Ocean Conservancy®

United States OF PLASTICS

Assessing Efforts to Combat Plastic Pollution at the State Level

Introduction

Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing threats to ocean health. Every year, over 11 million metric tons of plastic pollution enter the ocean.[1] That amounts to more than a garbage truck's worth of plastics entering the ocean every minute. While the ocean, and the vital wildlife and ecosystems it holds, have endured significant harm from this crisis, pollution from plastics has now impacted every dimension of the planet—including human health.

For over 40 years, Ocean Conservancy has worked with our International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC) partners to tackle plastic pollution head-on. From organizing local beach cleanups to participating in global coalitions, the ICC has removed hundreds of millions of pounds of plastic from the environment, thanks to the efforts of over 18 million dedicated volunteers worldwide, all while generating vital data on the sources and types of litter polluting beaches and waterways. This data adds to the growing body of scientific literature that clearly shows this crisis will only get worse without bold action.

Plastic pollution is not only an environmental issue but also an economic one. Local governments and taxpayers are forced to shoulder the escalating costs of managing an ever-increasing volume of complex plastic waste. Municipal waste systems are overwhelmed, recycling infrastructure is under strain, and pollution continues to damage natural and built environments. Beyond waste management, communities face mounting costs related to cleanup operations, infrastructure degradation and reduced economic activity from fisheries, agriculture and tourism.

As the number one generator of plastic waste worldwide[2] and a major producer of virgin plastic, the United States has the opportunity and responsibility to play a leading role in solving this crisis. Within the U.S., states have been and will continue to be the leaders in environmental conservation, including in tackling plastic pollution. Driven by public pressure and the rising costs of recycling and managing plastic pollution, momentum for action at the state level is at an all-time high. While no two states are identical in their approach, there are tried and tested policies developed around the country that can significantly reduce plastic pollution.

Ocean plastic pollution doesn't just come from beaches and coastal communities. Plastics enter our ocean directly from sources including rivers, canals and storm drains, and via less direct routes, such as wind and runoff, that can start far upstream and inland, eventually flowing into the ocean.

Tools like GPS trackers have been used by Ocean Conservancy researchers and other scientists to track movement of floating plastics like bottles through aquatic systems—demonstrating just how far plastic can travel before reaching the ocean. Microplastics, one of the smallest forms of plastic pollution, travel *extremely* far distances, and they are found on the tops of the world's highest mountain ranges, the depths of the ocean, in the most remote national parks and even in agricultural fields. Ocean Conservancy researchers recently identified microplastics in over a dozen commonly-consumed protein types from U.S. markets, including meats, seafoods and plant-based products—highlighting just how pervasive they are not just in the environment, but also in foods we eat.[3]

Ending plastic pollution will require a collective national effort in which every state has a critical role to play to match the urgency of this crisis. Recognizing this, the "United States of Plastics" report offers a tool for advocates and decision-makers in each state to assess their progress and identify opportunities for local action.

Within the U.S., states have been and will continue to be the leaders in environmental conservation, including in tackling plastic pollution.

1 The Pew Charitable Trusts & SYSTEMIQ. "Breaking the Plastic Wave, Summary Report." (2020).
2 Law, K.L., et al. (2020). *Science Advances*.
3 Milne, M.H., et al. (2024). *Environmental Pollution*.

National Overview

A study by Ocean Conservancy found that nearly 80% of Americans consider plastic pollution to be the most pressing problem for the health of our ocean.[4] While states have proven to be leaders in passing laws to reduce plastic pollution, the results of our nationwide study of state laws find that there is a clear need for increased action to address the plastic pollution crisis with the urgency it demands.

PROGRESS TO DATE

- **14 states** have phased out single-use expanded polystyrene (colloquially called "Styrofoam" or plastic foam) foodware.
- **12 states** have phased out single-use plastic bags.
- **11 states** have laws supporting funding for reuse and reduction programs.
- **6 states** have laws supporting research and future action on microplastics.
- Since 2022, **7 states** have passed extended producer responsibility (EPR) laws for packaging. Approximately 20% of Americans live in states that have passed an EPR for packaging law.
- Nearly **every state** that has passed EPR for packaging started by passing a phase-out on one or more of the single-use plastics reviewed in this study.
- Nearly **27%** of the U.S. population is covered by a deposit return system for beverage containers. Despite representing just over a quarter of the country, these programs are responsible for over 50% of aluminum can and glass bottle recycling and over 60% of all PET bottles recycled.

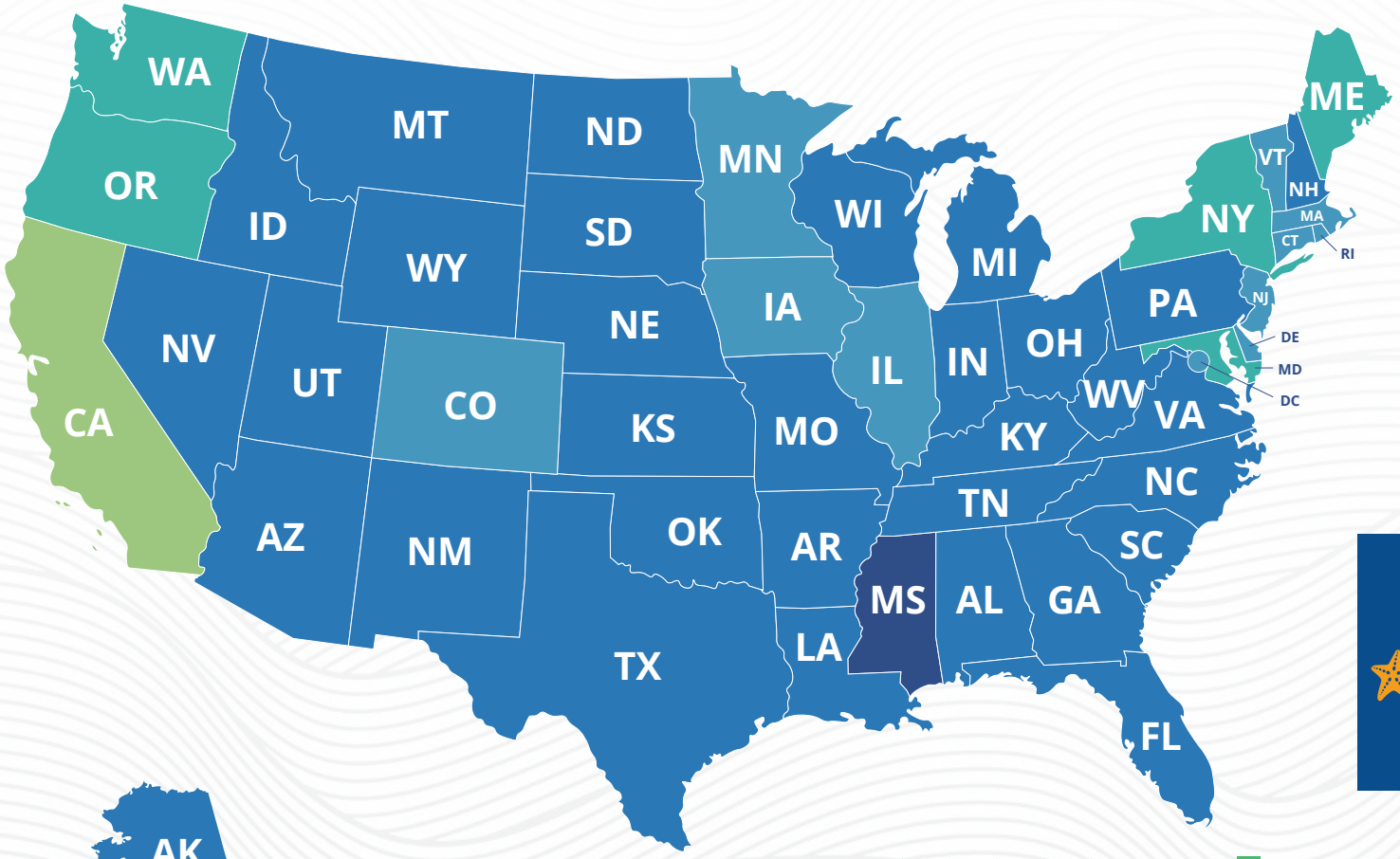
NEED FOR INCREASED ACTION

- An Ocean Conservancy-led study of U.S. adults published in 2024 found that the most widely-adopted action people take to reduce their plastic footprint is ensuring they are properly recycling plastics.[5] These findings stand in stark contrast to the plastic recycling rate in the U.S., which is below 9%.[6] This highlights the significant system challenges that are limiting our recycling system—from lack of upstream design standards to insufficient infrastructure.
- Although recently passed EPR laws provide an opportunity to increase recycling rates, these laws need to be effectively implemented and additional states should consider developing their own programs.
- Action is needed most to support reuse systems and to address microplastic pollution.
    - No states have passed laws requiring reusables for dine-in settings, an important opportunity to reduce single-use plastics and increase education in a closed system.
    - No states have passed laws requiring microfiber filtration in washing machines, which would significantly reduce microfiber pollution.
    - Only one state has a law regulating pollution from pre-production plastic pellets (nurdles).
- Nearly half the states have passed laws that could hinder further progress, whether by limiting the ability of local governments to regulate single-use plastics, supporting harmful chemical recycling or both. However, there are opportunities for progress in those states by reversing these policies or developing proactive state-level policies.
- Many states that have taken action to reduce problematic single-use plastics like plastic foam foodware or single-use plastic bags still have opportunities to take action to promote reuse, address microplastics or improve producer accountability.

4 Baechler, B., et al. (2024). Frontiers in Marine Science.
5 *Id.*
6 "The U.S. Recycling System." U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.

UNITED STATES OF PLASTICS

National Overview



NATIONAL AVERAGE

Needs Improvement

Methodology

This report details the current landscape of plastics laws across the U.S., focusing on statewide laws that prevent plastic pollution. We focus on policies recommended by Ocean Conservancy's *Plastics Policy 101* report,[7] which outlines some of the most impactful and commonly adopted strategies to tackle plastic pollution.

We used legislative tracking tools, including Bloomberg Government and Quorum, along with individual state legislative websites to systematically review whether states had enacted the laws identified in our rubric. In general, we did not evaluate the effectiveness of implementation. We then shared individual state report cards with on-the-ground partners where feasible.

We focused on the following five categories, based on decades of Ocean Conservancy advocacy and research that has identified the most problematic single-use plastics and most effective policies to tackle plastic pollution. Policies identified within these categories can be efficiently and effectively implemented at the state level. While we recognize that city, county or executive-level efforts can also be very impactful, this report focuses specifically on state level laws to give a snapshot of progress across the U.S. Table 1 on Page 120 in the Appendix details the policies reviewed within each category.

CATEGORIES REVIEWED

The policies and data reviewed in our study are sorted into the following categories throughout the report. The order in which they are presented does not indicate any prioritization. For more on the weight provided to each data point, please see Table 1 on Page 120.

Single-Use Plastics

Single-use packaging represents approximately 40% of all plastic produced annually and is among the fastest-growing plastics sector.[8] Single-use plastic items are also consistently among the most frequently collected by volunteers during the ICC, and many are not readily recyclable. Reducing the use of these single-use plastics is essential for achieving immediate pollution reduction in our ocean and communities that depend on it. Our study reviewed laws regulating the most commonly polluted types of single-use plastics such as bags, expanded polystyrene (colloquially called "Styrofoam" or plastic foam) containers, cigarette butts, straws, packaging and utensils. We also reviewed laws that would hinder the ability of local governments to take action to reduce the use of these items (e.g., preemption).

Microplastics

Microplastics have been found in every corner of the planet, from the deepest ocean trenches to the highest mountains, and even within the human body. Once in the environment, microplastics are all but impossible to clean up. Given the broad range of sources, tackling microplastic pollution requires a diverse array of policy interventions. While the scientific understanding of microplastics continues to increase rapidly, we know enough about certain sources to act now. Our study reviewed the following types of laws targeting microplastic pollution: washing machine microfiber filtration requirements, microplastic research and monitoring initiatives, restrictions on intentionally added microplastics and policies to reduce pollution from pre-production plastic pellets, also known as nurdles. We only included laws that support research if that research includes drafting recommendations or a report for future action.

7 "Plastics Policy 101." (2025). Ocean Conservancy.
8 Geyer, R., et al. (2017). *Science Advances*.

Reduce and Reuse

Scientific consensus confirms that reducing the amount of plastic we make and use in the first place is critical to addressing the plastic pollution crisis.[9] Source reduction and reuse laws—such as mandatory reuse or reduction targets or incentives or grants for refillable systems—encourage producers to invest in innovative alternatives that can lead us away from single-use altogether. We assessed laws promoting plastic source reduction—reducing the total amount of plastic produced—and the adoption or investment in reuse and refill systems, which can contribute to plastic source reduction. Examples of policies reviewed include single-use plastic source reduction or reuse targets, requirements for use of reusable foodware for dine-in customers, including in fast food settings, and funding to alleviate the startup costs of reuse systems.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

For decades, local governments have shouldered the financial and logistical burden of managing an increasingly complex recycling stream, where dozens of types of plastics made with different chemicals and components must be sorted in order to be properly managed. Producer accountability laws shift this responsibility to the companies that produce plastic and other single-use products, encouraging upstream redesign and reduction. We reviewed whether states have passed laws to hold producers responsible for the waste created by the products they put on the market and to improve reduction, reuse and recycling including extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging and deposit return systems (DRS or bottle bills) for beverage containers. As one of the goals of producer responsibility laws is to improve the recycling system, we also reviewed whether states had passed laws prohibiting the use of harmful chemical recycling[10] technologies or alternatively, deregulating or otherwise supporting these technologies. How states treat chemical recycling plays a critical role in ensuring that investments in improving mechanical recycling systems reduce virgin plastic production and protect human and environmental health.

9 Borrelle, S.B., et al. (2020). *Science*.

10 Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Key Terms

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
EPR programs shift the costs of local recycling programs (collection, sorting and processing materials) and other end of life services, like reuse and composting, from ratepayers and local governments to the producers of packaging and paper products while also creating performance standards for producers to achieve better environmental and social outcomes.

Deposit Return System (DRS)
DRS, also known as a recycling refund or bottle bill, is a type of EPR policy that provides a financial incentive through a deposit paid at the point of purchase for consumers to return a beverage container for recycling or reuse.

Chemical Recycling
Also known as advanced recycling or molecular recycling, chemical recycling is an umbrella term that includes a suite of technologies that use non-mechanical processes to break down plastics. Conversion technologies like pyrolysis or gasification are the most commonly used chemical recycling technologies. They turn plastics into oil or synthetic gas and release significant greenhouse gas emissions and harmful chemicals into the environment.

Mechanical Recycling
This is the processing of materials into secondary raw materials for use in new products without changing the chemical structure of the material, usually through a process of sorting, grinding, washing and re-pelletizing.

Recycling Access and Rate

While we cannot recycle our way out of the plastic pollution crisis, mechanical recycling plays an important role in decreasing the reliance on fossil fuel-derived virgin plastic and incentivizing the proper management of waste. We reviewed recycling access and recycling rate based on data from The Recycling Partnership's 2024 State of Residential Recycling report as there is little to no consistent data available on recycling rates or access from states or federal sources. Recycling access rate is defined as having physical access to a recycling container across all household types (single-family, multi-family) and including access via curbside collection or drop off. The recycling rate is calculated in their report as the amount of recyclable materials recycled, meaning it excludes non-recyclable packaging, which likely inflates overall recycling rates across the country.

To help identify specific trends and opportunities for action in each state, we included the most commonly collected items in each state according to nearly four decades of data from Ocean Conservancy's ICC. More state specific data is available through the Trash Information and Data for Education and Solutions (TIDES) dataset, available online at https://www.coastalcleanupdata.org. This data was not included in the scoring of each state.

Local action and executive action within states also play a significant role in tackling plastic pollution, which we do not capture in this report. While we tried to be comprehensive, the specific laws we reviewed do not tell the whole story for actions taken in each state. For this reason, we included case studies for select states to highlight progress not captured by the grade alone.

SCORING

Each state was graded by evaluating the presence or absence of specific laws identified in our study and their recycling rate and access. Within each category, points were weighted based on our estimation of the impact on reducing plastic pollution, as detailed in Table 1 in the Appendix. We utilized a 5-point scoring system based on the total points each state earned across all categories. Each category was worth a total of 5 to 7 points. We then normalized each state's total score to fit a 5-point system and applied a curve to better reflect the distribution of scores across the country. No state received 5 stars as no state has enacted every policy included in this study.

5 stars	EXCELLENT
>4 stars	VERY GOOD
>3 stars	GOOD
>2 stars	FAIR
>1 star	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
<1 star	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Resources for Taking Action

This report is intended as both a resource and a roadmap for further action. Momentum is growing across the country for action on plastic pollution. Now is the time to expand proven solutions, fill policy gaps and act with the urgency this crisis requires.

READY TO TAKE ACTION IN YOUR STATE?

- **Learn more about proven policy solutions:**
  - Plastics Policy 101: A primer on the plastic pollution crisis and key policy solutions.
  - Tackling Plastic Pollution Through Producer Accountability: Ocean Conservancy's toolkit for comprehensive state EPR legislation.
  - Fiber to Filters: A Toolkit for Microfiber Solutions: A toolkit on washing machine microfiber filtration as a solution to address microfiber pollution.
  - What the Foam?!: Ocean Conservancy's report on how to keep plastic foam foodware out of our ocean.
- **Start a cleanup**
  Learn more about the ICC and how you can join a cleanup or start your own. For more information, contact the ICC team at cleanup@oceanconservancy.org.
- **Add your voice**
  Visit Ocean Conservancy's Action Center for actions you can take today to help protect the ocean.

Together we can, and must, put an end to plastic pollution.

Photo credit: Courtney Jenkins

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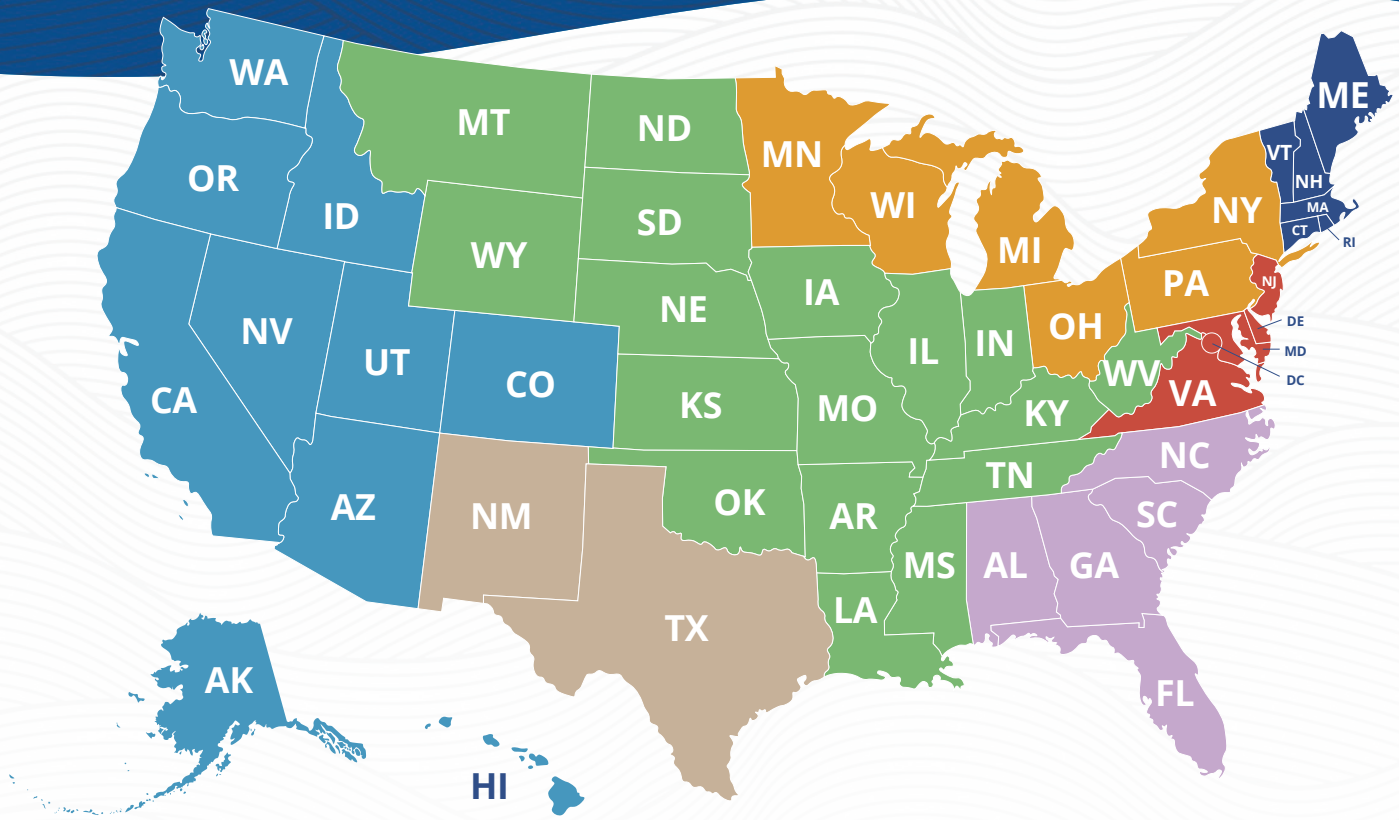
This report organizes states into watershed regions using data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).



PACIFIC & COLORADO RIVER BASINS

- Alaska
- Arizona
- California
- Colorado
- Hawai'i
- Idaho
- Nevada
- Oregon
- Utah
- Washington

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

- Arkansas
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota
- Tennessee
- West Virginia
- Wyoming

RIO GRANDE & TEXAS GULF

- New Mexico
- Texas

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

- Alabama
- Florida
- Georgia
- North Carolina
- South Carolina

MID-ATLANTIC

- Delaware
- Maryland
- New Jersey
- Virginia
- Washington, D.C.

GREAT LAKES BASIN

- Michigan
- Minnesota
- New York
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- Wisconsin

NEW ENGLAND

- Connecticut
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- New Hampshire
- Rhode Island
- Vermont

Photo credit: eyecrave productions / Getty Images

Pacific & Colorado River Basins

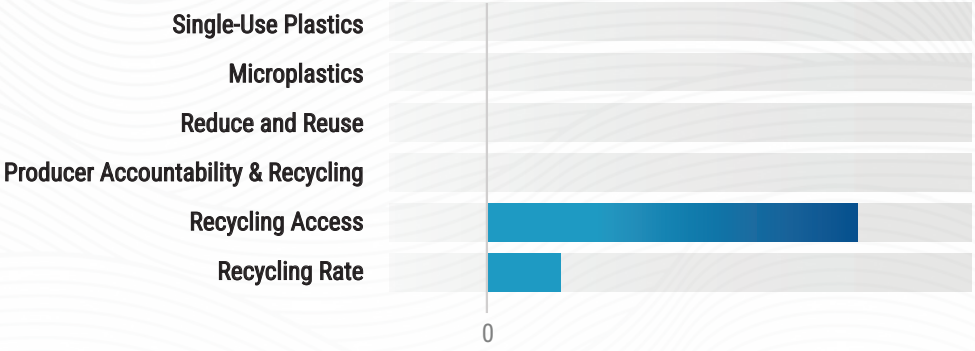
- Alaska
- Arizona
- California
- Colorado
- Hawai'i
- Idaho
- Nevada
- Oregon
- Utah
- Washington

Photo credit: Tomasz Wozniak / Adobe Stock

Alaska

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Alaska has the highest mileage of shoreline of all U.S. states at nearly 34,000 miles (including islands).[11] A healthy ocean is central to life in Alaska. Coastal communities depend on the ocean for food, economic opportunity, cultural continuity and other aspects of daily life. Tribes have stewarded ocean resources in Alaska for millennia and continue to do so today. These ocean waters provide vital feeding and breeding habitat for thousands of species of whales, birds, fish and other iconic wildlife. Because of ocean currents, Alaska also receives plastic pollution that originates beyond its borders. The state has yet to pass legislation that would reduce plastic pollution, which poses a serious threat to its communities and wildlife.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

11 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state has not enacted extended producer responsibility or deposit return systems for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are many opportunities to take action in Alaska. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- Given the rural nature of many communities in the state, policies that support local reuse and refill systems could help reduce reliance on single-use plastics and the need to transport waste over long distances.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Fishing Net & Pieces
2. Fishing Line
3. Rope
4. Fishing Buoys, Pots, & Traps
5. Cigarette Butts
6. Other Plastic Foam
7. Beverage Bottles
8. Beverage Cans
9. Food Wrappers
10. Construction Material

Managing Marine Debris

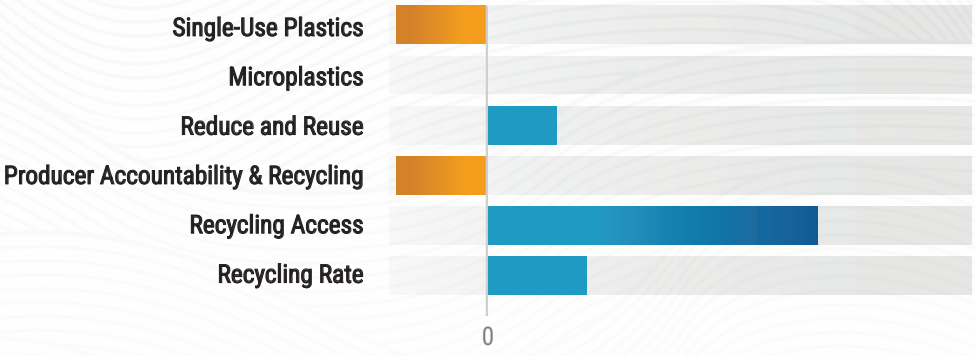
Marine debris is the term used to describe a range of items found polluting the marine environment—including microplastics, single-use plastics, abandoned and lost fishing gear and derelict fishing vessels. Marine debris presents a significant threat to Alaska's ecosystems, wildlife and coastal communities, harming wildlife, local economies and customary and traditional harvesting and cultural practices that are critical to Alaska communities. The marine debris problem in Alaska is exacerbated by the sheer size of the state and the nature of its coast. The state's shoreline is larger than that of the rest of the contiguous U.S. combined with much of it being remote, difficult to access and far from resources and debris disposal options. While community and Tribal-led cleanup efforts are increasingly underway across the state, these efforts are often limited by the lack of reliable, affordable options for transporting collected debris off-site. A statewide backhaul program is essential to support these cleanups, enabling debris to be removed from remote locations and properly managed—rather than left to accumulate on beaches, burned or dumped in overburdened landfills.

Photo credit: simonkr / Getty Images

Arizona

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Arizona, although a landlocked state, is indirectly connected to the ocean and surrounding states through the Colorado River. The river supports agricultural irrigation, drinking water and the surrounding ecosystems vital to Arizona's diverse wildlife. The Colorado River flows through hundreds of miles of the Grand Canyon, providing water to many of the state's reservoirs including Lake Havasu and Lake Mohave. While Arizona's unique and picturesque landscape relies greatly on protecting this water source, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[12]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has a recycling grant program that can be used to fund waste reduction assistance, including the development of reuse infrastructure.[13]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

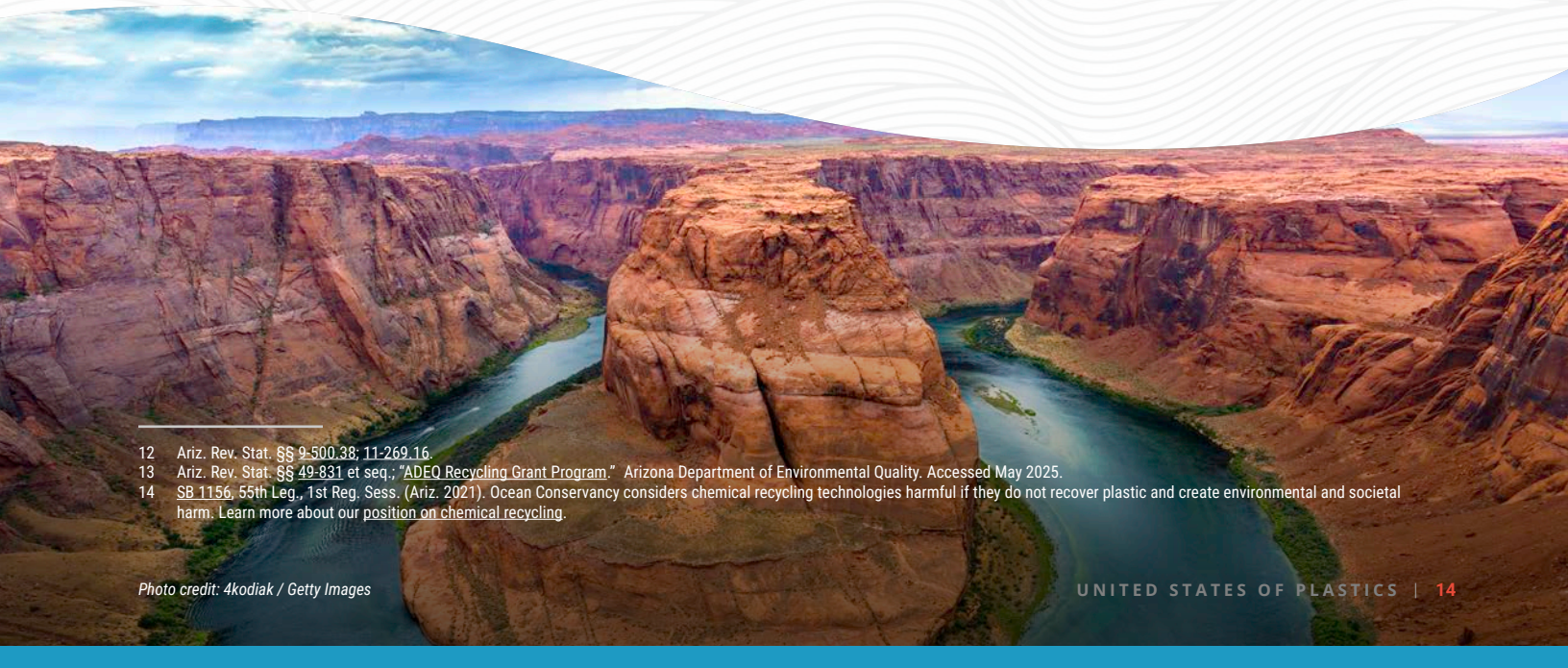
The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[14]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arizona has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Since tourism is a major driver in Arizona's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Straws, Stirrers



12 Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 9-500.38; 11-269.16.
13 Ariz. Rev. Stat. §§ 49-831 et seq.; "ADEQ Recycling Grant Program." Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. Accessed May 2025.
14 SB 1156, 55th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Ariz. 2021). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

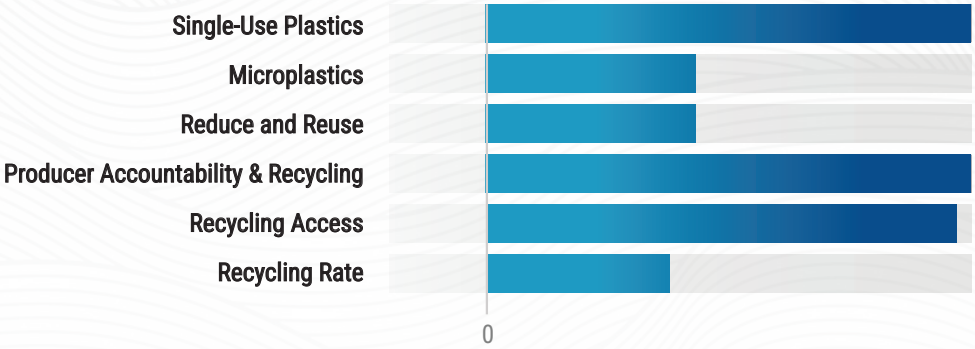
Photo credit: 4kodiak / Getty Images

Photo credit: dh tang

California

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

California has a long history of leading the U.S. in environmental practices, often resulting in significant changes well outside its borders as one of the world's largest economies. California has over 3,000 miles of shoreline[15] on the Pacific with unique ecosystems supporting many endemic species. Communities within the state rely heavily on its coastal waters to support tourism, fishing and maritime trade. Although California has been a pioneer in many aspects of environmental policy, including tackling plastic pollution, opportunities remain for continued action, especially around microplastics and reuse.



FINAL SCORE

Very Good

15 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

California has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware, plastic bags and single-use personal care products in hotels.[16] It also requires that single-use foodware accessories, including straws and utensils, be provided to customers only by request.[17] California prohibits smoking or improper disposal of cigar or cigarette waste on a state beach or within the state park system, reducing the likelihood of cigarette butts entering coastal waters.[18]

Microplastics

California is the only state in the U.S. with a law directly addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets.[19] It has also enacted laws supporting research on microplastics to inform future actions, including a first-in-the-nation statewide microplastics strategy.[20]

Reduce and Reuse

California's packaging extended producer responsibility (EPR) law sets a 25% source reduction requirement for single-use plastic packaging and foodware by 2032, with a minimum of 4% of that reduction coming from refill and reuse.[21] California enacted a law through its appropriations to support the development of glass reusable containers within the state's existing deposit return system.[22]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

California's packaging EPR law holds producers accountable for the products they create and prohibits harmful chemical recycling from counting as recycling.[23] California also has a deposit return system in place for beverage containers.[24]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The two greatest opportunities for improvement for California are in taking actions to further promote reuse and to address microplastic pollution. The state should:
  - Look to the California Ocean Protection Council's Statewide Microplastics Strategy[25] for suggested policy actions to address microplastic pollution.
  - Continue to promote reuse and refill through implementation of SB 54 and identify additional opportunities to support reuse, such as dedicated funding, state procurement targets or requirements for dine-in facilities.
- While the state has passed the U.S.'s most ambitious EPR and source reduction policy for single-use plastics to date through SB 54, it now needs to implement the law successfully to realize its full environmental and economic benefits.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
7. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic Bags
9. Beverage Cans
10. Paper Bags

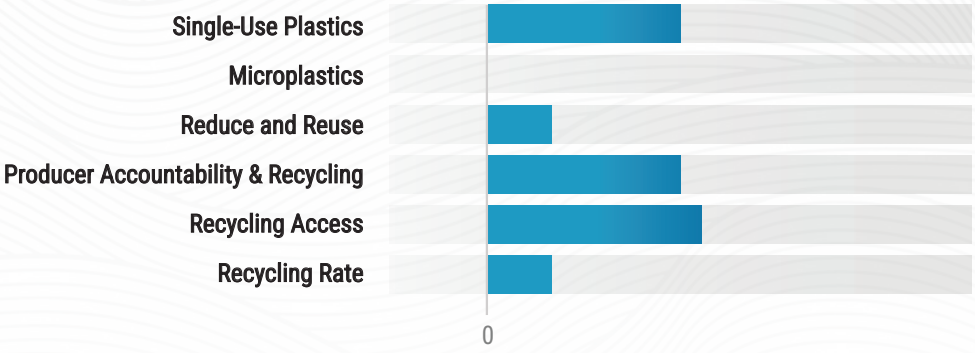
16 SB 54, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2022) (expanded polystyrene); SB 1053, 2023–2024 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2024) (bags); AB 1162, 2019–2022 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2019) (personal care products).
17 AB 1276, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2021).
18 SB 8, 2019–2020 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2019).
19 AB 258, 2007–2008 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2007).
20 SB 1263, 2017–2018 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2018); SB 1422 2017–2018 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2018); SB 1147, 2023–2024 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2024).
21 SB 54 (Cal. 2022).
22 AB 179, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2022).
23 SB 54 (Cal. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
24 Cal. Pub. Res. Code §§ 14500 et seq.
25 "Statewide Microplastics Strategy." (2022). California Ocean Protection Council.

Photo credit: Gerard M Costa / Getty Images

Colorado

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Colorado may be far from the ocean, but its connection to watersheds and, by extension, the ocean is powerful. Colorado is home to the Rocky Mountains, where the Colorado River begins. This grand river flows over 1,400 miles through multiple states, supplying more than 40 million people, including 30 federally recognized Tribal nations, with water before leading to the ocean.[26] The survival of numerous threatened, endangered and migratory species is dependent on the river's health. Protecting the ocean starts upstream, and while Colorado has been a leader among inland states to address plastic pollution, there remain many opportunities for additional action.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

26 Sencan, G. and B. Gray. "The Colorado River." Public Policy Institute of California. March 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Colorado restricts the use of expanded polystyrene foodware and single-use plastic carryout bags.[27] The state also became the first to repeal a previous law that prohibited local governments from regulating plastic materials or products.[28]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

Although Colorado's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law does consider reuse in the fees producers will pay, it does not establish plastic source reduction or reuse targets. The state passed a law establishing the Colorado Circular Communities (C3) Enterprise, which funds projects that reduce material consumption, including through reuse and reduction.[29]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Colorado has taken steps to hold producers accountable, with the state having passed an EPR law for packaging set to launch in 2026.[30]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While Colorado has made significant efforts to mitigate plastic pollution, the state should consider strengthening its reuse infrastructure as it implements an EPR program.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most collected items in the state, Colorado should consider complementing its existing EPR law for packaging with a deposit return system (or bottle bill), which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
9. Take Out/Away Containers (Plastic)
10. Cups & Plates (Foam)

City Leadership

Cities throughout Colorado have stepped up as leaders in tackling plastic pollution. For example, Fort Collins pioneered a city-wide ban on single-use plastic bags as part of their broader "Zero Waste by 2030" goal, which helped lead to the statewide phase-out of these highly polluting single-use plastics.[31] Boulder is building out a circular economy hub, run by local nonprofits Eco-Cycle and Resource Central, that will be home for reuse, recycling and innovation projects to reduce waste.[32] Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Denver has switched to reusable cups for events to help minimize plastic pollution and waste.[33] These city-level efforts demonstrate the power that local level actions can have on the environment and in leading the way towards more ambitious state actions.

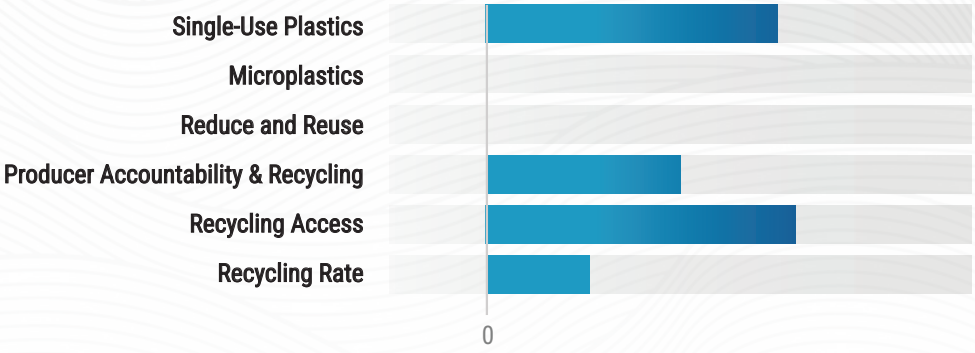
27 Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 25-17-501 et seq
28 HB 21-1162, 2021 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2021)
29 HB 24-1449, 2024 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2024).
30 HB 22-1135, 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022); Colo. Rev. Stat. Ann. §§ 25-17-701 et seq.
31 "Zero Waste." City of Fort Collins. Accessed May 2025.
32 "City of Boulder Hub for Reuse, Recycling & Innovation." City of Boulder. Accessed May 2025.
33 "Sustainability." Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre. Accessed May 2025.

Photo credit: Troy Squillaci

Hawai'i

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Hawai'i's connection to the ocean is foundational. Because the island is an isolated archipelago in the Pacific, the ocean has shaped its culture, economy and environment. Hawai'i is dependent on the health of its coral reefs, coastal waters and marine species for food security, cultural identity and a thriving economy. Currents in the Pacific, including those that form the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre, frequently deposit large amounts of marine debris on Hawai'i's shores. While Hawai'i has adopted some policies to address plastic pollution, including at the local level, there are more opportunities for statewide action to reduce plastic pollution and protect Hawai'i's critical ecosystems.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

Each county in Hawai'i has banned single-use plastic carryout bags and expanded polystyrene foodware, creating de facto bans statewide. Hawai'i prohibits smoking in all state parks, including its beaches, which could reduce the number of cigarette butts that enter the environment. However, the law allows designated smoking areas within state parks which could reduce the ban's impact.[34]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted policies relating to single-use plastic source reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Hawai'i has a deposit return system (or bottle bill) for beverage containers that establishes a 5-cent deposit.[35] Although the state does not have an extended producer responsibility (EPR) program for packaging, it passed a law requiring the development of a statewide needs assessment and the establishment of an advisory council, which will provide important information towards the development of an EPR program.[36]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since tourism is a major part of Hawai'i's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.
- Given the remote nature of Hawai'i as an island state, policies that support local reuse and refill systems, such as requiring reusable foodware for dine-in customers, could help reduce reliance on single-use plastics and the need to transport waste over long distances.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Bottle Caps (Metal)

Collective Local Action

Hawai'i's unique geography as an isolated island chain has enabled county-level initiatives to address plastic pollution that have resulted in de facto statewide policies. The state's four most populated counties—Maui, Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Honolulu—separately enacted phase-outs of single-use plastic bags between 2008 and 2015.[37] Each of these counties has also phased-out expanded polystyrene (plastic foam) foodware.[38] Hawai'i's fifth county has fewer than 100 residents,[39] which means the collective local action from the four most populated counties has resulted in a comprehensive, statewide elimination of these highly polluting single-use plastics and has replaced the need for further state-level action to address these items.

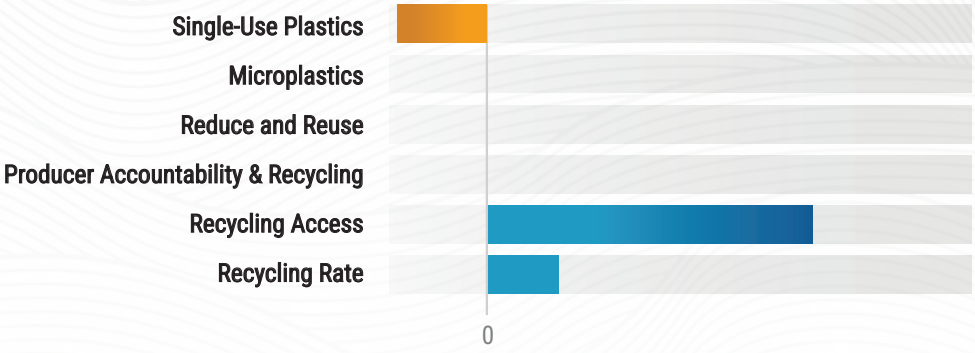
34 HB 525, 28th. Leg. (Haw. 2015).
35 Haw. Rev. Stat. §§ 342G-101 et seq.
36 HB 750, 33rd Leg. (Haw. 2025).
37 "Comparing County Food Ware Bans in Hawai'i." Hawai'i State Department of Health.
38 *Id.*
39 "Quick Facts: Kalawao County, Hawai'i." U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed May 2025.

Photo credit: Shunyu Fan / Getty Images

Idaho

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Idaho, while landlocked, possesses a rich network of rivers and lakes that are integral to its environment and economy. The Snake River, coursing over 1,000 miles, flows through Idaho before merging with the Columbia River and ultimately into the Pacific Ocean.[40] Communities in Idaho rely on the Snake River for agricultural irrigation and wildlife, including culturally and economically important salmon and steelhead species, depend on the river. Despite research that has found microplastics throughout the Snake River,[41] the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

40 "Snake River." American Rivers. Accessed May 2025.
41 Kapp, K.J. and E. Yeatman. (2018). *Environmental Pollution*.

Single-Use Plastics

Idaho limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[42]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have any extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Idaho should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
- Idaho would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[43] Idaho should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
7. Other Plastic Bags
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Paper Bags
10. Cups & Plates (Plastic)

42 HB 372, 63rd Leg., 2nd Reg. Sess. (Idaho 2016).
43 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

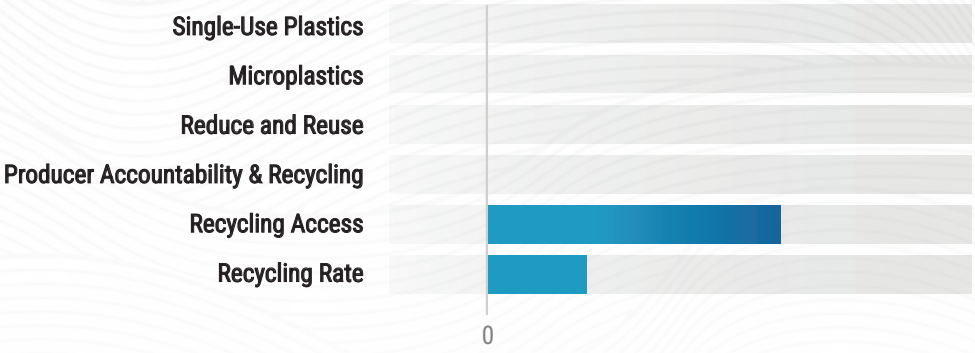
Photo credit: Brett Sayles

Photo credit: Colin Freld

Nevada

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Nevada, a landlocked state in the Great Basin, is best known for its vast deserts and vibrant entertainment scene. Nevada is connected to the ocean through the Colorado River, which supplies Lake Mead, a crucial reservoir in Nevada, with millions of gallons of water annually, providing drinking water and recreation for many communities. Nevada is also home to Lake Tahoe, Red Rock Canyon and the Black Rock Desert which attract numerous outdoor enthusiasts each year. Although the state and its communities rely heavily on its connection to a healthy waterway and environment, Nevada has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution, which poses a serious threat to its communities and wildlife.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are many opportunities to take action in Nevada. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- Since tourism is a major driver in Nevada's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.
- Policies that support local reuse and refill systems, such as requiring reusable foodware at events, could help reduce reliance on single-use plastics and increase awareness around plastic pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Lids (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Bottle Caps (Metal)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

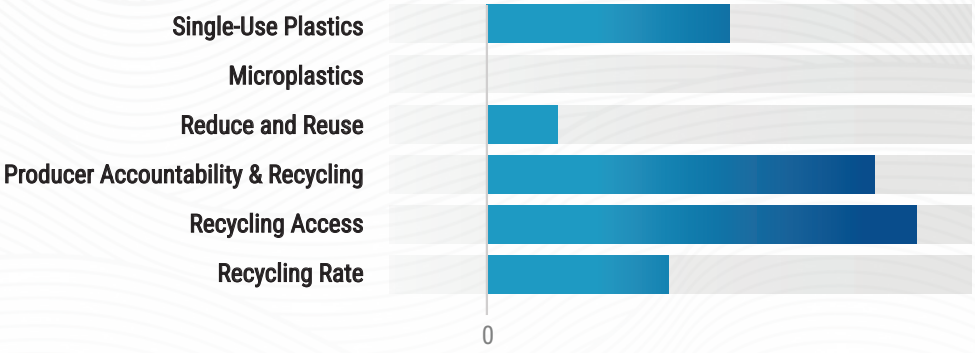
Photo credit: simonkr / Getty Images

Photo credit: Samuel Frontino

Oregon

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Oregon's identity is deeply intertwined with its diverse and beautiful ecosystems and Pacific shoreline, which are vital to the state's economy and culture. Key industries such as commercial fishing, forestry and tourism depend heavily on the health of the state's waterways and marine environments. However, plastic pollution poses a significant threat to these ecosystems, jeopardizing the wildlife, personal livelihoods and communities that rely on them. A study by Environment Oregon found microplastics in 100% of the waterways they tested around the state.[44] The state has been an early and long-standing leader in environmental leadership, including tackling plastic pollution, from passing the first bottle bill in the country to phasing out problematic single-use plastics.



44 Meiffren-Swango, C. "Microplastics in Oregon: A survey of waterways." (2021). Environment Oregon Research & Policy Center.

Single-Use Plastics

Oregon has phased out many of the most problematic single-use plastics such as expanded polystyrene foodware, coolers and loose fill packaging and restricts the use of single-use plastic carryout bags.[45] Oregon also requires that single-use plastic straws be provided to consumers only by request.[46]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

Oregon's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law includes funding for reuse infrastructure and the state has gone further by updating their health codes to ensure consumers can bring their own containers for reuse.[47]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Not only does Oregon have the oldest and one of the best performing bottle bills in the country,[48] it was the second state to pass EPR for packaging.[49]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- While Oregon has been a strong leader on reducing plastic pollution, the state could do much more to tackle microplastics. Oregon is home to many leading microplastics researchers that can help inform policies based on the best available science. The state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.
- Oregon should consider additional policies to promote plastic source reduction and reuse, such as considering reuse targets in their existing bottle bill and EPR program, to build on policies already in place.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
4. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
5. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
6. Other Plastic Bags
7. Beverage Cans
8. Paper Bags
9. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
10. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)

Funding for the Future

While Oregon's EPR law does not include requirements for reusable packaging, it did establish the Material Impact Reduction and Reuse (MIRROR) program, an initiative aimed at reducing environmental impacts through waste prevention strategies. Funded by producer fees in the EPR program, MIRROR provides grants and loans for projects throughout the state that are focused on reducing waste at its source. The funding of this program will help build out critical infrastructure needed to assist small businesses scale up reuse infrastructure to have a significant impact in reducing plastic pollution.

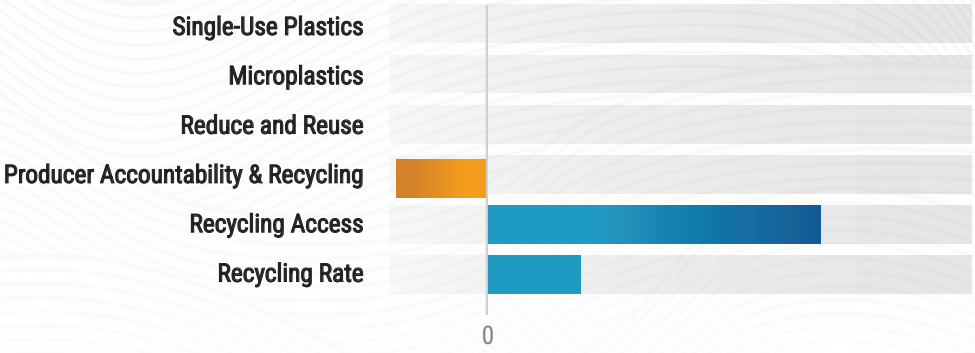
45 SB 543, 82nd Leg., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2023) (expanded polystyrene); SB 551, 83rd. Leg., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2025) (bags).
46 SB 90, 80th Leg., 2019 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2019).
47 SB 582, 81st Leg., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2021) (EPR); SB 545, 82nd Leg., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2023) (container reuse)
48 "Redemption Rate and Other Features of 10 U.S. State Deposit Programs." (2025). Container Recycling Institute.
49 Or. Rev. Stat. §§ 459A.700 et seq. (bottle bill); SB 582 (Or. 2021) (EPR).

Photo credit: grandriver / Getty Images

Utah

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Utah, a landlocked state in the Great Basin, is known for its stunning landscapes, including vast deserts, mountain ranges and the Great Salt Lake. Utah is home to five national parks that attract millions of visitors each year. The Colorado and Green Rivers flow through the state, connecting it to surrounding communities and downstream freshwater and marine ecosystems. While Utah has taken some action to promote better recycling practices, such as mandated publishing of their recycling data to the public,[50] the state has yet to pass legislation that would specifically address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

50 HB 107, 2024 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2024).

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

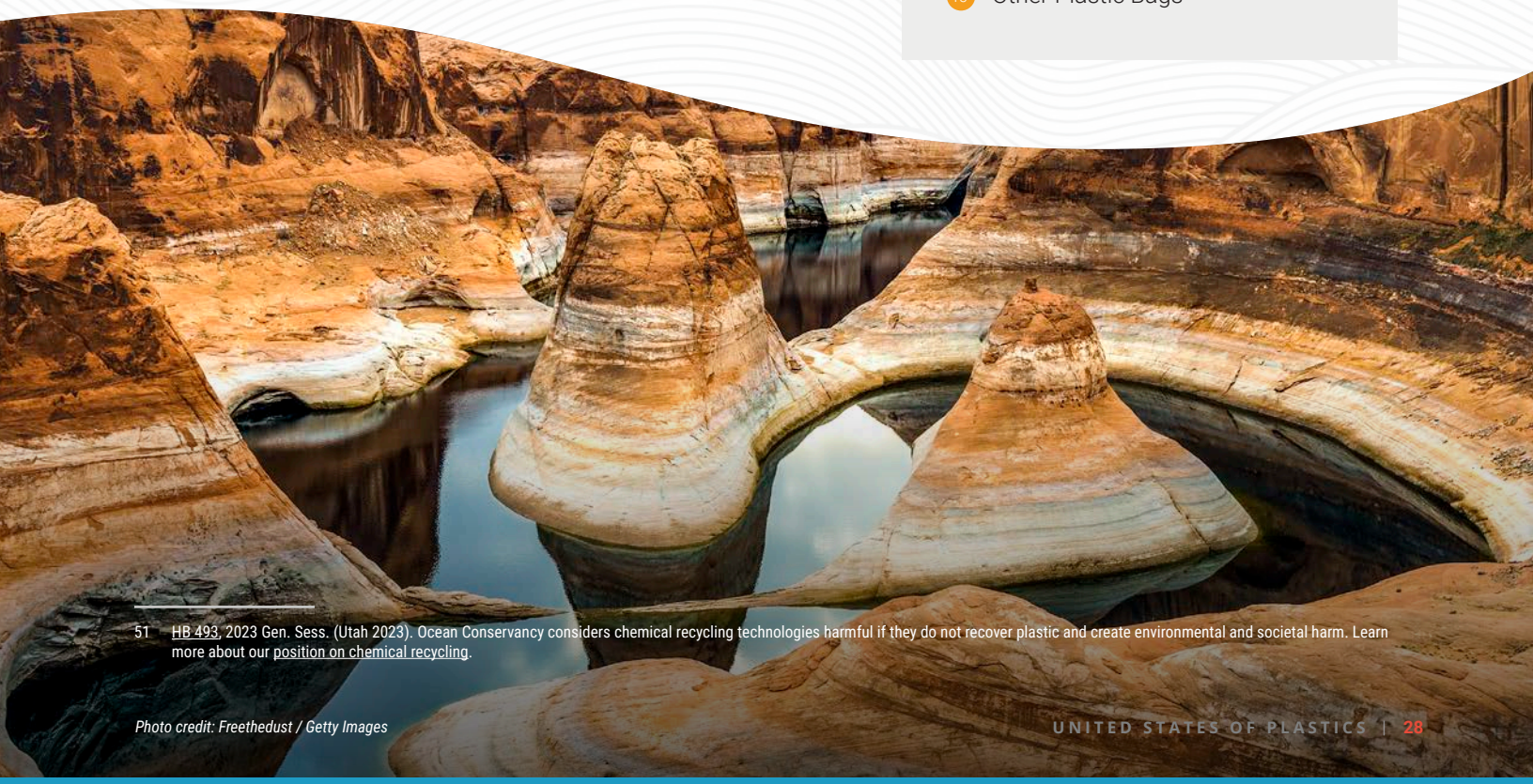
The state does not have any extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[51]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Utah has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state should consider enacting policies to reduce plastic pollution. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Other (non-plastic) trash
   **2016 onward*
9. Straws, Stirrers
10. Other Plastic Bags



51 HB 493, 2023 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2023). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

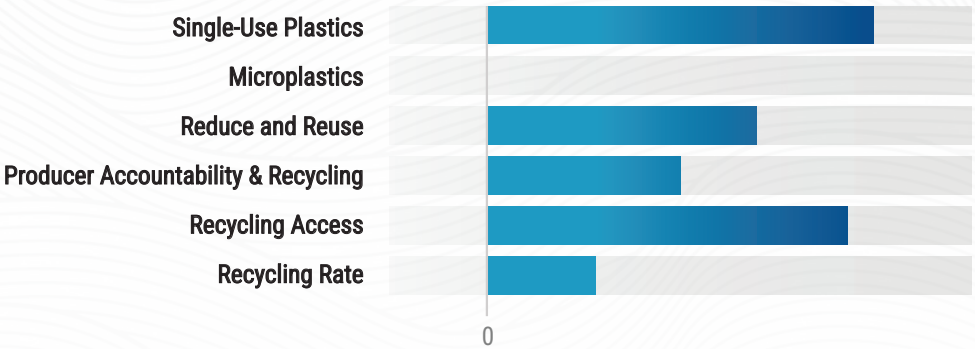
Photo credit: Freethedust / Getty Images

Photo credit: Mike Krejci

Washington

PACIFIC AND COLORADO RIVER BASINS

Located in the Pacific Northwest, Washington boasts a stunning shoreline along the Pacific Ocean and the Puget Sound, the second largest estuary in the United States. Washington's waterways play a vital role in supporting its communities and diverse wildlife. Its coastal waters are critical for commercial fishing and maritime shipping, recreation and tourism, while also sustaining diverse marine ecosystems that are home to iconic wildlife like orcas, salmon and seabirds, all of which are under threat from plastic pollution. Recent research identified a specific chemical released from tire wear—a form of microplastic pollution—that causes the sudden death of coho salmon (as well as other related species like rainbow and lake trout), highlighting the severe impact of pollution on these sensitive ecosystems. Washington has been a leader in environmental stewardship, including on plastic pollution, with policies aimed at restricting single-use plastics and expanded recycling programs. There are many opportunities for Washington to continue making strides toward a cleaner, healthier environment.



FINAL SCORE

Good

Single-Use Plastics

Washington prohibits the sale of expanded polystyrene foodware, coolers and loose fill packaging and restricts the use of single-use plastic carryout bags.[52] Washington has also passed a by-request law for food service accessories, including straws and cutlery.[53] The state also prohibits hotels from providing single-use personal care products in plastic containers.[54]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

Washington's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law requires plastic source reduction and reuse targets and also directs funding towards reuse.[55] The state also requires water bottle filling stations in any construction that includes a drinking fountain, making it easier for people to opt for reusable options over single-use.[56]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

In 2025, Washington became the seventh state to pass a law establishing EPR for packaging.[57]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Washington's recently passed EPR law has the potential to reduce single-use plastics, improve reuse systems and increase recycling. The state should work to ensure robust and timely implementation of the law to realize its full environmental and economic benefits.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items in the state, Washington could consider complementing their EPR law for packaging with a deposit return system (or bottle bill), which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.
- Given the outsized impact of microplastics on important species in the state, Washington could consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as funding for tire wear mitigation projects and requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Straws, Stirrers
10. Other Plastic Bags

52 SB 5022, 67th Leg., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2021) (expanded polystyrene); Wash. Rev. Code §§ 70A.530.005 et seq. (bags).
53 SB 5022 (Wash. 2021).
54 HB 1085, 68th Leg., 2023 Reg. Sess (Wash. 2023).
55 SB 5284, 69th Leg., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2025).
56 HB 1085 (Wash. 2023).
57 SB 5284 (Wash. 2025).

Photo credit: iferrer / Getty Images

Missouri-Mississippi Drainage

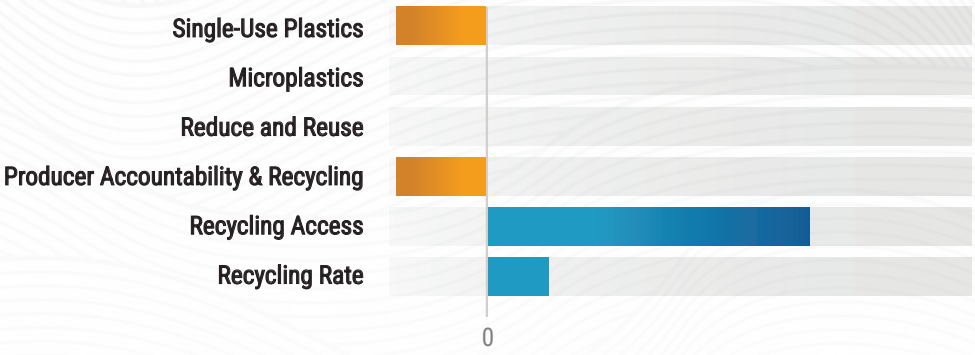
- Arkansas
- Illinois
- Indiana
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Mississippi
- Missouri
- Montana
- Nebraska
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- South Dakota
- Tennessee

Photo credit: Rdlamkin / Getty Images

Arkansas

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Arkansas is a landlocked state that connects to the Gulf through the Mississippi River, which flows through many midwestern states. Flowing along almost the entirety of the eastern border of the state, the Mississippi River also supports the delta of eastern Arkansas, which is part of the nation's largest alluvial plain. The delta supports a wide range of wildlife within its wetlands and lakes and includes the largest lake in the state, Lake Chicot. Arkansas has some of the richest and most productive agricultural land in the nation. While the state has a deep cultural connection and agricultural dependance on the Mississippi River, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[58]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[59]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arkansas has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[60] the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Other Plastic Bags
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

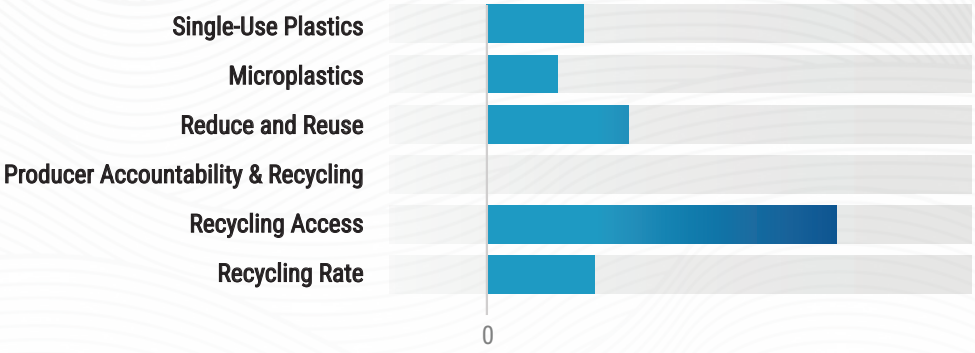
58 HB 1704, 93rd Gen. Assemb. (Ark. 2021).
59 HB 1944, 93rd Gen. Assemb. (Ark. 2021). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
60 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

Photo credit: Iuliia Sokolovska / Adobe Stock

Illinois

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Illinois maintains a connection to the ocean through the Mississippi River, which flows into the Gulf, and through the Great Lakes, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean by way of the St. Lawrence River. Illinois sits on the shore of Lake Michigan, one of the five Great Lakes, which is essential to Illinois' communities and economy, supporting commerce, tourism, shipping, fishing and recreation. The lake also provides drinking water to millions of residents. Plastic pollution is a growing threat to this vital resource, with an estimated more than 22 million pounds of plastic pollution ending up in the Great Lakes each year and microplastics increasingly found in Great Lakes waters, sediments and even fish.[61] The state is a leader in the Great Lakes region in adopting policies to reduce plastic pollution, but many opportunities remain for continued progress.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

61 Hoffman, M.J. and E. Hittinger. (2017). *Marine Pollution Bulletin*.

Single-Use Plastics

Illinois prohibits hotels from providing personal care products in single-use plastic bottles.[62] It has not passed laws restricting the other single-use plastics included in our study, although it has taken steps to reduce government procurement of certain single-use plastics (see Reduce and Reuse below).

Microplastics

The state has passed two laws aimed at gathering and increasing public availability of more information on microplastics to direct future action.[63]

Reduce and Reuse

Illinois has passed laws to reduce plastic pollution through state purchasing, including by requiring state agencies to track and set goals to reduce single-use plastic foodware, prohibiting state agencies from procuring expanded polystyrene food containers, and prohibiting the use of single-use plastic foodware that is not compostable or recyclable in state parks or natural areas.[64] The state also requires any new construction with a drinking fountain to have a water bottle filling station.[65]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have any extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. However, the state has enacted a law requiring the development of a Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment and Advisory Council, which will provide important information towards the development of an EPR program.[66]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Illinois has not taken any actions to hold producers responsible for their products. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, Illinois should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution, addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission (IJC).[67]

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Beverage Cans
7. Bottle Caps (Metal)
8. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
9. Lids (Plastic)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

Microplastics are a Mega-Problem

Illinois has long been at the forefront of addressing microplastic pollution. In 2014, it became the first U.S. state to ban microbeads in personal care products, a move that set a precedent for additional state action and eventually, national law.[68] Illinois also collaborates with Canadian partners through the IJC to monitor and assess microplastic pollution in the Great Lakes. In 2024, the IJC's Great Lakes Science Advisory Board proposed a coordinated framework for microplastics monitoring and ecological risk assessment across the lakes.[69] This binational effort seeks to fill knowledge gaps regarding microplastic sources, distribution and impacts on aquatic life and human health, to inform future policy decisions to protect these critical freshwater resources.

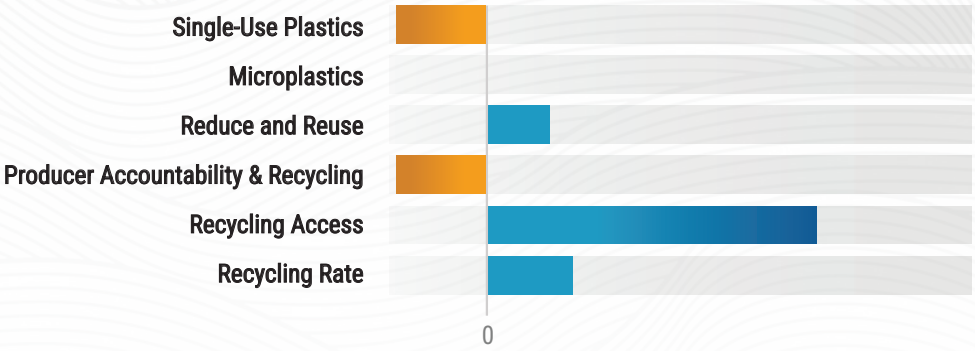
62 SB 2960, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2024).
63 SB 1563, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023); SB 1392, 101st Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2019).
64 SB 58, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023) (expanded polystyrene); SB 1915, 102nd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2022) (state parks).
65 SB 1715, 103rd Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023).
66 SB 1555, 103rd. Gen. Assemb. (Ill. 2023); "Statewide Recycling Needs Assessment Advisory Council." Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. Accessed May 2025.
67 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.
68 SB 2727, 98th Gen. Ass. (Ill. 2014); Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-114, 129 Stat. 3129 (2015).
69 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

Photo credit: jimfeng / Getty Images

Indiana

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Indiana is connected to the ocean through its contact with Lake Michigan, the second largest of the five Great Lakes. Lake Michigan is connected to the Great Lakes system which flows into the St. Lawrence River, and ultimately the Atlantic Ocean. In addition to being a vital drinking water source for communities in Indiana, Lake Michigan also offers recreational opportunities and is a major economic driver for the state through the shipping industry. While the state is reliant on the health of the lake for multiple uses, Indiana has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[70]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has enacted two laws that support grant programs that fund projects focusing on reuse and reduction, in addition to recycling.[71]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have any extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. Additionally, the state has adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[72]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Indiana has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- There are a lot of opportunities to take action in the state. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Beverage Cans
8. Balloons
9. Cigar Tips
10. Lids (Plastic)

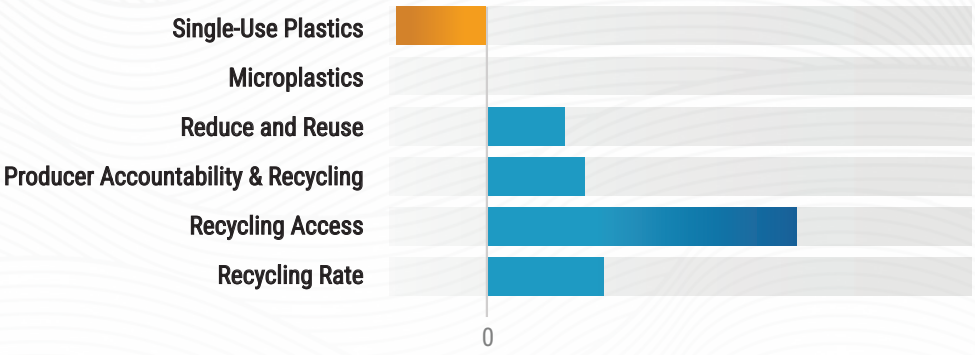
70 HB 1053, 119th Gen. Assemb., 2nd Reg. Sess. (Ind. 2016)
71 Ind. Code §§ 4-23-5.5-14, 13-20-22-2 (2024); "Indiana Recycling Market Development Program." Indiana Department of Environmental Management. Accessed May 2025; "Community Recycling Grant Guidelines." Indiana Department of Environmental Management.
72 SB 472, 123rd Gen. Assemb., 1st. Reg. Sess. (Ind. 2023). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Dee Liu / Getty Images

Iowa

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Iowa, while landlocked, is connected to the ocean through its extensive river systems that flow into the Mississippi River which ultimately drains into the Gulf. These waterways support diverse aquatic ecosystems, providing habitats for numerous species and serving as crucial corridors for migratory birds that traverse hemispheric routes. Iowa's agriculture relies heavily on these waterways for irrigation and for raising livestock. While the state depends on the health of these waterways, Iowa has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

Iowa has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[73]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state enacted a waste reduction and recycling fund to support projects that focus on reuse and reduction in addition to recycling.[74]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Although the state has a deposit return system for certain beverage containers,[75] it has not enacted an extended producer responsibility program for packaging. Iowa also has adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[76]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Iowa has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[77] the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Forks, Knives, Spoons
2. Beverage Cans
3. Cigarette Butts
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
7. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Toys

**2016 onward*

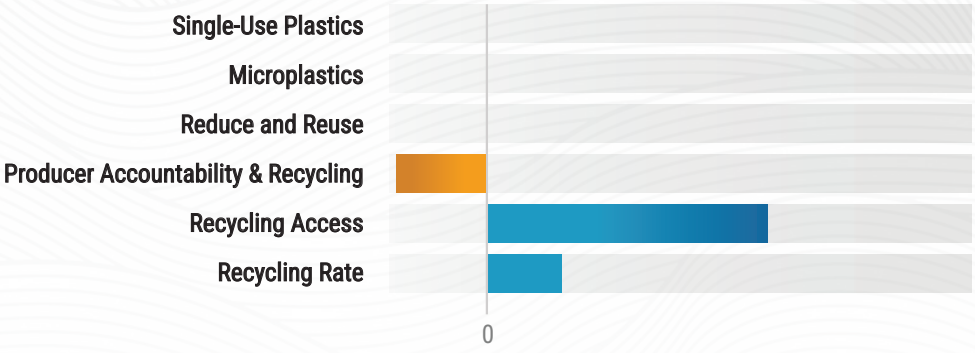
73 HF 295, 87th Gen. Assemb. (Iowa 2017).
74 Iowa Code § 455D.15 (2024); "Solid Waste Alternative Program (SWAP)." Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Accessed May 2025.
75 "Bottle Deposit Law." Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Accessed May 2025.
76 SF 534, 88th Gen. Assemb. (Iowa 2019). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
77 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

Photo credit: Dee Liu / Getty Images

Kansas

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Kansas, while geographically distant from the ocean, is connected to it through the Missouri River, which flows along the state's northeastern border before ultimately flowing into the Gulf. The Missouri River serves as a key part of the state's watershed, supplying communities in eastern Kansas with water for drinking, irrigation and recreational activities. The river supports the state's agricultural economy by providing essential water for crops and livestock while also facilitating trade through connections to larger shipping routes downstream. Additionally, wildlife such as migratory birds, fish and beavers depend on the river's wetlands and riparian habitats for survival. Kansas has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[78]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Kansas has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Kansas would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[79] the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and safeguard its agricultural industry.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
5. Other Plastic Bags
6. Cigarette Butts
7. Paper Bags
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
10. Straws, Stirrers

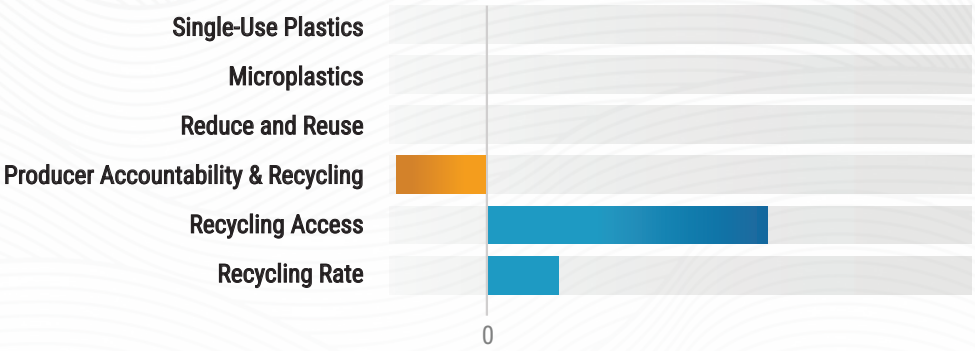
78 Kan. Stat. § 65-3402 (2024). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
79 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

Photo credit: DanBrandenburg / Getty Images

Kentucky

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Kentucky is deeply dependent on water through its extensive river network, including the Ohio River which flows into the Mississippi River before ultimately draining into the Gulf. These waterways are vital to Kentucky's economy, supporting agriculture, manufacturing and transportation. They also serve as the primary source of drinking water for more than five million residents, contributing to the state's ranking as number one for best tap water across the country.[80] While the state relies on its rivers' health for a multitude of reasons, Kentucky has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

80 "As Americans Focus on Water Quality, These States Boast the Best." (2023). J.D. Power.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[81]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Kentucky should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Kentucky would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[82] the state could consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and safeguard its agricultural industry.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
2. Beverage Cans
3. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Cigarette Butts
7. Other Plastic Bottles (Oil, bleach, etc.)
8. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Bottle Caps (Metal)

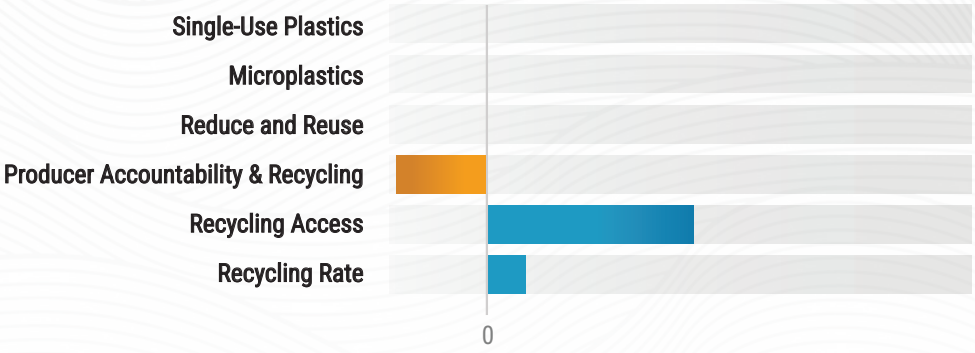
81 HB 45, 2022 Reg. Sess (Ky. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
82 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

Photo credit: Martina Birnbaum / Getty Images

Louisiana

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Louisiana is a state with a rich culture and economy built on its ties to its rivers, wetlands and coasts. Louisiana is a Gulf state with a massive seafood industry that has a $2.4 billion annual economic impact on the state, including through the harvest of crawfish, shrimp and oysters.[83] Louisiana is also the last state that the Mississippi flows through before draining into the Gulf. The Mississippi River sustains healthy wetland habitats throughout the state that serve as natural barriers to storms and sea-level rise. Louisiana is a major hub for petrochemical and plastic production, with dozens of facilities concentrated along the Mississippi River corridor in an area known as "Cancer Alley." This region has some of the highest rates of toxic air pollution and associated health impacts in the country.[84] Louisiana has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

83 "The Economy of Seafood." Louisiana Seafood Industry. Accessed May 2025.
84 "The Fight for Life in a Louisiana Fossil Fuel Sacrifice Zone." (2024). Human Rights Watch.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

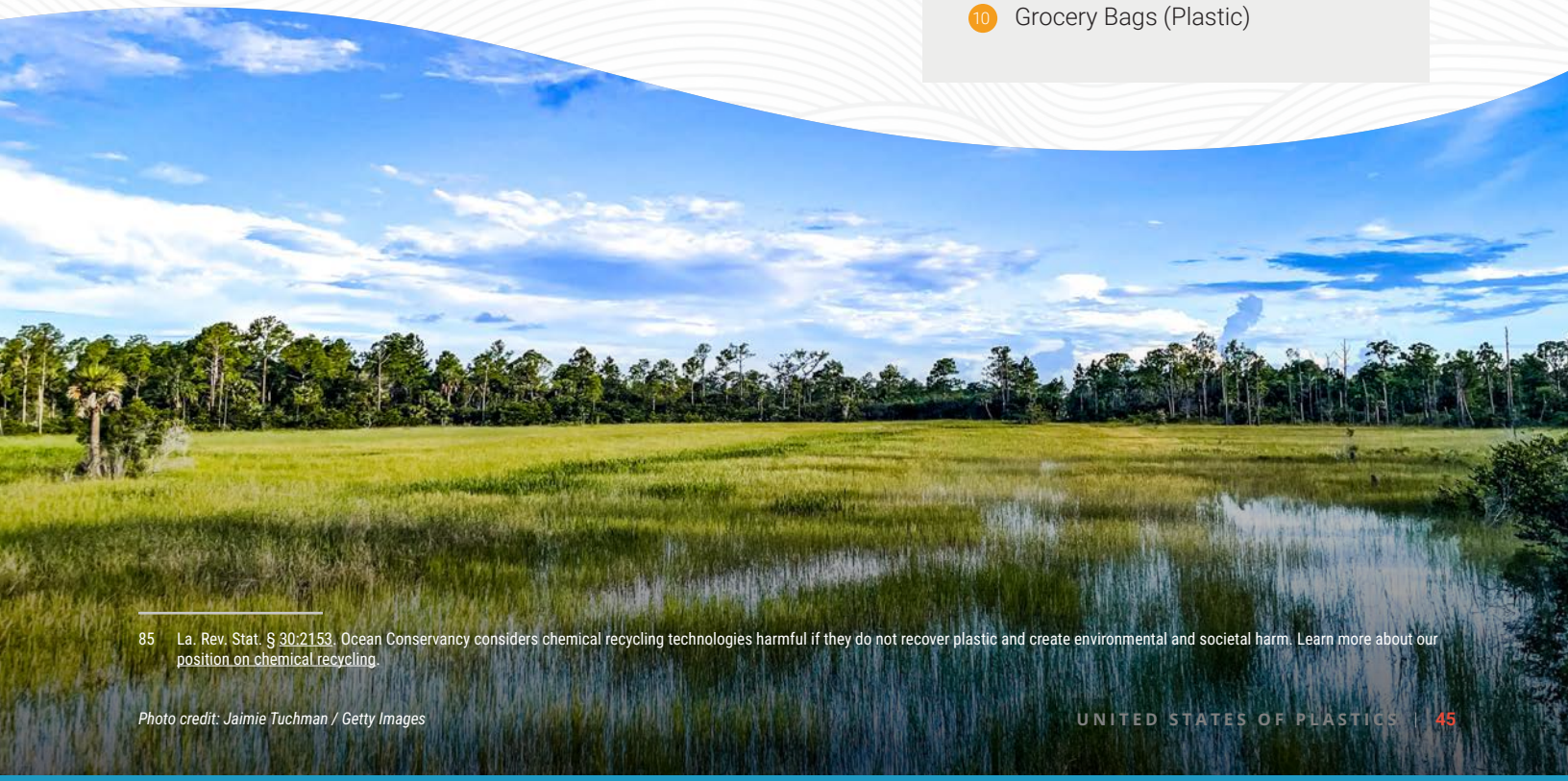
The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[85]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Louisiana has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
9. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)



85 La. Rev. Stat. § 30:2153. Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

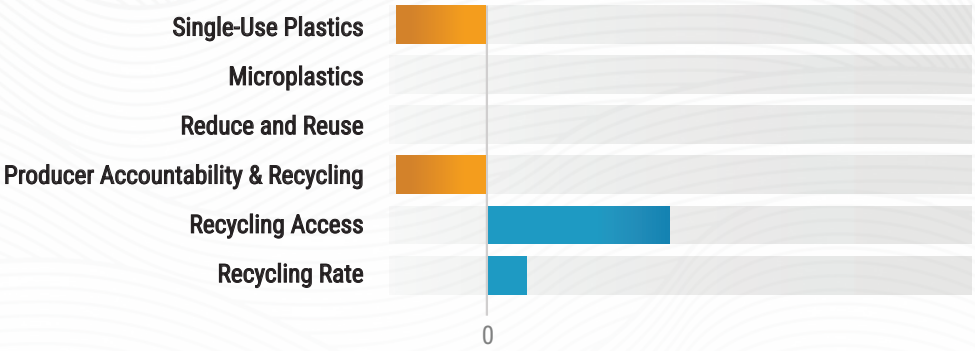
Photo credit: Jaimie Tuchman / Getty Images

Photo credit: marekuliasz / Getty Images

Mississippi

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

The state of Mississippi was named after the Mississippi River. The river flows over 2,300 miles before reaching the Gulf. The Mississippi River Basin is the third largest drainage basin in the world; it includes 31 states and drains 41% of the continental United States.[86] Much of the state's culture, economy, communities and wildlife are supported directly by its connection to the river and coast. The river serves as a vital transportation hub while also supporting the economy through tourism and recreation. Mississippi also has several ports on its coast to support its shipping sector. While the state has deep ties to its river and coast, the state has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

86 "The Mississippi Drainage Basin." U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[87]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[88]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mississippi has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could reduce plastic pollution, increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Construction Materials

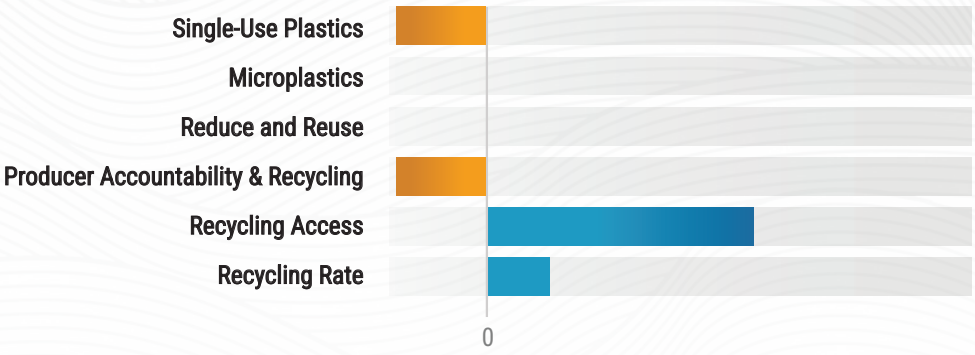
87 SB 2570, 2018 Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2018).
88 HB 1135, 2022 Reg. Sess. (Miss. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: f11photo / Getty Images

Missouri

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Although a landlocked state, Missouri holds a strong connection to the ocean through the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, which converge near St. Louis and ultimately flow into the Gulf. Many people within Missouri rely on the river for drinking water, recreation and transportation. Additionally, St. Louis also has a major port on the river which supports its economy through shipping. Missouri's abundant freshwater systems support natural habitats and wildlife, including the endangered pallid sturgeon. While Missouri's communities, ecosystems and economy rely on healthy rivers, the state has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastic bags and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[89]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[90]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Missouri has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Cans
3. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

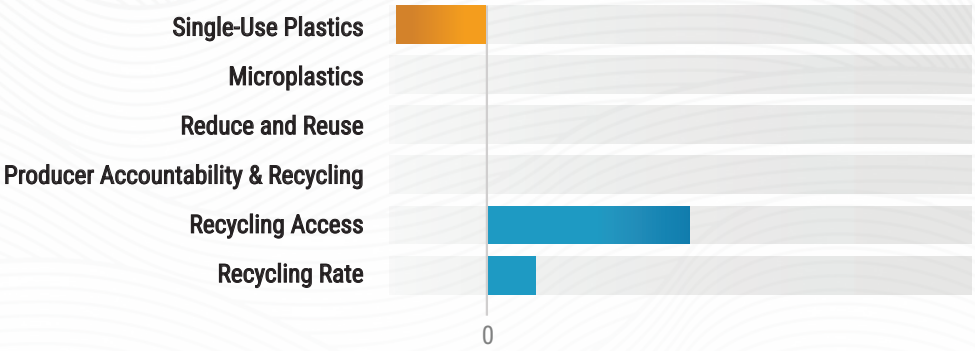
89 HB 722, 98th Gen. Assemb., 1st Reg. Sess. (Mo. 2015).
90 HB 2485, 101st Gen. Assemb. 2nd Reg. Sess. (Mo. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Pixabay

Montana

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Montana is connected to the ocean through the Missouri River, which flows into the Mississippi River, making it the westernmost state connected to the Mississippi River Drainage Basin that ultimately flows into the Gulf. Communities in Montana rely on the Missouri River, using its waters to support drinking water, recreation and transportation. The pallid sturgeon, one of the rarest and largest freshwater fish in North America, is an endangered species that relies on the health of the Missouri River, as do countless other wildlife. Missouri has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

Montana limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[91]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Montana should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
- Montana would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
3. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Cigarette Butts
6. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
7. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Clothing
   **2022 onward*
10. Footwear (Shoes/slippers)
    **2022 onward*

91 HB 407, 67th Leg. (Mon. 2021).

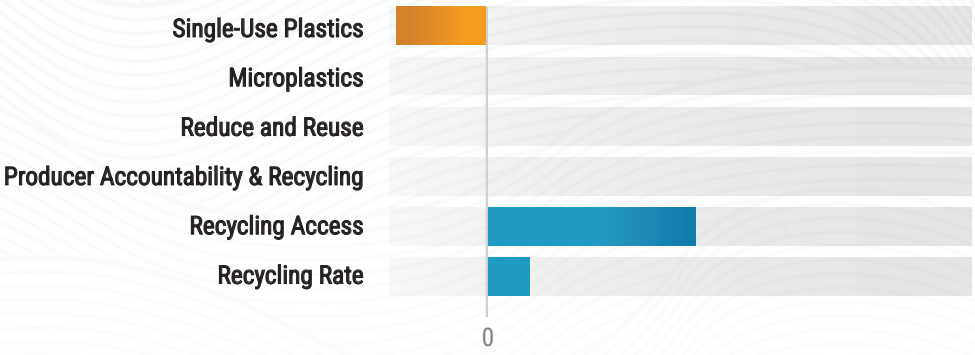
Photo credit: kellyvandellen / Adobe Stock

Photo credit: Jim Glab/ Getty Images

Nebraska

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Located in the heart of the U.S., Nebraska is connected to the health of the ocean through its extensive river network including the Niobrara, Platte and Missouri Rivers. All the rivers in Nebraska drain into the Missouri River, which eventually flows into the Gulf. Many communities in Nebraska are dependent on the health of the state's many rivers, using them for recreational and fishing purposes. These rivers are also essential for Nebraska's agricultural economy, providing water for irrigation and supporting livestock. Nebraska has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

Nebraska limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws phasing out the single-use plastics covered in our study.[92]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Nebraska should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
- As microplastics have been shown to affect soil health and crop productivity,[93] the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.
- Nebraska has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Straws, Stirrers
7. Bottle Caps (Metal)
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Take Out/Away Containers (Plastic)

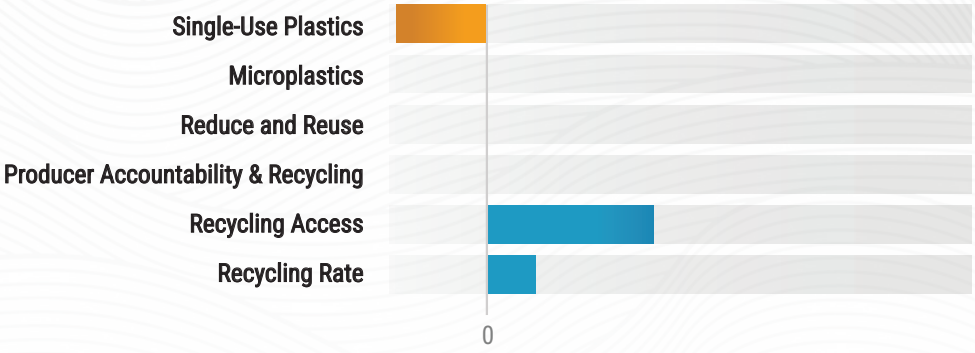
92 LB 632, 106th Leg., 2nd Sess (Neb. 2020).
93 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.

Photo credit: Jithin Mathew

North Dakota

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

North Dakota, though landlocked, is intricately connected to the Missouri River, which originates in Montana and flows southeast through North Dakota before eventually reaching the Mississippi River and ultimately the Gulf. Communities in North Dakota rely on the Missouri for drinking water and for agricultural and industrial uses, making the health of this river vital to daily lives. The river also supports local economies through energy production from dams, transportation and recreation. Wetlands along the river provide nesting grounds, food sources and migration pathways for wildlife within the state. North Dakota has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

North Dakota limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[94]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- North Dakota should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
- North Dakota would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Cigarette Butts
6. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
7. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
8. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
9. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

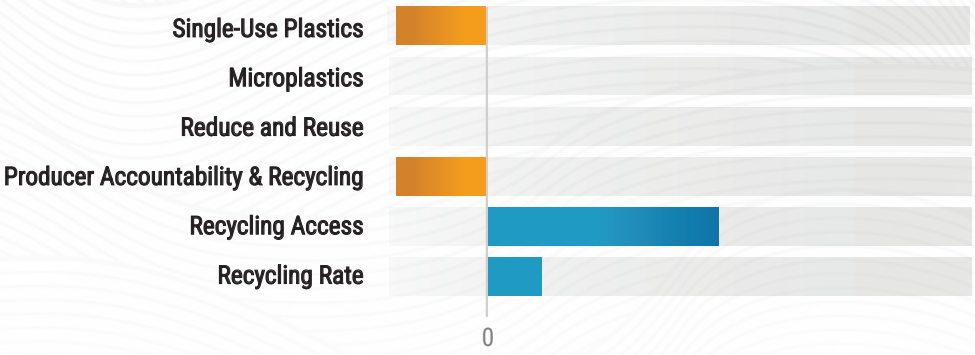
94 N.D. Cent. Code §§ 23.1-08-02; 23.1-08-06.1.

Photo credit: Dennis_Casey / Getty Images

Oklahoma

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Oklahoma is connected to the ocean through the Arkansas and Red Rivers, both of which flow through the state before joining the Mississippi River and ultimately drain into the Gulf. Local communities are dependent on healthy rivers for drinking water and agriculture and also support the state's economy through transportation, power generation and tourism. The rivers play a key role in providing flood protection against storms through both engineered and natural features. Oklahoma has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

Oklahoma limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[95]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted harmful policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[96]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Oklahoma has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Oklahoma would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Lids (Plastic)
9. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
10. Cups & Plates (Plastic)

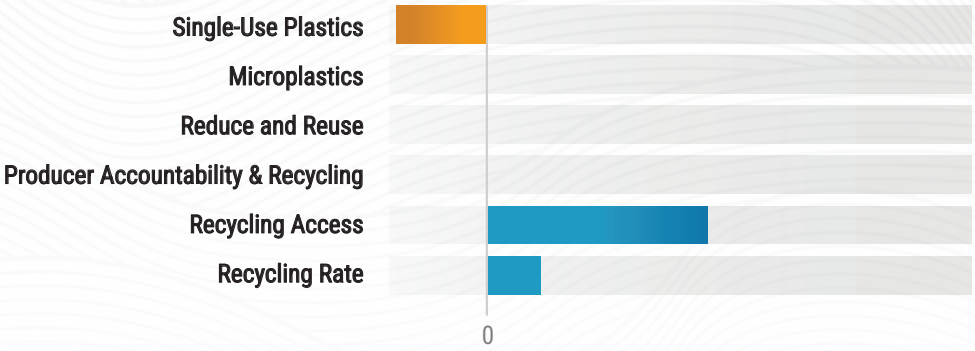
95 SB 1001, 2019 Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2019).
96 SB 448, 2021 Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2021). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Kubrak78 / Getty Images

South Dakota

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

South Dakota, though far away from a coastline, is integrally connected to the ocean through the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, which ultimately drain into the Gulf. The Missouri River is a vital resource for the state, supporting agriculture, recreation, wildlife habitat and drinking water for many communities. South Dakota is home to both Badlands and Wind Cave National Parks as well as Mount Rushmore Memorial, attracting millions of visitors from across the country to enjoy its natural beauty. The state has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

South Dakota has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[97]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- South Dakota should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
- South Dakota would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.
- Since tourism to national parks and other outdoor spaces provides a major part of South Dakota's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Cans
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

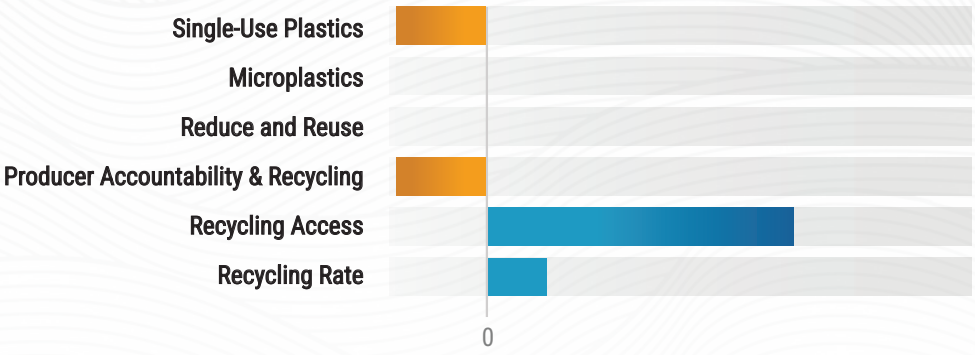
97 SB 54, 95th Legis. Sess. (S.D. 2020).

Photo credit: WendellandCarolyn / Getty Images

Tennessee

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Known for its vibrant music heritage, the Great Smoky Mountains, and rich biodiversity, Tennessee plays a key role in the broader network of U.S. waterways that connect to the ocean. The Tennessee River flows through much of the state and is a major tributary of the Ohio River, which then joins the Mississippi River before ultimately draining into the Gulf. These waterways are vital to Tennessee's economy, supporting agriculture, transportation, tourism and outdoor recreation. Additionally, the state's diverse ecosystems depend on clean and healthy water to sustain wildlife, including economically and ecologically important species such as the smallmouth bass and blue catfish. While the state relies on its connection to healthy waterways, Tennessee has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

Tennessee has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[98]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[99]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Tennessee has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Although Tennessee's recycling access rate is higher than some states, its recycling rate is still below 15% and some of the top items collected by ICC volunteers are readily recyclable. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic Bags
9. Fishing Line (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
10. Straws, Stirrers

State Investments in Recycling

Tennessee is among many states that are considering the best EPR program for their state to address a landfill space shortage and the need for additional investments in expanding and improving recycling. Increasing recycling rates and recycling-associated jobs is a key part of these discussions. As well-crafted EPR is known to improve recycling rates,[100] EPR also has the potential to address these local concerns while securing domestic supply chains and delivering environmental benefits.

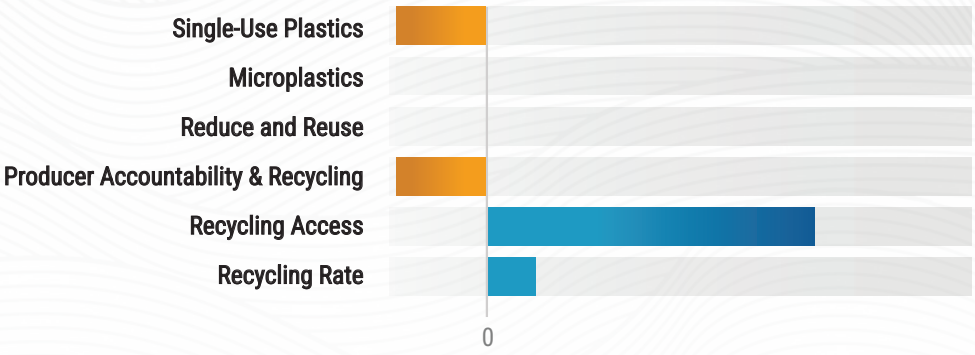
98 HB 1021, 111th Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2019).
99 SB 923, 111th Gen. Assemb. (Tenn. 2019). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
100 "Increasing Recycling Rate with EPR Policy." The Recycling Partnership.

Photo credit: JPecha / Getty Images

West Virginia

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

West Virginia, while landlocked, is intricately connected to the ocean through its expansive river systems, particularly the Ohio River, which flows through the state and feeds into the Mississippi River before ultimately reaching the Gulf. The state is home to lush forests covering over 70% of its land, the third highest in the country, that rely on the health of the river systems.[101] These waterways are crucial to the state's economy, supporting industries such as agriculture, tourism and recreation, while providing drinking water to many communities. Despite taking pride in its natural beauty, West Virginia has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

101 "West Virginia." National Association of State Foresters. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

West Virginia has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[102]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[103]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- West Virginia has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- West Virginia would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic Bags
9. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
10. Straws, Stirrers

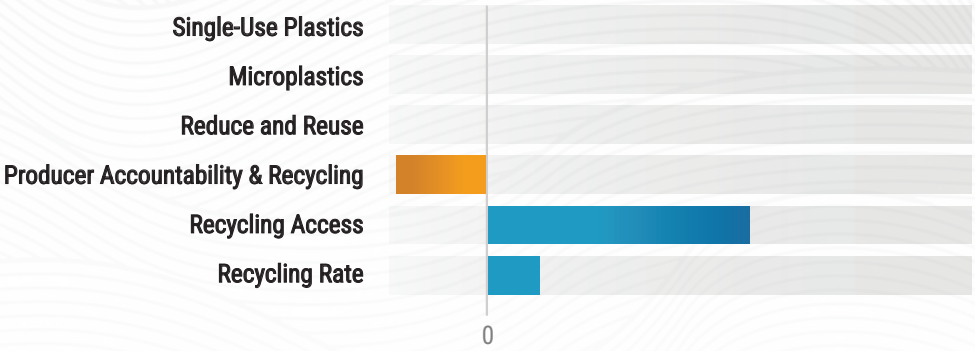
102 HB 2500, 2021 Reg. Sess. (W. Va. 2021).
103 W. Va. Code § 22-15-2. Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: SeanXu / Getty Images

Wyoming

MISSOURI-MISSISSIPPI DRAINAGE

Although landlocked, Wyoming is still connected to the ocean through a system of rivers, in particular the Yellowstone River, that flow into the Missouri River before ultimately draining into the Gulf. Wyoming is home to some of the most iconic natural landscapes in the U.S., including Yellowstone National Park, the first national park in the world, and Grand Teton National Park, which draw millions of visitors each year. As a state with some of the lowest rainfall in the country annually, Wyoming relies on the health of its river systems and adjacent reservoirs extensively for drinking water and to support local agriculture. Wyoming has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[104]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Wyoming should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state would benefit from increased participation in Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC). Organizing cleanup efforts removes harmful plastic pollution from the environment, helps raise citizen awareness and gathers important data to better target policy solutions. A great way to get involved and contribute valuable data is to download Ocean Conservancy's Clean Swell® app or join an ICC event.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
6. Other Plastic Bags
7. Paper Bags
8. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
9. Construction Materials
10. Straws, Stirrers

104 SF 80, 67th Leg., 2024 Budget Sess. (Wyo. 2024). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Pixabay

Photo credit: Tim Speer / Getty Images

Rio Grande & Texas Gulf

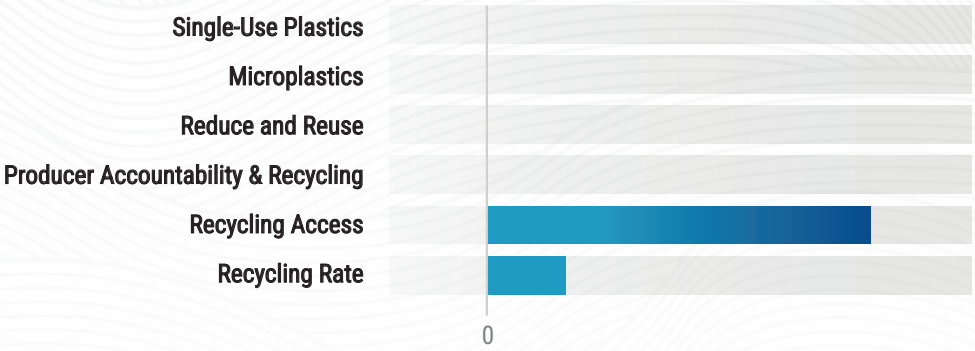
- New Mexico
- Texas

Photo credit: ericfoltz / Getty Images

New Mexico

RIO GRANDE & TEXAS GULF

Communities in New Mexico rely on the Rio Grande River, which flows from Colorado through New Mexico and Texas before draining into the Gulf. The Rio Grande is the third longest river in the continental United States and supports over six million people through drinking water use, agricultural use and recreation. Several threatened and endangered species also rely on the waters in the Rio Grande Basin, including the Southwestern willow flycatcher, Rio Grande silvery minnow and New Mexico meadow jumping mouse. New Mexico is renowned for its unique desert landscapes, including Carlsbad Caverns National Park and the Chihuahuan Desert, both of which rely on healthy ecosystems to thrive. New Mexico has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution, which poses a serious threat to its communities and wildlife.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are many opportunities to take action in New Mexico. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- Since tourism is a major driver in New Mexico's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.
- The state has a relatively high recycling access rate, but recycling rates are still less than 20% and some of the top items collected by ICC volunteers are readily recyclable. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Other Plastic Waste
   **2022 onward*
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Other (non-plastic) Trash
   **2016 onward*
9. 6-Pack Holders
10. Bottle Caps (Metal)

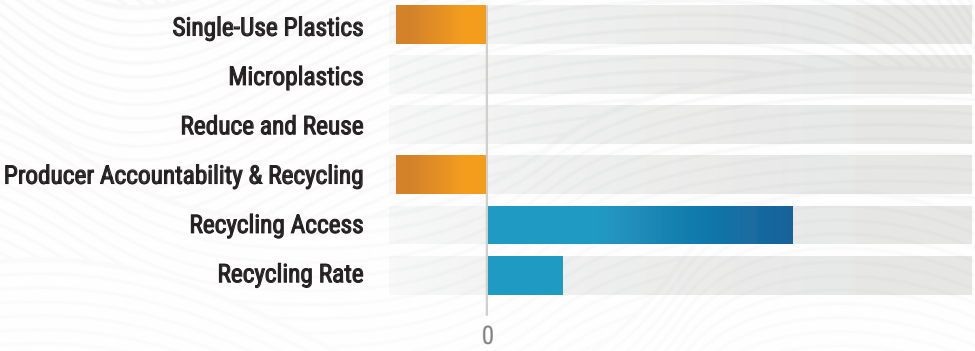
Photo credit: Tara Krauss / Getty Images

Photo credit: RoschetzkyIstockPhoto / Getty Images

Texas

RIO GRANDE & TEXAS GULF

Texas's vast shoreline has shaped both its natural environment and its communities. Coastal towns and cities depend on the ocean for tourism, fishing and recreation, while marine wildlife thrives in habitats like estuaries and wetlands supported by this coastal access. Economically, the Gulf supports billions in revenue through industries such as shipping, commercial fishing and energy production. While communities in Texas have made efforts to address plastic pollution on the local level, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any statewide restrictions on the single-use plastics covered in our study.[105]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[106]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Texas has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
10. Other Plastic Bags

Home of Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC)

In 1986, the inaugural ICC event took place on a Galveston, Texas beach. Founders Linda Maraniss and Kathy O'Hara, colleagues at Ocean Conservancy's predecessor organization (Center for Environmental Education) knew that volunteers could assist with more than just trash pickup. So, in addition to removing pollution, volunteers meticulously documented each item they collected, starting what is now the longest-running marine debris database in the world. Since then, the cleanup has grown and changed, but the mission has remained the same: to have an immediate, positive impact on waterway and ocean health, including the communities that depend on them, and to collect critically important data to drive policy change to keep plastics from getting to the ocean in the first place. Over the last 40 years, more than 18 million volunteers have collected more than 380 million pounds of debris worldwide through the ICC.

105 Tex. Health & Safety Code Ann. § 361.0961; SB 577, 88th Leg. Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2023).
106 HB 3060, 88th Leg. Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2023); HB 1953, 86th Leg. Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2019). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Jaimie Tuchman / Getty Images

South Atlantic-Gulf

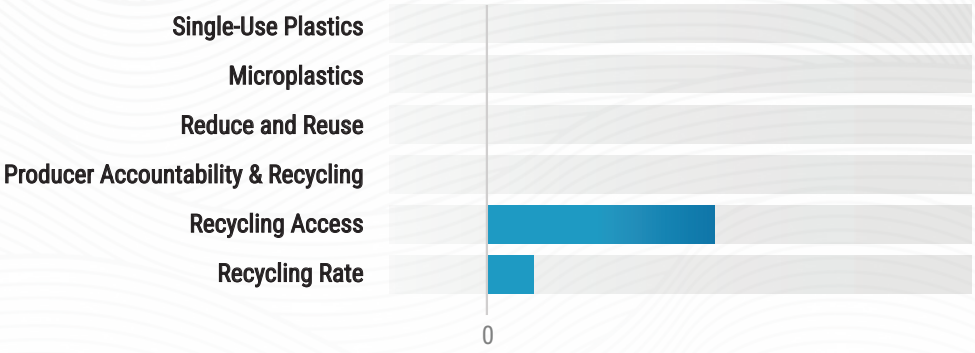
- Alabama
- Florida
- Georgia
- North Carolina
- South Carolina

Photo credit: BJ Ray / Adobe Stock

Alabama

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

Alabama, known for its rich history and cultural heritage, is integrally connected to the ocean through its southern shoreline. The seafood industry, particularly oysters and shrimping, is vital to local economies, with towns like Bayou La Batre historically dependent on this trade. Tourism also thrives along Alabama's Gulf Coast, attracting visitors to its white-sand beaches, historic sites and diverse recreational activities, thereby supporting numerous businesses and employment opportunities. The Mobile-Tensaw River Delta is one of the most biodiverse areas in North America and serves as a nursery for a variety of marine life. Despite its deep reliance on a healthy ocean, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution, which poses a serious threat to its communities and wildlife.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are many opportunities to take action in the state. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- Given the increasing detection of microplastics in seafood[107] and the importance of fisheries to the state's economy, Alabama should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.
- The state has both a low recycling access rate and a low recycling rate and readily recyclable items like beverage containers are among the most commonly collected items by ICC volunteers. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Cigar Tips
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Construction Materials

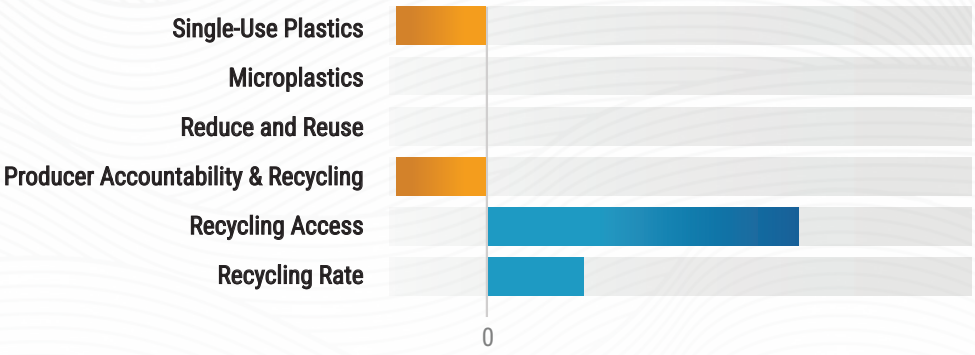
107 Smith, M., et al. (2018). *Current Environmental Health Reports*.

Photo credit: Shotmedia / Adobe Stock

Florida

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

Florida is a deeply unique state. With over 8,000 miles of shoreline,[108] the state is home to some of the country's most unique and pristine ecosystems, supporting wildlife species like the manatee and green sea turtle in its coral reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds. This connection to the ocean is also an important part of the economy with coastal tourism accounting for billions annually as millions of visitors are drawn to Florida's beaches, marine wildlife and water-based activities like diving and snorkeling. While some communities in Florida have made efforts to address plastic pollution on the local level, the state has passed few laws to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

108 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has laws limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics.[109] However, it has passed a law allowing local governments to restrict smoking on public beaches and parks.[110] At least 55 municipalities have enacted cigarette smoking bans on beaches or in parks since this bill passed in 2021.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[111]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Florida has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Since tourism is a major driver in Florida's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists in Florida could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Bottle Caps (Metal)
10. Lids (Plastic)

Bye-Bye Balloon Releases

In 2024, Florida passed a law prohibiting the intentional release of balloons.[112] This law closed a loophole in the state's existing littering law that allowed for the release of up to 10 balloons per person per day. Data from Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup® (ICC) show that balloons are a common form of plastic pollution on beaches worldwide and Ocean Conservancy scientists have found that nearly one in three seabirds that consumed even a single balloon died from balloon ingestion. They also concluded that balloons are among the highest-risk debris items—32 times more likely to kill seabirds than hard plastic. This type of policy is important to prevent devastating impacts to wildlife, especially in states where balloons are not covered under existing litter laws.

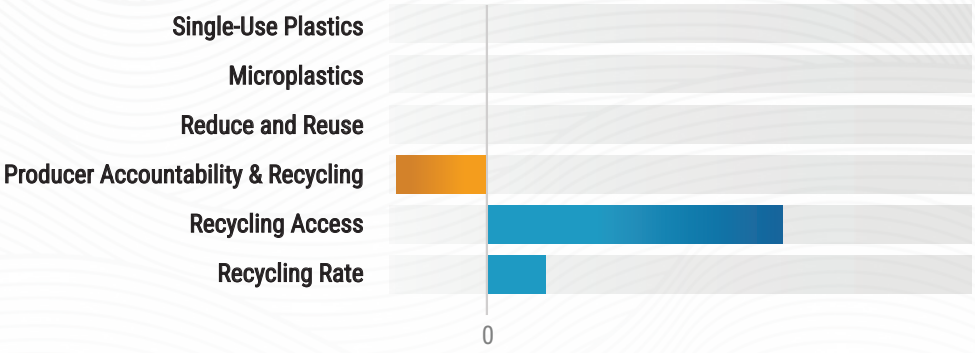
109 SB 694, Reg. Sess. 2021 (Fla. 2021); HB 7007, Reg. Sess. 2016 (Fla. 2016).
110 HB 105, Reg. Sess. 2022 (Fla. 2022).
111 HB 335, Reg. Sess. 2017 (Fla. 2017). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
112 HB 321, Reg. Sess. 2024 (Fla. 2024).

Photo credit: Justin Potter / Adobe Stock

Georgia

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

Georgia's Atlantic shoreline is crucial to the state's economy, communities and wildlife. Coastal towns rely on the ocean for fishing, shipping and tourism, while salt marshes, estuaries and barrier islands provide essential habitats for birds, sea turtles and marine life, including Georgia's state marine mammal, the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale. The Port of Savannah, one of the busiest in the U.S., is a key driver of the state's economy, directly connecting ocean access to global trade and job creation. While in recent years some Georgia communities have taken steps toward addressing plastic pollution at the local level, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

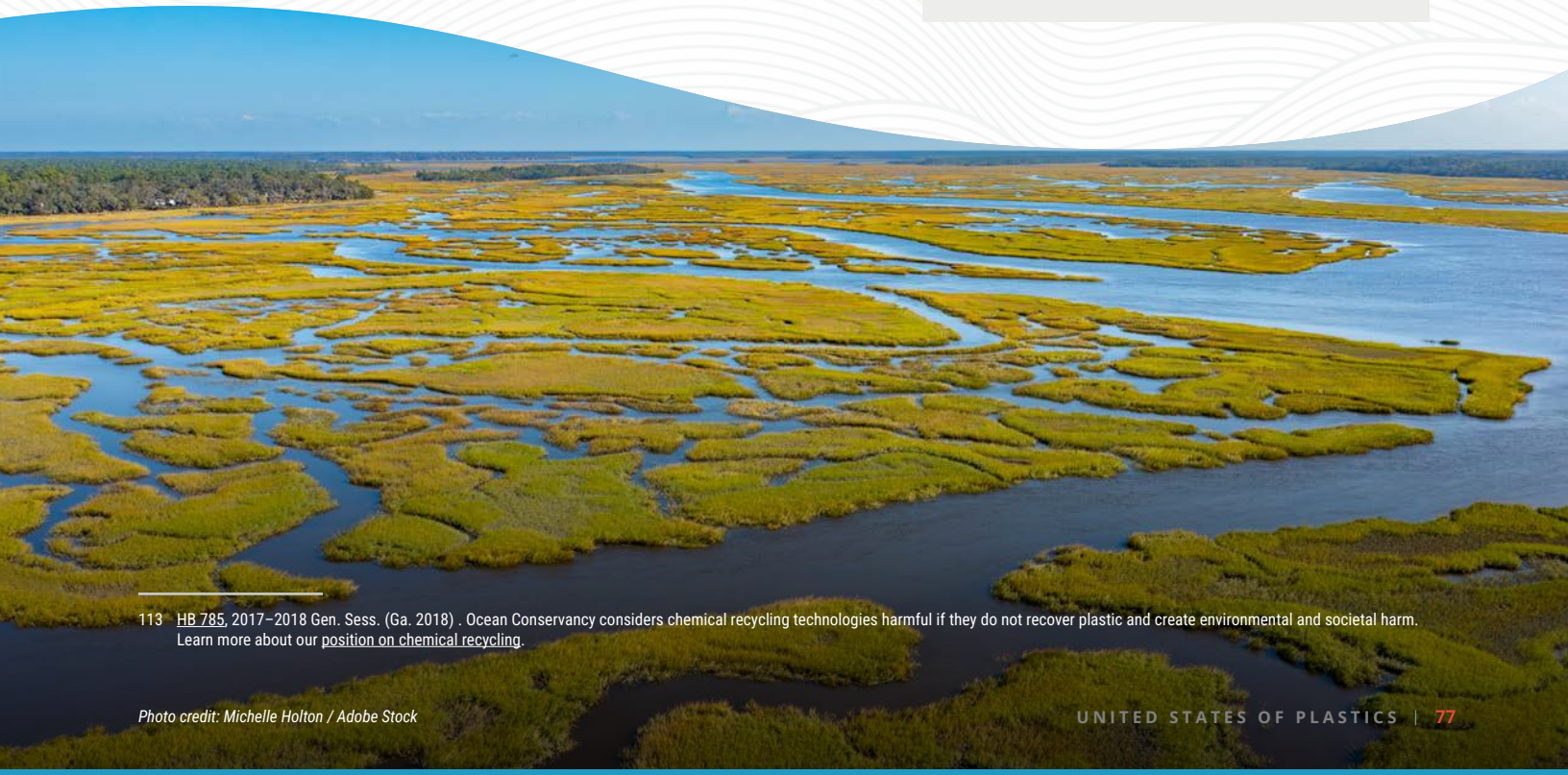
The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[113]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Georgia has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items in the state, Georgia could consider policies like comprehensive EPR combined with a deposit return system, which could increase the amount of material that is recycled and immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
10. Other Plastic Bags



113 HB 785, 2017–2018 Gen. Sess. (Ga. 2018) . Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

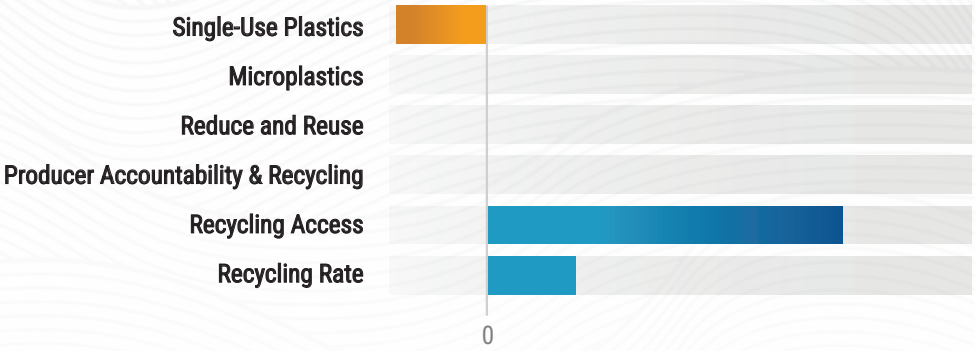
Photo credit: Michelle Holton / Adobe Stock

Photo credit: David Garrison / Getty Images

North Carolina

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

North Carolina sits along the Atlantic coast and its economy relies heavily on its connection to the ocean and its extensive network of rivers and estuaries. North Carolina spans three distinct environments from the Appalachian Mountains in the west, to the Piedmont Plateau, and on to the Outer Banks in the east. The Outer Banks, a chain of barrier islands, are not only a popular tourist destination but also serve as critical habitats for wildlife and as natural protection against hurricanes and sea-level rise. These coastal and aquatic environments are essential to the state's identity and economy, supporting major industries such as fishing, tourism, agriculture and shipping. North Carolina has cultivated a thriving economy reliant on a healthy ocean, but to date, the state has yet to pass laws that would address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

North Carolina has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[114]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

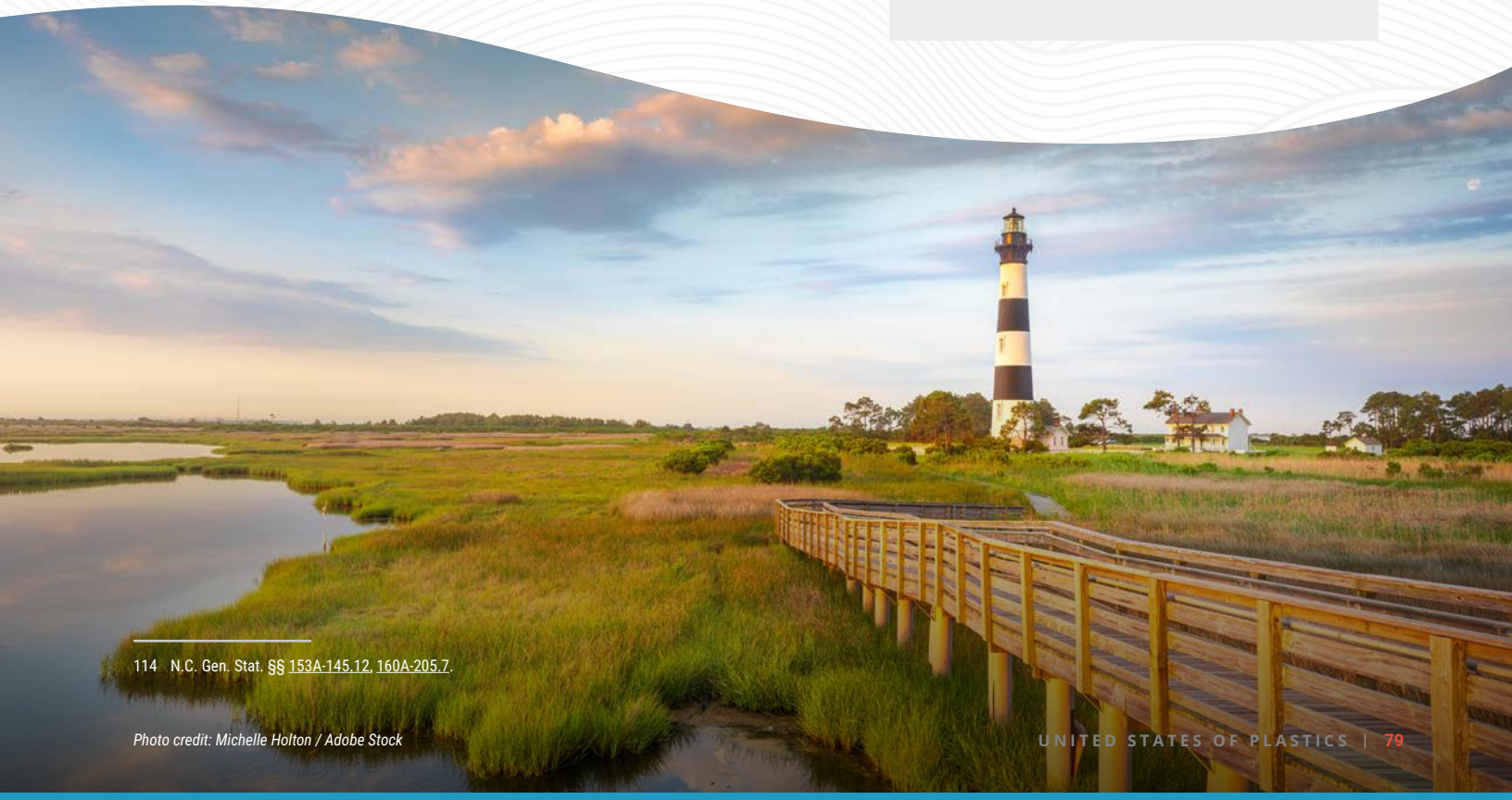
The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- North Carolina has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities
- Although North Carolina's recycling access rate is higher than some states, its recycling rate is low. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic Bags
9. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
10. Straws, Stirrers



114 N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 153A-145.12, 160A-205.7.

Photo credit: Michelle Holton / Adobe Stock

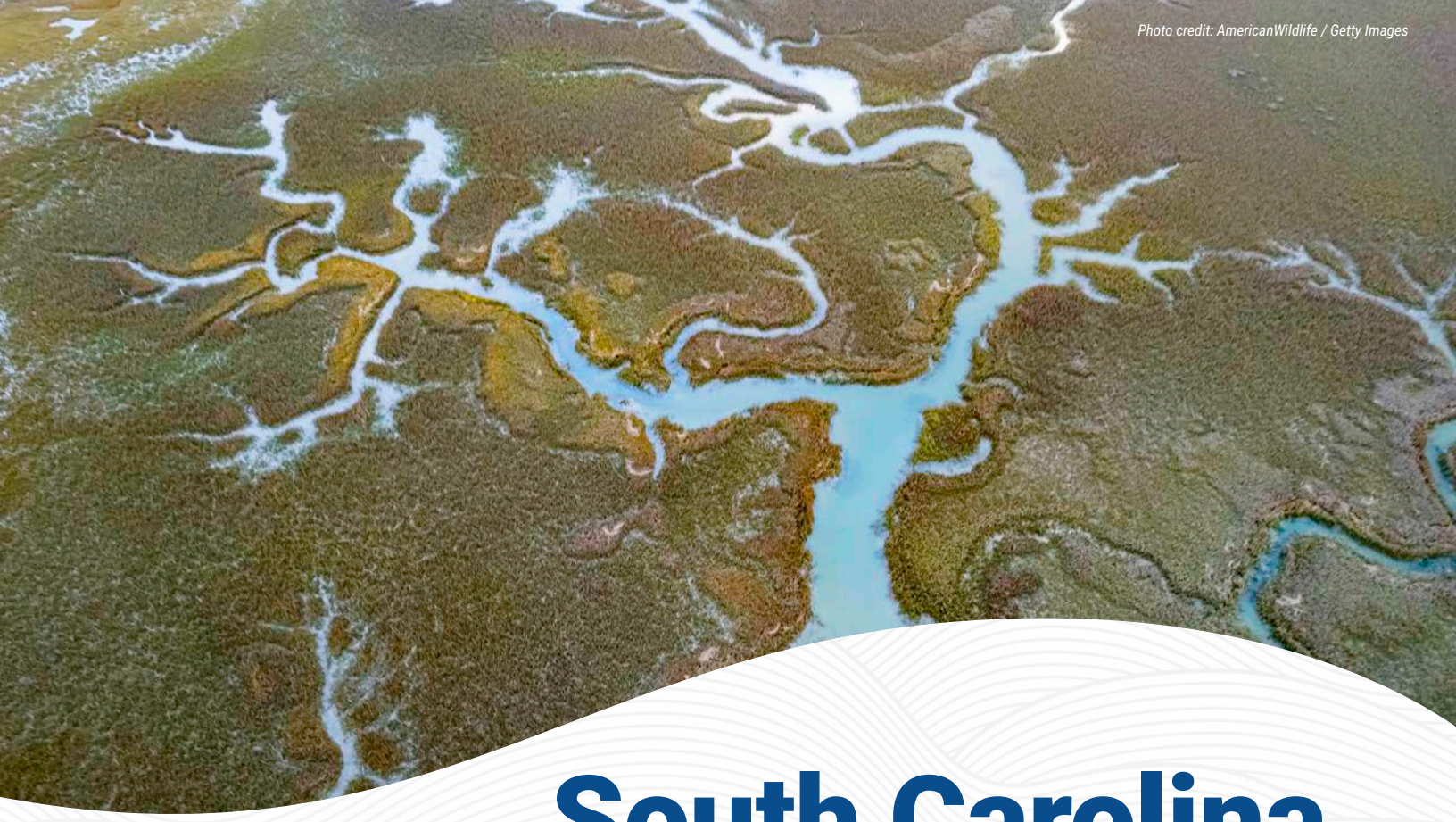
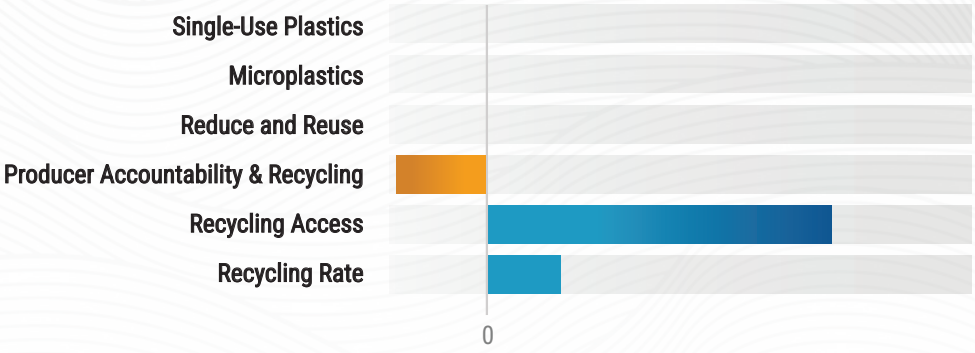


Photo credit: AmericanWildlife / Getty Images

South Carolina

SOUTH ATLANTIC-GULF

South Carolina's deep connection to the ocean is evident in its extensive Atlantic shoreline, estuaries, salt marshes and river systems that support diverse ecosystems and vibrant coastal communities. The ocean is vital to the state's economy through tourism, commercial and recreational fishing and shipping. South Carolina's iconic natural areas like the ACE Basin (located around the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto Rivers) and its coastal waters are home to wildlife, including threatened and endangered sea turtles, as well as sturgeons, mussels and rays. Just off South Carolina's coast, extending from the top of the state to the top of Florida, is the only known calving ground for the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale.[115] South Carolina has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

115 "North Atlantic Right Whale Calving Season 2025." NOAA Fisheries. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

South Carolina has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. South Carolina has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[116]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- South Carolina has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Although South Carolina's recycling access rate is higher than some states, its recycling rate is low. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Cans
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Construction Materials
10. Cups & Plates (Plastic)

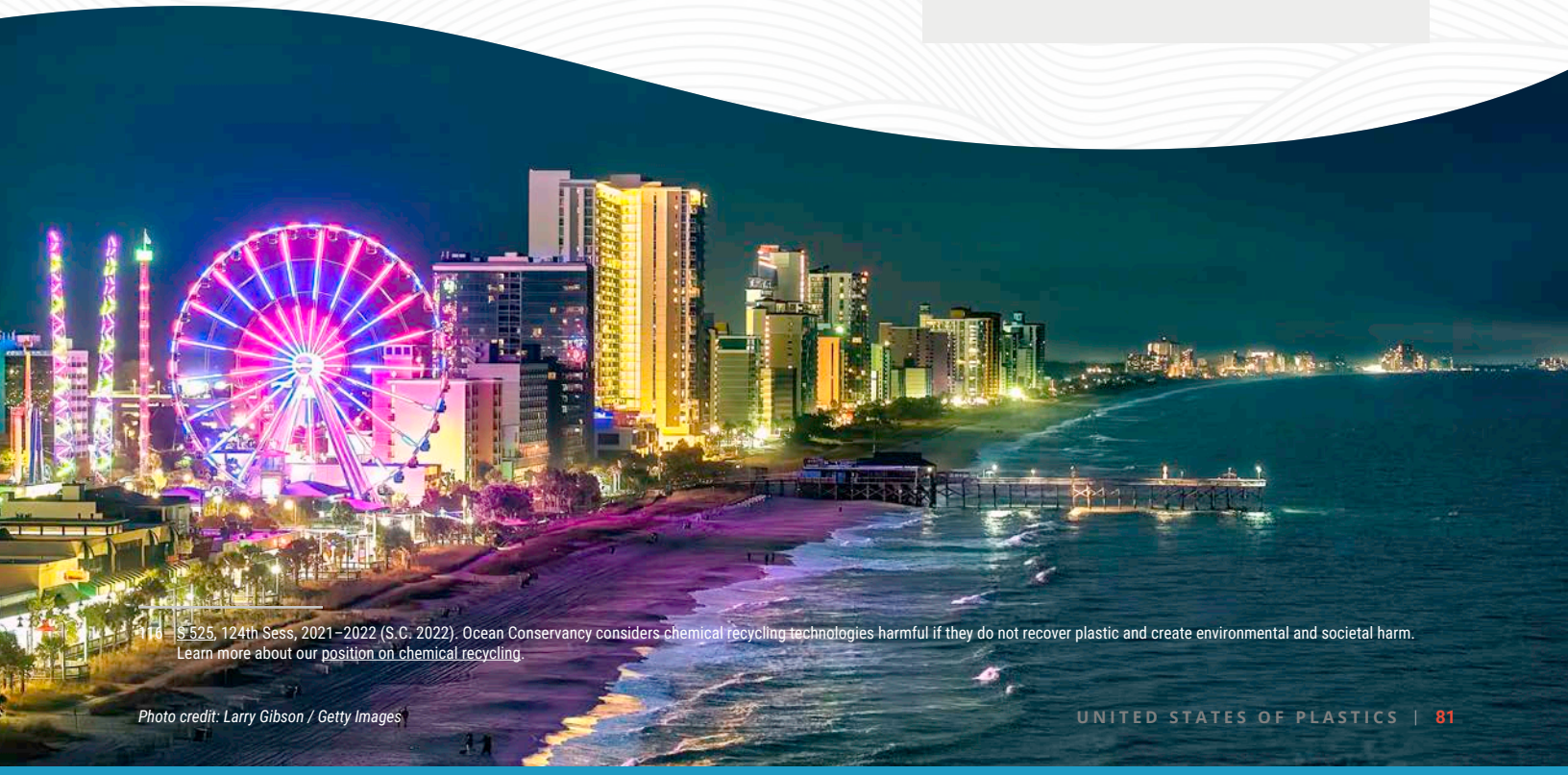


Photo credit: Larry Gibson / Getty Images

116 S 525, 124th Sess, 2021–2022 (S.C. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Kelly Cassella

Mid-Atlantic

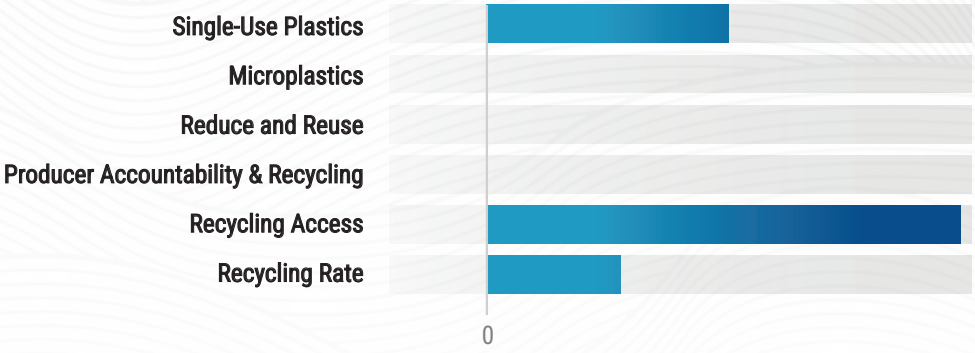
- Delaware
- Maryland
- New Jersey
- Virginia
- Washington, D.C.

Photo credit: mdgmorris / Getty Images

Delaware

MID-ATLANTIC

Delaware is deeply intertwined with the health of its waterways and the Atlantic Ocean. Bordered by the Delaware River, Delaware Bay and the Atlantic, the state has a rich maritime history and economy rooted in coastal tourism, shipping and fisheries. Delaware's beaches and estuaries, such as those within the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve, provide critical habitat for migratory birds, shellfish and marine species, including the largest spawning population of horseshoe crabs in the world. Delaware's coast also provides storm protection and popular recreational opportunities. Recognizing the importance of protecting these natural resources, Delaware has a history of environmental stewardship that includes taking actions to address plastic pollution. However, there are many opportunities for continued progress.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

Delaware has passed laws to phase out expanded polystyrene foodware, single-use plastic bags and plastic foodware accessories like stirrers and picks.[117] The state also requires that single-use plastic straws be provided to consumers only by request.[118]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Delaware has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR combined with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.
- Given the increasing detection of microplastics in seafood[119] and the importance of fisheries and coastal tourism to the state's economy, Delaware could consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and safeguard the state's seafood industry.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Straws, Stirrers
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Lids (Plastic)

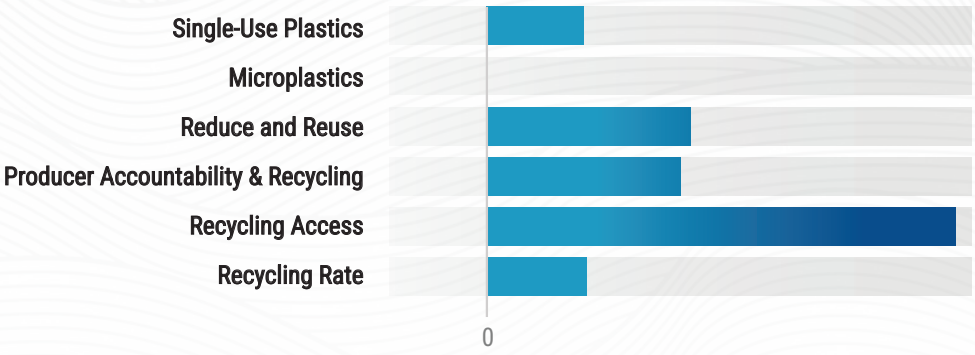
117 SB 51, 152nd Gen. Assemb. (Del. 2023) (expanded polystyrene, accessories); Del. Code tit. 7, § 6099A (bags).
118 SB 51 (Del. 2023).
119 Smith, M., et al. (2018). *Current Environmental Health Reports*.

Photo credit: Patricia Anderson / Getty Images

Maryland

MID-ATLANTIC

Maryland is deeply connected to water, particularly through the Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the U.S., which is critical to the state's environment, culture and economy. Coastal communities along the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic coast depend on the health of marine ecosystems for tourism and protection from storm surges. The Chesapeake Bay supports a diverse array of wildlife including blue crabs, oysters and migratory birds and produces roughly 500 million pounds of seafood each year.[120] Maryland has been an early leader in addressing plastic pollution, but many opportunities remain for continued action.



FINAL SCORE

Good

120 "Chesapeake Bay." NOAA Fisheries. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Maryland has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware.[121] Ocean Conservancy research found a 65% reduction in plastic foam foodware pollution collected by International Coastal Cleanup® volunteers from beaches and waterways in Maryland after its phase-out in the state.[122]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

Maryland's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law for packaging requires producers, with approval by the state, to develop targets for waste reduction and reuse through the development of their plan.[123] Maryland has also passed a law to require any new construction with a drinking fountain to also have a water bottle filling station.[124]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

In 2025, Maryland became the sixth state to pass a law establishing EPR for packaging.[125] This followed the completion of a statewide needs assessment required by a previously enacted law.[126]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maryland's recently passed EPR law has the potential to reduce single-use plastics, improve reuse systems and increase recycling. The state should work to ensure robust and timely implementation of the law to realize its full environmental and economic benefits.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items in the state, Maryland could consider complementing their existing EPR law for packaging with a deposit return system (or bottle bill), which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.
- Given the increasing detection of microplastics in seafood[127] and the importance of fisheries to the state's economy, Maryland could consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and safeguard its seafood industry.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
2. Cigarette Butts
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Straws, Stirrers
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

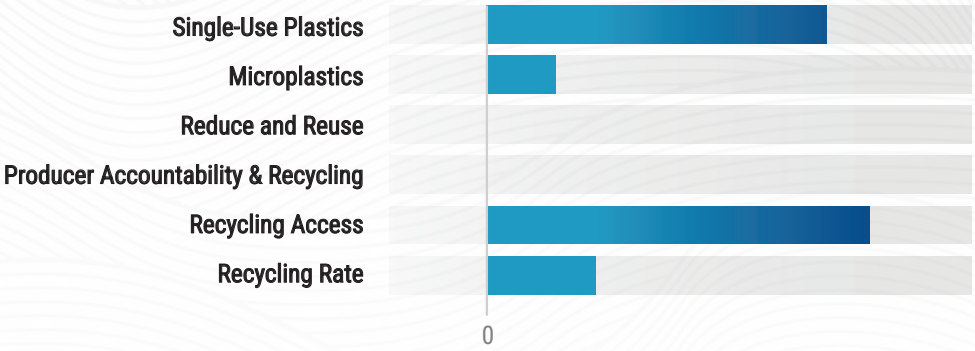
121 Md. Code Ann., Envir. §§ 9-2201 et seq.
122 Banigan, C., et al. "Impact of Plastic Foam Bans on Pollution." (2023). Ocean Conservancy.
123 SB 901, 2025 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2025).
124 SB 96/HB 277, 2025 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2025).
125 SB 901 (Md. 2025).
126 SB 222, 2023 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2023).
127 Smith, M., et al. (2018). *Current Environmental Health Reports*.

Photo credit: Johnrob / Getty Images

New Jersey

MID-ATLANTIC

New Jersey's deep connection to the ocean is evident in its nearly 2,000 miles of shoreline,[128] vibrant shore communities and extensive network of rivers and estuaries, including the Delaware River and Raritan Bay. These waterways are central to the state's economy, supporting commercial and recreational fishing, tourism, shipping and coastal industries. The Jersey Shore, famous for its boardwalks and beaches, draws millions of visitors annually and provides critical habitat for migratory birds and marine species. Many endangered and threatened species reside in New Jersey's coastal marshes and shores that play a key role in maintaining the state's ecosystems. New Jersey has a vital connection to its coastal waters, and the state has taken action to address the growing threat of plastic pollution. However, many opportunities remain for continued progress.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

128 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

New Jersey has phased out expanded polystyrene foam foodware and single-use plastic bags and requires that plastic straws be provided to consumers only by request.[129] The state also prohibits smoking on or in any public beach or park.[130]

Microplastics

The state has enacted a law supporting research on microplastics to inform future actions.[131]

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs (DRS) for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items in the state, New Jersey should consider a comprehensive approach to EPR by combining a DRS program for beverage containers, which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter, with an EPR program for packaging to increase recycling rates.
- Since tourism is a major driver in New Jersey's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists in New Jersey could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
3. Straws, Stirrers
4. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
7. Beverage Cans
8. Lids (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Bottle Caps (Metal)

129 N.J. Stat. §§ 13:1E-99.126 et seq.
130 N.J. Stat. §§ 26:3D-56 et seq.
131 A 4821/4823, Sess. 2022–2023 (2024).

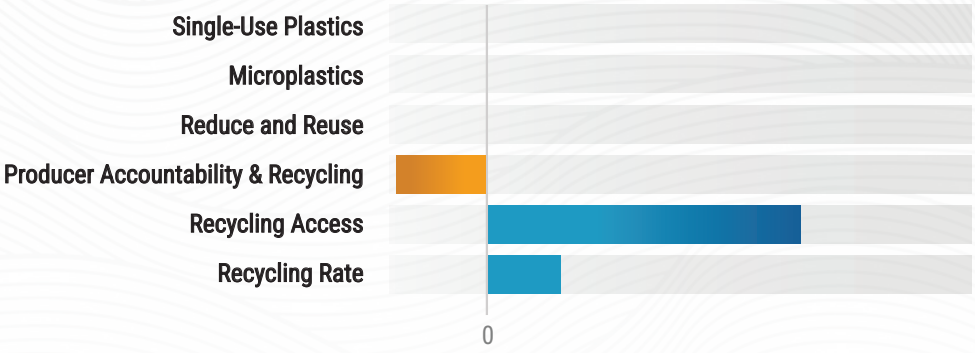
Photo credit: DenisTangneyJr / Getty Images

Photo credit: Ultima_Gaina / Getty Images

Virginia

MID-ATLANTIC

Virginia's strong connection to water is anchored by its extensive shoreline on the Chesapeake Bay, Atlantic Ocean and a vast network of rivers such as the James, Potomac and Rappahannock. These waterways are vital to the state's history, culture and economy, supporting commercial fishing, naval operations, shipping and tourism. The Chesapeake Bay is an important estuary that provides habitat for species like blue crabs, oysters and striped bass. Virginia's economy benefits from both its natural coastal beauty and its working waterfronts, including the Port of Virginia, one of the busiest on the East Coast. Virginia has made efforts to address plastic pollution, however, the state also has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

Single-Use Plastics

Virginia has a law to phase out expanded polystyrene foodware.[132] The state also has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics.[133]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. Virginia also has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[134]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Virginia has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- The state has both a low recycling rate and a high amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items. Policies like comprehensive EPR combined with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Other Plastic Bags
9. Straws, Stirrers
10. Cups & Plates

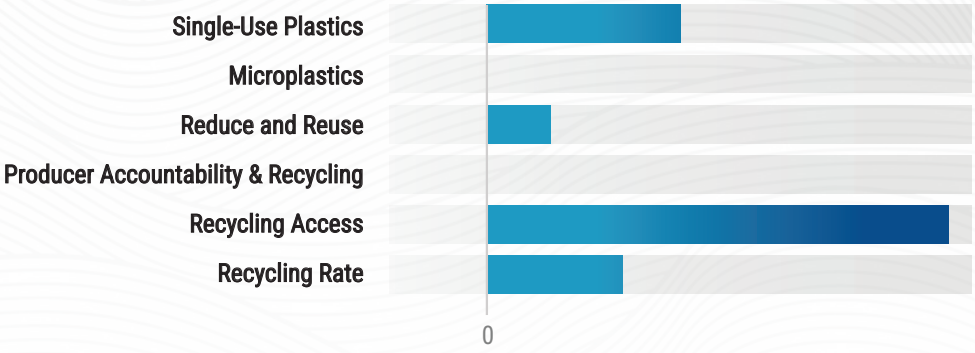
132 HB 1902, 2021 Spec. Sess. I (Va. 2021); "Foam-Free Resources." Virginia Department of Environmental Quality. Accessed June 2025.
133 Va. Code. § 10.1-1425.
134 SB 1164, 2021 Spec. Sess. I (Va. 2021). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies harmful if they do not recover plastic and create environmental and societal harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: Sean Pavone / Getty Images

Washington, District of Columbia

MID-ATLANTIC

Washington, D.C. (D.C.) is deeply connected to the ocean through the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay watershed, which ultimately drain into the Atlantic. This connection supports regional ecosystems and communities that depend on healthy waterways for drinking water, recreation and habitat for fish and bird species. As the nation's capital, D.C. has a unique opportunity to model solutions that protect the health of waterways and the ocean. Recognizing the impact of plastic pollution on these interconnected waterways, D.C. has been an early leader in passing legislation to address plastic pollution. However, many opportunities remain for continued action.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

D.C. has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware and packaging materials and requires that single-use food accessories like straws or cutlery be provided to consumers only by request.[135] While D.C. does not have a ban on plastic bags, it does discourage their use through a bag fee.[136]

Microplastics

D.C. has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

D.C. has enacted a law to make grants available to support increased use of reusable foodware.[137]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

D.C. does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Since tourism is a major driver in D.C.'s economy, it has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists in D.C. could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.
- Policies that support local reuse and refill systems, such as requiring reusable foodware at events or for dine-in consumers, could help reduce reliance on single-use plastics and increase awareness around plastic pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Cigarette Butts
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Beverage Cans
6. Bottle Caps
7. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
8. Cups & Plates (Plastic)
9. Straws, Stirrers
10. Other Plastic Bags

Leading by Example

D.C. has established an ambitious zero waste plan with the goal of diverting 80% of its solid waste by 2040, driven in part by its goal to reduce plastic pollution. If fully implemented, the plan estimates it could divert approximately 958,442 tons of solid waste annually—enough to fill a recycling container the height of the Washington Monument every six months. The plan includes goals to implement policies to support reuse and to shift away from single-use plastics commonly found polluting waterways or contaminating recycling streams.[138]

135 D.C. Code §§ 8-1531, 8-1532, 8-1533.
136 D.C. Code § 8-102.03.
137 D.C. Code § 8-1533(f).
138 "Zero Waste DC Plan." Feb. 2024.

Photo credit: csterken / Getty Images

Great Lakes Basin

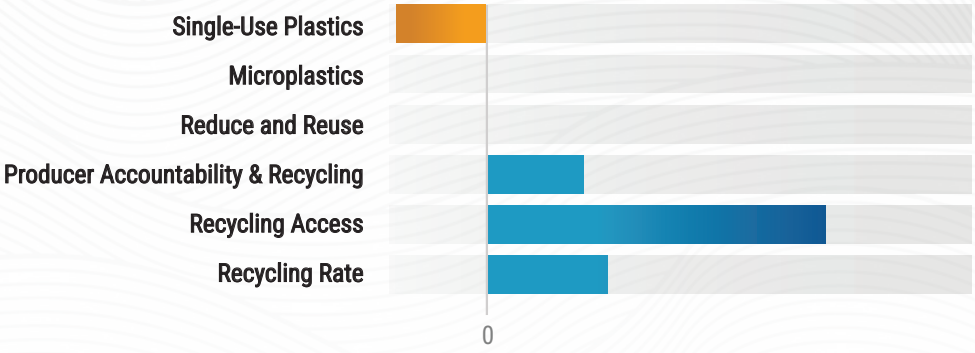
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- New York
- Ohio
- Pennsylvania
- Wisconsin

Photo credit: ehrlif / Getty Images

Michigan

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Michigan is uniquely defined by its connection to water, bordered by four of the five Great Lakes —Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie—which together hold over 20% of the world's surface freshwater.[139] This vast freshwater network not only shapes the state's identity but also supports its economy, including fisheries, agriculture, shipping, tourism and recreation. The Great Lakes are indirectly connected to the Atlantic Ocean through the St. Lawrence River. Plastic pollution, including microplastics, has been increasingly detected in the Great Lakes. While dependent on the health of its surrounding waterways, Michigan has yet to pass many laws to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

139 "Great Lakes Facts and Figures." U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting single-use plastics covered in our study.[140]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Michigan has a bottle bill for beverage containers that establishes a 10-cent deposit.[141] The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[142]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Michigan has a low recycling rate despite having an existing deposit return system. Policies like extended producer responsibility would complement the state's existing deposit return system and increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments. Expanding the types of beverage containers covered under the bottle bill and making other updates to improve the system would be another option to decrease plastic pollution and improve local recycling.
- Michigan has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, Michigan should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution, addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission.[143]

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Balloons
6. Cigar Tips
7. Lids (Plastic)
8. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
9. Bottle Caps (Metal)
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

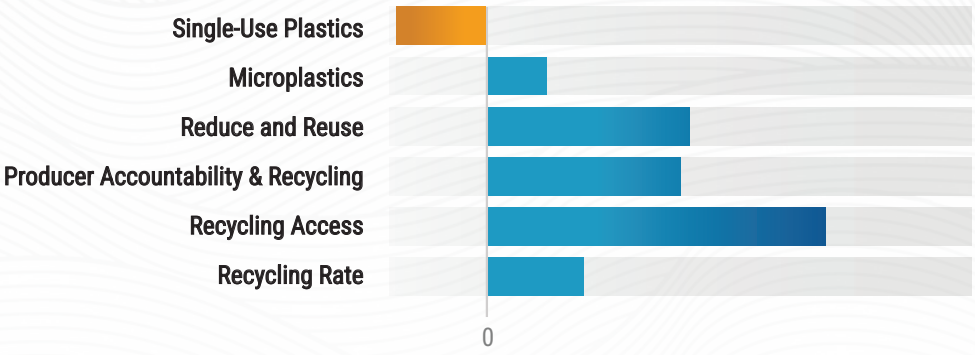
140 SB 853, 98th Leg. Reg. Sess. 2016 (Mich. 2016).
141 Mich. Comp. Laws §§ 445.571 et seq.
142 HB 2254, 101st Leg. Reg. Sess. 2022 (Mich. 2022). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
143 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

Photo credit: lavin photography / Getty Images

Minnesota

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Minnesota, known as the "Land of 10,000 Lakes," has a deep-rooted connection to water that defines its geography, culture and economy. It is home to the headwaters of the Mississippi River and shares a shoreline with Lake Superior, the largest and deepest of the Great Lakes. These waters ultimately flow into the Gulf, connecting Minnesota directly to downstream marine ecosystems. Communities in Minnesota rely on Lake Superior for drinking water, commercial shipping, tourism and outdoor recreation. The lake also plays a crucial role in the state's economy by supporting port infrastructure and iconic wildlife including trout, sturgeon, bald eagles and loons. While Minnesota has passed several laws to address plastic pollution, many opportunities remain for continued action.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastic bags and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[144]

Microplastics

Minnesota has enacted laws to support research on microplastics to inform future actions.[145]

Reduce and Reuse

The state's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law requires the state agency to develop targets for reduction and reuse.[146] The state has also enacted a law to support funding for waste reduction and reuse projects.[147]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

In 2024, Minnesota became the fifth state to enact EPR for packaging.[148]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Minnesota should remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastic bags in their communities.
- Minnesota's recently passed EPR law has the potential to reduce single-use plastics, improve reuse systems and increase recycling. The state should work to ensure robust and timely implementation of the law to realize its full environmental and economic benefits.
- Given the amount of beverage container-related pollution in the top ten most commonly collected items in the state, Minnesota should consider complementing their existing EPR law for packaging with a deposit return system (or bottle bill), which is known to immediately and significantly decrease beverage container pollution as well as overall litter.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, Minnesota should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution, addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission.[149]

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Cans
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Paper Bags

The Case for Mission-Based Recycling

The Twin Cities in Minnesota is home to Eureka Recycling, a nonprofit that exemplifies the transformative role of mission-based recyclers in addressing plastic pollution and fostering community education. Since its inception in 2001, Eureka has been committed to the principle that "waste is preventable, not inevitable," focusing on zero-waste solutions through education, advocacy and operational excellence. As a founding member of the Alliance of Mission-Based Recyclers (AMBR), Eureka and its partners have played a critical role in shaping policies that push for systemic change that prioritize waste reduction over waste management.

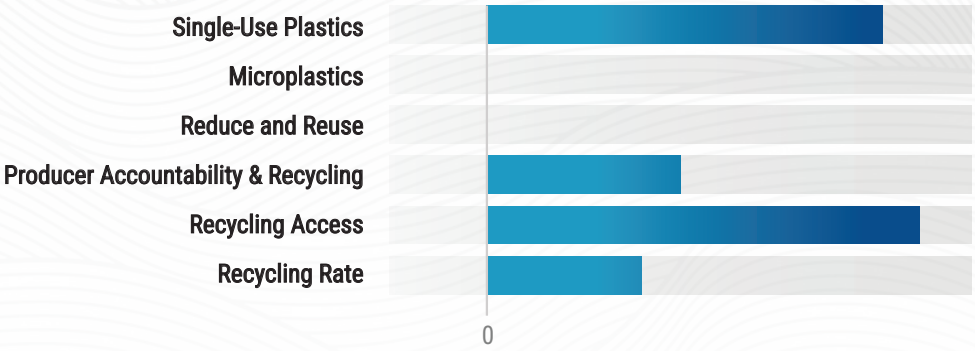
144 Minn. Stat. § 471.9998.
145 For example, HF 2310, 93rd Leg. Reg. Sess. (Minn. 2023).
146 HF 3911, 93rd Leg. Reg. Sess. (2024).
147 Minn. Stat. § 115A.565.
148 HF 3911 (2024).
149 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

Photo credit: Meinzahn / Getty Images

New York

GREAT LAKES BASIN

New York has a deep and multifaceted connection to water, with its borders spanning from the Great Lakes in the west to the Atlantic Ocean on the east. The state borders Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, and the Hudson River flows through the heart of the state into the New York Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean, making New York a crucial link between inland freshwater systems and the marine environment. These waterways, which provide drinking water for millions of residents, support major industries including shipping, fishing, tourism and recreation. New York is also home to the largest and most voluminous waterfall in the U.S., Niagara Falls, as well as other scenic ecosystems like the Finger Lakes, the Long Island Sound and the New York Bight. New York is a national leader on environmental policy and has passed several laws to address plastic pollution, but many opportunities remain for continued action.



FINAL SCORE

Good

Single-Use Plastics

New York has phased out expanded polystyrene (plastic foam) foodware, loose-fill packaging materials and single-use coolers, as well as single-use plastic bags.[150] The state also prohibits hotels from providing personal care products in single-use plastic bottles and has a law that prohibits smoking on beaches.[151]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

New York has a bottle bill that establishes a 5-cent deposit for certain beverage containers (including carbonated beverages, still water, and beer).[152]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- New York has a low recycling rate despite having an existing bottle bill. Policies like extended producer responsibility would complement the state's existing deposit return system and increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments. Expanding beverage containers covered under the bottle bill and including incentives for reuse through that program would be another option to decrease plastic pollution and improve local recycling.
- New York should consider policies that support local reuse and refill systems, such as requiring reusable foodware at events, which could help reduce reliance on single-use plastics and increase awareness around plastic pollution.
- Given the important connection New York has to freshwater systems and the marine environment, the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as funding for tire wear mitigation projects and requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Beverage Cans
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Bottle Caps (Metal)
10. Other Plastic Bags

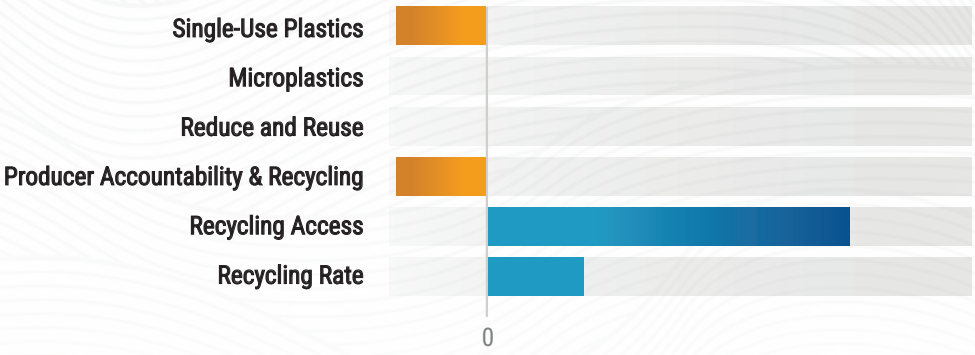
150 N.Y. Envtl. Conserv. Law §§ 27-3001 et seq. (expanded polystyrene); S 1508C/A 2008C, 2019–2020 Reg. Sess. (2021) (bags).
151 S 543/A 5082, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess. (N.Y. 2021) (hotel personal care products); S 4142/A 5061, 2021–2022 Reg. Sess. (2021) (smoking).
152 N.Y. Envtl. Conserv. Law §§ 27-1001 et seq.

Photo credit: Patrick Jennings / Getty Images

Ohio

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Ohio is deeply connected to water through its position along the southern shore of Lake Erie, one of the five Great Lakes that together hold over 20% of the world's surface freshwater and eventually drain into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River.[153] The Ohio River runs along the state's southern border and connects Ohio to its neighboring states. Lake Erie plays a central role in Ohio's economy, environment and public health, supporting commercial and recreational fishing, shipping, agriculture and tourism. The lake also provides drinking water to millions of Ohioans. However, Lake Erie has faced significant pollution challenges, including harmful algal blooms and increasing levels of plastic and microplastic pollution, which threaten aquatic ecosystems and water quality. While Ohio sits between two major water sources and relies on their continued health, the state has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

153 "Great Lakes Facts and Figures." U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Ohio limits local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[154]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. Ohio has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[155]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ohio has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Ohio has a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes, the state should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution, addressing pollution from pre-production plastic pellets and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission.[156]

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Straws, Stirrers
8. Cigar Tips
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

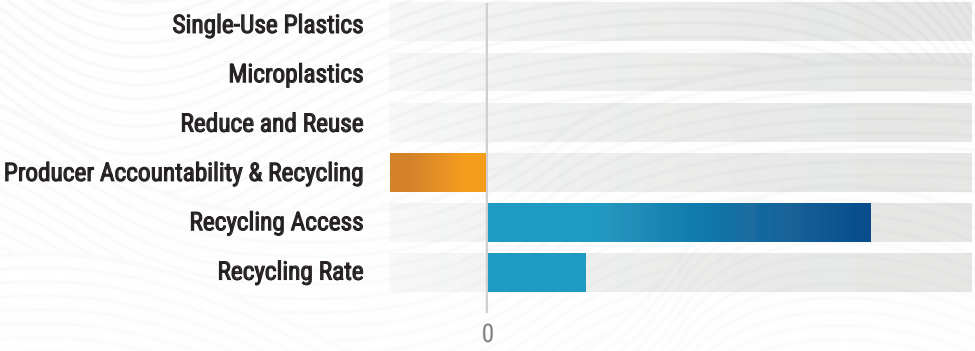
154 HB 110, 134th Gen. Assemb. (Ohio 2021).
155 Ohio Rev. Code § 3734.01. Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
156 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

Photo credit: Zack Frank

Pennsylvania

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Pennsylvania's communities rely on the state's connection to Lake Erie, the smallest yet most biologically productive of the Great Lakes. The fishing and recreational opportunities within the lake contribute tens of millions of dollars towards Pennsylvania's regional economy. Lake Erie also provides fresh water to roughly 11 million people, including thousands within the state, making it critical to protect to support clean drinking water.[157] The state is also indirectly connected to the Atlantic Ocean through its extensive river network including the Delaware and Ohio River Basins. Similarly, the Susquehanna River is the major water source flowing into the ecologically and economically important Chesapeake Bay. While Pennsylvania is home to diverse and unique natural spaces like the Appalachian and Pocono Mountains, the state has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

157 "Lake Erie." U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Pennsylvania has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

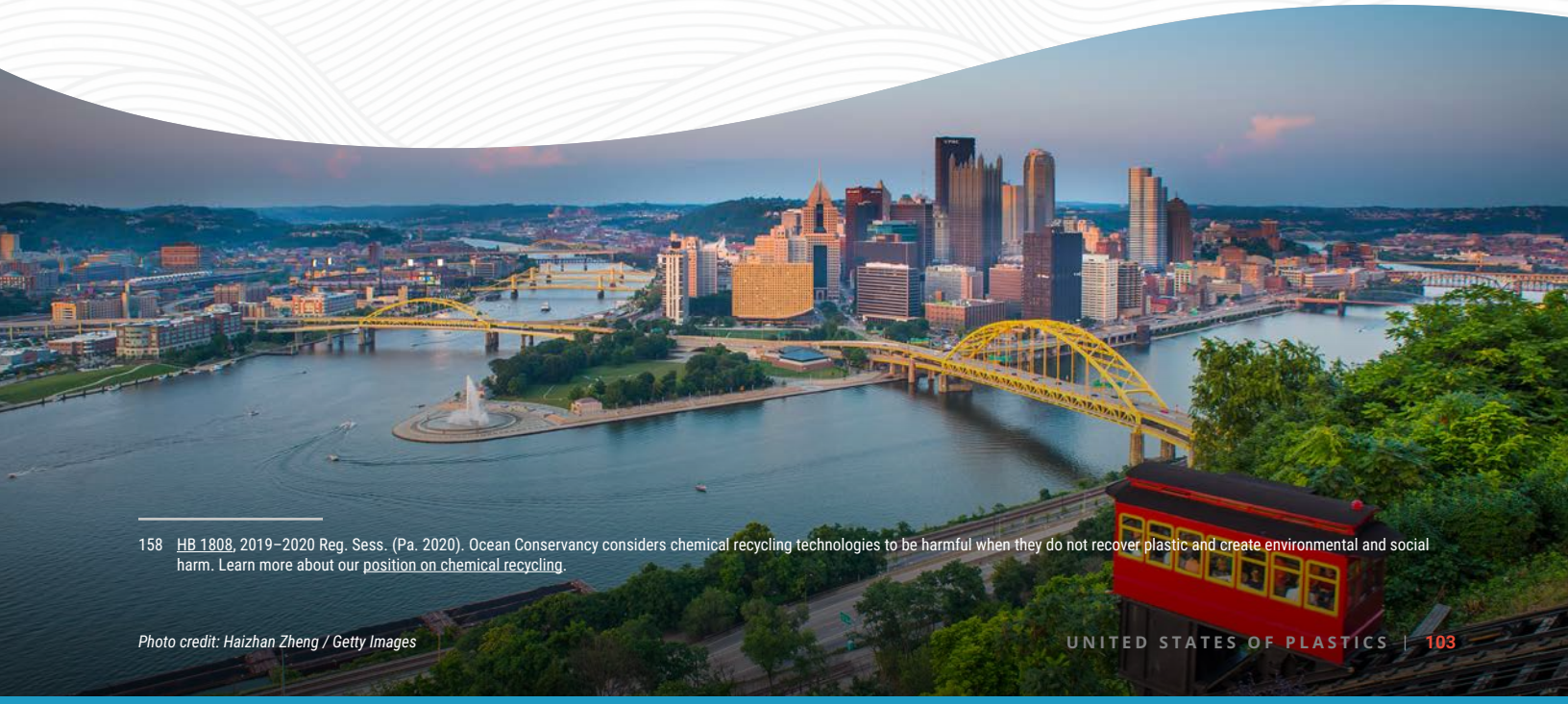
The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. Pennsylvania has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[158]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Pennsylvania has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- There are many opportunities to take action in the state. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raising awareness of the issue for future action.
- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Pennsylvania has a low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Bottle Beverages (Glass)
7. Tires
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging



158 HB 1808, 2019–2020 Reg. Sess. (Pa. 2020). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

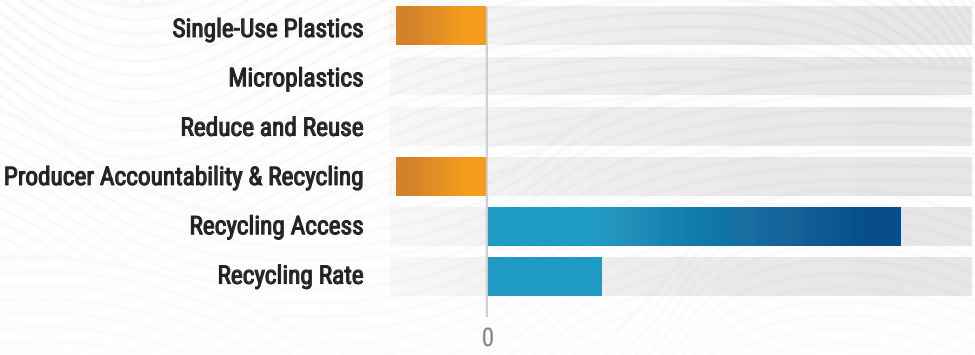
Photo credit: Haizhan Zheng / Getty Images

Photo credit: GummyB / Getty Images

Wisconsin

GREAT LAKES BASIN

Wisconsin's deep connection to water is woven into its identity, with over 15,000 lakes and extensive shoreline along two Great Lakes—Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. These waters support a thriving commercial and recreational fishing industry, provide drinking water to millions and are central to tourism, shipping, the state's agricultural economy and outdoor recreation. As a Great Lakes state, Wisconsin plays a critical role in the health of the world's largest surface freshwater system, which ultimately drains into the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River.[159] Plastic pollution, including microplastics, has been increasingly detected in the Great Lakes. While dependent on the health of its surrounding waterways, Wisconsin has yet to pass legislation to address plastic pollution and has enacted laws that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

159 "Great Lakes Facts and Figures." U.S. EPA. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has a law limiting local governments' ability to regulate single-use plastics and has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics covered in our study.[160]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[161]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Wisconsin has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should:
  - Remove restrictions on local governments and allow them to regulate single-use plastics in their communities.
  - Reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- Given the high concentration of microplastics found in the Great Lakes and the impacts of microplastics on soil health and crop productivity,[162] Wisconsin should consider policies to address microplastic pollution, such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and implementing recommendations from the International Joint Commission.[163]
- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Wisconsin has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Straws, Stirrers
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Beverage Cans
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
9. Cigar Tips
10. Lids (Plastic)

160 AB 730, 2015–2016 Legis. (Wis. 2016).
161 AB 789, 2017–2018 Legis. (Wis. 2018). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
162 Hoang, V.-H., et al. (2024). *Science of the Total Environment*.
163 Kidd, K., et al. "Final Report of the IJC Great Lakes Science Advisory Board Work Group on Microplastics." Nov. 2024.

Photo credit: Haizhan Zheng / Getty Images

New England

- Connecticut
- Maine
- Massachusetts
- New Hampshire
- Rhode Island
- Vermont

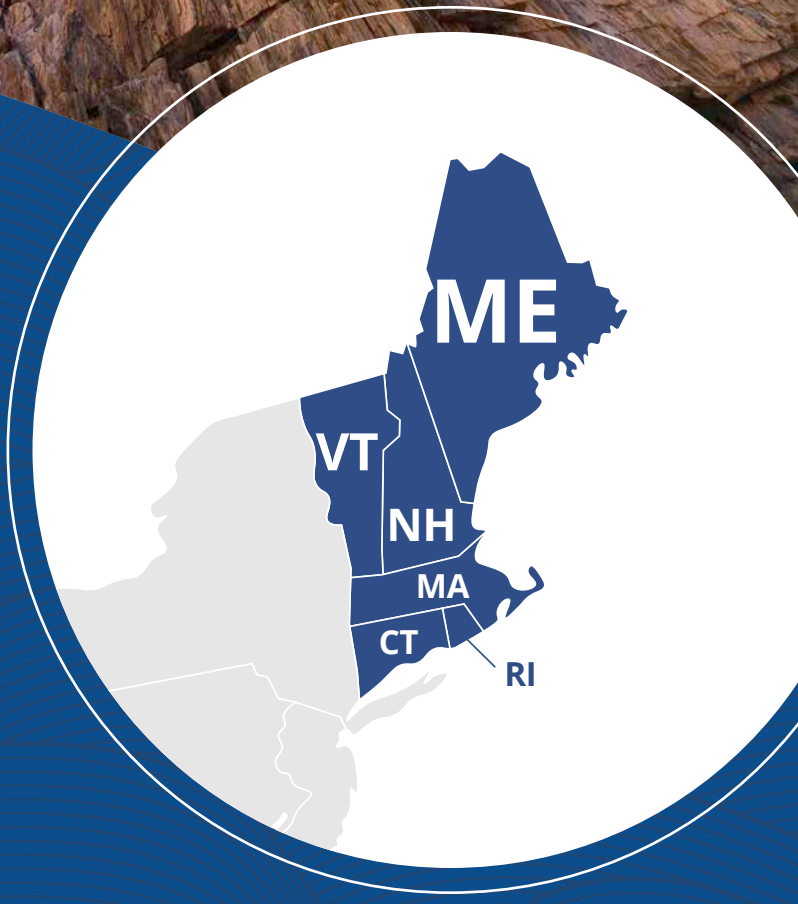
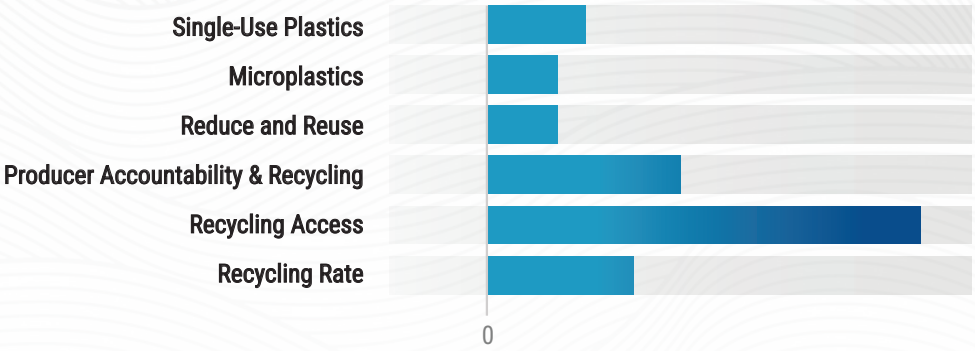


Photo credit: DenisTangneyJr / Getty Images

Connecticut

NEW ENGLAND

Connecticut's identity and economy are deeply linked to its coastal location along Long Island Sound, a vital estuary that supports diverse marine life, recreational activities and a robust maritime economy. The Sound generates billions annually through commercial fishing, boating and tourism, and supports a diverse array of wildlife, including migratory birds, fish and shellfish. The Connecticut River, the longest river in New England, flows through the heart of the state and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystems, supplying drinking water and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. Connecticut also enacted a law to ensure that all residents, businesses and institutions have access to recycling services.[164] Known for its scenic beauty, Connecticut has a strong history of environmental stewardship, including taking action to address plastic pollution; however, many opportunities remain for continued progress.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

164 "Recycling…It's the Law." Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Connecticut has phased out single-use plastic bags.[165]

Microplastics

Connecticut passed a law establishing a microfiber pollution working group to develop a consumer awareness and education program to reduce microfiber pollution.[166]

Reduce and Reuse

The state enacted a law to support grants for projects that prioritize waste reduction and reuse.[167]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

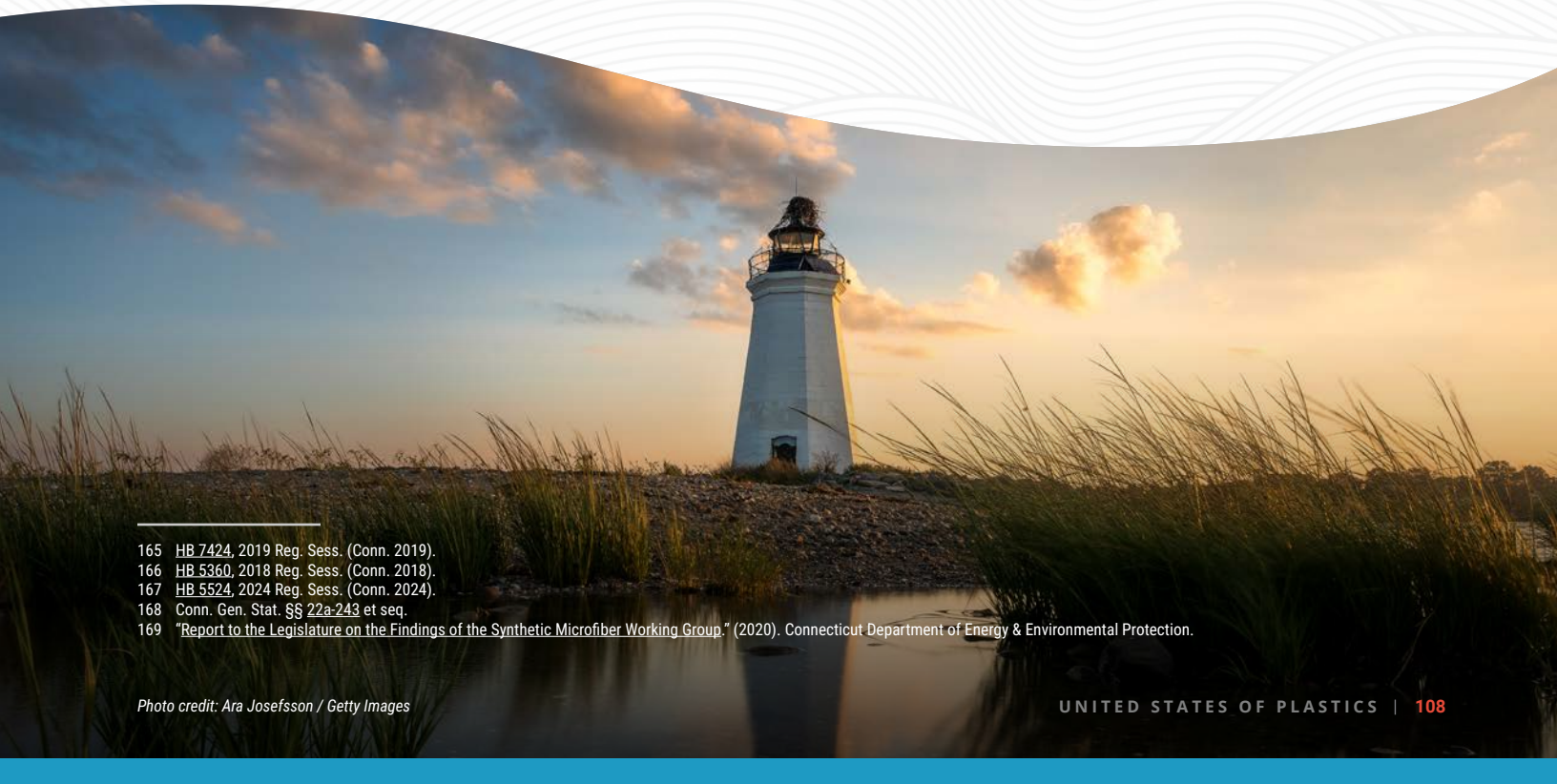
Connecticut has a bottle bill for beverage containers that establishes a 10-cent deposit.[168]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In its report to the legislature,[169] the Synthetic Microfiber Working Group supported the use of filters to capture microfiber pollution and suggested that appliance manufacturers consider incorporating internal filters. To support this consumer awareness campaign and decrease microfibers in the state's waterways, Connecticut should consider requiring new washing machines to include a microfiber filter.
- While Connecticut has mandatory recycling access and a high recycling access rate, it has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like extended producer responsibility would complement the state's existing bottle bill and increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Straws, Stirrers
6. Beverage Cans
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)



165 HB 7424, 2019 Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2019).
166 HB 5360, 2018 Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2018).
167 HB 5524, 2024 Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2024).
168 Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 22a-243 et seq.
169 "Report to the Legislature on the Findings of the Synthetic Microfiber Working Group." (2020). Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection.

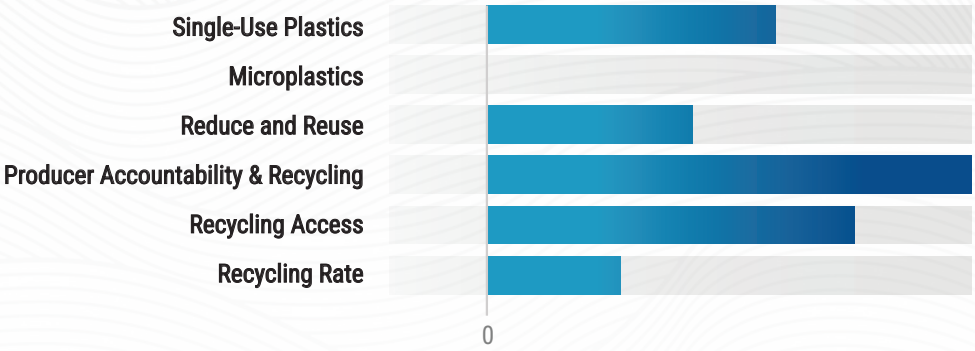
Photo credit: Ara Josefsson / Getty Images

Photo credit: Ultima_Gaina / Getty Images

Maine

NEW ENGLAND

Maine's rugged Atlantic shoreline stretches nearly 3,500 miles and supports iconic industries like lobster fishing, boatbuilding and tourism.[170] The state's economy and coastal communities depend on a healthy marine ecosystem, making ocean conservation critically important. Maine's lobster fishery is the most valuable single-species fishery in the country, accounting for 80% of the country's lobster production.[171] Maine is home to Acadia National Park as well as diverse marine habitats. The state has a history of environmental stewardship, including passing laws to address plastic pollution, but many opportunities remain for continued action, especially around addressing microplastics.



FINAL SCORE

Good

170 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.
171 "Maine Innovation Economy Advisory Board." The University of Maine. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Maine has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware and single-use plastic bags.[172] The state also prohibits smoking on or within 20 feet of a beach, playground or public space in a state park.[173]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

Maine required targets for plastic reduction and reuse through the state's extended producer responsibility (EPR) law to be set through the rulemaking process.[174] The state also requires that a minimum amount of funds from unredeemed deposits from the bottle bill program be used to support reuse and refill efforts.[175] Maine has a law that allows for the use of refillable or reusable food packaging.[176]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Maine has a long established bottle bill and was the first state to enact EPR for packaging in 2021.[177] Maine also prohibits harmful chemical recycling from being classified as recycling and requires financial assurances for the cleanup of chemical recycling facility sites.[178]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Maine's EPR law has the potential to reduce single-use plastics, improve reuse systems and increase recycling. The state should work to ensure robust and timely implementation of the law to realize its full environmental and economic benefits.
- Given the increasing detection of microplastics in seafood, including lobster,[179] and the importance of fisheries to the state's economy, Maine should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
5. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
6. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
7. Beverage Cans
8. Fishing Buoys, Pots & Traps
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

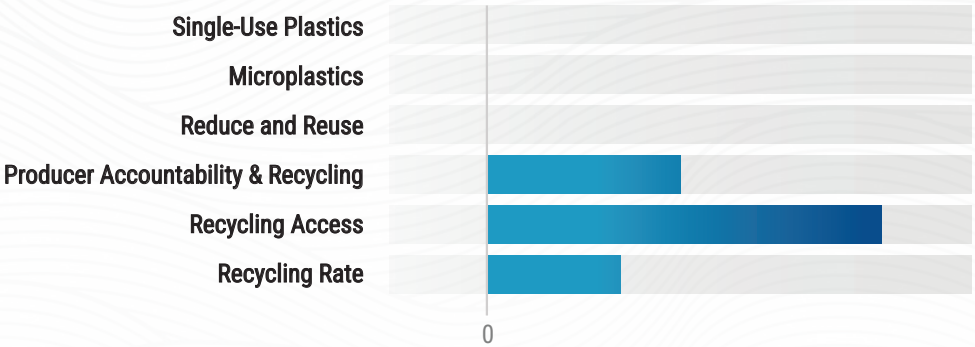
172 Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 38, §§ 1571 et. seq. (expanded polystyrene foodware); Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 38, § 1611. (bags).
173 SP 26, 124th. Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Me. 2009).
174 Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 38, § 2146.
175 Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 38, § 3108-A.
176 Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 7, § 219-C.
177 Me. Rev. Stat. tit. 38, §§ 3101 et seq. (bottle bill); Me. Rev. Stat., tit. 38, § 2146 (EPR).
178 SP 665, 131st Leg., 2nd Reg. Sess. (Me. 2024). Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.
179 Woods, M.N., et al. (2020). *Marine Pollution Bulletin*.

Photo credit: Christian Delbert / Adobe Stock

Massachusetts

NEW ENGLAND

Massachusetts has a deep and enduring connection to the ocean, with its economy and environment closely tied to its Atlantic shoreline. The state is home to historic fishing ports like Gloucester and New Bedford, one of the most valuable fishing ports in the U.S., and supports robust maritime industries, including shipping, tourism and marine research. Massachusetts is also home to Cape Cod Bay, which supports a myriad of different marine ecosystems and species, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale, which use the bay as a feeding ground. The Connecticut River, the longest river in New England, flows through the heart of the state and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystems, supplying drinking water and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. While Massachusetts has a strong history of environmental leadership, the state has enacted few policies to address plastic pollution, which poses a serious threat to its communities and ecosystems.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

Massachusetts has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

While the state has several funding opportunities to support reuse as part of their 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan, because none of them are enacted in statute, they were not counted in our study.[180]

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Massachusetts has a bottle bill for beverage containers that establishes a 5-cent deposit.[181]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There are many opportunities to take action in the state. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- While Massachusetts has a high recycling access rate, it has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like extended producer responsibility would complement the state's existing deposit return system and increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
4. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
5. Straws, Stirrers
6. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
7. Beverage Cans
8. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Other Plastic Bags

Executive Leadership

In September 2023, Massachusetts Governor Healey signed Executive Order No. 619, making the state the first in the U.S. to ban the purchase of single-use plastic bottles by executive branch agencies.[182] This order, which went into effect immediately, prohibits state agencies from purchasing single-use plastic bottles (21 ounces or less), except in emergencies or when alternatives are unavailable. The state is estimated to purchase 100,000 plastic bottles each year, which highlights the power of government procurement policies to lead by example to significantly reduce plastic pollution.

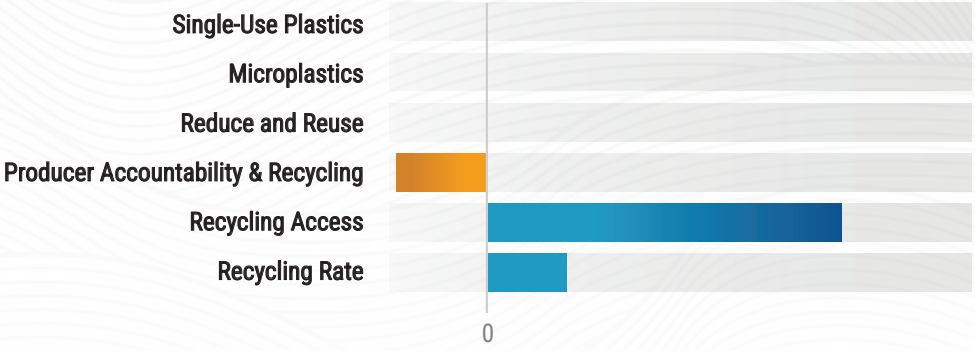
180 "Reduce, Reuse, Repair Micro-Grant." Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Accessed May 2025; "Recycling & Reuse Business Development Grant." Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection. Accessed May 2025.
181 Mass. Gen. Laws, ch. 94, §§ 321 et seq.
182 Mass. Exec. Order No. 619: Eliminating the Purchase by the Executive Department of Single Use Plastic Bottles (2023).

Photo credit: Sean Pavone / Getty Images

New Hampshire

NEW ENGLAND

New Hampshire is home to the shortest shoreline in the U.S.[183] Despite its small Atlantic shoreline, New Hampshire has a vibrant maritime history and the state's economy benefits from commercial fishing, tourism and a thriving seafood industry centered in communities like Portsmouth and Hampton. One of the state's most important natural features is the Great Bay Estuary, a rich and biodiverse ecosystem that serves as a nursery for many marine species. Known for its natural beauty from the White Mountains to scenic lakes, New Hampshire has a strong history of environmental stewardship. The Connecticut River, the longest river in New England, flows along the state's border and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystems, supplying drinking water and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. While New Hampshire depends on the health of its marine and freshwater ecosystems, the state has yet to pass legislation that would address plastic pollution and has enacted a law that could hinder further progress.



FINAL SCORE

Needs Improvement

183 "Shoreline Mileage of the United States." NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

The state has not passed any laws restricting the single-use plastics reviewed in our study.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

New Hampshire does not have extended producer responsibility or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state has also adopted policies that support harmful chemical recycling.[184]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The state has policies in place that are impeding progress towards addressing plastic pollution. The state should reverse policies that enable harmful chemical recycling technologies and undermine reduction and effective recycling practices.
- There are many opportunities to take action in the state. Policies that reduce our reliance on single-use plastics can have a near-term impact on preventing plastic pollution and raise awareness of the issue for future action.
- Since tourism is a major aspect of New Hampshire's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists in New Hampshire could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Rope (1 yard/meter = 1 piece)
3. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
4. Beverage Cans
5. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
6. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
7. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
8. Straws, Stirrers
9. Fishing Buoys, Pots & Traps
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

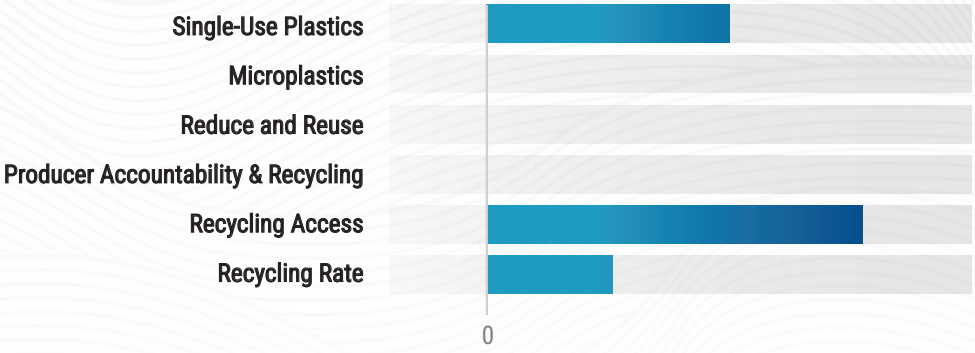
184 N.H. Rev. Stat. §§ 149-M:4, 149-M:62. Ocean Conservancy considers chemical recycling technologies to be harmful when they do not recover plastic and create environmental and social harm. Learn more about our position on chemical recycling.

Photo credit: nikon401 / Getty Images

Rhode Island

NEW ENGLAND

Known as the "Ocean State," Rhode Island has an extensive shoreline along the Atlantic as well as numerous rivers and bays. The state's economy is deeply connected to maritime industries, including fishing, boating and tourism. The waters of Narragansett Bay, which provides a critical ecosystem for marine life, are also vital to the state's economy, supporting shellfish harvesting and recreational activities, among other industries. Rhode Island is also home to renowned coastal communities, such as Newport, which rely heavily on its oceanfront attractions for tourism. Many species, like the Atlantic cod, American lobster and a threatened species of sea turtle, rely on the health of Rhode Island's waterways. While Rhode Island has been a leader in addressing plastic pollution, many opportunities remain for continued action.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

Single-Use Plastics

Rhode Island has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware and single-use plastic bags.[185] The state also requires that single-use plastic straws be provided to consumers only by request.[186]

Microplastics

The state has not passed any laws to address microplastic pollution.

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

The state does not have extended producer responsibility (EPR) or deposit return programs for packaging or beverage containers. The state recently passed a law commissioning a statewide needs assessment and recommendations for future action on comprehensive EPR with a bottle bill.[187]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Rhode Island has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like comprehensive EPR with a deposit return system together could increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments.
- Given the increasing detection of microplastics in seafood[188] and the importance of fisheries to the state's economy, Rhode Island should consider policies to address microplastic pollution such as requiring filters for new washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution and safeguard its seafood industry.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Cigarette Butts
2. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
3. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
4. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
5. Straws, Stirrers
6. Beverage Cans
7. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
8. Bottle Caps (Metal)
9. Other Plastic Bags
10. Grocery Bags (Plastic)

185 H 5090/S 14, 2023 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2023) (expanded polystyrene); H 7065/S 2446, 2022 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2022) (bags).
186 H 5131/S 155, 2021 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2021).
187 H 6207/S 996, 2025 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2025).
188 Smith, M., et al. (2018). *Current Environmental Health Reports*.

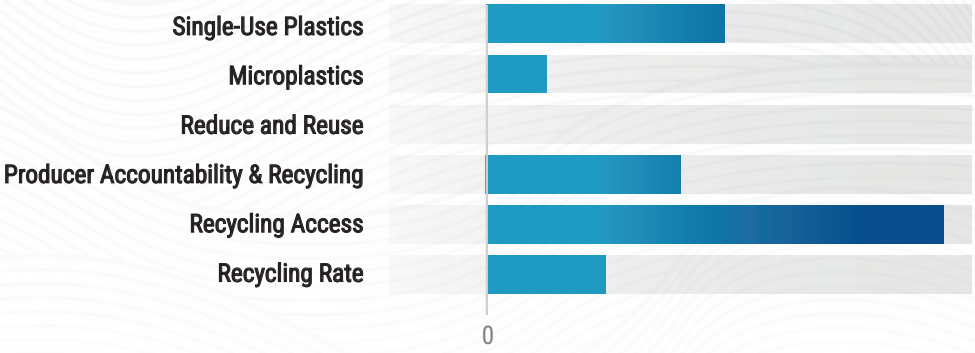
Photo credit: Beth Fitzpatrick / Getty Images

Photo credit: DenisTangneyJr / Getty Images

Vermont

NEW ENGLAND

Vermont is home to Lake Champlain, one of the largest freshwater lakes in the U.S. with more than 70 islands and 6.8 trillion gallons of water.[189] The water flows northward to the St. Lawrence River which leads to the Atlantic Ocean. The lake serves as a major source of drinking water for tens of thousands of Vermont residents and supports ecological health and wildlife. The Connecticut River, the longest river in New England, flows along the eastern border of the state and plays a crucial role in sustaining ecosystems, supplying drinking water and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. Vermont has a strong history of environmental stewardship, which includes passing several laws to address plastic pollution, an important reminder that inland communities can still take actions to protect our ocean and waterways.



FINAL SCORE

Fair

189 "Lake and Basin Facts." Lake Champlain Basin Program. Accessed May 2025.

Single-Use Plastics

Vermont has phased out expanded polystyrene foodware and single-use plastic carryout bags.[190] The state also requires that single-use plastic straws be provided to consumers only by request.[191]

Microplastics

Vermont has enacted a law to require a study and report on the prevalence of microplastics and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in food waste and food packaging in the state.[192]

Reduce and Reuse

The state has not enacted any laws relating to plastic reduction or reuse.

Producer Accountability and Recycling

Vermont has a bottle bill for beverage containers that establishes a 5-cent deposit.[193]

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Despite having a high recycling access rate, Vermont has a relatively low recycling rate. Policies like extended producer responsibility could complement their existing deposit return system for beverage containers and increase the amount of material that is recycled and kept out of the environment without increasing costs for local governments. Expanding the types of beverage containers covered under the bottle bill and making other updates to improve the system would be another option to decrease plastic pollution and improve local recycling.
- Since tourism is a major part of Vermont's economy, the state has an opportunity to champion sustainable tourism by phasing out single-use plastics for personal care products in hotels. Reducing the use of unnecessary single-use plastics by tourists could lead to a significant reduction in waste and pollution.

Top 10 Items Collected by ICC Volunteers

1. Food Wrappers (Candy, chips, etc.)
2. Beverage Bottles (Plastic)
3. Cigarette Butts
4. Beverage Cans
5. Beverage Bottles (Glass)
6. Other Plastic/Foam Packaging
7. Bottle Caps (Plastic)
8. Take Out/Away Containers (Plastic)
9. Grocery Bags (Plastic)
10. Cups & Plates (Foam)

Farewell to Foam Docks

In 2024, Vermont passed a law prohibiting the use and sale of unencapsulated foam for docks, buoys and other floating structures.[194] Expanded polystyrene, colloquially referred to as "Styrofoam," is the most common type of plastic foam used in docks and other floating structures. Unencapsulated, this foam readily breaks apart from collisions and weathering over time. This results in tiny plastic pieces, including microplastics, that pollute beaches, the ocean and other waterways. Foam pieces are the most common type of tiny trash item (<2.5cm in size) collected by International Coastal Cleanup® volunteers in Vermont and nationwide.[195] These plastic pieces threaten wildlife through ingestion in addition to containing chemical additives that can leach into the environment and cause harm.[196] Proactive measures, like the law passed in Vermont, help prevent these microplastics from entering the environment in the first place.

190 Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 10, §§ 6691 et seq.
191 *Id.*
192 H 446, 2021–2022 Sess. (Vt. 2022).
193 Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 10, §§ 1521 et seq.
194 S 213, 2023–2024 Sess. (Vt. 2024).
195 Ocean Conservancy. "Trash Information and Data for Education and Solutions (TIDES) dataset." Retrieved from: https://www.coastalcleanupdata.org/. May 2025.
196 Thaysen, C., et al. (2018). *Frontiers in Marine Science*.

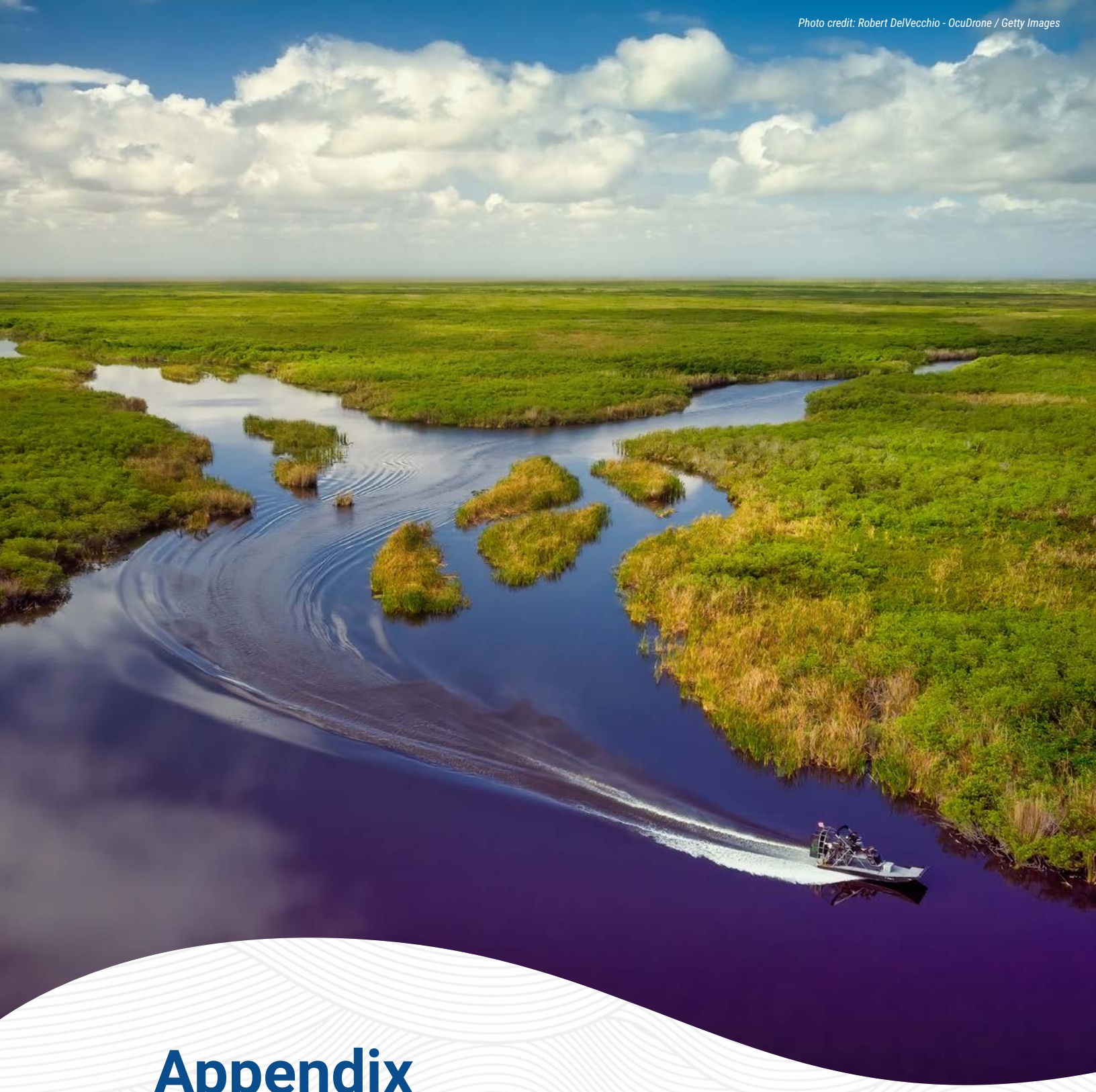


Photo credit: Robert DelVecchio - OcuDrone / Getty Images

Appendix

TABLE 1

Additional Details on Categories Reviewed for Grading

SPECIFIC POLICY	SCORING DETAILS
Single-Use Plastics We reviewed phase-outs or restrictions on some of the most polluted and easily replaced single-use plastics. ***[5 points max]***	
Single-use expanded polystyrene foam bans.	**+1** for laws phasing out commonly used single-use expanded polystyrene items such as foam foodware, single-use coolers or loose fill packaging.
Single-use plastic bag restrictions.	**+1** for laws that ban single-use plastic carryout bags. We excluded laws that established a fee without additional restrictions.
Single-use plastic foodware accessories by request.	**+1** for laws that require customers specifically request single-use plastic accessories rather than being provided automatically (+.5 for law on straws, +.5 for law on cutlery).
Restrictions on smoking on beaches or in other outdoor spaces.	**+1** for laws that restrict smoking in areas where cigarette waste could more easily enter the environment, like beaches or parks.
Ban on single-use personal care products in hotels.	**+1** for laws that phase out single-use plastic personal care products in hotels.
Statewide prohibitions on local actions to address single-use plastics (e.g., preemption).	**-1** for laws prohibiting local governments from enacting policies to address single-use plastics in their communities.
Microplastics We reviewed the most tangible and evidence-based policies that have been, or could readily be, implemented to reduce microplastic pollution. ***[7 points max]***	
Support for research and recommendations for future action.	**+1** for laws supporting research into local sources, fate and impacts of microplastics if that research includes drafting recommendations or a report for future action.
Bans on intentionally added microplastics.	**+2** for laws that restrict the use of intentionally added microplastics in products above and beyond what is already required under the federal Microbead-Free Waters Act.[1]
Washing machine filter requirements.	**+2** for laws that require microfiber filtration on washing machines to reduce microfiber pollution.
Regulations on pre-production plastic pellets.	**+2** for laws that regulate discharges of pre-production plastic pellets.

1 Microbead-Free Waters Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-114, 129 Stat. 3129 (2015).

SPECIFIC POLICY	SCORING DETAILS
Reduce and Reuse We reviewed the most tangible and evidence-based policies that have been or could readily be implemented to reduce reliance on single-use plastics through reduction targets or support for reuse and refill systems. We did not consider postconsumer recycled content requirements (PCR) as part of source reduction. ***[7 points max]***	
Requirements for reusables for dine-in.	**+2** for laws that require the use of reusable servingware for dine-in customers at restaurants.
Water bottle refill station requirements.	**+1** for laws that require newly constructed or renovated public buildings to include water bottle refill stations to reduce single-use plastic bottles.
Plastic source reduction and/or reuse targets.	**+2** for laws (through EPR, DRS programs or otherwise) that require plastic source reduction or reuse and refill targets.
State procurement plastic reduction targets or phase-out of single-use plastics.	**+1** for laws that require the state to set single-use plastic reduction targets or to phase out the purchase of certain single-use plastics.
Funding to support reuse or refill systems.	**+1** for laws that fund the development of wide scale reuse and refill systems. We excluded laws that were limited to reuse in schools.
Producer Accountability and Recycling We reviewed policies that hold producers financially accountable for helping to manage the waste created by their products as well as policies that will help or hurt a state's ability to improve recycling. ***[5 points max]***	
Extended producer responsibility (EPR) for packaging.	**+2** for EPR laws that shift the financial burden of waste management for packaging to producers and that include targets to improve the recycling system.
Deposit return system (DRS, bottle bill) for beverage containers.	**+2** for DRS laws that put a deposit (regardless of amount) on beverage containers to incentivize their return.
Restrictions on harmful chemical recycling.	**+1** for laws (through EPR or otherwise) that exclude harmful chemical recycling technologies from their definitions of recycling.
Support for harmful chemical recycling.	**-1** for laws that reclassify harmful chemical recycling technologies as manufacturing, exempt these technologies from regulations or otherwise support these technologies.
Recycling Data We reviewed recycling access and recycling rate based on data from The Recycling Partnership's 2024 State of Residential Recycling report as there is little to no consistent data on recycling rates or access from states or federally available. ***[5 points max]***	
Recycling Access Rate.	Data from Fig. 4, "All Households, Can recycle" **0:** <40% | **+1:** 40-60% | **+2:** >60%
Recycling Rate.	Data from Fig. 15 **0:** <10% | **+1:** 10-19% | **+2:** 20-20% | **+3:** >30%

TABLE 2

Summary of Findings From Across the U.S.

		Single-Use Plastics							Microplastics				Reduction and Reuse					Prod. Accountability & Recycling			
State	Final Score	EPS	Bags	Straws	Cutlery	Cigarette Butts	Hotel Pers. Care Products	Ban on Bans	Washing Machine Filter	Study Bills	Intent. Added	Pellets	Dine-in Reuse	Refill Stations	Reuse/ Reduce Targets	Procur. Targets	Reuse Funding	EPR	DRS	Support Chemical Recycling	Prohibit Chemical Recycling
Alabama	1																				
Alaska	1.5																				
Arizona	1.5							✗									✓			✗	
Arkansas	1							✗												✗	
California	4.5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Colorado	2	✓	✓														✓	✓			
Connecticut	2.5		✓							✓							✓		✓		
Delaware	2	✓	✓	✓																	
D.C.	2	✓		✓	✓												✓				
Florida	1.5							✗												✗	
Georgia	1.5																			✗	
Hawai'i	2.5	✓	✓			✓													✓		
Idaho	1.5							✗													
Illinois	2.5						✓			✓				✓		✓					
Indiana	1.5							✗									✓			✗	
Iowa	2							✗									✓		✓	✗	
Kansas	1																			✗	
Kentucky	1																			✗	
Louisiana	1																			✗	
Maine	3.5	✓	✓			✓									✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Maryland	3	✓												✓	✓			✓			
Massachusetts	2																		✓		
Michigan	1.5							✗											✓	✗	
Minnesota	2.5							✗		✓					✓		✓	✓			
Mississippi	0.5							✗												✗	
Missouri	1							✗												✗	
Montana	1							✗													
Nebraska	1							✗													
Nevada	1.5																				
New Hampshire	1.5																			✗	
New Jersey	2.5	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓											
New Mexico	1.5																				
New York	3	✓	✓			✓	✓												✓		
North Carolina	1.5							✗													
North Dakota	1							✗													
Ohio	1.5							✗												✗	
Oklahoma	1							✗												✗	
Oregon	3	✓	✓	✓													✓	✓	✓		
Pennsylvania	1.5																			✗	
Rhode Island	2	✓	✓	✓																	
South Carolina	1.5																			✗	
South Dakota	1							✗													
Tennessee	1							✗												✗	
Texas	1							✗												✗	
Utah	1.5																			✗	
Vermont	2.5	✓	✓	✓						✓									✓		
Virginia	1.5	✓						✗												✗	
Washington	3.5	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓							✓	✓		✓	✓			
West Virginia	1							✗												✗	
Wisconsin	1.5							✗												✗	
Wyoming	1																			✗	

ABOUT OCEAN CONSERVANCY

Ocean Conservancy is working to protect the ocean from today's greatest global challenges. Together with our partners, we create evidence-based solutions for a healthy ocean and the wildlife and communities that depend on it. For 40 years, we have been on the forefront of tackling one of the ocean's biggest threats, plastic pollution, through organizing the largest cleanup effort in the world, leading novel scientific research on the crisis and successfully advocating for state, national and international policies to prevent plastics from becoming pollution in the first place.

July 2025

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information contact Anja Brandon (abrandon@oceanconservancy.org).

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