

Canada-U.S. Cooperation in the Salish Sea: 2017-20 Action Plan



Environment and
Climate Change Canada

Environnement et
Changement climatique Canada



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency



Introduction: Toward Twenty Years of International Cooperation

The "Salish Sea" is a term that describes the inland marine waters of Washington and British Columbia comprised of Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Strait of Georgia.¹ Currently, a population of more than 7 million people inhabits the Salish Sea and its contributing watersheds, with some projections envisioning an increase to over 9 million people by the year 2025.² The term also recognizes the Coast Salish peoples who have inhabited the area since long before Euro-Americans first arrived.¹

On January 19, 2000, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)³ signed a Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem ("Statement of Cooperation" or "SoC"). The SoC outlines common goals for the health of the ecosystem and commits the two agencies to work collaboratively to achieve these goals. ECCC and EPA maintain a Working Group under the SoC which is advised by representatives from Tribes and First Nations, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Washington State Department of Ecology, Puget Sound Partnership, and the Northwest Straits Commission. The Working Group develops and periodically updates Action Plans to achieve SoC goals.

This document presents ECCC and EPA's 2017-20 joint Priority Action Items (PAIs) under the SoC.⁴ For 2017-20, ECCC and EPA propose that our Action Plan focus on implementing the shared priorities described below and summarized in the table at the end of this document.

1. From "Map of the Salish Sea (Mer des Salish) & Surrounding Basin" website by S. Freelan at Western Washington University (http://staff.wvu.edu/stefan/salish_sea.shtml) accessed 10/11/17.
2. EPA-ECCC "Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report," <http://www2.epa.gov/salish-sea/executive-summary>.
3. In 2000, Environment and Climate Change Canada was known as Environment Canada.
4. In addition to efforts under the Statement of Cooperation, ECCC and EPA currently collaborate in several program areas. These activities may involve other partners, such as Tribes and First Nations, as well as other organizations, and include transboundary coordination under regional hazard response agreements; and joint chairing of the International Airshed Strategy Coordinating Committee, whose aim is to address shared air quality management concerns in the transboundary Georgia Basin-Puget Sound region (<https://www.ec.gc.ca/air/default.asp?lang=En&n=D6F2B21E-1>).

Promoting Information Exchange

Promoting information exchange across the border is a foundational goal of the SoC. As explained in the SoC, promoting information exchange can help participants identify priorities, as well as opportunities for effective coordination and cooperation. Two ongoing activities under this shared commitment include supporting the [Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference](#); and maintenance and dissemination of the [Health of the Salish Sea ecosystem indicators report](#).

The biennial Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference, proposed in the original SoC, has become one of the largest, most comprehensive transboundary ecosystem conferences in the Region, with more than 1200 participants attending recent conferences. Selected themes from the conference are captured in a series of articles synthesizing [ecosystem research and management approaches in the Salish Sea](#). SoC Working Group members support the Conference by participating in the Executive and Program Committees and convening special sessions within the Conference to explore and foster progress on Action Plan Priority Action Items. Examples of special sessions from the 2016 Conference include "Cross-Border Exchange: Environmental Review Processes for Projects with Transboundary Impacts" and "Cross-Border Local Leadership Exchange: Water Quality in Border Areas."

The [Health of the Salish Sea transboundary indicator report](#) describes trends in indicators that can help identify priorities for future action across the entire Salish Sea. The indicators include: air quality (fine particulates), marine species at risk, Chinook salmon, southern resident killer whales, toxics in the food web, freshwater quality, marine water quality, stream flow, shellfish beaches, and swimming beaches. These indicators help show where we are seeing progress in sustainably managing the Salish Sea ecosystem and its valuable resources, where conditions are declining, and where course corrections are needed. This work

has recently been described in an article found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14634988.2014.980209#.VMq8jpU5AiQ>.

In addition to these two ongoing activities, the Working Group convenes special meetings of members and guests to explore and spotlight issues related to PAIs. For example, in June 2015, the Working Group convened a special workshop on water quality issues in border watersheds, including transport of pollutants in small agricultural streams that cross the border in the Nooksack River watershed, and transport of asbestos from the Sumas Mountain landslide in the Sumas River. Similarly, in November 2016, the Working Group invited Transport Canada, the Canadian Coast Guard, and the Pacific Pilotage Authority to give a presentation to the Working Group and guests on the Canadian marine safety system.

For 2017-20 we reaffirm our commitment to strengthen information sharing across the border. We plan to continue supporting the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference and the Health of the Salish Sea report. Our engagement in the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference will be directly linked to the priorities identified in this Action Plan. In addition, we intend to continue to convene focused information sharing activities relating to Priority Action Items, such as major U.S. or Canadian federal initiatives in the Salish Sea.

Our Priorities for 2017-20 are to:

- Support Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) planning.
- Maintain or further develop the transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem health indicators.
- Support information sharing activities on major federal initiatives relevant to Salish Sea protection and identify opportunities where U.S. and Canadian interests intersect.
- Support information sharing activities on transboundary environmental assessment and notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem.

Strengthening Coordination Mechanisms

The original SoC recognized the many existing cross-border and other coordination mechanisms and stated the intention to “work through these cooperative mechanisms to the fullest extent possible.”

Cross-border coordination mechanisms within the Salish Sea region have evolved greatly since the original SoC was signed. Several major developments bear note. First, the [Coast Salish Gathering](#) has emerged as a unique forum in this region. The Gathering is an environmental policy platform where the Tribal and First Nations governments, state, provincial and federal governments can discuss environmental strategies and practices.

Second, local, Tribal, federal, and state salmon and estuary recovery and protection efforts in the Puget Sound basin have converged into a strong, coordinated Puget Sound ecosystem protection and restoration effort, coordinated by the Puget Sound Partnership, a state agency.

Third, the Washington State-British Columbia Environmental Cooperation Council has activated working or task groups as needed to target topical transboundary issues.

The SoC Working Group has worked to support these developments in targeted ways over the years. For example, as advisory members of the Working Group, staff coordinators of the Coast Salish Gathering have represented and conveyed perspectives arising from this forum. The Working Group co-chairs have also supported ongoing activities of a BC-WA Water Quality Task Group, contributing as observers to this new forum.

We have also helped solidify transboundary representation within the Puget Sound “[Management Conference](#).”⁴ The Working Group

⁴ The Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) coordinates the Puget Sound region’s collective effort to protect and restore Puget Sound. PSP brings together hundreds of partners to mobilize action and investments around a common agenda. PSP provides leadership through the collective development of a shared roadmap, measurements, and funding strategy. PSP’s four boards (Leadership Council, Ecosystem Coordination Board, Science Panel, and Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council) support and guide PSP in its responsibilities. PSP, its boards, and the decision-making structure are also known as the Puget Sound Management Conference.

co-chairs worked with the Puget Sound Partnership to recommend formal Canadian participation in the Puget Sound Management Conference. Two Canadian scientists now formally serve on the Puget Sound Science Panel, and two Canadian entities (Government of British Columbia and the Fraser Basin Council) participate as *ex officio* members of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Coordination Board. In June 2015, the Canadian Science Panel participants reported to a Working Group meeting on their engagement on the Science Panel, affirming the value of their participation in fostering awareness of activities on both sides of the border, and making recommendations as to specific actions that could further strengthen the ongoing information exchange.

For 2017-20, we will continue to support existing and emerging coordination mechanisms.

Our Priorities for 2017-20 are to:

- Support coordination mechanisms at the State/Provincial and Federal level.
- Support Tribal-First Nation coordination and information sharing mechanisms.

Working Group Administration

Routine administration of the SoC Working Group includes planning for and facilitating semi-annual Working Group meetings; developing and implementing Action Plans; implementing Working Group Terms of Reference; convening meetings to spotlight topics of priority transboundary interest; and sharing information about each agency's relevant activities and protocols.

**Environment and Climate Change Canada-Environmental Protection Agency
Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Salish Sea Ecosystem
2017-2020 Commitments**

Priority Action Item	Product	Outcome	Primary Responsibility
Support Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) Planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WG member participation in the Executive and Program Committees • Sessions supporting 2017-2020 Action Plan Priority Action Items. 	2017-2020 Action Plan PAIs advanced	WG advisory members, WG co-chairs.
Maintain or further develop the transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem health indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website updated with current information for existing or new indicators relevant to the goals and objectives of the SoC. • Targeted information-sharing activities to support indicator updates, including summer streamflow. 	Continued web presence for decision support and for the public. Continued information sharing and collaboration with subject matter experts at all levels to facilitate integrated understanding of transboundary ecosystem health and to inform ecosystem based approaches in Salish Sea.	WG transboundary indicator leads.
Support information sharing activities relating to major federal initiatives relevant to Salish Sea protection and identify opportunities where US and Canadian interests intersect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Webinar(s) or other information sharing activities on key elements of the Canadian Ocean Protection Plan (OPP), Ocean Strategy, and the Puget Sound Federal Action Plan. • Information-sharing session(s) with appropriate coordinating bodies (e.g., the BC Federal Council; or the U.S. Federal Task Force for Puget Sound). 	Working Group members and their stakeholders are well informed of Salish Sea protection initiatives through the OPP and the U.S. Federal Action Plan for Puget Sound. Potential areas for transboundary collaboration are identified.	WG co-chairs and subject matter experts
Support information sharing activities on environmental assessment (EA) and notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic updates to WG, including on (a) Canadian Federal EA review process, (b) BC-WA MOU on environmental review, and (c) other (including U.S. Federal, e.g., IAS) developments if any. • WG members share information about project EA processes they are aware of. 	Increased WG understanding of developments in transboundary EA and notification processes.	WG co-chairs and subject matter experts, WG advisory members.
Support coordination and information sharing mechanisms at the State/Provincial and Federal level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support BC/WA Nooksack River Transboundary Water Quality Task Group (WQTG), including one technical webinar and technical and policy contributions as identified by WQTG. • EPA technical staff will continue to communicate periodically with ECCC staff regarding the Swift Creek/ Sumas Mountain Sediment Management Project. • EPA will continue to share with ECCC the content of outreach mailings EPA develops for local residents. 	<p>Improved cross-border data-sharing and engagement on key water quality issues in border watersheds.</p> <p>EPA and ECCC improve awareness of, and coordination with, state/provincial/local needs and initiatives relating to water quality issues in border watersheds.</p>	WG co-chairs and subject matter experts, BC and WA WG advisory members
Support Tribal-First Nation coordination and information sharing mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued active engagement by Coast Salish Gathering Steering Committee representatives as advisory members to the SoC WG. • ECCC, EPA, and WG advisory members participate and engage as invited in the annual Coast Salish Gathering and other key Tribal-First Nation coordination and information sharing forums. 	ECCC and EPA have greater awareness of Tribal and First Nation Salish Sea interests and priorities, and activities of WG reflect this greater awareness.	Coast Salish Gathering WG advisory members, WG co-chairs; other WG advisory members.



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