

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2023

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SENATE BILL 582
Agriculture, Energy, and Environment Committee Substitute Adopted 4/19/23
PROPOSED COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE S582-PCS45326-TQf-21

Short Title: North Carolina Farm Act of 2023.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

April 5, 2023

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT TO MAKE VARIOUS CHANGES TO THE AGRICULTURAL AND
3 WASTEWATER LAWS OF THIS STATE.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5
6 **INCLUDE INCOME FROM THE SALE OF HONEY IN GROSS INCOME FOR**
7 **PURPOSES OF PRESENT USE VALUE TAXATION**

8 **SECTION 1.(a)** G.S. 105-277.3(a)(1) reads as rewritten:

9 "(1) Agricultural land. – Individually owned agricultural land consisting of one or
10 more tracts, one of which satisfies the requirements of this subdivision. For
11 agricultural land used as a farm for aquatic species, as defined in
12 G.S. 106-758, the tract must meet the income requirement for agricultural land
13 and must consist of at least five acres in actual production or produce at least
14 20,000 pounds of aquatic species for commercial sale annually, regardless of
15 acreage. For all other agricultural land, the tract must meet the income
16 requirement for agricultural land and must consist of at least 10 acres that are
17 in actual production. Land in actual production includes land under
18 improvements used in the commercial production or growing of crops, plants,
19 or animals.

20 To meet the income requirement, agricultural land must, for the three years
21 preceding January 1 of the year for which the benefit of this section is claimed,
22 have produced an average gross income of at least one thousand dollars
23 (\$1,000). Gross income includes income from the sale of the agricultural
24 products produced from the land, grazing fees for livestock, the sale of bees
25 or products derived from ~~beehives other than honey, beehives,~~ any payments
26 received under a governmental soil conservation or land retirement program,
27 and the amount paid to the taxpayer during the taxable year pursuant to P.L.
28 108-357, Title VI, Fair and Equitable Tobacco Reform Act of 2004."

29 **SECTION 1.(b)** This section is effective for taxes imposed for taxable years
30 beginning on or after July 1, 2023.

31
32 **CLARIFY THAT TURKEY BROODER LITTER RECYCLING IS A BONA FIDE**
33 **FARM PURPOSE WITH RESPECT TO COUNTY ZONING**

34 **SECTION 1.1.** G.S. 160D-903(a) reads as rewritten:



* S 5 8 2 - P C S 4 5 3 2 6 - T Q F - 2 1 *

1 "(a) Bona Fide Farming Exempt From County Zoning. – County zoning regulations may
 2 not affect property used for bona fide farm purposes; provided, however, that this section does
 3 not limit zoning regulation with respect to the use of farm property for nonfarm purposes. Except
 4 as provided in G.S. 106-743.4 for farms that are subject to a conservation agreement under
 5 G.S. 106-743.2, bona fide farm purposes include the production and activities relating or
 6 incidental to the production of crops, grains, fruits, vegetables, ornamental and flowering plants,
 7 dairy, livestock, poultry, and all other forms of agriculture, as defined in G.S. 106-581.1.
 8 Activities incident to the farm include existing or new residences constructed to the applicable
 9 residential building code situated on the farm occupied by the owner, lessee, or operator of the
 10 farm and other buildings or structures sheltering or supporting the farm use and operation. A
 11 building or structure that is used solely for storage of cotton, peanuts, or sweetpotatoes, or any
 12 byproduct of those commodities, is a bona fide farm purpose, including a building or structure
 13 on a property that does not have the documentation listed in subdivisions (1) through (4) of this
 14 subsection. For purposes of this section, a facility that receives used turkey brooder litter from
 15 brooder farms and recycles the used litter by means of a drying process to reduce the moisture
 16 content of the litter sufficient to send the recycled litter to a turkey grow-out farm for reuse is a
 17 bona fide farm purpose. For purposes of this section, "when performed on the farm" in
 18 G.S. 106-581.1(6) includes the farm within the jurisdiction of the county and any other farm
 19 owned or leased to or from others by the bona fide farm operator, no matter where located. For
 20 purposes of this section, the production of a nonfarm product that the Department of Agriculture
 21 and Consumer Services recognizes as a "Goodness Grows in North Carolina" product that is
 22 produced on a farm subject to a conservation agreement under G.S. 106-743.2 is a bona fide farm
 23 purpose. For purposes of determining whether a property is being used for bona fide farm
 24 purposes, any of the following is sufficient evidence that the property is being used for bona fide
 25 farm purposes, but other evidence may also be considered:

26 "

27
 28 **CORRECT REFERENCES TO NORTH CAROLINA TOBACCO FOUNDATION, INC.**

29 **SECTION 1.2.(a)** G.S. 106-568.3 reads as rewritten:

30 **"§ 106-568.3. Action of Board of Agriculture on petition for referendum; creation of the**
 31 **Tobacco Research Commission.**

32 (a) The State Board of Agriculture, upon a petition being filed with it so requesting and
 33 signed by the governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, the North
 34 Carolina State Grange, and the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation, Inc., shall examine such
 35 petition and upon finding that it complies with the provisions of this Article shall authorize the
 36 holding of a referendum as hereinafter set out and the governing boards of the North Carolina
 37 Farm Bureau Federation, the North Carolina State Grange, and the North Carolina Agricultural
 38 Foundation, Inc., shall thereupon be fully authorized and empowered to hold and conduct on the
 39 part of the producers and growers of the commodities herein mentioned a referendum on the
 40 question of whether or not such growers and producers shall levy upon themselves an assessment
 41 under and subject to and for the purposes stated in this Article. Provided, that the petition for a
 42 tobacco referendum shall be signed by and, once approved, shall authorize the holding of a
 43 referendum by the governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., the
 44 North Carolina State Grange, the North Carolina ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation, Inc., and the
 45 Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, Incorporated.

46 (b) There is hereby created a North Carolina Tobacco Research Commission within the
 47 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The Commission shall consist of the
 48 Commissioner of Agriculture, or ~~his~~ the Commissioner's designee; the President of the North
 49 Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., or ~~his~~ the President's designee; the President of the
 50 Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, Incorporated, or ~~his~~ the President's designee;

1 the ~~Master~~ President of the North Carolina State Grange, or ~~his~~ the President's designee; and, the
 2 President of the North Carolina ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation, Inc., or his designee."

3 **SECTION 1.2.(b)** G.S. 106-568.4 reads as rewritten:

4 "**§ 106-568.4. By whom referendum to be managed; announcement.**

5 The governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, the North Carolina
 6 State Grange, and the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation, Inc., shall arrange for and manage
 7 any referendum conducted under the provisions of this Article but shall, 60 days before the date
 8 upon which it is to be held, fix, determine, and publicly announce in each county the date, hours,
 9 and polling places in that county for voting in such referendum, the amount and basis proposed
 10 to be collected, the means by which such assessment shall be collected as authorized by the
 11 growers and producers, and the general purposes for which said funds so collected shall be
 12 applied. Provided, that the governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.,
 13 the North Carolina State Grange, the North Carolina ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation, Inc., and
 14 the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina, Incorporated, shall arrange for and manage
 15 any referendum for tobacco poundage assessments under the provisions of this Article."

16 **SECTION 1.2.(c)** G.S. 106-568.7 reads as rewritten:

17 "**§ 106-568.7. Preparation and distribution of ballots; poll holders; canvass and**
 18 **announcement of results.**

19 The governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, the North Carolina
 20 State Grange, and the North Carolina Agricultural Foundation, Inc., shall prepare and distribute
 21 in advance of such referendum all necessary ballots and shall under rules and regulations, adopted
 22 and promulgated by the organizations holding such referendum, arrange for the necessary poll
 23 holders and shall, within 10 days after the date of such referendum, canvass and publicly declare
 24 the results thereof. Provided, that for the tobacco poundage assessment referendum, the North
 25 Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., the North Carolina State Grange, the North Carolina
 26 ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation, Inc., and the Tobacco Growers Association of North Carolina,
 27 Incorporated, shall perform the functions set forth in this section."

28 **SECTION 1.2.(d)** G.S. 106-568.8 reads as rewritten:

29 "**§ 106-568.8. Collection and disposition of assessment; report of receipts and**
 30 **disbursements; audit.**

31 ...

32 (b) Tobacco Poundage Assessments. In the event two-thirds or more of the eligible
 33 farmers and producers participating in the tobacco referendum vote in favor of the tobacco
 34 poundage assessment authorized under this Article, then said assessment shall be collected for a
 35 period of six years under rules, regulations, and methods adopted by the North Carolina Tobacco
 36 Research Commission. The North Carolina Tobacco Research Commission is exempt from the
 37 provisions of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes.

38 The assessments collected shall be remitted to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer
 39 Services to be expended under the direction of the Tobacco Research Commission for research
 40 and dissemination of research facts concerning tobacco. Any person that receives assessment
 41 funds from the Tobacco Research Commission shall file quarterly written reports with the
 42 Tobacco Research Commission on the receipt and expenditure of assessment funds. The Tobacco
 43 Research Commission may transfer assessments to the North Carolina ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural
 44 Foundation, Inc., to be held and invested by the ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation until such time
 45 as the Commission shall direct their expenditure for the purposes set forth in this section."

46 **SECTION 1.2.(e)** G.S. 106-568.10 reads as rewritten:

47 "**§ 106-568.10. Subsequent referenda; continuation of assessment.**

48 If the assessment is defeated in the referendum, the governing boards of the North Carolina
 49 Farm Bureau Federation, the North Carolina State Grange, and the North Carolina Agricultural
 50 Foundation, Inc., shall have full power and authority to call another referendum for the purposes
 51 herein set out in the next succeeding year on the question of the annual assessment for six years.

1 In the event the assessment carried in a referendum by two-thirds or more of the eligible farmers
2 participating therein, such assessment shall be levied annually for the six years set forth in the
3 call for such referendum and a new referendum may be called and conducted during the sixth
4 year of such period on the question of whether or not such assessment shall be continued for the
5 next ensuing six years. Provided, that if the tobacco poundage assessment is defeated in the
6 referendum, the governing boards of the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation, Inc., the North
7 Carolina State Grange, the North Carolina ~~Tobacco~~ Agricultural Foundation, Inc., and Tobacco
8 Growers Association of North Carolina, Incorporated, may call another referendum in the next
9 succeeding year on the question of the annual assessment for six years. If the tobacco assessment
10 carried in a referendum by two-thirds or more of the eligible farmers participating therein, the
11 assessment shall be levied annually for the six years set forth in the call for the referendum and
12 a new referendum may be called and conducted during the sixth year of the period on the question
13 of whether or not the assessment shall be continued for the next ensuing six years."
14

15 **ADD EQUINE INDUSTRY MEMBER TO THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

16 **SECTION 1.3.** G.S. 106-2 reads as rewritten:

17 **"§ 106-2. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services established; Board of**
18 **Agriculture, membership, terms of office, etc.**

19 ...

20 (b) Membership; Qualifications. – The Board of Agriculture shall consist of the
21 Commissioner of Agriculture, who shall be an ex officio member and chairman thereof and shall
22 preside at all meetings, and of ~~4~~12 other members from the State, so distributed as to reasonably
23 represent the different sections and agriculture of the State. The Commissioner of Agriculture
24 and the members of the Board of Agriculture shall be practicing farmers engaged in their
25 profession. The members of the Board shall be appointed by the Governor by and with the
26 consent of the Senate. In the appointment of the members of the Board the Governor shall also
27 take into consideration the different agricultural interests of the State, and shall appoint members
28 with the following qualifications:

- 29 (1) One member who shall be a practicing tobacco farmer to represent the tobacco
30 farming interest.
- 31 (2) One member who shall be a practicing cotton grower to represent the cotton
32 interest.
- 33 (3) One member who shall be a practicing fruit or vegetable farmer to represent
34 the fruit and vegetable farming interest.
- 35 (4) One member who shall be a practicing dairy farmer to represent the dairy and
36 cattle interest of the State.
- 37 (5) One member who shall be a practicing poultryman to represent the poultry
38 interest of the State.
- 39 (6) One member who shall be a practicing peanut grower to represent the peanut
40 interests of the State.
- 41 (7) One member who shall be experienced in marketing to represent the
42 marketing of products of the State.
- 43 (8) One member who shall be actively involved in forestry to represent the
44 forestry interests of the State.
- 45 (9) One member who shall be actively involved in the nursery business to
46 represent the nursery industry of the State.
- 47 (10) One member who shall be a practicing general farmer to represent the general
48 farming interest.
- 49 (11) One member who shall be a practicing pork farmer to represent the swine
50 interest of the State.

- 1 (12) One member who shall be actively involved in the equine industry to represent
 2 the equine industry of the State.
 3 (c) Terms. – The term of office of members of the Board shall be six years and until their
 4 successors are duly appointed and qualified.
 5 (d) Vacancies. – Vacancies in the Board shall be filled by the Governor for the unexpired
 6 term."
 7

8 **EXEMPT COMPOST FROM SALES TAX FOR QUALIFYING FARMERS**

9 **SECTION 1.4.(a)** G.S. 105-164.13E(a) reads as rewritten:

10 **"§ 105-164.13E. Exemption for farmers.**

11 (a) Exemption. – A qualifying farmer is a person who has an annual income from farming
 12 operations for the preceding taxable year of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) or more or who has
 13 an average annual income from farming operations for the three preceding taxable years of ten
 14 thousand dollars (\$10,000) or more. For purposes of this section, the term "income from farming
 15 operations" means sales plus any other amounts treated as gross income under the Code from
 16 farming operations. A qualifying farmer includes a dairy operator, a poultry farmer, an egg
 17 producer, and a livestock farmer, a farmer of crops, a farmer of an aquatic species, as defined in
 18 G.S. 106-758, and a person who boards horses. A qualifying farmer may apply to the Secretary
 19 for an exemption certificate number under G.S. 105-164.28A. The exemption certificate expires
 20 when a person fails to meet the income threshold for three consecutive taxable years or ceases to
 21 engage in farming operations, whichever comes first.

22 Except as otherwise provided in this section, the items exempt under this section must be
 23 purchased by a qualifying farmer or conditional farmer and used by the qualifying or conditional
 24 farmer primarily in farming operations. For purposes of this section, an item is used by a farmer
 25 for farming operations if it is used for the planting, cultivating, harvesting, or curing of farm
 26 crops, in the production of dairy products, eggs, or animals, or by a person who boards horses.
 27 The items that may be exempt from sales and use tax under this section are:

- 28 (1) Fuel, piped natural gas, and electricity that are measured by a separate meter
 29 or another separate device and used for a purpose other than preparing food,
 30 heating dwellings, and other household purposes.
 31 (2) Commercial fertilizer, lime, land plaster, plastic mulch, plant bed covers,
 32 potting soil, baler twine, compost, and seeds.

33 "

34 **SECTION 1.4.(b)** This section becomes effective October 1, 2023.

35
 36 **ADD PINE STRAW HARVESTING TO THE DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURE**

37 **SECTION 1.5.** G.S. 106-581.1 reads as rewritten:

38 **"§ 106-581.1. Agriculture defined.**

39 For purposes of this Article, the terms "agriculture", "agricultural", and "farming" refer to all
 40 of the following:

- 41 ...
- 42 (2) The planting and production of trees and ~~timber~~timber, including pine
 43 orchards planted and maintained for the purpose of harvesting pine needles
 44 for sale, or the harvesting of pine needles for sale from land with a forest
 45 management plan.

46 "

47
 48 **AGRITOURISM ADVERTISING**

49 **SECTION 2.** G.S. 136-32 reads as rewritten:

50 **"§ 136-32. Regulation of signs.**

1 (a) Commercial Signs. – No unauthorized person shall erect or maintain upon any
2 highway any warning or direction sign, marker, signal or light or imitation of any official sign,
3 marker, signal or light erected under the provisions of G.S. 136-30, except in cases of emergency.
4 No person shall erect or maintain upon any highway any traffic or highway sign or signal bearing
5 thereon any commercial or political advertising, except as provided in subsections (b) through
6 (e) of this section: Provided, nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit the erection or
7 maintenance of signs, markers, or signals bearing thereon the name of an organization authorized
8 to erect the same by the Department of Transportation or by any local authority referred to in
9 G.S. 136-31. Any person who shall violate any of the provisions of this section shall be guilty of
10 a Class 1 misdemeanor. The Department of Transportation may remove any signs erected without
11 authority or allowed to remain beyond the deadline established in ~~subsection (b)~~ subsections (b)
12 and (b1) of this section.

13 (b) Compliant Political Signs Permitted. – During the period beginning on the 30th day
14 before the beginning date of "one-stop" early voting under G.S. 163-227.2 and ending on the 10th
15 day after the primary or election day, persons may place political signs in the right-of-way of the
16 State highway system as provided in this section. Signs must be placed in compliance with
17 subsection (d) of this section and must be removed by the end of the period prescribed in this
18 subsection. Any political sign remaining in the right-of-way of the State highway system more
19 than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in this subsection shall be deemed unlawfully
20 placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of such political sign
21 without penalty.

22 (b1) Compliant Farm Signs Permitted. – During a farm's seasonal operation, persons may
23 place farm signs in the right-of-way of the State highway system as provided in this section.
24 Signs must be placed in compliance with subsection (d) of this section and must be removed by
25 the end of the farm's season. Any farm sign remaining in the right-of-way of the State highway
26 system more than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in this subsection shall be deemed
27 unlawfully placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of the farm
28 sign without penalty.

29 ~~(c) Definition-Definitions.~~ – For purposes of this section, "~~political sign~~" means any the
30 following definitions apply:

- 31 (1) Farm. – Any property that is used for a bona fide farm purpose as provided in
32 G.S. 106-581.1.
33 (2) Farm sign. – A sign that advertises a farm, products grown, raised, or produced
34 on a farm, or services provided on a farm; or that provides customers with
35 directions to a farm.
36 (3) Political sign. – Any sign that advocates for political action. The term does
37 not include a commercial sign.

38 (d) Sign Placement. – The permittee must obtain the permission of any property owner
39 of a residence, business, or religious institution fronting the right-of-way where a sign would be
40 erected. Signs must be placed in accordance with the following:

- 41 (1) No sign shall be permitted in the right-of-way of a fully controlled access
42 highway.
43 (2) No sign shall be closer than three feet from the edge of the pavement of the
44 road.
45 (3) No sign shall obscure motorist visibility at an intersection.
46 (4) No sign shall be higher than 42 inches above the edge of the pavement of the
47 road.
48 (5) No sign shall be larger than 864 square inches.
49 (6) No sign shall obscure or replace another sign.

1 (e) Penalties for Unlawful Removal of Signs. – It is a Class 3 misdemeanor for a person
2 to steal, deface, vandalize, or unlawfully remove a political sign that is lawfully placed under this
3 section.

4 (f) Application Within Municipalities. – Pursuant to Article 8 of Chapter 160A of the
5 General Statutes, a city may by ordinance prohibit or regulate the placement of political signs on
6 rights-of-way of streets located within the corporate limits of a municipality and maintained by
7 the municipality. Any such ordinance shall provide that any political sign that remains in a
8 right-of-way of streets located within the corporate limits of a municipality and maintained by
9 the municipality more than 30 days after the end of the period prescribed in the ordinance is to
10 be deemed unlawfully placed and abandoned property, and a person may remove and dispose of
11 such political sign without penalty. In the absence of an ordinance prohibiting or regulating the
12 placement of political signs on the rights-of-way of streets located within a municipality and
13 maintained by the municipality, the provisions of subsections (b) through (e) of this section shall
14 apply."
15

16 AMEND REQUIREMENTS ON AGRITOURISM WARNING SIGNS

17 SECTION 2.1.(a) G.S. 99E-3 reads as rewritten:

18 "§ 99E-3. Warning required.

19 (a) Every equine professional and every equine activity sponsor shall post and maintain
20 signs which contain the warning notice specified in subsection (b) of this section. The signs
21 required by this section shall be placed in a clearly visible location on or near stables, corrals, or
22 arenas where the equine professional or the equine activity sponsor conducts equine activities.
23 The warning notice specified in subsection (b) of this section shall be designed by the Department
24 of Agriculture and Consumer Services and shall consist of a sign in black letters, with each letter
25 to be a minimum of three quarters of one inch in height. Every written contract entered into by
26 an equine professional or by an equine activity sponsor for the providing of professional services,
27 instruction, or the rental of equipment or tack or an equine to a participant, whether or not the
28 contract involves equine activities on or off the location or site of the equine professional's or the
29 equine activity sponsor's business, shall contain in clearly readable print the warning notice
30 specified in subsection (b) of this section.

31 (b) The signs and contracts described in subsection (a) of this section shall contain the
32 following warning notice:

33 "WARNING

34 Under North Carolina law, an equine activity sponsor or equine professional is not liable for
35 an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting exclusively from the
36 inherent risks of equine activities. Chapter 99E of the North Carolina General Statutes."

37 (c) Failure to comply with the requirements concerning warning signs and notices
38 provided in this Part shall prevent an equine activity sponsor or equine professional from
39 invoking the privileges of immunity provided by this Part."

40 SECTION 2.1.(b) G.S. 99E-8 reads as rewritten:

41 "§ 99E-8. Warning required.

42 (a) Every farm animal activity sponsor and every farm animal professional shall post and
43 maintain signs which contain the warning notices specified in subsection (b) or (c) of this section.
44 The signs required by this section shall be placed in a clearly visible location on or near stables,
45 corrals, arenas, or other farm animal facilities where the farm animal professional or the farm
46 animal activity sponsor conducts animal activities. The warning notices specified in subsections
47 (b) and (c) of this section shall be designed by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer
48 Services and shall consist of a sign in black letters, with each letter to be a minimum of three
49 quarters of one inch in height. Every written contract entered into by a farm animal professional
50 or by a farm animal activity sponsor for the providing of professional services, instruction, or the
51 rental of equipment or tack or a farm animal to a participant, whether or not the contract involves

1 farm animal activities on or off the location or site of the farm animal professional's or farm
2 animal activity sponsor's business, shall contain in clearly readable print the warning notice
3 specified in subsection (b) or (c) of this section.

4 (b) The signs and contracts described in subsection (a) of this section shall contain the
5 following warning notice:

6 "WARNING

7 Under North Carolina law, a farm animal activity sponsor or farm animal professional is not
8 liable for an injury to or the death of a participant in farm animal activities resulting exclusively
9 from the inherent risks of farm animal activities. Chapter 99E of the North Carolina General
10 Statutes."

11 (c) If a farm animal activity sponsor or farm animal professional sponsors or engages in
12 farm animal activities only involving equines, the signs and contracts described in subsection (a)
13 of this section may contain the following warning notice:

14 "WARNING

15 Under North Carolina law, an equine activity sponsor or equine professional is not liable for
16 an injury to or the death of a participant in equine activities resulting exclusively from the
17 inherent risks of equine activities. Chapter 99E of the North Carolina General Statutes."

18 (d) Failure to comply with the requirements concerning warning signs and notices
19 provided in this Part shall prevent a farm animal activity sponsor or farm animal professional
20 from invoking the privileges of immunity provided by this Part."

21 **SECTION 2.1.(c)** G.S. 99E-32 reads as rewritten:

22 "**§ 99E-32. Warning required.**

23 (a) Every agritourism professional must post and maintain signs that contain the warning
24 notice specified in subsection (b) of this section. The sign must be placed in a clearly visible
25 location at the entrance to the agritourism location and at the site of the agritourism activity. The
26 warning notice must consist of a sign in black letters, with each letter to be a minimum of three
27 quarters of one inch in height. Every written contract entered into by an agritourism professional
28 for the providing of professional services, instruction, or the rental of equipment to a participant,
29 whether or not the contract involves agritourism activities on or off the location or at the site of
30 the agritourism activity, must contain in clearly readable print the warning notice specified in
31 subsection (b) of this section.

32 (b) The signs and contracts described in subsection (a) of this section must contain the
33 following notice of warning:

34 "WARNING

35 Under North Carolina law, there is no liability for an injury to or death of a participant in an
36 agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism location if such injury or death results from the
37 inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among
38 others, risks of injury inherent to land, equipment, and animals, as well as the potential for you
39 to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury or death. You are assuming the
40 risk of participating in this agritourism activity."

41 (c) Failure to comply with the requirements concerning warning signs and notices
42 provided in this subsection will prevent an agritourism professional from invoking the privileges
43 of immunity provided by this Article."

44 **SECTION 2.1.(d)** This section is effective when it becomes law and applies to
45 actions arising from events occurring on or after that date.

46
47 **CLARIFY DEFINITION OF PROPERTY-HAULING VEHICLES**

48 **SECTION 3.** G.S. 20-4.01 reads as rewritten:

49 "**§ 20-4.01. Definitions.**

50 Unless the context requires otherwise, the following definitions apply throughout this
51 Chapter to the defined words and phrases and their cognates:

1 ...
 2 (31) Property-Hauling Vehicles. –

3 ...
 4 g. A fifth-wheel trailer, recreational vehicle, semitrailer, or trailer used
 5 exclusively or primarily to transport vehicles in connection with
 6 motorsports competition events is not a property-hauling vehicle.

7"

8
 9 **AMEND VETERINARY MEDICAL BOARD INSPECTION PROCESS AND GIVE**
 10 **VETERINARY MEDICAL BOARD RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERFORMING**
 11 **INSPECTIONS OF BOARDING KENNELS OPERATED BY VETERINARIANS**

12 **SECTION 4.(a)** Article 11 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes is amended by
 13 adding a new section to read:

14 **"§ 90-187.17. Inspection process.**

15 At least one week prior to conducting any inspection pursuant to G.S. 90-185(3) or
 16 G.S. 90-186(2), the Board shall provide written notice of the upcoming inspection to the
 17 veterinarian. The written notice may be provided via an electronic communication. The
 18 veterinarian may contact the Board to reschedule the inspection, but the inspection shall be
 19 rescheduled no later than one week after the originally scheduled date of the inspection. Along
 20 with the written notice of inspection, the Board shall provide the veterinarian with a checklist of
 21 all standards adopted by rule for which the inspector may issue a violation and, with as much
 22 specificity as possible, conditions that violate the standards."

23 **SECTION 4.(b)** G.S. 19A-37 reads as rewritten:

24 **"§ 19A-37. Application of Article.**

25 This Article shall not apply to a place or establishment which is operated under the immediate
 26 supervision of a duly licensed veterinarian as a hospital where animals are harbored, boarded,
 27 and cared for incidental to the treatment, prevention, or alleviation of disease processes during
 28 the routine practice of the profession of veterinary ~~medicine.~~ medicine or a boarding kennel
 29 operating under the supervision of a veterinarian licensed pursuant to Article 11 of Chapter 90
 30 of the General Statutes. This Article shall not apply to any dealer, pet shop, public auction,
 31 commercial kennel or research facility during the period such dealer or research facility is in the
 32 possession of a valid license or registration granted by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to
 33 Title 7, Chapter 54, of the United States Code. This Article shall not apply to any individual who
 34 occasionally boards an animal on a noncommercial basis, although such individual may receive
 35 nominal sums to cover the cost of such boarding."

36 **SECTION 4.(c)** G.S. 90-181.1(b) reads as rewritten:

37 "(b) The following definitions are applicable to this section:

38 (1) ~~"Animal health center" or "animal medical center" means a~~ Animal health
 39 center or animal medical center. – A veterinary practice facility in which
 40 consultative, clinical, and hospital services are rendered and in which a large
 41 staff of basic and applied veterinary scientists perform significant research and
 42 conduct advanced professional educational programs.

43 (1a) Boarding kennel. – A facility or establishment under the supervision of a
 44 veterinarian which regularly offers to the public the service of boarding dogs
 45 or cats or both for a fee. Such a facility or establishment may, in addition to
 46 providing shelter, food, and water, offer grooming or other services for dogs
 47 and/or cats.

48 (2) ~~"Emergency facility" means a~~ Emergency facility. – A veterinary medical
 49 facility whose primary function is the receiving, treatment, and monitoring of
 50 emergency patients during its specified hours of operation. At this veterinary
 51 practice facility a veterinarian is in attendance at all hours of operation and

sufficient staff is available to provide timely and appropriate emergency care. An emergency facility may be an independent veterinary medical after-hours facility, an independent veterinary medical 24-hour facility, or part of a full-service hospital or large teaching institution.

- (3) ~~"Mobile facility" means a~~ Mobile facility. – A veterinary practice conducted from a vehicle with special medical or surgical facilities or from a vehicle suitable only for making house or farm calls; provided, the veterinary medical practice shall have a permanent base of operation with a published address and telephone facilities for making appointments or responding to emergency situations.
- (4) ~~"Office" means a~~ Office. – A veterinary practice facility where a limited or consultative practice is conducted and which provides no facilities for the housing of patients.
- (5) ~~"On call emergency service" means a~~ On-call emergency service. – A veterinary medical service at a facility, including a mobile facility, where veterinarians and staff are not on the premises during all hours of operation or where veterinarians leave after a patient is treated. A veterinarian shall be available to be reached by telephone for after-hours emergencies.
- (6) ~~"Veterinary clinic" or "animal clinic" means a~~ Veterinary clinic or animal clinic. – A veterinary practice facility in which the practice conducted is essentially an out-patient practice.
- (7) ~~"Veterinary hospital" or "animal hospital" means a~~ Veterinary hospital or animal hospital. – A veterinary practice facility in which the practice conducted includes the confinement as well as the treatment of patients."

SECTION 4.(d) G.S. 90-186 reads as rewritten:

"§ 90-186. Special powers of the Board.

In addition to the powers set forth in G.S. 90-185 above, the Board may:

- ...
- (2) Inspect any boarding kennels, hospitals, clinics, mobile units or other facilities used by any practicing veterinarian, either by a member of the Board or its authorized representatives, for the purpose of reporting the results of the inspection to the Board on a form prescribed by the Board and seeking disciplinary action for violations of health, sanitary, and medical waste disposal rules of the Board affecting the practice of veterinary ~~medicine~~, medicine or the operation of a boarding kennel, or violations of rules of any county, state, or federal department or agency having jurisdiction in these areas of health, sanitation, and medical waste disposal that relate to or affect the practice of veterinary ~~medicine~~; medicine or the operation of a boarding kennel;
- ...
- (6) Set and require fees pursuant to administrative rule. The Board may increase the following fees, provided (i) no fee shall be increased more than fifteen percent (15%) within a calendar year and (ii) the cumulative total increases of any fee shall not exceed one hundred percent (100%) of the fee amounts set in this subdivision:
 - ...
 - p. Issuance of a boarding kennel permit, in the amount of seventy-five dollars (\$75.00).

The fees set under this subdivision for the renewal of a license, a limited license, a registration, a certificate, or a veterinary facility permit apply to each year of the renewal period.

1 "

2 **SECTION 4.(e)** G.S. 90-187.10 reads as rewritten:

3 **"§ 90-187.10. Necessity for license; certain practices exempted.**

4 No person shall engage in the practice of veterinary medicine or own all or part interest in a
5 veterinary medical practice in this State or attempt to do so without having first applied for and
6 obtained a license for such purpose from the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Board, or
7 without having first obtained from the Board a certificate of renewal of license for the calendar
8 year in which the person proposes to practice and until the person shall have been first licensed
9 and registered for such practice in the manner provided in this Article and the rules and
10 regulations of the Board.

11 Nothing in this Article shall be construed to prohibit:

12 ...

13 (12) Any person licensed pursuant to G.S. 19A-28 from operating a boarding
14 kennel."

15 **SECTION 4.(f)** The Veterinary Medical Board shall adopt rules to establish
16 minimum standards for boarding kennels operating under the supervision of a veterinarian no
17 later than July 1, 2024. The standards shall be at least as stringent as those adopted by the Board
18 of Agriculture pursuant to Article 3 of Chapter 19A of the General Statutes.

19 **SECTION 4.(g)** Subsection (a) of this section becomes effective October 1, 2023.
20 Subsections (b), (d), and (e) of this section become effective 60 days after the rules adopted
21 pursuant to subsection (f) of this section become effective. The remainder of this section is
22 effective when it becomes law.

23
24 **CREATE CLASS 3 MISDEMEANOR FOR LEAVING THE SCENE OF AN ANIMAL**
25 **WASTE SPILL**

26 **SECTION 4.1.(a)** G.S. 14-399(i)(4) reads as rewritten:

27 (4) "Litter" means any garbage, rubbish, trash, refuse, can, bottle, box, container,
28 wrapper, paper, paper product, tire, appliance, mechanical equipment or part,
29 building or construction material, tool, machinery, wood, motor vehicle or
30 motor vehicle part, vessel, aircraft, farm machinery or equipment, sludge from
31 a waste treatment facility, water supply treatment plant, or air pollution control
32 facility, animal waste as defined in G.S. 143-215.10B, dead animal, animal or
33 animal parts, animal by-products, or discarded material in any form resulting
34 from domestic, industrial, commercial, mining, agricultural, or governmental
35 operations. While being used for or distributed in accordance with their
36 intended uses, "litter" does not include political pamphlets, handbills,
37 religious tracts, newspapers, and other similar printed materials the
38 unsolicited distribution of which is protected by the Constitution of the United
39 States or the Constitution of North Carolina."

40 **SECTION 4.1.(b)** Article 52 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes is amended by
41 adding a new section to read:

42 **"§ 14-399.3. Duty to stop in event of certain spills from vehicles.**

43 The driver of any vehicle who knows or reasonably should know that animal waste, as defined
44 in G.S. 143-215.10B, dead animals or animal parts, or animal by-products have been blown,
45 scattered, spilled, thrown, or placed from the vehicle shall immediately stop his or her vehicle at
46 the scene of the incident. The driver shall remain with the vehicle at the scene of the incident
47 until a law enforcement officer completes the investigation of the incident or authorizes the driver
48 to leave and the vehicle to be removed, unless remaining at the scene places the driver or others
49 at significant risk of injury.

50 Prior to the completion of the investigation of the incident by a law enforcement officer, or
51 the consent of the officer to leave, the driver may not facilitate, allow, or agree to the removal of

1 the vehicle from the scene for any purpose other than to call for a law enforcement officer; to call
2 for assistance in removing the materials that were blown, scattered, thrown, spilled, or placed
3 from the vehicle; or to remove oneself or others from significant risk of injury. If the driver does
4 leave for a reason permitted by this section, then the driver must return with the vehicle to the
5 scene of the incident within a reasonable period of time, unless otherwise instructed by a law
6 enforcement officer. A willful violation of this section shall be punished as a Class 3
7 misdemeanor, and the court may order restitution for the cost of removing the materials that were
8 blown, scattered, thrown, spilled, or placed from the vehicle."

9 **SECTION 4.1.(c)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2023, and applies to
10 offenses committed on or after that date.

11
12 **ENCOURAGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO MAKE ONE HUNDRED PERCENT**
13 **MUSCADINE GRAPE JUICE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS**

14 **SECTION 5.(a)** G.S. 115C-12 is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

15 "(49) Goal To Make Available Muscadine Grape Juice In Certain Schools. – The
16 State Board of Education shall strive to ensure that one hundred percent
17 (100%) muscadine grape juice is made available to students in every school
18 operated under Article 9C of this Chapter as a part of the school's nutrition
19 program or through the operation of the school's vending facilities."

20 **SECTION 5.(b)** Part 2 of Article 17 of Chapter 115C of the General Statutes is
21 amended by adding a new section to read:

22 **"§ 115C-264.5. Muscadine grape juice.**

23 Local boards of education shall strive to ensure that one hundred percent (100%) muscadine
24 grape juice is made available to students in every school in the local school administrative unit
25 as a part of the school's nutrition program or through the operation of the school's vending
26 facilities."

27 **SECTION 5.(c)** G.S. 115C-218.75 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

28 "(k) Muscadine Grape Juice. – A charter school shall strive to ensure that one hundred
29 percent (100%) muscadine grape juice is made available to students as a part of the school's
30 nutrition program or through the operation of the school's vending facilities."

31 **SECTION 5.(d)** G.S. 115C-238.66 is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

32 "(19) Muscadine grape juice. – A regional school shall strive to ensure that one
33 hundred percent (100%) muscadine grape juice is made available to students
34 as a part of the school's nutrition program or through the operation of the
35 school's vending facilities."

36 **SECTION 5.(e)** G.S. 116-239.8(b)(4)c. reads as rewritten:

37 "c. Food services. – The laboratory school shall strive to ensure that one
38 hundred percent (100%) muscadine grape juice is made available to
39 students as a part of the school's nutrition program or through the
40 operation of the school's vending facilities. Upon request, the local
41 school administrative unit in which the laboratory school is located
42 shall administer the National School Lunch Program for the laboratory
43 school in accordance with G.S. 115C-264."

44 **SECTION 5.(f)** G.S. 115D-20 reads as rewritten:

45 **"§ 115D-20. Powers and duties of trustees.**

46 The trustees of each institution shall constitute the local administrative board of such
47 institution, with such powers and duties as are provided in this Chapter and as are delegated to it
48 by the State Board of Community Colleges. The powers and duties of trustees shall include the
49 following:

50 ...

1 (15) To strive to make available one hundred percent (100%) muscadine grape
2 juice as a beverage option in the operation of the community college's vending
3 facilities."

4 **SECTION 5.(g)** Part 5 of Article 1 of Chapter 116 of the General Statutes is amended
5 by adding a new section to read:

6 "**§ 116-43.25. Availability of muscadine grape juice on campuses.**

7 Each constituent institution shall strive to make one hundred percent (100%) muscadine
8 grape juice available as a beverage option in the operation of the institution's vending facilities."

9 **SECTION 5.(h)** This section is effective when it becomes law. Subsections (a), (b),
10 (c), (d), and (e) of this section apply beginning with the 2023-2024 school year. Subsections (f)
11 and (g) of this section apply beginning with the 2023-2024 academic year.

12 **ESTABLISH EQUINE STATE TRAIL**

13 **SECTION 6.(a)** The General Assembly makes the following findings:

14 (1) The equine industry provides a three billion four hundred forty million dollar
15 (\$3,440,000,000) overall economic impact to the State of North Carolina, and
16 horses are a rich part of our State's historical and cultural heritage.

17 (2) The inclusion of an Equine State Trail as a State trail in the State Parks System
18 would be beneficial to the people of North Carolina and further the
19 development of North Carolina as the "Great Trails State."

20 **SECTION 6.(b)** The General Assembly authorizes the Department of Natural and
21 Cultural Resources to add the Equine State Trail in Chatham, Cumberland, Harnett, Hoke, Lee,
22 Montgomery, Moore, and Richmond Counties to the State Parks System as a State trail, as
23 provided in G.S. 143B-135.54(b).

24 **SECTION 6.(c)** The Department shall support, promote, encourage, and facilitate
25 the establishment of trail segments on State park lands and on lands of other federal, State, local,
26 and private landowners. On segments of the Equine State Trail that cross property controlled by
27 agencies or owners other than the Department's Division of Parks and Recreation, the laws, rules,
28 and policies of those agencies or owners shall govern the use of the property.

29 **SECTION 6.(d)** The requirement of G.S. 143B-135.54(b) that additions be
30 accompanied by adequate appropriations for land acquisition, development, and operations shall
31 not apply to the authorization set forth in this act; provided, however, that the State may receive
32 donations of appropriate land and may purchase other needed lands for the Equine State Trail
33 with existing funds in the Land and Water Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the
34 Complete the Trails Fund, the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, and other available
35 sources of funding.

36 **RENAME THE OFFICIAL STATE FRUIT TO THE MUSCADINE GRAPE**

37 **SECTION 7.(a)** The General Assembly makes the following findings:

38 (1) North Carolina is the home of our nation's first cultivated grape, the variety of
39 native Muscadine grape known as Scuppernong.

40 (2) French explorers in 1524 first discovered Muscadine grapes while exploring
41 the Cape Fear River Valley, and later British explorers in 1584 and 1585
42 reported to Queen Elizabeth and Sir Walter Raleigh that the barrier islands
43 were full of grapes and the soil of the land was "so abounding with sweet trees
44 that bring rich and most pleasant gummies, grapes of such greatness, yet wild
45 as France, Spain and Italy hath not greater..."

46 (3) The thick skins, fruit seed, and sweet pulp and juice that characterize
47 Muscadine grapes make the native fruit a state treasure.

48 (4) In recent times, researchers have discovered that Muscadine grapes are rich in
49 antioxidants and phytochemicals, including resveratrol, among many others.
50
51

1 **SECTION 7.(b)** G.S. 145-18(a) reads as rewritten:

2 "(a) The official fruit of the State of North Carolina is the ~~Seppernong~~ Muscadine grape
3 (Vitis genus)."

4
5 **DESIGNATE THE LONGLEAF PINE AS THE EMBLEM REPRESENTING THE**
6 **TREES OF NORTH CAROLINA**

7 **SECTION 8.** G.S. 145-3 reads as rewritten:

8 "**§ 145-3. State tree.**

9 The pine is hereby adopted as the official State tree of the State of North ~~Carolina~~ Carolina,
10 and the longleaf pine (Pinus palustris) is designated as the emblem representing the trees of North
11 Carolina."

12
13 **PRESCRIBED BURNING ACT AMENDMENTS**

14 **SECTION 9.(a)** G.S. 106-966 reads as rewritten:

15 "**§ 106-966. Definitions.**

16 As used in this Article:

- 17 (1) "Certified prescribed burner" means an individual who has successfully
18 completed a certification program approved by the North Carolina Forest
19 Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.
- 20 (2) "Prescribed burning" means the planned and controlled application of fire to
21 ~~naturally occurring~~ vegetative fuels under safe specified weather and safe
22 environmental and other conditions, while following appropriate
23 precautionary measures that will confine the fire to a predetermined area and
24 accomplish the intended management objectives.
- 25 (3) "Prescription" means a written plan establishing the conditions and methods
26 for conducting a prescribed burn prepared by a certified prescribed burner for
27 starting, controlling, and extinguishing a prescribed burning."

28 **SECTION 9.(b)** G.S. 106-967 reads as rewritten:

29 "**§ 106-967. Immunity from liability.**

30 (a) Any prescribed burning conducted in compliance with G.S. 106-968 is in the public
31 interest and does not constitute a public or private nuisance.

32 (b) A landowner or the landowner's agent who conducts a prescribed burning in
33 compliance with G.S. 106-968 shall not be liable in any civil action for any damage or injury
34 caused by fire, including reignition of a smoldering, previously contained burn, or resulting from
35 smoke.

36 (c) Notwithstanding subsections (a) and (b), this section does not apply when a nuisance
37 or damage results from ~~a negligently or improperly conducted prescribed burning-gross~~
38 negligence.

39 (d) Notwithstanding subsections (a), (b) and (c), this section shall not apply to claims by
40 public utilities resulting from damage to their equipment or facilities, where a prescribed burn
41 proximately causes such damage.

42 (e) For purposes of this section, the term "public utility" means an electric power
43 supplier, as defined in 62-133.8(a)(3), a gas operator, as defined in 62-50(g), or a business
44 providing telecommunications service taxed under G.S. 105-164.4(a)(4c)."

45 **SECTION 9.(c)** G.S. 106-968 reads as rewritten:

46 "**§ 106-968. ~~Prescribed~~ Certified prescribed burning.**

47 (a) Prior to conducting a prescribed burning, a certified prescribed burner shall prepare
48 and provide to the landowner ~~shall obtain~~ a prescription for the prescribed ~~burning prepared by~~
49 ~~a certified prescribed burner and filed burning.~~ The certified prescribed burner shall also file the
50 prescription with the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and
51 Consumer Services. ~~A copy of the prescription shall be provided to the landowner. A Both the~~

1 landowner and the certified prescribed burner on site shall retain a copy of this prescription shall
2 be in the possession of the responsible burner on site throughout the duration of the prescribed
3 burning. The prescription shall include:

- 4 (1) The landowner's name and address.
- 5 (2) A description of the area to be burned.
- 6 (3) A map of the area to be burned.
- 7 (4) An estimate of tons of the fuel located on the area.
- 8 (5) The objectives of the prescribed burning.
- 9 (6) A list of the acceptable weather conditions and parameters for the prescribed
10 burning sufficient to minimize the likelihood of smoke damage and fire
11 escaping onto adjacent areas.
- 12 (7) The name of the certified prescribed burner responsible for conducting the
13 prescribed burning.
- 14 (8) A summary of the methods that are adequate for the particular circumstances
15 involved to be used to start, control, and extinguish the prescribed
16 burning-burning, including firebreaks and sufficient personnel and
17 firefighting equipment to contain the fire within the burn area.
 - 18 a. Fire spreading outside the authorized burn area on the day of the
19 prescribed burn ignition shall not constitute conclusive proof of
20 inadequate firebreaks, insufficient personnel, or a lack of firefighting
21 equipment.
 - 22 b. If the prescribed burn is contained within the authorized burn area
23 during the authorized period, there shall be a rebuttable presumption
24 that adequate firebreaks, sufficient personnel, and sufficient
25 firefighting equipment were present.
 - 26 c. Continued smoldering of a prescribed burn resulting in a subsequent
27 wildfire does not in itself constitute evidence of gross negligence
28 under G.S. 106-967.
- 29 (9) Provision for reasonable notice of the prescribed burning to be provided to
30 nearby-homes and businesses located adjacent to the burn site to avoid effects
31 on health and property.

32 (b) The prescribed burning shall be conducted by a certified prescribed burner in
33 accordance with a prescription that satisfies subsection (a) of this section. The certified prescribed
34 burner shall be present on the site and shall be in charge of the burning throughout the period of
35 the burning. A landowner may conduct a prescribed burning and be in compliance with this
36 Article without being a certified prescribed burner if the landowner is burning a tract of forestland
37 of 50 acres or less owned by that landowner and is following all conditions established in a
38 prescription prepared by a certified prescribed burner.

39 (c) Prior to conducting a prescribed burning, the landowner or the landowner's agent shall
40 obtain an open-burning permit under Article 78 of this Chapter from the North Carolina Forest
41 Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This open-burning permit must
42 remain in effect throughout the period of the prescribed burning. The prescribed burning shall be
43 conducted in compliance with all the following:

- 44 (1) The terms and conditions of the open-burning permit under Article 78 of this
45 Chapter.
- 46 (2) The State's air pollution control statutes under Article 21 and Article 21B of
47 Chapter 143 of the General Statutes and any rules adopted pursuant to these
48 statutes.
- 49 (3) Any applicable local ordinances relating to open burning.
- 50 (4) The smoke management guidelines adopted by the North Carolina Forest
51 Service of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

- 1 (5) Any rules adopted by the North Carolina Forest Service of the Department of
2 Agriculture and Consumer Services, to implement this Article.
3 (d) The North Carolina Forest Service may accept prescribed burner certification from
4 another State or other entity for the purpose of prescribed burning under this Article."
5

6 PROHIBIT USE OF AN UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEM NEAR A FOREST FIRE

7 SECTION 10.(a) Article 16B of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes is amended by
8 adding a new section to read:

9 "§ 15A-300.4. Use of an unmanned aircraft system near a forest fire prohibited.

10 (a) Prohibition. – No person, entity, or State agency shall use an unmanned aircraft
11 system within either a horizontal distance of 3,000 feet or a vertical distance of 3,000 feet from
12 any forest fire within the jurisdiction of the North Carolina Forest Service. For purposes of this
13 section, the horizontal distance shall extend outward from the furthest exterior perimeter of the
14 forest fire or forest fire control lines.

15 (b) Exceptions. – Unless the use of the unmanned aircraft system is otherwise prohibited
16 under State or federal law, the prohibitions in subsection (a) of this section do not apply to any
17 of the following:

- 18 (1) A person operating an unmanned aircraft system with the written consent of
19 the official in responsible charge of management of the forest fire.
20 (2) A law enforcement officer using an unmanned aircraft system in accordance
21 with G.S. 15A-300.1(c).
22 (3) A North Carolina Forest Service employee or a person acting under the
23 direction of a North Carolina Forest Service employee.

24 (c) Penalties. – The following penalties apply for violations of this section:

- 25 (1) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
26 of this section and such use is the proximate cause of the death of another
27 person is guilty of a Class D felony and shall also be fined not less than one
28 thousand dollars (\$1,000).
29 (2) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
30 of this section and such use is the proximate cause of serious bodily injury to
31 another person is guilty of a Class E felony and shall also be fined not less
32 than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).
33 (3) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
34 of this section and such use is the proximate cause of serious physical or
35 mental injury to another person is guilty of a Class F felony and shall also be
36 fined not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).
37 (4) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
38 of this section and such use interferes with emergency operations and such
39 interference proximately causes damage to any real or personal property or
40 any tree, wood, underwood, timber, garden, crops, vegetables, plants, lands,
41 springs, or any other matter or thing growing or being on the land is guilty of
42 a Class G felony and shall also be fined not less than one thousand dollars
43 (\$1,000).
44 (5) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
45 of this section and such use interferes with emergency operations is guilty of
46 a Class H felony and shall be fined not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).
47 (6) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
48 of this section and such use is the proximate cause of physical or mental injury
49 to another person is guilty of a Class I felony and shall also be fined not less
50 than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

1 (7) A person who uses an unmanned aircraft system in violation of subsection (a)
2 of this section and such use is not covered under another provision of law
3 providing greater punishment is guilty of a Class A1 misdemeanor and shall
4 be fined not less than one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

5 (d) Seizure, Forfeiture, and Disposition of Seized Property. – A law enforcement agency
6 may seize an unmanned aircraft system and any attached property used in violation of this
7 section. An unmanned aircraft system used in violation of this section and seized by a law
8 enforcement agency is subject to forfeiture and disposition pursuant to G.S. 18B-504. An
9 innocent owner or holder of a security interest applying to the court for release of the unmanned
10 aircraft system, in accordance with G.S. 18B-504(h), shall also provide proof of ownership or
11 security interest and written certification that the unmanned aircraft system will not be returned
12 to the person who was charged with the violation of subsection (a) of this section.

13 (e) Definitions. – For purposes of this section, the following definitions apply:

14 (1) Physical or mental injury. – Cuts, scrapes, bruises, or other physical or mental
15 injury that does not constitute serious bodily injury or serious physical or
16 mental injury.

17 (2) Serious bodily injury. – Bodily injury that creates a substantial risk of death,
18 or that causes serious permanent disfigurement, coma, a permanent or
19 protracted condition that causes extreme pain, or permanent or protracted loss
20 or impairment of the function of any bodily member or organ, or that results
21 in prolonged hospitalization.

22 (3) Serious physical or mental injury. – Physical or mental injury that causes great
23 pain and suffering."

24 **SECTION 10.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2023, and applies to
25 offenses committed on or after that date.

26 **AMEND TIMBER LARCENY STATUTE**

27 **SECTION 11.(a)** G.S. 14-135 reads as rewritten:

28 **"§ 14-135. Larceny of timber.**

29 (a) Offense. – Except as otherwise provided in subsection (b) of this section, a person
30 commits the offense of larceny of timber if the person does any of the following:

31 (1) Knowingly and willfully cuts down, injures, or removes any timber owned by
32 another person, without the consent of the owner of the land or the owner of
33 the timber, or without a lawful easement running with the land.

34 (2) Buys timber directly from the owner of the timber and fails to make payment
35 in full to the owner by (i) the date specified in the written timber sales
36 agreement or (ii) if there is no such agreement, 60 days from the date that the
37 buyer removes the timber from the property.

38 (3) Knowingly and willfully aids, hires, or counsels an individual to cut down,
39 injure, or remove any timber owned by another person without the consent of
40 the owner of the land or the owner of the timber, or without a lawful easement
41 running with the land.

42 (4) Knowingly and willfully transports forest products that have been cut down,
43 removed, obtained, or acquired from the property of a landowner without the
44 consent of the owner of the land or the owner of the timber, or without a lawful
45 easement running with the land.

46 (b) Exceptions. – The following are exceptions to the offense set forth in subsection (a)
47 of this section:

48 (1) A person is not guilty of an offense under subdivision (1) of subsection (a) of
49 this section if the person is an employee or agent of an electric power supplier,
50 as defined in G.S. 62-133.8, and either of the following conditions is met:
51

- 1 a. The person believed in good faith that consent of the owner had been
2 obtained prior to cutting down, injuring, or removing the timber.
- 3 b. The person believed in good faith that the cutting down, injuring, or
4 removing of the timber was permitted by a utility easement or was
5 necessary to remove a tree hazard. For purposes of this
6 ~~sub-subdivision, subsection,~~ the term "tree hazard" includes a dead or
7 dying tree, dead parts of a living tree, or an unstable living tree that is
8 within striking distance of an electric transmission line, electric
9 distribution line, or electric equipment and constitutes a hazard to the
10 line or equipment in the event of a tree failure.
- 11 (2) A person is not guilty of an offense under subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of
12 this section if either of the following conditions is met:
- 13 a. The person remitted payment in full within the time period set in
14 subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of this section to a person he or she
15 believed in good faith to be the rightful owner of the timber.
- 16 b. The person remitted payment in full to the owner of the timber within
17 the 10-day period set forth in subsection (c) of this section.
- 18 (3) A person is not guilty of an offense under subdivision (3) of subsection (a) of
19 this section if the person is an electric power supplier, as defined in
20 G.S. 62-133.8, and either of the following conditions is met:
- 21 a. The person believed in good faith that consent of the owner had been
22 obtained prior to aiding, hiring, or counseling the individual to cut
23 down, injure, or remove the timber.
- 24 b. The person believed in good faith that the cutting down, injuring, or
25 removing of the timber was permitted by a utility easement or was
26 necessary to remove a tree hazard.
- 27 (c) Prima Facie Evidence. – An owner of timber who does not receive payment in full
28 within the time period set in subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of this section may notify the timber
29 buyer in writing of the owner's demand for payment at the timber buyer's last known address by
30 certified mail or by personal delivery. The timber buyer's failure to make payment in full within
31 10 days after the mailing or personal delivery authorized under this subsection shall constitute
32 prima facie evidence of the timber buyer's intent to commit an offense under subdivision (2) of
33 subsection (a) of this section.
- 34 (d) Penalty; Restitution. – A person who commits an offense under subsection (a) of this
35 section is guilty of a Class G felony. Additionally, a defendant convicted of an offense under
36 subsection (a) of this section shall be ordered to make restitution to the timber owner in an amount
37 equal to either of the following:
- 38 (1) Three times the value of the timber cut down, injured, or removed in violation
39 of subdivision (1) of subsection (a) of this section.
- 40 (2) Three times the value of the timber bought but not paid for in violation of
41 subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of this section.
- 42 Restitution shall also include the cost incurred by the owner to determine the value of the
43 timber. For purposes of subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection, "value of the timber" shall be
44 based on the stumpage rate of the timber.
- 45 (e) Civil Remedies. – Nothing in this section shall affect any civil remedies available for
46 a violation of subsection (a) of this section.
- 47 (f) For purposes of this section, "person" means any individual, association, consortium,
48 corporation, partnership, unit of State or local government, or other group, entity, or
49 organization."

50 **SECTION 11.(b)** This section becomes effective December 1, 2023, and applies to
51 offenses committed on or after that date.

1
2 **LIMIT CIVIL PENALTIES FOR REMOVAL OF TIMBER IN A RIPARIAN BUFFER**
3 **TO THE VALUE OF THE TIMBER**

4 **SECTION 11.1.(a)** G.S. 143-215.6A is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

5 "(b2) A civil penalty issued by the Secretary pursuant to this section for removal of timber
6 in a riparian buffer in violation of rules applicable to that riparian buffer shall not exceed the
7 value of the timber removed from the riparian buffer."

8 **SECTION 11.1.(b)** This section becomes effective July 1, 2023, and applies to acts
9 committed on or after that date.

10
11 **ESTABLISH FORESTRY SERVICES AND ADVICE FUND**

12 **SECTION 12.** G.S. 106-1003 reads as rewritten:

13 **"§ 106-1003. ~~Deposit of receipts with State treasury.~~Forestry Services and Advice Fund.**

14 (a) The Forestry Services and Advice Fund is established as a special fund within the
15 Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, North Carolina Forest Service. All moneys
16 paid to the Commissioner for services rendered under the provisions of this Article shall be
17 deposited into the State treasury to the credit of the Department Fund. The Fund may also consist
18 of any gifts, bequests, or grants for the benefit of this Fund. No General Fund appropriations shall
19 be credited to this Fund.

20 (b) The Department shall use the Fund to develop, improve, repair, maintain, operate,
21 and otherwise invest in providing forestry services and advice to owners and operators of
22 forestland as authorized by this Article."

23
24 **SEDIMENTATION BUFFER AROUND TROUT WATERS**

25 **SECTION 13.(a)** G.S. 113A-52.01 reads as rewritten:

26 **"§ 113A-52.01. Applicability of this Article.**

27 (a) This Article shall not apply to the following land-disturbing ~~activities:~~activities
28 except as provided in subsection (b) of this section:

29 (1) Activities, including the production and activities relating or incidental to the
30 production of crops, grains, fruits, vegetables, ornamental and flowering
31 plants, dairy, livestock, poultry, and all other forms of agriculture undertaken
32 on agricultural land for the production of plants and animals useful to man,
33 including, but not limited to:

- 34 a. Forages and sod crops, grains and feed crops, tobacco, cotton, and
35 peanuts.
36 b. Dairy animals and dairy products.
37 c. Poultry and poultry products.
38 d. Livestock, including beef cattle, llamas, sheep, swine, horses, ponies,
39 mules, and goats.
40 e. Bees and apiary products.
41 f. Fur producing animals.
42 g. Mulch, ornamental plants, and other horticultural products. For
43 purposes of this section, "mulch" means substances composed
44 primarily of plant remains or mixtures of such substances.

45 ...

46 (b) Waters that have been classified as trout waters by the Environmental Management
47 Commission shall have an undisturbed, vegetated buffer zone 25 feet wide where activities
48 included under subdivision (a)(1) of this section are prohibited. The Commission, however, may
49 approve plans that include land-disturbing activity within the 25-foot buffer when the duration
50 of the disturbance would be temporary and the extent of the disturbance would be minimal in the

1 discretion of the Commission. The Commission may take any action reasonably necessary to
2 enforce this requirement."

3 **SECTION 13.(b)** This section becomes effective January 1, 2024, and applies to
4 tracts or portions of tracts on which activities set forth under G.S. 113A-52.01(a)(1), as amended
5 by this section, are initiated on or after that date.

6 7 **DIGESTER GENERAL PERMIT CLARIFICATION**

8 **SECTION 14.** G.S. 143-213(12a) reads as rewritten:

9 "(12a) The term "farm digester system" means a system, including all ~~associated~~
10 manure management equipment and lagoon covers, by which gases are
11 collected and processed from an animal waste management system for the
12 digestion of animal biomass ~~for use that may be used~~ as a renewable energy
13 resource. A farm digester system shall be considered an agricultural feedlot
14 activity within the meaning of "animal operation" and shall also be considered
15 a part of an "animal waste management system" as those terms are defined in
16 G.S. 143-215.10B."
17

18 **CLARIFY DEFINITION OF WETLANDS**

19 **SECTION 15.(a)** Definitions. – For purposes of this section and its implementation,
20 "Wetlands Definition" means 15A NCAC 02B .0202 (Definitions).

21 **SECTION 15.(b)** Wetlands Definition Rule. – Until the effective date of the revised
22 permanent rule that the Environmental Management Commission (Commission) is required to
23 adopt pursuant to subsection (d) of this section, the Commission shall implement the Wetlands
24 Definition Rule as provided in subsection (c) of this section.

25 **SECTION 15.(c)** Implementation. – Wetlands classified as waters of the State are
26 restricted to waters of the United States as defined by 33 C.F.R. § 328.3 and 40 C.F.R. § 230.3.
27 Wetlands do not include prior converted cropland as defined in the National Food Security Act
28 Manual, Fifth Edition, which is hereby incorporated by reference, not including subsequent
29 amendments and editions.

30 **SECTION 15.(d)** Additional Rulemaking Authority. – The Commission shall adopt
31 a rule to amend the Wetlands Definition Rule consistent with subsection (c) of this section.
32 Notwithstanding G.S. 150B-19(4), the rule adopted by the Commission pursuant to this section
33 shall be substantively identical to the provisions of subsection (c) of this section. Rules adopted
34 pursuant to this section are not subject to Part 3 of Article 2A of Chapter 150B of the General
35 Statutes. Rules adopted pursuant to this section shall become effective as provided in
36 G.S. 150B-21.3(b1), as though 10 or more written objections had been received as provided in
37 G.S. 150B-21.3(b2).

38 **SECTION 15.(e)** Sunset. – This section expires when permanent rules adopted as
39 required by subsection (d) of this section become effective.
40

41 **WASTEWATER AMENDMENTS**

42 **SECTION 16.(a)** Definitions. – For purposes of this section and its implementation,
43 "Prefabricated Permeable Block Panel Systems Rule" means 15A NCAC 18E .0905
44 (Prefabricated Permeable Block Panel Systems).

45 **SECTION 16.(b)** Prefabricated Permeable Block Panel Systems Rule. – Until the
46 effective date of the revised permanent rule that the Commission for Public Health is required to
47 adopt pursuant to subsection (d) of this section, the Commission shall implement the
48 Prefabricated Permeable Block Panel Systems Rule as provided in subsection (c) of this section.

49 **SECTION 16.(c)** Implementation. – Prefabricated permeable block panel system
50 trenches shall be located a minimum of 8 feet on center or three times the trench width. When
51 used in sand-lined trench systems, bed, or fill systems, prefabricated permeable block panel

1 systems shall use the equivalent trench width of 6 feet to calculate the minimum trench length
2 unless otherwise instructed by the manufacturer on a case-by-case basis.

3 **SECTION 16.(d)** Additional Rulemaking Authority. – The Commission shall adopt
4 a rule to amend the Prefabricated Permeable Block Panel Systems Rule consistent with
5 subsection (c) of this section. Notwithstanding G.S. 150B-19(4), the rule adopted by the
6 Commission pursuant to this section shall be substantively identical to the provisions of
7 subsection (c) of this section. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are not subject to Part 3 of
8 Article 2A of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. Rules adopted pursuant to this section shall
9 become effective as provided in G.S. 150B-21.3(b1), as though 10 or more written objections
10 had been received as provided in G.S. 150B-21.3(b2).

11 **SECTION 16.(e)** Sunset. – This section expires when permanent rules adopted as
12 required by subsection (d) of this section become effective.

13 **SECTION 17.(a)** G.S. 130A-343 reads as rewritten:

14 "**§ 130A-343. Approval of on-site subsurface wastewater systems.**

15 ...

16 (h) Accepted Wastewater Dispersal Systems. – A manufacturer of an Innovative
17 wastewater dispersal system or other approved trench dispersal system specifically identified in
18 a rule adopted by the Commission that has been in general use in this State for a minimum of
19 five years may petition the Commission to have the system designated as an Accepted wastewater
20 system as provided in this subsection. The manufacturer shall provide the Commission with the
21 data and findings of all prior evaluations of the performance of the system in this State and other
22 states referenced in the petition, including disclosure of any conditions found to result in
23 unacceptable structural integrity, treatment, or hydraulic performance. In addition, the
24 manufacturer shall provide the Commission with information sufficient to enable the
25 Commission to fully evaluate the performance of the system in this State for at least the five-year
26 period immediately preceding the petition. The Commission shall designate a wastewater
27 dispersal system as an Accepted wastewater system only if it finds that there is clear, convincing,
28 and cogent evidence based on actual field surveys and county activity reports (i) to confirm the
29 findings made by the Department at the time the Department approved the system as a wastewater
30 dispersal system and (ii) that the system performs in a manner that is equal or superior to a
31 conventional or Accepted wastewater system under actual field conditions in this State. The
32 Commission shall specify the circumstances in which use of the system is appropriate and any
33 conditions and limitations related to the use of the system. However, the Commission shall not
34 include more restrictive conditions and limitations established in the approval of a wastewater
35 system as Accepted that are not included in the approval of the wastewater system as Innovative
36 or as otherwise approved by rule. If the Department designates a wastewater dispersal system as
37 an Accepted wastewater system pursuant to this section, the following shall apply:

38 (1) The approval shall be limited to the manufacturer who submitted the petition
39 and received the Accepted status from the Commission.

40 (2) Neither the Commission, the Department, or any local health department shall
41 condition, delay, or deny the substitution of any Accepted wastewater system
42 based on location of nitrification lines when all parts of the dispersal field can
43 be installed within the approved initial dispersal field area while complying
44 with all Commission rules.

45 (i) Nonproprietary Wastewater Systems. – The Department may initiate a review of a
46 nonproprietary wastewater system and approve the system for use as a provisional wastewater
47 system or an innovative wastewater system without having received an application from a
48 manufacturer. ~~The Department may recommend that the Commission designate a nonproprietary~~
49 ~~wastewater system as an accepted wastewater system without having received a petition from a~~
50 ~~manufacturer.~~

51 ...

1 (j2) Clarification of Use of Native Backfill. – In considering the use of backfill material
2 in subsurface trench dispersal products, neither the Commission nor the Department shall
3 condition, delay, or deny the approval of a subsurface trench dispersal product based on a
4 non-native backfill material requirement without the prior approval of the manufacturer. With
5 respect to approvals already issued by the Department or the Commission that include conditions
6 or requirements specifying the use of non-native backfill material, the Department or
7 Commission, as applicable, shall reissue those approvals, at the written request of the
8 manufacturer, without conditions or requirements relating to the use of non-native backfill
9 material.

10 "

11 **SECTION 17.(b)** This section is effective when it becomes law and applies
12 retroactively to any wastewater system approvals issued by the Commission for Public Health or
13 the Department of Health and Human Services.

14
15 **SEVERABILITY CLAUSE AND EFFECTIVE DATE**

16 **SECTION 18.(a)** If any provision of this act or the application thereof to any person
17 or circumstances is held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications
18 of this act that can be given effect without the invalid provision or application and, to this end,
19 the provisions of this act are declared to be severable.

20 **SECTION 18.(b)** Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes
21 law.