



2024

Operational Plan



CEC Mission Statement

In the context of environmental, economic and social linkages between Canada, Mexico and the United States, the CEC facilitates effective cooperation and public participation to conserve, protect and enhance the North American environment in support of sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations.

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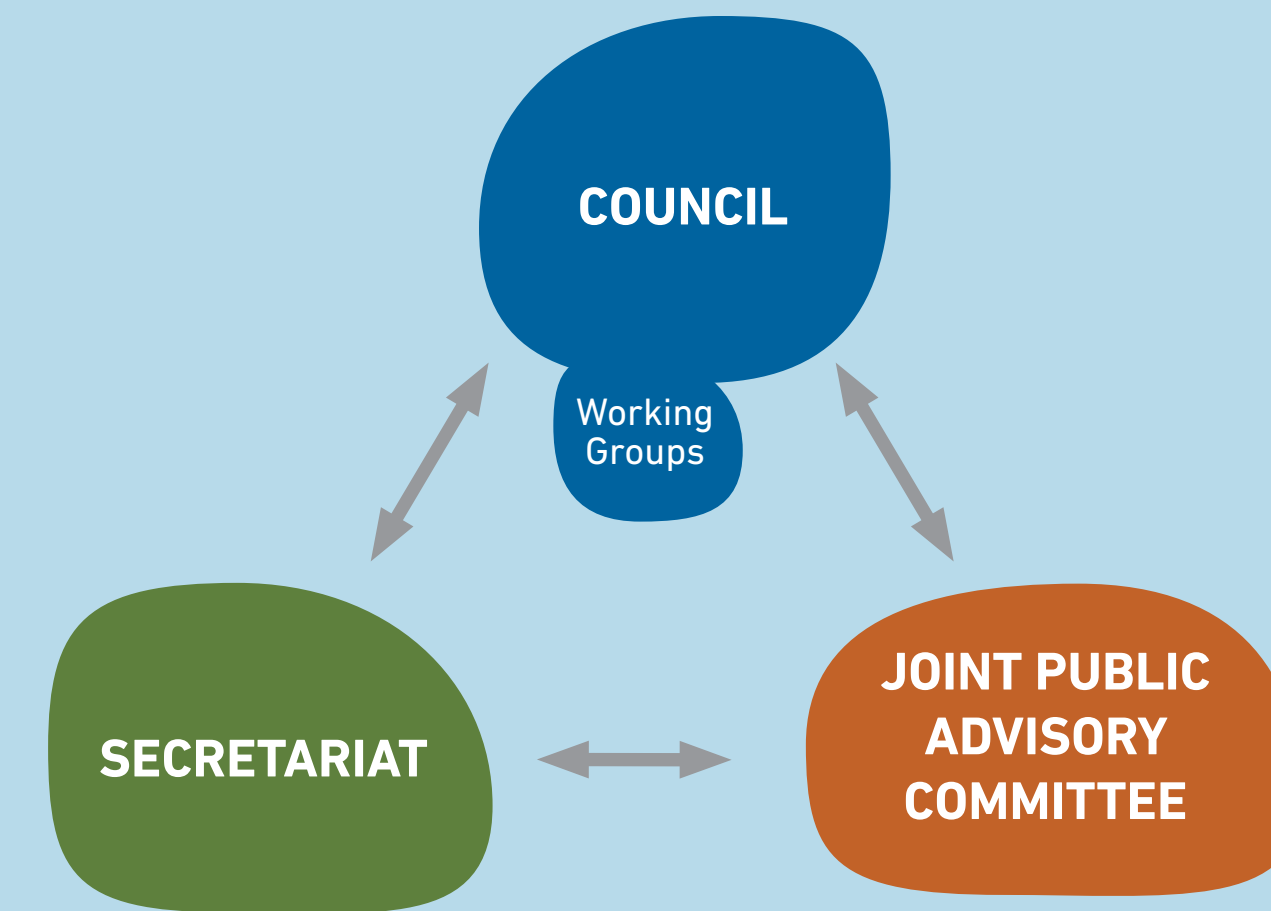
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About the CEC

Since 1994, the CEC has played a pivotal role in fostering and sustaining environmental cooperation between the Governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States for the conservation, protection and enhancement of our shared environment.

The cooperative work program of the CEC has helped strengthen environmental governance across the North American region in the following ways: building relations among people; supporting communities and governments; promoting effective environmental enforcement; promoting inclusive participation (with an emphasis on vulnerable communities); fostering best practices for conservation and nature-based solutions; building capacity in communities and among practitioners; and implementing restoration, remediation and conservation activities focusing on improving human well-being and promoting environmental justice. The CEC's mission is fulfilled through its three constituent bodies, with the support of various key actors:¹

1. For more information, please refer to Articles 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the Agreement on Environmental Cooperation available at: www.cec.org/about/agreement-on-environmental-cooperation/.



- **The Council**, which is the governing body of the Commission, comprises cabinet-level or equivalent representatives of each Party responsible for environmental affairs.
- **The Secretariat**, which provides technical, administrative and operational support to the Council (and to committees and groups established by the Council).
- **The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC)**, which comprises nine citizens, three from each country (Canada, Mexico and the United States), that advise the Council on a wide array of environmental issues within the scope of the Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA). The alignment with the ECA is described in the following section. JPAC engages the public in open forums and public consultations, bringing together experts and interested individuals to identify options to address North America's most pressing environmental challenges.



The CEC's cooperative work program is implemented by a Secretariat staff of 45 employees² (supplemented by external resources and interns). Additionally, the work program is supported by trilateral working groups of government experts, as well as through the engagement and involvement of interested groups and individuals representing the private sector, nongovernmental organizations, academia, youth, the public at large, as well as Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

2. Information as of January 2024.

Institutional Priorities

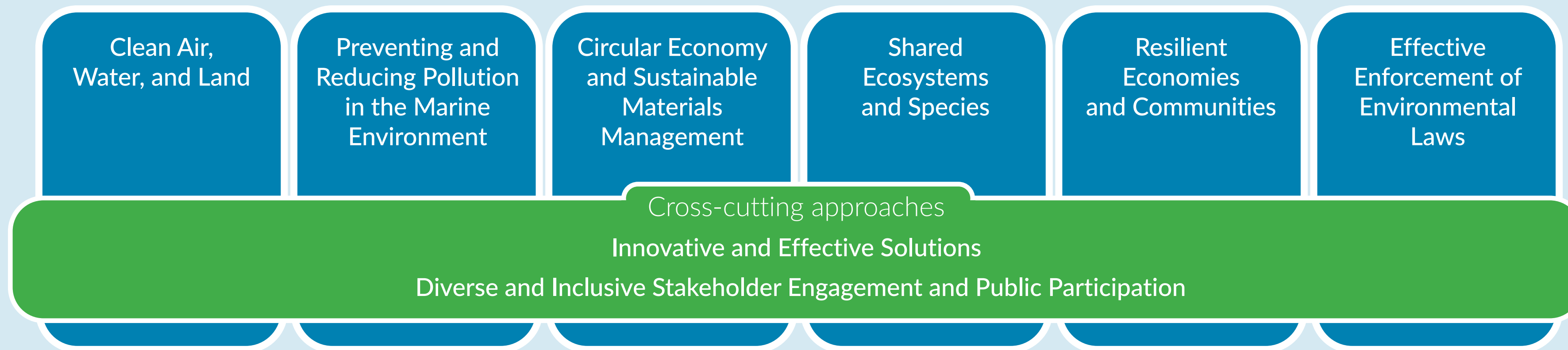
Guided by Chapter 24 of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement³ (“Trade Agreement”) and under the accompanying Environment Cooperation Agreement (ECA), as well as their commitments under other regional or international environmental agreements, the three Parties have affirmed their engagement to cooperate in promoting sustainable development and address shared environmental challenges across North America. The CEC’s work has focused on addressing topics such as reducing pollution; promoting climate mitigation and adaptation for vulnerable communities; advancing environmental governance; conserving and protecting biodiversity and habitat; the sustainable management and use of natural resources; supporting green growth and sustainable development; promoting meaningful participation, diversity and inclusivity, equity and non-discrimination; strengthening community resilience; engaging Indigenous communities and considering Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge.

3. Chapter 24 of CUSMA/USMCA/T-MEC, available at: <www.cec.org/files/documents/sem/chapter24-environment.pdf>.



The ECA, as its first objective states, “seek[s] ways to modernize and enhance the effectiveness of environmental cooperation between the Parties, building upon their long history of environmental cooperation.”⁴ The strategic focus provided under the Strategic Plan (SP) 2021–2025⁵ is a major step in this direction as it encompasses six thematic pillars and two cross-cutting approaches, see Figure 1, ensuring all Parties have shared goals and can align their efforts effectively. The SP 2021–2025 reflects Council’s guidance and direction for CEC efforts over a five-year period and supports the development of specific activities, projects, and initiatives to be included in the CEC’s work program.

Figure 1. CEC’s 2021–2025 Strategic Pillars and Cross-cutting Approaches



4. Agreement on Environmental Cooperation among the Governments of the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada, available at: <www.cec.org/about/agreement-on-environmental-cooperation/> .

5. Available at: <www.cec.org/files/documents/strategic_plans/cec-strategic-plan-2021-2025.pdf> .

In line with Articles 10 and 11 of the ECA, the SP 2021–2025 promotes the CEC’s efforts to plan and evaluate its work effectively and in a meaningful manner and emphasizes the importance of strategies to increase outreach and support public participation and partnerships in the development, implementation and monitoring of activities and projects. The planning process will promote an inclusive and intersectional approach to the CEC’s engagement, ensuring that youth engagement, gender, diversity, equity and environmental justice are integrated in all of the CEC’s work, where applicable. It will also ensure that consideration be given to Indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge in various facets of project design and management.

Emphasis is put in this Operational Plan on describing activities taking place in 2024 and how these will be implemented to help achieve their stated objectives.

All projects and initiatives include workplans as well as performance measures and indicators to assist in monitoring and evaluating progress in achieving results (including through participatory evaluation). The latter requirement supports ECA Article 8, which refers to making public an annual report of the Commission. This exercise is critical to strengthening environmental governance in the North American region and to fostering transparency, inclusive public participation and accountability (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Governance Instruments to Promote Impact and Transparency



2024 Budget

(All figures are in Canadian dollars)

The allocated budget to support CEC operations and project development for the calendar year is C\$13,572,500. The table below provides line items for the main expense categories and the budget allocated for them.

REVENUES	2024 Budget Draft
Parties' Contributions (Contributions US\$7,650,000) (US\$1.35/C\$ in 2024, US\$1.35/C\$ in 2023)	10,327,500
Special Contributions from US Government (US\$500,000) (US\$1.35/C\$1,000,000 US\$ in 2023)	675,000
Apportioned amount from Surplus Funds	2,570,000
Other	n/a
TOTAL REVENUES	13,572,500

EXPENSES

2023 budget

PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

Multi-Year

Cooperative Projects	1,230,000
North American Marine Protected Areas Network (NAMPAN)	100,000
Council Initiatives	500,000
EJ4Climate	2,625,000

Annual

Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM)	410,000
Tracking Pollutant Releases and Transfers in North America (PRTR)	200,000
CEC Interactive Platforms (Atlas)	175,000
Mandate Priorities and Emerging Issues	150,000

TOTAL PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES 5,390,000

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE

Council Support	326,000
JPAC Support	400,000
Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group Support	150,000
Work Program Support	100,000
CEC30 Activities	80,000
Communications	400,000
Stakeholder engagement and Partnership Development	396,000
Information System Infrastructure Maintenance	191,500
Performance Measurement and Reporting	85,000
Strategic and Operational Planning	60,000

STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLANNING 2,188,500

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

Salaries, Benefits and Professional Development	4,490,000
Operating Expenses	752,000
External Administrative Support	327,000
Recruitment and relocation	150,000
Executive Director's Office	75,000

TOTAL ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT 5,794,000

Contingency Fund (includes FX impact of rate on Parties contributions – 800K) 200,000

TOTAL EXPENSES 13,572,500

2024 Work Program

Addressing Issues of Common Interest and Concern

Cooperative Projects and Initiatives




The CEC's cooperative work program includes both core projects and Council initiatives. Core projects are multi-year cooperative projects funded from the annual contributions of the three Parties and focused on addressing key areas for cooperation under the six strategic pillars for 2021–2025 (as presented in Figure 1 and in Table 1).

Council initiatives are funded generally through accumulated surplus funds and announced annually by Ministers at their regular Council Session. These new Council initiatives are often designed to address the theme of the Council Session or other emerging regional priorities. This dynamic process of introducing new projects and initiatives to reflect emerging priorities, while sustaining core projects creates a vibrant landscape of environmental cooperation on the region's most important and evolving environmental issues.

Table 1. Projects Supporting Each Strategic Pillar



	Clean Air, Land and Water	Circular Economy and Sustainable Materials Management	Shared Ecosystems and Species	Resilient Economies and Communities	Effective Enforcement of Environmental Laws	Preventing and Reducing Pollution in the Marine Environment
Grasslands Conservation and Migratory Birds			•	•		
Reduction of Marine Litter	•		•			•
Transforming Recycling and Solid Waste Management in North America		•		•		•
Nature-based Solutions to Address Flooding in Coastal Cities			•	•		
Enhancing Co-Benefits of Marine Protected Areas			•	•		
Advancing Pollinator Conservation throughout North America			•	•		
Advancing Supply Chain Transparency for Chemicals in Products		•				
Communities for Environmental Justice Network (CEJN)				•		
Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America	•	•	•	•		
Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy	•	•		•		
Addressing Ghost Gear in North America	•	•		•		•
Air Quality Improvements for Environmental Justice	•					
Resilience of Indigenous People’s Traditional Food Systems	•	•	•	•		
Fast Mitigation Strategies to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants, including Methane*	•					
Stimulating Behavior Changes to Reduce Food Loss and Waste in North America and Expanded Promotion and Uptake of Related CEC FLW Resources*	•	•		•		
North American Center for Informed Substitution Scoping Work*	•	•				
Community-led Environmental Education Initiative for Biocultural Heritage Protection*			•	•		
Opportunities for Circularity in the North American Electronics Sector: Phase 1*		•				
Climate Adaptation Initiative*				•		
Advancing Responsible Consumption of Forest Products*			•		•	
Indigenous and Urban Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation “Champion Cities”*				•		
Reaching Horizon 2030: an Environmental Outlook for North American Cooperation*	•	•	•	•		

*Under development as of January 2024.



CEC projects and initiatives encourage teamwork, promote outreach, support learning opportunities and foster the exchange of knowledge, reflecting a vast array of modalities and forms of cooperation.

The following section presents the activities taking place in 2024 for the cooperative projects and initiatives, some of which were initiated under previous OPs. More detailed information on project activities and budgets can also be found in Appendix I.



Grasslands Conservation and Migratory Birds

Project duration: 36 months (November 2021–October 2024)

Context: The central grasslands of the Great Plains are a shared ecosystem stretching from southern Canada, through the United States, into northern Mexico. These grasslands are one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America, home to many endemic grassland-dependent species that are at-risk, threatened, or endangered. The central grasslands also provide other valuable environmental services (e.g., carbon sequestration, water supply and flow regulation, and erosion control), and play a crucial role in agricultural sustainability for rural communities and economies. Building on past work by the CEC on grasslands conservation and ongoing efforts, such as the [Central Grasslands Roadmap](#)⁶ and the [JV8 Central Grasslands Initiative](#)⁷, the current project will fill recognized gaps in central grasslands conservation.

Objective: The three countries have made commitments to conserve at least 30 percent of their respective land and waters by 2030. To help fulfill these commitments, the CEC will support central grasslands' cross-sectoral mainstreamed management, restoration, and conservation in Canada, Mexico and the United States, by raising awareness of the grasslands' importance, providing new knowledge for decision-making, and strengthening collaboration, through inclusive network-building and strategic planning.

2024 Activities:

- Produce a social science analysis of challenges, constraints, and drivers for the conservation of grasslands, analyzing socio-economic factors and human dimensions (motivations, values, economics, needs of communities and barriers) to inform grasslands' conservation strategies.
- Lay the groundwork to identify a common trilateral framework for monitoring native grasslands loss/gain.
- Support equitable engagement of those less represented in or absent from the Central Grasslands Roadmap and JV8 conservation strategy, such as private and communal landowners (ejidos) in Mexico, Central Grasslands Indigenous communities, and other potential partners.

6. Available at: www.grasslandsroadmap.org.

7. Available at: <https://jv8.org>.



Reduction of Marine Litter

Project duration: 30 months (November 2021–April 2024)

Context: As a growing problem that negatively affects economies and threatens ecosystems and potentially human health, marine litter is a high-priority global issue being addressed from several different angles. It is estimated that 80 percent of marine litter originates from land-based sources, often due to the improper disposal of items or uncollected waste that becomes litter and then travels through watersheds to the oceans. To prevent and reduce marine litter, actions are needed across the lifecycle of products.

Objective: Building on previous CEC efforts, the project will build public awareness about marine litter, deploy litter capture devices, collect comparable data across the three countries, and reduce land-based marine litter, including single-use plastic products and packaging, in communities located inland along waterways and river systems in North America. By demonstrating, educating, and communicating about the flow of commonly littered items downstream to the ocean, using low-cost technology and a variety of communication tools, the project will help prevent and reduce marine litter originating from inland cities.

2024 Activities:

- Support the uptake and implementation by local organizations of the Last Stop: the Ocean (LSTO)⁸ public awareness campaign toolkit and community engagement guide developed by the CEC.

8. Available at: <www.cec.org/topics/ecosystems/reducing-marine-litter/>



Transforming Recycling and Solid Waste Management in North America



Project duration: 48 months (November 2021–October 2025)

Context: The World Bank estimates that around 2 billion tons of municipal solid waste were generated in 2016, with Canada, Mexico and the United States generating 0.4-1.5 kg more waste per capita per day than the global average.⁹ North America has the highest per capita plastic and paper consumption in the world. The region represents 21% of total plastics consumption¹⁰ and four times the global average in per capita paper consumption.¹¹ Reducing waste and closing material loops will help minimize the environmental impacts along the value chain of resources and products, as well as presenting considerable economic opportunities and solutions to mitigate climate change.

Objective: This project aims to accelerate the uptake of circular economy and sustainable materials management practices that are needed to transform North American recycling and solid waste management and realize the economic and environmental benefits for the region. The project will address information gaps, inform policymaking across Canada, Mexico and the United States, identify potential areas for policy coherence, and advance circularity and sustainable material management practices.

2024 Activities:

- Address additional work requested by Mexico to complement the information of this country in the three milestone studies on paper, plastics, and bioplastics waste, prior to their publication.
- Define and start the implementation of pilot testing through collaboration between industry, academia, governments, and civil society on issues of circular economy and sustainable materials management strategies, with findings supported and adopted by various relevant actors.

9. Kaza, Silpa; Yao, Lisa C.; Bhada-Tata, Perinaz; Van Woerden, Frank. 2018. *What a Waste 2.0: A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050*. Urban Development. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

10. Heller, M., Mazor, M., & Keoleian, G. (2020). *Plastics in the US: toward a material flow characterization of production, markets and end of life*. *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(9), 94034–.

11. Mandy Haggith, Susan Kinsella, Sergio Ba foni, Patrick Anderson, Jim Ford, Rune Leithe, Emmanuelle Neyroumande, Neva Murtha and Bas Tinhout. 2018. *The State of the Global Paper Industry: Shifting Seas – New Challenges and Opportunities for Forests, People and the Climate*. Environmental Paper Network.

Nature-based Solutions to Address Flooding in Coastal Cities

Project duration: 30 months
(November 2021–December 2024)

Context: Many North Americans live in coastal cities that produce a high value of goods and services but are vulnerable to flooding. The risks associated with coastal flood hazards are escalating due to land-use changes, ecosystem loss or transformation, population growth in coastal zones, sea-level rise, changes in the frequency and severity of storms, and ageing flood protection infrastructure. Nature-based solutions (NBS) reduce flood and erosion risk through the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of natural coastal environments, and the construction of new features that mimic or work with ecological processes.

Building on past collaborative experiences advancing knowledge on blue carbon, coastal adaptation, and extreme events, the CEC is uniquely placed to build capacity for coastal communities to manage flood risk in a changing climate through NBS that maximize co-benefits to human and natural communities.

Objective: This project provides a first opportunity for NBS practitioners, working across North America in a broad range of disciplines, to lay the foundation for a North American community of practice that can offer an interdisciplinary approach to implementing NBS. It also addresses barriers to using NBS by filling knowledge gaps on co-benefits, retrofitting and monitoring, and by training practitioners and educating community members on the use of NBS.

2024 Activities:

- Publish final foundational guidance report on the co-benefits of NBS, retrofitting existing infrastructure, and monitoring the efficacy of NBS reports, with accompanying graphics-based material and briefing notes to support uptake.
- Hold webinars to share practical experience on NBS implementation.



Enhancing Co-benefits of Marine Protected Areas

Project duration: 36 months
(January 2022–December 2024)

Context: Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are key to conserving and restoring coastal and marine ecosystems, delivering many natural and socio-economic co-benefits. Over several projects, the CEC has provided a unique forum for North American MPA practitioners, bringing them together to identify and describe the marine ecoregions of North America and priority conservation areas; communicate the vital roles MPAs play for communities, the economy, scientific knowledge, and conservation; gather scientific information on the impact of climate change on MPAs; and develop tools to assess conditions and identify vulnerabilities in coastal and marine ecosystems and respond to these vulnerabilities.



Objective: This project aims to enhance co-benefits by increasing Indigenous and local leadership in MPA networks; facilitating seascape-level conservation through collaboration; and identifying and sharing best practices for climate change adaptation and mitigation, habitat restoration, and blue carbon and other critical habitat work. By providing a platform to learn from Indigenous and community-led conservation and for practitioners to identify opportunities for adaptation, mitigation, conservation and restoration in their MPAs, within shared seascapes, and across the marine ecoregions of North America, the project will support the development of an ecologically and socially inclusive MPA network across North America, for the benefit of coastal and marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and a more resilient North America.

2024 Activities:

- Develop knowledge on socio-ecological connectivity and conservation to strengthen seascape-level conservation of sharks and whales.
- Identify and share best practices for conservation and restoration of blue carbon.
- Build on existing approaches and opportunities for Indigenous and community leadership and engagement in coastal conservation and adaptation.

Advancing Pollinator Conservation throughout North America

Project duration: 24 months (February 2022–January 2024)

Context: Pollinators support the reproduction of about 80% of wild vascular plants and 75% of crop species, and as such are crucial to food security, human well-being and ecosystems. The population sizes of pollinators have declined worldwide. This decline requires urgent conservation actions and the engagement of relevant actors in different sectors. Canada, Mexico and the United States established foundations for regional collaboration on pollinator conservation through an initial project. Over two years, the project held targeted workshops and supported a literature review to inform the drafting of a first North American Pollinator Framework. The framework highlights the need for long-term, harmonized monitoring data to design and implement effective pollinator conservation strategies.

Objective: By sharing best practices and strategies to organize and mobilize native bee inventory and monitoring, this project will lay the foundations for more robust and standardized data repositories to inform conservation actions across the continent. In addition, the project will develop tools and communication materials to raise awareness about native bees and their importance, and to drive action through citizen science and community involvement.

2024 Activities:

- Communicate the environmental, social and economic benefits of native bees for communities, food production and natural ecosystem functioning through the People for Pollinators campaign.
- Publish State of Knowledge on North American Pollinator Conservation and report on native bee inventories.
- Complete the update of a geospatial tool for bee inventories ([The Bee Tool](https://thebeetool.com)¹²).
- Continue posting content developed through the project until the end of 2024, with additional funding agreed by the Council (TBC). This would allow the CEC to enhance this social media campaign by creating additional engaging materials, such as infographics and short videos, and further amplify the message to reach a broader audience, fostering public support and understanding of the importance of pollinators.

12. Available at: <<https://thebeetool.com>>



Advancing Supply Chain Transparency for Chemicals in Products



Project duration: 24 months
(July 2022–June 2024)

Context: A fundamental assumption in a circular economy is that materials re-introduced within value chains are safe for human health and the environment. However, a lack of composition data for chemicals in products, and industry awareness of them, poses challenges to identifying risks. Increased chemical supply chain transparency (SCT) will help governments and industry to: 1) identify problematic chemicals or classes of chemicals, and suitable alternatives for them; 2) inform trade and procurement decisions for raw materials, product components, and final goods at various points within value chains; 3) inform recycling and waste management systems; 4) improve the ability of industry to comply with chemical reporting and other regulations; and 5) meet growing consumer demand for product ingredient information.

Objective: The goal of this project is to foster collaboration among North American countries to improve SCT and enhance governments' ability to identify and prevent products containing chemicals of concern, or chemical substitutes of concern (*e.g.*, regrettable substitution), from entering or re-entering the economy. The information derived from this project will also help industry build resilient supply chains that respond to consumer demand for safer products and information on their chemical composition.

2024 Activities:

- Undertake three case studies of industry sectors currently using best practices for supply chain transparency and knowledge of product composition. Selected case studies to highlight SCT best practices are cosmetics / personal care products, electronics and building materials.
- Plan and conduct workshop(s) with decision makers, industry actors and other experts to share the findings and gather additional recommendations to enhance SCT in North America.

Communities for Environmental Justice Network

Project duration: 18 months (April 2023–September 2024)

Context: Environmental Justice (EJ) is a broad term used to describe a range of social movements and policy frameworks that address the heightened risk of environmental harm on marginalized communities. Seeking justice in this context implies an effort to increase and enable the fair and equitable treatment among the population, leading to the elimination of inequities. For the purposes of this project and due to the lack of common definitions in a North American context, the terms “environmental equity” and “environmental justice” refer indistinctly both to fair and equitable treatment among the population, leading to the elimination of inequities, subordination, discrimination and exclusion, recognizing and protecting cultural and gender differences, from a human rights perspective in actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change.¹³

Objective: The project is intended to create 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. Through the network, participating members will contribute to the facilitation of learning and knowledge exchange processes, in particular traditional knowledge and practices, and develop a virtual resource library, with the goal of strengthening the climate adaptation, mitigation and other capacity building of Indigenous, local, and vulnerable communities in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

13. Source: US EPA. *Environmental Protection Agency*, <www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>. This is one government-centric definition, note that others exist from the NGO perspective. A historic, yet still highly recognized list of 17 Environmental Justice principles from NGOs may be found here: <www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html>.



2024 Activities:

- Select communities for inclusion in the CEJN and engage them as founding members of the network.
- Develop and disseminate CEJN toolkit and knowledge exchange tools and culturally relevant information.

Other initiatives under design

- *Fast Mitigation Strategies to Reduce Short-lived Climate Pollutants, Including Methane*
- *Stimulating Behavior Changes to Reduce Food Loss and Waste in North America and Expanded Promotion and Uptake of Related CEC FLW Resources*
- *North American Center for Informed Substitution Scoping Work*

Council Initiatives

Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America

Initiative duration: 30 months¹⁴ (October 2021–March 2024)

Context: Water is at the core of the six pillars under the CEC’s Strategic Plan 2021–2025: water management, water cleanliness, ecosystem health, marine pollution, and supporting economic sectors heavily reliant on the sustainable management of water. Indigenous Peoples’ traditional cultures and knowledge systems are globally recognized as holding critical information related to achieving sustainable practices in environmental management. As such, a fuller appreciation of Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives is essential to advancing inclusive and diverse sustainable environmental management approaches in meeting the goals and priorities of the CEC, and to institutionalizing the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in the activities of the organization.

Objective: This initiative is documenting Indigenous approaches to freshwater management in North America and making lessons learned available to the public through an online portal on the CEC’s website. This initiative will include a series of case studies identified by the TEKEG, a knowledge dialogue to complement the case studies, and a workshop with water experts on potential opportunities to apply Indigenous knowledge, including TEK, to the CEC’s operations and policy recommendations.

2024 Activities:

- Finalize the Canadian case study with the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), which will include a video with interviews and social activities related to traditional Red River Métis freshwater management.
- Launch the online portal on the CEC’s website showcasing Indigenous Peoples’ perspectives on freshwater management and sustainable use.

14. The Council approved extension of the initiative’s implementation until March 2024.



Air Quality Improvements for Environmental Justice



Initiative duration: 45 months (October 2022–September 2025)

Context: Black carbon (BC), or “soot” (a component of fine particulate matter, PM), is a significant air contaminant that affects not only public health but also our climate. Sources of these emissions include agricultural burning, domestic wood combustion, and fossil fuel combustion from transportation and industrial activities. Our countries’ systems for monitoring air pollution have limited coverage, with millions of people across North America living in communities that have no means of measuring local air quality conditions.

Objective: Black carbon (BC), or “soot” (a component of fine particulate matter, PM), is a significant air contaminant that affects not only public health but also our climate. Sources of these emissions include agricultural burning, domestic wood combustion, and fossil fuel combustion from transportation and industrial activities. Our countries’ systems for monitoring air pollution have limited coverage, with millions of people across North America living in communities that have no means of measuring local air quality conditions.

2024 Activities:

- Formalize collaborative partnerships with communities (at least one per country).
- Identify and procure appropriate $PM_{2.5}$ /BC sensor technologies for each community.
- Work with the community and technical advisors to identify $PM_{2.5}$ /BC sources and define mitigation priorities and develop monitoring and capacity-building plans.
- Implement monitoring activities led by three community organizations in each North American country.

Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy

Initiative duration: 18–24 months
(April 2023–March 2025)

Context: In North America, many rural, isolated and remote communities lack proper access to traditional electrical grid infrastructure and often rely on small, mainly diesel-based, mini-grids for their electricity supply. These mini-grids are inefficient, expensive and contribute to local pollution. Furthermore, old inefficient generators leave communities vulnerable to power outages, including damage from extreme weather events, while capacity limitations and unreliability hinder many communities from expansion and economic growth. In many cases, Indigenous communities are disproportionately impacted by these issues. Transitioning these communities to clean and decentralized energy solutions has the potential to bring socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Objective: The CEC will develop case studies of best practices from across North America on transitioning communities to cleaner, more affordable, and reliable sources of clean energy that will improve environmental conditions, enhance energy security, and promote self-sufficiency and community-ownership of energy generation projects. These case studies will be integrated in a “Multi-stakeholder Platform for Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy,” developed by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), which will serve as a global communication platform on the topic of energy transitions for remote communities. It would be the first regional case study completed on this topic and would provide models and strategies for countries around the world facing similar challenges. This project builds on previous CEC expertise on the topic, namely, the “[Guide to Developing a Community Renewable Energy Project in North America](https://www.cec.org/publications/guide-to-developing-a-community-renewable-energy-project-in-north-america/)”¹⁵.”

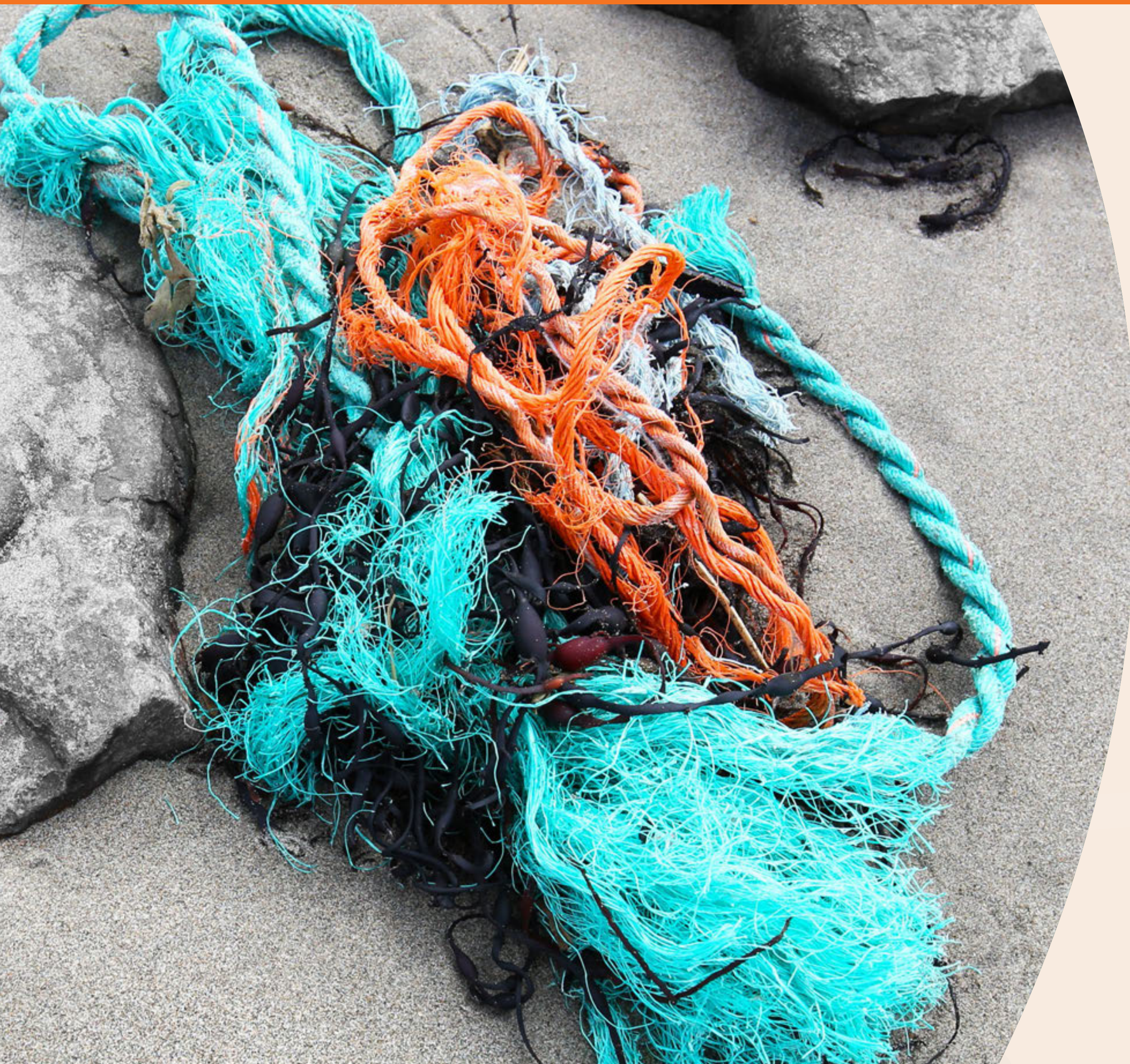
15. Available at: <www.cec.org/publications/guide-to-developing-a-community-renewable-energy-project-in-north-america/>

2024 Activities:

- Define the final list of case studies in North America as models of community-driven ownership and maintenance of renewable energy projects.
- Engage case study communities (at least one per country) in sharing renewable energy transition experiences and lessons learned.
- Compile information and document each case study for its integration into the IRENA’s *Multi-stakeholder Platform for Transitioning Remote Communities to Renewable Energy*.
- Conduct a campaign to disseminate and promote the findings of the CEC IRENA initiative and case studies.



Addressing Ghost Gear in North America



Initiative duration: 39 months
(December 2022–February 2026)

Context: Tonnes of ghost gear (abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear—ALDFG) enter the ocean every year, harming marine life, reducing fish stocks and impacting the livelihoods of coastal communities. Our three countries are signatories to the Global Ghost Gear Initiative, an alliance of fishing industry, private sector, academia and governments focused on solving the problem of ghost gear through collaborative work.

Objective: This initiative aims to prevent and reduce ghost gear in Canada, Mexico and the United States by developing tools to address ALDFG best practices in fisheries, building fishing industry understanding and collaboration, identifying knowledge and data gaps, and supporting responsible management of end-of-life fishing gear in coastal fishing communities. The initiative will also identify opportunities for technologies for pilot testing in consultation with potential partners.

2024 Activities:

- Promote best practices for responsible fishing.
- Support coordination of ghost gear advocacy initiatives.
- Pilot market-ready new technology.
- Support gear retrieval efforts in priority areas.
- Conduct cost-benefit analysis to understand end-of-life gear management opportunities.
- Conduct outreach to showcase project results.

Resilience of Indigenous People's Traditional Food Systems

Initiative duration: 24 months
(February 2024–February 2026)

Context: Food security is one of the major global challenges facing humanity today. The climate crisis and the depletion of natural resources have put an increased strain on food production. Therefore, promoting and ensuring diverse and sustainable food systems that contribute to human well-being and avoid the deterioration of nature are now more than ever top priorities. The food systems of Indigenous Peoples have existed for thousands of years and are recognized for being sustainable and respectful of nature. While Indigenous peoples have demonstrated resilience and leadership in maintaining their traditional food systems, most North American Indigenous communities face traditional food system shortages and crises. Through the activities below, the CEC will support the greater inclusion of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous knowledge, often referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), in activities and decisions affecting Indigenous Peoples traditional food systems.

Objective: This initiative aims to better understand the current state of traditional food systems of Indigenous Peoples in North America; support the revitalization of networks and relationships among Indigenous Peoples across North America to foster knowledge exchange and partnerships; and raise awareness and promote the respect of Indigenous resiliency and leadership in policies, activities, and decisions affecting Indigenous Peoples' traditional food systems.

2024 Activities:

- Compile existing literature regarding the use of Indigenous knowledge in Indigenous Peoples' food systems throughout North America.
- Initiate planning efforts for the organization of the North American Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems Forum to take place in early 2025.



Other initiatives under design

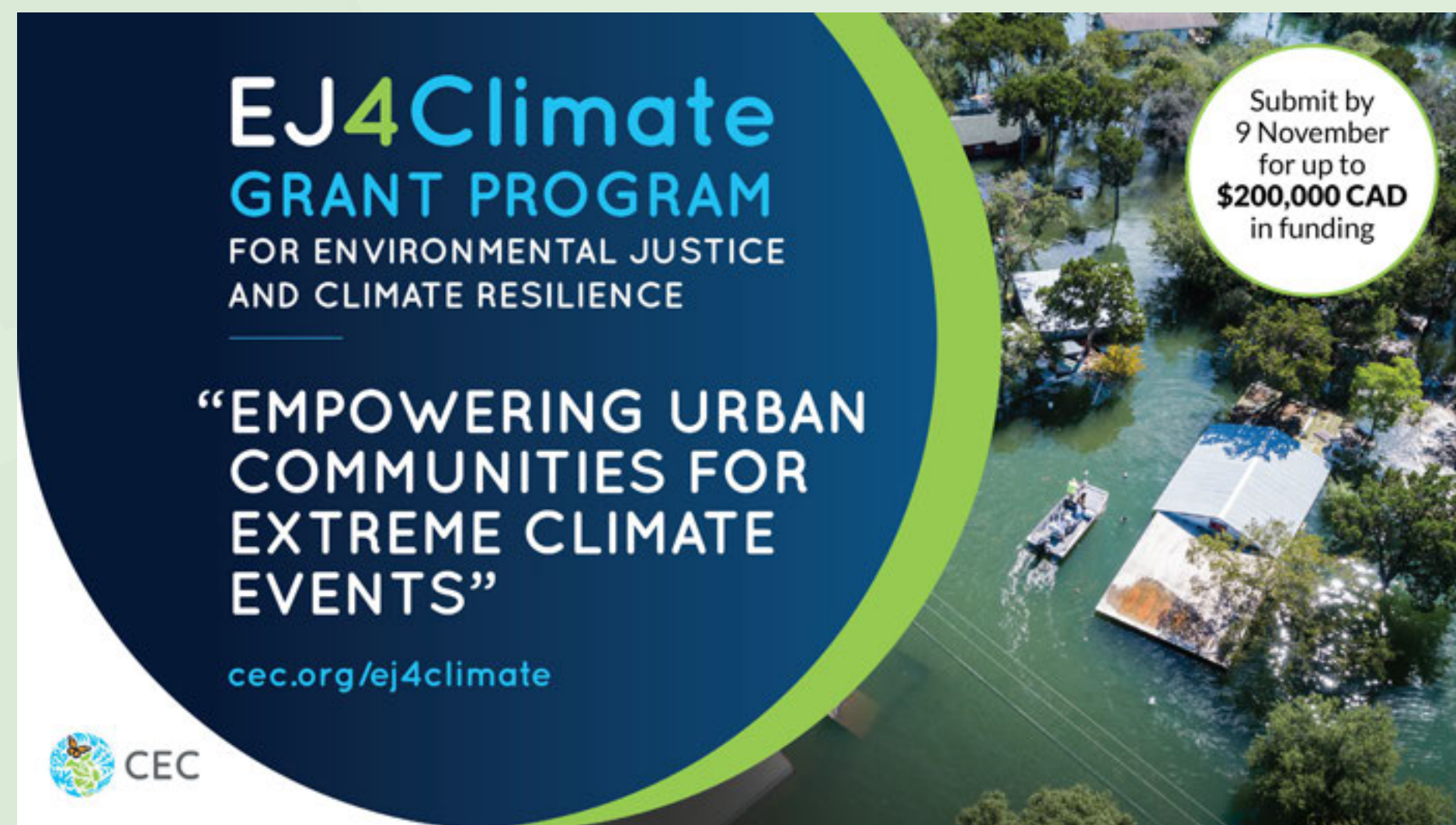
- *Community-led Environmental Education Initiative for Biocultural Heritage Protection*
- *Opportunities for Circularity in the North American Electronics Sector: Phase 1*
- *Climate Adaptation Initiative*
- *Advancing Responsible Consumption of Forest Products*
- *Indigenous and Urban Approaches to Climate Change Adaptation “Champion Cities”*
- *Reaching Horizon 2030: an Environmental Outlook for North American Cooperation*



Grant Programs

Environmental Justice and Climate Resilience (EJ4Climate) Grant Program

This grant program, initiated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), was launched by the Council in 2021. It provides funding directly to local and Indigenous communities and community-based organizations in Canada, Mexico and the United States, supporting underserved and vulnerable communities as they prepare for climate-related impacts.



For the third grant cycle of EJ4Climate, the CEC called for project proposals¹⁶ that will advance community-driven strategies in support of environmental justice and community resilience to the impacts of extreme weather events in urban areas. In North America, approximately 80% of people live in urban areas, making urban environments the space and framework through which much of today's climate change, and responses to it, unfolds and therefore could result in greater impacts.

Projects will be implemented in communities in urban areas. The community-driven strategies will integrate empowerment as the main principle to support and enable communities and individuals to gain more influence and implement long-lasting solutions to strengthen resilience to extreme weather events and reduce the current disproportionate and adverse health, economic and social impacts. Please find more information [here](https://www.cec.org/grant-programs/ej4climate)¹⁷.

16. Proposals were due 9 November 2023 and the evaluation of grants applications is happening from November 2023 to February 2024.

17. Available at: <www.cec.org/grant-programs/ej4climate>.

North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA)

Since its launch in 2010, the CEC's North American Partnership for Environmental Community Action (NAPECA) grant program has supported the delivery of projects led by nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations that build partnerships and drive action to improve environmental conditions at the community, Indigenous, local and regional levels. This program promotes a sense of shared purpose and responsibility for the environment and has served as an important mechanism for bringing direct benefits to local communities in the region and for engaging the public in addressing the CEC's priorities. Indeed, all supported projects have complemented the work of the CEC by addressing one or many of its strategic pillars and carrying out innovative and effective solutions.

Given years of experience conserving and managing the environment since time immemorial, Indigenous Peoples and communities have invaluable knowledge systems and practices that contribute to the sustainable management and preservation of natural resources and can help with meeting environmental challenges, including the climate crisis.



This new NAPECA grant cycle aims to support climate adaptation in North America by engaging and empowering communities, particularly Indigenous and local communities, in applying Indigenous Knowledge to strengthen community-based resilience to climate change. The CEC will support environmental initiatives from organizations that will help North American communities enhance climate adaptation by working with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to recognize, apply, and protect traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems.¹⁸ Please find more information [here](#)¹⁹.

18. Proposals will be due 18 January 2024 and official grants announcement will happen May 2024.

19. Available at: <www.cec.org/grant-programs/north-american-partnership-for-environmental-community-action/>.

Improving Access to Information for Decision-Making

The CEC's online publications library²⁰ and tools and resources²¹ provide the public with access to high-quality environmental information and materials. These include scientific reports, databases and geospatial data related to environmental research and management, all intended to support the efforts of government officials, the private sector, academic and research institutions, nongovernmental organizations and communities. The CEC's webpage hosts hundreds of publications available in English, French and Spanish. A list of CEC's most popular publications can be found [here](#).²²

The following initiatives further the Council's commitment to facilitate cooperation and knowledge sharing in North America towards decision-making that supports environmental protection and sustainable development. The specific actions to be taken in 2024 are presented in the subsections below.

20. Available at: <www.cec.org/publications/>

21. Available at: <www.cec.org/tools/>

22. Available at: <www.cec.org/top-50-publications>

North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (NAPRTR) Initiative

Supporting the 2021–2025 strategic pillar, *Clean Air, Water, and Land*, the North American Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (NAPRTR) Initiative compiles, harmonizes and presents data on the sources, amounts and management of pollutants reported by approximately 40,000 industrial facilities to the Canadian, Mexican and United States' pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). These data are made accessible via the *Taking Stock Online* website and searchable database, as well as through analyses in the *Taking Stock* report series.²³ They are used by governments, industry, researchers, NGOs and the public to explore and better understand the pollutant releases and transfers reported by North American facilities, their risks, and related pollution prevention measures.

During 2024, continuity will be maintained for various activities implemented in 2023. The sixteenth edition of the *Taking Stock* report, featuring a special analysis of reported off-site transfers to disposal, was published in 2023. The CEC also launched the enhanced *Taking Stock Online* website, which now includes additional contextual information and interactive data graphics on the home page, along with a simplified database user interface. Two additional years of trilateral data (for the 2021 and 2022 reporting years) will be integrated into *Taking Stock* in 2024. In addition, a subset of facility-level greenhouse gas data is being tested for inclusion in the database.



23. Available at: <http://takingstock.cec.org/content/landing/en/>



The CEC held a very successful online public engagement event in August 2023 to share updates with interested groups and individuals, get their feedback regarding the *Taking Stock* report and Taking Stock Online enhancements, and hear about their concerns relating to industrial pollution and sustainability. A second public engagement event will be held in 2024.

Activities in 2024 will focus on strengthening ongoing coordination with the national PRTR programs to enhance the quality, coverage, comparability, and accessibility of North American PRTR data. To address a key recommendation of the Action Plan to Enhance the Comparability of PRTRs in North America²⁴, the CEC, in collaboration with the national PRTR programs and representatives of the automotive manufacturing sector and supply chain, launched the Pollution Prevention (P2) Challenge. The first phase of this initiative, involving an assessment of the quality and coverage of pollution prevention reporting for the industry, has been completed; a second phase, focused on engaging facilities and sector representatives in the sharing of information and best practices, is anticipated to begin in 2024 (pending review of the Phase 1 report).

In collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Working Party on PRTRs, the CEC has also undertaken a pilot project to assess the quality and coverage of cross-border transfer data.

24. Available at: <www.cec.org/publications/action-plan-to-enhance-the-comparability-of-pollutant-release-and-transfer-registers-prtrs-in-north-america/>

The North American Environmental Atlas

The [North American Environmental Atlas](https://www.cec.org/north-american-environmental-atlas/)²⁵ is an online mapping resource providing combined and harmonized geospatial environmental data from Canada, Mexico and the United States, allowing for a continental and regional perspective on transboundary environmental issues. Downloadable North American map layers can also be examined through an online map viewer, allowing the visualization of various environmental aspects, such as terrestrial and marine ecological regions, climate zones, as well as protected areas across the three countries. The Atlas supports a wide range of governmental and academic research and analysis of environmental challenges in North America, as attested by citations in over a thousand published scientific articles and reports. The Atlas supports CEC's Strategic Plan 2021–2025 by providing geospatial information that can be associated to all strategic pillars. New and updated thematic map layers are often based on data generated by CEC initiatives/projects.

Activities in 2024 will focus on updating map layers, including, but not limited to, the North American Land Cover and Land Cover Change, North American Major Roads, and North American Protected Areas map layers, as well as creating brand new layers. Additional activities and resources will also be dedicated to improving the accessibility, visibility and reach of this online mapping resource to the North American public and beyond.

25. Available at: <www.cec.org/north-american-environmental-atlas/>



North American Land Change Monitoring System

The North American Land Change Monitoring System (NALCMS)²⁶ is an ongoing collaborative initiative between the CEC and the Governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States and their respective mapping agencies to monitor land cover and its change over time at the North American level. Land cover refers to the classification of surface cover on the ground, whether forest, urban infrastructure, bodies of water or agricultural land, etc., which helps to distinguish natural and anthropogenic features. The NALCMS products depict information about land cover and land cover change in a seamless and consistent way across North America by assembling and harmonizing national geospatial datasets.

26. Available at: www.cec.org/north-american-land-change-monitoring-system/



North American Environmental Atlas – Land Cover 2020, 30m

NALCMS provides valuable indicators to help the three countries better understand the dynamics of land cover and its changes over time and can be used in analyses for decision-making for various applications, such as carbon sequestration analysis, wildlife habitat mapping, ecosystem monitoring, environmental planning, water quality assessments, and evaluation of biofuels production potential.

Activities will be undertaken in 2024 to update the North American land cover and land cover change datasets with the latest classification methodologies and publish these datasets as part of the North American Environmental Atlas. These activities will also include the development of promotional and outreach material to connect with existing and new geospatial practitioners and engage them in the use of the NALCMS set of products, as well as strengthening the long-standing collaboration between the CEC and its NALCMS governmental partners.



Public Participation and Engagement Mechanisms

Public participation and engagement are at the core of the CEC mission. For 30 years since its inception, the CEC has developed a strong network of individuals and organizations who have been engaged through different mechanisms including the implementation of projects, initiatives, grant programs and participation in the annual Council session, JPAC public forums and consultations, youth programs, outreach and partnership activities and through the Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process. Furthermore, the importance of achieving *Diverse and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation* was identified as a cross-cutting theme in the CEC Strategic Plan 2021–2025, especially regarding private sector engagement, the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous perspectives, youth, vulnerable populations and environmental justice, gender and diversity considerations.

In 2024, the CEC will continue identifying opportunities for collaboration to increase the inclusive engagement of key sectors and enhance the impact of its work. It will explore and promote partnership efforts to leverage resources effectively. Additionally, the CEC will strive to increase its visibility by raising awareness of North American environmental priorities and collaboration, showcasing its unique role as a facilitator and convener, and setting an example for other global regions.

Throughout 2024, the CEC will strengthen its commitment to finding innovative approaches and tools to promote ever more diverse and inclusive engagement, including with youth, 2SLGBTQIA+²⁷ communities, private sector actors and other key North American constituents. This includes promoting meaningful engagement activities with individuals, communities, organizations and businesses by identifying opportunities to share knowledge of emerging environmental priorities and disseminating best practices and tools to better address our region's environmental challenges. The CEC will also build and expand networks with these actors to encourage actions to address environmental priorities. To achieve these objectives, the CEC's efforts will be guided by the overarching 2021–2025 Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Strategy, the 2024–2025 Youth Engagement Strategy, and the Private Sector Engagement Strategy. Additionally, the Partnerships Action Plan and Reference Guide will keep informing our partnership efforts to support the implementation of the CEC's 2021–2025 Strategic Plan.

27. The acronym 2SLGBTQIA+ stands for "Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other sexually and gender diverse individuals."



31st Annual Council Session and JPAC Public Forum



Every year, the CEC Council holds a public meeting during its annual Council Session. Council public sessions offer a unique opportunity for individuals and organizations to engage in-person or remotely in a dialogue with Council members and share their views on relevant topics and issues.

From 24 to 26 June 2024, the CEC will convene for its thirty-first regular session in Wilmington, North Carolina. #CEC31 will bring together North America's top environmental officials and the public-at-large to learn from and engage with environmental justice (EJ) advocates, Indigenous and community leaders, experts, youth, activists and others in a hybrid meeting under the theme *Strengthening Environmental Justice through Community Empowerment*.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the CEC. The Council Session will showcase the work and impact of the CEC over three decades, highlighting the key role of collaborators and partners, as well as the expertise, capacity and unique positioning of the CEC to respond to future environmental challenges.

In 2024, the Council public meeting will pursue the following objectives, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2021–2025:

- Offer a unique opportunity for citizens to engage in-person or remotely in a dialogue with Council members and share their views on relevant topics and issues.
- Offer the public a direct opportunity to learn about trilateral environmental collaboration in the context of liberalized trade and integrated economies.
- Provide an effective forum for discussion by using the best digital tools available.
- Promote the visibility of CEC initiatives.





CEC

#3Countries1Environment

30th Anniversary of the CEC

More than thirty years ago, on 14 September 1993, the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC), a side agreement that created the CEC and entered into force alongside the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), received its final signature in Ottawa.

In celebration of the CEC's 30th anniversary, encompassing three decades of trilateral cooperation to conserve and protect the North American environment, the CEC will highlight its unique role promoting collaboration, its relevance fostering capacity building, developing tools, and facilitating inclusive engagement. The anniversary will also serve to showcase the important role of CEC collaborators and partners and will promote the North American region as a model for regional cooperation.

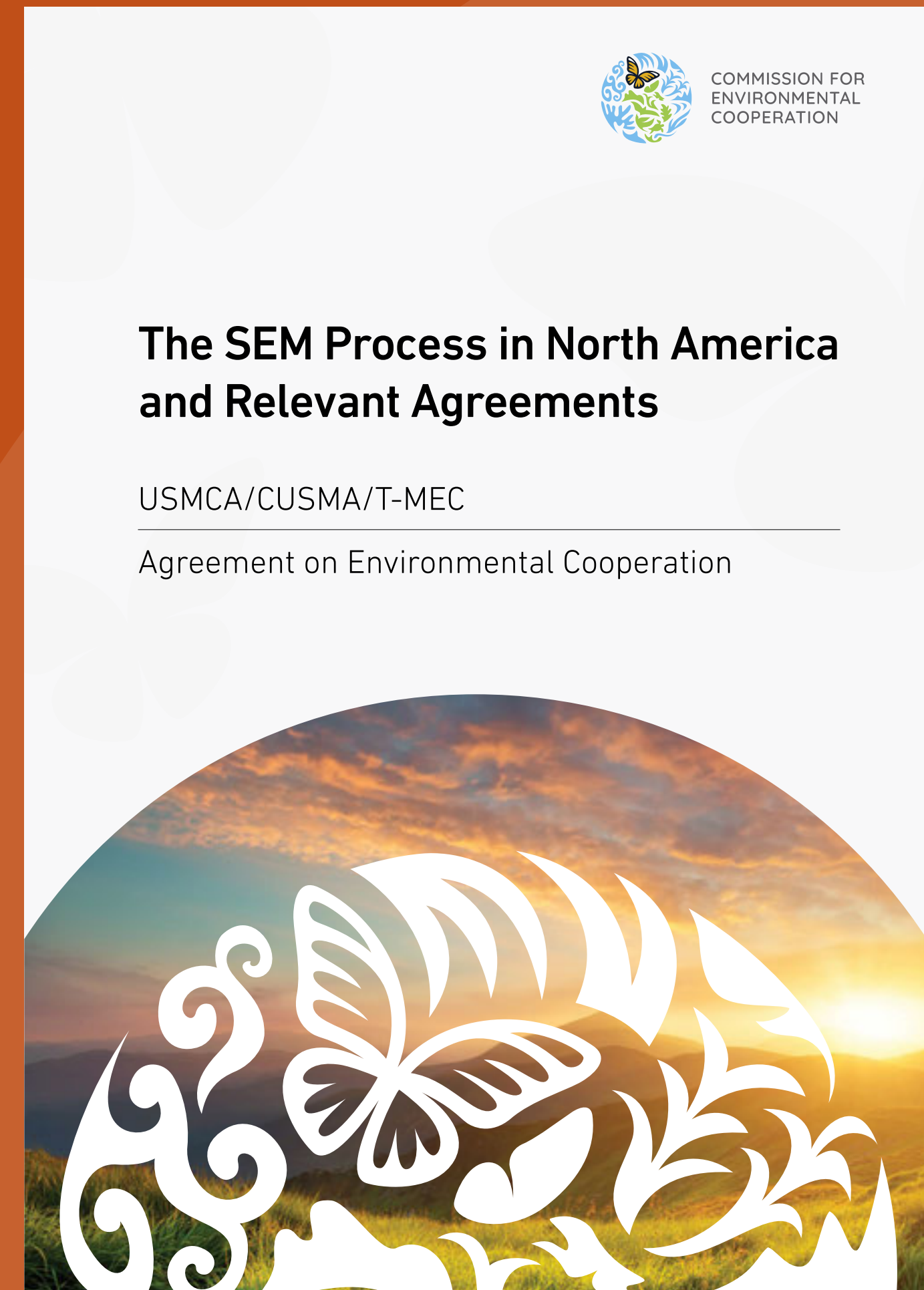
Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) Activities

The Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process is a mechanism originally established under the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation that allows any person or entity in one of the three countries to raise concerns about an alleged failure of any of the three Parties to effectively enforce its environmental laws. The process has continued and is now governed by Articles 24.27 and 24.28 of the environment chapter of the Trade Agreement (CUSMA/T-MEC/USMCA). The SEM process promotes transparency and public participation by providing information to enhance understanding of the enforcement of environmental law in North America. The CEC Secretariat is responsible for implementing key stages of this process as per the Environmental Cooperation Agreement and the Trade Agreement. Please find more information about SEM [here](#)²⁸.

28. Available at: <www.cec.org/submissions/>

In 2024, the CEC will address the following objectives, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2021–2025:

- Ensure transparency throughout the SEM process.
- Promote a better understanding of the SEM process.
- Make the filing of submissions from the public simple and straightforward.
- Foster public discourse regarding compliance with and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.
- Continue our engagement and learning with external actors and strengthen our relationship with other transparency and accountability mechanisms as well as compliance and enforcement working groups.





Loggerhead Turtle

Factual Record Regarding Submission SEM-20-001

Submitted to Council in accordance with Article 24.28(5) of the *Agreement between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada*



As part of the Council's efforts to promote transparency and the information-sharing focus of the SEM process, in 2024 the Parties agreed to continue meeting regularly to discuss next steps for the active submissions and assess how to streamline aspects of the SEM process.

In 2024, the Legal Affairs and SEM Unit will finalize and publish the *Loggerhead Turtle* and the *Hydraulic Fracturing in Nuevo Leon* factual records and will undertake the development of any new factual records as instructed by the Council.²⁹ The Secretariat will continue processing other active submissions.

In early 2024, the CEC will publish the independent, long-term impact assessment of the SEM process developed by the Environmental Law Institute. Other activities will include an annual meeting with other Secretariats in the Americas charged with the implementation of similar submissions processes under trade agreements with the United States, and an event in Montreal with the University of British Columbia to bring together academics and practitioners to produce a volume on the USMCA and Sustainable Development. The Secretariat may also host or participate in events to announce the publication of any factual records published in 2024.

²⁹. See Registry of Submissions, available at: <www.cec.org/submissions-on-enforcement/>.



 Esteban Escamilla
JPAC Chair

Joint Public Advisory Committee Activities

JPAC is committed to supporting the CEC’s mission of facilitating effective cooperation and public participation to conserve, protect and enhance the North American environment. As such, it will continue to support efforts to have diverse public participation in the various CEC activities and its cooperative work program, especially through the organization of events and public consultations, among others. The CEC’s Strategic Plan 2021–2025, the Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA), and Chapter 24 of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement all establish broad areas of cooperation in the North American region. Based on these, and with Indigenous Knowledge (IK), including Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous perspectives as cross-cutting themes, JPAC will focus its efforts in 2024 on the following:

- Increase collaboration with the other CEC constituent bodies and the TEK Expert Group (TEKEG) and other key actors in the region.
- Implement the JPAC-led initiative on *Advancing Responsible Purchasing of Wood Products*.
- Address the climate crisis by supporting the Parties’ efforts to address the triple planetary crisis and continue to build on efforts to increase knowledge sharing, public dialogue and engagement in North America at its events, on climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Continue to support the TEKEG in the final implementation phase of the project *Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America*.
- Under trade and environment, identify issues of common interest and opportunities for collaboration to inform current and future CEC work, including on sustainable trade models, market-based strategies to address climate change and sustainable production in different sectors, among others.

To achieve this, JPAC members will carry out the following activities:

- JPAC Public Forum (hybrid) on 24 June, in the margins of the Council Session in Wilmington, North Carolina, United States, which will center on “Strengthening Environmental Justice through Community Empowerment.”
- JPAC Regular Session 24-02 in the United States.

Throughout all activities, JPAC will seek to integrate a Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) approach into its work and activities, as part of its commitment to address inequity and respond to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by marginalized and disadvantaged groups and individuals. A strong emphasis will continue to be given to the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, while being respectful of relationships with Indigenous communities. This will include the integration of TEK, when appropriate, based on free, prior, informed, and culturally appropriate consent. Please find more information about JPAC [here](#)³⁰.

30. Available at: <www.cec.org/about/joint-public-advisory-committee/>.



Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group Activities

Working with the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group has had an invaluable impact on the CEC's work, by contributing to an improved understanding of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and TEK practices in North America.

The Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG),³¹ created in 2015, is the first Traditional Ecological Knowledge panel to provide advice to an intergovernmental organization such as the CEC. The creation of the group recognizes the importance of preserving the traditional knowledge and practices of local and Indigenous communities, to help address the effects of climate change, and contribute to the conservation and protection of biodiversity, as well as the sustainable use of natural resources.

31. For more information about the TEKEG, please visit: www.cec.org/about/traditional-ecological-knowledge-expert-group/

In 2024, the TEKEG will center its activities on the following objectives, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2021–2025:

- Continue to promote opportunities to apply IK/TEK to the CEC's operations and recommendations.
- Enhance efforts to strengthen the engagement of the TEKEG and Indigenous Peoples in CEC activities.
- Advance the integration of IK/TEK, Indigenous perspectives, and Indigenous-led stewardship practices across CEC operations.
- Enhance our understanding of Indigenous environmental, social and economic concerns.
- Develop a CEC Indigenous Strategy and a Protocol for Engaging Indigenous Communities.
- Develop principles for engaging and incorporating IK/TEK.

The CEC will continue working with the TEKEG to inform, support and enhance CEC engagement activities and identify and incorporate IK, including TEK, as well as Indigenous perspectives and stewardship practices, into its activities and recommendations. In 2024, this will be done through the completion of the TEKEG-led initiative on *Indigenous Approaches to Freshwater Management in North America*.

The TEKEG developed a new initiative in 2023 on the *Resilience of Indigenous People's Food Systems*, and implementation will begin in March 2024. In addition to these efforts, the TEKEG will continue providing advice throughout the next phases of design and implementation for the *Community-Led Environmental Education Initiative for Biocultural Heritage Protection* initiative, and will continue working with the CEC Secretariat, to develop a CEC Indigenous Strategy and protocol for Engaging Indigenous Communities.

Outreach and Partnerships Activities

The CEC recognizes the importance of increasing both its regional and international presence and highlighting its unique role in promoting trilateral cooperation in North America and serving as a platform to disseminate North American best practices at a global scale. Activities aimed at ensuring sustained, meaningful and inclusive engagement and strengthened relationships with individuals, communities, organizations and businesses, and to develop and maintain collaborations and partnerships, will be managed to optimize resources and impact.

Based on the 2021–2025 Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Strategy, during 2024, the CEC will address the following objectives:

- The CEC audience will be clearly identified and understood
- The CEC network of key actors will be increasingly aware and engaged
- The CEC work and key successes will be apparent and shared with target audiences
- The CEC's collaborators and partners will be highlighted
- Solid and broad partnerships will be established



Outreach and partnership efforts will continue to focus on increasing the CEC's visibility, raising awareness of key environmental issues, and enhancing the CEC's unique role in facilitating collaboration. Guided by the *2021–2025 Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Strategy* and the *Partnerships Action Plan and Reference Guide*, the CEC will continue to seek innovative and inclusive approaches for meaningful engagement and facilitate collaborative opportunities to facilitate knowledge sharing opportunities and build stronger networks.



Outreach efforts will include the development and implementation of more awareness and behavior-change campaigns, co-hosted events, implementation of innovative tools to promote a diverse, inclusive and meaningful engagement of key actors, collaborators and partners. Target audiences include youth (see below), gender-diverse, other intersectional vulnerable communities, as well as Indigenous communities. Outreach will include expanding and reinvigorating the CEC's engagement efforts that align with the Private Sector Engagement Strategy.

Partnership opportunities will include more joint statements, events, efforts, videos, partnership agreements and memoranda of understanding to promote regional and global discussions, recognize the value of collaboration and partnerships and strengthen the commitment to leverage efforts to support key actors and environmental topics. A special focus will be given to identify opportunities for partnerships to support the implementation of regional and international frameworks and position the North American region as a leader on environmental topics.

Youth Engagement

Youth Innovation Challenge

Since 2017, the CEC has hosted the annual Youth Innovation Challenge (YIC), a contest that invites youth, aged 18 to 30, from Canada, Mexico and the United States, to propose innovative solutions for improving both the environment and the economy in North America. The CEC's YIC was a central pillar of the CEC's youth initiatives promoting youth engagement. It supported 23 youth-led projects across North America, investing C\$225,000 in seed funding, mentorship, networking opportunities for the winners, and increased exposure of their winning projects on CEC's social media platforms and website.

While celebrating the successes of the YIC, the CEC acknowledges the challenges of reaching diverse youth in North America and keeping them engaged over the years. In 2024, the last cohort of YIC winners will finish their mentorship and with it this youth initiative will become inactive allowing for a new youth program (the Generation of Environmental Leaders Program that will be presented below) to be implemented. This is in line with the CEC's Strategic Plan 2021–2025, the Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Strategy, and the Executive Director's mandate. It also follows the recommendations from the YIC long-term impact assessment.



2024–2025 Youth Engagement Strategy

During 2024, the CEC will develop and implement its 2024–2025 Youth Engagement Strategy (YES), which main objectives are to improve existing youth activities to foster innovation, build community capacity and ensure long-term sustainability of its youth efforts. This strategy emphasizes the need to meaningfully engaging youth, accelerating knowledge-sharing, raise awareness and provide opportunities for skill development and network-building.

Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP)

During 2024, the Generation of Environmental Leaders Program (GELP) will be launched. This new program will support young leaders in developing the necessary skills and accessing seed funding to make a real and meaningful impact in their communities and beyond. The GELP will invite teams of young leaders from North America to support communities and preserve our shared waters, lands and air. The program will be aimed at youth who are 18–35 years old and are part of a team such as, but not exclusively, youth-led organizations, youth-led associations, nongovernmental organizations, not-for-profit youth-led businesses, and teams of young innovators and entrepreneurs interested in building their businesses. Youth leaders from Canada, Mexico or the United States are invited to submit their solutions. In addition to building capacity for youth, this new CEC program will accelerate youth leadership by expanding youth environmental networks and provide seed funding for creative solutions to flourish, particularly at the local level. As part of the year-long mentorship program, the leaders will also engage in knowledge-sharing sessions with experts to advance their solutions and contribute to a North American community of knowledge.



Youth Engagement Week

The CEC is seeking to amplify the voices of youth who are at the forefront of addressing environmental challenges in North America. In alignment with CEC’s Strategic Plan 2021–2025 cross-cutting approach: “Diverse and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation”, and with the Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships Strategy’s strategic goal: “Increase the CEC’s visibility among stakeholders,” and objective #2: “Key stakeholders should be increasingly aware and engaged”; in 2023, the CEC hosted its first Youth Engagement Week (YEW). The YEW represents an opportunity to facilitate meaningful engagement with youth. With a view to sustaining this youth engagement, youth leaders from across the three countries have meaningfully engaged since this gathering and worked alongside the CEC at multiple CEC events and in various CEC workstreams.

During 2024, the CEC will host its second YEW. The event will aim to engage with young individuals from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, to learn from their expertise on youth-led initiatives, share priorities and youth engagement approaches at the CEC and have an opportunity to inspire change at a regional level.



Enhancing Visibility and Public Awareness of CEC's Work

To increase public participation in the implementation of this OP and to harness the momentum building across North America for action to counter the climate, biodiversity and pollution crises, the CEC will communicate with an array of target audiences on its trilateral activities and priorities as well as on issues of common concern and interest for Canada, Mexico and the United States. In 2024, the CEC will address the following objectives, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2021–2025:

- Raise awareness of the CEC.
- Build engaged communities in Canada, Mexico and the United States, both online and offline.
- Position the CEC as a prime North American information portal for environmental data, information, and analyses covering the region.

These objectives will be achieved through CEC publications, media releases, more frequent newsletters, new audiovisual products, participation in events, more robust social media, a modern web presence and by utilizing emerging regional and international opportunities.

The overarching goal of the CEC's communications efforts will be a growing and widespread recognition, both regionally and globally, of the CEC's values, relevance, leadership, and distinct role in catalyzing sustainable development. The three guiding objectives of the Strategic Communications Action Plan will be to enhance visibility, public awareness, and understanding of the CEC's work and role in environmental cooperation and public participation; modernize access to information for decision-makers and interested individuals and groups that can make a difference with their actions; and improve modes of communication to facilitate public participation and promote diverse and inclusive engagement.

Additional efforts to raise awareness increase the visibility of the organization will include showcasing CEC's work in national and international fora for the North American region, partnering to co-host joint events and promoting participation and engagement in all CEC events.

Administration and Budget

For the CEC to deliver on its priorities, it must also align its operations (which include human resources, information systems support, meetings services and finance) to better support the work programs and promote workplace values, while striving to maximize efficiencies and promote sustainability.



Human Resources

As stated before, the Secretariat staff is comprised of 45 employees, with almost 10 employees focused on operations and administrative support.

In 2024, the CEC will continue its efforts to support an inclusive and diverse workplace by implementing updates to policies and procedures. This year, it will also roll out its Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) Strategy, necessitating adjustments to internal policies and processes.

With growing demands from submissions and other work programs, the CEC will hire a SEM Officer and an EJ Officer (in the 4th quarter) in 2024, along with an Assistant for the Outreach and Communications Teams.

In response to feedback from the *2023 Employee Survey* and recognizing that 40 percent of Secretariat staff have been with the CEC for less than three years, the CEC will focus more on supporting employee development in 2024. In early 2024, and to ensure ongoing modernization and streamlining of processes, the CEC will conduct a review of its Human Resource function. This will also enable the identification of medium-term opportunities.

Meeting Services

Considering the growing number of meetings, both hybrid and in person, the CEC will continue to improve internal processes for meeting planning and train staff to control costs and enhance the efficiency of meeting planning. One approach will be through the February 2024 update to its Manual for Meeting Services, with targeted training for project teams.

Meetings also significantly contribute to the CEC's environmental footprint. To make progress in reducing this footprint, the CEC will strive to ensure that the hotel venues and suppliers it contracts adhere to the highest sustainability standards.

Information System Infrastructure

Annual updates to CEC's operating systems, cybersecurity, and application software are essential. In 2024, it will be necessary to replace outdated information technology (IT) equipment. More importantly, with a fully staffed IT Team, the CEC will focus on developing a Business Continuity Plan to prevent vulnerabilities in its IT infrastructure and network, thus improving the resilience of its operations.

Accounting/Finance

To promote sound financial management and reporting the CEC will work during 2024 with a new auditor (the first in 30 years) with greater expertise in providing targeted support and advice on financial management to non-profits.

During 2024, the CEC will publish the updated CEC's 2014 Procurement Manual on its website. Considering the rising costs of services and need to streamline contracting processes, it was necessary to update CEC's 2014 Procurement Manual, including limits for sole source contracting, to reflect current realities and practices.

With fixed contributions and growing demands on our budget, the CEC will continue working during 2024 to explore ways to partner with select actors to share expenses on targeted activities.

During 2024, the CEC's budget and operating expenses will remain relatively stable (except for salaries and benefits), considering efforts to improve internal efficiencies.

Sustainable Operations

During 2024, the Secretariat will continue the work that began in 2023 regarding the development of a comprehensive office sustainability review. The CEC will prioritize integrating eco-friendly practices into its operations, encompassing everything from energy consumption and waste management to travel and supplies. As a pivotal step in this journey, our first deliverable for 2024 will be the formulation and implementation of a robust Sustainability Policy. This policy will articulate specific measures to decrease the CEC's ecological footprint, including enhancing operational efficiency and reducing resource consumption. By promoting this workplace initiative, the CEC aims to inspire its team members and relevant actors to actively participate in its sustainability journey. The CEC will make the policy available to the public on its website.

Strategic Planning, Measuring Performance and Reporting on Progress

Planning, monitoring, and reporting are crucial activities that will be put into practice through the CEC's core values of transparency, excellence, collaboration, inclusiveness, and integrity. In 2024, the CEC will address the following objectives, aligned with the Strategic Plan 2021–2025:

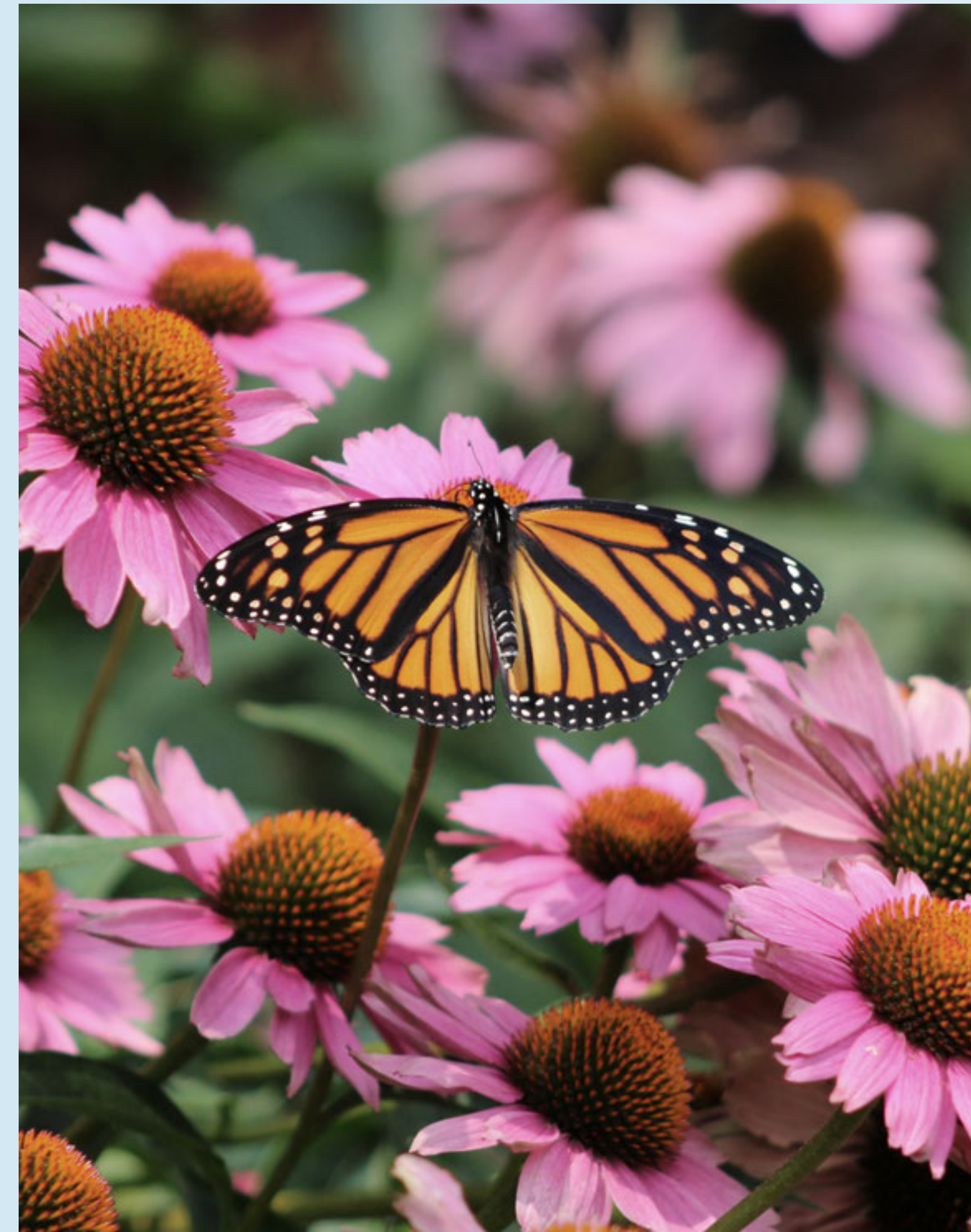
- Demonstrate progress in meeting the CEC's environmental goals and objectives.
- Enhance the CEC's performance, accountability, and reporting ability.
- Re-direct action to meet the set goals and objectives.
- Evaluate the CEC's activities and projects.
- Share relevant accomplishments.
- Identify and document the long-term impact of initiatives in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.
- Evaluate the impact of the CEC's activities.



In addition to publishing this Operational Plan, the CEC will publish its Annual Report for 2023. The Secretariat will continue reporting regularly on the development of the cooperative projects and initiatives and providing quarterly updates on the implementation of projects and initiatives. During 2024, the CEC will also provide technical support to the Parties in defining new projects and initiatives.

During 2024, the CEC will continue using its strategic key performance indicators, strengthened by user-based evaluation methods. This will allow key actors and collaborators to contribute to the assessment of our efforts, as it will encourage the participative audience to be involved in the activities. This approach calls for evolving, innovative thinking about the way we incorporate a wide diversity of voices and will bring about improvements and positive changes in existing practices. These strategic key performance indicators will provide the CEC with more information about the impact of our cooperative work and in creating collaboration and fostering inclusiveness.

In addition to this monitoring of project performance, the CEC will conduct two long-term impact assessments of cooperative projects, which should generate valuable lessons to improve future work. Finally, the CEC will publish the findings of the long-term impact assessments conducted in 2023.





An Effective Model of Collaboration to Address the Triple Planetary Crises

There has never been a more urgent time to advance trilateral North American cooperation to conserve, protect and restore our shared environment. As North America's foremost environmental organization, the CEC's work and its mission³² are of paramount importance to this challenge and to tackling the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Through its work over the last 30 years, the CEC has been recognized as a model of successful collaboration. It provides a neutral forum for examining emerging and complex issues, and possible strategies to address them. Much of the CEC's success can be attributed to its ability to act as a convener to facilitate consensus among experts and policy makers in the three countries.

In 2024, the CEC will continue building on the successful collaboration among the three countries to deliver a bold agenda for action to address the growing environmental challenges and begin setting the course for the future. The CEC will also seek new partnerships and the engagement of a broader range of local and sectoral actors to further its reach and ensure tangible successes, both locally and regionally.

32. See page 1.

