

## **COMMITMENT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

**Approved by NC State University Board of Trustees,  
May 10, 1999**

Mankind has the ability to make development sustainable-to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. NC State is committed to the concept of environmental as well as economic sustainability. It will focus its processes to promote environmental sustainability in the following ways:

**NC State publicly declares its commitment to protecting and enhancing the environment for future generations through its educational mission.**

**First, we will encourage and provide a high level of support for strengthening undergraduate and graduate programs that have a concentrated focus on environmental issues.** Further, we will conduct a comprehensive review of all undergraduate curricula to determine whether we offer a desired level of environmental literacy to our students. Since universities educate most of the leaders of society's institutions and the teachers who educate children, the most positive influence our university can have is to turn out environmentally literate citizens. We need not only to take a closer look at our degree programs, general education requirements, and college structure, but also to consider innovations like a living/learning environmental education center where the latest practices in sustainability can be developed, utilized, and demonstrated by students and faculty.

**Second, we will, in collaboration with our sister educational institutions, provide the new ideas, technologies, and best practices that will help society-including business, industry, and agriculture-meet this enormous challenge.** As North Carolina's land-grant Research I university, NC State is uniquely positioned to develop and disseminate alternative solutions to the most pressing issues facing society. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to find ways to provide food, housing, and an acceptable quality of life for the Earth's expected six, eight, and perhaps twelve billion people, while acknowledging the higher responsibility to our children and all future generations by enhancing the health of the world's vital ecological processes. These two goals are clearly interdependent.

**NC State publicly declares its commitment to using and managing its own physical environment in ways that lead toward sustainability.**

If we wish to play a meaningful role in helping society at large meet the challenge described above, we must be sure that we, ourselves, apply the best ideas, technologies, policies and practices on our own campus.

**First, we will revisit the university's strategic plan and other seminal planning documents to ensure that our commitment to protecting and improving both campus and world environment is clear.** Our institutional vision and goals serve as criteria and justification for major decisions, and environmental health and impact should not be absent from those decisions.

**Second, we will begin a campus-wide dialogue to develop a vision of a sustainable, NC State environment to serve as the basis for short-, mid-, and long-term action plans that can be monitored by using specified indicators of progress.**

Rather than convene yet another environmental commission, the administration can charge every college, department, unit, and existing committee to reflect on its operations and interpret and enrich the principles included here for all their operations and activities. All such units will be responsible for developing a set of guiding principles for their own actions and operations. Through this charge, not only will NC State engage in a grassroots process for evolving a set of guiding principles, but will also educate the entire faculty, staff, administration, and student body on issues of sustainability.

**Third, we will agree on a set of principles of organizational sustainability that will be the guideposts for all future actions related to the health of NC State's physical environment.** The principles adopted by individual units will be reported back to a small steering group appointed by the chancellor and provost. Building upon this grass roots process, the group will develop a set of guiding principles for the University as a whole. These could include (but not be limited to) such statements as the following:

We will not allow the degradation of the quality of our campus' water, air, or soils.

Every structure and system added or renovated shall-through its design, construction and use-not only protect the environment but also improve the existing environmental quality.

In all our actions, programs, and plans, we will acknowledge and demand of ourselves the constant need to protect, conserve, and increase the biodiversity of the surrounding environment.

Our buildings shall not only be healthy places to live, work, and play, but also generate energy and resources rather than just "sinks" for the same.

Our university shall move toward modeling our operations on the workings of Nature, which has cyclical systems (eliminating the

concept of waste), functions only on current solar income (making this transition in 20 years), and embraces diversity (thriving, like Nature, on differences and perishing under the imbalance of uniformity).

**Fourth, we will activate a process of collecting and organizing an ecological audit that will allow us to honestly evaluate our actions and progress.** This action acknowledges the need for baseline data on our own environment, so that innovations can be monitored and openly evaluated. It can also become the departure point for our research in sustainability and a basis for our outreach efforts to the public at large.

**Fifth, we will support efforts of the Governor and of the state government to elevate the attention of all state agencies to environmental sustainability.** In 1988, Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. called on all state agencies to identify plans and new initiatives to assure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities for environmental stewardship. NC State will play a leadership role in state government programs related to environmental sustainability.

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As a land-grant university, NC State is committed to building on the collective wisdom of the public citizenry. With the largest amalgamation of teachers and scientists in North Carolina working on environmental issues, NC State is ideally poised to work with the Governor's Office to forge a statewide vision of what the citizens want their environment to be. NC State's educational mission requires a commitment to becoming a model of sustainability through research, teaching, and action.

It is often said that each journey begins with a single step. For NC State, that step is a commitment to honesty in evaluating our own environmental impact. As we journey, we can constantly remind ourselves to pay attention to generational pulses, gauging our success by considering the environment and the quality of life we are passing on to our children. As Chief Seattle reputedly wrote, "We did not inherit the Earth from our parents. We are borrowing it from our children."

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