



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

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JAN 22 2015

Brian Houseal, Chair  
U.S. National Advisory Committee  
Adirondack Council  
103 Hand Avenue, Suite 3  
Elizabethtown, NY 12932

Office of  
International and  
Tribal Affairs

Dear Mr. Houseal:

On behalf of Administrator Gina McCarthy, I would like to thank you for the National Advisory Committee (NAC) letter of advice of December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 reporting on the forty-third meeting held by teleconference in Washington, D.C. on October 23, 2014. We appreciate the recommendations provided by the NAC on integrating Council priorities and cross-cutting themes into the CEC Operational Plan, integrating traditional ecological knowledge into CEC activities, and the CEC Performance Framework.

It was a pleasure for JoAnn and me to meet with those who attended the meeting in person and those who participated via teleconference. We value our relationship with the NAC committee members and we appreciate the commitment the NAC members make to support our Administrator, particularly through the U.S. Chairmanship of the CEC Council.

We are pleased that the NAC members support the strategic priorities and cross-cutting themes that underpin the CEC 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. The Council determined these priorities to enable cooperative trilateral initiatives that cover the spectrum of regional environmental challenges. As you have noted, the Council took particular care to highlight the importance of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and have committed the CEC to working with tribal communities and experts to develop meaningful engagements on TEK.

***Recommendations on Charge Question 1:***

*(1) The NAC respectfully recommends that the EPA further prioritize and reduce the list of proposed USG projects based on criteria which reflect trilateral interest, the CEC mission, direct impact on the strategic priorities, and ability to attract other governmental or private sector funds to implement the project.*

*(2) Noting that the NAC's response to this Charge Question, re: the CEC Operational Plan is incomplete due to the timing of the document's preparation, we respectfully offer to provide comments on the final draft 2015 CEC Operational Plan at such time that the document be made available to us.*

We agree with your recommendation to prioritize and streamline the proposed projects based on the criteria that reflect trilateral interests, the CEC mission, the impacts on CEC strategic priorities, and we understand the need for projects to leverage resources where possible.

The Alternative Representatives considered 54 projects proposed by government experts representing federal agencies in our three countries. From this list expansive group, the Alt Reps have approved 16 projects to be further developed for the 2015-16 Operational Plan. The approved projects reflect the criteria noted above and include several of the projects recommended by the NAC, including: *North America's Blue Carbon: Assessing the Role of Coastal Habitats in the Continent's Carbon Budget*; *Using Ecosystem Function and Tribal Ecological Knowledge together to Build Resilience and Adapt to Climate Change over North America*; and *Engaging Farmers and Other Landowners to Support Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Conservation* among several other U.S. proposals selected for development.

We further note that project steering committees are still developing project specifics in order to improve their potential outcomes. We acknowledge that the project proposals provided to the NAC represented only the U.S. proposals and we will provide an approved Operational Plan in the coming weeks.

***Recommendations for Charge Question 2:***

- (1) The NAC respectfully recommends to the EPA that a Tri-national Working Group on Traditional Ecological Knowledge be formed to explore appropriate protocols and procedures to incorporate TEK into the CEC's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and Annual Operational Plans.*
- (2) The NAC respectfully recommends that the CEC make available NAPECA grant funds to encourage and strengthen the incorporation of TEK into North American programs and activities.*

We concur with the recommendation to form a trilateral committee dedicated to establishing an international interface between indigenous peoples, traditional knowledge holders, and governments. The Parties have agreed to establish a TEK group of experts composed of five TEK experts from each CEC country to advise and consult on the cooperative work plans of the CEC. We will continue to work with our NAC advisors to develop this list and finalize the expert group soon.

We also agree with the recommendation to make NAPECA grant funds available to projects that strengthen the integration of TEK into our cooperative efforts. We will continue to encourage our counterparts from Mexico and Canada to consider this approach in developing the Request for Proposals for NAPECA grants in 2015-16.

***Recommendations for Charge Question 3:***

- 1) The NAC respectfully recommends that the CEC continue to refine the Performance Framework and identify Key Performance Indicators to measure the effectiveness of its outputs and outcomes, and which can be readily understood by the CEC's internal and external stakeholders.*



2) *The NAC respectfully recommends that the CEC also incorporates environmental baseline conditions and measures trends over the coming years to assess whether or not it has had an impact on the Strategic Priorities and Cross-cutting Themes from 2015-2020.*

Your advice on the performance measures shows a deep reflection and consideration of how the Parties and the CEC can improve their approach to measuring both the output and outcomes of our collective efforts. We agree that the performance measures currently outlined require greater specificity and the inclusion of Key Performance Indicators. It is true that some projects do not as easily avail themselves to clear-cut performance measures and for such projects we will continue to encourage an approach that meets the criteria of supporting the broad objectives of the NAAEC. . We also agree that these measures need to be more readily understood by the CEC's internal and external stakeholders.

We also note that the CEC has unique access to scientific information, mapping and monitoring tools, and collaborative tools at many levels to assess and inform on the impacts of climate change, green growth, and sustainable communities and ecosystems across North America. The Parties have supported the inclusion of *Taking Stock; North American Pollutant Releases and Transfer* into the annual activities of the CEC and we are further considering a strategic vision for the maintenance, interoperability, and future development of these information tools. We appreciate the suggestions to incorporate environmental baselines and will work toward that end as we continue to refine these important resources.

Again, we thank the NAC for their thorough reflections and thoughtful advice and look forward to further discussions to improve the impact of our trilateral cooperation.

Sincerely,



Jane Nishida  
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator