

2022

Report of the Executive Director
to the Council

Capitalizing on Opportunities to Modernize and Enhance Regional Cooperation



COMMISSION FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL
COOPERATION





CEC Mission Statement

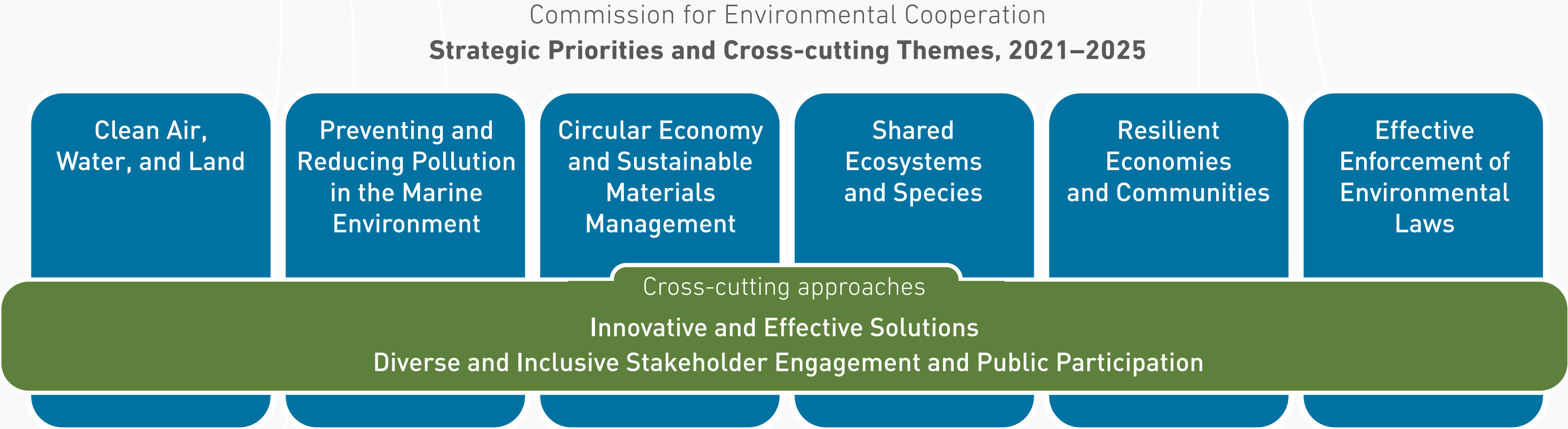
In the context of environmental, economic and social linkages between Canada, Mexico and the United States, the CEC facilitates effective cooperation and public participation to conserve, protect and enhance the North American environment in support of sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations.



This past year witnessed significant transformations that will enable the CEC to tackle a more ambitious agenda and increase its relevance as a **model of regional cooperation**. The sustained efforts of the organization reflect a commitment of the CEC's three constituent bodies to continue working constructively together, along with stakeholders and collaborators, in pursuing opportunities to improve the CEC's unique potential for an expanded role and even greater involvement of communities working together on solutions for sustainable development. Furthermore, our respect for shared values and responsibility is an important factor for effective capacity-building and collaboration, and the need for understanding and dialogue is a primary **agent of change** from an operational and a strategic management level.



In 2019–2020, the Secretariat emphasized results aimed at readiness to change. [Laying the groundwork](#) and developing a path toward results-oriented goals were critical in this first transitional phase, especially in the context of the new [Free Trade Agreement \(USMCA, CUSMA, T-MEC\)](#), and a renewed focus under the accompanying [Environmental Cooperation Agreement \(ECA\)](#).

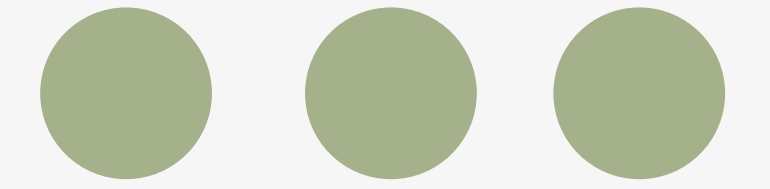


Within this context, the [CEC Strategic Plan \(SP\) 2021–2025](#), which set priorities for the three countries on environmental issues of mutual concern, provided courses of action, that when fully implemented, will help move the CEC in a common direction and maximize its effectiveness on environmental cooperation. The SP 2021–2025 revealed CEC pillars of cooperation and action that guide planning our operations over a five-year period, as well as cross-cutting approaches that support effective and innovative solutions and facilitate engagement and participation.

In 2020–2021, the spotlight was on helping the organization mobilize the necessary consensus and collective action for change, as reported in the second Executive Director report entitled [*Harnessing the Winds of Change in a Common Direction*](#).

For this Executive Director report, covering the period of 2021–2022, the focus is on the development and implementation of the CEC work program. This third report also aims to be forward-looking. It describes recent successes; however, it is also linked to present and future opportunities for increasing CEC's capacity to deliver on its mandate and to enhance regional cooperation. As a result, what follows below are highlights of how the CEC adapted to new requirements and realities. Specifically, the highlights depict how we have adopted fresh ideas and methods, including those related to Council's vision for CEC to become a global leader on linking nature and climate.





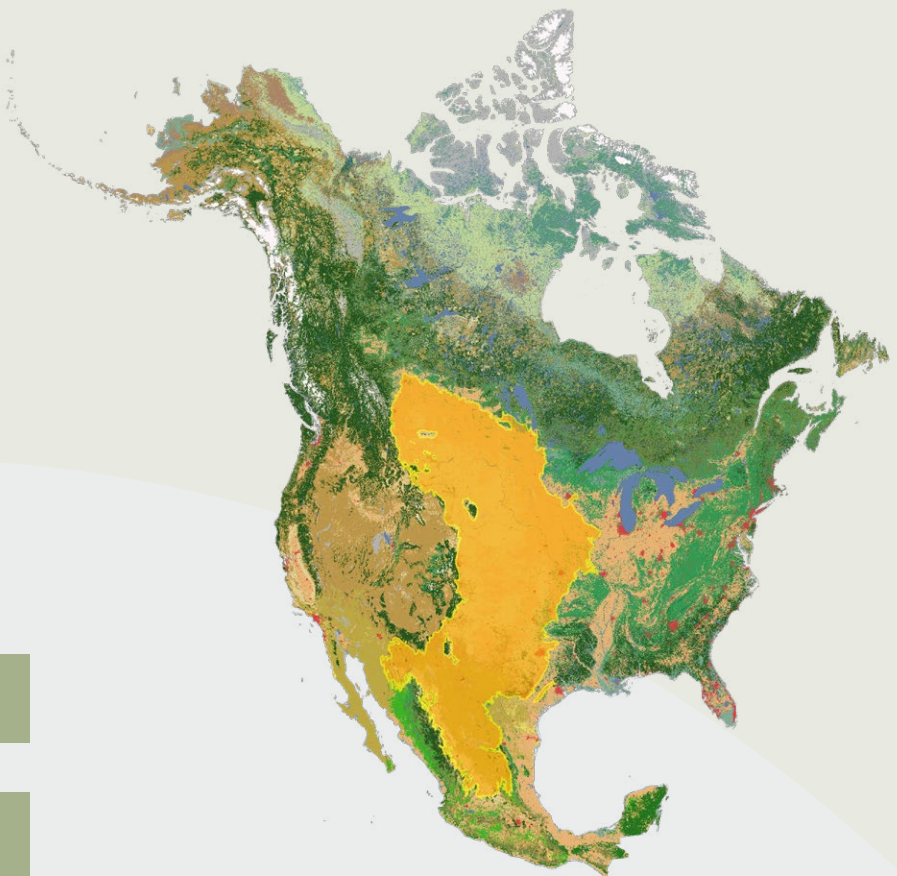
The **need for collective action and progress is as urgent as ever**. This year alone, in June 2022, there have been alarming reports, including the fact that carbon dioxide emissions, as measured at Mauna Loa, reached the highest level in recorded history. There have also been reports that the adverse impacts of climate change have been and will continue to be most damaging for vulnerable groups, especially Indigenous groups. On this topic, we are proud of the fact that the CEC was featured at the **United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26)**, hosted in Glasgow in November 2021, where we launched the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) initiative to help transition isolated and remote communities to clean and renewable sources of energy.

From the perspective of strengthening leadership and commitment, the Council **has been supportive** of “moving the yardstick forward” on a range of activities, including encouraging innovative solutions, providing a forum for dialogue and advocacy, facilitating engagement and knowledge-sharing, and promoting equity for vulnerable populations. The Council has also responded with additional resources and flexibility that allowed the CEC’s work program to be customized to evolving circumstances, with “rolling” Operational Plan activities that may be of medium- or longer-term duration. The CEC is thus **in the midst of implementing its work program** and has begun the **development phase** for other projects and initiatives, in collaboration with experts and with the input of stakeholders.



Our work initiatives since last year's Council Session:

- Strengthening the **implementation and effective enforcement of CITES** for timber in North America, with the objectives of developing information, enhancing capacity of enforcement officials, exploring methods and systems for tracking, and supporting scientific assessment. Specifically, we are engaged in several activities that will continue through 2022, including sharing information and providing training to enforcement officers, and forming an alliance of laboratories.
- Conserving **grasslands and migratory birds**, reflecting the commitment to conserve at least 30 percent of our respective land and waters by 2030, including raising awareness on the importance of grasslands, knowledge for decision-making, and network-building and strategic planning. In terms of 2022 activities, we are analyzing challenges, constraints, and drivers for grasslands conservation, as well as socio-economic factors and human dimensions, to identify a standardized, annually updated trilateral framework for monitoring grasslands change, indicator species and develop a methodology to track loss/gain in native grasslands, as well as create and support virtual events, especially for underrepresented groups.



- Reducing **marine litter**, while continuing to build public awareness, deploy litter capture devices, collect comparable data across the three countries, and reduce land-based marine litter, including single-use plastic products and packaging. Specifically, for 2022, we are installing trash capture devices in small to mid-size streams or urban waterways and implementing community-science activities.
- Transforming **recycling and solid waste management**, to accelerate the uptake of circular economy and sustainable materials management practices and to realize the economic and environmental benefits for the region. At this time, we are generating milestone studies to evaluate the current state of recycling opportunities and barriers, emerging technologies, best practices, with a focus on the waste streams of paper, plastics, and bioplastics. We are also developing a work program to identify relevant stakeholders and interested partners and to promote their engagement into collaborative work on the topics related to the studies.



- **Address flooding** in coastal cities by working on **Nature-based Solutions (NBS)** that will provide a first opportunity for practitioners, offer an interdisciplinary approach, and address barriers. Ongoing activities include establishing trilateral intersectoral collaboration to support the use of NBS to address coastal flooding and provide knowledge and tools for communities to support NBS implementation.
- Trilateral **data exchange system** on the import and export of **hazardous waste**, focused on maintenance, implementation, testing, and IT support. All of these include activities that will continue in 2022, namely testing of the US-Mexico API exchange, and operations and maintenance support for the IT system at Mexico's environment ministry.
- Enhancing **co-benefits of marine protected areas**, which will increase Indigenous and local leadership, facilitate seascape-level conservation, and encourage best practices for climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as further habitat restoration and blue carbon and other critical habitat work. We are currently identifying and sharing these best practices and building on existing approaches, together with ongoing and upcoming opportunities for Indigenous and community leadership and engagement.





- **Ecolnnovation Network (EIN) transition**, in terms of financial, operational and governance responsibilities. We have supported and ensured the proper transfer of the EIN from the Commission to the University of Waterloo and will support its operations for a two-year transition period, including tools related to green growth for youth and communities and assistance in disseminating information to increase visibility and promote EIN activities.
- Preventing and reducing **food loss and waste**, as a follow-up project to build upon the success and momentum achieved previously, with an emphasis on increasing visibility, continued outreach, awareness-raising, and stakeholder engagement. The CEC is involved in ongoing promotion, awareness raising, and the dissemination of the “Food Matters Action Kit” and the “Practical Guide 2.0: Why and how to measure food loss and waste.”
- Advancing **supply chain transparency for chemicals** in products, to foster collaboration and enhance governments’ ability to identify and prevent products containing chemicals of concern, or chemical substitutes of concern. Our main activity in 2022 is conducting a review and assessment of current supply chain practices, tools, challenges, and regulations.



- Advancing **pollinator conservation**, by sharing best practices to mobilize native bee inventory and monitoring, for more robust, standardized data repositories that will inform conservation actions, and tools and communication materials to raise awareness and drive action. We are currently sharing these best practices through an emerging North American community of practice and communicating the environmental, social, and economic benefits of native bees for communities, food production, and natural ecosystem functioning.



- **Indigenous approaches to freshwater management** in North America, a Council-supported initiative to document these unique approaches to freshwater management and make lessons learned available to the public through an online portal on the CEC website. We are planning to document six successful case studies, conducting a Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group-led knowledge dialogue on Indigenous experience with freshwater management in North America. We are also working on a workshop to assess opportunities to integrate TEK, Indigenous Peoples' perspectives, and stewardship practices in freshwater management led by Indigenous People across North America.

Projects in the design phase this year:



A Community Environmental Justice Network (CEJN), aimed at strengthening the capacity of local, Indigenous, and vulnerable communities in Canada, Mexico and the United States to adapt and thrive in a changing climate;



A project on *Air Quality Improvements for Environmental Justice*, to build partnerships with communities suffering from poor air quality due to high emission levels of Black Carbon and particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), as well as with those experiencing disproportionate environmental harm or risk, and/or have environmental justice concerns;



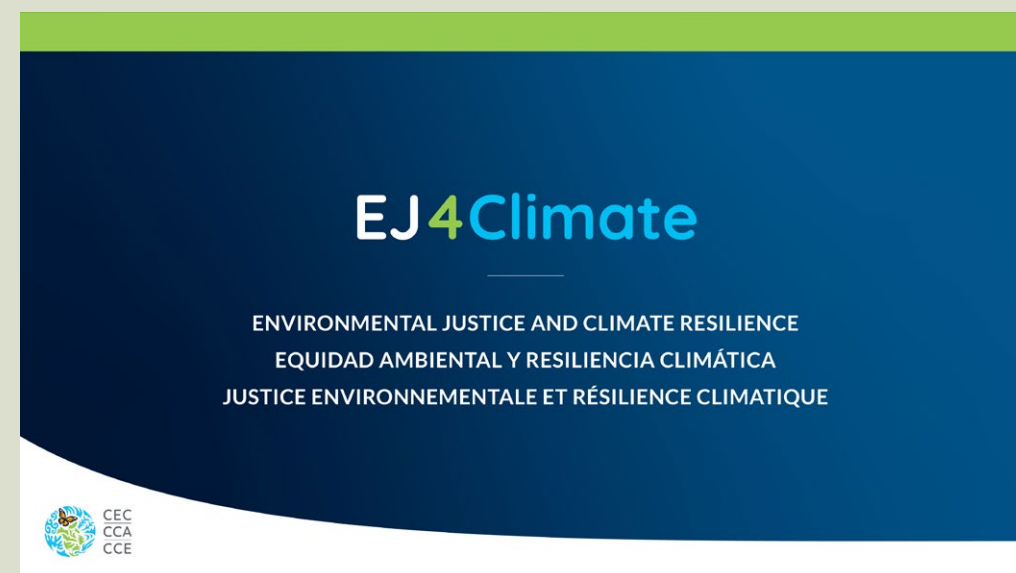
Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy, that will develop North American case studies of communities transitioning to cleaner, more affordable, and reliable sources of clean energy, which will be integrated into a “Multi-stakeholder Platform for Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy,” to be developed by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA); and



Addressing Ghost Gear in North America, which will focus specifically on abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear and the implementation of immediate actions to reduce such fishing gear, including protocols and strategies to manage coastal fishing communities responsibly.

Other CEC activities this year:

In addition to projects and initiatives, the CEC was productive on many other fronts.



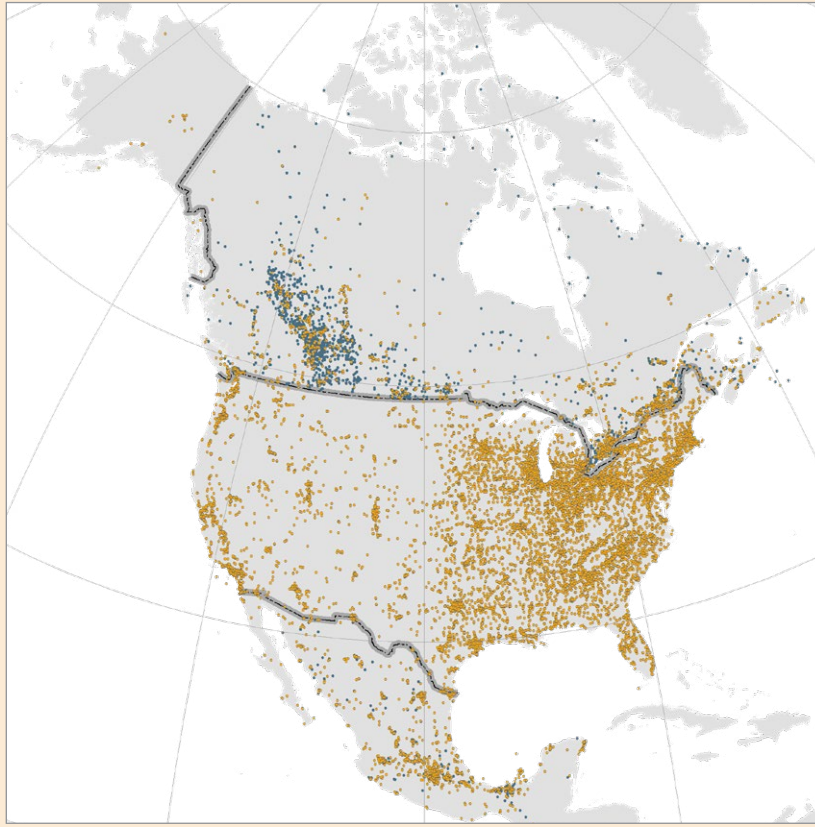
In 2022, we announced 15 grant recipients, selected from more than 375 proposals, as part of a new US\$2 million grant program, **E4J Climate**, launched by the Council in September 2021. The funds will help organizations in all three countries deliver

community-based initiatives over the next 24 months to support underserved, vulnerable, and Indigenous communities to prepare for climate-related impacts.

We also announced C\$1.5 million in funding for 10 community projects chosen under the **North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA 2021-23)** in support of community-based recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, including environmental initiatives for communities to implement solutions, strengthen capacities to recover, and increase resilience.

In 2022, we also launched the **Youth Innovation Challenge**, a contest that invites youth from across North America to submit their innovative ideas and solutions for improving both the environment and the economy on the continent. This year, the invitation was for youth to propose innovation towards COVID-19 recovery, with the successful submissions from Canada, Mexico, and the United States to be presented at the CEC Council Session on July 15, 2022, in Mérida, Mexico.

With emphasis on an evidence-based approach to environmental quality, the CEC continues to **improve access to information for decision-making**. Through its online library and data tools and resources, such as scientific reports, databases, and geospatial data, the CEC supports government officials, the private sector, academic and research institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and communities in conducting research and adopting sustainable management practices.



The **North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (NAPRTR)** includes data reported from approximately 30,000 industrial facilities, and program coordination will continue in 2022. Furthermore, the CEC will launch a voluntary industry pollution prevention “Challenge” initiative, the first phase of which involves assessing the level of pollution prevention reporting by facilities

in the sector. The latest edition (volume 16) of the Taking Stock report, featuring a special analysis of off-site transfers to disposal during the 2014–2018 period, will be published this year.

The **North American Environmental Atlas** (NAEA), an online mapping resource of geospatial data from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, supports a wide range of research and analysis of environmental challenges in North America, as attested by citations in more than a hundred published scientific articles. Activities in 2022 will focus on updating individual map layers, improving the visibility and dissemination of this online mapping resource.

The **North American Land Change Monitoring System** (NALCMS), which provides valuable indicators to help the three countries better understand the dynamics of land cover and how it changes over time, can be applied to decision-making on different fronts such as carbon sequestration analysis, wildlife habitat mapping, ecosystem monitoring, environmental planning, water quality assessments, and evaluation of biofuels production potential. Activities in 2022 will include completing the North American 2020 land cover dataset for publication in the NAEA, as well as promotional and outreach material.

None of these activities or accomplishments would be possible without an expanded focus on outreach, engagement, partnerships, and communications, with due regard to inclusion, diversity, and widespread public participation in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. For instance, the **5th Annual International Monarch Monitoring Blitz**, the most successful survey yet, involved more than 2,000 volunteers across 80 states and provinces in North America over a 10-day period, shared well over 4,000 observations of monarch butterflies and milkweed plants, produced useful information on their habitat and reproduction, and exemplified the resilience of this emblematic species and the resilience and dedication of people across North America.





With respect to the value of partnerships and expanding our reach to a wider audience, the recent signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Waterloo**, will provide mutual benefits for the university's reputable Faculty of the Environment and CEC's mission and is intended to empower students to lead environmental change through entrepreneurship and innovation. Linked to this creative collaboration and formal relationship is the second edition of the **Green Entrepreneurship Series** (March 2022) that attracted more than 300 participants from 31 countries, representing a wide variety of sectors—academia, NGOs, government, private sector and international organizations.

To help shape its vision for enhanced cooperation, the CEC has focused on consolidating its strategic positioning vis-à-vis engaging and partnering with individuals and organizations, in line with Article 9 of the ECA on modalities of cooperation and the Strategic Plan 2021–2025. We are developing a **Partnership Action Plan** for the next two years to support the Stakeholder Strategy 2021–2025 and sustain our efforts on trilateral cooperation. The Action Plan will outline the rationale for establishing partnerships between the CEC and interested entities, as well as measurable and action-oriented objectives. We are also putting in place a reference guide that includes criteria and guidelines to maximize our efforts in formal relationships with suitable partners, as well as a roadmap for success in working with partners in a cohesive and consistent manner.

Also, in alignment with the stakeholder strategy, we designed a clear and focused strategy to facilitate **private sector engagement** in CEC activities, including a more systematic approach for promoting dialogue, and increasing the impact of our initiatives by leveraging private sector resources. The CEC's unique role as a catalyst and forum for knowledge-sharing will help foster mutually supportive trade and environmental policies. Undoubtedly, the well-being of future generations relies on all stakeholders adopting a sustainable approach to environmental management and economic growth. Industry and local businesses are an essential part of communities, providing livelihoods for citizens. They also have the potential to improve community prosperity and well-being through sustainable innovations and green growth that reduces their environmental footprint.

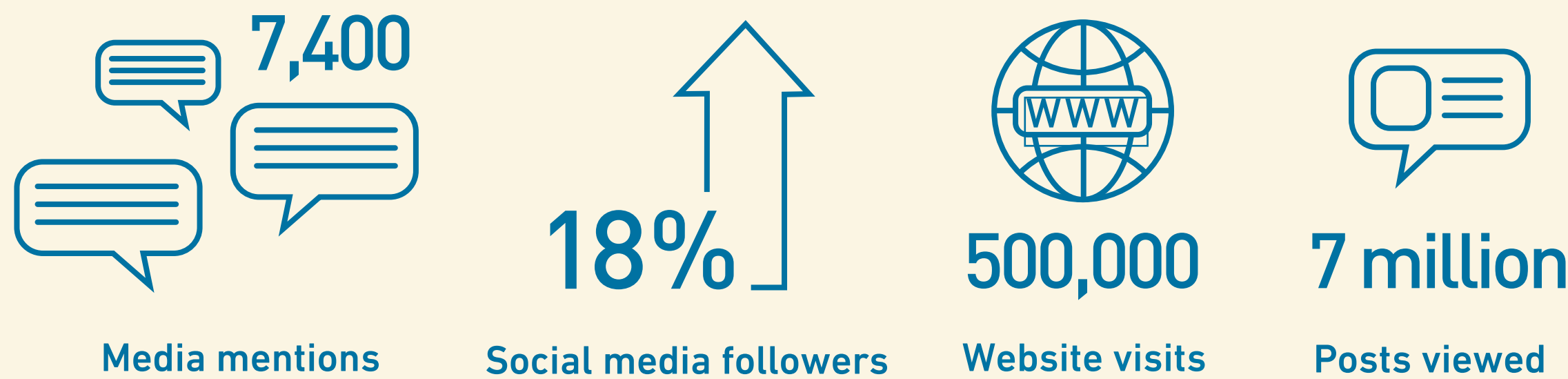
In addition, we intend to strengthen our relationships with collaborators and partners, and with other target audiences such as youth, building on the **Youth Engagement Strategy**. We are also expanding our approaches to foster broader and inclusive engagement, in line with the 2021–2025 **Gender and Diversity Action Plan**, and our support for socio-economic and cultural diversity in pursuing CEC goals.



In response to the CEC strategic plan, which called for progress on gender equity and empowerment of women, we have considerably improved our potential for equitable growth and development in Secretariat positions of authority, leadership, and increased responsibility. With the support of Council, the composition of personnel, as well as adjustments to classification levels, have led to an **increase of professional positions being occupied by women**, to nearly 60%, as of today. As well, women make up two-thirds of all employees at the Secretariat. With new recruitments, we are building an organization that increasingly reflects **cultural and racial diversity**, while respecting parity among nationals in the three countries.



We developed the **Strategic Communications Action Plan** for 2022–2023 to address the need for effective and impactful strategic communications that would reflect the breadth and depth of our accomplishments and support visibility and recognition for the CEC. Its purpose is to facilitate the implementation of CEC activities and disseminate awareness of them, reflecting a renewed approach to enhancing our relevance in the region and abroad. It comprises tactics, approaches, tools, and products necessary to support the rolling Operational Plans and contribute to the front-end phase of the Strategic Plan implementation process. It builds on a successful advocacy campaign, which has resulted in a substantial increase in coverage and public following over these three years, as well as surpassing previous attendance records at meetings and events even considering the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It also builds upon the CEC’s fresh new look and branding and a more dynamic website design and content.



These **robust CEC communications activities are bearing fruit** in an unprecedented fashion. Over the last 12 months, the CEC has been mentioned in the media more than 7,400 times, which likely means that we have reached millions of people, according to industry standards. On social media, we grew our followers by 18%, to a total of 42,000, and our posts were viewed more than 7 million times. This growing trend helped generate nearly 500,000 visits to the CEC website, a substantial increase over previous years. Moreover, we have reached out to more than 1,500 stakeholders, inviting them to participate in CEC grant programs, JPAC forums, public consultations, and several online engage activities.

In terms of greater visibility, relevance, and recognition, nowhere is this more apparent than the **November 2021 North American Leaders Summit**, at which the three leaders announced the establishment of a North American Climate Adaptation Workplan under the responsibility of the CEC and highlighted in their statement the role of the CEC in preserving knowledge and practices of Indigenous and local communities. It can be argued that this recognition from the political leadership reflects our mandate, with a unique vehicle for pursuing sustainable development and helping North America become a global leader on specific concerns that impact the world today and future generations. This high-level recognition is also an indication that the CEC has been on the right track with our collective vision for bold and innovation solutions. It certainly underscores the importance of persevering in the pursuit of our mission and being equipped with the means to match our ambitions.

The **Joint Public Advisory Committee** (JPAC) has been instrumental in its roles of reaching out to audiences in the three countries and in the provision of advice to Council. JPAC activities such as the public consultation on the new CEC project to advance supply chain transparency with regard to chemicals used in products; the online webinar on sustainable management of transboundary waters and successful collaboration; as well as the advice produced; a youth roundtable to focus on environmental justice and climate change solutions are all examples. We are helping JPAC organize its annual public forum, to be held on July 15, 2022, which will showcase community-led environmental education efforts across North America, and also feature an intergenerational roundtable that will offer young leaders from the three countries the opportunity to engage in dialogue on critical environmental issues and share their perspectives within the framework of the Council's Public Session. JPAC will continue its efforts to reach new and more diverse stakeholders and will also develop and implement a new JPAC-led initiative, beginning in 2022.





The **Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group**, (TEKEG), which works with experts in traditional environmental practices, has had an invaluable impact on the CEC's work. The members contribute to an improved understanding of ecological processes and ultimately to better results for the environment. The CEC is currently implementing a TEKEG-led initiative on Indigenous approaches to freshwater management in North America, among others. The TEKEG will also develop and lead a new project initiative, starting in 2022. To support our TEK efforts and opportunities for increased collaboration and Indigenous-led stewardship practices across CEC operations, we created a new full-time officer-level position within the CEC Secretariat, which was also filled this year with a highly qualified, experienced professional from an Indigenous background.



Under the Free Trade Agreement, the CEC also has significant responsibility in facilitating public participation, transparency, and environmental governance, namely through the **Submissions on Enforcement Matters** (SEM) process. The Secretariat manages the SEM process, which allows any person of a Party to raise concerns about an alleged failure of any of the three Parties to effectively enforce its environmental laws, and it has been meeting stricter timelines under the Free Trade Agreement, as well as having increased awareness in the three countries through its education campaign. In April 2022, the Secretariat recommended the development of a factual record to explore factors contributing to the near-extinction the vaquita porpoise—the world's smallest cetacean and rarest marine mammal—in Mexico's Gulf of California. In June 2022, the Secretariat recommended the development of a factual record to explore enforcement activities protecting the North Atlantic right whale (NARW), one of the most endangered large whale species, along the east coast of the United States. In addition, the Secretariat is reviewing a new submission relating to the enforcement of environmental laws to protect the coastal ecosystem of Playa Hermosa, a local beach located in Ensenada, Baja California, Mexico, and is also finalizing the development of two draft factual records, Metrobús Reforma and the City Park project, in Mexico City and León, respectively.





In conclusion, the Secretariat encourages as many people as possible to visit the CEC website, as it contains a wealth of information and details on our activities, including the 29th Regular Session of the CEC Council, and to participate in the **Council Public Meeting** and the **JPAC Public Forum** on July 14–15, 2022. We are confident that this annual session, involving the three cabinet-level ministers from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, will lead to productive discussions on new opportunities to modernize and enhance regional cooperation toward sustainable development.

Furthering these opportunities will respect our long-standing tradition of facilitating and promoting community engagement and participation for the benefit of citizens and the natural environment, which we all depend for survival and prosperity. I am also pleased to say that the CEC Secretariat has overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in its day-to-day work, while promoting a strong sense of shared responsibility on the environment, aimed at contributing meaningfully to our overall health, social and economic well-being.

As my three-year term as Executive Director comes to a close, I want to express my special gratitude to an exceptional team of passionate and dedicated staff at the CEC Secretariat. I also would like to extend my appreciation to our other constituent bodies, the Council and JPAC, as well as the TEKEG, for their support and guidance during this period of important change and renewal at the CEC. It has truly been an honor and great privilege to serve the people of Canada, Mexico, and the United States in a leadership position and have the opportunity of contributing to such a noble cause.



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