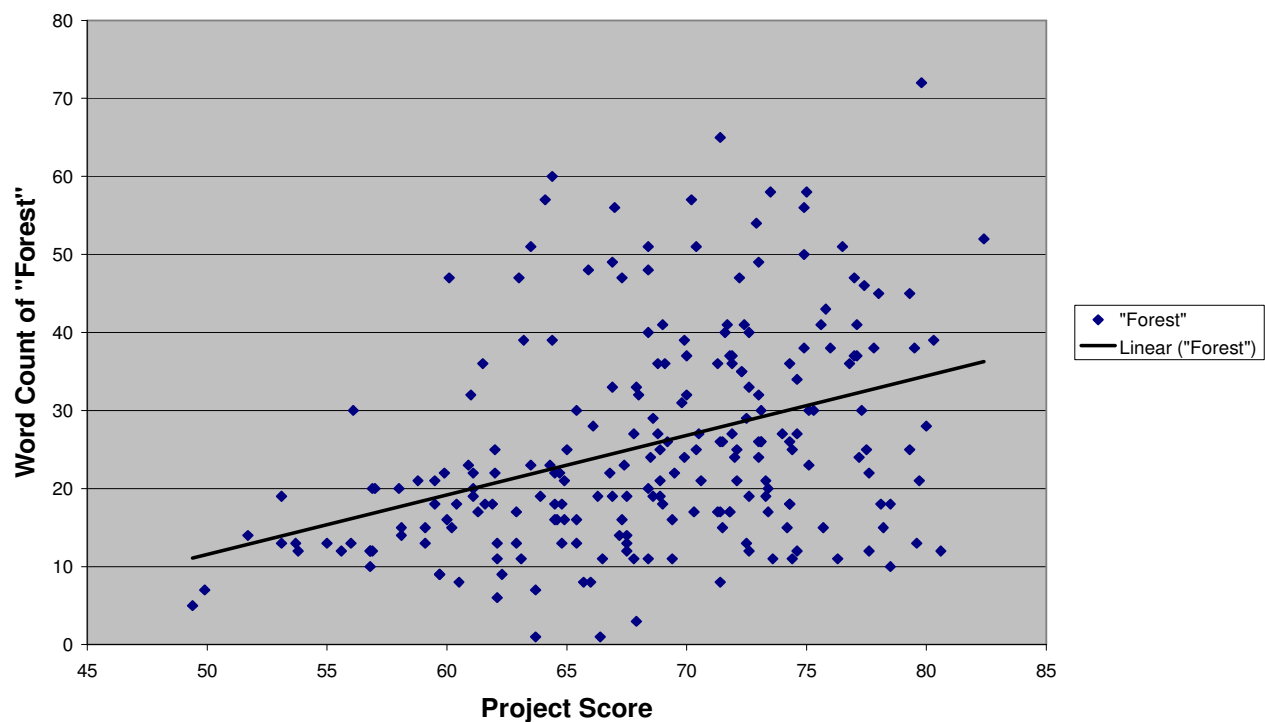
**"Water" vs. Project Score**



### **“Forest Frequency”**

The number of times the word “forest” appeared in each project proposal was counted and recorded. This was done to determine if the use of the word forest had any effect on project score. The use of the word forest would signify that in the report there was at least a mention about the protection of forest resources. The word “forest” appeared in a range from being used once to 72 uses per project proposal. This graph below shows that there is a direct relationship between the usages of the word forest with the project score. This shows that is also important to include the project’s potential influence on the forest resources in the area.

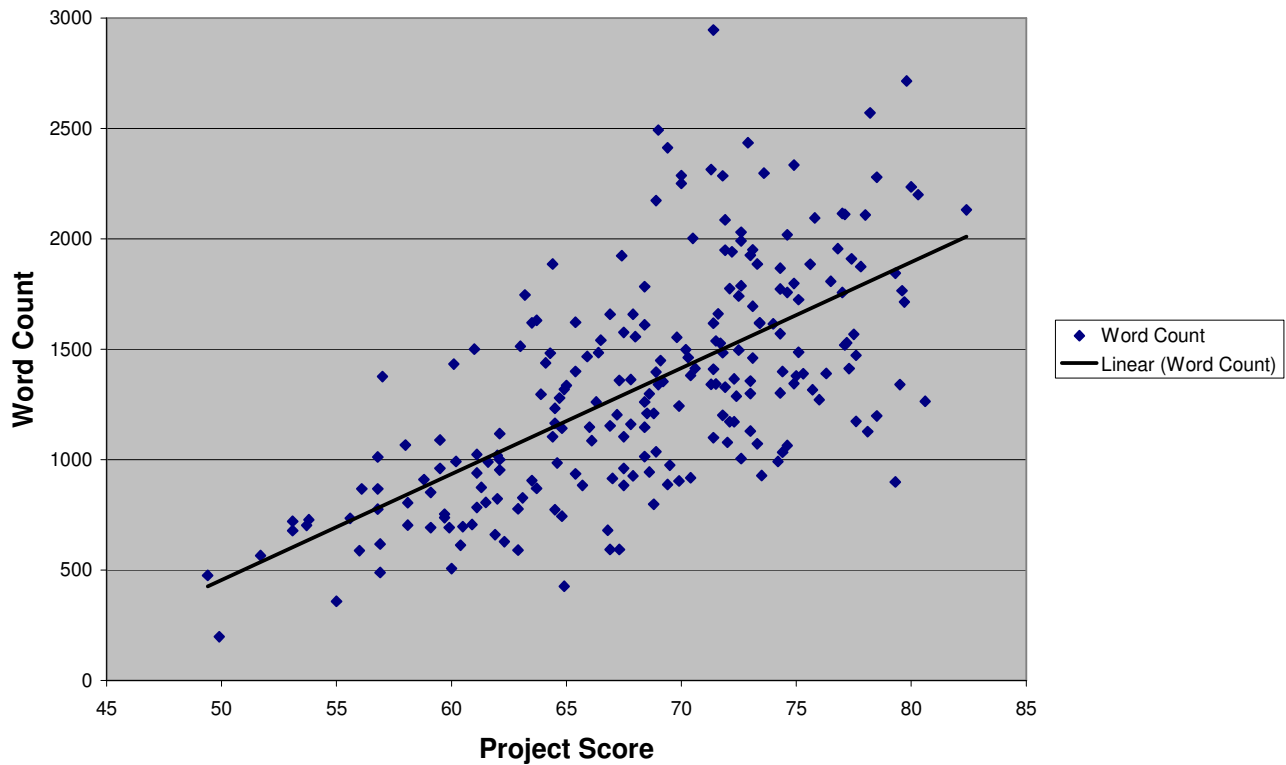
### **"Forest" vs Project Score**



## Word Count

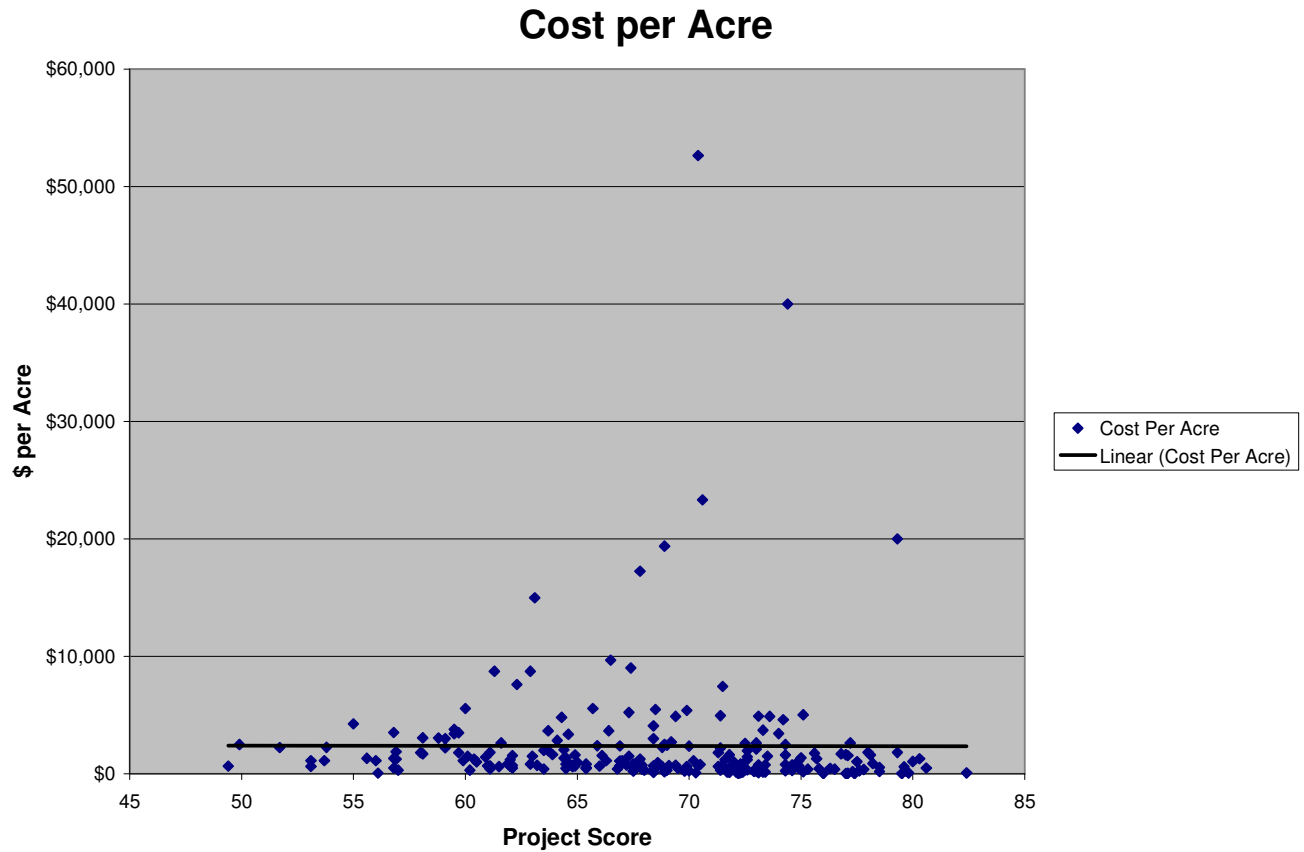
The number of words within a project proposal varied greatly. This figure ranged from 198 to 2,946 words. This shows that the word count is directly related to project score. However, wordiness may have negative consequences if phrases are repeated, if nothing new is being introduced, and consequently reading the proposal becomes a waste of time for the reviewers.

## Word Count vs. Project Score



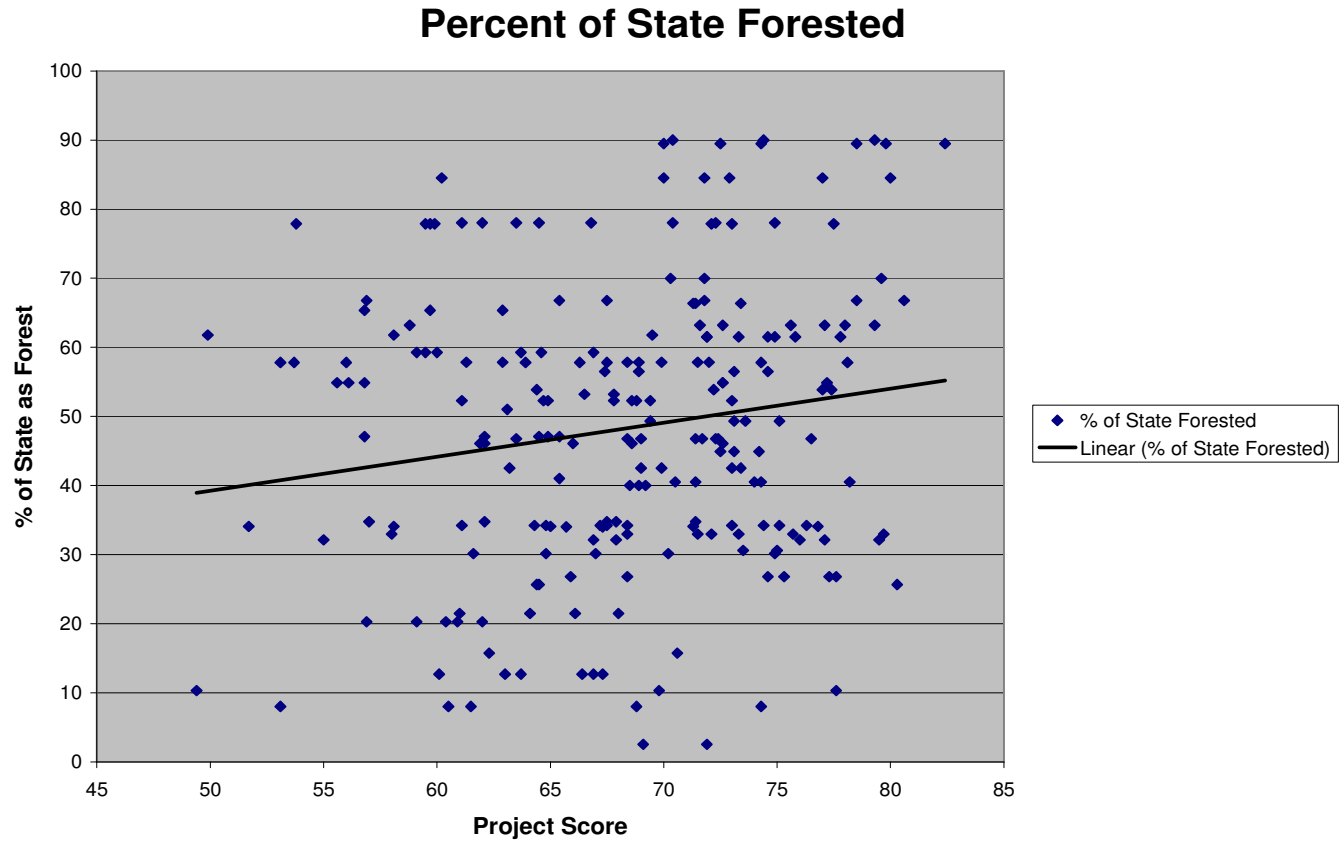
### Cost Per Acre

The number of acres per project varied greatly within the proposals as did the cost of each acre. This figure ranged from 13.25 to 52,631.58 dollars per acre. This data shows that on average the cost per acre does not directly relate to the score of the project.



### Percent State Forested

The percent of state forested is in reference to the amount of land in each state that is forested annually. When plotted against the project scores it can be found that there is a direct relationship between the project score and the amount of state forested. This shows that there is relationship but that it may not be the strongest.





## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results of this analysis show that several factors correlate with a high-ranking project. The profile of the highest ranking projects includes:

- Greater than required cost-share
- High levels of support from non-profit organizations
- High levels of public access
- High word count

Several other factors appeared to positively impact the project ranking to a lesser degree. These include:

- High number of total project acres
- High Funding Request Level
- Prior FLP Funding
- Frequent Use of “water” related words and the frequent use of the word “forest” within the project brief
- State is perceived to have extensive forest

Of note: even a one point increase in the project score can move the project over tens other projects.