



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

July 29, 2020

Office of International and Tribal Affairs

Theresa A. Pardo, Chair  
National Advisory Committee (NAC)  
University at Albany, State University of New York  
187 Wolf Road, Suite 301  
Albany, NY 12205

Dear Ms. Pardo:

On behalf of CEC Council member, Administrator Andrew Wheeler, thank you for the National Advisory Committee's (NAC) 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 are facing with the pandemic, we appreciate your dedication and commitment to undertaking your charge and providing us with your valuable advice. We appreciate the NAC'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 as it will help 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.

**NAC Recommendations:**

- A. Environmental Issues and Challenges and Opportunities for the CEC**  
**1. Strategic Priority #1- Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency**

The NAC's top issues of interest are:

- a. Recycling and waste management in North America;
- b. Sustainable production, resource and energy efficiency practices; and

c. Plastics and micro plastics

We thank you for identifying the top issues of interest for the NAC. We agree that cooperation regarding information exchange (best practices, data and scientific information) will be an integral part of implementing work under this priority.

Regarding the ranking of priority areas, the Parties have made the decision not to rank the issues of interest under each priority area as the plan will comprise a 5-year period and opportunities for implementation may vary. As mentioned above, projects addressing issues in the Strategic Plan will be specified and described in Operational Plans.

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

The NAC's top issues of interest are:

- a. Air quality;
- b. Fresh water science, data and management; and
- c. Pollutant release data and information

Thank you for your recommendation to use health-based standards as we plan and implement our work. We agree that considering health standards should continue to be a component of our decision making.

**3. Strategic Priority #3- Shared Ecosystems and Species**

The NAC's top issues of interest are:

- a. Priority migratory species;
- b. Connected and priority habitats; and
- c. Sustainable management of coastal and marine ecosystems

We thank you for identifying the top issues of interest for the NAC. We agree that we should aim to undertake actions that focus on high-impact change with a common understanding on the needs.

Regarding issues involving the Tijuana River Valley, EPA will be addressing the transboundary water flow issues and sewage pollution infrastructure needs through our US-Mexico binational efforts. These efforts will 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.

#### **4. Strategic Priority #4- Resilient Communities**

The NAC's top issues of interest are:

- a. Sustainable cities;
- b. Remote, coastal and indigenous communities; and
- c. Resilience of food production sectors

Thank you for identifying the issues that are of highest priority to the NAC. We appreciate your feedback regarding the inclusion of extreme weather events within the existing priorities identified.

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

The NAC's top issues of interest are:

- a. Illegal trafficking and traceability of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) species;
- b. Illegal trafficking of HFCs; and
- c. Transboundary movements of hazardous wastes

Thank you for identifying the issues that are of highest priority to the NAC under this priority. As mentioned above, the Parties will not be ranking the issues of interest within the Strategic Plan, but will make those determination when developing Operational Plans.

#### **B. How can the CEC amplify its work through partnerships in North America?**

Regarding your advice on increasing awareness of CEC grant opportunities, the CEC is working on improving and streamlining its outreach and communications efforts with the aim of enhancing the availability of materials and opportunities for public participation with a new communications strategy. We will also analyze opportunities to develop partnerships with various stakeholders as we implement new projects and initiatives.

#### **C. Where in this Strategic Plan do you see opportunities for enhanced roles for stakeholders and citizens?**

Concerning your advice regarding youth engagement, we look forward to determining potential collaborative partnerships to implement CEC work as we prepare Operational Plans with specific projects and initiatives. Thank you for your suggestions regarding potential partners.

On the recommendation to establish stakeholder groups in Canada and Mexico similar to the NAC and GAC, that decision is made individually by each country.

#### **D. General Comments**

We agree that the current pandemic provides us with challenges and opportunities in dealing with environmental issues and has encouraged us to be creative and find innovative solutions to address issues.

Regarding flexibility on work plan deliverables and extension for grants for tribes in light of the current pandemic, EPA recognizes COVID-19 may have an impact on EPA financial assistance agreements and EPA is providing administrative flexibilities where appropriate to grant recipients experiencing challenges related to COVID-19. More information about these flexibilities can be found on our website.

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

Sincerely,

Jane Nishida  
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator