



Advice to Council No: 14-03

Re: Results and Recommendations from the JPAC Workshop (November 2014) in Arlington, Virginia, on “North America’s Coasts in a Changing Climate”

The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America:

IN ACCORDANCE with Article 16(4) of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC), which states that JPAC “may provide advice to Council on any matter within the scope of this agreement (...) and on the implementation and further elaboration of this agreement, and may perform such functions as the Council may direct;”

HAVING conducted a public workshop in Arlington, Virginia, on 6–7 November 2014, entitled “North America’s Coasts in a Changing Climate,” that offered expert presentations and engaged over 100 participants from the three countries, in person and via webcast from Mexico City and Montreal;

HAVING reviewed the comments and recommendations of workshop participants and the invited experts, which are provided in Appendices A, B, and C to this Advice;

SEEKING to advise the Council on priorities for regional action and potential areas of work under the CEC’s 2015–2016 Operational Plan and 2015–2020 Strategic Plan;

SUBMITS the following observations and recommendations for Council’s consideration:

1. Scientific research has demonstrated that carbon sequestration and storage is vast and vitally important within coastal wetlands: they sequester carbon at a rate estimated to be two to four times greater than in mature tropical forests and store three to five times more per equivalent area than tropical forests. The CEC has made important contributions to the development and dissemination of this research through its Blue Carbon project, which has been commended by scientists and experts working in this important field. The CEC has a unique ability to convoke relevant decisionmakers, experts, and constituents throughout the region. It can thus facilitate regional collaboration and coordination, as well as a broader dissemination of knowledge to the public of the importance of coastal wetlands in the mitigation of climate change impacts through carbon sequestration and storage. JPAC recommends that Council continue to make the Blue Carbon project a high priority and requests that Council, the Alternate Representatives, and their staffs seriously consider the findings and recommendations that emerged from the Arlington Workshop (summarized below and included in full in Appendix A). Further details regarding the expert presentations and public input are given in Appendixes B and C.

2. Among the findings and recommendations that emerged from the Arlington Workshop, JPAC believes the following warrant particular attention from the Council:
- a. There is a need to collaborate jointly in the further development of valid, reliable, and standardized methodologies to more accurately quantify carbon sequestration and storage, which are appropriate to the unique geochemical features of the coastal wetland ecosystems of North America.
 - b. Scientific collaboration, data sharing, and networking among scientific communities and the public in all three countries will save time and money and lead to better results. The CEC should support projects and methodologies that facilitate information sharing on:
 - o Changes in coastal wetlands
 - o The economic and social value of mitigating storm impacts on coastal wetlands
 - o Nutrient loads from upland sources
 - o Impacts of acidification on species and ecosystems
 - o Restoration practices
 - c. The Verified Carbon Storage methodology in review is focused only on carbon credits for wetland restoration and there is no accepted methodology for wetland conservation. Accordingly, in order to protect the health of ecosystems, the CEC should support efforts to establish methodologies that will verify carbon credits for emissions avoided through wetland conservation.
 - d. There is a need for greater focus on upland influences on coastal wetlands, including researching and developing methodologies to account for carbon as it passes from upland to coastal systems. There is also a need for greater focus on upland, freshwater wetlands in their own right because carbon capture and storage are also occurring in freshwater wetlands at high rates that greatly exceed those of other terrestrial systems. The CEC should extend its Blue Carbon work in the near future to address impacts of upland aquatic ecosystems and the conservation of those systems.
 - e. Many environmental policies in all three countries could better account for blue carbon capture and storage. For example, environmental impact assessment protocols in all three countries should include an assessment of blue carbon impacts. The CEC should prioritize efforts to review legal and regulatory frameworks so that the Parties can strengthen and harmonize their regulatory approaches to blue carbon, where appropriate.
 - f. Land-use decisions in all three countries are often made or overseen by subnational and local governments and this complicates efforts to promote best practices for coastal wetlands management, as well as efforts to strengthen and harmonize regulations where appropriate. For this reason, it will be important to prioritize efforts in the near future to study local rules and practices and engage local decisionmakers in the CEC's ongoing Blue Carbon program, where feasible.
 - g. In its Blue Carbon project, the CEC should continue to give priority to training and educating relevant constituencies in the importance of restoring and conserving those

coastal wetlands through outreach, community engagement, and media strategies. This includes directing more NAPECA funding toward pilot projects on climate, carbon, and water education. It should also include creating partnerships with corporate entities at all levels and engaging the insurance, construction (infrastructure), consumer, and other private actors.

- h. Engaging local communities in meaningful ways around conservation and restoration projects is an essential component of the success of such projects. This can include calculating and communicating the benefits of healthy coastal and upland wetlands in climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as other critical ecosystem services.
- i. There is a strong need to raise awareness about the importance of blue carbon capture and storage, and coastal wetland conservation more generally, as these topics relate to the economic and cultural livelihood of vulnerable coastal communities. The ability of these communities to continue to inhabit the coastlines in all three countries is threatened by the effects of climate change, and coastal communities are thus key stakeholders in the CEC's ongoing work relating to blue carbon.
- j. Indigenous communities in coastal areas will be among the most vulnerable to climate impacts on coastal wetlands because of their distinctive connection with nature and with coastal ecosystems. Efforts should be made to develop greater understanding of this connection and better understand and integrate indigenous knowledge of conservation practices and the potential for climate change mitigation and adaptation. Treaties with indigenous peoples should also be reviewed to glean insights that might support mitigation and adaptation in indigenous communities.

JPAC is confident that the recommendations contained herein are highly relevant to the CEC Council's strategic priorities, and is unanimous in supporting this Advice to Council.

**Approved by the JPAC members
15 December 2014**