



Canada – U.S.

# Cooperation in the Salish Sea

2021-2024 Action Plan



Government  
of Canada

Gouvernement  
du Canada



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency



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Environment and Climate Change Canada  
Public Inquiries Centre  
12<sup>th</sup> Floor, Fontaine Building  
200 Sacré-Coeur Boulevard  
Gatineau QC K1A 0H3  
Telephone: 819-938-3860  
Toll Free: 1-800-668-6767 (in Canada only)  
Email: [enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca](mailto:enviroinfo@ec.gc.ca)

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# Introduction: Building on Twenty Years of International Cooperation

The Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem (“Statement of Cooperation” or “SoC”) was signed by the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)<sup>1</sup> in January 2000. The SoC outlines common goals for the health of the internationally-shared ecosystem and commits the two agencies to work collaboratively to achieve these goals<sup>2</sup>.

ECCC and EPA maintain a Working Group under the SoC that develops and periodically updates Action Plans to achieve SoC goals. The Working Group is currently advised by representatives from the Coast Salish Gathering, British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Washington State Department of Ecology, Puget Sound Partnership, the Northwest Straits Commission, and the Salish Sea Institute at Western Washington University.

This document presents the joint Priority Action Items (PAIs) for 2021-2024. High-level results achieved during the preceding 2017-2020 Action Plan are also presented. More detail on the SoC’s twenty-year history, and accomplishments under the 2017-2020 Action Plan can be found on [EPA’s Cooperation with Canada webpage](#).

In addition to efforts under the SoC, ECCC and EPA collaborate in several program areas and with a wide variety of partners, including on regional hazard response agreements and the [International Airshed Strategy Coordinating Committee](#).

The “Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem” broadly refers to the inland marine waters of Washington and British Columbia comprising Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and the Strait of Georgia, as well as the lands and watersheds draining into them<sup>3</sup>. More recently, the term “Salish Sea” has been adopted by some geographical naming bodies in both Canada and the United States<sup>4</sup>.

The original SoC recognizes that the Indigenous Peoples of the Georgia Basin and of Puget Sound have been stewards of the lands and resources in the region since time immemorial, honors their traditional values and knowledge, and commits to working with their representatives in an atmosphere of mutual respect to preserve and protect the region. With this Action Plan, we reaffirm and renew these intentions.

Today, more than 8.7 million people inhabit the geographic area referred to as the Salish Sea ecosystem and projections envision an increase to over 10.5 million people by the year 2040<sup>5</sup>.

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1 In 2000, Environment and Climate Change Canada was known as Environment Canada.

2 The original signed SoC can be found at <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/461828/publication.html>

3 For the purpose of Puget Sound Geographic Program funding, EPA states that the ‘greater Puget Sound basin is defined as all watersheds draining to the U.S. waters of Puget Sound, southern Georgia Basin, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca.’ (<https://beta.sam.gov/fal/f100cbe34f7f49dfa8720cde29cb1abe/view>). ECCC’s former Georgia Basin Action Plan (<https://ec.gc.ca/pabg-gbap/default.asp?lang=En&n=82FEBD49-1>) stated that the Georgia Basin is comprised of the Strait of Georgia, part of an inland sea which encompasses Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca as well as the lands and watersheds that surround and drain into the Strait.

4 See Geographical Names Board of Canada at <http://www4.rncan.gc.ca/search-place-names/unique/JDCTI> and U.S. Board on Geographic Names, as cited by the U.S. Geological Survey at [https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:3:::NO::P3\\_FID,P3\\_TITLE:2573411,Salish%20Sea](https://geonames.usgs.gov/apex/f?p=138:3:::NO::P3_FID,P3_TITLE:2573411,Salish%20Sea)

5 ECCC calculations at time of writing based on data obtained from BC Statistics at <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/people-population-community/population> and Washington State Office of Financial Management at <https://ofm.wa.gov/washington-data-research/population-demographics>.

## Supporting the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference and Health of the Salish Sea Report

Promoting information exchange across the border is a foundational goal of the SoC, as it helps to identify priorities and opportunities for effective coordination and cooperation.

Two ongoing commitments under this shared goal include supporting the [Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference](#) and maintenance and dissemination of the [Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report](#).

The biennial Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference was proposed in the original SoC and has become one of the largest, most comprehensive transboundary ecosystem conferences in the region, with more than 1,500 participants attending recent conferences. Proceedings of [recent](#) and [past](#) conferences are archived, and selected themes are captured in a series of articles in the Encyclopedia of Puget Sound's [Salish Sea Currents magazine](#), synthesizing ecosystem research and management approaches in the Salish Sea. Although the 2020 Conference program shifted to a free, online, and reduced-program format due to the coronavirus pandemic, registration markedly increased to 3,700 attendees.

SoC Working Group members support the Conference by participating in the Executive and Program Committees as well as convening special sessions within the Conference to explore and foster progress across all PAIs. Examples of SoC member-led sessions from 2018 include: “[Federal Initiatives I: Puget Sound Federal Task Force](#)” and “[Federal Initiatives II: Oceans Protection Plan](#).”

The transboundary [Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report](#) describes trends in indicators that can help identify priorities for future action across the entire Salish Sea ecosystem. The [current suite of indicators](#) are: 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 harvesting, and swimming beaches. These indicators help show progress in sustainably managing the Salish Sea ecosystem and its valuable resources, where conditions are declining, and where course corrections are needed. Each indicator was updated in 2020 and published online in 2021 in the report mentioned above.

For 2021-2024 we reaffirm our commitment to strengthen these two key regional cross-border information sharing mechanisms. We will 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 other priorities identified in this Action Plan.

### Our Priorities for 2021-2024 are to:

- Support the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC).
- Maintain and further develop the transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem health indicators.

## Promoting Targeted Transboundary Information Exchange

In addition to the conference and ecosystem indicators reporting, regular meetings and communication with the SoC Working Group are key information-sharing opportunities. We convene focused discussions with members and guests to explore and highlight issues related to the PAIs.

For example, in recent years we have brought special presentations to the SoC Working Group on topics including U.S. federal [storm surge](#) and [coastal ocean](#) modelling, marine plastics, and the response to the Big Bar landslide.

For 2021-2024 we reaffirm our commitment to informing the SoC Working Group and other ecosystem partners of federal initiatives in the Salish Sea such as the Oceans Protection Plan, the U.S. Federal Task Force for Puget Sound, and relevant climate change and environmental initiatives. Further, we will continue work to increase awareness and understanding of developments in environmental and impact review and notification processes.

## Our Priorities for 2021-2024 are to:

- Promote and foster coordination and information sharing activities on Salish Sea-related federal initiatives, and identify opportunities where U.S. and Canadian federal interests and mechanisms may intersect.
- Support information-sharing activities on environmental and impact assessment and notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem.

# Strengthening Transboundary Coordination Mechanisms

The SoC recognizes the many existing cross-border and other coordination and information-sharing mechanisms and states the intention to “work through these cooperative mechanisms to the fullest extent possible.”

Cross-border mechanisms within the Salish Sea region have evolved greatly since the SoC was signed in 2000. Several major developments bear note. First, the [Coast Salish Gathering](#) has emerged as a unique environmental policy forum where Coast Salish Tribal and First Nations governments, state, provincial and federal governments build mutual understanding and discuss strategies to address environmental issues facing our shared Salish Sea region.

Second, salmon and estuary recovery and protection efforts by local, tribal, federal, and state actors 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 utilizes working or task groups as needed to target topical transboundary issues.

The SoC Working Group continues to support and engage with these mechanisms. 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. Working Group members also support ongoing activities of a BC-WA Nooksack River Transboundary Technical Collaboration Group. In May 2017, the Working Group convened a special webinar on EPA technical initiatives relevant to the BC/WA Nooksack River Transboundary Task Group. WA and BC continue to lead this work, to which EPA and ECCC contribute as observers to this new forum.

We are also working to solidify transboundary representation within the Puget Sound “Management Conference”<sup>6</sup>; a Canadian scientist now serves on the Puget Sound Science Panel, and there is opportunity for increased Canadian participation as *ex officio* members of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Coordination Board.

For 2021-2024, we will continue to support existing and emerging transboundary coordination mechanisms.

## Our Priorities for 2021-2024 are to:

- Support State/Provincial and local transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms.
- Support Tribal-First Nation transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms.

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6 The Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) coordinates the Puget Sound region’s collective effort to protect and restore Puget Sound. PSP, its boards, and the decision-making structure are also known as the Puget Sound Management Conference.

## Working Group Administration

ECCC and EPA share in the administration of the SoC Working Group that includes:

- Planning, convening, facilitating, and reporting on semi-annual Working Group meetings;
- Leading the development and implementation of Action Plans;
- Convening special meetings and information-sharing sessions to spotlight topics of priority transboundary interest;
- Identifying and pursuing opportunities to further advance SoC goals and Action Plan PAIs, including as raised by Working Group Advisory Members, Working Group meeting guests, and SoC Action Plan evaluation and review processes;
- Keeping ECCC and EPA senior leadership informed of key SoC-related developments and supporting their engagement in SoC-related transboundary forums; and
- Sharing information about each agency’s relevant activities and protocols.

In addition to these activities, during the 2017-2020 Action Plan period, the Working Group co-chairs established a “Sharing Information” email series to inform Working Group members of developments and opportunities relevant to the PAIs. Since the first email in 2018, more than 50 updates have been shared on major policy and funding initiatives, environmental review processes, and other projects on both sides of the border.

ECCC and EPA intend to continue to support these Working Group Administration activities in the 2021-24 Action Plan period.

Finally, ECCC and EPA commit to adaptively manage the Working Group Terms of Reference, Working Group structure and function, and Priority Action Item commitments, consistent with Tribal trust and treaty, reconciliation with First Nations, and other related mandates, responsibilities, and priorities.

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## Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Salish Sea Ecosystem

### 2021-2024 Commitments

Priority Action Item (PAI)	Outcome	Proposed Outputs	Primary Responsibility
1. Support for the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2021-2024 Action Plan PAIs advanced</li> <li>Sustained support for the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WG member participation in the Executive and Program Committees</li> <li>Content advancing 2021-2024 Action Plan PAIs.</li> <li>Approaches for supporting the long-term organizational and financial sustainability of the conference are explored and resulting WG member commitments upheld and implemented.</li> </ul>	All members
2. Maintain and further develop the transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem health Indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued web presence for decision support and for the public.</li> <li>Continued information sharing and collaboration with transboundary partners and subject matter experts to facilitate integrated understanding of transboundary ecosystem health and inform ecosystem-based approaches in Salish Sea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EPA website updated with current information for existing and new indicators relevant to the goals and objectives of the SoC.</li> <li>Targeted information-sharing activities to support indicator updates.</li> <li>EPA &amp; ECCC engagement to identify opportunities to expand the suite of indicators, to better represent Indigenous knowledge, and to link to related regional initiatives.</li> <li>Processes explored for applying indicators to inform adaptive management of SoC Action Plan and other Salish Sea work.</li> </ul>	EPA & ECCC Technical Leads
3. Support information sharing activities on environmental and impact assessment and notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea ecosystem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased WG understanding of developments in transboundary environmental and impact and notification processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Periodic updates to WG on US and Canadian Federal environmental and impact assessment review processes State-Provincial, Indigenous, or other review processes or mechanisms (e.g., BC-WA MOU on environmental review).</li> <li>WG members share information about project EA processes, including a standing agenda item at WG meetings.</li> </ul>	EPA & ECCC All members

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## Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Salish Sea Ecosystem

### 2021-2024 Commitments

Priority Action Item (PAI)	Outcome	Proposed Outputs	Primary Responsibility
4. Support Tribal-First Nation transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tribal and First Nation transboundary coordination and connection on Salish Sea health are supported, consistent with Tribal trust and First Nations treaty and reconciliation mandates, responsibilities, and priorities.</li> <li>WG has greater awareness of Tribal and First Nation Salish Sea ecosystem interests and priorities, and activities of WG reflect this greater awareness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore options to improve support for tribal and First Nation transboundary coordination and engagement, including in the SOC Working Group.</li> <li>Continued active engagement by Coast Salish Gathering Steering Committee</li> <li>WG members participate and engage as invited in the annual Coast Salish Gathering and other key Tribal-First Nation coordination and information sharing forums.</li> </ul>	<p>EPA &amp; ECCC</p> <p>Coast Salish Gathering advisory members</p> <p>All members</p>
5. Support State/Provincial and local transboundary coordination and information sharing mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EPA and ECCC coordinate with, state/provincial/local needs and initiatives relating to water quality issues and ecosystem health in border watersheds, including data-sharing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued support of the BC/WA Nooksack River Technical Collaboration Group (TCG).</li> <li>Continued updates by relevant WG members on the Swift Creek/Sumas Mountain Sediment Management Project and include a standing agenda item at WG meetings.</li> <li>Explore engagement with other local and State/Provincial transboundary mechanisms including the Puget Sound Management Conference on shared interests and opportunities for cooperation.</li> </ul>	<p>EPA &amp; ECCC</p> <p>All members</p>
6. Promote and foster coordination and information sharing activities on Salish Sea-related federal Initiatives; identify opportunities where US and Canadian federal interests and mechanisms may intersect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WG members and their stakeholders are well informed of federal Salish Sea protection initiatives.</li> <li>Potential areas for transboundary collaboration are identified.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Webinar(s) or other information sharing activities on key federal initiatives (e.g. Ocean Protection Plan, Salish Sea Initiative, Puget Sound Federal Action Plan) involving appropriate coordinating bodies (e.g., the BC Federal Council; or the U.S. Federal Task Force for Puget Sound).</li> <li>Explore transboundary meetings of federal partners to review shared interests and progress, including on ecosystem science, climate change, and other environmental issues.</li> <li>Continued engagement in and tracking of transboundary ecosystem governance initiatives as they relate to current SoC and federal roles.</li> </ul>	<p>WG Co-chairs</p> <p>All members</p>





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**Anna Classen**  
Regional Director General  
Environment and Climate Change Canada  
West and North

MICHELLE  
PIRZADEH

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**Michelle Pirzadeh**  
Deputy Regional Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Region 10