

Strategic Plan

of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation
2015–2020



cec.org

This Strategic Plan was approved by the Parties to the
North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation.




Commission for Environmental Cooperation

393, rue St-Jacques Ouest, Bureau 200
Montréal (Québec) Canada H2Y 1N9
t (514) 350-4300 f (514) 350-4314
info@cec.org / www.cec.org

Strategic Plan

of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation
2015–2020

15 July 2015

A photograph of a large, ancient-looking tree trunk in a forest. The bark is deeply textured and grey, with numerous horizontal and vertical cracks. The base of the tree is heavily covered in bright green moss. Several thick, horizontal roots or branches are visible, also covered in moss. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees, with some green ferns visible in the undergrowth. The lighting is soft and diffused, typical of a forest interior.

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Our mission

To facilitate cooperation and public participation to foster conservation, protection and enhancement of the North American environment for the benefit of present and future generations, in the context of increasing economic, trade and social links among Canada, Mexico and the United States

Green Growth



Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
A. The North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation	1
B. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation	1
II. The Value of North American Cooperation Under the CEC	3
III. CEC Priorities for 2015–2020	5
A. Strategic Priorities	5
1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	7
2. Green Growth	8
3. Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems	9
B. Cross-cutting Themes	10
C. Public Outreach, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications	10
North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA)	11
Submissions on Enforcement Matters	11
D. Performance Measurement	12
IV. Conclusion	13



**Sustainable Communities
and Ecosystems**



Introduction

A. The North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation

The North American environment is as diverse as the people who populate it. Through mountains, deserts, arctic tundra, forests, prairies, wetlands, lakes, rivers and coastlines and the species that inhabit them, North America's complex ecosystems are essential for our way of life and our cultures, our well-being, and our economies.

When the leaders of Canada, Mexico, and the United States adopted the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), they created one of the largest trading blocks in the world. Recognizing the importance of protecting this richly diverse environment for our communities and for future generations, the North American leaders also put in place the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation ("NAAEC," or "the Agreement") to ensure that the increased levels of commerce and economic activity would not come at the expense of our environment.


B. The Commission for Environmental Cooperation

Building on a rich history of bilateral cooperation on the environment among the three North American countries, NAAEC provided for the establishment of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), the first collaborative, trilateral venue promoting a cooperative approach to environmental protection in the region, including for the effective enforcement of our laws. Through this unique partnership that is the CEC, the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States ("the Parties"), as well as civil society across North America, work together to pursue environmental objectives that are greater than the sum of any individual efforts.

The CEC is composed of the Council, a Secretariat and a Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC), which work for the benefit of effective regional collaboration among the NAAEC Parties on the environment:

- The Council is the CEC's governing body and comprises cabinet-level or equivalent representatives of each country. It approves and oversees the implementation of a trilateral work program by officials and experts of each of the three Parties. It also holds an annual public meeting.
- The Secretariat provides technical, administrative and operational support to Council and carries out the work in response to priorities identified by Council to support its experts' activities.
- JPAC, composed of five citizen volunteers from each country, may advise the Council on any matter within the scope of the Agreement or its implementation and further elaboration. It may also perform other functions as the Council may direct.

Through its variety of programs and activities, including government-to-government collaboration, stakeholder engagement and public education, the CEC has provided a unique forum to address regional environmental issues.



The Value of North American Cooperation Under the CEC

NAAEC implementation over the last twenty years has been a unique linking of environmental concerns to the deepened trade relations committed to under NAFTA. The Agreement was meant to ensure that environmental considerations and cooperation efforts would take place in the trade and economic configuration envisioned for North America. Today, we continue to benefit from this unique partnership on domestic, regional, and global scales. Specifically, the creation of the CEC has provided the three North American governments with:

- a forum that allows the three Ministers to meet and discuss trilateral environmental issues;
- a forum for enhanced cooperation on shared environmental issues;
- a model for regional dialogue that convenes experts to provide recommendations, develop innovative tools and training, and promote best practices;
- opportunities for information sharing and capacity building to address environmental issues of common concern;
- a venue to focus on emerging issues, as well as test new scientific areas—from blue carbon to clean energy to sustainable communities;
- a vehicle through which to address environmental issues and develop concrete solutions, including the establishment of a North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Registry, an action plan to reduce or eliminate the use of toxic chemicals such as lindane, and the creation of a multilingual online trainer on managing hazardous waste in our region;
- a process to support public submissions on environmental matters that is a model of accountability and public transparency in North America; and
- a unique organization in North America, with a permanent Secretariat with full-time staff and a dedicated budget.

The environment is a critical part of the conversation on economic and social development. The CEC continues to play an important role in regularly **addressing key trade and environment issues** that connect our three countries, including those issues related to transportation, transborder movement of pollutants, trade in wildlife species, and hazardous waste management. In addressing these issues trilaterally, our governments recognize that many environmental concerns have no borders. In addition, work through the CEC **adds value to domestic actions** and creates efficiencies in government by bringing together officials to share expertise, best practices, and knowledge; strengthens each country's capacity to find innovative and **technological solutions**; enhances the alignment of environmental standards; and examines the practical implications of emerging scientific areas.

With a coordinated focus on environmental protection in the three countries, the CEC is also instrumental in **facilitating trilateral dialogue and cooperation**, including at the ministerial level, to advance ideas on emerging matters and discuss transnational issues. In addition, the CEC provides a forum for **public engagement on the environment** and making a difference in local communities and ecosystems. It also helps ensure **alignment of North American goals with international commitments**. For example, Canada, Mexico and the United States are actively involved in eliminating the presence of short-lived climate pollutants (methane, black carbon, and hydrofluorocarbons) through the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), and with hydrofluorocarbons, in particular, through work with partner signatories to the Montreal Protocol. Our three countries will continue to seek opportunities for the CEC to broaden the reach of these commitments and give greater depth in the North American context.



CEC Priorities for 2015–2020

The past 20 years of positive cooperation have reinforced our commitment to continue to work together to meet our shared objectives. In order to ensure that the future of North American environmental cooperation continues to generate positive results, the Council provides guidance and direction, which allows the trilateral partnership supported through the CEC to remain relevant and adaptable to changing realities, including creating opportunities for public engagement and outreach by JPAC.

The CEC Council members met in July 2014 to mark NAAEC's 20th anniversary and to set the CEC's direction for the next five years. By announcing strategic priorities for the organization, and three cross-cutting themes, Council members provided the broad parameters within which the CEC's work will be developed and implemented to complement important initiatives taken by each of our governments domestically and internationally. In announcing these priorities, in line with the commitments made by the North American leaders in 2014, Council members also reiterated CEC's importance as a value-added organization.

A. Strategic Priorities

The Council has focused this five-year Strategic Plan on what it considers to be some of the most urgent environmental issues we must confront through 2020 and that build upon priorities identified in the previous Strategic Plan. These include:

- Working to improve conditions in vulnerable communities by sharing and increasing access to information, such as expanding the AirNow monitoring system to Mexico.
- Developing guidelines for designing marine protected area networks in a changing climate.
- Enhancing the enforcement of environmental laws to improve the management of electronic waste and spent lead-acid batteries, and share information on the illegal trade of wildlife.
- Improving the comparability of data related to climate change.
- Working with the private sector to improve environmental performance in green building construction; the transportation sector; and emissions from maritime transportation.

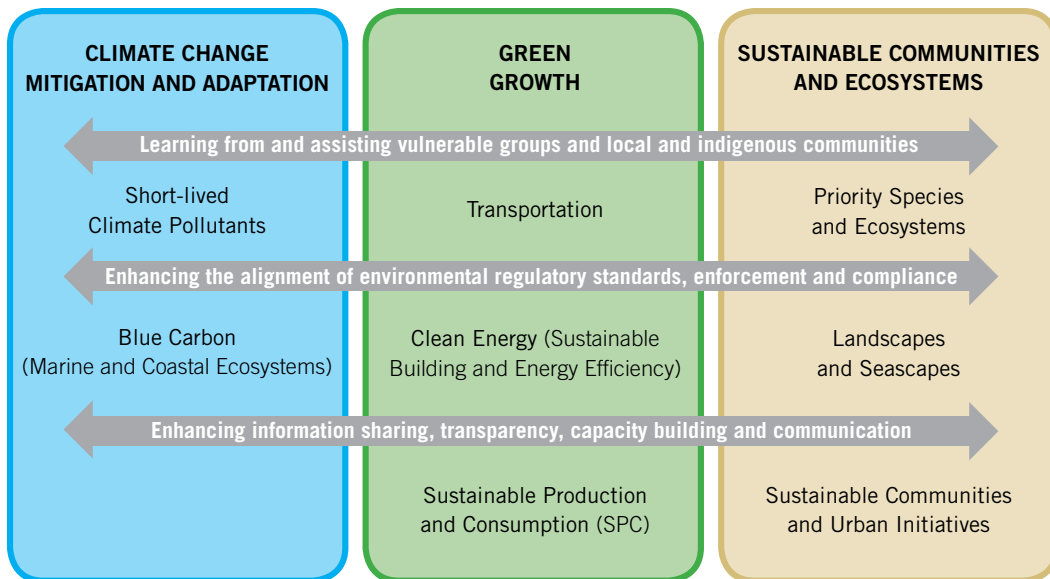
The new priorities are pressing environmental challenges that require continued coordination in regional and international response. The Council endorsed a new focus on cross-cutting themes in the strategic priorities, taking into account global, regional and local challenges, emerging issues and common goals, as well as input from our stakeholders. Thus the strategic priorities for the 2015–2020 Strategic Plan are:

- **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation**
- **Green Growth**
- **Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems**

Each strategic priority includes proposed goals to be attained over the next five years that will build on recent projects that strengthen cooperation to tackle climate change, support green growth, and share knowledge for assessing, improving and restoring communities and ecosystems.

These priorities also reflect the CEC’s support of innovative approaches to knowledge-gathering on the environment. For 2015–2020, this includes learning from and assisting local and indigenous communities to make effective environmental management decisions.

Commission for Environmental Cooperation Strategic Priorities and Cross-cutting Themes, 2015–2020



1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

As mentioned above, Council recognizes the ongoing environmental challenge posed by climate change at the global, regional, and local levels. Many effects of climate change are already evident and have adversely affected vulnerable communities and ecosystems. As well, economic damage from severe weather is increasing in North America. Therefore, it is important to address climate change through mitigation and adaptation measures.

Mindful of the continued impacts of climate change, the focus of the CEC's 2015–2020 plan will be on exploring mitigation and adaptation measures that will enhance our national efforts, contribute to international commitments, and support emerging scientific areas. In recognition that adaptation concerns are best addressed in tandem with actions to lower greenhouse gas emissions, the three North American governments will continue to act independently and internationally to reduce the emissions that cause climate change, as we work through the CEC to increase our efforts to prepare for or adjust to future climate changes.

The objectives for the work under this strategic priority are to minimize threats posed by climate change by taking actions to plan for and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures that will protect human health and the environment from the effects of climate change.

Initiatives under this priority include:

- **Developing, comparing, and implementing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions mitigation actions, consistent with international commitments.**
- **Piloting protocols in key sectors, like waste management, the food industry, and transportation, to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants, such as black carbon and methane.**
- **Increasing the adaptive capacity of vulnerable populations to adverse environmental health effects from extreme climatic events.**
- **Improving scientific knowledge to conserve and restore coastal and marine blue carbon.**

2. Green Growth

Although a number of definitions exist, at heart green growth is economic growth that is environmentally sustainable, and promoting green growth implies both opportunities and risks. For example, as we reduce or change the use of natural resources, minimize waste, or develop new environmentally friendly products and services, the demand for such products and services could increase (potential economic growth), which would decrease the pressure on natural resources and result in the opportunity to create new, more sustainable patterns of development. As well, the mismanagement of natural resources could present risks to economic growth, with increasingly unmanageable pressure on different segments of our global economy.

Through the CEC, the three countries will continue to support opportunities for innovation in green growth that encourage environmentally responsible economic development in such key North American sectors as transportation, where such innovation would not only enhance competitiveness but also increase energy efficiency. This greater efficiency could halve the increased demand for global energy that is projected for 2035.

The objectives for the work under this strategic priority are to identify steps to reduce emissions from the transportation sector; to provide management systems options that will explore clean energy technologies and increase energy efficiency; to explore alternatives for addressing waste reduction and recycling, including the diversion of organic waste from landfills; and to develop information and tools in support of sustainable consumption and production.

Initiatives under this priority could include:

- **Establishing best practices to promote innovative technologies and measures for clean and efficient transportation, including the establishment of an Emissions Control Area (ECA) throughout North America.**
- **Promoting and sharing with key stakeholders beneficial practices for improving energy efficiency.**
- **Enhancing the management and sustainable use of chemicals in products.**
- **Improving the reliability of trade data on products containing environmentally regulated substances.**

3. Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems

The environmental and economic well-being of the citizens of North America is grounded in healthy communities and ecosystems. The Parties will work through the CEC to support efforts that will ensure safe communities and ecosystems through risk assessment/risk management strategies covering the full range of ecosystem stressors while also protecting human health. The priority is to prevent pollution before it occurs and, even when that is not possible, reduce the toxicity and quantity of waste and increase recycling.

By meeting sustainable community and ecosystem goals via pollution prevention, risk management and remediation strategies, including via urban-related initiatives, Council hopes to encourage innovation and development of state-of-the-art technologies, which can in turn stimulate local economies and reduce exposure to toxics. Such efforts can translate into decreased health care costs, such as for treatment of asthma-related illnesses. Decreases in the amount and toxicity of waste, as well as increased use of genetically engineered organisms, can avoid contamination of water and soil, prevent loss of wildlife, and increase the recreational value of the natural environment.

The objectives for work under this strategic priority are to maintain efforts to improve and restore the integrity of ecosystems, landscapes and seascapes; to conserve priority species; and to enhance rural and urban environments by working closely with communities.

Initiatives under this priority could include:

- **Supporting the establishment of collaborative networks, including among local and indigenous communities, to share traditional ecological knowledge and experience.**
- **Undertaking conservation actions to protect and restore ecosystems and species of common conservation concern.**
- **Coordinating management processes and identifying beneficial practices at site and at landscape and seascape levels.**
- **Increasing the awareness, engagement and capacity of communities in rural and urban areas in the management and sustainable use of natural resources.**

B. Cross-cutting Themes

The Council has also agreed to incorporate three cross-cutting themes that reflect issues relevant to the CEC's strategic priorities and that will further focus CEC work. These cross-cutting themes will also help generate linkages between program activities, enhance the CEC's capacity to reach out to key stakeholders, and communicate the value of regional cooperation on environmental issues. The themes are:

- Learning from and assisting vulnerable groups and local and indigenous communities
- Enhancing the alignment of environmental regulatory standards, enforcement and compliance
- Enhancing information sharing, transparency, capacity building and communication

These cross-cutting themes represent policy tools that will help the three countries address the strategic priorities and meet the goals set forward by the Council. For the first time, local and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) will be integrated, where appropriate, into CEC initiatives. In addition, by aligning environmental regulatory standards, the three countries will collaborate on enhancing the enforcement of environmental laws. Lastly, the CEC will continue to embrace new technologies and platforms to gather, share, and disseminate information produced through this cooperative effort. Over the course of the five years of this Strategic Plan, the CEC will also reflect these themes in its ongoing project work and in its public outreach and stakeholder engagement activities.

C. Public Outreach, Stakeholder Engagement and Communications

Efforts will be made to increase public awareness of the organization's accomplishments and enhance public engagement in its ongoing initiatives. In this regard, the Council has directed the CEC to improve and broaden its strategic communications efforts. A key goal is to promote the organization as a forum that offers the Parties and its stakeholders, civil society, communities, academia, and the private sector a range of opportunities (through JPAC, domestic advisory committees, public forums, Council Sessions, and webinars) to **share ideas and to collaborate on environmental issues in North America.**

Stakeholder outreach will seek to raise public awareness of the value the CEC adds domestically and across North America in strengthening environmental stewardship and supporting the organization's role in fostering emerging environmental science.

This includes a focus on enhancing the engagement of opinion leaders and the wider public in outreach activities led by JPAC that contribute to the transparency and relevance of the CEC in advancing ongoing initiatives and in contributing to the knowledge base on North American environmental matters. The CEC will continue to work with key stakeholders to enhance the impact of government-to-government activities and community-led projects.

North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA)

In promoting a sense of shared responsibility and stewardship for the environment, partnering and engaging with stakeholders and the public is an integral part of the Council's long-term strategic plan. Trilateral initiatives are complemented through grant support to community-based projects under the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA). The NAPECA grant program was established by the Council in 2009 to address environmental challenges at the community level. Since its inception, a series of NAPECA community-based projects have yielded concrete results and benefits on a broad range of issues in all three countries. Examples include:

- Sol not Coal, based in the US in northern New Mexico, implements four solar energy projects for nonprofit organizations in that area.
- Escuela del Agua, in the State of Mexico, worked with households to promote the use of a low-tech water purification system in gardens.
- The Adopt a Rancher project in Canada is creating awareness among students, teachers and school communities about the valuable role that ranching can play in sustaining native prairie ecosystems.

Submissions on Enforcement Matters

The CEC will continue to **advance public understanding of the Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process**, which allows North American residents to share their concerns on the effective enforcement of environmental laws. The Parties have instructed the Secretariat to make the factual records more accessible to the public by making them shorter and more concise, moving away from the legalized writing style, and generally making them easier for non-lawyers to read and understand. The Secretariat will prepare PowerPoint presentations to guide the public to better understanding the SEM process. In addition, outreach efforts throughout North America will be expanded.

D. Performance Measurement

The Council is committed to effectively measuring CEC achievements and communicating them to our governments and citizens. This requires demonstrating progress in meeting our environmental goals and objectives across North America, and showing how these achievements help the Parties meet their domestic and international commitments. The Council has directed the CEC Secretariat to strengthen its ability to measure performance.

The Strategic Plan provides the foundation for the CEC's performance measurement framework, which establishes a process to evaluate progress in attaining the goals and objectives of each strategic priority, while addressing the three cross-cutting themes. The three countries will engage in various initiatives under each strategic priority, as described in this Strategic Plan, and will implement, through biennial operational plans, a set of projects leading to concrete results.

Project success is vital to supporting the Council's strategic priorities. To report on progress towards achieving the five-year goals and objectives set out in this plan, project-specific performance measures are reported upon project completion every two years. The performance measures include clear targets and reporting periods for each project outcome, using a SMART (specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) approach. These measures assess the long-term project outcomes (i.e., by the end of projects), which ensures the success of various initiatives and contribute to the attainment of strategic priorities.

The CEC's performance measurement framework ensures that project-level measures undertaken through our trilateral cooperative work program are tied to the goals and objectives of this Strategic Plan, as set forth under each strategic priority and cross-cutting theme approved by the Council, and contribute to meeting them. These measures for the 2015–2020 goals and objectives will be reported on a biennial basis, as well as by the end of this Strategic Plan.

Organizational-level measures are also in place to evaluate the CEC's overall performance, including the performance of the Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) unit, the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA) grant program, as well as of outreach, publications, and administrative activities. These organizational-level measures will be described in annual reports and other outreach materials.

V.

Conclusion

The Strategic Plan 2015–2020 represents a renewed commitment on the part of the three NAAEC Parties to conserve, protect, and enhance the North American environment by providing resources, expertise and direction through the CEC over the next five years.

Our renewed efforts will ensure that the three countries of North America will continue to work together, complementing our efforts domestically and internationally, as we committed to more than 20 years ago, in order to benefit the citizens and the environment of all North America.

CEC Priorities for 2015–2020



1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

2. Green Growth



3. Sustainable Communities and Ecosystems



Commission for Environmental Cooperation

393, rue St-Jacques Ouest, Bureau 200
Montréal (Québec) Canada H2Y 1N9
t (514) 350-4300 f (514) 350-4314
info@cec.org / www.cec.org