

National Caucus of Environmental Legislators

2026 Legislator Briefing Book



NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators

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Our Vision

At NCEL, we believe that state leadership advances a clean and healthy environment for all.



Welcome to NCEL!

Dear state legislators,

Welcome to NCEL's 2026 Legislator Briefing Book where you can learn more about the environmental issues we work on and the ways NCEL can enhance your legislative efforts. Whether you are new to the legislature or a seasoned environmental policymaker, the NCEL team is here to help and invites you to join our caucus founded by and for state legislators. We look forward to working with you soon.



Dylan McDowell
NCEL CEO

National Caucus of Environmental Legislators 2026 Legislator Briefing Book

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NCEL

National Caucus of
Environmental Legislators

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About NCEL

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Who We Are

The **National Caucus of Environmental Legislators** is a nationwide network of state lawmakers committed to protecting the environment. NCEL was created by and for 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.

How We Work

- NCEL participants include over 1,300 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.
- NCEL does not lobby for or against any state or federal legislation.



Mission

NCEL empowers a nonpartisan network of legislative champions to protect, conserve, and improve the natural and human environment.

Environmental Solutions for State Leaders

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 that is curated specifically for busy legislators. **Visit ncelenviro.org to learn more.**



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What Our Members Say About Us

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“

"NCEL has been instrumental in connecting me with other legislative leaders, stakeholders and Federal funding opportunities for the environmental work I am most passionate about."

Alicia Rule

Washington State Representative



“

"What I appreciate about NCEL is that it allows me to connect with other environmentally focused lawmakers and to share different policy ideas. Being up in Alaska, I don't usually have that much awareness of what goes on in the lower 48. So it's really exciting to see policies moving forward and thinking about how I can implement those ideas in my state."

Genevieve Mina

Alaska State Representative



“

"NCEL is the conduit through which I've probably gotten some of the best ideas we've had and taken back to our colleagues and we've actually got into law."

Chris Lee

Hawaii State Senator



“

"NCEL really provided that guidance for me, connecting me with other legislators who have done the work before and who were able to guide me and my colleagues through the process of developing our own plastic reduction bill."

Alex Valdez

Colorado State Senator

Become an NCEL Member

There is no cost to join the Caucus and NCEL staff are ready to assist you. Visit ncelenviro.org/team to meet our team and get in touch.



“

"NCEL's ability to give us quick information – whitepapers, data, stats, and history of legislation in other parts of the country – is super helpful because it saves us a lot of time in figuring out how we can most effectively do the work of protecting our planet, fight climate change, and advance environmental justice."

Abraham Aiyash

Former Michigan State Representative



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Program Areas Overview

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Climate and Energy

NCEL members are working to reduce carbon emissions by transitioning to renewable energy, electrifying transportation, and building a more resilient and efficient grid.

- **Utilities:** advancing legislation promoting 100% renewable energy, electrification of industries, managing rising electricity demand, demand-side management strategies, and increased protection for ratepayers.
- **Transmission:** investing in grid buildout to assist with a clean energy transition, increased grid capacity, affordability, and resilience.
- **Transportation:** decarbonizing through electric vehicle adoption and infrastructure, active transportation, transit-oriented development, public transportation, and Department of Transportation reform.



Get In Touch: To learn more or hear about options for your state, contact [Ava Gallo](#).

Conservation

As biodiversity loss threatens human, environmental, and wildlife health, NCEL members are working to conserve land, water, and wildlife.

- **Biodiversity:** protecting endangered species and pollinator populations while addressing invasive species.
- **Land & Water Conservation:** promoting species movement and health through corridors, crossings, and conserving natural areas.
- **Outdoor Engagement:** increasing access to the outdoors, outdoor recreation, outdoor education, and the health benefits associated with time spent outdoors.



Get In Touch: To learn more or hear about options for your state, contact [Kate Burgess](#).

Environmental Health

In an ever-changing world, NCEL members are ensuring safer communities by removing toxins from our air, waters, and homes and encouraging safer, healthier alternatives.

- **Zero Waste:** 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.



Get In Touch: To learn more or hear about options for your state, contact [Nabjot Kaur](#).

Ocean

The ocean hosts countless ecosystems which support climate regulation, marine and coastal habitats, and coastal community protection.

- **Coastal Resilience and Adaptation:** protecting coastlines and communities through adaptation and resilience.
- **Blue Economy:** promoting regenerative, sustainable ocean-based activities that promote the health of coastal resources and communities.
- **Offshore Energy Transition:** supporting a transition to 100% renewable energy from offshore energy projects to reduce climate impacts, grow the climate-ready workforce, and protect marine ecosystems.



Get In Touch: To learn more or hear about options for your state, contact [Alissa Weinman](#).

How We Can Help

Our program areas are determined by member interest. Are you working on a different issue? Let us know! We are happy to help.



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The Issues We Work On

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Utilities (Climate & Energy)

Comprehensive and updated utility policy is needed to effectively decarbonize the power sector. Currently, outdated utility regulations are keeping energy costs high, and status quo grid policies result in decades-long processes for new transmission and clean energy siting. State legislators are addressing this issue by changing regulator mandates, streamlining permitting, and adjusting ratemaking processes.

Fast Facts

- There are [three main types](#) of utility ownership models: Investor-Owned Utilities, Publicly-owned or Municipal Utilities, or Rural Electric Coops.
- About [60% of electricity generation](#) is still derived from fossil fuels such as coal, natural gas, petroleum, and other gasses.

Resources

- [Utilities and the Grid](#)
- [Microgrids and Virtual Power Plants](#)
- [Utility Briefing Book](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
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Transmission (Climate & Energy)

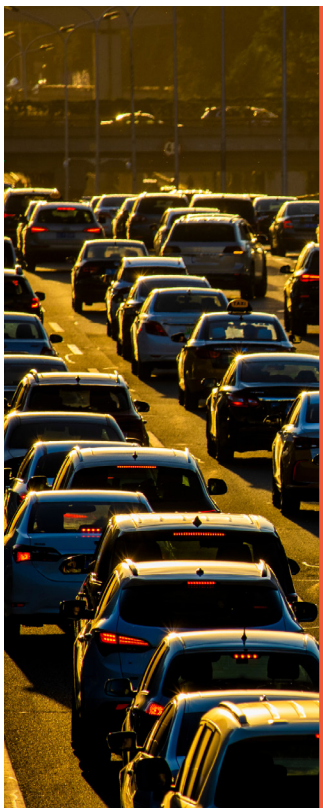
Serving as vital energy infrastructure, transmission brings energy from where it's produced to where it's used. However, increased transmission development is necessary to ensure a reliable, resilient, and affordable energy grid. State legislators play a role in long-term transmission planning, strengthening ties between regions, and proposing new legislation to increase grid capacity.

Fast Facts

- Approximately [192 million people](#) live in regions served by a Regional Transmission Organization (RTO) or an Independent System Operator (ISO).
- Improved transmission will allow for more [distributed energy resources like solar to be connected to the grid](#), creating better access to cleaner, cheaper, and more local energy resources.

Resources

- [Transmission](#)
- [Transmission Briefing Book](#)
- [Enhancing Existing Transmission Lines Issue Brief](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Emily Odgers](#)
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Transportation (Climate & Energy)

Transportation leads the country as the largest source of carbon pollution accounting for roughly one-third of the country's emissions. The switch to cleaner and more varied forms of transportation increases the quality of life in communities by decreasing public health impacts from pollution while increasing mobile equity. State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) can also invest in innovative and pragmatic solutions to reduce emissions and congestion. State legislators are tackling this sector's emissions to advance transportation that centers people.

Fast Facts

- The transportation sector accounts for ~30% of all U.S. climate emissions.
- Communities that invest in public transit reduce the nation's carbon emissions by 63 million metric tons annually.

Resources

- [Active Transportation](#)
- [Public Transportation](#)
- [Electric Vehicles](#)
- [Transportation Briefing Book](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Ava Gallo](#)
ava.gallo@ncelenviro.org



Biodiversity (Conservation)

Biodiversity represents the diversity of all life on earth, and currently, populations of native wildlife, fish, and plant species in the United States are steeply declining. Biodiversity is severely threatened by human activities like habitat fragmentation (development), overharvesting, and pesticide use. Loss of biodiversity threatens nature's ability to provide climate resilience, storm mitigation, crop pollination, and recreation. States are working to protect biodiversity through state endangered species acts, pollination protection, combating invasive species, and more.

Fast Facts

- One million species are threatened with extinction while 75% of all land and 66% of aquatic environments are being severely degraded.
- The five main drivers of biodiversity loss are habitat destruction, overexploitation of wildlife, climate change, the introduction of invasive species, and pollution.
- Recent data show an average 73% decline in wildlife populations since 1970.

Resources

- [Biodiversity](#)
- [Pesticide Briefing Book](#)
- [Wildlife Agency Relevance and Funding Policy Options](#)
- [A Natural Legacy: Report on State Endangered Species Policy Options](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Kate Burgess](#)
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Land & Water Conservation (Conservation)

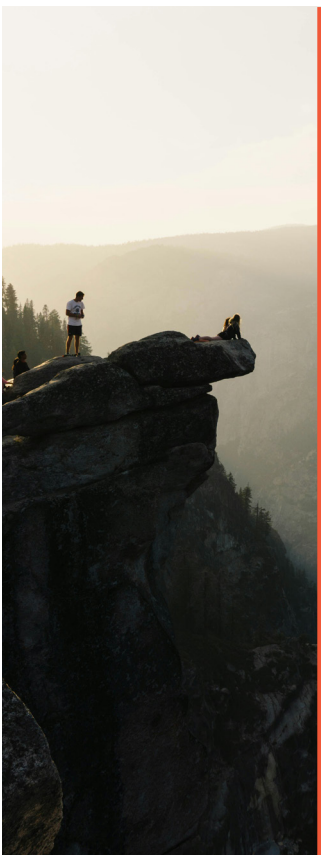
Conserving habitat - like land and water ecosystems - is the most effective way to curb species loss. Wildlife populations will continue to decline without the ability to move, migrate, and disperse due to habitat loss. Conserving land and water carries many co-benefits for human communities, including: providing fresh drinking water, access to outdoor spaces, reducing the impact of catastrophic natural disasters, and lessening the effects of extreme heat and climate emergencies. Policy options are plentiful, and state lawmakers are pursuing a variety of approaches to actualize these benefits for all wildlife, and all people.

Fast Facts

- A [2020 report](#) from the Campaign for Nature found the economic benefits of protecting 30% of the planet's land and ocean outweigh the costs at least 5-to-1.
- Wildlife crossings can [reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by over 90%](#) while improving habitat connectivity for migrating animals and imperiled species.

Resources

- [State of the States Report](#)
- [Landowner Incentives for Endangered Species Conservation and Recovery](#)
- [State Policy Leadership to Conserve Nature](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Logan Christian](#)
logan@ncelenviro.org



Outdoor Engagement (Conservation)

Outdoor engagement, such as outdoor recreation and environmental education, provide mental and physical health benefits, stimulate economic development, and build stronger communities. Time spent outside has been shown to reduce stress, help treat ADHD in children, and improve PTSD symptoms. However, there is increasing recognition that these benefits aren't distributed equally, and states are working to ensure nature access is available for all communities. Outdoor recreation can catalyze economic growth and community development.

Fast Facts

- Spending [time outdoors](#) increases happiness, concentration, immune function, and sleep quality while reducing stress, heart rate, blood pressure, and inflammation.
- Outdoor recreation generated [\\$1.2 trillion](#) and directly accounted for 5 million jobs in 2023, with an additional [3 million jobs](#) reliant on outdoor recreation.
- Seventy percent of low-income communities in the U.S. live in [nature-deprived areas](#).

Resources

- [Outdoor Engagement](#)
- [Outdoors as a Climate Solution Briefing Book](#)
- [Outdoors as a Health Solution Briefing Book](#)
- [Outdoor Education Fact Sheet](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Grant Gliniecki](#)
grant@ncelenviro.org



Zero Waste (Environmental Health)

Derived from fossil fuels, petrochemical processing and plastic materials create a global crisis threatening public health and the environment. Plastics are often incinerated, landfilled, or exported after consumer use, fueling additional challenges. State legislators are anticipating an increase in fossil fuel extraction and production and a subsequent increase in plastic production. States are combatting this by eliminating the most problematic types of plastic, with improved waste management practices, limits on hazardous substance exposure through consumer plastics, and more.

Fast Facts

- Plastic pollution has [reached every part of the planet](#), from the Arctic to the depths of the Mariana Trench. There are even microplastics found in the food we eat and the water we drink.
- Plastics are [derived from fossil fuels](#) — primarily oil, gas, and coal — and therefore create carbon emissions throughout their entire life cycle.

Resources

- [Plastic Pollution](#)
- [Extended Producer Responsibility](#)
- [Zero Waste Policy Roadmap for a Plastic-Free Future](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Julia Meltzer](#)
julia@ncelenviro.org



Toxic Chemicals (Environmental Health)

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 products including food packaging and firefighting foam and are known carcinogens that cause adverse health effects. While federal action has been slow and limited, states have taken the lead to address these “forever chemicals”.

Fast Facts

- PFAS [do not break down naturally](#) and can bioaccumulate in the environment and the bodies of living organisms like humans. Exposure to PFAS can lead to adverse health outcomes in humans.
- The drinking water of [over six million Americans](#) contains highly fluorinated chemicals at concentrations of concern.

Resources

- [PFAS](#)
- [Toxic Flame Retardants Fact Sheet](#)
- [Environmental Justice and Cumulative Impacts Policy Options](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
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Sustainable Agriculture & Water Quality (Environmental Health)

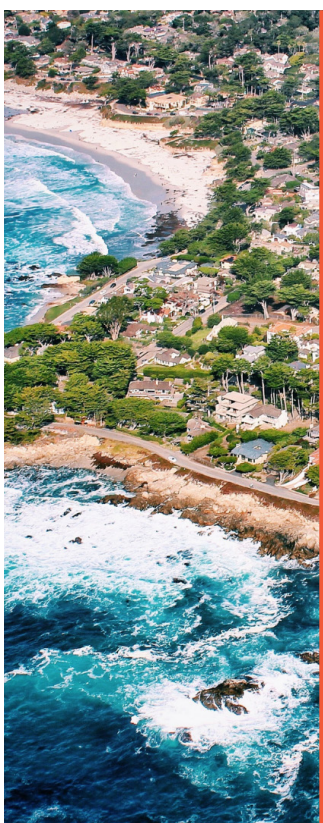
The Mississippi River Legislative Caucus (MRLC) works to build the capacity of legislators to address river health and water quality issues and to create a platform for collaboration on growing communities and local economies. Given the environmental footprint and proximity of agricultural systems to natural resources, sustainably managed operations provide an opportunity to reduce pollution, promote biodiversity, rebuild and enhance soil, and address climate change while supplying food, feed, and fuel to a growing global population.

Fast Facts

- Soil has [five essential functions](#): managing water resources, sustaining plant and animal life, filtering nutrient runoff, cycling nutrients, and providing physical stability and support.
- Healthy soil [absorbs more water](#), reducing the severity of stormwater run-off and soil erosion while also making it more resilient to droughts and floods.

Resources

- [Mississippi River Legislative Caucus \(MRLC\)](#)
- [Soil Health](#)
- [Flood Resilience](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Nabjot Kaur](#)
nabjot@ncelenviro.org



Coastal Resilience & Adaptation (Ocean)

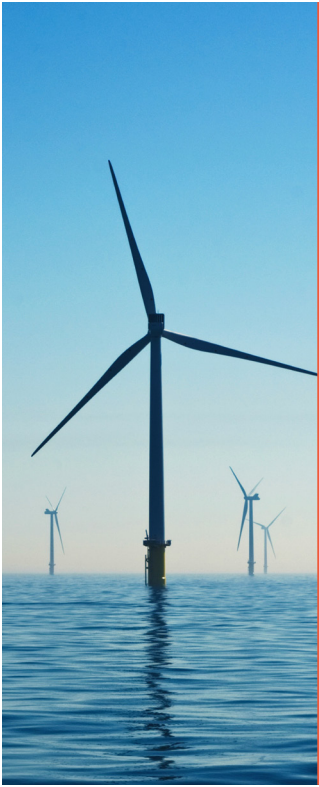
Coastal states continue to feel the impacts of intensifying storms and rising sea levels. To increase coastal resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and protect marine biodiversity, states are exploring how to build flood and storm-resilient infrastructure, halt coastal erosion, and implement nature-based solutions.

Fast Facts

- The coast is home to [40% of the U.S. population](#) with more than \$1 trillion worth of property located within 700 feet of the ocean.
- Coastal ecosystems can provide [cheaper and more effective shoreline protection](#) than sea walls. Each year, coral reefs provide an estimated \$10.9 billion of flood protection, and mangrove forests provide an average of \$65 billion of flood protection.

Resources

- [Blue Carbon](#)
- [Ocean Acidification](#)
- [Coastal Resilience Policy Options](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Alissa Weinman](#)
alissa@ncelenviro.org



Offshore Energy Transition (Ocean)

U.S. offshore wind energy has the potential to generate nearly double the nation's current electricity demand while creating thousands of jobs, supporting local economies, and producing renewable energy. States have proven to be integral partners in the transition of offshore wind and in reaching the goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030. States can lead their communities towards this goal through comprehensive stakeholder engagement, policy drivers, and workforce development trainings to support the renewable energy transition.

Fast Facts

- U.S. offshore wind could generate more than [7,200 TWh per year](#) - double the nation's current electricity use.
- Full deployment of offshore wind could provide [\\$440 million](#) in annual lease payments, \$680 million in annual property tax payments, and up to 160,000 jobs.

Resources

- [Offshore Wind](#)
- [Offshore Drilling](#)
- [States Continue Efforts to Advance Offshore Wind](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Alissa Weinman](#)
alissa@ncelenviro.org



Blue Economy (Ocean)

The blue economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth; however, not all ocean-based activities fall under this definition, only those that protect coastal resources, habitats, and communities. States are developing their blue economies through the conservation of marine ecosystems and through ocean-based activities like regenerative aquaculture, ocean data collection, and sustainable tourism and recreation.

Fast Facts

- Blue economies across the country contribute [\\$373 billion](#) to the nation's gross domestic product and support 2.3 million jobs.
- Healthy coastal ecosystems serve as [nursery and spawning grounds](#) for many marine species, including species in commercial and recreational fisheries.

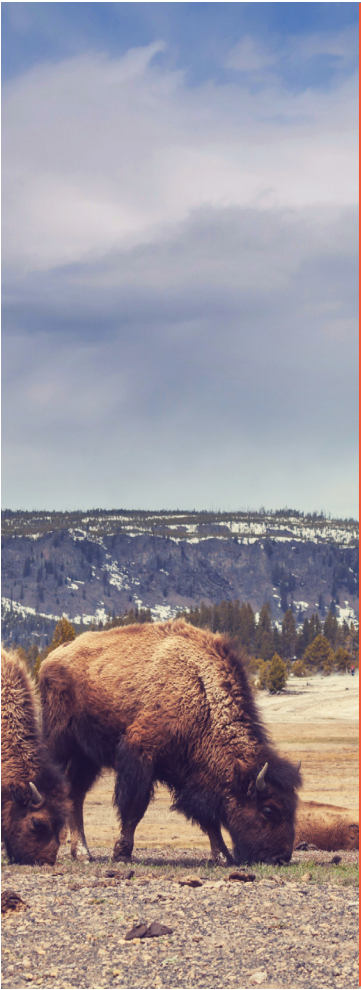
Resources

- [Blue Economy](#)
- [Nature-Based Solutions: Blue Carbon](#)
- [The Blue Economy Policy Options](#)
- **NCEL Contact:**
[Alissa Weinman](#)
alissa@ncelenviro.org



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Tribal Engagement

One of the biggest barriers to stronger state-Tribal partnerships is a lack of knowledge and understanding by state elected officials about their responsibilities to Tribal Nations. Tribes hold and maintain vast natural resources and environmental cultural knowledge and they have distinctive political and legal power through their nation-to-nation relationship with the federal government. To overcome these hurdles and increase financial support for these communities, it is crucial to ensure that the philanthropic sector and state officials acknowledge and support the leadership of Tribes.

NCEL's partnership with Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) seeks to amplify the voices of Tribal leaders, enlighten lawmakers on their treaty obligations to uphold Tribal sovereignty, and highlight the funding opportunities available to both states and Tribal nations. By fostering public-private partnerships, states and Tribes can gain access to vital resources that empower Indigenous leadership and facilitate co-management of public lands while integrating traditional knowledge into decision-making processes.

Resources

- [State and Tribal Relationships Fact Sheet](#)
- [NCEL and NAP Launch New Partnership](#)
- [New Partnership Fosters Relationships Between States and Tribes for the Environment](#)

Working Groups

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NCEL's Working Groups provide state legislators with the opportunity to dive deeper into specific environmental issues, to learn from and collaborate with other state legislators, and to engage in member-led discussions.



Coastal Working Group

Addressing issues impacting coastal communities and marine habitats. *Contact: Alissa Weinman (alissa@ncelenviro.org)*



Outdoor Working Group

Increasing outdoor engagement, recreation, and equitable access to the outdoors. *Contact: Grant Gliniecki (grant@ncelenviro.org).*



Plastic Pollution Working Group

Phasing out single-use plastics and promoting zero-waste practices. *Contact: Julia Meltzer (julia@ncelenviro.org).*



Pesticides and Pollinators Working Group

Reforming pesticides use and conserving pollinator species and pollinator habitats. *Contact: Justin Gulino (justin@ncelenviro.org)*



Wildlife Corridors and Crossings Working Group

Protecting and increasing habitat connectivity through wildlife corridors and crossings. *Contact: Logan Christian (logan@ncelenviro.org)*

Join a Working Group



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2026 National Forum

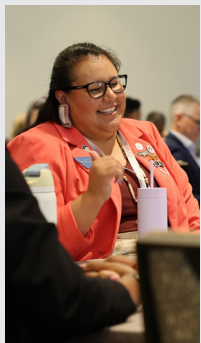
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SAVE THE DATE: NCEL 2026 National Forum

When: July 23-25, 2026
Where: Chicago, Illinois

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 solutions with their colleagues. You will walk away from the Forum with deeper knowledge of various issue areas and concrete legislative actions you can take. Mark your calendars and we look forward to seeing you!

Registration for the 2026 Forum is now open! Learn more here: bit.ly/NCEL2026Forum



2025 Forum Recap

In August 2025, more than 170 state legislators from 40 states and territories gathered in Boston for NCEL's 2025 National Forum. The event provided lawmakers the opportunity to learn from experts and collaborate with peers on policy solutions related to climate, energy, conservation, and environmental health. Sessions explored how states are financing solutions amid federal retreat, embedding equity into policy, strengthening community resilience, and more. The Forum also included special events at the New England Aquarium and the Boston Nature Center, as well as keynote speakers spanning the academic, NGO, and government sectors. Legislators left with a deeper understanding of how environmental challenges intersect with core community concerns — from public health to affordability — and with new connections to drive policy action back home. Visit the [2025 Forum Recap](#) to learn more.

"I love the NCEL National Forum because it is full of substantive policy discussion on ways to move forward on protecting our environment and I get to learn from other state legislators who have been working on these issues."



Priya Sundareshan
Arizona State Senator

"NCEL provides exactly the type of support I need to be an effective environmental legislator. The National Forum is a can't-miss event."



Sheila Ruth
Maryland State Delegate



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Program Staff Directory

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Below are the NCEL Program Staff mentioned in this briefing book. To learn more about the issues our staff work on and to meet the full team, visit ncelenviro.org/team

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Outdoor Policy Coordinator

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Colleen Goggin

Nature and Health Fellow

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Claire Gonzales

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