Appendix D – Urban & Rural Counties Designation
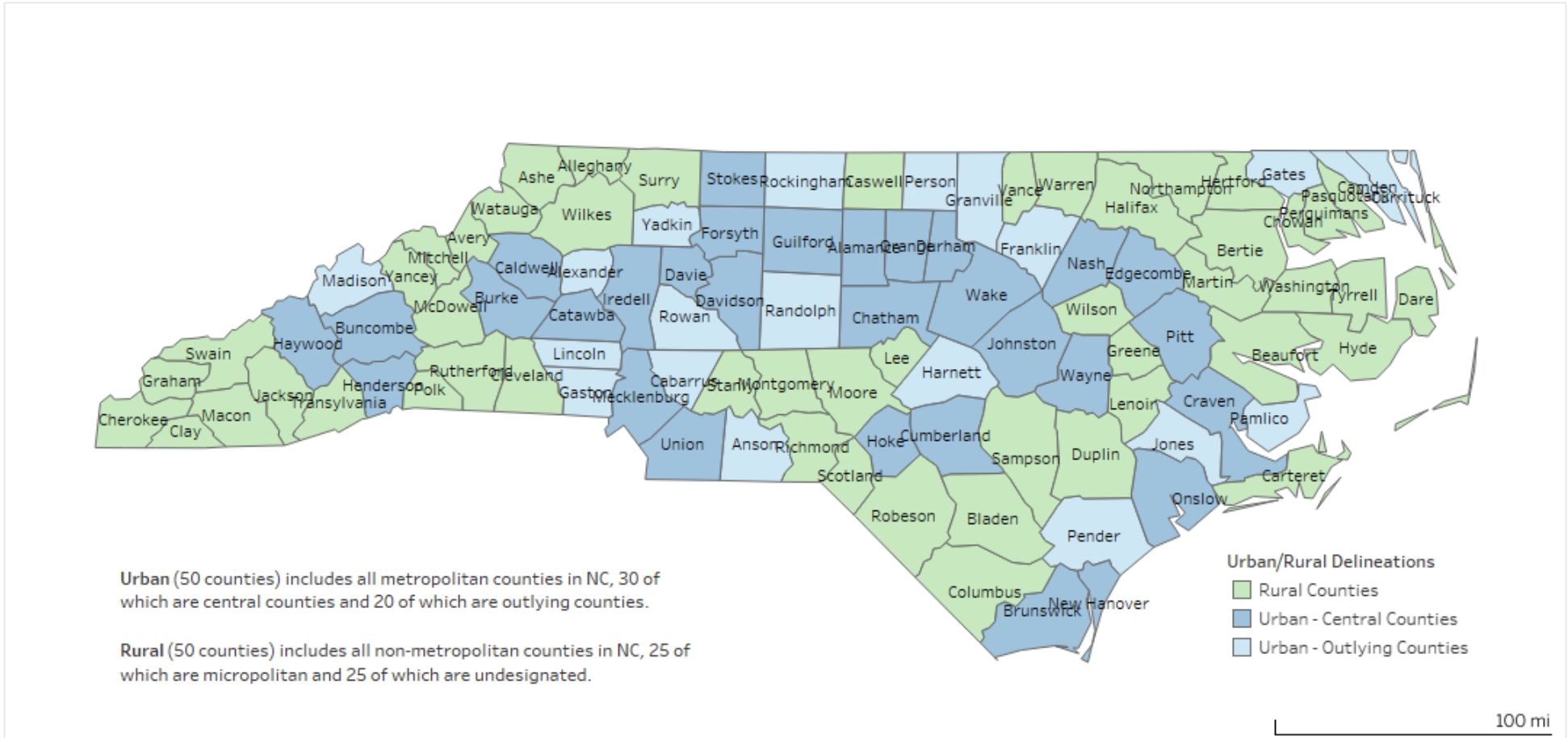
North Carolina Metropolitan (Urban) and Non-Metropolitan (Rural) Counties

Urban (50 counties) includes all metropolitan counties in NC, 30 of which are central counties and 20 of which are outlying counties.

Rural (50 counties) includes all non-metropolitan counties in NC, 25 of which are micropolitan and 25 of which are undesignated.

Urban/Rural Delineations
- Rural Counties
- Urban - Central Counties
- Urban - Outlying Counties

100 mi

The United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB) delineates metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas and designates counties as metropolitan, micropolitan, or neither according to published standards that are applied to Census Bureau data. The general concept of a metropolitan or micropolitan statistical area is that of a core area containing a substantial population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core.

A Metropolitan area contains a core urban area of 50,000 or more population. OMB considers all counties that are part of a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) to be urban and all counties that are not part of an MSA to be rural. In NC as of September 2018, there are 50 metropolitan (urban) counties and 50 non-metropolitan (rural) counties.

Under the standards, counties in which at least 50 percent of the population resides within urban areas of 10,000 or more population, or that contain at least 5,000 people residing within a single urban area of 10,000 or more population, are identified as "central counties". Additional "outlying counties" are included in the MSA if they have a high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core and meet specified requirements of commuting to or from the central counties. In NC as of September 2018, 30 urban counties are "central" and 20 urban counties are "outlying".