



2025-2026 Catawba Riverkeeper Legislative Agenda

The 2023 long sessions in both North and South Carolina's legislatures showed that there is an appetite for advancing legislation for the betterment of our waters. Catawba Riverkeeper was proud to be leading several initiatives in both state legislatures. We look forward to building on the successes of the past legislative sessions for the sessions following the 2024 election season.

Our priorities are broken up into the following three categories, based on our level of involvement.

Lead: These are issues critical to the specific waters of the Catawba-Wateree basins and that our organization plans to advance. We plan on dedicating resources to the drafting of the legislation, mobilization of support, and active lobbying on these bill initiatives. (5 items in NC, 3 items in SC)

Collaborate: These are issues that we will be working on in coalition with others. This is a priority issue that we share with other key partner organizations. (2 in NC)

Support: While these issues are important to us and we support other organizations working on these efforts, we do not plan to actively pursue these priorities. (3 in NC, 4 in SC)

North Carolina Priorities

Parking Lot Reform

Rationale: Requirements for parking are subjective and often antiquated. Many groups oppose parking lots/decks for a variety of reasons.

- Builders don't like them because they are remarkably expensive to build, particularly parking decks.
- Property managers don't like them because they are expensive to maintain.
- River advocates don't like them because impervious surfaces lead to more stormwater runoff and pollutants reaching our waterways.
- Wildlife and land conservation advocates don't like them because unnecessarily paved surfaces generate heat and destroy habitat.

Likewise, as we see an increase in redevelopment projects (an old mill becoming apartments, an abandoned car dealership becoming a food hall, etc.), it is critical that local communities have the choice to require updated stormwater controls for the property. Sites built prior to the 1980's most likely do not have any stormwater controls.

Our proposition: Enact legislation that would...

1. Prohibit and nullify local parking and parking spot width minimum ordinances for motorized vehicles to ensure effective use of spaces.



2. Allow local communities the choice to incentivize updated runoff controls on redevelopment sites that are out of date with current runoff controls.

Our involvement: **Lead**

Support for Poultry Farmers and County Public Health Officials

Rationale: Poultry is a major economic driver for NC. For all that poultry farmers do for our state, the state provides only 3 NC State Extension Agents to support our farmers. With all that is asked of poultry farmers by their aggregator (Tyson, Perdue, Etc.), we need more state resources dedicated to our farmers to ensure healthy and successful farms.

Each farmer is supposed to have a nutrient management plan. These are plans for how a farmer intends to manage the waste from their birds. These plans are critical for the health and wellbeing of the farmers and the community at large, particularly their downstream neighbors. Writing these plans can be a laborious process for farmers already stretched thin. Thankfully, the writing of these plans can be done by NC State Extension Agents.

Our Proposition:

1. Appropriate additional and reoccurring funds to the NC State Extension program for additional poultry extension agents.
2. As a provision for this funding, the nutrient management plans written by extension agents will become searchable by county health officials in a public health emergency to ensure a quick response and identification of potential sources.

Our Involvement: **Lead**

State Trails Designations

Rationale. Our basin has two areas that have natural and cultural significance to the story of North Carolina. In addition to their cultural significance, the South Fork of the Catawba River and the main stem of the Catawba River from the Lake James Dam to the Lake Rhodiss Dam provide exceptional recreational and tourism value.

Our Proposition

- Pursue “State Trail” Designation for the South Fork of the Catawba River from Jacob Fork Park (Catawba County) to Goat Island Park (Gaston County)
 - Would connect with Wilderness Gateway Trail
- Pursue “State Trail” Designation for the Catawba River from Lake James Dam (Burke County) to Lake Rhodiss Dam (Caldwell and Catawba Counties)
 - Would connect with Wilderness Gateway Trail, Overmountain Victory Trail, and Fonta Flora State Trail

Our Involvement: **Lead/Collaborate**

Appropriations for Stream Bank Stabilization Post-Hurricane Helene

Rationale. Assessments of impacted areas find overwhelming evidence that flooding during Hurricane Helene stripped vegetation and soil from the banks of streams,



threatening their integrity and function. Without mending, these streams will degrade downstream water, lead to property loss, and decrease the general quality of life for all. Our Proposition: Designated funds for restoration in each legislative district impacted by Hurricane Helene in our basin.

Our Involvement: **Lead**

Creek Reclassifications of Mecklenburg County Creeks from “Class C” to “Class B”

Rationale: As Mecklenburg County expands its greenway network along and close to creeks, more people and pets interact with the waters flowing in these creeks. More people than ever are cooling off in the water, fishing, letting their dogs drink in the creek, and more. Currently, these creeks are listed as “Class C.” This classification does not adequately protect these waters and the citizens who recreate along them.

Our proposition: Reclassify Sugar, McMullen, Four Mile, Briar, Irwin, Steward, Paw, Coffey, Mallard, Steele, Ramah, Clarke, Clarks, McAlpine, Reedy, and Little Sugar Creeks as well as Rocky River reclassified from “Class C” to “Class B” waters.

Our Involvement: **Lead**

Appropriations for Dam Removal

Rationale: Across the Catawba River Basin, there are dams that are no longer functional. Many of these nonfunctional dams are failing. These dams pose a threat to downstream communities and infrastructure including interstates and drinking water intakes. We have two options; either wait for disaster to strike and these dams fail or remove them with dignity and document the history of these dams to ensure a legacy of community advancement.

Our Proposition: Appropriate funds to speed up the removal of failing dams in the Catawba River Basin.

Our Involvement: **Collaborate**

Flood Risk Reduction Post-Helene

Rationale: Extreme flooding due to Hurricane Helene severely impacted properties in floodplains, areas prone to flooding from nearby rivers and streams. Owners of these homes, farms, or businesses now face significant recovery costs. Flood risk reduction programs offer a voluntary alternative to address the costs of flood events and risks of living in flood-prone areas. These projects allow governments to purchase property from willing sellers, demolish or relocate structures, and conserve the land as open space.

Our Proposition: Appropriate funds to a flood risk reduction program in areas impacted by Hurricane Helene.

Our Involvement: **Collaborate**

Access to Waterways for Recreation

Rationale:



For communities across the state, access to our waterways continues to be a barrier for North Carolinians connecting with their waterways. First, when construction occurs on a bridge, parking often accompanies the construction to accommodate the parking needs of the construction crew. Instead of letting these parking spaces waste away after the construction is done, why not convert them into public access points to the waters below for the public? Furthermore, NCDOT holds a tremendous amount of property and keeps it away from the public. Instead of keeping the people from their land, why not allow for trails in the easements they hold? Second, not all waters are navigable via pontoon or power boat. Many are accessible by human powered craft such as canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddle boards. Some of the best access points are in rural areas that do not have the funds for such access points but could benefit from the tourism dollars these access points bring.

Our Proposition:

1. Direct NCDOT to convert their parking to public access following the completion of construction and allow for public, permeable surface trails within their easements.
2. Appropriate funds for additional kayak/canoe access points to navigable waterways.
3. Support legislation to increase the punishment for killing someone with a boat.

Our Involvement: **Support**

PFAS

Our Rationale: PFAS is a major issue that we don't know enough about. We need more support in combating and understanding this increasing problem.

Our Proposition: Support legislative efforts to combat PFAS.

Our Involvement: **Support**

Plastics

Our Rationale: Plastics continue to be a major pollutant in the Catawba River. We support efforts to address the impacts plastics are having on our river.

Our Proposition: Support legislative efforts to combat the impacts of plastics.

Our Involvement: **Support**



South Carolina Priorities

Scenic Rivers Program

Our Rationale: The section of the Catawba River below Lake Wylie Dam to HWY 9 in Chester/Lancaster County is one of the most visited sections of our entire river. From tubing below Lake Wylie to the Spider Lillies at Landsford Canal State Park, this section of our river has cultural, ecological, economic, and historic values. It is also the section of our river that flows past the Catawba Nation. Unfortunately, that title of “Scenic River” means nothing. There are no additional protections or funds for preservation of this section of our river. In short, this designation does nothing for our river.

Our Proposition: Appropriate reoccurring funds for the Scenic Rivers Program, River Management Plans, and the acquisition of land to preserve this section of our river.

Our Involvement: **Lead**

Inter-Basin Transfers

Our Rationale: Waters of the Catawba/Wateree River should stay in the Catawba Wateree River. It is critical for the health of our river and all who use it to have access to the natural water supply of our river.

Our Proposition: Advocate for long term, sustainable practices to conserve our precious resources and ensure healthy waterways and clean water for all regional users.



Our Involvement: **Lead**

Sugar Creek Listing

Our Rationale: Sugar Creek needs a lot of help. From its headwaters in Mecklenburg to its confluence with the main stem of the Catawba in York/Lancaster Counties, we need all hands on deck to improve the water quality of this massive waterway. Enhancing Sugar Creek's state classification would require cleaner water being discharged into the creek and its tributaries.

Our Proposition: Reclassify Sugar Creek to require stricter protections.

Our Involvement: **Lead**

Septic Tanks Inspections

Our Rationale: A septic tank system could be failing causing an illicit discharge (fecal) to run onto the surface and/or flow outside of the drain field area. And unless someone reports the discharge the system could be doing this for years without ever being corrected (if it ever gets corrected). It seems reasonable that on-site wastewater treatment systems should have to be inspected every so often to ensure they are in good working order. Being proactive instead of reactive (if the problem is ever actually reported).

Our Proposition: Require semi-regular inspection of septic tanks.

Our Involvement: **Support**

HAB Mitigation

Our Rationale: Harmful Algal Blooms are increasingly dangerous and frequent in our river. If the state were to include HAB's in its Nuisance Vegetation Program, it would allow for state funds to treat these deadly occurrences on our waters.

Our Proposition: Add Harmful Algal Blooms to the list of issues the state can address.

Our Involvement: **Support**

Legal Consequences for Tire Dumping

Our Rationale: The number of tires we find in our waters is staggering. In 2023 alone, we removed over 1,000 tires from our waters. While some have been there for years, some are quite new. We have learned that putting tires in our waters for fish habitat or simply not wanting to take them to the dump is detrimental to water quality and the fish that we believed would appreciate the tires for shelter.

Our Proposition: Provide legal punishments for dumping tires as well as transporting these tires and regulate how many tires can be stored at a private residence.

Our Involvement: **Support**

NPDES Signage



Our Rationale: We believe that residents of South Carolina deserve to know who is dumping into their waters.

Our Proposition: In the 2024 Short Session, S. 999 was introduced. This bill would require all NPDES discharges to have signage on them, noting who the discharge belongs to and who to contact in the event of an emergency. We support this bill being reintroduced.

Our Involvement: **Support**