

CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS

Through the [North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation](#) (NAAEC), Canada, Mexico, and the United States recognized the interrelationship of their environments and committed to increasing cooperation among themselves to better conserve, protect and enhance the environment, including wild flora and fauna (Preamble and Article 1(c)).

Biodiversity and ecosystem conservation has been one of the main areas of focus of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) over the nearly 20 years of its existence. The CEC has made significant contributions to conservation in North America by deepening the understanding of wild species and spaces shared across the region; facilitating joint planning to conserve North American wildlife and its habitats, with a focus on migratory species and species of common conservation concern; helping to build capacity, particularly in Mexico; and creating trinational biodiversity and ecosystem conservation initiatives and networks.

Bird Conservation in North America

Cooperative efforts for the protection and conservation of migratory birds were one of the first areas of focus of the CEC, beginning with a project to identify [North American Important Bird Areas](#) (1995–1999).

Migratory birds were also the focus of the Secretariat’s first Independent Report under NAAEC Article 13, on the death of thousands of birds in Mexico’s [Silva Reservoir](#) (1995).

[North American Bird Conservation Initiative](#) (NABCI) – This cooperative initiative was established by the CEC in 1999 and is now embedded in government agencies in all three countries, representing one of the CEC’s best success stories in “fledging” a working group. NABCI aims to ensure that populations and habitats of North America’s birds are protected, restored and enhanced through coordinated efforts at international, national, regional and local levels guided by sound science and effective management.

North American Conservation Strategy and Action Plans

Much of the work of the CEC to conserve biodiversity has focused on facilitating regional strategic planning and building a collaborative North American conservation community.

In 2000, JPAC provided Advice to Council [00-01](#), regarding the “Questionnaire for Stakeholder Feedback” on the document *A Strategic Plan for the Conservation of Biodiversity for the Commission for Environmental Cooperation*.

In 2001, the Council created the **Biodiversity Conservation Working Group** through [Council Resolution 01-03](#), tasking it with the completion and implementation of the CEC Conservation of Biodiversity program’s Strategic Plan for North America.

The [Council](#) adopted the [Strategic Plan for North American Cooperation in the Conservation of Biodiversity](#) in 2003. The main goals of the Strategic Plan are the following:

1. Ecologically Significant Regions – Promote cooperation for the conservation and maintenance of North American regions of ecological significance.
2. Conservation of Species – Promote the conservation of North American migratory and transboundary species, and other species identified by the Parties.
3. Assessment and Information Sharing – Facilitate data- and information-sharing across North America and promote integrated monitoring and assessment, to increase understanding of the state of North American biodiversity.
4. Capacity Building and Training – Facilitate communication, networking, and identification and sharing of best practices, priorities, and opportunities for education and training.
5. Responding to Threats – Promote collaborative responses to threats facing North American ecosystems, habitats and species.
6. Biodiversity Conservation and Trade – Identify and evaluate potential collaborative opportunities for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of biological resources that arise from regional trade.

The CEC's [North American Conservation Action Plans](#) (NACAPs) were formulated by the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States, in cooperation with scientists, academics and environmental groups. The selection of the eight species targeted was based on a variety of factors, including a common understanding of the threats faced by each species, their geographic location and profile, and the feasibility of success:

- [Vaquita](#)
- [Monarch butterfly](#)
- [Leatherback turtle](#)
- [Humpback whale](#)
- [Pink-footed shearwater](#)
- [Burrowing owl](#)
- [Ferruginous hawk](#)
- [Black-tailed prairie dog](#)

A list of 17 Species of Common Conservation Concern (SCCC) [announced by the CEC Council in 2000](#) also included: Sonoran Pronghorn, Lesser Long-nosed Bat, Mexican Long-nosed Bat, Mexican Black Bear, Gray Wolf, Peregrine Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike, Piping Plover, Mountain Plover, Northern Spotted Owl, Mexican Spotted Owl, Golden-cheeked Warbler, Whooping Crane, California Condor.

In addition to the NACAP developed for the monarch butterfly, monarch-related projects included sponsoring [Monarch Net](#) and support for citizen science. In 2007 the [Council resolved](#) to strengthen trilateral collaboration to promote sustainable livelihoods in support of conservation of [monarch butterfly](#) over-wintering and flyway habitat in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The [Council also instructed](#) the Secretariat to initiate collaborative actions to recover the [vaquita](#) and promote sustainable local livelihoods related to its habitat.

Conserving Marine Species and Spaces of Common Concern

[Implementing the Global Programme of Action in North America](#) – The CEC supported two pilot projects stemming from the United Nations Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land Based Activities (GPA), adopted in 1995.

[Baja California to the Bering Sea](#) – This collaborative effort between the CEC and the Marine Conservation Biology Institute (MCBI) mapped 28 priority conservation areas for this region and identified a new set of flagship spaces for North American cooperation.

In 2008, [Council resolved](#) to continue trilateral cooperation to protect marine biodiversity in North America by fostering an effective North American marine protected areas (MPAs) network.

The [North American Marine Protected Areas Network](#) (NAMPAN) is a network of both important marine places and the institutions and people connected with those places. NAMPAN's website features information on North America's marine ecoregions, priority conservation areas, MPA condition reports, and species of common conservation concern.

[Marine Ecoregions of North America](#) – This book, produced in 2009, classifies North America's oceans and coastal waters into 24 ecological regions according to oceanographic features and geographically distinct groups of species, describing them through maps, photos and detailed information on habitats, ecosystems and human activities.

Conserving North American Grasslands

The CEC has long worked on the conservation of the grasslands shared by Canada, Mexico and the United States. [Initial work](#) concentrated on identifying [North American grassland priority conservation areas](#) and species of common concern, on creating capacity for grasslands conservation in Mexico and on building a trilateral conservation strategy.

As noted above, [North American Conservation Action Plans](#) were developed for three grassland species: [Burrowing owl](#), [Ferruginous hawk](#) and [Black-tailed prairie dog](#).

The CEC continues to work on grasslands conservation under the Healthy Communities and Ecosystems five-year strategic objective, of the 2010–2015 Strategic Plan. The focus is to promote both sustainable production and conservation in the North American grasslands region: [North American Grasslands: Management Initiatives and Partnerships to Enhance Ecosystem and Community Resilience](#).

Information in Support of Conservation

The CEC has developed a series of maps, databases and information systems to support conservation efforts across North America:

- [Marine Ecoregions of North America](#)
- [Terrestrial Ecoregions of North America](#)
- [North American Environmental Atlas](#) (Map viewer), which is the repository/host for all geospatial data and maps and includes much more than biodiversity data.
- [North American Land Change Monitoring System](#) (NALCMS)
- Before the establishment of the Global Biodiversity Information Facility ([GBIF](#)), the CEC participated in the North American Biodiversity Information Network ([NABIN](#)), an online collaborative effort to manage and share biodiversity information across the region.

Other 1994–2010 Projects

At its 2001 Regular Session, the [CEC Council agreed](#) to undertake an initiative to analyze issues related to “local water pricing and watershed management, and promote accessible, affordable technologies for improving water management.” In October 2002, the CEC held a [Public Workshop on Freshwater Issues in North America](#). A background paper on [Groundwater in North America](#) was produced for this meeting, followed by JPAC Advice to Council 02-10, on “The CEC and the Management of Freshwater in North America.”

[Conserving Biodiversity through Trade](#) – This project sought to enhance the availability and quality of information on best practices and analysis of methods to harness emerging green market opportunities, with a focus on [shade-grown coffee](#) and [sustainable palm](#).¹

In November 2006, JPAC hosted a [Roundtable on Conservation and Trade](#) and provided Advice to Council [07-01](#).

Another area of focus has been cooperation with regard to [alien invasive species](#) related to trade and other economic activity. The CEC has supported the establishment of the [North American Invasive Species Network \(NAISN\)](#). In April 2009, the CEC published its [Trinational Risk Assessment Guidelines for Aquatic Alien Invasive Species](#).

The CEC has also produced or supported [other publications](#) related to the conservation of biodiversity, including three independent reports related to conservation issues: [Silva Reservoir](#), [Ribbon of Life](#) and [Maize and Biodiversity](#).

NAAEC requires the CEC Secretariat to “periodically address the state of the environment in the territories of the Parties.” The state of biodiversity and ecosystems was discussed in the first of these reports, published in [2001](#). In 2008, the CEC published [The North American Mosaic](#). Among other biodiversity conservation issues, the report addresses invasive species, oceans and coasts, species of common conservation concern, shared water resources and water quantity and quality.

Also in 2008, the CEC held a conference on the future of the North American environment, including its biodiversity, projected to the year 2030, and produced a report that grew out of the conference proceedings—[North American Environmental Outlook to 2030](#).

CEC’s 2010–2015 Priorities: Healthy Communities and Ecosystems

Over the 2010–2015 period, the intent of Canada, Mexico and the United States has been to focus their cooperative biodiversity conservation work through the CEC under the strategic objective of promoting healthy communities and ecosystems. Projects include(d) the following:

With respect to invasive species, in 2011 the CEC published the report [Aquatic Invasive Species in the Río Bravo / Laguna Madre Ecological Region](#).

¹ A separate *Backgrounder on Trade and the Environment* provides additional information on these projects.

In 2012, the CEC released [Scientific Guidelines for Designing Resilient Marine Protected Area Networks in a Changing Climate](#), produced in collaboration with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and based on the work of 33 of North America's top experts. A [series of films](#) was also produced, through a unique collaboration of marine protected area agencies and aquarium learning centers in the three countries of North America. The videos illuminate the vital role these areas play in sustaining communities that depend on marine resources, providing exciting recreational experiences, enhancing our scientific understanding, and helping to conserve habitat, restore fisheries and protect species. The guidelines and videos were followed in January 2013 by the publication of a [guide for planners and managers](#).

[Big Bend-Río Bravo Collaboration for Transboundary Landscape Conservation—North American Invasive Species Network \(NAISN\)](#) – This project aims to foster transboundary conservation in this area, including a binational assessment of priority conservation areas, target species and restoration tools for the region, and management of alien invasive species.