Lara Simmons Nichols

Partner

Charlotte

lara.nichols@troutman.com

D 704.916.2370



Lara is an energy regulatory attorney with more than 30 years of experience, including serving as senior vice president at a *Fortune* 150 energy company. She advises electric utilities and energy companies before FERC and state commissions on regulatory strategy, rate design, and nuclear licensing, and counsels clients on environmental permitting matters.

OVERVIEW

Lara represents energy companies and utilities in complex regulatory, environmental, and governance matters before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, state public utility commissions, and administrative and judicial bodies. With more than 30 years of experience — including nearly three decades as senior in-house counsel at Duke Energy Corporation, a *Fortune* 150 energy holding company — Lara brings a distinctive combination of regulatory depth, strategic acumen, and board-level perspective to her clients.

Lara's practice focuses on federal and state energy regulation, rate strategy, energy legislation, environmental permitting and compliance, nuclear development and decommissioning, and enterprise risk management. She advises utilities, energy companies, and project developers on regulatory strategy across multistate and federal proceedings and has particular experience guiding clients through high-stakes, multiparty rate cases, carbon and resource planning, obtaining regulatory approvals and authorizations for infrastructure projects, including certificates of public convenience and necessity, coal combustion residuals matters, and nuclear licensing and compliance before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Lara's work includes regulatory approvals for major capital investments exceeding $1 billion and a series of landmark firsts — among them North Carolina's first Carbon Plan and first Multi-Year Rate Plan.

Lara has deep familiarity with the operational and policy challenges facing large integrated utilities, having served as a senior executive and strategic partner to C-suite leadership and board committees throughout her career at Duke Energy. She is recognized for building consensus among diverse stakeholders and for delivering creative, business-oriented solutions in complex regulatory environments.

REPRESENTATIVE MATTERS

- Served as the executive sponsor and lead counsel for the merger of Duke Energy Carolinas and Duke Energy Progress negotiated settlements with key wholesale customers and retail consumer advocates leading to FERC and state public utility commission approvals.
- Developed and prosecuted North Carolina's first Carbon Plan under the state's bipartisan Energy Solutions for

©2026 Troutman Pepper Locke

North Carolina legislation, leading a three-week evidentiary hearing involving more than 40 intervening parties on behalf of Duke Energy.

- Led the legal team that obtained North Carolina Utilities Commission approval for the state's first Multi-Year Rate Plan, authorizing recovery of over $1.2 billion in capital investment over three years and implementing performance incentive mechanisms through an innovative collaborative stakeholder process for Duke Energy.
- Served as project co-sponsor for FERC approval of a centralized, automated Southeast Energy Exchange Market, enhancing market structure and delivering cost savings and efficiency gains for approximately 50 million customers across 15+ energy companies.
- Negotiated a comprehensive settlement resolving 23 lawsuits and administrative cases involving six Duke Energy facilities, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, and multiple community groups, saving approximately $1.5 billion in coal ash basin closure costs.
- Advised Duke Energy on regulatory and contractual strategies to accommodate large load growth customers, including data centers, within the utility system.
- Represented Duke Energy in obtaining NRC licenses for new nuclear reactors at the Lee site in South Carolina and the Levy site in Florida.
- Supervised the negotiation and regulatory approval of a first-of-its-kind accelerated decommissioning and dismantlement agreement for Duke Energy Florida's Crystal River Nuclear Plant, transferring responsibilities and licensing to a third party.
- Managed Duke Energy's environmental litigation involving the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Coal Combustion Residuals Rule, as well as OSHA investigations and hydroelectric licensing proceedings.
- As an integral member of the Nuclear Energy Institute Legal Committee, helped secure a ruling requiring the U.S. Department of Energy to set the nuclear waste fee paid by nuclear facilities to zero.

TOP AREAS OF FOCUS

- Energy
- FERC
- Oil + Gas
- Renewable Energy
- State Energy Regulation

PROFESSIONAL/COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Board of Trustees; chair, Board Development Committee, Charlotte Ballet, 2022-present
- Board of Directors, E4 Carolinas, 2026
- Steering Group, Legal Advisory Committee, Nuclear Energy Institute, 2010-2015
- Executive Committee, Board of Directors; chair, Pro Bono Committee, Charlotte Center for Legal Advocacy, 2011-2017

EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

EDUCATION

- University of North Carolina School of Law, J.D., *high honors*, 1993
- University of Pennsylvania, B.A., *magna cum laude*, 1990, English language and literature

BAR ADMISSIONS

- North Carolina

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Presenter, "The First 24 Hours: Critical Decisions that Shape Reputation, Preserve Trust and Minimize Risk in the Court of Public Opinion," Mecklenburg Bar Association, September 17, 2026.

MEDIA COMMENTARY

- Quoted, "A 'Wholesale Revision' of US Nuclear Rules Is on the Table," *Canary Media*, September 30, 2026.