



Leadership North Carolina

Class 33 Environment Session

April 14 – 16, 2026
Asheville

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Class 33 Environment Session

April 14 – 16, 2026
Asheville

Base Hotel

Renaissance Asheville Hotel
31 Woodfin Street
Asheville, NC 28801
(828) 252-8211
[Hotel Website](#)

Session Goals

1. Build a common understanding of the major environmental issues facing North Carolina today.
2. See how history, place, and lived experience shape environmental challenges and solutions across the state.
3. Understand how environmental decisions impact individual and community well-being.
4. Practice engaging with complex issues that involve tradeoffs and competing priorities.
5. Explore how the environment connects to and intersects with government, education, health and human services, economic development, and inclusive leadership in NC.

Planning Committee

Chris Rivera, Program Chair
EMD Division Director, Department of Community Resources
Mecklenburg County
Mecklenburg

DeDreana Freeman, Co-Chair *Durham*
Principal Manager
DEEP LLC

Jenn Heiss Wake
Deputy Marketing and Communications Director
North Carolina Department of Transportation

Emily Wallace, Co-Chair *Wake*
Managing Principal
Thrivner, Inc.

Michael Johnson *Durham*
Senior Vice President
Dogwood State Bank

Eric Bowen *Wake*
Director - Software and Data Engineering
North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives

Jodi Kaplan *Mecklenburg*
Associate Vice Chancellor, Alumni Engagement
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Layla Cummings *Wake*
Director, Regulatory Affairs - NC
Duke Energy

Leslie Karkanawi *Wake*
Chief Education Program Officer & General Counsel
North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority

Tracey du Laney *Wake*
Vice President, Science and Technology
Development
North Carolina Biotechnology Center

Stacy Sereno *Wake*
State Legislative Director and Legislative Counsel
North Carolina Farm Bureau

Esteban Guzmán *Wayne*
Director, Small Business Center
Wayne Community College

Each planning committee for the Class 33 program year is made up of members from LNC Class 32.

Tuesday, April 14, 2026

Optional Tour: French Broad Chocolate Factory & Café, 821 Riverside Drive, #199, Asheville.

Optional Reception: Center for Craft, 67 Broadway Street, Asheville.

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|----------------|--|--|
| 2:00 – 4:00 pm | French Broad Chocolate Factory Tour (Optional) Advance RSVP required. Business casual attire. | Jael Skeffington Co-Founder and CEO French Broad Chocolate |
| 5:30 – 7:00 pm | Session Reception at the Center for Craft (Optional) Advance RSVP required. Business casual attire. | |

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

Breakfast and Meeting: Ingles Mountain View Room in the Sherrill Center/Kimmel Arena, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 227 Campus Drive, Asheville.

Parking pre-registration required through [this link](#). See directions page for details.

Asheville Botanical Garden: 151 W.T. Weaver Boulevard. Limited parking available on site or 10-15 minute walk from the Sherrill Center meeting venue.

Dinner: Century Room at Pack's Tavern, 20 South Spruce Street, Asheville.

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| 8:00 – 8:30 am | Breakfast (Optional) Advance RSVP Required | UNC Asheville |
| 8:00 – 8:30 am | William Garrett Fund Committee Meeting | |
| 8:30 – 8:55 am | Setting the Stage | Chris Rivera EMD Division Director, Department of Community Resources Mecklenburg County LNC Class 32 Alumnus and Class 33 Program Chair |
| | | DeDreana Freeman, Co-Chair Principal Manager DEEP LLC LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Co-Chair |
| | | Emily Wallace, Co-Chair Wake Managing Principal Thrivner, Inc. LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Co-Chair |
| 8:55 – 9:25 am | Local Welcome and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Perspective | Mike LaVoie Natural Resources Director Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians |
| 9:30 – 10:30 am | State of the State of North Carolina's Environment | Dr. Kathie Dello Assistant Secretary for Resilience North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality LNC Class 31 Alumna |
| 10:30 – 10:50 am | Morning Break Snack and beverages will be provided | |
| 10:50 – 11:30 am | Environmental Justice in NC: Past to Present | Dr. Chris Lamont Brown Co-Director for Research and Education North Carolina Environmental Justice Network |
| 11:30 am – 12:00 pm | Class Business | LNC Team |

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| 12:00 – 12:45 pm | Land Preservation Win-Win: The Conservation Tax Credit | The Honorable Stephen M. Ross <i>Representative, District 63 North Carolina General Assembly</i> |
| | | Will Summer <i>Executive Director, North Carolina Land and Water Fund Director, Division of Land and Water Stewardship North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources</i> |
| | | Leslie Karkanawi, Moderator <i>Chief Education Program Officer & General Counsel North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Planning Committee</i> |
| 12:45 – 1:30 pm | Lunch | |
| 1:30 – 2:30 pm | Recovery and Resilience in Western NC | The Honorable Zeb Smathers <i>Mayor Canton, NC</i> |
| | | The Honorable Maggie Ullman <i>Council Member, Asheville City Council Founder and Principal, Ullman Consulting</i> |
| | | Nathan Ramsey <i>Executive Director, Land of Sky Regional Council Director, Mountain Area Workforce Development Board</i> |
| | | Jenn Heiss, Moderator <i>Deputy Marketing and Communications Director North Carolina Department of Transportation LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Planning Committee</i> |
| 2:30 – 3:15 pm | Exploring WNC's Biodiversity | Brian Wuertz <i>Outreach Education Manager Friends of the WNC Nature Center</i> |
| | | Cassie Payne <i>Education Specialist Friends of the WNC Nature Center</i> |
| 3:15 – 3:30 pm | Wrap-Up and Adjourn | LNC Team |
| 3:30 – 4:15 pm | Self-Guided UNC Asheville Campus Walk and Visit to Asheville Botanical Garden <i>10-15 minute walk or 3-minute drive from meeting venue Limited parking on site, walking or carpooling encouraged</i> | |
| 4:15 – 6:30 pm | Free Time | |
| 6:30 pm | Class Dinner <i>5-10-minute walk from the Renaissance Hotel</i> | Century Room at Pack's Tavern <i>20 South Spruce Street</i> |

Thursday, April 16, 2026

Breakfast and Meeting: Ingles Mountain View Room in the Sherrill Center/Kimmel Arena, University of North Carolina at Asheville, 227 Campus Drive, Asheville.
Parking pre-registration required through [this link](#). See directions page for details.

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|----------------|--|---------------|
| 8:00 – 8:30 am | Breakfast (Optional) <i>Advance RSVP Required</i> | UNC Asheville |
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|---------------------|---|--|
| 8:30 – 8:50 am | Morning Reflections | Chris Rivera <i>EMD Division Director, Department of Community Resources Mecklenburg County LNC Class 32 Alumnus and Class 33 Program Chair</i> |
| 8:50 – 9:50 am | Agriculture and the Land | Corey Hoilman <i>Assistant Director, Farmland Preservation Division North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services</i> |
| | | Kaleb Rathbone <i>Assistant Commissioner, Western NC Agricultural Programs and Small Farms North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services</i> |
| | | Jason Davis <i>Farmer North River Farms</i> |
| | | Stacy Sereno, Moderator <i>State Legislative Director and Legislative Counsel North Carolina Farm Bureau LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Planning Committee</i> |
| 9:50 – 10:15 am | Morning Break and Paired Networking Conversations Snack and beverages will be provided | |
| 10:15 – 11:00 am | Fireside Chat: Data Centers and Energy Use in NC | Steven J. Levitas <i>Interim Executive Director New Energy Economics</i> |
| | | Venu Ghanta <i>VP, Regulatory Affairs and Policy Duke Energy LNC Class 31 Alumnus</i> |
| 11:00 – 11:10 am | Kudos | LNC Class 33 |
| 11:15 am – 12:00 pm | Water Is the System: Risk, Resilience, and Choice in North Carolina | Dr. Susan N. White <i>Executive Director, NC Sea Grant College Program Director, Water Resources Research Institute of UNC Director, NC Space Grant</i> |
| 12:00 – 12:20 pm | Lunch | |
| 12:20 – 1:10 pm | Leadership Profile | Sharon Decker <i>Senior Advisor to Governor Josh Stein on Economic Recovery of Western North Carolina LNC Class 1 Alumna</i> |
| 1:10 – 1:30 pm | Closing and Adjourn | LNC Team |