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**U.S. Governmental Advisory Committee**  
*Independent Federal Advisors  
on the North American  
Agreement on Environmental Cooperation*

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November 15, 2018

**Committee Members**

Jeffrey Wennberg  
**Chair**  
*Vermont*

Patty Acomb  
*Minnesota*

Cornelius Antone  
*Arizona*

Martha Bohrt  
*Virginia*

Marina Brock  
*Massachusetts*

Sally Ann Gonzalez  
*Arizona*

Suzanne E. Hanson  
*Minnesota*

Edna A. Mendoza  
*Arizona*

Vincent R. Nathan  
*Texas*

Nazaret Sandoval  
*Michigan*

Cristina Viesca-Santos  
*Texas*

Kelly C. Wright  
*Shoshone-Bannock  
Tribes*

The Honorable Andrew R. Wheeler  
Acting Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler:

The Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Representative to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) held its 51st meeting in Tucson, Arizona in the Pascua Yaqui Tribal lands, on October 10 – 11, 2018. This letter represents our full advice resulting from that meeting.

The main objective of our meeting was to provide advice to EPA on extreme weather events and how tribes, state, local government and the private sector respond to these events. Jane Nishida, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs, was not able to join the meeting due to other responsibilities. However, she sent Mr. Luis Troche, Senior Advisor for North America to provide her remarks on the charge questions. Mr. Troche explained that EPA's desire for advice stemmed from the results of the CEC June 26 – 27, 2018 Council Session in Oklahoma City. He reiterated the meeting charge to provide EPA advice on actors and capacities at the local, tribal and private sector level who have expertise, best practices and resources on early warning, preparedness, response and resilience to drought-flood, wildfires and extreme temperatures. Recognizing that preparedness response and resilience is primarily a local effort, these actors may contribute their expertise and best practices through the CEC initiative to help advance capacities across North America.

We received a warm welcome from Mr. Verlon Jose, Vice-Chairman of the Tohono O'odham Nation. He welcomed participants to the Southwest Desert and extended his sincere hospitality. He thanked the committees for their scope of work in protecting the environment and remarked on the long-standing relationship between the Tohono O'odham Nation and the nearby Pascua Yaqui Nation. Mr. Jose noted the timeliness of this NAC/GAC meeting given the recent emergency declared after remnants of Hurricane Rosa devastated the area.

We also received an important briefing on the proposed U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which replaces the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The briefing was conducted via phone by Sarah Stewart, Deputy Assistant, Environmental and Natural Resources, U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and Joe Ferrante, Senior Advisor on Trade and Economics, OITA, EPA. Ms. Stewart highlighted components of the USMCA Environment Chapter, which are the most comprehensive enforceable objectives of any such agreement. Issues such as transboundary, air pollution, shared fishery stock and wildlife trafficking are important to all Parties. Mr. Joe Ferrante provided an

update on the proposed new Environmental Cooperation Agreement (ECA), which aligns with the USMCA Environment Chapter. He indicated that the institutions and organizations of the current structure are being retained and that there has been progress in negotiations with Mexico and Canada and a seamless transition to a new platform in cooperation among the Parties is anticipated.

The GAC members recognize the increased frequency and severity of wildfires, floods, hurricanes and windstorms affecting the entire planet and especially North America. The GAC members found the presentation by Dr. Gregg Garfin, of the University of Arizona, useful and compelling. We agree that these extreme weather events are connected somehow to changes in our climate. Thus, preparedness is an essential component of how we respond to such events. It should be noted that NOAA and the National Weather Service have excelled in predicting and tracking these extreme weather events. In addition, Ms. Judy Lynn, South Region Coordinator, Emergency Management, Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (AZDEMA), described the Arizona state emergency management system and its "all-hazards" framework. This approach is not specific to any one emergency but is flexible to meet the emergent needs in real-time and adopts language common to the region being served.

We received excellent briefings on tribal government efforts by Mr. Cornelius Antone, GAC member and Environment Manager for the Tohono O'odham Nation and Robert DeLeon, Director of the Gila River Indian Tribe Office of Emergency Response, who both described tribal government emergency responses to extreme weather events. The committee also received updates on key activities at the CEC Secretariat from Executive Director Cesar Rafael Chavez who updated members on the active 2017 – 2018 operational plan cooperative projects and grants. We also received a report on JPAC activities from Dr. Octaviana Trujillo, on behalf of Mr. Gustavo Alanis-Ortega, JPAC Chair, who was not able to join us. The meeting was opened by a welcome from Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACMD) Designated Federal Officer, Oscar Carrillo. The GAC deeply appreciates the excellent support provided by the FACMD and thanks Director Monisha, Harris, and all the FACMD staff for their support, before, during and after the meeting.

Sincerely,



Sally Ann Gonzales, Acting Chair  
Governmental Advisory Committee

cc: Jane T. Nishida, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of International & Tribal Affairs  
Monisha Harris, Director, Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACMD), EPA  
Oscar Carrillo, Designated Federal Officer (FACMD), EPA  
Mark Kasman, Director, Office of Regional & Bilateral Affairs, OITA, EPA  
Luis Troche, Senior Advisor, North American Affairs, OITA, EPA  
Gustavo Alanis-Ortega, Chair, Joint Public Advisory Committee  
César Rafael Chávez, Executive Director, CEC  
Members of the U.S. National and Governmental Advisory Committees

Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)  
to the U.S. Representative to the  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

**Advice 2018 – 2 (October 10 – 11, 2018):**

***Charge Question:***

- ***The U.S. seeks advice on actors and capacities at the local, tribal and private sector who have expertise, best practices, experience and resources on: early warning, preparedness, response and resilience to drought-flood, wildfires and extreme temperatures.***
- ***Because preparedness response and resilience are primarily a local effort, these actors may contribute their expertise and best practices through the CEC initiative to help advance capacities across North America.***

The meeting of the U.S. Governmental Advisory Committee at the Pascua Yaqui Tribal Reservation was very timely as the region was recovering from Hurricane Rosa. Extreme weather events are a threat to many communities in the Southwest and throughout the United States. Extreme events have been felt as summer heat waves, winter freezes, tropical storms, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, floods and everything else in between throughout our land. It was sobering to hear Mr. Jose, Vice-Chairman of the Tohono O’odham Nation, speak about how the recent storm exceeded their 100-year flood plans and that he had to make an emergency declaration. People lost their livelihoods, as their cattle, chickens were covered in several feet of mud. It was a very real experience and the take away was that these extreme weather events are occurring more frequently, and community cooperation is essential to surviving these storms without loss of lives. The GAC looks forward to continuing to stay engaged in this important topic. Below are our answers to the charge questions listed above.

Emergency Management

Emergency management is most effectively performed as a tiered approach, extending from local government through to national or federal and (in its highest form) best extended to multinational alliances. Natural disasters tend not to differentiate or discriminate between towns, cities, regions, states, or national boundaries. In fact, specific regions often share similar types of natural hazard vulnerabilities and mitigation efforts performed, shared, and coordinated broadly within affected areas prove to be much more valuable at mitigating the propensity of any single or series of events to cause widespread damage.

Essentially, emergency management has four phases, mitigation (prevention), preparedness, response, and recovery. Although much focus is given to the response and recovery phases, money would be better spent in the mitigation stages; and mitigation (prevention) best takes place at the local and regional levels. Although local/regional, and tribal government entities are the faces most recognized at these local level, to be most valuable there should be many diverse

community-based groups representing the specific interests of the area and acting as a team to achieve the best results.

### Broad Involvement of Stakeholders Recommendation

The federal government should consider advancing participants at the local, tribal, regional, and state level (even regional state collectives) while including applicable NGOs and private sector entities with the focus on prevention and mitigation in the arena of local, tribal and regional mitigation and resilience.

These chosen “players” should include broad-based representation (representatives) not necessarily from any unique city, town, or region. The broader goal should not be focused on any specific disaster or extreme event, but on the process of defining hazard vulnerabilities, and sound prevention or mitigation strategies that any local, tribal, or regional area may use as a blueprint or template to initiate a sound local foundation for mitigation strategies and activities. Encouragement would best be given to “think outside of the box” concerning how we are currently managing these efforts at all levels. How well are current efforts working? Are costs and collateral damage associated from these types of extreme events lessening or increasing? It may take courage to move away from these currently held concepts maintained at every tier and rethink any attempt at “perfecting the wrong solution.”

Leadership at all levels needs to set ground rules for expected roles and activities best performed at each tier and where each prescribed action is best and most efficiently performed and accomplished. Determine and define which prevention and mitigation activities are best accomplished at the local, tribal, regional, state, regional state-collective, national, or international levels. This may be accomplished by placing lower tier “local and regional” government representation around the table to best identify gaps and impediments to more effective local prevention and mitigation strategies.

Federal agencies who understand the US framework and can be involved in incentivizing local, tribal, regional, and state actions (examples may include DHS, FEMA, CDC, USPHS, etc.) to fill the gaps and develop useful strategies and resources to move local, tribal, regional levels forward in these endeavors. It is at the lowest levels of government that the most effective mitigation actions can take place. Our communities, towns, cities, and tribal nations must provide necessary local leadership, plan and take mitigation actions on their own behalf, and recognize that local mitigation is where the national framework for resilience and sustainability begins.

### Community and Communication

The GAC recommends that communication to affected communities be done in advance and use radio, TV and social media, like Twitter and Facebook, but also do door to door alerts to reach vulnerable populations not connected to social digital networks or due to loss of power. As several speakers reiterated at our meeting, it takes communication and able bodies to respond swiftly to extreme weather events. Mr. Jose shared that they had to place 500 sand bags to hold the dam from overflowing with about 100 volunteers.

Members of GAC recommend that any plans for building early warning, preparedness, response and resilience capability in any community must consider and include; vulnerable populations and populations that speak languages other than English.

Members of the GAC also recommend these entities with expertise in Preparedness & Response Management:

- US Regional Government Organization
- National Association of Cities and County Health Officials (NACCHO)
- National Leagues of Cities and Towns
- Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (AZDEMA)
- National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO)
- Marina Brock, Local and Regional Government-Massachusetts Maritime Academy (MMA) Emergency Management -Mitigation Theorist
- Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Disaster Medicine
- Dr. Vince Nathan, Ph.D., Center for Houston's Future

The membership can be broadened when specific gaps or impediments are determined and where solutions are identified and developed.

Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)  
to the U.S. Representative to the  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

**Advice 2018 – 3 (October 10 – 11, 2018):**

Names of Actors who have the Requested Expertise, Experiences or Resources

The members of GAC recommend the following organizations as having expertise in preparedness, response and resilience in their specialized geographic area.

*Red Cross* – Comprehensive volunteer database to allow it to deploy volunteers quickly following disasters and to assist with shelters and finally to perform other emergency relief functions.

*Gila River Indian Community* – in preparedness with equipment, training and inventory of stakeholders to be shared and duplicated with/in other communities specially in Indigenous Communities in Az.

*Tohono O'odham Community* – Experience in Flooding and how to communicate with the community and their resiliency.

*Phoenix, Arizona* – Extreme Heat

*Oklahoma City* – Tornados

*Texas Engineering Extension Services (TEEX) and Emergency Services Training Institute (ESTI)* - a division which has all the emergency training including Disaster City (a full-scale disaster training facility), HazMat Courses, EMT and ParaMedic Training, etc. They have conducted exercises in the five (5) Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) cities, along the Gulf Coast and on the US Border. They have included participants from local, state and federal agencies including FEMA, CDC and DOD. Exercises have required coordination at the regional, state and federal levels and have included as many as 8,000 participants and volunteers in a single exercise. TEEX has conducted two regional catastrophic preparedness functional exercises with multiple components, four regional rehearsals of concept drills, one Evacuation Area Leadership Tabletop exercises, and one Interstate Emergency Response Support Discussion-based Exercise that included FEMA and the four states of the region.

Since 1999, TEEX has conducted functional, table-top, and full-scale exercises that include but are not limited to: Ebola outbreak, Interoperable communications, WMD incidents, Bioterrorism incidents, Bridge and tunnel incidents, Pandemic influenza outbreaks, Points of Dispensing (POD), Cyberterrorism incidents, Smallpox exercises (public health and hospitals), Animal stop movement, Hazardous materials incidents, Radiological incidents (both accidental and terrorism), Hurricane incidents, Flooding scenarios, Mass casualty response and long-term care, Secondary medical facilities establishment, Emergency response nationwide, and others.