

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



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The Southeastern Region of North Carolina

The 11 counties of Southeastern North Carolina stretch from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to the Sandhills. Its 7,500 sq. miles (19,425 sq. kms) include dynamic New South cities, picturesque small towns, fertile farms and pine-covered woodlands. The Southeast is home to the Port of Wilmington, North Carolina's international container port complex. The region also encompasses Fort Bragg, now among the U.S. Army's largest and most strategically important bases.

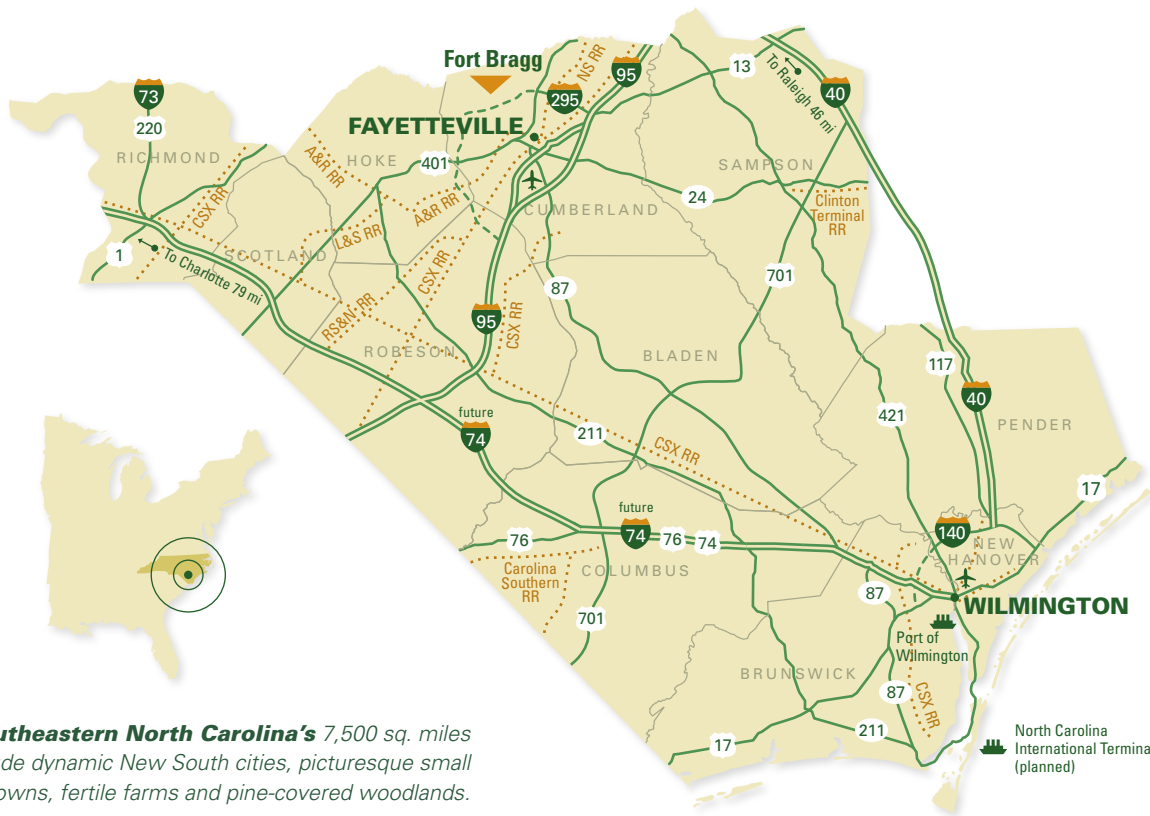
Over one million people live in the region, and its growing population includes newly arriving residents from around the world at all stages of life and career. Demographers project continued population growth for the Southeast during the coming five years, with all counties expected to see positive increases in residents. The region's workforce, which now numbers nearly 500,000, includes a diverse cross-section of workers in agriculture, manufacturing, wholesale trades (i.e., distribution), construction, healthcare, government and the professions. Top private employers include GE, Smithfield Foods, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, Wal-Mart Corp., PPD, Inc., and International Paper.

The region's unique network of multi-modal transportation assets continues to spur economic advantages. The Port of Wilmington, which connects firms across the state to buyers and suppliers around the world, makes the Southeast North Carolina's "gateway to the global economy." As competing port complexes in the eastern U.S. operate at full capacity, shipping lines and the firms they serve are turning to Wilmington as an increasingly popular conduit for bulk, break-bulk and containerized goods. State and federal governments have spent generously on highways in the Southeast Region, with new Interstate extensions around Fayetteville and Wilmington complementing I-40, I-95 and the still-in-progress I-73/74 corridor. The region's utility infrastructure is undergoing transformation as Progress Energy's Sutton Plant converts from coal to natural gas in a move that boosts regional natural gas capacity while serving the long-term interests of the environment.

Southeastern North Carolina continues to offer a competitive cost structure for new and existing businesses—including tax rates, construction costs, real estate valuations and other factors. The region's K-12 school systems maintain a commitment to measurable results under state and federal quality improvement programs. Nine campuses of the North Carolina Community College System serve business, industry and residents of all ages with an innovative, responsive catalogue of affordable education and training programs. Three Universities of the University of North Carolina System support Southeastern North Carolina's global economic competitiveness through research, instruction and extension; their athletics and cultural offerings provide engaging entertainment and enrichment opportunities for surrounding communities.

Temperate climate, abundant waterways, stimulating historical attractions and outdoor recreational amenities produce an enviable quality of life for those who live and work in the region.





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