

NC Department of Environmental Quality

# 2023 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN



*Providing science-based environmental stewardship  
for the health and prosperity of all North Carolinians.*



## A Message from the Secretary

**Elizabeth S. Biser**

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the lead stewardship agency for the protection of North Carolina's environmental resources.

With offices from the mountains to the coast, DEQ administers regulatory programs designed to protect North Carolina's air, water, and land quality, the public's health, and works to advance an all-of-the-above energy strategy that fits the state's needs. DEQ also offers grants and technical assistance to businesses, farmers, local governments, and the public and encourages environmental stewardship through educational programs provided at DEQ facilities and through the state's school system.

Through a multitude of regulatory and non-regulatory programs, DEQ touches the lives of all North Carolinians in many ways to enhance and ensure our quality of life. These programs all serve different functions, but they work collaboratively in pursuit of a shared vision. It's important that our strategic plan, meant to be a set of guideposts for the agency over the next three years, reflects that integrated mindset.

DEQ's mission is to provide science-based environmental stewardship for the health and prosperity of all North Carolinians. To carry this out, it's crucial that we not only focus on our day-to-day functions and improve our current work, but also that we adjust as needed to a changing world and address the issues of the future. Over the last few years, there has been an increased need to adapt to new areas of concern and be creative to address new challenges. As we address these novel challenges, let's strive for innovative solutions and ensure that our processes are transparent, equitable, and inclusive.

I am so proud to be part of Team DEQ. Thank you for your dedication to the agency and to North Carolina. There is much work ahead, but I am confident in our ability to meet whatever challenges come our way.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Biser". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Mission:** Providing science-based environmental stewardship for the health and prosperity of all North Carolinians.

**Vision:** Our Department will be a leader in using collaborative, inclusive processes to solve pressing environmental issues.

**Core Values:**

Be **TRANSPARENT** and **ACCOUNTABLE** to uphold public trust

Seek **EQUITABLE** outcomes through **INCLUSIVE** processes

Lead with personal, professional, and scientific **INTEGRITY**

Pursue **LEARNING** and **INNOVATIVE** solutions

As a state agency, We will be **TRANSPARENT** and **ACCOUNTABLE** to uphold the public trust as we carry out our mission.

We will seek to be **EQUITABLE** and **INCLUSIVE** in our decision-making processes to ensure all voices are heard, including those that have been historically disadvantaged or with differing viewpoints.

We will hold ourselves to the highest standards of personal, professional, and scientific **INTEGRITY**.

We will maintain a **LEARNING** mindset and pursue **INNOVATIVE** solutions to complex issues.

**Goals:**

- 1) Promote and ensure environmental stewardship and provide technical, compliance, permit, and financial assistance to meet or exceed regulatory requirements and prevent pollution.
- 2) Create a working environment where employees are empowered to be active participants in developing science-based solutions to better protect public health and the environment.
- 3) Modernize and streamline internal processes to provide enhanced public service, increase transparency, and strengthen partnerships to better serve the people and businesses of North Carolina.
- 4) Ensure the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- 5) Address climate change impacts through engagement, accounting, mitigation efforts, and resiliency strategies that are equitable and just.
- 6) Protect North Carolinians from exposures to emerging compounds using a transparent and science-based decision-making process.
- 7) Strengthen North Carolina’s infrastructure through thoughtful and strategic investments in communities.

# 1. Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures

**Goal 1 – Promote and ensure environmental stewardship and provide technical, compliance, permit, and financial assistance to meet or exceed regulatory requirements and prevent pollution.**

**Objective 1.A** – Ensure the water quality for the people of North Carolina will be maintained and where possible enhanced through the standards and regulations set forth in state and federal statute.

**Strategy 1.A.1:** Provide technical water supply planning assistance through the continued collection of detailed annual data from water suppliers to better enable communities to resolve immediate and long-term water shortage issues.

**Strategy 1.A.2:** Invest state and federal water infrastructure funding in intentional and equitable ways to make sure water and wastewater projects serve communities with the greatest need.

**Strategy 1.A.3:** Improve management strategies for pathogens, toxins, and nutrients to have a more extensive focus on water quality standards than traditional total maximum daily load plans, which primarily manage industrial point sources and municipal stormwater.

**Strategy 1.A.4:** Improve compliance with the Sedimentation Pollution Control Act of 1973 and the NPDES Construction Stormwater Permit Coverage, state post-construction stormwater requirements, and the NPDES Industrial Stormwater Program.

**Performance Measures for Objective 1.A:**

- Collect Local Water Supply Plan (LWSP) data annually to identify and resolve immediate and long-term water supply issues (e.g., water systems with demand: supply ratios of 80% or greater)
- Annually evaluate and update the community mapping tool and criteria to identify water infrastructure needs and prioritize funding for disadvantaged communities.
- Complete a study of E. coli and fecal coliform levels in Class B freshwaters throughout the state.
- Complete rulemaking for the site-specific Chlorophyll a surface water quality standard for the High Rock Lake Reservoir and begin associated nutrient management strategy (NMS) development.
- Update and enhance the Erosion & Sedimentation Control Planning & Design Manual in accordance with the latest technologies and best management practices for controlling erosion and sedimentation.

**Objective 1.B** – Protect outdoor, ambient air quality to provide public health benefits for all.

**Strategy 1.B.1:** Conduct air quality monitoring for hazardous and criteria pollutants and develop strategies for monitoring emerging compounds and determining contributing sources.

**Strategy 1.B.2:** Develop clear and consistent air quality permits that comply with state and federal regulations and take into consideration public input.

**Strategy 1.B.3:** Ensure compliance with air quality rules and regulations through regular inspections, technical assistance, education, engagement, and outreach.

**Performance Measures for Objective 1.B:**

- Maintain and operate an adequate network for monitoring hazardous and criteria air pollutants, such that the continually collected data are verified, validated, and certified to the USEPA by May 1 of each year for the previous calendar year.
- Reduce the current backlog of Title V permit applications (30) exceeding their 18-month statutory processing timelines considering existing staffing levels, high-priority applications, and Division needs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with leadership of North Carolina Manufacturers’ Alliance (NCMA) by January 30th each year to determine training and technical assistance needs for their members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 1.C</b> – <i>Maintain and enhance land quality in North Carolina by ensuring the effective management of solid and hazardous waste material and proper supervision of dams.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.C.1:</b></u> <i>Expand the use of the Brownfields Program to stimulate safe redevelopment of contaminated sites and achieve higher levels of sustainability, thereby supporting both public health and economic development.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.C.2:</b></u> <i>Effectively assess and remediate environmental contamination at solid waste, hazardous waste, and Superfund sites where needed while also increasing the use of risk-based remediation to provide protective land use controls on properties moving forward.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.C.3:</b></u> <i>Analyze solid waste management disposal and materials management trends to plan for adequate disposal capacity and to encourage and incentivize waste reduction and recovery.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.C.4:</b></u> <i>Inspect dams at the required frequency and take necessary and proactive actions to ensure protection of public safety.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 1.C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct hydrologic and hydraulic capacity study of dams—Additional Cape Fear River Basin, Yadkin, Catawba, French Broad by December 31, 2024.</li> <li>• Study risk informed prioritization of NC High Hazard Dams by December 30, 2023.</li> <li>• Complete landslide mapping and modeling by September 1, 2024.</li> <li>• Introduce statutory modifications to brownfields property reuse act for fee modernization as well as a brownfields sales tax incentive legislation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 1.D</b> – <i>Protect North Carolina’s coastal resources and marine life through planning, permitting, research, engagement, and education.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.D.1:</b></u> <i>Develop management plans for coastal habitats and marine and estuarine fisheries using best available science, robust data collection, and stakeholder input.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.D.2:</b></u> <i>Maintain watershed restoration plans to protect, restore, or replicate natural habitats and hydrology through natural and nature-based solutions.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.D.3:</b></u> <i>Patrol coastal waters and enforce state rules and regulations for protecting natural resources, public health and ensuring the quality of North Carolina’s fisheries.</i></p> <p><u><b>Strategy 1.D.4:</b></u> <i>Work through the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership to foster greater engagement</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 1.D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By December 2024, develop fishery management plan amendments for spotted seatrout and striped mullet following the Fishery Management Plan schedule approved by the Secretary in 2022.</li> <li>• By December 2024, facilitate the implementation of approximately 50% of the 2021 Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) Amendment through collaboration of the CHPP Leadership Team (DMF, APNEP) and other DEQ divisions and partners.</li> <li>• By December 2023, construct and equip a new operational Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Laboratory in Manteo and complete prerequisites for FDA certification.</li> </ul>

<p><i>with the Commonwealth of Virginia to improve and protect the water quality in the Sounds.</i></p>	
<p><b>Objective 1.E</b> – <i>Promote environmental stewardship, sustainable practices, and going beyond compliance through non-regulatory technical and compliance assistance, outreach, and recognition programs.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 1.E.1:</u></b> <i>Provide multi-media compliance and pollution prevention technical assistance, natural resource conservation, and recycling program support and promotion.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 1.E.2:</u></b> <i>Promote beyond compliance activities and sustainable practices through environmental recognition program and industry networks.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 1.E:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide on-site technical assistance and track the number visits completed per FY.</li> <li>• Track and report on key environmental sustainability measures of Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI) members and Waste Reduction Program (WRP) customers including the water use reductions, energy use reductions, waste reductions, GHG emission reductions and estimated cost savings for the two-year period.</li> <li>• Provide and track the number of permit/compliance assistance inquiries addressed in FY21-22.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Goal 2 – Create a working environment where employees are empowered to be active participants in developing science-based solutions to better protect public health and the environment.</b></p>	
<p><b>Objective 2.A</b> – <i>Foster creativity and collaboration within DEQ. Create a collegial atmosphere that encourages team members to be inventive and challenge the status quo. Encourage and provide opportunities for innovation and creative problem solving.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.A.1</u></b> <i>Provide opportunities for staff among and across divisions to engage with each other in formal and informal settings to promote teamwork and collaboration.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.A.2</u></b> <i>Utilize technology to increase broader employee participation during events.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 2.A:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administer engagement survey to new employees within four months of their start date targeting the hiring and on-boarding processes and experiences.</li> <li>• Administer an annual employee engagement survey to all DEQ staff by April 1<sup>st</sup> of each year and report results to all employees by June 1<sup>st</sup>.</li> <li>• By August 1<sup>st</sup> of each year, conduct at least 1 engagement per DEQ location (e.g., focus groups) to provide employees with opportunities to identify solutions to the highest</li> </ul>

<p><b><u>Strategy 2.A.3</u></b> <i>Routinely highlight employees or teams for innovative thinking in newsletters, social media, employee events, and other forms of recognition.</i></p>	<p>priority challenges identified in engagement surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By September 2023, create and post a virtual DEQ innovation wall that highlights innovative and creative work of DEQ staff. The initial wall will highlight DEQ employees that have received DEQ innovation coins to date. The wall will be updated on a quarterly basis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 2.B</b> – <i>Provide professional development and career advancement opportunities to retain our best talents. Develop pathways to create a multi-generational and diverse workforce.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.B.1</u></b> <i>Develop training programs for employees interested in or currently serving in management.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.B.2</u></b> <i>Increase recruitment efforts and outreach to NC Colleges and Universities – including Historically Black Colleges and Universities.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.B.3</u></b> <i>Provide intentional opportunities for employees, including interns, to grow professionally, such as through a mentoring program.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 2.B:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By June 2023, develop a project plan for an online DEQ training and knowledge transfer program modeled after the Kentucky Department of Environment and provide an initial set of at least 3 modules to DEQ staff.</li> <li>• By September 2023, develop and implement a pilot DEQ Skills Marketplace program that provides opportunities for DEQ staff to grow professionally by applying their talents in support of DEQ projects or programs.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 2.C</b> – <i>Motivate leaders to effectively engage with their staff and inspire them to be agents of positive change.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.C.1</u></b> <i>Demonstrate an employee-focused leadership style that instills value, trust, and appreciation of DEQ employees.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 2.C.2</u></b> <i>Expand on the mentorship program to create positive onboarding, opportunities to lead, and foster collaboration and teamwork.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 2.C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By December 2023, establish a formal DEQ mentoring program with a rolling application process, automated pairing process and an annual event to recognize mentors and engage potential new members.</li> <li>• By June 2023, complete initial round of DEQ supervisory leadership training and offer future training opportunities to new supervisors at least on an annual basis.</li> <li>• By November of each year, conduct an annual DEQ Leadership Forum event accessible to all DEQ staff.</li> <li>• Establish informal employee engagements (such as young professionals, volunteer opportunities, and leadership “coffee hours”) and implement on a regularly scheduled basis starting by August 2023.</li> </ul>

**Goal 3 – Modernize and streamline internal processes and foster innovation to provide enhanced public service, increase transparency, and strengthen partnerships to better serve the people and businesses of North Carolina.**

**Objective 3.A – Streamline permit handling, compliance, and inspection processes.**

Strategy 3.A.1: Assess existing permit processes from start to finish for inefficiencies and make improvements wherever possible.

Strategy 3.A.2: Evaluate the feasibility of expanding express permitting options.

Strategy 3.A.3: Study the existing permit fee structure to determine whether revenues generated are sufficient to support regulatory duties and make recommendations for changes as needed.

Strategy 3.A.4: Identify strategies to reduce backlogs across all permit types.

**Performance Measures for Objective 3.A:**

- Complete streamlined future state mapping with LEAN techniques for 40 prioritized permitting programs by December 2024.
- Standardize and document approximately 20 permit sub-processes for department wide use by December 2023.
- By May 1, 2023, confirm and communicate permitting process timelines for each permit program, including clarifying conditions, if any, under which the permit process timeline “restarts.”

**Objective 3.B – Develop secure digital solutions for agency business, external communications, and regulatory actions.**

Strategy 3.B.1: Continue working on the Permitting Transformation Program to completely digitize and streamline permitting processes within the Department.

Strategy 3.B.2: Develop and maintain an internal structure to track and analyze permit data. With robust feedback loops on all permits, we can pinpoint issue areas and address them directly.

Strategy 3.B.3: Modernize, develop, and maintain digital solutions for the delivery of non-regulatory tools and resources that improve communications and technical assistance to external customers and the public.

Strategy 3.B.4: Incorporate cyber security in our tools, technologies, and processes, and promote cyber security training and awareness to all our employees.

**Performance Measures for Objective 3.B:**

- Deliver PTP solutions for at least 4 DEQ permit programs by December 2023.
- Deliver PTP solutions for 20 DEQ permit programs by December 2024.
- Deliver PTP solutions for 43 DEQ permit programs by December 2025.
- Craft a business developer plan; this provides an initial plan to allow non-technical employees the ability to create or modify solutions in our most used tool including Microsoft Power Platform, Laserfiche, Smartsheets, and AGOL By July 2023.
- 95% of DEQ employees complete their cybersecurity modules assigned in LMS on or before the due date, which is approximately 6 weeks after training is assigned.

**Objective 3.C – Enhance technical assistance and regional office support for permit applicants, businesses, and the public.**

**Performance Measures for Objective 3.C:**

- By December 2023, develop a set of training modules for DEQ staff on best practices for engaging and communicating with applicants,



<p><b><u>Strategy 3.C.1:</u></b> Assess staffing needs and resources to non-regulatory programs, including those that work directly with the public or with external partners for coordination and communication.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 3.C.2:</u></b> Provide opportunities for staff from various divisions and regional offices to share experiences, ideas, and to learn from each other to provide better service to the public.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 3.C.3:</u></b> Identify strategies to reduce backlogs across all permit types.</p>	<p>businesses, and the public during the permitting submittal, review, and issuance process.</p>
--	--

**Goal 4 – Ensure the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.**

<p><b>Objective 4.A – Ensure funding processes include equitable access for underserved communities.</b></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.A.1:</u></b> Provide training to grant program staff on environmental justice and equity concerns and develop processes to provide equitable access for underserved communities.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.A.2:</u></b> Review grant programs to ensure equity considerations are part of the application and review processes.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.A.3:</u></b> Collaborate with private and public stakeholders and partners to alert North Carolina residents and businesses, particularly underserved communities and historically underutilized businesses, of state and federal grant opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 4.A</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Environmental justice learning curriculum for DEQ managers, supervisors, and grant staff by June 2024.</li> <li>• Develop and implement a communications plan by September 2023 to increase awareness of funding opportunities targeting underserved communities that includes digital, traditional, and in-person outreach materials in plain language and tailored to regional/local concerns. The plan will include a timeline and metrics for success and continually track progress over the quarter.</li> <li>• Identify and reach out to 1-2 existing or potential partnerships per county, with a focus on partners within environmental justice communities identified through the Community Mapping System. Bi-monthly share information on funding opportunities, application open and closing dates, how to get support, etc. for community, local government, and business leaders to pass on to relevant publics.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 4.B – Incorporate environmental justice and equity throughout Department decision making.</b></p>	<p><b>Performance Measure for Objective 4.B</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By June 2023, develop supplemental training materials to refresh and expand current Title VI</li> </ul>

<p><b><u>Strategy 4.B.1:</u></b> Provide additional training to staff on environmental justice concerns and strategies to address and incorporate equity considerations in their programs.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.B.2:</u></b> Identify gaps where environmental justice is not currently considered in Department decision making and determine process changes that could be made to close those gaps.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.B.3:</u></b> Routinely utilize federal environmental justice mapping tools and DEQ’s Community Mapping System earlier in the site assessment process.</p>	<p>and Environmental Justice training and track utilization by program and division.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate Environmental Justice training into onboarding materials for new employees by June 2024.</li> <li>• By December 2023, evaluate all DEQ administered funding programs to ensure consideration of underserved/disadvantaged communities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 4.C – Enhance transparency by informing stakeholders of DEQ regulatory programs and actions, providing access to community level information, and increasing opportunities for public engagement.</b></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.C.1:</u></b> Provide presentations and educational materials on the Community Mapping System and other publicly available visual resources.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.C.2:</u></b> Ensure opportunities for public participation are publicized in accordance with the agency’s Public Participation Plan, including enhanced outreach and engagement when appropriate, and update plan annually per Executive Order 246.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.C.3:</u></b> Offer support in accordance with the Agency’s Language Access Plan when communities need language.</p>	<p><b>Performance Measure for Objective 4.C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By Dec 2023, complete annual review of Community Mapping System data sources and evaluation of potential data additions/upgrades to the CMS.</li> <li>• By December 2023, evaluate and develop additional internal materials and trainings related to the DEQ Public Participation Plan.</li> <li>• By June 2023, contract with vendor to provide on-demand interpretation services for callers to the DEQ hotline and create standardized source for external translation services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 4.D – Encourage stakeholder engagement on issues of concern to underserved and underrepresented communities.</b></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.D.1:</u></b> Provide training to external partners, including other state agencies, local governments, Economic Development Partnerships, and Chambers of Commerce to increase awareness of underserved communities and environmental justice concerns.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.D.2:</u></b> Develop a pre-application toolkit to assist businesses and business recruiters engage with communities at all stages of the project development process.</p> <p><b><u>Strategy 4.D.3:</u></b> Continue to solicit the advice of the Secretary’s Environmental Justice and Equity Board on issues that impact underserved and underrepresented communities and ways to improve engagement and outreach.</p>	<p><b>Performance Measure for Objective 4.D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By September 2023, conduct Community Mapping System training with EDPNC staff.</li> <li>• By May 2023, publish EJ toolkit for businesses and incorporate into scoping conversations though permitting assistance and project liaison interactions.</li> <li>• By March 2024, conduct additional outreach meetings with state recognized Tribes and connect representatives with regional supervisors for ongoing relationship building.</li> </ul>

**Goal 5 – Address climate change impacts through engagement, accounting, mitigation efforts, and resiliency strategies that are equitable and just.**

**Objective 5.A – Incorporate resiliency planning into Agency programming and decision-making.**

**Strategy 5.A.1:** Coordinate with interagency partners to implement state agency recommendations outlined in North Carolina’s Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan.

**Strategy 5.A.2:** Integrate future climate conditions and resiliency into public and natural infrastructure improvements, disaster recovery programs, and relevant long-term agency planning and operations.

**Performance Measures for Objective 5.A:**

- Develop a statewide Flood Resiliency Blueprint and a beta-version of an IT product by December 2023 as required under Session Law 2021-180.
- Identify and implement one or more pilot projects that address chronic flooding in the Stoney Creek watershed in Wayne County and Goldsboro per G.S. 143-214.11A.
- Complete and submit a DOE 40101(d) Grid Resilience grant application by May 31, 2023 which addresses rural, low-income communities that are underserved and disproportionately impacted by prolonged power outages caused by natural disasters.
- Develop grid resiliency projects consistent with objectives and metrics approved by DOE and fund their implementation through \$9.2 million approved by DOE for FFY 2023.
- Execute Phases 1 through 4 of Resilient Coastal Communities Program according to the schedule outlined in approved plans.

**Objective 5.B – Mitigate the impact of climate change by promoting the reduction of lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions through clean energy resources.**

**Strategy 5.B.1:** Support programs and activities in the transportation, buildings, electricity supply, and energy efficiency sectors that support achieving greenhouse gas (GHG) targets contained in the energy legislation and Governor’s Executive Orders.

**Strategy 5.B.2:** Maintain the statewide GHG inventory system that reports GHG emissions by sector and projects future emissions based upon existing policies and trends.

**Strategy 5.B.3:** Form partnerships with local governments, businesses, K-12 schools, and institutions for higher learning to create clean energy apprenticeship, training, and education programs.

**Performance Measures for Objective 5.B:**

- Identify sector specific action items and submit implementation grant proposals by January 1, 2024 to enable DEQ to compete for \$4.6 billion in EPA CPRG funding.
- Lead the development of a Priority Climate Action Plan in partnership with state agencies and other stakeholders for submission to EPA by March 1, 2024.
- Develop rules and fiscal analysis for implementation of the Advance Clean Trucks program in NC by May 30, 2023.
- Update and publish North Carolina’s Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions Inventory and Forecast report using the best available methods/data, with consideration given to

	<p>use of USEPA methodologies and data sets where appropriate by January 31, 2024.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with state agencies through the Utility Savings Initiative to identify potential energy projects for Federal funding through DOE grant opportunities by December 2024.</li> <li>Fund clean energy pre-apprenticeship and workforce training programs through partnerships with NCA&amp;T’s STEPs4GROWTH program in summer of 2023 and 2024.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 5.C</b> – <i>Encourage the transition toward a more circular economy through source reduction and preservation of environmental resources.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 5.C.1:</u></b> <i>Support the growth of efficient and effective public and private recycling collection, processing, and manufacturing capacity, including new programs for food waste, through grants, education, and technical assistance.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 5.C.2:</u></b> <i>Encourage public and private investment in recycling infrastructure and food waste diversion programs to reduce emissions and foster economic growth.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 5.C.3:</u></b> <i>Determine the impact of degrading plastics and marine debris on aquatic life, wetlands, sediment, and the benthos.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 5.C.4:</u></b> <i>Evaluate strategies to improve waste reduction within Department operations.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 5.C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research reuse and recycling markets for renewable energy technologies including solar panels, electric vehicle batteries, and utility storage system batteries and work with stakeholders to grow collection and processing infrastructure in the state by June 30, 2024.</li> <li>Develop food waste reduction campaign and statewide strategies to reduce food waste across the supply chain by June 30, 2024.</li> <li>Collect and analyze data about food waste in North Carolina and encourage strategic investment in diversion and recycling opportunities through grant funding and outreach with stakeholders by March 31, 2024.</li> <li>Provide grant funding to local governments and recycling businesses to address specific recycling infrastructure needs (e.g., MRF improvements), create new jobs, and invest in local economies by June 30, 2024.</li> <li>Assess the potential impacts that North Carolina could face from degrading plastics and marine debris based on available science to support N.C. Marine Debris Action Plan by June 30, 2024.</li> <li>Develop best practices for waste reduction at other state owned or leased DEQ facilities based on the Green Square assessment and recommendations by June 2024.</li> </ul>

**Goal 6 – Protect North Carolinians from exposures to emerging compounds using a transparent and science-based decision-making process.**

**Objective 6.A** – *Protect communities by identifying and notifying those who may be at risk of exposure, study the human health risks and expand the base of scientific knowledge for North Carolina-specific PFAS compounds.*

**Strategy 6.A.1:** *Prioritize future actions to protect drinking water supplies based upon the number of people impacted, concentration of PFAS in the drinking water, and the impacts to vulnerable populations and disadvantaged communities.*

**Strategy 6.A.2:** *Prioritize the reporting of PFAS emissions or discharges to air, surface water, or groundwater from priority locations including but not limited to industrial sites, municipal wastewater treatment plants, landfills and sites with firefighting foam use.*

**Strategy 6.A.3:** *In collaboration with DHHS, develop a list of PFAS most frequently detected in North Carolina (PFAS Priority List) with input from the Secretaries’ Science Advisory Board (SAB) and determine which contaminants should be examined further to develop reference dose values and human health risk factors.*

**Strategy 6.A.4:** *With guidance from the SAB, evaluate existing scientific literature on PFAS risks and health effects and work with partners at DHHS, in federal government and the scientific community to identify the additional data needed to support regulatory standards development.*

**Strategy 6.A.5:** *As additional site monitoring and new scientific data become available at the federal and state levels, DEQ will update the PFAS priority list for North Carolina and related health assessment information.*

**Performance Measures for Objective 6.A:**

- Create an interactive and forward-facing map containing PWS monitoring data and other data collected by external partners by November 2023. The map should be updated at least twice annually and will help inform the public and create more awareness and transparency.
- Execute DEQ’s “Small Public Water Supply PFAS Testing” plan that aims to assess non-PWS community systems by December 31, 2023.
- Develop a workplan by August 2023 to prioritize drinking water systems and private wells that serve disadvantages communities and connect priority sites with PFAS contamination to funding programs managed by DWI and DWM.
- Execute the development of a “Multimedia PFAS Policy Resource Database and Dashboard” that will include information and sampling data for PFAS industries by December 31, 2023.
- Solicit guidance from the SAB regarding the use of Bioaccumulation Factors from the EPA and the DEQ Cape Fear River Fish Tissue study for use in Surface Water standards development.

**Objective 6.B** - *Protect drinking water by developing and implementing science-based regulatory standards and encouraging non-regulatory actions to prevent future PFAS pollution.*

**Strategy 6.B.1:** *Propose regulatory standards for groundwater, surface water, and drinking water.*

**Strategy 6.B.2:** *Implement standards through issuing environmental permits with enforceable limits of PFAS discharges and ensuring that drinking water is treated to a level protective of human health.*

**Strategy 6.B.3:** *Encourage permittees to monitor and voluntarily disclose PFAS information in their products,*

**Performance Measures for Objective 6.B:**

- Evaluate rulemaking options to adopt PFOA and PFOS standards for surface water and groundwater once EPA establishes National Primary Drinking Water Regulations.
- Develop and implement a NC NPDES Permitting Strategy to address emerging contaminants.
- Create a pilot program to work with targeted manufacturers to provide voluntary, source reduction technical assistance to businesses to reduce or eliminate PFAS discharges.

<p><i>processes, stacks, and outfalls and take early action to reduce or eliminate PFAS entering the environment and provide technical assistance to early action takers to help reduce or eliminate PFAS discharges prior to standard implementation.</i></p>	
<p><b>Objective 6.C</b> – <i>Clean up existing contamination by focusing on remediation to address known sites of PFAS contamination, prioritizing those that impact communities.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 6.C.1.</u></b> <i>Set remediation goals for sites with PFAS contamination and ensure cleanup results in health-protective outcomes.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 6.C.2:</u></b> <i>Hold polluters accountable and require responsible parties to clean up PFAS contamination, using the State’s ability to recover costs from responsible parties when possible.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 6.C:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groundwater Remediation Goal-Determined after establishment of 2L standards as outlined in key result under 6.B.1 (in the interim enforce the PQL in lieu of a standard).</li> <li>• Surface Water Remediation Goal-Determined after establishment of 2B standards as outlined in key result under 6.B.1.</li> <li>• Risk-Based Remediation Goal-Programs to enforce existing risk-based remediation goals as outlined in each program's respective statutes, laws, and rules.</li> <li>• Develop plan to provide alternate drinking water for affected users of private wells identified in 6.A.2.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Objective 6.D</b> – <i>Develop a robust communication strategy for education and engagement with impacted communities, state, local, and federal partners, and research institutions.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 6.D.1:</u></b> <i>Streamline risk communication protocols for engaging, communicating, and educating within state government, other regulatory agencies, and the regulated community consistently.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 6.D.2.</u></b> <i>Create educational and outreach materials for the public related to the Emerging Contaminants in their communities through collaboration with NCDHHS and other partners.</i></p> <p><b><u>Strategy 6.D.3:</u></b> <i>Conduct education and outreach to affected communities, including addressing resident requests for data and information surrounding emerging contaminants. Communicate in an easily understandable way and offer materials in multiple languages as needed.</i></p>	<p><b>Performance Measures for Objective 6.D:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a PFAS risk communication plan to facilitate consistent and responsive communication with North Carolinians and other stakeholders by December 31, 2023.</li> <li>• Work with DHHS to create facts sheets for PFOA, PFAS and other emerging contaminants covered in EPA’s proposed MCLs and hazard index for 6 PFAS.</li> <li>• Develop standard communication templates for resident inquiries, both those served by well water and by Public Water Systems by December 31, 2023.</li> <li>• Create centralized internal access point for all documents for staff to engage with public stakeholders and revise Emerging Compounds pages to centralize guidance document availability by March 1, 2024.</li> </ul>

**Goal 7 – Strengthen North Carolina’s infrastructure through thoughtful and strategic investments in communities.**

**Objective 7.A** – Utilize a holistic and unified approach to ensure programs are working together towards a common goal for infrastructure related funding and activities.

**Strategy 7.A.1:** Create a cross-division organizational unit within the department for all infrastructure related funding and activities.

**Strategy 7.A.2:** Form robust partnerships and leverage other sources of funding when possible, including from local governments, universities, and other external entities, to maximize impact of projects.

**Strategy 7.A.3:** Coordinate with external partners such as the NC Pandemic Recovery Office and the NC Office of Recovery and Resiliency for better interagency and intergovernmental communication and outcomes.

**Performance Measures for Objective 7.A:**

- Develop and implement a plan for creating a cross-division organizational committee within the department for all infrastructure-related funding and activities by the end of Q4 2023.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing between programs and departments to ensure that resources are used effectively and efficiently, with at least one joint project or initiative by the end of the year as a template for success.
- Increase the number of partnerships for infrastructure funding projects by 50% by the end of Q2 2024, leveraging other DEQ programs and departments, local governments, universities, and other external entities demonstrating the effectiveness of the cross-divisional unit and partnerships.

**Objective 7.B** – Develop a robust strategy to track and measure short-term and long-term progress.

**Strategy 7.B.1:** Establish both department-wide and division-specific goals.

**Strategy 7.B.2:** Develop a performance measure tracking template to be used across divisions for consistency, accountability, and transparency.

**Performance Measures for Objective 7.B:**

- Work with at least four DEQ Divisions to develop a prototype of performance measures for infrastructure projects by December 2023.
- Create and implement a reporting system that provides regular updates on project progress to stakeholders, with at least one report per month.

**Objective 7.C** – *Develop comprehensive communication strategy for education and outreach with local partners, impacted communities, and interested parties.*

**Strategy 7.C.1** *Conduct outreach to environmental service providers and communities, especially small, rural, and historically underserved communities to ensure they are aware of funding and infrastructure improvement opportunities.*

**Strategy 7.C.2:** *Highlight the environmental, economic, and public health benefits of infrastructure investments.*

**Performance Measures for Objective 7.C:**

- Increase awareness of environmental infrastructure funding opportunities among local partners, impacted communities, and interested parties by 50% by the end of the year.
- Develop and implement a communication plan that includes regular updates on infrastructure funding opportunities and progress on ongoing projects, with at least two updates per quarter.
- Establish and maintain a listserv by July 2023 identifying key stakeholders, such as community organizations and local government agencies, to ensure ongoing support for infrastructure funding initiatives.



## Agency Highlights:

DEQ has several noteworthy accomplishments in 2022. DEQ supported historic investments in the North Carolina's water infrastructure awarding 386 total projects in 86 counties totaling \$789.4 million. In addition, DEQ began accepting applications for funding under the new Local Assistance for Stormwater Infrastructure Investments (LASII) program, less than eight months after the Session Law created the program and continued the development of the Viable Utility Reserve (VUR) program. DEQ also continued to address challenges with PFAS contamination in North Carolina, including the release of an Action Strategy for PFAS which focuses on three primary objectives: protecting communities, protecting drinking water, and cleaning up contamination. A key DEQ accomplishment related to PFAS was the sampling of over fifty public water supply systems that provide drinking water to over 75% of the state's population in anticipation of coming federal drinking water standards. DEQ also contributed to efforts to enhance resiliency for the State of North Carolina, including awarding over \$1.14 million in grants to 22 communities for phase three of the Resilient Coastal Communities Program; awarding \$12 million in COVID-19 and hurricane Florence relief to the fishing industry; building 30 acres of oyster habitat; and, enhancing dam safety through completion of a dam overtopping study and the launch of the Facility Assessment Management Application (FAMA) WebApp which assists in risk assessment and pre-storm event preparation. DEQ also supported investments to enhance energy infrastructure through Phase 2 of the Volkswagen Settlement, including funding 43 electric school buses, 255 diesel vehicle replacements, 116 DC fast charging and 482 level 2 charging ports. Also related to energy, DEQ weatherized 1,178 low-income households. DEQ also has several accomplishments to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of DEQ programs, including releasing the first module under the Permit Transformation Program for the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) major permits. Finally, this year DEQ is celebrating 20 years of supporting and recognizing North Carolina organizations that make voluntary commitments to reduce their impact on the environment through its Environmental Stewardship Initiative. Members' efforts to improve their environmental performance since 2002 have saved over \$105M and reduced energy use by more than 8.6 trillion BTUs, water use by more than 15 billion gallons, and landfilled waste by more than 4.3 million tons.

## Collaborative Opportunities:

Several of DEQ's highest priorities and areas of focus provide significant opportunities for collaboration across state government. These areas include PFAS, resiliency, and transitioning to a clean energy economy. For PFAS, there are opportunities to collaborate with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and other agencies to better understand human health risks of PFAS exposure and expand the scientific knowledge based on PFAS compounds most commonly found in North Carolina. In addition, treating and protecting drinking water and addressing PFAS contamination in North Carolina will require collaboration with communities and local governments. Resiliency offers tremendous opportunities for DEQ to collaborate across state government, including the opportunity to collaborate on the Statewide Flood Resiliency Blueprint.

DEQ has initiated efforts to establish and implement Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) for the Flood Resiliency Blueprint which include broad representation from across state and local governments. Finally, transitioning to a clean energy economy requires significant investment in infrastructure and DEQ is collaborating with several state organizations, including the Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Commerce (DOC).

### **Priority Questions:**

1. How can the DEQ improve its processes to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of environmental permitting and compliance?
2. How can the DEQ enhance its communication and engagement with stakeholders, including the public, regulated industries, and other government agencies, to promote environmental protection and address environmental concerns effectively?
3. What are the most effective strategies to ensure the water quality is maintained and enhanced and how can these strategies be implemented in an equitable manner to serve communities with the greatest need?
4. What DEQ processes would benefit from streamlining, modernization, and innovation?
5. What steps can DEQ take to effectively develop and retain a diverse and talented workforce?
6. What steps will DEQ take to ensure that historically underserved communities have equal access to funding opportunities and regulatory decisions, and how can the department increase transparency and engagement with these communities throughout the decision-making process?
7. How can the agency effectively integrate resiliency planning into long-term decision-making processes and infrastructure improvements while minimizing the impact of climate change on the environment and public health?
8. How can the agency effectively engage and educate affected communities about PFAS risks and remediation efforts?