

# Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Renewing our trilateral commitment and implementing  
the new Free Trade Agreement and its supporting  
Environmental Cooperation Agreement

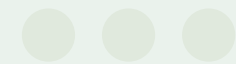


CEC  
CCA  
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Canada, Mexico, and the United States  
**THREE COUNTRIES, ONE ENVIRONMENT**

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)



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.

CEC's Renewed Mission

## Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Context	4
1.2	The Free Trade Agreement's Chapter 24 and the Environmental Cooperation Agreement	5
1.3	Who We Are and How We Work	6
1.4	What is the Strategic Plan?	7
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Pillars for 2021-2025</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Clean Air, Land and Water	12
2.2	Preventing and Reducing Pollution in the Marine Environment	14
2.3	Circular Economy and Sustainable Materials Management	18
2.4	Shared Ecosystems and Species	20
2.5	Resilient Economies and Communities	22
2.6	Effective Enforcement of Environmental Laws	24
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Cross-cutting Approaches</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1	Innovative and Effective Solutions	29
3.2	Diverse and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation	30
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Stakeholder Participation and Engagement Mechanisms</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1	Submissions on Enforcement Matters	34
4.2	Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC)	35
4.3	Council Public Sessions	37
4.4	Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG)	37
4.5	Cooperative Projects	37
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Communications and Outreach</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Measuring Performance and Reporting on Progress</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>41</b>



# 1.0 Introduction



Prime Minister Trudeau, President Trump, and President López Obrador are anticipating the implementation of the strongest set of environmental provisions in a free trade agreement ever – emphasizing environmental consideration at the core of international negotiations.

Unveiling the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan for the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) marks a renewed commitment by Canada, Mexico and the United States (“the Parties”) to work together on pressing regional and global issues related to trade and the environment within the framework of a new trilateral free trade agreement<sup>1</sup>— and a new Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA). The Strategic Plan represents trilateral guidance on effective trilateral cooperation on environmental issues of common interest and concern.

The plan builds upon the cooperative work carried out under the 1994 North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) while incorporating the more ambitious areas of cooperation and commitments possible under the ECA. Moving forward, the CEC will encourage the involvement of all relevant sectors and public participation in the implementation of this strategic plan, while harnessing the momentum that is building across North America for concrete actions on the environment.

1. In Canada and Mexico, the trade agreement is referred to as CUSMA (Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement) and T-MEC (*Tratado entre México, Estados Unidos y Canadá*), respectively. In the US the trade agreement is referred to as USMCA (the United States, Mexico, Canada Agreement).



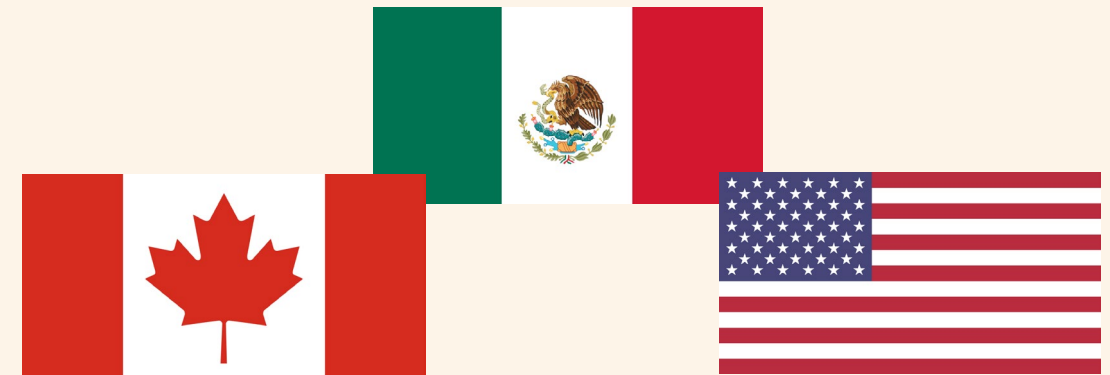
## 1.1 Context

More than 25 years have passed since the Governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States created the CEC when they established the NAAEC. During this period, the CEC has proven to be an effective instrument to facilitate sustained environmental cooperation between our countries for the conservation, protection and enhancement of the environment in our territories. The cooperative work program of the CEC has helped establish North American networks and build a wealth of expertise, tools, resources, and standards to support communities and governments in addressing common environmental challenges.

Through a continued determination to add value to environmental protection and natural resources conservation in North America, and new efforts to support the implementation of the free trade agreement, the CEC work program yields numerous benefits for our shared environment including our air, water, and a wide variety of ecosystems, as well as renewable and non-renewable energy sources.

The extent to which our governments share renewed, high priorities for trilateral cooperation to protect, conserve and enhance the North American environment is demonstrated by the expanded commitments and amplified areas of collaboration on environment-and trade-related issues in the **free trade agreement's** Environment Chapter (Chapter 24) and the ECA.

Over the last 25 years, North America's population has increased by more than 15% (to nearly 500 million people), while trade in the region (exports of all commodities) has increased by over 350% in the same period. As a result, the prospect of future generations relies on countries adopting today a sustainable approach to environmental management and economic prosperity. In North America, issues such as biodiversity loss, efficient use of natural resources, and waste reduction have become emerging priorities. They require effective cooperation, innovative tools and knowledge, and the ability to define solutions to respond efficiently and rapidly to fast-occurring environmental changes like extreme weather events.



## 1.2 The Free Trade Agreement's Chapter 24 and the Environmental Cooperation Agreement

The CEC is entering a pivotal moment in its history, as this new Strategic Plan represents a transition from the NAAEC to a reaffirmed key role under the **free trade agreement's** Chapter 24 and the ECA, thus giving it continuity and modernizing its approaches. The **free trade agreement's** Chapter 24 and the ECA are both responding to the need for strong environmental protection with an expansion of environmental commitments and priorities, and are creating new opportunities for strategic cooperation. Under the free trade agreement and the ECA, the CEC and its three constituent parts will remain the primary mechanism for facilitating trilateral environmental cooperation between Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

An item of notice in the **free trade agreement's** Chapter 24 is the creation of an Environment Committee, comprising representatives of each Party and responsible for overseeing implementation of Chapter 24. The Environment Committee periodically informs the CEC Council on implementation of the Chapter and provides input related to submissions on enforcement matters under Chapter 24, as appropriate.

The 2021-2025 Strategic Plan supports the objectives established by the Parties in these agreements, which recognize the role of environmental cooperation and the role of public participation in promoting mutually supportive trade and environmental policies. The strategic pillars set out in this strategic plan consider the free trade agreement's Chapter 24 and the activity areas outlined in Article 10 of the ECA (see annexes 1 and 2).

## 1.3 Who We Are and How We Work

The CEC has proven to be a unique organization, promoting a regional approach to environmental cooperation, and creating linkages between stakeholders across North America to address emerging and complex environmental and sustainable development issues.

The core functions of the CEC include promoting effective environmental enforcement in the three countries and fostering public participation and engagement in support of the conservation and enhancement of the North American environment.

The CEC has been an effective framework for promoting “win-win” approaches to the environment, economy, and trade. As part of the intergovernmental cooperative work program, the CEC has supported industry and businesses so that the private sector can improve its economic and environmental performance, and benefit from a greener economy.

### 1.3.1 Three Constituent Bodies (Council, Secretariat, JPAC)

The CEC is composed of a Council, a Secretariat and a Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC).

#### The Council

**is the governing body of the CEC and comprises cabinet-level or equivalent environmental representatives of each Party. In carrying out its functions, the Council may periodically exchange information with the Environment Committee established under the free trade agreement.**

#### The Secretariat

**provides technical, administrative and operational support to the Council and to committees and groups established by the Council. The Secretariat also offers a substantive and impartial resource to the Parties to cooperate trilaterally and effectively to implement the work program.**

#### The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC)

**consists of nine citizen volunteers (three from each country) representing diverse segments of society. Its role is to provide advice to the Council on matters within the scope of the ECA, and help promote and enhance public participation.**

### 1.3.2 A Shared Responsibility

The annual budget of the CEC is based on equal contributions from each Party, complemented by staff time and expertise from the three governments. Supplemental funding from the Parties or external sources may also be added to the core budget. Partnerships, linkages and channels are fundamental in broadening the scope and reach of the CEC’s work and leveraging resources. The CEC also recognizes that effective cooperation and management solutions will depend on respecting perspectives, knowledge, understanding, and practices of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

The CEC fosters inclusive and diverse public participation in its activities to create awareness of environmental and trade-related issues and of its own trilateral work, obtain advice on priorities and projects, and exchange information about key resources.

## 1.4 What is the Strategic Plan?

The CEC Strategic Plan establishes Council guidance and direction of the CEC’s efforts for the 2021-2025 period. It guides the development of the CEC’s operational plans (OP), which will include specific projects and detailed initiatives. The Strategic Plan is comprised of six thematic pillars, listed below.

CEC activities must be aligned with the Strategic Plan and be relevant to Parties’ shared goals. Impact at the local level, considering the different roles and responsibilities of different levels of government (federal, Indigenous, state/provincial, and municipal) is also pursued under the Strategic Plan.





# 2.0 Pillars for 2021-2025

In considering international, North American, and national challenges, the CEC Council has defined the following six strategic pillars for the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan:

- 1 Clear Air, Land and Water**, particularly addressing matters of mutual interest with respect to air quality and protection of the ozone layer.
- 2 Preventing and Reducing Pollution in the Marine Environment**, particularly taking action to prevent and reduce marine litter, including plastic litter and microplastics, and addressing ship pollution.
- 3 Circular Economy and Sustainable Materials Management**, particularly the use of flexible, voluntary mechanisms to protect the environment and natural resources, such as conservation and the sustainable use of those resources.
- 4 Shared Ecosystems and Species**, particularly the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and protection of ecosystems.
- 5 Resilient Economies and Communities**, including promoting environmental goods and services, improving environmental, economic and social performance, contributing to green growth and jobs, and encouraging sustainable development.
- 6 Effective Enforcement of Environmental Laws**, including promoting public awareness of environmental laws and policies, and enforcement and compliance procedures.





## 2.1 Clean Air, Land and Water

Air, land and water are inherently linked to the building blocks of life. Ensuring the quality and proper management of these resources is fundamental not only to protecting and improving the health of our citizens and natural ecosystems and species, but also to supporting sustainable economic prosperity.

Although significant reductions in air pollution have been achieved across North America in recent decades, air quality remains a significant concern due to smog-forming pollutants and other contaminants from industrial and non-industrial sources. Moreover, some of these pollutants can contribute to impacts on the ozone layer and affect human health, water quality, biodiversity, agriculture, and infrastructure. Improvements in air, land and water quality, and their downstream benefits, have had lasting impacts on all of our citizens.

Despite vast freshwater resources on the North American territory, several environmental and sustainability issues affect water security. An increase in the frequency of droughts, deforestation, forest fires and floods; changes in our climate; the release of toxic chemicals to surface waters; the depletion of groundwater; the litter and leakage of plastics, nutrients, and emerging pollutants into the water supply and years of land-use changes can have a direct impact on water quantity and quality and also cause long-term damage to aquatic ecosystems and communities in North America. As a result, the ability to meet the demand for a high-quality water supply for an increasing population and available to key economic sectors, such as agriculture, industry, energy, and transportation, is at risk.

In addressing the issues above, the CEC will build on its success in tracking pollutant releases and transfers, and improving air quality and chemicals management. Activities could include:

- exploring collaboration in air, land, and water pollution;
- exchanging best practices on clean technologies and nature-based solutions; and
- promoting integrated water, soil and chemical management solutions in border areas.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- scientific, technical and policy issues related to improving air quality, including information exchange and regulatory or policy approaches associated with pollutants of mutual concern such as particulate matter, ground-level ozone and its precursors, and methane;
- forest fire monitoring and information-sharing;
- control of ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and use of environmentally friendly alternatives in support of the Montreal Protocol;
- green chemistry and other clean technologies relevant to reducing pollutant releases from key sectors;
- comparability, quality, comprehensiveness, timeliness and accessibility of pollutant release data;
- cooperation on freshwater science, data and management, in relation to hydrometeorological events, water pollution, and other stressors;
- adoption of sustainable water practices in key economic sectors (agriculture, forestry, industry, mining, energy), including transboundary environmental impacts;
- water efficiency practices and standards in the public and private sectors;
- water reuse standards and regulations in all sectors: municipal wastewater, agriculture, industry, oil and gas produced water, and stormwater;
- sound management of chemicals in water, air, and land;
- regional coordination and tracking of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, including hazardous recyclables for environmentally sound management in support of bilateral and multilateral waste agreements;
- risks from poor environmental quality and associated impacts; and
- best practices in the mining sector, associated with socio-environmental impacts, including marine mining.



## 2.2 Preventing and Reducing Pollution in the Marine Environment

Mismanaged waste and litter from coastal and inland locations make up the majority of marine litter that pollutes our oceans. Marine litter, including plastic waste and microplastics, damages ecosystems, threatens economies, especially those related to the tourism and fishing industries. The issue requires solutions that involve varied approaches that address land-based sources of marine litter through improved solid waste management practices and litter capture.



Canada, Mexico, and the United States strive to complement ongoing international efforts and capitalize on their initial work to prevent and reduce marine litter, while supporting innovation to tackle plastic waste. This work focused on engagement and capacity building to identify and implement low-cost and low-technology solutions to communities in transboundary watersheds. Trilaterally, this work continues in the development of tools specific to solid waste decision-makers and the inland communities that are often overlooked as sources of marine litter.

Future efforts are expected to focus on best practices as well as technologies to promote sustainable practices at the trinational, national, community and individual level. The CEC will prioritize solutions that North America is best poised to embrace and that increase the value of recovered materials, such as the expansion of recycling and increased capacity for environmentally sound management of waste across North America, and identification of key trading opportunities to achieve solutions. As an extension of previous work on marine litter, the CEC will explore opportunities to continue collaboration trilaterally in addressing gaps, building capacity for monitoring and implementing best practices and technologies. Activities could include:

- Sharing best practices and technologies for environmentally sound management of waste to reduce the impact of land-based sources of marine litter;
- Raising awareness among coastal, riverine and Indigenous communities and youth, as well as developing tailored messages to help inland communities understand their impact on marine litter; and
- Identifying hotspots of litter accumulation in and around waterways, especially in shared watersheds; deploying relevant litter capture systems; improving waste management systems where necessary; and establishing or promoting monitoring protocols.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- opportunities for collaboration on management of sustainable materials to address common marine litter materials; and
- environmentally sound management of different waste streams, including improvements to recycling infrastructure.





## 2.3 Circular Economy and Sustainable Materials Management

Economic growth has placed a high demand on natural resources. Consumption and environmental degradation translates into increasing business risks through higher costs, as well as supply uncertainties and disruptions. Effective management and efficient use of natural resources are essential for sustainable development. Improving resource efficiency should be pursued as part of broader strategies to promote managing materials sustainably throughout their life cycles (from extraction to recovery) and closing material cycles where it makes sense.

Shifting toward sustainable production and consumption patterns is about improving the management and efficient use of materials and resources. This shift opens the door to new economic and environmental opportunities, as well as securing a more sustainable and resilient economic future for our citizens.

As an extension of previous work on green growth, the CEC will explore opportunities to encourage circular economy and broader sustainable materials management strategies. Activities could include:

- promoting a common understanding of the concepts of circular economy, bioeconomy, and sustainable management of materials across their life cycles, including their potential benefits for the environment, low emission technologies, trade, job creation, natural resource security, well-being of communities, and economies in North America;
- identifying and sharing information on the measures taken in North America to promote circular economy and sustainable materials management, and seeking opportunities for the region to strengthen cooperation on circular economy and sustainable materials management solutions in sectors of common interest;
- intensifying collaboration and enhancing the role and engagement of consumers and communities, as well as those of the private sector and local governments, relative to efficient use of resources: reducing, reusing, repurposing, repairing and recycling; and
- supporting the establishment and development of collaborative networks of relevant stakeholders, particularly consumers, research institutions, private sector and municipalities, including strengthening existing networks.

One example is to build on knowledge, tools, information and partnerships (e.g., with the food industry) developed since 2015, to take concerted action with governments, businesses and communities to expand recycling and green supply chains and reducing **food loss and waste** across North America. There is a growing realization that food loss and waste entails enormous social, environmental and economic costs. Notwithstanding, there is a tremendous opportunity for the North American circular bioeconomy to focus on economic gains, reduction of environmental impacts, and improved social conditions for those who are undernourished.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- sustainable resource management and resource and energy efficiency practices in the private sector;
- public awareness and capacity building for circular economy and sustainable materials management practices at the domestic level;
- the status of and improvements to recycling and solid waste management in North America, including best practices, opportunities for increasing recycling and science-based understanding of waste characteristics (e.g., toxicity);
- greener supply chains and supply chain transparency in risk-based decisions throughout the life-cycle of products (e.g., chemicals of concern in products);
- sound management of pesticide chemicals, risk prevention of pesticides and pollinator conservation;
- e-commerce in goods and resource efficiency, including the impact of e-commerce on resources (including wildlife species), planning and environmental quality, and socio-economic factors; and
- energy-efficiency practices in the private sector (e.g., ISO 50001 standard).



## 2.4 Shared Ecosystems and Species

Having functional, healthy ecosystems is intrinsically linked to the well-being of people in North America. Our countries depend on the ecosystems' countless environmental, social, and economic benefits. Certain North American ecoregions cover vast territories that cross national boundaries on land and at sea. In a context where biodiversity loss is occurring, conserving and protecting our shared ecosystems and species will continue to be a critical component of the CEC's work program.

The CEC will explore opportunities for cooperation to help effectively conserve and protect shared species (particularly priority migratory species) and critical habitats, including trans-boundary ecosystems. Activities could include:

- supporting the establishment, development and strengthening of collaborative networks of conservation practitioners, communities and partners from the private and public sectors, including Indigenous Peoples;
- identifying and developing information, knowledge and guidance in support of cooperative conservation intervention, including updated mapping, exchange of lessons learned and best practices, and performance monitoring;
- increasing the active engagement of individuals, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples in conservation, notably by addressing the human dimensions of conservation, while recognizing ecosystems and the natural resources they provide as sources of sustainable livelihoods, clean water, food security and social stability; and
- engaging and working alongside Indigenous communities, as appropriate, to exchange knowledge and experience on methodologies and tools related to issues such as traceability of species, invasive alien species, ecosystems deterioration and stewardship of conservation areas.

To support effective collaboration, actions will be informed by national and regional conservation priorities, and relevant international commitments.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- preservation of priority migratory species, such as the monarch butterfly, the North Atlantic right whale, several bird species including Arctic migratory birds that overwinter or migrate across North America, and other priority groups of species, including pollinators and endangered species, to help stop and reverse their decline and ensure that they continue to provide social, environmental and economic benefits;
- conservation, restoration and cooperative management of connected and priority habitats, such as grasslands and wetlands, among others;
- conservation and sustainable management of forests, including recognizing their role as nature-based solutions and the environmental and economic benefits derived from trade in products from sustainably managed forests; and
- conservation, restoration and sustainable management of coastal, island, and marine ecosystems, recognizing their role as nature-based solutions beneficial to fisheries, tourism and other economic sectors.



## 2.5 Resilient Economies and Communities

Canada, Mexico and the United States recognize that our shared environmental and economic well-being is grounded in the adaptive capacity and resilience of communities, ecosystems, and all sectors of the economy in relation to changing climatic conditions, which may result in a rise of extreme weather events and associated risks to public health, infrastructure, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and the natural environment.

The three countries also acknowledge the importance of self-determination for Indigenous communities over their land and, in addition, the distinct and highly valuable contributions Indigenous Peoples can provide to environmental activities and decisions. Indigenous Peoples have unique perspectives and knowledge that have a vital role in strengthening community-based resilience.



When communities improve their resilience, they are less likely to be adversely affected by extreme events that can have devastating effects on their economy, such as impacts on infrastructure that facilitate trade. This is especially true for communities and populations that are disproportionately impacted by or are uniquely vulnerable to extreme events such as wildfires, droughts, floods and heat and cold waves by virtue of their location or socio-economic conditions.

Opportunities for trilateral cooperation on adaptation measures and resilience through the CEC will build on its work to improve early warning and health monitoring systems for extreme events and on geospatial environmental information. Activities could include:

- working with North American local health agencies on their technical and professional capacities to monitor environmental-related public health risks and effects, as well as to assess economic health costs associated with such extreme weather events and hazards, as drought, floods, extreme heat or cold, and wildfires;
- conducting systematic monitoring and evaluation of climate impacts and adaptive capacity to assess their economic and health benefits and their effectiveness;
- evaluating and designing strategies for adaptive and resilient communities;
- ensuring accessibility of climate adaptation tools and information; and
- promoting the use of self-generated renewable and clean energy in disadvantaged communities.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- best practices and lessons learned for green infrastructure and nature-based solutions for sustainable cities;
- adaptation strategies and resilience capacity for remote, coastal and Indigenous communities;
- knowledge-sharing, including citizen science, to enhance the adaptive capacity and resilience of the food production sectors;
- environmental impacts of extreme weather in the spread of contaminants to improve emergency planning;
- improved forest fire management to reduce negative health effects; and
- co-benefits of nature-based solutions for public health and ecosystems in selected sectors (e.g., urban planning).



## 2.6 Effective Enforcement of Environmental Laws

The promotion of high levels of environmental protection, the effective enforcement of environmental laws, and enhanced environmental cooperation have long been key to the Parties' commitment to sustainable development. These principles, embedded in the **free trade agreement's** Chapter 24, recognize that it is inappropriate to encourage trade or investment by weakening or reducing the protection afforded in the Parties' respective environmental laws.

Given its mandate, the CEC is uniquely positioned to play an effective role in strengthening cooperative mechanisms and enhancing compliance with, and enforcement of, environmental laws and regulations. The CEC has promoted building enforcement capacity in areas such as maritime fuel sulfur standards, electronic and hazardous waste, and wildlife enforcement. Under this strategic plan, the effective enforcement of environmental laws has been elevated to underscore the Parties' renewed commitment to this obligation, which is now included in the core text of the free trade agreement.

In strengthening cooperation related to compliance with the Parties' environmental regulations, and their enforcement, activities could include:

- collecting and exchanging information on the Parties' environmental laws, national environmental programs, and compliance and enforcement mechanisms;
- coordinating, as appropriate, responses of the Parties against those who violate environmental regulations, including through information sharing;
- enhancing the capacity of enforcement officials through information-sharing and training activities, including programs for the judiciary;
- sharing best practices and enhancing environmental impact assessment processes; and
- supporting public awareness of, and participation in compliance assistance, including outreach and education programs.

### *Related issues of interest include:*

- priority regional actions to prevent and curb wildlife trafficking, strengthen value chains, improve traceability of CITES Appendix II species,<sup>2</sup> and enhance capacity of enforcement officials to better identify CITES species in trade;
- initiatives designed to prevent and combat illegal logging and associated trade;
- implementation and enforcement of the Montreal Protocol, and associated regional implementation of bilateral and multilateral agreements to combat illegal trafficking of ozone-depleting substances (ODS);
- regional coordination and tracking of transboundary movements of hazardous wastes, including hazardous recyclables for environmentally sound management in support of bilateral and multilateral agreements related to waste; and
- exchange of information on ways to ensure meaningful public participation, including by supporting Indigenous Peoples in accordance with national legislation.





# 3.0 Cross-cutting Approaches



The CEC recognizes that success of its strategic pillars will depend on the effectiveness of solutions, the positive impact on sustainable economic growth, and on engaging stakeholders and the public to harness their potential as catalysts for change and progress.

The following strategies will guide the development of CEC projects and initiatives, how the project work is to be implemented and, in turn, how the ultimate success of the strategic and operational plans is to be measured.



### 3.1 Innovative and Effective Solutions

To generate innovative and effective solutions, the CEC will emphasize the following three cross-cutting strategies:

- 1) Recognizing the important role of Indigenous Peoples, the CEC will encourage the use of nature-based solutions and traditional ecological knowledge to help achieve environmental goals, including enhancing resilience to extreme weather events, environmental conservation and biodiversity protection, consider carbon sequestration, and promote the sustainable management of natural resources.
- 2) Promote sustainable innovation, including entrepreneurial ideas rooted in sustainability, partnerships and networks across North America, with emphasis on private sector engagement, academic institutions, as well as capacity-building and access to knowledge and resources.
- 3) Support existing and emerging clean technologies and supply chains in key economic sectors as part of the solution for addressing pollution and minimizing its effects, promote the sustainable management of natural resources, and foster green economic growth and the development of resource-efficient and more circular economies.



### 3.2 Diverse and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation

As it implements this Strategic Plan, the CEC will develop outreach strategies to engage various segments of the population to assist in delivering on its priorities.

To advance the objectives outlined in the free trade agreement’s Chapter 24 and the ECA through cooperation under this strategic plan, the CEC will consider potential opportunities with specific economic sectors, communications activities, and private sector partnerships, particularly in areas related to sustainable innovation, clean technologies, and regional competitiveness. Specifically, it will consider the many facets of environment, trade, and economic links to entrepreneurship, production and consumption, environmental goods and services, the return on investment, the economic and social benefits of environmental quality, energy and resource efficiency, support to circular economy and sustainable materials management, and the sustainable use and management of natural resources.

A priority for the CEC is to find and adopt innovative ways to apply and incorporate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and Indigenous perspectives (based on free, prior, informed, and culturally appropriate consent), including the views and wisdom of Elders, in its activities. Indigenous Peoples have long recognized the intimate relationship between humans and their environment. For Indigenous Peoples, human life on this earth is inextricably linked to the elements around us, including air, earth, light, and water; and, as such, stewardship is a lifelong responsibility. The protection of their traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous resources, and land is of importance to the three countries.

The adverse effects of environmental degradation impact all communities, albeit to varying degrees. The burden is often greater for vulnerable populations, including people in remote areas. To be inclusive is to ensure that those whose safety, livelihood and future prospects, which are compromised by environmental degradation or extreme climatic events, are not overlooked in capacity-building efforts. Close cooperation at the planning stage and in the development and implementation of strategies will involve direct engagement with local residents for us to fully grasp their concerns, as well as to harness their insights and knowledge (in accordance with recognized Indigenous rights in each country) for the effective delivery of CEC projects and initiatives.

The Parties recognize the importance of gender and diversity perspectives in relation to CEC activities. Pursuant to the ECA, the Secretariat will consider gender and diversity effects and opportunities in the implementation of the strategic and operational plans, including gender balance in the recruitment of Secretariat staff. In appointing JPAC members and the TEKEG membership, the Parties will also seek to promote membership from a diverse pool of candidates, including with respect to gender balance.

**Diagram: Strategic Pillars and Cross-cutting Approaches**





# 4.0 Stakeholder Participation and Engagement Mechanisms

Since 1994, the public has filed 98 submissions with the Secretariat, 32 concerning Canada, 51 concerning Mexico, 13 concerning the United States, and two concerning both Canada and the United States.

#### 4.1 Submissions on Enforcement Matters

The Submissions on Enforcement Matters (SEM) process has existed since the NAAEC came into force in 1994. The process provides evidence of the Parties' strong commitment to involving the public in ensuring that governments are effectively enforcing their environmental laws. A unique non-adversarial fact-finding, the SEM process seeks not only to ensure transparency and promote a better understanding, but also to foster public discourse regarding compliance with and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.

The SEM process allows any person or nongovernmental organization in North America to file a submission with the CEC Secretariat asserting "that a Party is failing to effectively enforce its environmental laws." Since 1994, the public has filed 98 submissions with the Secretariat, 32 concerning Canada, 51 concerning Mexico, 13 concerning the United States, and two concerning both Canada and the United States. The Council has authorized 24 factual records on submissions relating to a myriad of environmental law matters, including environmental assessment, water quality, air pollution, and energy projects.

As the Parties transition to the free trade agreement's Environment Chapter and the ECA, the SEM process (now located in Chapter 24 of the new free trade agreement) has been modernized and continues to play a vital role in monitoring effective enforcement of environmental laws, with more expeditious timelines and a focus on enforcement of environmental laws by the central level of government.

The Secretariat will continue its modernization efforts to make the filing of submissions from the public simple and straightforward, ensure that the filing process is rigorous, transparent, timely, and efficient, and ensure a seamless transition under the new governing documents. In addition, the Secretariat will continue its outreach activities to strengthen public awareness on this important tool and its cooperative work with partners and stakeholders in academia, the environmental community, and government officials.



#### 4.2 Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC)

The Joint Public Advisory Committee is the organization's core mechanism for stakeholder engagement and public participation in CEC activities. Composed of a diverse group of experts from the three countries (representatives from private sector, NGOs, Indigenous People, youth, etc.), JPAC provides advice to the Council on matters related to environmental cooperation in North America and contributes to strengthening environmental governance for the CEC across the region.

JPAC facilitates opportunities for stakeholder engagement in the development of CEC's work programs through different means, including online consultations on operational plans and public meetings on a broad range of topics, while its members may also participate individually in CEC projects, based on their respective expertise.

In the next five years, JPAC will take advantage of new opportunities, including through digital means, to facilitate more diverse and inclusive stakeholder engagement in the activities of the CEC. These new ways of engaging a broader segment of the population will strengthen JPAC's advice on the CEC's work.





### **4.3 Council Public Sessions**

Every year since 1995 the Council has held public sessions during its regular annual meeting. Council public sessions 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. These public sessions also offer the public a direct opportunity to learn about trilateral environmental collaboration in the context of liberalized trade and integrated economies.

Looking ahead, Council public sessions will seek to use the best digital tools available to provide an effective forum for discussion and promote visibility of CEC initiatives.

### **4.4 Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG)**

In 2015, the Council created the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG), composed of nine individuals, three from each country. Its mandate is to provide advice and guidance on opportunities to apply TEK to the CEC's operations and policy recommendations and undertake other activities as the Council may request.

Under this strategic plan, the CEC will continue to enhance the engagement of the TEKEG and Indigenous Peoples, to advance the integration of TEK, Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous-led stewardship practices across CEC operations, to address shared environmental, social and economic concerns. To this end, the TEKEG will develop, in collaboration with the CEC Secretariat, an Indigenous engagement plan for upcoming CEC activities.

### **4.5 Cooperative Projects**

Public participation and stakeholder engagement will feature prominently across the CEC's cooperative work program, whether through regular public meetings of the North American Pollutant Release and Transfer (PRTR) initiative, JPAC-led public consultations on specific areas of work or via public outreach and education efforts.

## 5.0

# Communications and Outreach

To achieve the objectives set forth in this plan, a robust approach to communications and outreach will be essential to raise awareness of the CEC and ultimately drive action among a wide array of actors and audiences.

Communications and Outreach efforts to 2025, coordinated with the Parties' environment and trade ministries, will include an integrated social business strategy and a solid plan for traditional media relations and thought leadership to build engaged communities in Canada, Mexico and the United States both online and offline. CEC communications efforts and information management practices will systematically position the CEC as a prime North American information portal for environmental data, information and analyses covering the region. In addition, creating partnerships and increasing outreach to key stakeholder groups will become a key focus to maximize resources and impact, and ultimately build a larger network of CEC supporters helping to achieve the objectives set out in this strategic plan.

## 6.0

# Measuring Performance and Reporting on Progress

The implementation of a performance measurement framework across all activities of the organization is a means by which the CEC can demonstrate progress in meeting the organization's environmental goals and objectives and showing how, over the long term, these achievements have helped the three Parties pursue their national priorities. The framework serves to enhance the CEC's performance, accountability, and reporting ability. It also represents a monitoring mechanism by which it becomes possible to re-direct action to meet the set goals and objectives.

At this juncture, performance reporting is fully integrated in the operations of the CEC, and the Secretariat reports to the Parties on a regular basis, using meaningful and reliable data as evidence of results. The CEC has established a results-based management process to evaluate its activities and projects, to demonstrate progress in meeting the Parties' environmental priorities for the region, and to share relevant accomplishments.

Identifying and documenting the long-term impact of initiatives in Canada, United States, and Mexico requires engagement and closer coordination with Parties' experts and other stakeholders, particularly on projects that may lead to changes in capacity, conditions and policies. The long-term impact of the three countries' work is thus assessed on an ongoing basis.

Under the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the CEC will monitor and report on how well it matches its cooperation activities to the strategic pillars and cross-cutting approaches, and how it delivers on the pillars in creating or seizing opportunities to address the issues of interest listed herein. In addition, the CEC will develop metrics for evaluating the impact of its activities and measuring its contribution to the ECA objectives.



## 7.0 Conclusion

The CEC Strategic Plan sets high-level direction for an ambitious agenda for concrete action and positive outcomes. In setting its priorities, the CEC is building on its past success and laying the groundwork for increased opportunities and successful achievement of common trilateral objectives.



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