

Advice to Council No: 24-01

JPAC Public Forum on Community-based Conservation of Freshwater Resources: Forging Alliances for Water Stewardship

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

IN ACCORDANCE with Article 6(4) of the [Agreement on Environmental Cooperation](#) (ECA), which states that JPAC “may provide advice to the Council on matters within the scope of this agreement, and may perform such other functions as the Council may direct”;

HAVING conducted a [Public Forum](#) in Oaxaca, Mexico, on 29 November 2023, to discuss water management strategies and highlight community-led efforts to address the multifaceted aspects of freshwater conservation and its sustainable use, with a strong focus on partnerships and alliances, with invited speakers from Indigenous communities, academia, NGOs and government;

RECALLING the CEC [2021–2025 Strategic Plan](#) and the Parties’ commitment to explore opportunities for cooperation to help effectively conserve and protect shared ecosystems and species, particularly critical habitats; recognizing “that our shared environmental and economic well-being is grounded in the adaptive capacity and resilience of communities, ecosystems, and all sectors of the economy in relation to changing climatic conditions; and acknowledging the important role of Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to help achieve environmental goals and to strengthen community-based resilience;

RECALLING [key deliverables](#) from the 2023 North American Leaders’ Summit (NALS), including the commitment from the three leaders to “(...) meet a joint commitment to conserve 30 percent of the world’s land and ocean area by 2030 and to advance Indigenous-led conservation”;

RECALLING the recognition on 28 July 2010, through Resolution 64/292, by the United Nations General Assembly of the [human right to water and sanitation](#), and that Article I.1 of General comment no. 15 (2002), The right to water (arts. 11 and 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) states that “[t]he human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights”;

RECALLING the adoption of the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) which recognizes Indigenous peoples’ right to determine and develop priorities for the development or use of their lands or territories and Indigenous peoples’ right to maintain and strengthen their spiritual relationship with traditionally owned or occupied lands, territories, waters, coastal seas, and other resources, and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations;

RECALLING that the final declaration of the COP27 “recogniz[es] the critical role of protecting, conserving and restoring water and water-related ecosystems in delivering climate adaptation benefits and co-benefits, while ensuring social and environmental safeguards” and “urges Parties to further integrate water into adaptation efforts”;

RECALLING the key messages from the [UN 2023 Water Conference](#) underlining the need for a transformational change to resolve the global water crisis, the call from Member States for improved, inclusive, and transparent water cooperation, across sectors and boundaries, and the adoption of the Water Action Agenda, representing voluntary commitments of nations and stakeholders to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets connected to water;

RECALLING the overarching demand of children and youth across the world, represented by the official Children and Youth Constituency (YOUNGO) of the UNFCCC, stated in the Global Youth Statement prior to the COP26 “that youth should be actively and meaningfully included in all decision-making processes concerning climate change and implementation”;

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

Recommendation #1: Continue to support relationship building among Indigenous Peoples, community-led and not-for-profit organizations, and other public and private key actors, as a key component for developing successful partnerships among them, and for advancing the weaving of TEK and Indigenous perspectives into the work of the CEC.

The Trilateral Forum on Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America and the JPAC Public Forum on Community-based Conservation of Freshwater Resources: Forging Alliances for Water Stewardship, once again highlighted the importance of the appropriate recognition of TEK and Indigenous perspectives in the conservation and management of freshwater resources, as well as the need to continue supporting dialogues and relationship building among Indigenous Peoples, the CEC and different actors throughout North America, to build trust, reinforce relationships and foster cooperation. Invited speakers, participants, and members of the TEKEG commended the CEC and JPAC for the organization of both forums, which allowed for a deeper level of dialogue among attendees.

- JPAC recommends that the Council continue to consider freshwater management and conservation as a priority topic in CEC’s work, including in the development of future projects, as well as during the planning of the next Strategic Plan.
- As part of our continued engagement and collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, JPAC would like to work together with the TEKEG to organize a joint annual trilateral Indigenous-led session that could take place in conjunction with one of the JPAC Public Forums, rotating among the three countries, beginning in the fall 2024. The main goal for the event will be to bring together Indigenous Peoples, community-led and not-for-profit organizations, and other public and private key actors, to foster stronger knowledge exchange, dialogue, and relationship building and to help identify needs and potential opportunities. The session could also be dedicated exclusively to Indigenous Peoples, aiming to uphold Indigenous rights, strengthen Indigenous leadership, revitalize transboundary networks, and promote TEK exchange and transfer. JPAC would work closely with the TEKEG to identify areas of key significance for Indigenous Peoples

concerning environmental protection, adverse effects of climate change in their communities, and potential partnerships with other relevant actors.

- Due to the limited resources available, JPAC recommends that the Council allocate additional financial resources (C\$50,000) to the TEKEG budget to support the travel of Indigenous participants to this one-day event as well as the JPAC public forum.

Recommendation #2: Support Indigenous and community-led conservation efforts through a knowledge, practices, and experience-sharing process¹.

The Public Forum highlighted several Indigenous and community-led initiatives and solutions being implemented across North America to restore access to freshwater, adopt sustainable water management practices, and establish successful collaborations involving governments and the private sector. Invited panelists and participants emphasized how an exchange of knowledge on best practices and experiences from these initiatives can make information more accessible, improve decision-making, facilitate knowledge transfer and monitoring, and boost collaboration and performance.

Despite its limited resources and capacities, the CEC has a long history of working with local leaders and key stakeholders and has an extensive network of partners that can be leveraged to support experience-sharing processes and the dissemination of Indigenous and community-led conservation efforts.

- JPAC recommends that the Council focus the next cycle of the North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA) on supporting Indigenous and community-led conservation initiatives that promote experience-sharing processes, as well as capacity building of Indigenous and local communities on knowledge transfer and dissemination.
- JPAC recommends that the CEC carry out an assessment of CEC projects related to Indigenous and community-led conservation efforts planned for 2024, as well as projects funded under NAPECA in 2025. This assessment would compile best practices and lessons learned. The outcomes could include executive summaries (pamphlets, brochures) covering different categories, such as freshwater, ecosystem restoration, etc. Additionally, the Council might also explore the possibility of evaluating past projects with an Indigenous component. To facilitate this, the CEC Secretariat could gather these reports and build a portfolio for dissemination, including to marginalized communities, through channels like community centers, Indigenous networks and national agencies working with Indigenous peoples.

¹ We suggest implementing an iterative process to identify experiences, evaluate and document their challenges and successes, in order to identify lessons learned and good practices.

Recommendation #3: Explore additional ways to include participants from diverse populations, in particular, from youth and Indigenous Peoples, into the activities of the CEC.

Strengthening the participation and inclusion of youth and Indigenous Peoples in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, including freshwater conservation, are key for building a safe and sustainable future. Invited panelists and participants highlighted the urgent need to integrate education as a priority area of CEC's work, through the promotion of intercultural education, locally and in larger territories, the organization of education and awareness raising campaigns, the dissemination of community initiatives, such as training and sensitization of children and youth, and the inclusion of narratives that promote Indigenous perspectives to educate and bring people back to their territories and traditions.

The CEC Secretariat is committed to increase participation of youth and Indigenous Peoples in its work and activities, and to create opportunities for them to express themselves, voice their ideas, and provide input for projects and programs. In this context:

- JPAC recommends that the Council support an activity, as part of the Community-led Environmental Education Initiative for Biocultural Heritage Protection (currently in the revision phase), to explore ways to promote and leverage youth engagement and intergenerational exchanges into the CEC's activities and initiatives.
- JPAC recommends that the Council support a youth engagement activity/event for 2024, in conjunction with the trinational workshop that will be organized as part of the project *Communities for Environmental Justice Network (CEJN)*, aimed at creating a network of Indigenous, local vulnerable, disadvantaged, and/or underserved communities that have environmental justice concerns, in order to increase local capacity through the amplification and dissemination of community-based expertise, lessons learned, and guidance in the context of climate change.
- JPAC recommends that the CEC continue to review and assess the different mechanisms available to promote a greater diversity among participants in its public activities, including Indigenous communities, youth, women, and LGBTQ+ persons. This can be achieved through collaborations with relevant key actors, such as educational institutions, community centers, other government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, etc.

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

**Approved by the JPAC members
18 April 2024**