

# Clean Watershed Needs Survey: How Much Do We Need?

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## Background

Clean Watersheds Needs Survey started on March 1, 2022, and closed on May 3, 2023. It is the only national survey of needed wastewater infrastructure improvements in the country. It is a joint effort by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), states, and local organizations. The EPA reports the capital investment needs collected to Congress. Congress is authorized to use this report to reallocate Clean Water State Revolving funds (SRF).

Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems (DWTSs) needs have been under-reported nationally and for North Carolina. Even though 25% of households nationally relies on DWTSs, needs reported were 7% of the total wastewater infrastructure needs and only received <1% of SRF funding assistance. For a state like North Carolina where almost 50% of the housing units utilize DWTSs to collect, treat, and disperse their wastewater, it is very crucial to participate in the survey and let the federal government know our DWTSs needs. DWTSs are an important part of North Carolina's wastewater infrastructure, especially in rural and remote areas.

After the installation of a septic system, it is the owner's responsibility to ensure their system is properly functioning and maintaining to keep the public and the environment safe. In the historically marginalized communities where homeowners can barely buy medication and put food on the table, a cost-effective sustainable means for disposal of wastewater helps relieve some of the financial burden. Typical DWTSs do not carry with them usage fees that add to monthly bill due and the sustainability of these systems can make this a long-term benefit.

## Methods

Recent identification and reporting of DWTS needs in NC was a collaborative effort between the On-Site Water Protection Branch of DHHS and DEQ's Division of Water Infrastructure.

State Specific Approach (SSA) to estimate DWTSs needs in NC over a 20-year period was developed and submitted to EPA for approval.

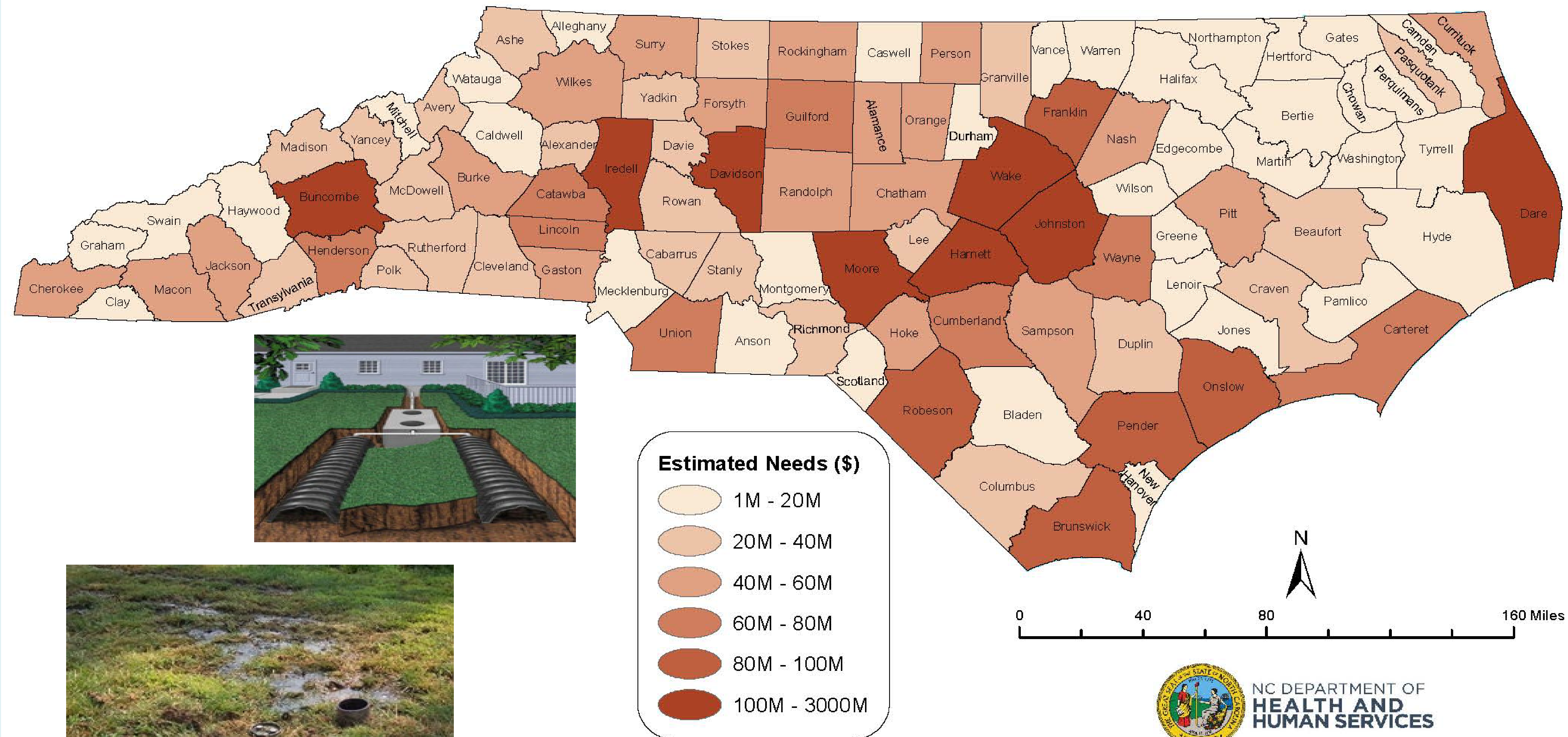
DWTS data was gathered, documented following approved SSA, and entered into the EPA's data entry portal following a set of guidelines and criteria for the CWNS.

Average number of new, repair, replacement, and addition/expansion permits for subsurface discharge DWTSs across NC were included in the inputs used in the CWNS Cost Estimation Tool to estimate costs.

## Results

North Carolina's estimated needs reported in the 2022 survey was **\$4.3 billion**.

Decentralized Wastewater Treatment Systems can provide underserved and economically challenged communities with viable, environmentally friendly, cost-effective options for wastewater collection, treatment, and disposal:  
**North Carolina's estimated needs over a 20-year period from 2022 to 2042 is \$4.3 billion.**



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