



COVID-19 County Alert System

Updated November 23, 2020

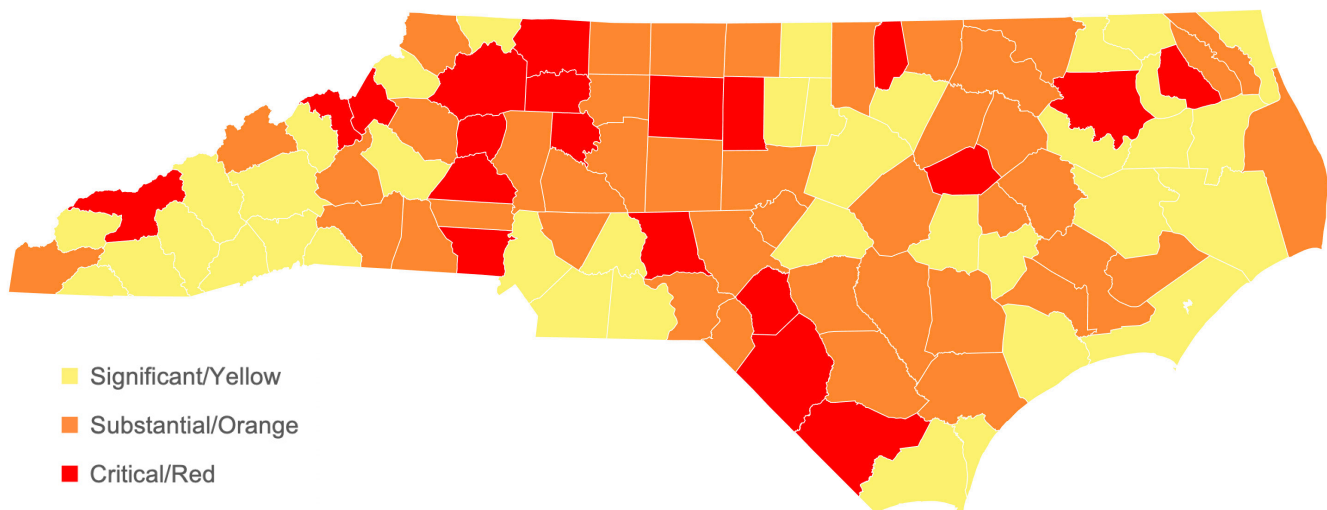
Introduction

North Carolina is experiencing high levels of community transmission of COVID-19 statewide, but the virus is impacting some counties particularly hard. The State has established a COVID-19 County Alert System to give individuals, businesses, community organizations, and public officials another tool to understand how their county is faring and to make decisions about actions to slow the spread of the virus. The COVID-19 County Alert System uses metrics informed by the White House Coronavirus Task Force and North Carolina's key metrics to categorize counties into three tiers:

1. **Yellow:** Significant Community Spread
2. **Orange:** Substantial Community Spread
3. **Red:** Critical Community Spread

Because no one metric provides a complete picture, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses a combination of three metrics: case rate, the percent of tests that are positive, and hospital impact within the county.

NC Counties by Tier: Data from November 6 through November 19, 2020



A complete list of counties and their metrics is listed at the end of the report.

County Metrics

The COVID-19 County Alert System uses a combination of metrics to determine whether a county meets criteria to be in the red or orange tier. These metrics provide information about the amount of viral spread and hospital impact in the county.

How Tiers are Determined:

To be assigned to the red or orange tier, a county must meet the threshold for case rate for that tier **AND** the threshold for either percent positive OR hospital impact.

- **Case Rate:** The number of new cases in 14 days per 100,000 people
- **Percent Positive:** The percent of tests that are positive over 14 days
- **Hospital Impact:** A composite score based on the impact that COVID-19 has had on hospitals including percent of COVID-19 hospitalizations, COVID-19 related visits to the Emergency Department, staffed open hospital beds, and critical staffing shortages over 14 days

| | Counties must meet: | And meet one of these: | |
|-----------------------------|---|------------------------|--|
| | Case rate | Percent positive | Hospital Impact within the county* |
| Critical (Red) | >200/100,000 new cases in 14 days with at least 42 cases in 14 days. | >10% | High Impact on county hospital(s) |
| Substantial (Orange) | 101-200/100,000 new cases in 14 days with at least 21 cases in 14 days. | 8-10% | Moderate Impact on county hospital(s) |

*Counties without a hospital are assigned the average hospital impact score from the county where the highest percentage of their inpatient hospital admissions occurred.

Counties that do not meet criteria for the red or orange tier are categorized as being in the yellow tier (significant community spread) and should continue to be vigilant to prevent further spread of COVID-19.

Recommended Actions for Individuals, Businesses and Community Organizations, and Public Officials

There are critical actions we can all take to slow the spread of COVID-19, regardless of whether your county is currently in the yellow, orange, or red tier. Individuals, businesses, community organizations, and public officials all have a responsibility to take these recommended actions, in addition to following the requirements in existing [Executive Orders](#) and [NCDHHS guidance](#). Red and orange counties need to do even more to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their communities; it is strongly recommended these counties go further and build upon current requirements as outlined in the recommendations below.

Note: If more than 25% of cases are linked to outbreaks in congregate living settings, different and additional outbreak mitigation steps may be recommended. Congregate living setting outbreaks are often linked to spread in the community through staff who are exposed in the community and bring the virus into the setting or vice versa.



Individual Actions

ALL INDIVIDUALS

- Wear a mask at all times outside the home and maintain physical distance from people who do not live in your household
- Download the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#) and share with friends and family; if you test positive, enter your pin into the app to notify close contacts to get tested
- Get a flu shot
- Get [tested](#) if [symptomatic](#) or if you think you have been exposed to COVID-19
- Answer the call and participate in contact tracing
- Avoid large gatherings and crowds
- If you must host or attend a gathering, limit attendance to 10 or fewer, host outdoors, and ventilate indoor spaces as much as possible (e.g., keep windows open) (resources: [Guidance for Private Social Gatherings](#))
- Avoid non-essential travel

INDIVIDUALS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Individuals in red and orange counties should take the actions listed for All Individuals AND the actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- Limit mixing between households and minimize the number of people in your social circle
- Avoid settings where people congregate, like outdoor bars and night clubs (in NC, indoor bars remain closed and indoor night clubs must remain below indoor mass gathering limits)
- If patronizing restaurants, consider ordering take out from restaurants and/or eating outdoors socially distanced
- Individuals who are [high-risk for developing serious illness](#) should consider staying at home as much as possible
- Reduce your public interactions to mainly essential activities like going to work or school, caring for family members, buying food, getting health care or picking up medications



Businesses & Community Organization Actions

ALL BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- Share messages about the importance of wearing a mask and [practicing the 3Ws](#)
- Post [signs about 3Ws at entrances in accordance with executive order](#)
- Provide face coverings to employees and patrons (resources: certain organizations can [request PPE](#))
- Support employees to stay home when sick (resources: [Check My Symptoms](#))
- Strongly encourage all employees download and use the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#)
- Follow [general guidance for businesses and organizations](#) as well as [industry-specific guidance](#)
- Take actions from the [business toolkit](#)
- Community and religious organizations are strongly encouraged to:
 - Hold meetings, events, and/or services online/virtually, or
 - Limit occupancy at indoor meetings, events, or services to ensure social distancing and require face coverings
- Follow guidance in [Places of Worship Guidance](#) and [Faith Leaders Toolkit](#)

BUSINESSES AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Businesses and community organizations in red and orange counties should take actions listed for All Businesses and Community Organizations AND actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- All businesses are strongly encouraged to implement teleworking the greatest extent possible and cancel any non-essential work travel
- Promote [Find My Testing Place](#) website to employees
- Require all employees to participate in [Count on Me NC training](#)
- Manufacturing, construction, food processing, farms – request a consultation from NCDHHS on reducing workplace transmission (919-707-5900)
- [Institutes of Higher Education](#)
 - Adopt strict restrictions on student gatherings and events on-campus and off-campus
 - Close indoor dining and move to grab and go
 - Consider moving to single occupancy dorms or other single occupancy living arrangements
- Community and religious organizations should avoid any in-person indoor meetings, events, worship services, or other gatherings above the indoor mass gathering limit



PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN ALL COUNTIES

- Role model and actively [promote 3Ws](#). Always wear a mask when you are with people you do not live with
- Post [signs about the 3Ws](#) in all public buildings
- Work with local media to share messages about the importance of wearing a mask and [practicing the 3Ws](#)
- Have all public employees download and use the [SlowCOVIDNC app](#)

PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN RED AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Public officials in red and orange counties should take actions listed for Public Officials in All Counties AND actions below to slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community.

- Meet with State officials to discuss plans for mitigating spread
- Work with the state to expand availability of [no-cost testing](#) to residents, especially prior to holiday travel
- Work with the state to increase availability of non-congregate housing
- Increase messaging on the risk of serious disease for older individuals and individuals in all age groups with certain underlying medical conditions [identified by CDC](#), and recommend those individuals stay at home as much as possible
- Adopt ordinances that allow for the use of civil penalties for enforcement of the statewide restrictions
- Increase enforcement of mass gathering limits and masks with local law enforcement or other local regulators or inspectors, such as the fire marshal
- Consider adopting local ordinances to end alcohol sales for onsite consumption at an earlier time
- Consider adopting local ordinances with additional restrictions for public facing businesses

State Resources for Counties

The State can provide additional resources to support counties. Public officials from counties that are in the red or orange tier, in coordination with their local health departments, should contact the State to meet to discuss plans for mitigating spread. Our intent is to prioritize resources for counties in red and orange tiers as we make resource allocation decisions.



Prevention communications

- Targeted promotion of prevention campaigns/communications, including to specific sub-populations in the county
- Direct outreach to stakeholder groups through webinars, presentations, or town halls
- NCDHHS leadership can speak on local media outlets about prevention



Enforcement

- Department of Public Safety outreach to local law enforcement
- NCDHHS to issue warning letters to establishments not complying with the Governor's Executive Order
- NCDHHS Secretary to issue imminent hazard abatement orders to establishments where there is an imminent threat to the public health
- Increased communications to Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE)/Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) Commission, and other regulatory groups to enforce



Ramp up testing

- Deploy state and/or federally sponsored testing vendors, if not already present in county, to host community testing events
- Deploy rapid, point-of-care antigen tests for targeted testing
- Assist in identifying additional capacity for specimen processing
- Help county plan local testing event(s), including finding additional local partners to engage



Ramp up support to Local Health Departments

- Surge staff for data entry, case investigation, and contact tracing
- Provide technical assistance on case investigation and contact tracing
- Provide technical assistance on reducing workplace transmission at manufacturing, construction, food processing plants, and farms



Wrap-around services

- Provide technical assistance on setup, funding, and reimbursement for non-congregate sheltering
- Help promote Support Services program (relief payments, food assistance, COVID-19 supplies, transportation, and medication delivery) in counties with services available

Frequently Asked Questions

If my county is in the red or orange tier, what can I do to help my county move out of the red or orange tier?

Individuals, business leaders, community leaders, and public officials all have actions they can take to help slow the spread of COVID-19 in their community (outlined on page 3 of this report).

How were these metrics selected?

The selected metrics align with the White House Coronavirus Task Force for cases per 100,000 individuals and for percent positive. Hospital stakeholders were consulted on how to best measure the impact of the pandemic on individual hospitals.

What is a case rate and how is it calculated?

To compare counties with different populations to one another, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses a case rate. This is the same case rate measure that the White House Coronavirus Task Force uses to compare counties and states. It shows how many new cases there are per 100,000 people in the county over a 14 day period.

How is percent of tests that are positive determined?

The percent of tests that are positive is the number of positive COVID-19 molecular (PCR) test results divided by the total number of molecular (PCR) test results during the period of interest. This calculation only includes results from laboratories that electronically report both positive and negative results to NCDHHS. Antigen tests are excluded from percent positivity calculations to align with current CDC definitions used to calculate percent positivity.

How is hospital impact measured?

Hospital impact is based on a composite score of four measures:

1. Percent of hospitalizations from COVID-19
2. COVID-19 related visits to the Emergency Department
3. Total number of open beds for which the hospital has people to staff*
4. Critical Staffing Shortages

*Patients cannot be placed in an open bed if there are not the necessary number of staff to provide support.

What if my county doesn't have a hospital or has more than one hospital?

Counties without a hospital are assigned the average hospital impact score from the county where the highest percentage of their inpatient hospital admissions occurred. Counties with multiple hospitals received the average composite score from all the hospitals in the county.

What happens if my county's case rate, percent positive, or hospital impact measures fall into different tiers?

A county must meet the criteria for case rate AND either percent positive or hospital impact to be in a red or orange tier. For example, if a county meets the orange tier criteria for case rate but meets the red tier criteria for percent positive and hospital impact, then the county will be assigned to the orange tier. Alternatively, if a county meets the red tier criteria for case rate, but meets the orange tier criteria for percent positive and hospital impact, then the county will be assigned to the orange tier.

Frequently Asked Questions (CONTINUED)

Why doesn't the COVID-19 County Alert System use Emergency Department visits for COVID-Like Illness?

Emergency department (ED) visits for COVID-Like Illness are closely tracked at the state and regional level, but are less useful at the county level particularly for counties with smaller populations and fewer ED visits. Instead, the COVID-19 County Alert System uses the numbers of COVID-19 -related ED visits that are directly reported daily by hospitals.

What if my county's case rate is high, but there are only a small number of cases?

Many small counties may have a high case rate, but a relatively small number of cases because the county has a smaller population. To account for this, there is a minimum number of cases that counties must have to be categorized as red or orange (42 cases in 14 days for red tier; 21 cases in 14 days for orange tier).

What if a large number of my county's cases are associated with a congregate living setting outbreak?

Congregate living setting outbreaks (including long-term care and correctional facilities) are often linked to spread in the community through staff who are exposed in the community and bring the virus into the setting or vice versa. Cases in congregate living settings are included in the case rate. Different response measures may be needed to mitigate the outbreaks in counties where a large proportion of cases are in congregate living settings.

How often will the COVID-19 County Alert System be updated?

NCDHHS will publish this report every other week.

How can I see how my county is doing after this report is published?

County metrics are published on the NCDHHS public dashboard. You can go to the [NCDHHS COVID-19 dashboard](#) to monitor your county's [case rate](#) and [percent positive](#). County officials can engage with their local hospitals to understand where and how they need support.

What should schools/school districts do if they are in a county that is in the red or orange tier?

School leaders should continue to work with their local health departments to determine the best plan for their district and/or school. Schools may continue to stay open according to plans allowed by the State (as of November 17, elementary schools can open in Plan A and middle and high schools can open in Plan B). Strict adherence to the prevention strategies in the [StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit \(K-12\)](#) are critically important. Additional information on CDC Indicators for Dynamic School Decision-Making found at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/indicators.html>.

What should counties do if they are in the yellow tier?

All executive orders apply to all North Carolina counties and their residents. Individuals, businesses, community organizations, and public officials in counties in the yellow tier should:

- Follow Executive Orders
- Continue prevention messaging
- Take recommended actions outlined on pages 3-5

Metrics by County

Metrics are based on data from November 6, 2020 to November 19, 2020.

* Counties that did meet the case rate threshold, but did not meet the minimum number of cases for the red tier (42 cases) or orange tier (21 cases).

^ Percent Positivity estimates in this table are rounded to the nearest decimal place. Tiers are assigned based on unrounded percent positivity estimates.

| County | Final Tier | 14-day Case Rate Per 100,000 | 14-day Percent Positive [^] | Hospital Impact |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Alamance County | Critical/Red | 511.5 | 8.8% | High Impact |
| Alexander County | Critical/Red | 954.7 | 16.4% | Low Impact |
| Alleghany County | Significant/Yellow | 278.4* | 5.8% | Low Impact |
| Anson County | Significant/Yellow | 400.9 | 6.5% | Low Impact |
| Ashe County | Substantial/Orange | 580.8 | 9.9% | Low Impact |
| Avery County | Critical/Red | 871.4 | 13.5% | Low Impact |
| Beaufort County | Significant/Yellow | 259.6 | 6.3% | Low Impact |
| Bertie County | Critical/Red | 501.4 | 10.4% | Low Impact |
| Bladen County | Substantial/Orange | 400.3 | 8.8% | Low Impact |
| Brunswick County | Significant/Yellow | 270.3 | 7.0% | Low Impact |
| Buncombe County | Significant/Yellow | 240.4 | 4.6% | Low Impact |
| Burke County | Significant/Yellow | 529.4 | 6.2% | Low Impact |
| Cabarrus County | Substantial/Orange | 438.0 | 9.5% | Low Impact |
| Caldwell County | Substantial/Orange | 489.2 | 8.1% | Moderate Impact |
| Camden County | Substantial/Orange | 220.9* | 10.2% | Low Impact |
| Carteret County | Significant/Yellow | 331.1 | 5.8% | Low Impact |
| Caswell County | Substantial/Orange | 442.4 | 8.8% | Low Impact |
| Catawba County | Critical/Red | 664.4 | 10.6% | Moderate Impact |
| Chatham County | Substantial/Orange | 273.9 | 6.0% | Moderate Impact |
| Cherokee County | Substantial/Orange | 269.1 | 8.1% | Low Impact |
| Chowan County | Significant/Yellow | 279.7* | 4.4% | Low Impact |
| Clay County | Significant/Yellow | 160.3* | 2.1% | Low Impact |
| Cleveland County | Substantial/Orange | 476.8 | 9.5% | Low Impact |
| Columbus County | Critical/Red | 983.6 | 18.1% | Moderate Impact |
| Craven County | Substantial/Orange | 325.0 | 5.9% | Moderate Impact |
| Cumberland County | Substantial/Orange | 322.8 | 9.2% | Low Impact |

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

| County | Final Tier | 14-day Case Rate Per 100,000 | 14-day Percent Positive [^] | Hospital Impact |
|------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Currituck County | Significant/Yellow | 223.3 | 8.0% | Low Impact |
| Dare County | Substantial/Orange | 413.4 | 7.3% | Moderate Impact |
| Davidson County | Substantial/Orange | 433.7 | 9.0% | Low Impact |
| Davie County | Critical/Red | 609.2 | 12.2% | Low Impact |
| Duplin County | Substantial/Orange | 434.1 | 6.6% | Moderate Impact |
| Durham County | Significant/Yellow | 312.3 | 6.0% | Low Impact |
| Edgecombe County | Substantial/Orange | 433.2 | 8.7% | Moderate Impact |
| Forsyth County | Substantial/Orange | 573.4 | 9.6% | Low Impact |
| Franklin County | Significant/Yellow | 337.2 | 7.1% | Low Impact |
| Gaston County | Critical/Red | 532.7 | 9.5% | High Impact |
| Gates County | Significant/Yellow | 216.2* | 7.3% | Low Impact |
| Graham County | Significant/Yellow | 130.3* | 2.1% | Low Impact |
| Granville County | Substantial/Orange | 395.4 | 4.7% | Moderate Impact |
| Greene County | Substantial/Orange | 569.6 | 7.5% | Moderate Impact |
| Guilford County | Critical/Red | 467.6 | 8.8% | High Impact |
| Halifax County | Substantial/Orange | 501.9 | 9.8% | Moderate Impact |
| Harnett County | Significant/Yellow | 335.4 | 7.8% | Low Impact |
| Haywood County | Significant/Yellow | 279.2 | 7.9% | Low Impact |
| Henderson County | Significant/Yellow | 242.7 | 4.8% | Low Impact |
| Hertford County | Significant/Yellow | 215.4 | 7.6% | Low Impact |
| Hoke County | Critical/Red | 374.8 | 14.2% | Low Impact |
| Hyde County | Significant/Yellow | 60.8 | 1.8% | Moderate Impact |
| Iredell County | Substantial/Orange | 390.0 | 8.8% | Moderate Impact |
| Jackson County | Significant/Yellow | 348.2 | 7.0% | Low Impact |
| Johnston County | Substantial/Orange | 404.6 | 9.5% | Low Impact |
| Jones County | Substantial/Orange | 318.5* | 4.1% | Moderate Impact |
| Lee County | Substantial/Orange | 239.6 | 6.8% | Moderate Impact |
| Lenoir County | Significant/Yellow | 541.6 | 6.2% | Low Impact |
| Lincoln County | Substantial/Orange | 526.1 | 9.4% | Moderate Impact |
| Macon County | Significant/Yellow | 295.6 | 6.7% | Low Impact |

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

| County | Final Tier | 14-day Case Rate Per 100,000 | 14-day Percent Positive [^] | Hospital Impact |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Madison County | Substantial/Orange | 524.0 | 8.9% | Low Impact |
| Martin County | Significant/Yellow | 311.9 | 5.2% | Low Impact |
| McDowell County | Substantial/Orange | 548.6 | 7.4% | Moderate Impact |
| Mecklenburg County | Significant/Yellow | 393.8 | 7.6% | Low Impact |
| Mitchell County | Critical/Red | 895.5 | 12.8% | Low Impact |
| Montgomery County | Critical/Red | 312.8 | 10.1% | Low Impact |
| Moore County | Substantial/Orange | 304.3 | 7.2% | Moderate Impact |
| Nash County | Substantial/Orange | 464.5 | 8.4% | Low Impact |
| New Hanover County | Significant/Yellow | 350.1 | 7.1% | Low Impact |
| Northampton County | Substantial/Orange | 626.2 | 9.8% | Moderate Impact |
| Onslow County | Significant/Yellow | 450.6 | 7.0% | Low Impact |
| Orange County | Significant/Yellow | 262.7 | 3.4% | Low Impact |
| Pamlico County | Substantial/Orange | 275.0* | 5.2% | Moderate Impact |
| Pasquotank County | Substantial/Orange | 243.6 | 8.4% | Low Impact |
| Pender County | Substantial/Orange | 328.3 | 9.0% | Low Impact |
| Perquimans County | Critical/Red | 326.8 | 11.5% | Low Impact |
| Person County | Significant/Yellow | 298.8 | 7.0% | Low Impact |
| Pitt County | Substantial/Orange | 433.8 | 7.0% | Moderate Impact |
| Polk County | Significant/Yellow | 164.1 | 4.6% | Low Impact |
| Randolph County | Substantial/Orange | 518.6 | 10.0% | Moderate Impact |
| Richmond County | Substantial/Orange | 508.6 | 8.9% | Low Impact |
| Robeson County | Critical/Red | 422.6 | 10.3% | Low Impact |
| Rockingham County | Substantial/Orange | 473.6 | 8.8% | Low Impact |
| Rowan County | Substantial/Orange | 494.1 | 9.9% | Low Impact |
| Rutherford County | Substantial/Orange | 432.6 | 8.5% | Moderate Impact |
| Sampson County | Substantial/Orange | 574.5 | 9.5% | Low Impact |
| Scotland County | Substantial/Orange | 413.5 | 9.0% | Moderate Impact |
| Stanly County | Significant/Yellow | 383.7 | 7.2% | Low Impact |

Metrics by County (CONTINUED)

| County | Final Tier | 14-day Case Rate Per 100,000 | 14-day Percent Positive [^] | Hospital Impact |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Stokes County | Substantial/Orange | 517.6 | 8.4% | Moderate Impact |
| Surry County | Critical/Red | 561.4 | 10.1% | Moderate Impact |
| Swain County | Critical/Red | 336.3 | 14.2% | Low Impact |
| Transylvania County | Significant/Yellow | 142.5 | 5.2% | Low Impact |
| Tyrrell County | Significant/Yellow | 99.6 | 3.3% | Low Impact |
| Union County | Significant/Yellow | 359.4 | 6.3% | Low Impact |
| Vance County | Critical/Red | 577.1 | 10.4% | Moderate Impact |
| Wake County | Significant/Yellow | 309.9 | 5.7% | Low Impact |
| Warren County | Substantial/Orange | 304.1 | 7.0% | Moderate Impact |
| Washington County | Significant/Yellow | 181.3 | 3.3% | Low Impact |
| Watauga County | Significant/Yellow | 361.4 | 5.4% | Low Impact |
| Wayne County | Significant/Yellow | 364.7 | 6.3% | Low Impact |
| Wilkes County | Critical/Red | 638.8 | 10.7% | Low Impact |
| Wilson County | Critical/Red | 501.2 | 7.9% | High Impact |
| Yadkin County | Critical/Red | 568.1 | 10.2% | Low Impact |
| Yancey County | Significant/Yellow | 619.8 | 7.4% | Low Impact |



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