

Report of the Executive Director
Commission for Environmental Cooperation



Laying the groundwork for an ambitious agenda for action



For presentation at the 27th Regular Session
of the CEC Council – June 26th, 2020

This period marks a turning point, especially in terms of the economic and environmental investments needed to recover from the pandemic crisis. It is urgent that we move forward on opportunities for innovative solutions, involving communities, the private sector, and a broad range of stakeholders.

With the continued support of my Secretariat colleagues and CEC's constituent bodies, I am confident that we will be able to sustain a sufficient resource capacity for our activities and networks of collaborators.



Richard A. Morgan
Executive Director



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Executive Director

Message from the Executive Director

It is my pleasure and privilege to present the June 2020 Executive Director Report, which outlines some of CEC's most meaningful accomplishments in the past year. The activities described herein are drawn from selected initiatives and projects under the current Operational Plan (2019-2020), which is being implemented by the CEC Secretariat in conjunction with a dedicated group of government experts and stakeholders across the North American continent.

I am proud of the entire team at the CEC Secretariat, which has carried out its mandate in a determined fashion. Nowhere has this been this more apparent than over the past three months, when everyone worked remotely while maintaining the pace of work to deliver quality outputs. I believe we rose to this challenge admirably and with great dedication. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Joint Public Advisory Committee, the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group, and officials on the General Standing Committee, steering committees, and working groups, for their cooperation during this difficult period.

Since assuming the role of Executive Director in July 2019, much of my effort has focused on fostering a quality workplace and being ready for the transition to the new trade agreement and the Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA) between Canada, Mexico and the United States expected to come into force shortly. These new agreements will bring a renewed commitment towards consensus-driven processes and enhanced cooperation on

environmental issues. In addition, the new CEC Strategic Plan for 2021-2025 has set far-reaching priorities and objectives consistent with the framework established under the ECA and Chapter 24 of the new trade agreement.

Greater visibility and engagement in climate action is a pressing need, as are resource efficiencies, pollution and waste reduction, and biodiversity protection. As well, given the clear linkages between the environment, economic development, and public health, the Secretariat must continue to support public participation in the Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process and play a key role in providing public access to knowledge and information on behalf of the Parties to the CEC.

Over the coming weeks and months ahead, our goal at the Secretariat is to reach out to an increasingly vast and diversified group of people and partners, ranging from Indigenous peoples, youth, experts, and academics, to the private sector in various industries. We will strengthen our efforts to work with the Parties to make a real difference, with measurable results for the benefit of North American citizens today and future generations.

I am convinced that, through continuing leadership and commitment at all levels, our value-added contribution will help turn the CEC into a more relevant and replicable model of cooperation and empowerment in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, that can be applied on a global scale.

Core values that guide the Secretariat's operations

Effective cooperation depends on quality relationships and progress being measured through shared accomplishments. The CEC, a unique, trilateral forum, facilitates the three countries coming together for a common vision and shared goals, to advance the common good.

As an integral part of our culture at the CEC Secretariat, we share core values that uphold rigorous governance and management practices. These core values, which were developed in Fall of 2019, set the tone for high standards of activities and behaviour daily. They are continually being reinforced to ensure a healthy and productive workplace and help us deliver on the Secretariat's mandate effectively and efficiently.



INTEGRITY.

The nature of our work calls for everyone to do the right thing. Ethical behaviour marks our professionalism and impacts positively on the work environment and our relationships inside and outside the organization.

EXCELLENCE.

Striving for excellence is a cornerstone of a quality work program. We value creativity and pursue excellence through evidence-based action and results-oriented programming. We assess issues, risks, and needs for action on the basis of the best science available. We work with government agencies and consult with experts in all three countries. Our focus is on the impact of our work on society and our contribution to continent-wide priorities.

COLLABORATION.

Making things happen through teamwork is the essence of enhanced and effective cooperation. A key aspect for all activities is the sharing of ideas, workload, and solutions with various participants, on committees, working groups, and projects.

INCLUSIVENESS.

In building networks across the North American continent, we continue to broaden the engagement of a diverse group of stakeholders in our work and create more opportunities for meaningful public participation.

TRANSPARENCY.

We share the results of our project work and other sources of knowledge widely and encourage all interested individuals and groups to use and review it, take part in discussions, and give input on our strategic and operational plans. Our approaches build trust and confidence of North Americans in our ability to add value and make a difference.



What trilateral cooperation has achieved over the last year

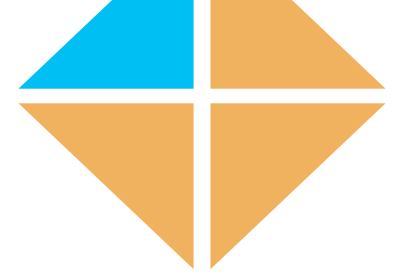
Responding to extreme events

For the last year, we have been working together with organizations, academic institutions, and government agencies in exchanging information on the use of remote sensing technologies in early warning systems. The goal is to greatly speed response to forest fires, droughts, and floods, through the best available early warning methods for these extreme events.

In addition, MPA practitioners have been trained in using the CEC-developed Climate Adaptation Toolkit for Marine and Coastal Protected Areas: a simple and feasible process to help build resilience in marine and coastal ecosystems.

The project on forest fires has been viewed by our partners as a “game-changer” and a big step forward in achieving “long-sought, more active, and thorough coordination with our North American counterparts on satellite-based fire mitigation and early warning systems,” and “an organized, harmonized response across our various agencies in operational satellite-based fire detection and monitoring.

David Streett
Branch Chief, NOAA/NESDIS Satellite Analysis Branch



Communities leading the way on disaster resilience

- After a most productive and well-attended public consultation held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in October 2019, our Joint Public Advisory Committee provided advice to the CEC Council in January 2020, outlining opportunities for the three countries to work together to improve community resilience to extreme events.
- Following the October 2019 JPAC forum, in November our North American Partnerships for Environmental Community Action awarded more than \$354,000 to two community-based projects in Puerto Rico for work on adaptation to extreme events, with very positive media coverage locally.
- More broadly, the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action announced funding for a total of eleven community-based environmental initiatives across North America for adaptation to extreme events, as part of our efforts to work closely with local and Indigenous communities to improve their environmental conditions.
- In addition, we are conducting feasibility studies on expanding some impressive community science initiatives across all three countries, including the Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow (aka CoCoRAHS) network and the SmokeSense mobile application.

“The NAPECA grant is allowing us to really maximize the impact of local organizations that have been working for a very long time with the vulnerabilities of these communities.”



Daniela Lloveras Marxuach
Communications and Partnerships Manager,
Resilient Power Puerto Rico





Conserving and protecting biodiversity and habitats

- We are developing the first North American Pollinator Conservation Framework, which will provide state of art knowledge and recommendations, developed with academia, pollinator conservation organizations, and government experts. The framework will support informed decision-making in the three countries and anchor future trilateral collaboration on pollinators.



Reducing pollution and supporting environmental sustainability

- In 2019, we concluded six years of cooperative work in support of Mexico's efforts to ratify Annex VI of the MARPOL Convention, and in developing a proposal for the establishment of an Emissions Control Area (ECA) for ships, similar to those in effect in Canada and the United States.
- We have supported efforts to enhance control of transboundary movements of hazardous waste by updating the Notice and Consent Electronic Data Exchange (NCEDE) system used by the three countries in order to add flexibility in the system to respond to updates in regulations.



“ As we think about community development and social challenges, about climate change and environmental challenges we need a generation of entrepreneurs who can bring new tools and ideas to those problems.”



Brock Dickinson

Adjunct Professor & Entrepreneur in Residence,
University of Waterloo and Founding Member,
CEC EcoInnovation Network




Supporting green growth and sustainable development

- In June 2019, we launched the [EcoInnovation Network](#) to facilitate the creation, enhancement and networking of innovation centers within academic institutions across North America. The CEC project also serves to cultivate youth and community leadership in innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable growth.
- In order to support a regional approach to measuring food loss and waste (FLW), we have been providing training and technical support to businesses using our comprehensive [Why and How to Measure Food Waste – A Practical Guide](#) to help them reduce FLW in their operations and demonstrate how measurement can yield benefits for both the environment and their bottom line.




Building awareness and community solutions to reduce marine litter

- We are currently capitalizing on best practices in community engagement and social marketing to develop tools that will help drive local action in communities across North America, as well as help change individual behaviors and perceptions related to everyday items that end up in the ocean as marine litter.





“ Having tools developed by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation allows us to focus on such key issues as climate change. ”



Maria Brown

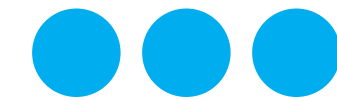
Superintendent, Greater Fallerones National Marine Sanctuary, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Quality science, information and policy research

- Through the Climate Adaptation Knowledge Exchange (CAKE) Network, the CEC published its online [Climate Adaptation Toolkit for Coastal and Marine Protected Areas](#), which aims to help practitioners evaluate the vulnerability of their sites to climate change.
 - In February 2020, we published the [2015 Land Cover Map for North America](#), the highest quality continental land cover product available. Land cover data are used in a wide range of scientific research, including climate modeling, carbon sequestration analysis, wildlife habitat mapping, hydrologic models, disaster management, ecosystem services analyses, water quality assessments, and deforestation mitigation.
 - The North American Environmental Atlas [map viewer](#) has been updated to be compatible with the most recent web mapping standards, featuring improved resolution and mobile-responsiveness, and allowing our users better access to support research and the ability to analyze environmental data across our three countries.
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Promoting the effective enforcement of environmental law – Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM)

- Over the last year, the Secretariat continued work on four active Mexican submissions and completed the final factual record on a Canadian submission, Alberta Tailings Ponds II, which was submitted to Council for a vote on publication.
- Recent developments related to the 2015 Sumidero Canyon II factual record have come to light. A mining quarry located within Mexico's national park (the subject of the submission) was closed by local health authorities in December 2019, following a report from the Human Rights Commission of Mexico that drew on the CEC Secretariat's factual record. The Secretariat, in conjunction with the Parties, has produced a short film on these events, highlighting the impact of public participation through the SEM process.



Increasing engagement and diversity

The ECA highlights the facilitation of partnerships, linkages, or other new channels, for the development and transfer of knowledge and technologies among representatives from academia, private sector, indigenous peoples (Article 9: Modalities and Forms of Cooperation).

The CEC is endeavoring to engage a broader and more diverse group of North Americans in our work in order to inform our collective efforts and broaden our impact on the North American environment. In achieving our mission to conserve, protect, and enhance the North American environment, we must seek to engage various sectors, including academia, private sector, youth, Indigenous peoples, local communities, as well as intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations.

In order to deliver on these objectives, support public engagement, and increase the visibility of the CEC in North America and globally, a new senior position—Outreach and Partnerships Officer—has been created at the Secretariat.

“ We were informed that an international body called the Commission for Environmental Cooperation addressed environmental issues and that we could file our complaint there.”



C. Alejandra Aldama
Committee for Improving Ribera Cahuaré/
Let's Save Sumidero Canyon



Strengthening youth leadership

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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#YOUTH4INNOVATION



- Later this year, the CEC will be launching a major digital campaign aimed at engaging youth in reducing food loss and waste in their homes, schools and communities. The campaign will be launched in the pilot cities of Merida, Montreal, and Seattle (for the Olympic Peninsula).
- In line with our consistent efforts to create learning and research opportunities for college and university students, over the last year, five graduate students from Simon Fraser University in Canada, *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, and University of Arizona in the United States have contributed to developing a standardized methodology to assess the cost of extreme floods, as a resource for decision-makers in North America.
- The fourth annual Youth Innovation Challenge saw more submissions received than ever before, with close to 200 ideas submitted to the CEC. For the first time, all three winning submitters are women. The winning submissions include a food repurposing enterprise created to combat food-waste, a 100% biodegradable and compostable bioplastic, and a plant-based synthetic hair care brand that replaces harmful hair products with compostable options.

Engaging Indigenous Communities and applying Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Indigenous communities have long been important partners in our work and will continue to be so in our future initiatives. During last year, community representatives joined us to contribute on a wide range of issues, including climate adaptation in marine protected areas, pollinator conservation, industrial pollution prevention, costing floods and improving warning systems for drought.

Members of our Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group continue to increase their participation in CEC activities, including the 2019 public forum in Puerto Rico and the planning retreat for the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan in Washington, DC. The TEK Expert Group has also provided a series of recommendations on how to increase the resilience of Indigenous, remote, and isolated communities in the face of extreme weather events.



In February 2020, representatives from the Aamjiwnaang First Nation presented their Pollution Reporter mobile application at the public meeting of the CEC's North American Pollutant Releases and Transfer Register (PRTR) Initiative. Engagement of Indigenous communities, such as the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, to address toxic chemicals has benefited CEC activities for more than 15 years.



In October 2019, in partnership with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, we launched a short documentary entitled [Voices of the Pacific Flyway](#). The film, produced in English, French, Spanish and Central Yu'pik, reveals the interconnectedness of three North American communities that host migratory shorebirds each year, including Alaska's Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, where birds have been important food and cultural resources for thousands of years.



Increasing the visibility of the CEC

Many North Americans can benefit from awareness of and engagement with the CEC. Increasing our visibility will help us drive action and engagement across the wide array of environmental challenges we address. Over the last year, the CEC has increased its visibility via a variety of events and digital media tactics, with an additional 15,672 visitors coming to our website on average each quarter, compared with the same period the year prior.

Additional highlights include:

- In November 2019, our 25th anniversary was showcased by Montreal International at their annual event for international organizations, attended by both federal and provincial cabinet ministers.
- In 2020, we were invited to partner with the UN Environment Programme North American Regional Office and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity to co-host World Environment Day for the North American region, with Montreal selected as the North American 'host city'. Events included a popular citizen activation digital campaign, panel event, and livestreamed concert.
- The CEC's digital footprint was expanded across new platforms like Instagram and Medium.
- A new website, with improved user experience and functionality, is being designed and will be launched this year. Along with this, a new organizational look and branding has been developed for the first time in over 20 years, which should be revealed in conjunction with the unveiling of the new website design.

Modernizing the CEC Secretariat

The past twelve months have been highly productive in terms of the relevance and significance of the priorities that fall under the Executive Director's mandate:

- Some of the activities include improvements to team work, internal working groups, administrative procedures, management of human and financial resources, recruitment tactics, and retention efforts, staff sensitivity training, a revised code of ethics and social media policy, and upgraded information technology systems.
- We supported Council in developing the new strategic plan and put forth a coherent and inclusive process to design the next operational plan. Finally, the Secretariat updated and implemented the 2019-2020 communications plan, focused on traditional and social media, outreach, and partnerships.

Despite the pandemic, we ensured that the Secretariat was able to continue operating at full capacity this spring and, in analyzing the circumstances surrounding this unprecedented situation, have concluded that we dealt very successfully with the challenges it posed.

The past year we also focused on preparedness, carrying out a comprehensive review of the requirements needed as we transition to the new mandate under the USMCA and ECA. This includes what will be required to support transformational changes as we enter a new era of renewal, with emphasis on a modernized approach to environmental cooperation and increasing the visibility of the CEC. We conclude that a more predictable and stable funding environment would be conducive to effective, efficient planning and management of our activities, as had been the case prior to 2017.



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