

Policy Appendix: 2025 Sustainability Solutions for North Carolina

Throughout the State of the Environment technical document, we have included cross-references to policy solutions, gathered in this appendix, that would help turn specific indicators and goals in a positive direction, bringing benefits to North Carolina's residents, economy, and environment. Many of these solutions are already the focus of policy advocacy campaigns by conservation or environmental advocacy groups or coalitions in North Carolina. For each, we include below a short description of the policy proposal.

Land and Water Conservation

A1. Fund the NC Land & Water Fund. Established in 1996 as the Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the Land & Water Fund (LWF) pays for land acquisition to protect our natural and historical heritage, restore stream and nearby habitats, improve stormwater management, and reduce flooding. L&WF funding chronically falls short of demand. We recommend incremental increases in recurring funding for L&WF.

A2. Fund the Parks & Recreation Trust Fund. The PRTF was established in 1994 and provides grants to expand, maintain, and enhance state and local parks across North Carolina. As our population grows, PRTF funding is essential to provide residents with safe, healthy places to gather with friends and family, recreate, and enjoy the state's natural beauty. However, in recent years PRTF funding has fallen far short of state and local needs. We recommend incremental increases in funding for PRTF.

A3. Fund the Agricultural Development & Farmland Preservation Trust Fund (ADFPTF). As the state's population continues to grow rapidly, North Carolina's agricultural and forest lands are under pressure from developed land uses. The ADFPTF helps provide a buffer against losing or most productive agricultural lands through grants to preserve or restore farmland. Recurring funding for the ADFPTF should be maintained and increased as demand for the program grows.

A4. Invest in floodplain restoration and reconnection. The best defense against staggering economic and social losses from floods is to let floodplains serve their natural functions of collecting and holding water. Funding floodplain restoration and reconnection, distinct from other land conservation programs and goals, offers a way to spare North Carolina much larger storm-driven losses in the future.

A5. Enact state wetlands protections. Wetlands reduce flooding, sustain fish populations, and clean our drinking water. As federal jurisdiction over wetlands has shrunk, it is increasingly clear that federal laws will not address the state's interest in limiting flooding or supporting healthy fisheries. The NC General Assembly should authorize state protections for wetlands that serve these crucial functions.

A6. Invest in peat, salt marsh, and forests conservation. The \$421 million Atlantic Conservation Coalition grant to conserve peatlands, salt marsh, and forests will provide economic and resilience benefits even as it keeps carbon sequestered in the soil. State agencies should carry forward this grant; the NC General Assembly should look for opportunities to add resources to expand the reach of the effort.

Working landscapes

B1. Increase agricultural cost share funding. The NC Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Soil & Water Conservation, deploys cost share funding to improve the water quality and habitat benefits of working lands. Cost share funds for stream protection, livestock fencing, and wetland restoration should be increased.

B2. Expand incentives for private woodlots. North Carolina has 18 million acres of forestlands, the great majority in private, non-commercial ownership. North Carolina would benefit from an incentives-based program for non-industrial landowners to manage their forests sustainably, as a basis for high-value wood products that feed local supply chains and return substantial revenue to rural communities.

B3. Sustain 'farm to school' and 'farm to market' initiatives. Sustainable and local farmers can benefit from local markets, and school districts need healthy food for their students. Several programs have brought real benefits to rural communities but are now threatened with loss of federal funding. The NC General Assembly and the NC Department of Agriculture should fill gaps to ensure that the programs continue to support farmers and students.

B4. Encourage local farmland protection plans. Suburban sprawl continues to overrun some of North Carolina's best agricultural soils. Although many counties have farmland protection plans, some 31 counties still do not; state leaders should prod and assist these counties to join the rest that do.

Coastal

C1. Expand oyster mariculture. Oysters are a coastal resource on the rebound, bringing revenue and jobs into coastal counties. Continued state support - in the form of leasing policies but also strong efforts to improve coastal water quality - are needed for this industry to reach its potential in North Carolina.

C2. Promote living shorelines over bulkheads. As sea level rises, living shorelines offer a way for coastal landowners to respond that buffers property against storms without increasing erosion of neighboring properties or wiping out vital underwater habitat. State and federal permitting and infrastructure investment should consistently favor living shorelines over bulkheads at all project scales.

C3. Improve maintenance of coastal stormwater measures. Developments along North Carolina's coast have been installing stormwater control measures since the early 1990s, but many have not been properly maintained, and are therefore not keeping bacteria and other pollutants out of coastal waters. North Carolina must educate and provide technical assistance to local landowner associations who are obligated to keep these measures in good repair.

C4. Implement the CHPP. The Coastal Habitat Protection Plan is a science-based blueprint for restoring and protecting the six vital aquatic habitats that underpin North Carolina's vibrant coastal economy. The NC General Assembly should invest in the data collection, analysis and management strategies outlined in the 2021 CHPP Amendment.

Environmental health

D1. Protect all North Carolinians from disproportionate burdens. To protect the environmental health of all residents, North Carolina should build consideration of cumulative impacts, and evaluation of disparate and disproportionate risks, into the basic procedures agencies follow when drafting rules, developing policy, making funding decisions, and issuing permits.

D2. Sustain Medicaid expansion and the Healthy Opportunities pilot program. While reaching well beyond the bounds of traditional environmental policy, North Carolina's 2023 expansion of Medicaid – which made as many as 600,000 residents eligible for health coverage – significantly improved public health. The Healthy Opportunities pilot program saves North Carolina money by addressing the many of the factors identified in this report – housing, food access – that mediate how North Carolinians' bodies respond to environmental exposures, and whether they stay healthy.

D3. Adopt standards to protect workers from excessive heat. North Carolina is experiencing more frequent extreme heatwaves. The NCGA and the state Commissioner of Labor should explore a combination of voluntary and standard-driven protections to ensure that outdoor workers and those in non-air-conditioned environments remain safe on the job during periods of extreme heat.

Toxics

E1. Fund lead testing and remediation. After decades of research, scientists have concluded that there is no safe level of lead exposure for infants and children. High levels of lead in the blood diminishes a child's intelligence, impulse control, school performance, and life outcomes. North Carolina has made substantial progress, but should continue to invest in lead line replacement, school and daycare testing, and lead paint removal in schools, daycares, and older housing stock.

E2. Establish state authority to protect against toxics in consumer products. North Carolina lacks modern laws to address toxics in consumer products, which comprise a major pathway of exposure for pregnant women, infants, and developing children. Protecting residents from toxics in consumer products will require state legislation.

E3. Ban aqueous fire-fighting foams and dispose of existing stocks safely. In 2024, the NC General Assembly established a voluntary program to collect PFAS-containing 'aqueous fire-fighting foams' (AFFF) from fire departments across the state. That's a great first step; the state legislature should ban the use of AFFFs and require the use of safe alternatives.

E4. Ban the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. Neonicotinoid pesticides rely on chemicals related to nicotine; the class was introduced in the 1980s and has proven exceptionally toxic to a wide swath of insects, including vital pollinators. The European Union has banned distribution and use of neonicotinoids. North Carolina should follow suit.

E5. Promote green chemistry as an economic development strategy. Synthetic chemicals play a vital role in our economy, but the ubiquity of toxic compounds in the stream of commerce threatens public health. By recruiting and rewarding the green chemistry sector in North Carolina, state leaders can have the best of both worlds – a growing, high-tech economy and healthy public and environment.

Air quality

F1. Target remaining air pollution hot spots. Data from ‘purple’ air monitors across the state suggest that while North Carolina’s air quality is great on average, some neighborhoods still experience particulate pollution hot spots that may threaten residents’ health. State environmental regulators should explore the available tools to target and resolve these hyperlocal problems, especially to protect children’s health and development.

F2. Update state list of toxic air pollutants. North Carolina was one of the first states to establish a program to regulate toxic air pollutants released from various industrial sources, before the US Congress added control of hazardous air pollutants to the federal Clean Air Act in 1990. Unfortunately, neither the state nor the federal list of chemicals has been updated since, even though North Carolina’s economy has evolved significantly. As a starting point for checking the adequacy of the lists, the state should invest in non-targeted assessments to identify the new compounds North Carolinians are breathing.

F3. Curb air emissions of forever chemicals. Separate from water discharges, some manufacturers emit toxic pre- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) directly into the air, from whence they can rain down and contaminate soil and groundwater. State-issued air permits should include conditions prohibiting the release of persistent toxics, including PFAS, into North Carolina’s air.

F4. Address transportation-related air pollution. Concentrations of pollutants are significantly higher close to major roads, placing serious health burdens on communities even when overall air quality seems good. State regulators should apply existing authority – and the state legislature may need to enact new authority – to protect children and adults from the highly local impacts of transportation-related air pollution.

F5. Ensure transparency in air permits. North Carolina has three locally delegated air permit programs: Mecklenburg, Forsyth, and Buncombe counties. All are missing from the state DEQ Community Mapping System and the North Carolina EJ Hub. Both the state and the Mecklenburg programs make permits and enforcement information available online, but permits and other documents in the Forsyth and Buncombe programs are largely inaccessible to the interested public. These delegated air programs need online transparency comparable to the state program.

F6. Monitor and set standards for indoor air. The NC General Assembly should fund a pilot program to monitor indoor air quality in public buildings, and consider enacting elements of the Johns Hopkins University model state indoor air quality act.

Water

G1. Establish water withdrawal permitting. North Carolina, although traditionally blessed with abundant water resources, is one of just two states in the nation that lack a clear statewide requirement for permitting of surface water withdrawals. Enacting a statutory system that provides clear protections for instream uses would give certainty to all stakeholders and – as specific watersheds bump up against the limits of supply – help avoid the kinds of water wars that have undercut other states’ economies and development.

G2. Conduct a periodic and systematic analysis of trends in groundwater levels. The state groundwater well network has strong coverage in the Coastal Plain, and state environmental managers keep a close eye on groundwater levels in crucial Coastal Plan aquifers. North Carolina and the US Geological Survey have data on groundwater resources in the Piedmont and mountain counties, but have not kept the same close eye on groundwater trends. A periodic analysis of well trends would be an inexpensive investment to detect and avoid long term threats to water supplies in these regions.

G3. Update surface water quality standards. The primary mechanism for protecting North Carolina's surface waters – drinking water sources for over half the state – is implementation of state surface water quality standards. The current and subsequent updates should revise the state's bacterial standard, adopt a numeric value for the carcinogen 1,4 dioxane, update details of how the state calculates toxicity, and update the state standard for ammonia to protect benthic and other aquatic life.

G4. Curb the discharge of forever chemicals. Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a class of thousands of compounds that do not occur naturally, break down very slowly, and are all or nearly all toxic to humans and wildlife. The NC Environmental Management Commission should adopt water quality standards to limit the discharge of PFAS to waters of the state; the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) should require industrial and municipal discharges to stop releasing these persistent toxics into the environment.

G5. Build out One Water strategies for nutrient-impaired lakes. Several major lakes and reservoirs – Falls Lake, Jordan Lake, High Rock Lake – suffer from excessive nutrient pollution with the potential for hazardous algal blooms. The NCGA, EMC, and DEQ should support robust nutrient management strategies for these lakes. Those strategies should include reductions from agriculture supported by cost-share programs; control of pollution from new development; and collaborative One Water structures for local governments to pool resources and invest in projects that boost water quality throughout the watersheds.

G6. Strengthen stormwater management. In the near term, the NCGA and EMC need to improve stormwater retention requirements for large developments and redevelopments. Longer term, the NCGA and EMC should require use of green stormwater infrastructure (GSI). On-site retention of stormwater using green stormwater infrastructure offers a way to minimize post-development increases in runoff, and should become the norm for new and retrofitted development.

G7. Expand funding for CCAP. The Community Conservation Assistance Program, housed in the NC Department of Agriculture, is a voluntary, incentive-based program that improves water quality through the installation of cost-shared stormwater control measures on urban, suburban and rural lands not in immediate agricultural use. Funding for CCAP is a direct investment in the water quality needed to support oyster mariculture, safe swimming, and healthy estuaries.

G8. Improve land application of municipal waste sludge. Municipal sewage sludge, or biosolids, contains a mixture of whatever contaminants reach the wastewater treatment plant from residents, commercial facilities, and industry discharges into the sewer system. Biosolids are typically land-applied to farm fields, where pollutants can contaminate groundwater and run off into surface waters. State land-application statutes and rules need an upgrade to better address this threat.

G9. Improve the financial stability of water utilities. The Viable Utility Reserve – and other infusions of infrastructure dollars – has been very successful at pulling dozens of small drinking and wastewater utilities bank from the brink of insolvency. But for many, that respite is temporary – they are simply too small, covering too scattered a service area, to make it on their own. The NCGA, the Division of Water Infrastructure, the State Water Infrastructure Authority, and the Local Government Commission need to work together to sketch out a path for these ultimately non-viable systems.

G10. Improve water affordability. Raising water and sewer rates is often necessary for a utility to maintain capacity but can burden low-income households. State law prohibits local governments from charging customers different rates based on income. However, local governments can establish subsidy programs. The federal Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP) assisted local governments that provided such subsidies, but the program has expired. The state should establish its own version of LIHWAP to help local governments establish subsidy programs for low- and moderate-income households.

G11. Establish septic repair fund for low-income households. Despite spending millions of dollars on centralized water and wastewater utilities every year through a consistent set of funding programs, the state does not have a dedicated, statewide mechanism for assisting owners of septic systems. Poorly-managed septic systems contaminate groundwater, pollute nearby surface waters, and threaten public health. Many failing septic systems are owned by rural residents with limited income. The state should provide needs-based assistance to repair or replace failing septic systems.

G12. Make trout stream buffers more effective. Undisturbed vegetated buffers along trout waters keep streams cool, minimize turbidity, and support the food chain that trout need to thrive. State regulation (15A NCAC 04B .0125) requires a 25-foot undisturbed buffer zone on trout waters, but loopholes have allowed nearby land clearing to degrade trout streams. Closing that loophole to allow temporary but not permanent impacts – as proposed by S.B. 613 in the 2023-2024 legislative biennium – will help protect economically and ecologically significant trout streams.

G13. Require swine farms to improve waste management. North Carolina's 2,000 industrial swine farms virtually all manage waste by storing it in a hole in the ground and then pumping liquids onto nearby sprayfields. In North Carolina's wet climate, this inevitably means untreated wastes are flowing into wetlands and rivers and down to our estuaries. It is past time to mandate adoption of environmentally superior technologies, possibly with state investment.

G14. Permit dry-litter poultry operations. Unlike swine farms, which have an extensive regulatory program, poultry farms lack siting restrictions or permit requirements. Yet, poultry has overtaken swine operations as a source of excess nitrogen and phosphorus. Many dry-litter waste operations are located in floodplains, and many massively overapply phosphorus. State legislators should close both of these loopholes and establish sensible regulatory oversight for poultry farms.

Waste

H1. Enact producer responsibility policies. Too many products – packaging and contents – are designed to be used and discarded, squandering the resources that went into making them. The fastest way to improve product and packaging design is to close the loop by making the company that makes or

packages a product responsible for disposing of the product or packaging after it is used. The European Union has led the way in promoting producer responsibility for a variety of products; North Carolina can follow suit for a much more efficient economy.

H2. Create state incentives for food waste diversion to compost. Food waste takes up space in landfills, where it generates methane that can contribute to climate change. Diversion of food waste to composting frees up landfill space, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and recovers food nutrients as valuable fertilizers rather than locking them up in lined landfills.

H3. Reduce plastic pollution. North Carolinians use a lot of plastic. Some of it ends up in landfills, but much ends up in the natural environment, where it breaks into smaller and smaller pieces. Researchers have found plastics and microplastics throughout the food chain and in every human organ system. North Carolina needs policies to promote biodegradable alternatives to plastics and to reduce single-use plastics.

H4. Address past contamination. For decades before 1993, communities across North Carolina disposed of waste – residential, commercial, and industrial – at unlined dumps and landfills. New examples of that historic contamination are regularly rediscovered. Neighbors usually want legacy contamination dug up and removed, but no one has money to do that in all the places it has been found. North Carolina needs a practical, compassionate, and well-funded approach to managing and containing rediscovered contamination and protecting well-users and other residents from exposure.

H5. Prevent future contamination. Many landfills closed after 1993 will soon begin to reach the end of their 30-year ‘post closure’ periods, after which it was once imagined they might be released entirely from state oversight. But many, perhaps most, of these sites still have contaminated groundwater, and new discoveries about the toxicity of old chemicals means it will likely never be safe to turn these sites loose with no supervision. The NCGA and state agencies need to provide for the efficient but indefinite management of these potential time bombs.

Wildlife

I1. Publish and implement recommendations from the 2025 Wildlife Action Plan. The 2025 North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan will be a crucial tool for understanding trends in wildlife populations and what North Carolina must do to conserve species. The Wildlife Resources Commission should include bold recommendations in the plan, and the NC General Assembly should invest in implementing those recommendations.

Energy

J1. Expand renewable energy generation and storage. North Carolina needs to increase the share of electric power generation that comes from renewables plus storage, and retire coal. Energy market competition will save ratepayers money.

J2. Expand energy efficiency savings. Following the majority of U.S. states, the state legislature should establish a stand-alone energy efficiency resource standard (EERS) of at least three years duration that sets a hard annual target for energy efficiency to displace retail electric consumption.

J3. Decline to invest in new gas generating capacity. Investments in new gas plants would pad Duke Energy's profit margins but expose ratepayers to greater price volatility, and impose huge sunk costs on the state's economy when those plants must be retired early to meet carbon emissions reductions goals.

J4. Minimize new natural gas pipelines. New large scale natural gas pipelines are a burden to landowners, communities, streams, and ratepayers; as sunk costs, they are also an obstacle to the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. North Carolina needs to avoid permitting or requiring ratepayers to subsidize major new natural gas pipelines.

J5. Pursue grid modernization to support distributed generation, electrification of the economy and especially the transportation sector, and greater resilience to intense storms, floods, and heat waves.

J6. Invest in statewide ZEV charging infrastructure. The future of passenger cars is zero emission cars – electric vehicles that can charge from renewable power on the grid. To move rapidly into that future, however, North Carolina needs to invest in charging infrastructure along highways and in large and small towns.

J7. Spend out federal IRA dollars in ways that distribute the benefits of a clean energy economy across North Carolina, with a special emphasis on communities that have been traditionally disenfranchised or are otherwise being left behind.

J8. Curb wood pellet facilities. Cutting North Carolina's timber for wood pellets returns minimal value to the state's economy, damages habitat, imposes burdens on nearby communities, and releases lots of carbon into the atmosphere. North Carolina should not approve new or expanded wood pellet facilities.

J9. Modernize North Carolina's building code. The NC General Assembly should unfreeze the state building code and allow the Building Code Councils to align North Carolina to the most current international building codes. Doing so would let North Carolinians benefit from greater energy efficiency, safer homes, and lower total housing costs.

J10. Establish a state-funded energy assistance program for low-income households. North Carolina should create a state funded program based on the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs and the Weatherization Assistance Programs to help low-income individuals and families pay energy bills and reduce energy costs.

Transportation

K1. Increase the share spent on non-highway modes of transportation. North Carolina spends just 6% of the state's budget for new projects on anything but roads – railroads, airports, ports, transit, bike paths, sidewalks. That share – set by NCDOT policy, not state law – needs to be steadily increased to meet the growing demand for energy-efficient, climate-efficient alternatives to roads.

K2. Prioritize highway spending to maintenance and improvements to existing infrastructure. Since the Great Depression, state government has owned and maintained most of North Carolina's roads. While

some new capacity is needed, metropolitan planning organizations and the state Department of Transportation should view proposals for major new highways – and especially unfinished legacy projects – with skepticism, recognizing that existing roads already represent a significant maintenance load.

K3. Integrate climate adaptation and sea level rise projections into state transportation investments. This includes implementing the recommendations of the NC-12 Stakeholder Group.

K4. Integrate carbon reduction and equity criteria into the scoring process for new capacity projects in the STI. This implies prioritizing investment in new capacity away from large road projects that drive sprawl.

K5. Support robust implementation of Complete Streets. NCDOT adopted a policy in 2009 and readopted it in 2020, requiring that all new road projects, and certain road maintenance projects, trigger an analysis of ways to fold in other modes – transit, bike, pedestrian, and personal mobility. Implementation of this Complete Streets Policy needs to be strengthened and sped up.

Growth & land use

L1. Support scalable affordable housing solutions. Across the state, rapidly growing urban areas are wrestling with the disappearance of housing that essential working people – including teachers, police, municipal employees, and service workers – can afford. Loss of affordable housing skews communities and hollows out the promise of representative government. The state legislature should provide funding to test and scale affordable housing solutions in the state’s fastest-growing cities.

L2. Reform single family zoning. Reservation of large areas of North Carolina’s major metros for single family neighborhoods has contributed to sprawl, traffic congestion, economic segregation, and a crisis of affordable, quality housing. Easing the path for single-family homeowners to build accessory dwelling units can boost the supply of affordable rental units. Local governments should providing for ‘missing middle’ housing – duplexes, townhomes, and so on – that can provide a path to ownership and financial stability for working families.

L3. Promote transit-accessible development. Affordable housing works best when it is located near transit routes. Transit delivers the greatest reductions in emissions and improvements in local economies when residential and commercial development is nearby, and provides a competitive alternative to sprawl. The state legislature should study and then adopt policies to promote transit-accessible development in North Carolina’s metro regions.

L4. Eliminate mandatory minimum parking. For years, many local governments have insisted that developers include parking spaces based on a ratio to the size of each development. The result: massive oversupply of parking spaces, increasing runoff, lowering tree canopy, and raising development costs. Jurisdictions that have abandoned parking minimums have benefited; they should be jettisoned statewide.

L5. Encourage and protect urban tree canopy. Trees in urban areas temper extreme heat, absorb runoff, reduce air pollution, and improve residents’ health. State and local budgets should fund tree planting and protection in North Carolina’s cities and towns, even as the state seeks to increase urban density to protect rural landscapes too.

L6. Authorize local governments to adopt 'assured supply'/ water-neutral growth ordinances. In North Carolina as in other states, rapid development has often dragged communities into expensive, catch-up infrastructure projects. The state legislature should give local governments the authority to avoid water allocation train wrecks by tying new development approvals to the availability of water to support new residents and businesses, or to adopt ordinances that ensure development is water neutral.

Resilient local communities

M1. Build out the NC Flood Resilience Blueprint. The Blueprint is both a powerful analytical tool for evaluating risk and vulnerability, and a program that – if resources are available – can prioritize investments to reduce vulnerability to future floods. The NC General Assembly deserves praise for launching and funding the first phases of the Blueprint; building it out will secure benefits for residents of all 17 of North Carolina's river basins.

M2. Fund buyout of repetitive-loss properties. National analyses have identified thousands of 'severe repetitive loss properties' - structures that have flooded at least five times since 1978 and been built back, usually with federal and state subsidies. North Carolina should invest in acquiring these properties and taking them out of developed uses, to minimize damage (and costs to the state) from future floods.

M3. Keep new development out of the floodplain. A 2024 study found that North Carolina has 70,000 parcels zoned for residential use in the 100-year floodplain but not yet developed. Those should never be built at grade, and most should not be built upon even with elevated structures, given the costs and danger imposed when emergency managers have to rescue stranded residents.

M4. Keep new state-funded facilities safe from floods. North Carolina's Uniform Floodplain Management Policy for State-owned Facilities (UFPM) took effect in February 2025, and requires most new and substantially rebuilt state facilities to stay out of or above the 500-year floodplain. It's a wise policy to protect state-owned facilities; it should be expanded to cover facilities that are funded but not directly owned by state government, such as locally-owned water infrastructure built with loans from the state Division of Water Infrastructure; or local emergency management facilities built with funds from the NC Departments of Commerce or Insurance.

M5. Establish a well-funded dam removal program. North Carolina has a dam safety program; many owners of hazardous or aging dams are not in compliance with requirements to have and maintain emergency plans. But beyond stronger enforcement, the state needs an adequately funded plan to buy and remove obsolete or failing dams, restoring free flowing rivers in the process.

M6. Direct counties to adopt proactive wildfire management plans. Among the 50 states, North Carolina has the fourth highest number of inhabited structures in the 'urban-wildlands interface', the part of the landscape most vulnerable to wildfire. The NCGA should require all counties to adopt and regularly update proactive wildfire management plans. This is a particularly urgent problem for western counties where Helene left a massive quantity of dead timber on the ground, where it could feed wildfires over the next five years.

M7. Address landslide hazards. Helene destroyed lives and property through flooding, but also through landslides – often in places where smaller landslides had happened before. North Carolina should fund

robust landslide hazard mapping across the mountain counties, and the state should authorize and support local governments in barring new development that would likely suffer from or cause landslides.

M8. Enact a path for resolving heirs properties. Heirs property – passed down for generations without wills or probate – creates a significant problem for accessing various federal and state assistance programs, including help rebuilding after a disaster. Many states have adopted a model policy for resolving heirs property relatively painlessly; the NCGA should adopt this or another solution that protects landowners and allows them to access federal and state assistance after disasters.

Citizen engagement

N1. Enact automatic voter registration. Voting is both a core right for adults in our democracy and the fundamental mechanism of accountability for our elected leaders. States that register residents by default, allowing them to opt-out by choice, have demonstrably higher rates of participation in elections than states that require residents to take the extra step of registering. North Carolina should adopt opt-out voter registration.

N2. Enact a nonpartisan redistricting process. When districts are gerrymandered, legislators are less accountable to their constituents and increasing numbers of elected officials become ideologically polarized. North Carolina needs a redistricting process that eliminates gerrymandering and gives voters of all political stripes a basis for faith that our state legislature reflects the actual choice of the state's electorate.

N3. Accommodate multiple languages. State agencies should ensure that, where appropriate, they translate materials (into Spanish, American Sign Language, or other languages) and offer staff support to allow North Carolinians to engage fully with state programs and with public comment opportunities.