



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

February 7, 2011

Paul Ganster
Chair
Good Neighbor Environmental Board
5500 Campanile Drive
San Diego, CA 92182-4403

Dear Chair Ganster,

Thank you for your June 2010 report, "A Blueprint for Action on the U.S.-Mexico Border." We greatly appreciate the Good Neighbor Environmental Board's (GNEB's) recommendations. The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) has coordinated this response to GNEB's report with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Energy (DOE), Department of the Interior (DOI), U.S. Department of State (State Department), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

President Obama has made securing our Southwest Border a top priority for this Administration. We will work to balance our need for a secure border with our responsibility for protecting the environment and human health. Our efforts to ensure our security do not diminish our commitment to environmental protection, including the protection of important ecosystems along our border.

CEQ is hosting regular meetings of the Southwest Border Interagency Working Group (SBIWG). The SBIWG provides a forum to discuss pressing cross-departmental issues as they arise, and will use the recommendations provided in GNEB's 13th report as a guide in the coming months. In order to better organize our response, we gathered agency responses under two broad themes: (1) climate change impacts, adaptation and mitigation and (2) improving environmental quality, discussed below.

Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Mitigation

GNEB's recommendations with regard to climate adaptation focus on increasing energy efficiency, conservation, and alternative energy production, areas in which EPA, DOE and other agencies are actively working to promote and support in the border region. We agree with the GNEB recommendation that binational cooperation is essential to achieving harmonization of regulations and permitting processes, accurate assessments of transboundary environmental impacts, and improved research on renewable energy resources.

To achieve these goals, DOE is working to develop best practices for energy conservation and alternative energy production in states along the southwest border. Currently, DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE) and National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) are working together with Mexico's Secretariat of Energy (SENER) and its Institute for Electricity Research (IIE) to develop a work plan that maps wind resources in strategic areas of Mexico and facilitates cooperation on wind turbine testing, standards and design. DOE's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability (OE) is also working with SENER and CFE, Mexico's state-run utility company, on the deployment of Smart Grid technologies, which will allow for greater efficiency in the electric power sector.

EPA is working with local, state and Federal agencies on both sides of the border to build capacity to address climate change, through facilitation of technical assistance, education and training projects that include: energy efficiency, freight sustainability, methane capture and climate action planning. EPA is also making available information and resource tools to local and state decision makers related to energy efficiency and GHG reduction measures, through its State and Local Climate and Energy Program. Also, NOAA's North America Drought Monitor (NADM) is a cooperative effort between drought experts in Canada, Mexico and the United States that monitors drought across the continent.

In addition to these initiatives, President Obama and President Calderon committed to strengthening bilateral cooperation through a US-Mexico Bilateral Framework on Clean Energy and Climate Change, launched in April 2009. The Bilateral Framework focuses on renewable energy, energy efficiency, adaptation, market mechanisms, forestry and land use, clean energy jobs, low carbon energy technology development and capacity building. Agencies across the Federal Government have committed to move toward greater cooperation in the border regions on efforts such clean and renewable energy, energy efficiency and reductions of greenhouse gas emissions.

Improving Environmental Quality

We agree that in order to build productive partnerships that improve environmental quality, binational cooperation is essential. As such, EPA has been working with Mexico to improve cooperation on hazardous waste facilities in the border area. Under the "Consultative Mechanism for the Exchange of Information on New and Existing Facilities for the Management of Hazardous and Radioactive Waste" agreement, the U.S. and Mexico exchange data on permitted hazardous and radioactive waste management facilities in the border region. Furthermore, EPA contributes funding to the California Department of Toxic Substances Control in order to carry out compliance assistance training in cities such as Tijuana, Tecate and Mexicali in Baja California, Mexico, which include topics on binational regulatory frameworks and pollution prevention. Pilot projects, funded through the U.S. Mexico Border 2012 Program, have established cooperative relationships with Mexican officials to develop an inventory and collect obsolete, banned, and high risk agricultural pesticides along the California-Baja California and Arizona-Sonora border regions.

To help address vehicle emissions, EPA, the Department of Transportation (DOT), and DHS are exploring measures that could effectively reduce vehicle idling at ports of entry. EPA and DOT will host a "Greening Transportation at the Border" workshop on February 23, 2011, and are exploring additional ways to green transportation systems along the border. DOT continues to work with the U.S./Mexico Joint Working Committee to sponsor studies regarding better use of technology to improve the efficiency of the border regions' transportation systems. DOT and DHS will be conducting pilot studies through the automated border wait time measurements program, which improves the measurement of idling times at ports of entries.

With regard to land conservation, DOI continues to engage with Mexico through the Trilateral Committee for Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and through an MOU between DOI and Mexico's Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT). DOI is also exploring additional opportunities for cooperation in this area through the Landscape Conservation Cooperation (LCC) and Field Coordinating Committee. Furthermore, DOI is evaluating ways to participate within the La Paz Agreement framework, which emphasizes pollution control by sharing information, coordinating as relevant and ensuring that efforts are mutually supportive and not duplicative.

Concerning institutional authorities, GNEB's recommendations highlight areas where departments or agencies are limited by statutory authority, budgetary constraints or jurisdiction. CEQ recognizes the need for continued coordination between and among the departments and agencies, especially where these issues arise in the context of collaborative efforts. For example, DHS provided \$6.8 million to DOI for

mitigation efforts and habitat projects along the border region. In addition, DHS and DOI are working together to provide secure cross border access to Big Bend National Park, which had a long history of bilateral cooperation in the conservation of the Park's natural and cultural resources.

President Obama and his Administration are committed to environmental quality and will continue to facilitate increased collaboration on border environmental issues. This will include promoting the use of interagency partnerships, and coordinating Federal, State and local resources. CEQ and the Federal departments and agencies involved with border issues share many of GNEB's concerns. I look forward to the Board's upcoming 14th report, and to continuing to work with the Board.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy H. Sutley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "N" and "S".

Nancy H. Sutley
Chair