

National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

2023 Legislator Briefing Book



NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators

Connect With Us

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State leadership advances a clean and healthy environment for all.

Who We Are

The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators is a nationwide network of state lawmakers committed to protecting the environment. NCEL was founded and continues to be led by state legislators who believe that they are much more effective when they can organize, communicate, and assist each other on issues like renewable energy, toxic chemicals, clean water, and conservation.

-  NCEL participants include over 1,200 legislators from all 50 states.
-  There is no cost to join the caucus.
-  NCEL convenes annually at national, regional, and issue-based forums.
-  Members receive regular updates about state and federal issues.
-  NCEL staff regularly respond to information requests from state legislators working on a variety of conservation, energy, and environmental issues.



Make Us Your Environmental Staff

We can conduct research, connect you with colleagues and experts working on similar issues, and provide examples of similar initiatives that have been introduced in other states. NCEL also maintains a library of online resources on its website that is curated specifically for busy legislators.



“NCEL has helped me to cultivate relationships that have allowed me to think through and reflect ideas rooted in my spaces, and seeing how they can also transform the rest of the nation – for the better.”

Angelica Rubio
New Mexico State Representative





The National Caucus of Environmental Legislators empowers a nonpartisan network of legislative champions to protect, conserve, and improve the natural and human environment.

Our program areas are determined by member interest. Interested in a different issue area?
Let us know! We are happy to assist.



Climate and Energy

NCEL members are working to reduce carbon emissions through transitioning to renewable energy, electrifying transportation and buildings, and adapting to climate change.

- **Utilities and the Grid:** advancing policies enabling the transition to 100% renewable energy.
- **Low-Carbon Transportation:** adopting electric vehicles and sustainable public transit systems.
- **Building Decarbonization:** incorporating energy efficiency upgrades and electrification.



Conservation

As wildlife and natural areas face increasing threats from human activity and climate change, NCEL members are working to conserve wildlife, land and water in their states.

- **Biodiversity:** safeguarding biodiversity through wildlife and pollinator protections and ensuring strong wildlife agencies.
- **Land & Water Conservation:** pursuit of 30x30 land and water conservation goals and allowing freer species movement through habitat connectivity.
- **Outdoor Engagement:** increasing equitable outdoor access, recreation, and health.



Environmental Health

Removing toxins from our air, waters, and homes and encouraging safer, healthier alternatives.

- **Zero Waste & Circular Economy:** working to reduce waste from single-use plastics.
- **Toxic Chemicals:** removing harmful chemicals from drinking water and household items.
- **Sustainable Agriculture & Water Quality:** connecting a network of legislators along the Mississippi River to address river health and soil health.



Oceans

Oceans provide countless ecosystem services, including climate regulation, marine habitats, coastal community protection, and clean energy.

- **Coastal Resilience and Protection:** protecting coastlines by addressing offshore drilling and climate adaptation.
- **Offshore Energy Transition:** moving towards clean energy alternatives produced by our oceans.
- **Blue Carbon and Blue Economy:** conserving blue carbon ecosystems and promoting ocean-based activities that protect coastal resources.





Utilities and the Grid

To facilitate electrification across all sectors, it's important for states to look at utility policy to decarbonize the power sector. Outdated utility regulations are keeping fossil fuels online and energy costs high. State legislators are addressing this issue by changing regulatory mandates, improving utility oversight, and adjusting ratemaking processes.

Resources

- [Utilities and the Grid](#)
- [100% Clean Energy and Zero-Carbon Emissions](#)
- [Carbon Pricing](#)
- [Community Solar Fact Sheet](#)

Fast Facts

- Improved transmission and distribution will allow for more energy resources like solar to be connected to the grid, creating better access to cleaner, cheaper, and more local energy resources.
- 100% renewable portfolio standards are popular across constituencies and allow states to decarbonize their power sectors.



Low-Carbon Transportation

Transportation emissions account for at least one-third of greenhouse gas emissions, leading the country as the largest source of carbon pollution. The adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and sustainable public transit systems have the potential to significantly lower these emissions and states are working to incentivize EVs and expand charging networks.

Resources

- [Active Transportation](#)
- [Public Transportation](#)
- [Electric Vehicles](#)
- [Transportation Briefing Book](#)

Fast Facts

- The transportation sector accounts for 30% of all U.S. climate emissions.
- Choosing a bike over a car just once a day reduces an average citizen's carbon emissions from transportation by 67%.



Building Decarbonization

Green buildings incorporate energy efficiency upgrades, electrification, and design elements which can drastically lower U.S. energy demand while providing benefits such as cost savings, carbon pollution reduction, and improved indoor air quality. Commercial and residential buildings account for ~13% of U.S. emissions, largely due to burning gas, diesel, or heating oil. States that are proactive about building codes and standards can reduce emissions while creating jobs in retrofitting and weatherization.

Resources

- [Buildings Fact Sheet](#)
- [Buildings Policy Options](#)
- [Legislators Call for HUD to Center Health and Climate in Public Housing](#)

Fast Facts

- Buildings consumed 28% of total U.S. energy in 2021.
- Green buildings cost only marginally more to build, and result in significantly higher sales and rental rates, as well as tremendous savings on energy costs over time.





Biodiversity

Biodiversity is severely threatened by human activities like habitat fragmentation, overharvesting, and pesticide use. Without abundant wildlife, fish, and plant populations, we start to lose the critical services that these species provide for millions of Americans, such as: climate resilience, storm mitigation, crop pollination, recreation, and prevention from future pandemics. Myriad policy options exist to help restore the diversity of life in the U.S.

Resources

- [Biodiversity](#)
- [Pollinators](#)
- [Wildlife Agency Relevance and Funding](#)

Fast Facts

- One in five native species in the United States are at risk of extinction.
- Many species that are not protected by law are decreasing in numbers because of human encroachment, making habitat connectivity critical for species.



Land and Water Conservation

Studies have shown that lands and waters are being lost to development at alarming rates, increasing numbers of plants and wildlife are facing extinction, and climate change is threatening human health and wellbeing. To help conservation efforts, many states are looking to set goals of preserving 30% of land and water by 2030. As federal momentum continues to build, states can play a key role in protecting lands and waters that support ecosystem, economic, and community health.

Resources

- [30x30](#)
- [Wildlife Connectivity and Crossings](#)

Fast Facts

- The economic benefits of protecting 30% of the planet's land and ocean outweigh the costs at least 5-to-1.
- People of color and low-income communities are more likely than white people to live in an area that is nature deprived.



Outdoor Engagement

Outdoor engagement presents a unique opportunity to serve diverse constituencies because it provides mental and physical health benefits, supports economic development, and connects communities. Decades of systemic racism have barred people of color from accessing a variety of outdoor opportunities, but states are working to ensure that green spaces and outdoor experiences are accessible for all.

Resources

- [Outdoor Engagement](#)
- [Outdoor Engagement Fact Sheet](#)
- [Outdoor Engagement Policy Options](#)

Fast Facts

- The outdoor recreation economy consists of \$887 billion in consumer spending and 7.6 million American jobs.
- Spending time in green spaces and nature lowers heart rates, reduces stress, increases short-term memory, and can even reduce the symptoms of clinical depression.





Zero Waste and Circular Economy

Plastic pollution is a global crisis causing extensive public health and ecological adversities. Given the fossil fuel origins of plastic materials, the extraction and refining processes for those petrochemicals create hazardous air and water conditions, particularly for community members who reside in proximity to these sites. Environmental hazards disproportionately burden communities of color and economically disadvantaged communities.

Resources

- [Plastic Pollution](#)
- [Plastic Pollution and the EPR Legislator Network](#)
- [Environmental Justice Issue Brief](#)

Fast Facts

- Only 9% of all plastic waste ever made has been recycled.
- As of 2022, nine states have banned plastic bags, and four states have passed extended producer responsibility for packaging.



Toxic Chemicals

NCEL prioritizes a wide range of toxic chemical issues including flame retardants, lead contamination, PFAS, and more. Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a suite of human-made chemicals used in many consumer products including food packaging to firefighting foam. While federal action has been limited, states have taken the lead to address PFAS.

Resources

- [PFAS](#)
- [Toxic Flame Retardants Fact Sheet](#)
- [Environmental Justice and Cumulative Impacts Policy Options](#)

Fast Facts

- The drinking water of over six million Americans has been found to contain PFAS chemicals at concentrations of concern.
- Children can have up to five times higher levels of flame retardant chemicals in their bodies than their mothers, increasing the risk of learning disabilities and developmental impairment.



Sustainable Agriculture and Water Quality

Given the environmental footprint and proximity of agricultural systems to natural resources, sustainably managed operations provide an opportunity to reduce agricultural pollution, promote biodiversity, rebuild and enhance soil, and address climate change while supplying food and fuel to a growing global population.

Resources

- [Mississippi River Legislative Caucus](#)
- [Soil Health](#)
- [Flood Resilience](#)

Fast Facts

- NCEL facilitates the Mississippi River Legislative Caucus (MRLC) to assist legislators representing river districts and their colleagues committed to a thriving, healthy Mississippi River.
- Natural infrastructure is vital in terms of managing floods, reducing sedimentation, and filtering nutrients.





Coastal Resilience and Protection

Coastal states continue to feel the impacts of coastal threats and rising sea levels. To increase coastal resilience states can explore offshore wind options as well as limitations on offshore drilling.

Fast Facts

- The ocean absorbs 25-30% of carbon dioxide emissions from the atmosphere, roughly 22 million tons per day.
- The oceans are acidifying at a rate 100 times faster than any time in the last 200,000 years, and perhaps all of Earth's history.

Resources

- [Ocean Acidification](#)
- [Coastal Resilience Policy Options](#)



Offshore Energy Transition

The offshore wind industry has been slow to take hold in the United States but is now gaining momentum among policymakers and financiers. With the right policy drivers and a robust stakeholder engagement process, coastal and Great Lakes states can protect coastlines, prevent new offshore drilling exploration, and harness the economic potential of offshore wind to create jobs and produce clean, renewable energy for years to come.

Fast Facts

- As of 2022, 10 states have enacted policies to ban or block offshore drilling.
- U.S. offshore wind could generate more than 7,200 TWh per year, nearly double the nation's current electricity use.

Resources

- [Offshore Wind](#)
- [Offshore Drilling](#)
- [States Continue Efforts to Advance Offshore Wind Implementation](#)



Blue Carbon and the Blue Economy

Blue carbon is the carbon naturally captured by the ocean and coastal ecosystems. The blue economy is defined as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth; however, not all ocean-based activities fall under this definition, but only those that protect coastal resources. The conservation of blue carbon ecosystems and the promotion of ocean-based activities that protect coastal resources go hand-in-hand.

Fast Facts

- Blue carbon ecosystems can sequester and store more carbon per unit area than terrestrial forests and are critically important to climate change mitigation.
- The current global economic output of blue economy activities is valued at around \$1.5 trillion.

Resources

- [Nature-Based Solutions: Blue Carbon](#)
- [The Blue Economy Policy Options](#)





Key Components

The IRA includes historic investments in clean energy tax credits that will encourage the development of carbon reducing infrastructure and move toward a 40% emissions reduction from 2005 levels by 2030. Credits and subsidies for technologies including renewable electricity, hydrogen, clean vehicles, carbon capture and sequestration, and nuclear power will be extended by 10 years to 2032. The bill will also incentivize the creation of clean energy jobs, lower energy bills by \$500 to \$1,000 each year, and invest in disadvantaged communities bearing the cumulative impacts of environmental injustice.



States' Role

States will play a major role in determining how and when the IRA investments are implemented. From regional power grid operators to state regulatory commissions, actors at the state level will be instrumental in carrying out new climate and energy policies.

The IRA allocates \$27 billion to establish a national green bank to provide low-cost financing for clean energy infrastructure projects, from which states and tribal governments can apply for \$7 billion in grants and loans. While green banks already exist in several states, this will allow more states to take advantage of financial support for low or zero-emission projects.

Other funding opportunities will be delegated to state and local policymakers to apply for and carry out. Some will face debate in state legislatures, while others, such as the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants, can be applied for by independent state agencies.

It will be up to states to utilize these new federal incentives and lead national climate action in a way that benefits states and their local communities.

Resources

- [IRA Briefing Book](#)
- [Green Banks and the IRA](#)
- [Full text of the bill](#)





SAVE THE DATE
NCEL 2023 National Forum
August 11-12, 2023 | Indianapolis, IN

The National Forum is NCEL’s premier annual event. It is an opportunity for legislators from across the country to learn and collaborate on policy areas with their colleagues. You will walk away from the Forum with a deeper knowledge of various issue areas and concrete legislative actions you can take.

Mark your calendars and we look forward to seeing you! Registration will open in early 2023.

2022 Forum Review

In July 2022, over 100 state legislators from 35 states convened for NCEL’s 2022 National Forum in Denver, Colorado. After two years of being held virtually, NCEL hosted its annual Forum in-person again, providing state lawmakers the opportunity to collaborate on policy solutions related to climate, energy, conservation, and environmental health. For more information, visit the [2022 Forum Recap](#).



// NCEL conferences are one of my favorites because we always talk about actual solutions I can take back to my district. Other conferences I go to we mostly sit around and admire the problem.

Minnesota State Representative Fue Lee



// The NCEL National Issues Forum continues to be one of my favorite events of the year because it is always a perfect mix of novel legislative ideas ready for implementation and networking with other legislators and professionals who care deeply about our environment.

Nevada State Representative Steve Yeager





National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

NCEL STAFF

We are your remote environmental staff. The NCEL Team is here to serve and assist you on your environmental priorities.



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// NCEL is the clearinghouse for State legislators working for environmental protection. The states are where the action is and connecting us is invaluable.

Vermont State Representative Amy Sheldon

