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November 15, 2021

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Clean Energy Awards Highlight NC's Commitment to Diversity and Equity

The 2022 award winners include Governor Roy Cooper's Clean Energy Director Peter Ledford and NC Department of Transportation Climate Advisor Jen Weiss

RALEIGH, N.C. – Today, NC Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) announces the recipients of its annual clean energy leadership awards. Awardees were selected amongst a pool of more than 350 member organizations and individuals creating significant contributions to an affordable and accessible clean energy economy in the state of North Carolina. Awards were announced in each of the following categories: Sustainable Energy Business of the Year, Individual Sustainable Energy Leader of the Year, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainable Energy, Women in Clean Energy, and Lifetime Achievement.

“An overarching theme seen throughout the award winners this year was a focus and commitment to expanding the benefits of clean energy within the communities that need it most in North Carolina. From community solar programs to equitable deployment of electric vehicle infrastructure and innovative financing programs for diverse communities, our award winners have each made sizable contributions advancing the clean energy market in the state,” said Arlene Brown, Manager of Membership and Engagement at NC Sustainable Energy Association. “As we usher in this next wave of clean energy investments, the organizations and individuals receiving awards this year will be at the forefront of ensuring the clean energy economy works for all North Carolinians, regardless of background or socioeconomic status.”

Recipients of the 2022 NC Sustainable Energy Association Clean Energy Awards include:

Sunwealth, winner of the *Sustainable Energy Business of the Year Award*: Sunwealth has committed to making solar more affordable, accessible, and inclusive throughout North Carolina by offering solar leasing as an option to customers across the state. The company currently has 17 leases registered with the North Carolina Utilities Commission, with the list continuing to grow as more customers express interest in this innovative financing option. The leased systems total approximately 1.67 MW of solar, emphasizing the importance of the solar leasing provisions included in HB589 passed in 2017 by the NC General Assembly. Specifically, Sunwealth was nominated for this award due in part to the two projects they've helped to bring online via solar leasing, including a project for Reverend Dr. William Barber II's nonprofit, Rebuilding Broken Places and a lease for the Lumbee Regional Development Association – the first organization affiliated with a state-recognized Tribe to install solar.

Ethan Blumenthal, winner of the *Individual Sustainable Energy Leader of the Year Award*: Ethan Blumenthal co-founded the organization Good Solar, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to creating renewable energy solutions for nonprofit organizations and low- and moderate-income communities to promote social justice, combat climate change, provide community economic development, and build community resiliency. To further enable the build out of clean energy projects, Good Solar provides matching funding for project development costs, breaking down barriers for those that need these installations the most. While founding Good Solar, Ethan also took a year-long postdoctoral scholar position working with UNC's Center for Climate, Energy, Environment, and Economics. Furthermore, Ethan has been instrumental in advocating for new programs in the state, including community solar to enable more North Carolinians access to the benefits of clean energy.

Laura Combs, winner of the *Diversity & Inclusion in Sustainable Energy Award*: Laura Combs has dedicated much of her time and attention in her role with Eagle Solar and Light to expanding solar access to low- and moderate-income communities, along with communities of color. Laura's commitment to equity and diversity in clean energy over the past two years has led to a solar installation with the Lumbee Regional Development Association, the first state-recognized tribe in North Carolina to install solar.

Jen Weiss, winner of the *Inaugural Women in Clean Energy Award*: Jen Weiss is Senior Advisor for Climate Change Policy with the NC Department of Transportation, spearheading the agency's efforts to help the state reach Governor Roy Cooper's goal of 1.25 million electric vehicles on the road by 2030. Jen has been leading the state's Clean Transportation Plan process throughout 2022, organizing numerous working groups and stakeholder convenings to develop a comprehensive, equitable plan by Spring 2023. Jen also has taken a lead organizing role in standing up North Carolina's first green bank to take advantage of millions of dollars of federal investments to fund clean energy projects in the state and enable access for low- and moderate-income communities. Prior to her role with the NC Department of Transportation, Jen has held several roles throughout the clean energy sector with Duke University, the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, and the UNC Environmental Finance Center.

Peter Ledford, winner of the *Lifetime Achievement Award*: Peter Ledford has been instrumental in shaping the North Carolina clean energy policy landscape in his nearly eight years on the team at NC Sustainable Energy Association. The proactive policies and regulations Peter successfully advocated for in his time with the organization have helped the state climb the national leaderboard in clean energy deployment. Peter's strategic vision for the direction of the state led to major pieces of comprehensive energy legislation in the NC General Assembly, including HB589 and most recently HB951. Given Peter's success in the market, he was named the Clean Energy Director for Governor Roy Cooper earlier this year where he'll help to advance the goals and priorities outlined in previous Executive Orders and HB951.

NCSEA extends our congratulations and sincerest thanks to our members and the 2022 award winners.

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About North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association

North Carolina Sustainable Energy Association (NCSEA) is the leading 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that drives public policy and market development for clean energy. Our work enables clean energy jobs, economic opportunities, and affordable energy options for North Carolinians. Learn more about NCSEA, our mission, and our vision at www.energync.org.