

## **Final Notice and Public Explanation of a Proposed Activity in a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard Designated Floodplain or Wetland**

To: All interested Agencies, Groups and Individuals

This is to give notice that North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDOC), Division of Community Revitalization (DCR), as the responsible entity under 24 CFR Part 58, has conducted an evaluation as required by Executive Orders 11988, as amended by Executive Order 13690, and Executive Order 11990, in accordance with HUD regulations at 24 CFR 55.20 in Subpart C Procedures for Making Determinations on Floodplain Management and Wetlands Protection. Although Executive Order 13690 was revoked on January 20, 2025, projects receiving HUD funding still must comply with the FFRMS standards in accordance with HUD's Final Rule, published on April 23, 2024. The activity is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program.

DCR is proposing to implement the additional single-family (1-4 unit) housing recovery programs of Buyout (including demolition for redevelopment and return to greenspace) and Relocation of program homes (both within an existing lot or onto a previously undisturbed lot). DCR previously considered the housing recovery programs including Reconstruction and Rehabilitation of single-family (1-4 unit) Housing. Collectively, these programs are part of the Renew NC program. Their goal is to assist homeowners and rental unit owners and tenants that have been and continue to be affected by Hurricane Helene. Renew NC intends to facilitate the buyout, reimbursement, rehabilitation, relocation, and reconstruction of single-family housing units (residential dwellings with a maximum of 1-4 units per property/activity) damaged by Hurricane Helene. Although individual project locations are not known at this time, project sites will be located within the eligible Program area, which is comprised of sixteen (16) counties, specifically, the counties of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Clay, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey; and the sovereign lands of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI), known as the Qualla Boundary. DCR is preparing reevaluations of the tiered environmental reviews based on the additional scope items to eliminate redundancy and improve efficiency in evaluating potential impacts of these programs. Under this tiering approach, the sixteen (16) counties and the Qualla Boundary have been grouped into the Mountain Ecoregion, which has been evaluated for potential impacts at a Tier 1 Environmental Assessment level of review. This region is a widely accepted boundary for conservation planning efforts and is commonly used in organizing, interpreting and reporting information about land-use dynamics.

Although individual project locations are not known at this time, the extent of the floodplain at individual project sites will be determined using the best available data, using either the 0.2 percent flood approach or the freeboard value approach and preliminary and effective flood hazard maps to identify the most protective flood elevation. National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps will be utilized as a potential indicator of wetlands in addition to assessing each individual project site for the presence of wetland indicators including vegetation, soil, and hydrology representative of the types of wetlands found in the ecoregion.

The scope of the proposed construction-related activities may consist of major and minor rehabilitation, reconstruction, relocation (involving demolition of a structure on the storm-damaged property and new construction on a previously disturbed or undisturbed lot in a location of lesser risk of storm damage), elevation, demolition substantially conforming to the existing footprint of each damaged structure or developed lot, acquisition of previously residential developed land, and repair or reconstruction of existing private roads and bridges. For projects that do not involve relocation, any ground disturbance will occur substantially within the original footprint of the damaged/previous structure and associated private roads, bridges and utilities. For properties in the floodplain, floodway, or other areas at-risk due to environmental conditions, property owners may opt for voluntary buyout, in which case, properties will be cleared of all structures and above ground improvements as necessary for consistency with open space and floodplain management principles. In cases where a damaged property is deemed unsuitable or unavailable for rehabilitation or reconstruction due to land loss, soil stability, loss of lease or other factors, Renew NC may decide to relocate the same eligible activity to another area (relocation). In the case of relocation, homes will be placed on existing lots or previously undisturbed lots to locations of lesser risk of storm damage including outside of the FFRMS floodplain and wetlands, where possible.

DCR has determined that the proposed project activities could affect up to an estimated total of 4000 acres (based on an estimated 4000 applicants, and each project site being approximately 1-acre in size on average) with a substantial portion of these activities anticipated to be located within the FFRMS floodplain. Although the Programs anticipate the majority of project activities to consist of rehabilitation, reconstruction, buyout (for demolition and/or return to greenspace) and potential relocation of residential structures within the footprint of previously developed areas, which would have no impact on wetlands, projects involving the repair or reconstruction of existing private roads and bridges and relocation of program homes onto previously undisturbed lots may occur in, and potentially impact, Waters of the US, including wetlands.

DCR has identified and evaluated potential alternatives and mitigation measures to minimize adverse impacts and to restore and preserve natural and beneficial functions and intrinsic

values of the existing floodplains and/or wetlands. Alternatives considered include 1) not implementing the proposed action in the designated floodplain, 2) commissioning infrastructure projects to achieve community-wide flood protection, 3) exclusively implementing acquisition of damaged structures in the designated floodplain for demolition and conversion to green space, and 4) relocating all projects outside of the designated floodplain. These alternatives were rejected as sole alternatives to the proposed action, because they do not support the Programs' goal of meeting unmet housing needs by providing safe and sanitary housing to disaster-impacted property owners within the available program budget. Having incorporated the alternatives and mitigation measures into the proposed project to the extent feasible, DCR has determined there is no practicable alternative to locating the proposed project in the designated floodplain and/or wetlands due to 1) the need to restore safe, sanitary and affordable housing within the disaster-impacted community; 2) the desire to not unduly displace residents, disconnecting them from their economic and social networks; 3) the need to enact economically viable and fiscally responsible programs within federal CDBG-DR allocation limits; and 4) the limited scope and impact of the proposed project combined with the Programs' ability to mitigate and minimize impacts on human health, public property floodplain values, and wetlands.

The Programs will be designed to minimize adverse impacts to lives and property, mitigate and avoid adverse impacts within the floodplain, and where feasible, restore the natural and beneficial values of the floodplain. The Programs will also require that all reconstruction and repair of substantially damaged structures in the floodplain adhere to the elevation requirements defined in 24 CFR 55.20(e)(1), and all participants with property in the 100-year floodplain as shown on the effective Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) will obtain and maintain flood insurance on the subject structure in perpetuity. Acquired properties in the floodplain, floodway, or other areas at-risk due to environmental conditions will be cleared of all structures and above ground improvements, consistent with open space and floodplain management principles. As such, this activity would minimize adverse impacts to lives and property and restore and preserve the natural and beneficial values of floodplains and may reduce future flood risk within the community. Lastly, Renew NC will incorporate Best Management Practices (BMPs) to the greatest extent feasible during construction activities to help minimize impacts to natural areas including floodplains and wetlands. These BMPs may include but are not limited to revegetating disturbed areas with a native seed mix, using temporary construction fencing to delineate and direct work away from sensitive areas, minimizing the footprint of any stream access, and using effective erosion and sedimentation control measures. The Programs will comply with all state and local floodplain and wetland protection procedures.

Therefore, DCR has reevaluated alternatives to building in floodplains and/or wetlands and determined that it has no practicable alternative to floodplains and/or wetlands development. Environmental files documenting compliance with Executive Order 11988, Executive Order 11990, and 24 CFR Part 55 are available for public inspection, review, and copying upon request as stated in the last paragraph of this notice.

There are three primary purposes for this notice. First, people who may be affected by activities in floodplains and/or wetlands and those who have an interest in the protection of the natural environment should be given an opportunity to express their concerns and provide information about these areas. Second, an adequate public notice program can be an important public educational tool. The dissemination of information and request for public comment about floodplains and/or wetlands can facilitate and enhance Federal efforts to reduce the risks and impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of these special areas. Third, as a matter of fairness, when the Federal government determines it will participate in actions taking place in floodplains and/or wetlands, it must inform those who may be put at greater or continued risk.

Written comments must be received by the Division of Community Revitalization (DCR), at the following address, on or before May 8, 2026: North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDOC), Division of Community Revitalization (DCR), 4301 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4301, Attention: Stephanie McGarrah, Deputy Secretary. Additional project information is available Monday – Friday from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM at the North Carolina Department of Commerce, 430 N. Salisbury St. Ste 4140, Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-1058. Comments may also be submitted via email at [dcr.environmental@commerce.nc.gov](mailto:dcr.environmental@commerce.nc.gov).

Date: April 30, 2026