

“Climate Change and Environmental Justice Solutions for North America”: Commission for Environmental Cooperation Council Session Chair Summary

*Twenty-eighth Regular Session of the CEC Council, September 9–10, 2021,
Chaired by Mr. Michael Regan, Administrator of the U.S Environmental Protection Agency*

The Council of the CEC affirms our commitment to environmental cooperation as we conclude our first regular session under the [United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement](#) (USMCA) and its companion [Environmental Cooperation Agreement](#) (ECA).

The Parties’ unwavering commitment to the CEC since its inception in 1994 is firmly rooted in the understanding that addressing the environmental challenges of our time requires ambitious and innovative solutions that transcend national borders.

Our countries share a common vision for a prosperous and sustainable economy that will help protect the environment and health of communities across North America, particularly underserved and vulnerable communities.

North America can be a global leader on linking nature and climate. We share geography, critical habitats, key waterways, and a common desire to conserve and enhance biodiversity for current and future generations.

We affirm our obligation to support the implementation of the environment chapter of the USMCA, recognizing the importance of cooperation to achieve shared environmental goals and to promote sustainable development with strengthened trade and investment relations that will benefit our people. Our work reflects the priorities for trilateral action to protect, conserve, enhance and sustainably use natural resources in North America.

As we focus on generating green growth in North America and building an inclusive and sustainable future, we recognize that our renewed trade relationship provides ample opportunities as well as full responsibility for delivering transformative and innovative solutions for our nearly 500 million citizens.

This Session affirmed the critical importance of robust science for evidence-based decision-making, particularly the value of the CEC in facilitating information sharing and coordination of approaches, as well as the invaluable role of traditional ecological knowledge.

Climate Change and Environmental Justice Solutions

This year’s theme for the Regular Session, *Climate Change and Environmental Justice Solutions*, links scientific elements with the respective socioeconomic factors each North American country faces. As a region, we look to solve the multifaceted crises on our continent and our planet. We recognize the importance of protecting the health and environment of **all** of our communities, including those who are more vulnerable to disproportionate climate impacts, and of trilateral cooperation and addressing environmental issues through our respective domestic laws, regulations and policies.

The Council Session agenda advanced the CEC’s work and mission in the context of the new trilateral environmental cooperation agreement, the new trade agreement, and the 2021-2025

Strategic Plan, bringing together the CEC's three constituent bodies, namely the Council, Secretariat, and the members of the Joint Public Advisory Committee, as well as the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG) that inform the work of the CEC.

Deliverables from the Regular Session

- The countries launched a new grant program, EJ4Climate, which will make \$2 million USD available for underserved and vulnerable communities, including Indigenous communities, in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, to address climate-related impacts. The program will directly fund community-based organizations to support community-driven solutions to the challenges of climate change. This program operationalizes the [commitment](#) made by the United States during the 2021 Leaders Summit on Climate for the EPA to support environmental justice and climate resilience by funding \$1 million USD in grants and cooperative agreements through the CEC.
- The CEC introduced three new large-scale initiatives: working on mitigating 'black carbon' for the improvement of air quality and support for environmental justice in a local context; addressing 'ghost' fishing gear in marine ecosystems; and supporting environmental education.
- The Council supported the creation of an additional initiative on Indigenous approaches to freshwater management in North America.
- The CEC awarded \$45,000 CAD to the winners of the [2021 Youth Innovation Challenge](#), which tasked young entrepreneurs to submit bold innovations for climate change and environmental justice solutions. Winning solutions included: an organic plastic waste disposal solution that uses microbes to degrade plastics in just weeks (Canada); a device that supports honey-producing bees and marginalized communities affected by declines in bees (Mexico); a pilot program that helps producer families adopt sustainable community forestry production (Mexico); and a solution to transform 'fugitive' CO₂ emissions from power plants into sustainable solar commodities, particularly helping marginalized communities located near coal-fired plants (United States).
- The CEC will soon open calls for proposals for the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA) community grant program, which supports local and Indigenous communities. This cycle's theme will support local communities in their efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Looking Ahead

The CEC's work has supported progress in all three countries to reduce air and water pollution; share information and improve responses on extreme weather and climate events; conserve, protect, and promote the sustainable use of biodiversity in marine as well as terrestrial ecosystems; conserve priority species, including the iconic monarch butterfly; and prevent food loss and waste, among others.

As we continue to strengthen our cooperative relationship, we look forward to building on these efforts to address environmental concerns and challenges in the context of liberalized trade in North America, including continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, with opportunities for sustainable, resilient and equitable growth.

We look forward to continuing our support for the CEC, including the Secretariat, JPAC and the TEKEG, other government agencies, and all stakeholders involved in this renewed era of trilateral cooperation.

We look forward to next year's annual Regular Session, which will be hosted by Mexico.