Leadership North Carolina

Class 33
Environment Session

April 14 – 16, 2026
Asheville

[#LNC33]

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ENBRIDGE

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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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Michael Johnson *Durham*
Senior Vice President
Dogwood State Bank

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

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

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

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.

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.

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	Eastern Band of Cherokee: Stewardship of the Kituwah Landscape	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

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

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.

8:00 – 8:30 am	Breakfast (Optional) Advance RSVP Required	UNC Asheville

8:30 – 8:50 am	Morning Reflections	Chris Rivera *EMD Division Director, Department of Community Resources* *Mecklenburg County* *LNC Class 32 Alumnus and Class 33 Program Chair*
8:50 – 9:50 am	Agriculture and the Land	Corey Hoilman *Assistant Director, Farmland Preservation Division* *North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services* Kaleb Rathbone *Assistant Commissioner, Western NC Agricultural Programs and Small Farms* *North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services* Jason Davis *Farmer* *North River Farms* Stacy Sereno, Moderator *State Legislative Director and Legislative Counsel* *North Carolina Farm Bureau* *LNC Class 32 Alumna and ENV Session Planning Committee*
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 *Interim Executive Director* *New Energy Economics* Venu Ghanta *VP, Regulatory Affairs and Policy* *Duke Energy* *LNC Class 31 Alumnus*
11:00 – 11:10 am	Kudos	LNC Class 33
11:15 am – 12:00 pm	Water-Smart Futures: Resilience in a Rapidly Changing Climate	Dr. Susan N. White *Executive Director, NC Sea Grant College Program* *Director, Water Resources Research Institute of UNC* *Director, NC Space Grant*
12:00 – 12:20 pm	Lunch	
12:20 – 1:10 pm	Leadership Profile	Sharon Decker *Senior Advisor to Governor Josh Stein on* *Economic Recovery of Western North Carolina* *LNC Class 1 Alumna*
1:10 – 1:30 pm	Closing and Adjourn	LNC Team