

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)
25 July 2025
Sheraton Mexico City Maria Isabel Hotel, Mexico City, Mexico

SUMMARY RECORD FOR PUBLIC MEETING

Welcoming Remarks and Video Presentations

The Council member from Mexico, Secretary Alicia Bárcena, opened the meeting by welcoming the public and introducing the Council representatives from the United States and Canada, Usha-Maria Turner, Assistant Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Michael Bonser, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy and International Affairs Branch, Environment and Climate Change Canada, respectively. A video of the Honourable Julie Dabrusin, the Canadian Council member, was played where she conveyed Canada's commitment to trilateral cooperation to preserve the shared environment of North America.

The CEC Executive Director, Jorge Daniel Taillant, acting as moderator for the session, greeted guests and shared that this is the moment at which the public gets to hear from the Council. A poll was launched, asking the audience: *"how familiar are you with circular economy and nature-based solutions?"* Approximately 42% of the audience reported that they are very familiar with the topic. He then shared the CEC's 2025 accomplishment video, which highlighted the trilateral work conducted by the CEC over the past year. The highlights included:

- A collaboration with the Ellen McArthur Foundation, focused on circular economy
- A report on helping to reduce risks of flooding in coastal cities
- A new trilateral initiative via workshops and expeditions on protecting species of sharks
- Updates to the *Taking Stock* Platform, which brings together data reported by industrial facilities to the Canadian, Mexican and US pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs).
- A pollinator conservation campaign that reached millions of people across North America
- Three new CEC reports on pollinators and native bees
- A project focused on bird ecotourism
- The CEC partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the University of Toronto Trash Team, to celebrate World Environment Day by raising awareness about sea litter
- A project with case studies on how remote populations are reducing their use of fossil fuels by using renewable energy
- The International Monarch Monitoring Blitz, which had over 5000 participants this year
- Collaborative work with the private sector

- A convening on Indigenous trade in North America
- A portal on Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America
- The Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP), which helps young leaders develop solutions to environmental challenges
- Youth engagement week and youth participation in the 2024 JPAC public forum in Mexico City
- The Secretariat's preparation and submission of draft factual records to the Council regarding key species, the North Atlantic Right Whale and the Vaquita Porpoise

The video's conclusion was that the challenges the CEC addresses are complex, but solutions are based on shared efforts.

Following the CEC's 2025 accomplishment video, Secretary Bárcena shared two videos. The first, a video titled "*Mexico Megadiverso*," was a striking visual showcase of the wealth of biodiversity and ecosystems in Mexico. The second, "*Forest Fire Brigade*," showcased bilateral cooperation in fighting forest fires. A letter of intent, in 2012, began bilateral cooperation between Mexico and Canada by facilitating the movement of human resources during emergencies, specifically for preventing, combating, and controlling forest fires. The first group of firefighters deployed from Mexico to Manitoba, began this collaboration, and Mexican personnel were able to help identify and control forest fire hotspots. Additional bilateral collaboration between California and Mexico took place in January 2025, during the large forest fires in Los Angeles, when the Government of Mexico sent firefighters to assist during that emergency. They helped control the hotspots, remove hazardous waste, and search for victims.

Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP) 2025 Cohort

The CEC Executive Director, Jorge Daniel Taillant introduced Britt Basel, the mentor for the CEC's Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP), who would then moderate this session.

In describing the importance of the GELP program and the solutions to environmental challenges which require bridges between generations, she said that there are millions of youth in North America, many of whom are promoting solutions for climate resiliency. There is clarity and courage in emerging leaders; they come with energy and an intuitive sense. However, leadership is not inherited, it is cultivated; therefore, the GELP is critically important. She then introduced the GELP youth leaders and the GELP recipients from each country presented their work.

Berenice Elizabeth Lizárraga Lizárraga and Nithzia Yulen Pineda Mendoza of Viva la Ola A.C., GELP recipients from Mexico, shared their project "*Rescuing Isla Basura: Environmental Restoration and Circular Economy*." They described Mazatlán, Sinaloa, which is facing an environmental crisis due to poor management of solid waste. One of the most critical sites is Isla Basura (Trash Island), which is devastated because of contamination loaded with hazardous and solid waste. Of course, Isla Basura is only one example of plastic pollution

around the world. The GELP team started working with the local fishing community to turn waste into resources, by providing environmental workshops and training. They also created a management plan with multiple routes for action, beginning with organizing cleaning days and recycling the recyclable products collected. They also collect organic waste, including fish heads, intestines, etc., and they make bio-gas with the waste. Most important, the bio-gas production is managed by the community itself and these collective efforts have eliminated three tons of waste in only a single year.

Lauren Mackenzie Click and Hanna Layton of Let's Go Compost, GELP recipients from the US, shared information about their project, *"Youth-Led Food Waste Solutions: Driving Demand for US Infrastructure and the Green Economy."* Based in Phoenix, Arizona, the team is bringing composting education to K-12 public schools. The team told a story about giving a worm and a compost kit to school children, who had a "pet worm" class, which sparked their personal interest in sustainability. The GELP team's composting program involves sharing children's books, worms, and worm farms with classrooms, and teaching children about composting as a cost-effective train-the-trainer model. To date, they have reached 120 schools in 10 states. Public schools may be the largest producer of food waste in the US, and the worm farms can help recapture this waste. There are 50 million students in US public schools, the Let's Go Compost program has shown that each student presents an opportunity to learn and teach about sustainability, from the ground up.

Sonia Vinogradova and Joe Workentin, of Spark Source Consulting, the Canadian GELP recipients presented their project: *"RegEnergy: Solar energy for regenerative farms,"* which helps small organic farmers. In Canada, local agriculture is the backbone of sustainable communities. However, small farmers are struggling in the market. Persistent drought and wildfires have hit farmers hard, and many must rely on off-farm employment to survive. The GELP team's goal is to help small farmers stay in the market by reducing their costs by facilitating their transition to solar energy. The team philosophy is *"think globally and act locally."* Solar panels can help small farms insulate themselves from high energy costs, and the GELP team reported that there is an 18% return on investment for solar panels. RegEnergy is working with farmers to acquire solar panels, get the permits for the panels and install them. Through these efforts, they are fighting climate change and supporting farmers at the same time.

Following their presentations, representatives of the GELP teams joined the Council on stage for a dialogue. Jorge Daniel Taillant opened the dialogue by asking: *"how do we scale up these youth-led solutions?"* Secretary Bárcena then congratulated the youth and made additional comments. She affirmed that youth are the future, and they are the generation with the will to do things differently and to involve the community. She mentioned that on June 5, 2025, Mexico had cleaned the beaches and coastal areas and removed tons of waste, and most of this waste was plastic. She said that the community needs to oversee the elimination of plastic, and that Mexico has a goal of 2030 for the elimination of plastics on their coasts. Secretary Bárcena also said that Mexico wants to eliminate one-use plastic and, to do this, we need to change the patterns of consumption.

Usha-Maria Turner congratulated the GELP recipients on their work and shared her personal experience in composting at home, showing the connection with the US GELP project. She also described kayaking near her home and witnessing plastic waste in waterways, like the plastic pollution being addressed by the GELP project in Mexico. Lastly, she expressed enthusiasm for the future careers of the GELP recipients.

Michael Bonser thanked the GELP recipients and emphasized that the program demonstrates how ideas can be transformed into practical approaches. He acknowledged the daunting nature of environmental challenges but noted that GELP shows how to begin addressing them. He commended the youth for bringing solutions to farmers, fishers, and school children, and highlighted the Canadian GELP project's contribution to sustaining farms from field to table.

Dialogue with the Council on Circular Economy and Nature-based Solutions (NBS)

José Luis Samaniego Leyva, Mexico Undersecretary for Sustainable Development and Circular Economy, delivered the keynote presentation. He emphasized the importance of up-scaling youth-led solutions and introduced Mexico's new circular economy law, which will mandate manufacturer responsibility for waste that comes from their products. He also highlighted Mexico's commitment to restoring 26,000 hectares of coastal mangroves by 2025 and 73,100 hectares by 2030, which should reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 35% by 2030. He also announced the launch of a payment for environmental services program and shared that mangrove ecosystems have helped Mexico avoid 25.5 billion pesos in damages.

He also described the goal of Mexico's current administration to reduce emissions by 140 million tons. To do so, they will be bridging NBS and aim to have compensation schemes, tax incentives, carbon capture, and restoration for reaching these emissions reduction goals. Additional initiatives include the development of a circular economy park in Hidalgo–Tula Atitalaquia, featuring tire and oil recycling centers, a biodigester, and carbon capture technologies. The administration will also be supporting mining and livestock that are free of deforestation.

Following the keynote presentation Secretary Bárcena presented slides on the restoration of Mexico's three major hydrological basins: the Lerma Santiago River, Atoyac River, and Tula River. She described the severe pollution in the Atoyac River, including hydrocarbon contamination and textile dye runoff. She stressed the need for ecological restoration, environmental justice, and community autonomy.

Jorge Daniel Taillant, thanked Secretary Bárcena for her candid remarks and for raising environmental justice concerns.

Usha-Maria Turner discussed the reuse of electric vehicle batteries and the associated fire risks. She emphasized the EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment, noting that regulation of coal ash led to its innovative use in concrete production. She also advocated for making circular economy policies relatable and accessible.

Michael Bonser underscored the importance of consumer trust in circular products and the role of strategic regulation and information sharing. He highlighted Canada's focus on critical minerals as essential to the circular economy, national security, and energy security.

Public Dialogue with the Council

Anne-Raphaëlle Audouin, JPAC Chair, then stepped in moderator for the public exchange with the Council, including questions about collaboration with Indigenous peoples. Secretary Bárcena affirmed Mexico's commitment to protecting Indigenous knowledge and resisting extractive industries. She noted that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) must be safeguarded and that Indigenous communities are essential partners in achieving Mexico's goal to protect 30% of its territory by 2030.

Michael Bonser reflected on the need to move beyond project-based approaches and embrace Indigenous ways of living. Usha-Maria Turner reminded the audience that the United States is home to 574 federally recognized tribal sovereign nations and that the EPA has a consultation policy to engage tribes in decision-making processes.

Camila Isabel Zepeda Lizama, Head of the International Affairs Unit of Mexico's Secretariat for Environment and Natural Resources, briefly took Secretary Bárcena's place and responded to a question about the possibility of a trilateral circular economy park. She noted that Mexico had consulted with the US during the development of its park. Usha-Maria Turner emphasized the value of trilateral cooperation under the USMCA, and Michael Bonser reiterated the importance of deepening collaboration through the CEC.

Anne-Raphaëlle Audouin fielded an additional question from the audience about how the Government of Mexico is doing the restoration and clean-up of the three river basins and whether there are actions to protect other rivers that are not yet as polluted? In response, Camila Zepeda explained that each basin presents unique challenges, requiring tailored solutions. She emphasized the importance of community engagement and a whole-of-government approach. Lessons learned from the three most contaminated basins will inform future efforts.

Council Announcements

Camila Zepeda announced the 2025 Council initiative: a C\$500,000 investment in integrated water solutions. The initiative will support decentralized systems for sustainable treatment of wastewater in urban and peri-urban areas, and to restore rivers with cost-effective infrastructure. Decentralized systems to treat water close to the source will offer modular, renewable, and scalable solutions.

The US announced the five-year anniversary of the July 1, 2020, Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (ECA) and the launch of its next five-year review. An independent trilateral committee will be convened to review the implementation of the ECA and provide

recommendations to the Council on improving operations and effectiveness in achieving the ECA objectives. Jorge Daniel Taillant remarked that this review is the opportunity to look at where we have been and where we are going, in reference to the CEC.

Michael Bonser announced the launch of a new program cycle of NAPECA grants, which will support circular economy initiatives. This marks the 15th anniversary of the program. A video showcasing NAPECA-funded projects was presented, which highlighted the great diversity of community-led work supported by the grant program.

Closing Remarks

Usha-Maria Turner expressed sincere appreciation and excitement for the development of the new strategic plan. Secretary Bárcena, now returned to the stage, acknowledged the challenges ahead, thanked the CEC staff and Executive Director, and formally passed the baton to Canada. Michael Bonser echoed the sentiment expressed by both the United States and Mexico and looked forward to continued collaboration. He also announced that the 2026 Council Session would take place in Ottawa, Canada.