



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

July 29, 2020

Office of International and Tribal Affairs

Sally-Ann Gonzalez, Chair
Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC)
Arizona State Government
1700 W. Washington Road
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Ms. Gonzales:

On behalf of CEC Council member, Administrator Andrew Wheeler, thank you for the Governmental Advisory Committee's (GAC) letter of advice of April 27, 2020, reporting on its 53rd meeting, held virtually on April 10, 2020. Despite some technical difficulties during the call and the uncertain times we face with the pandemic, we appreciate your dedication and commitment to undertaking your charge and providing us with your valuable advice. We appreciate the GAC's comprehensive advice on the draft 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.

As you know, this Strategic Plan will establish the course for CEC work in the 2021-2025 period. It will establish high-level priority areas and cross-cutting approaches that will guide the development of more detailed 2-year Operational Plans, which will include specific projects and initiatives, along with funding and targets.

We appreciate your ranking exercise within each strategic priority area and cross-cutting approach as it will inform our decisions when we enter the next step of streamlining the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. We also appreciate your recommendations regarding specific projects/initiatives that could be undertaken for each priority area, but note that these will be considered in the development of the next Operational Plan as the Strategic Plan establishes the high-level priorities of work.

GAC Recommendations:

A. Strategic Priority #1- Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency

The GAC's top issues of interest are:

1. Resource efficiency collaboration opportunities to do with materials, especially addressing plastics and micro-plastics, and cooperation associated with the trans

- boundary movements of plastic waste destined for recovery operations;
2. Sustainable production, resource and energy efficiency practices in the private sector; and
 3. Environmental and social dimensions of agricultural practices (agroecology and other innovative approaches), including alternatives for the chemical control of pests, risk prevention of pesticides and pollinator conservation.

We agree that the establishment of partnerships will be crucial in developing this priority area. Partnerships with industry, research organizations, and others will ensure the most comprehensive results for each topic, and we will evaluate specific collaboration opportunities once particular projects are agreed upon within the next Operational Plan. We agree that greater coordination among diverse groups will enhance the work we implement.

We would like to note that the Department of Energy has been an integral part of our interagency group and has been involved in the development of this Plan, as well as in projects related to their mandate/areas of expertise. We expect to continue such collaboration once the Strategic Plan, and subsequent Operational Plans, are implemented.

B. Strategic Priority #2- Clean Air, Land and Water

The GAC's top issues of interest are:

1. 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 (including black carbon), ground-level ozone and its precursors, and methane;
2. Comparability, quality, comprehensiveness, timeliness, and accessibility of pollutant release data and information; and
3. Adoption of sustainable water practices in key economic sectors

We agree that the CEC has an important role to play in helping reduce smog-forming pollutants and are pleased that this issue is included in the Strategic Plan.

Regarding the issue of sewage infrastructure inadequacies and the Tijuana River Watershed, EPA will be addressing the transboundary water flow issues and sewage pollution infrastructure needs through our US-Mexico binational efforts. These efforts involve eligible public entities as described in Section 821 of the USMCA implementing legislation. Within EPA, the Office of Water's Border Water Infrastructure Program and the Office of International and Tribal Affairs' US-Mexico Border Program are collaborating with the appropriate stakeholders to fulfill the Administrator's directive when the USMCA enters into force.

We agree that water is an invaluable natural resource and are pleased that cooperation on freshwater science, data, and management has been included as an issue of interest in this draft. Specific projects may be developed in upcoming Operational Plans.

C. Strategic Priority #3- Shared Ecosystems and Species

The GAC's top issues of interest are:

1. Conservation and cooperative management of connected and priority habitats, such as grasslands and wetlands, among others;
2. Conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of coastal and marine ecosystems, including sustainable fisheries management, nature-based solutions to address climate impacts to fisheries, tourism, and other economic sectors promoting connectivity and useful monitoring; and
3. Effective management of protected areas (terrestrial and marine); conservation and sustainable management of forests, recognizing their role as nature-based solutions to climate variability, the environment and economic benefits derived from trade in sustainably-harvested wood products.

We thank you for identifying the top issues of interest for the GAC. We agree that the issues identified present great opportunities for collaboration and obtaining results and look forward to identifying potential projects and initiatives that could be implemented in future Operational Plans.

D. Strategic Priority #4- Resilient Communities

The GAC's top issues of interest are:

1. Best practices and lessons learned for green infrastructure and nature-based solutions for sustainable cities;
2. Co-benefits of nature-based climate solutions for public health and ecosystems in selected sectors (e.g., urban planning); and
3. Environmental and public safety impacts of climatic events, such as economic, infrastructure and agricultural damage due to rising water levels, to improve emergency planning.

Thank you for identifying the issues that are of highest priority to the GAC. We appreciate your feedback regarding the importance of nature-based solutions and ideas concerning specific projects and case studies related to marine protected areas and the North America Protected Areas Network. As mentioned above, specific projects within priorities areas will be developed in the biennial operational plans for the CEC.

E. Strategic Priority #5- Effective Enforcement of Environmental Laws

The GAC's top issues of interest are:

1. Regional coordination and tracking of trans boundary movements of hazardous wastes, including hazardous recyclables for environmentally sound management in support of bilateral and multilateral agreements related to waste;
2. Priority regional actions to prevent and curb wildlife trafficking, strengthen value chains, improve traceability of CITES Appendix II species, enhance capacity of enforcement officials to better identify CITES species in trade; and
3. Exchange of information on ways to ensure meaningful public participation, including by supporting environmental defenders.

Thank you for identifying the issues that are of highest priority to the GAC under this priority.

We agree that the current pandemic provides us with challenges and opportunities in dealing with environmental issues and that a variety of stakeholders should be engaged as we implement the work of the CEC.

Once again, we thank you for the GAC's strategic and comprehensive advice in response to the development of the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan. We look forward to working together with Canada and Mexico on the important environmental and trade issues within this new framework.

Sincerely,

Jane Nishida
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator