

NORTH AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION ENHANCED

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- July 26, 1994 -- The North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation met today for the first time in regular session, establishing a new level of environmental co-operation between Mexico, Canada and the United States.

This landmark meeting was presided over by the Council, the governing body of the Commission, represented by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Carol M. Browner, Canadian Deputy Prime Minister and Environment Minister Sheila Copps and Mexico's SEDESOL Secretary Carlos Rojas.

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation was created by the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation to promote sustainable development, ensure increased environmental co-operation and supplement the environmental provisions of NAFTA. It consists of a Council, a Secretariat headed by an Executive Director and a Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC), composed of five members from each country. The JPAC assembled here in Washington for the first time.

At this first session of the Commission, each of the Council members presented their vision for the role the Commission should have. According to Administrator Browner " This Commission ushers in an exciting new era in co-operation and public participation in finding solutions to the environmental issues that affect the citizens of our three countries. "

Minister Copps said " The Commission for Environmental Cooperation must provide an effective framework for the conservation, protection and enhancement of the environment in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Secretary Rojas added " The Commission should intensify co-operation and create efficient links of collaboration among our three countries. The Commission should not become an instrument of commercial protectionism disguised as environmentalism. "

A number of items were unanimously approved by Council which officially launches the work of the Commission. These include:

- * A statement of the Council's priorities for the Commission's co-operative activities for the first year, including initiatives in seven areas: Conservation and Ecosystem Protection, NAFTA Effects and Consultation, Enforcement, Pollution Prevention, Environmental Policy Instruments including Economic Instruments, Technology Co-operation and Capacity Building, and Transboundary Environmental Issues.

• The 1994 budget and annual program for the Commission. The Secretariat's structure and staff of approximately 30 persons will represent a broad range of environmental expertise. The Executive Director is expected to begin hiring immediately.

• The Rules and Procedures for the Council and Rules of Procedures for the JPAC. These Rules will ensure that the Council operates in an open and transparent manner and that the JPAC will be able to effectively provide advice.

The Commission concluded the session by holding the first public meeting, providing citizens from the three countries the opportunity to present their views on the Commission's work and its role in enhancing the protection of the North American environment. A total of 18 speakers from the three countries addressed the Council. Each regular session of the Council will include a public meeting.

The Joint Public Advisory Committee

The JPAC is charged with providing advice to the Commission on implementing the Environment Agreement and may provide the Council with relevant technical, scientific or other information.

JPAC members have decided to meet regularly, four times a year in the early stages, and advise the Council on all aspects of the Commission's work. The members will draw on their expertise in a wide range of activities.

The Committee's membership, totalling fifteen members, five from each country, reflect the diverse range of interests that the public of all three countries have regarding the work of the Commission. The members will help ensure that the Commission's activities achieve the goals of the Agreement.

For further information:

John Kasper
U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency (202) 260-4355

Oscar Ramirez
Director General for Social
Communications
SEDESOL
(525) 515-4508 or 271-5217

Duncan Dee
Press secretary
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
of Canada and Environment Minister
(819) 997-1441