



## **2ND ANNUAL REGULAR SESSION OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS COMMISSION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION (CEC)**

**Oaxaca, Mexico  
October 13, 1995**

We, the Environment Ministers of the NAFTA countries -- Canada, Mexico and the United States -- have met in Oaxaca, Mexico for the second annual regular session since the creation of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. We are gathered to reaffirm our commitment to working with each other to foster the conservation and protection of the North American environment as our countries develop increased economic, trade and social links. We believe work accomplished in the last year ushers a new era of results-oriented cooperation and contributes to the greater well-being of our people, including both present and future generations.

The environment knows no borders. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the animals which move freely, all bind us together. But with these shared resources comes a collective responsibility. Only by working together will we solve North America's most pressing environmental problems in an efficient and cost-effective manner. In this way, we can make the North American region an environmental example for the rest of the world.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The CEC is striving to promote full public participation in the environmental decision-making process in North America. Local communities play a unique and essential role in protecting the environment and ensuring that economic growth does not endanger natural resources and ecosystems. For this reason, we decided today to create a Can \$2.0 million North American Environment Fund to offer grants to community-based organizations for projects that promote an integrated approach to ecosystem management and the sustainable use of natural resources important to the region as a whole. Ultimately, these community initiatives may serve as valuable experiences for the rest of North America.

**Report on Migratory Bird Deaths:** Today we released the CEC Secretariat's report, prepared under Article 13 of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC), on the die-off of migratory birds last winter at the Silva Reservoir in central Mexico. This report was prepared at the request of a coalition of American and Mexican non-governmental groups.



## **PROGRESS ON COOPERATIVE ACTION**

The central purpose of our work is to strengthen links which will improve environmental protection and conservation of the North American environment. This year, the CEC laid the groundwork for cooperative action that will bear fruit for many years. Our principal accomplishments this year are in Reducing Risk to Human Health, Wildlife Habitat Protection, Climate Change and the Information Highway.

### **Reducing Risk to Human Health**

One of the central goals of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC) was to ensure our continued economic health, while at the same time maintaining the health of our environment. Cooperative pollution prevention strategies are key to reducing the risk posed to humans by dangerous pollutants.

**Fast-track pollutant action:** The governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States are taking the first steps to agree on joint action to reduce toxic pollutants. The harmful effects of toxic pollutants may be irreversible, and associated health and clean-up costs are burdensome on governments and taxpayers. Our initiative targets the sound management of 12 pollutants identified by United Nations Environment Protection (UNEP) and certain heavy metals. From this group we are giving immediate priority to PCBs, and will select 3 other toxic substances and heavy metals for action plans by January 15, 1996.

**Pollutant inventory:** This past year, the NAFTA partners began to examine their common need for an inventory of polluting emissions. We have decided to create a North American Pollutant Release Inventory which will bring together, for the first time, existing national public information about emissions and long-range transportation of pollutants. This vital tool for improving the quality of the environment will be the result of harmonized methods of reporting on pollutant emissions of mutual concern.

### **Wildlife Habitat Protection**

Improved management of key habitats in North America is a priority for Canada, Mexico and the United States. These habitats are an essential link in the chain of life upon which we depend. They also are the home for migratory species which move freely across borders between the three countries. By developing common strategies for the conservation and protection of North American environment, including the wild flora and fauna, we will protect the biodiversity of our region.



**Ecoregion Maps:** By creating the first-ever set of maps on North American ecoregions, we are increasing understanding of the diversity of the environment. These maps will help scientists and policy makers in the three countries by providing them with a common basis for classifying ecoregions in North America. Developed by a trinational governmental team of cartographers, geographers and biologists, the data used to produce the maps will be made available in a written report and electronically.

**Protecting Songbirds:** Each year, some 250 species of songbirds travel through Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. A decline in the quality of habitat has put several of these species at risk. The survival of these migratory birds is our collective responsibility. This year, in cooperation with bird-watchers throughout North America, we developed a program which will identify the important flight paths and bird habitats and create an inventory of existing policies and measures for the protection of our song birds.

### **Energy Efficiency and Climate Change**

Many of the complex environmental issues facing the countries of North America have a global dimension. One issue is climate change. Scientists have shown that climate change is resulting in irreversible damage to our globe. By cooperating to meet this crucial challenge, the NAFTA countries have an opportunity to lead the world in advancing common policies that will save energy, increase industrial efficiency and possibly avoid a catastrophe.

**Towards Reducing Greenhouse Emissions:** This year, we took two major steps to work cooperatively towards reduction of greenhouse emissions in North America. The first step was the signing of a statement of intent to cooperate on issues of mutual interest in the area of climate change. The second step was to create an inter-governmental working group to exchange views and advance cooperative actions in such areas as promoting forest conservation and boosting investment in “green” technology, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

### **North American Green Lane**

Access to accurate and timely information is one of the most essential tools for building regional environmental cooperation. Reliable data supports better decision-making in the North American countries, and leads to a greater understanding of the environmental challenges we face.

This year we are inaugurating several initiatives which, by linking us to the electronic “information highway,” bring us closer together and enable us to share our expertise across borders.



**Information Center:** This year, the CEC created the CEC Resource and Public Information Center at its headquarters in Montreal. This center will electronically link users to thousands of environmental databases and information centers being developed by both the public and private sectors across North America. By acting as a clearinghouse for North American environmental information, the center will smooth the flow of information across borders.

**Environmental Information on Internet:** This month the CEC is inaugurating a CEC homepage on the WorldWideWeb of the Internet to serve as a public access point for a wide range of electronic information. The homepage will provide the public with inexpensive access to CEC publications, the CEC Resource and Information Center, a registry of citizens' environmental concerns, and CEC databases.

**Law Database:** This year the CEC developed the first of many databases: a comparative law database, accessible on the Internet, which enables policy-makers, researchers and environmental professionals to compare different approaches in North America to environmental policy and law-making.

**Private-Public Information Partnership:** The NAFTA partners recognize that joint private-public ventures will help us achieve our environmental goals faster and more efficiently. This year, Hewlett Packard is setting the example through its corporate sponsorship of computer and telecommunications equipment for a Mexico City-based initiative: the North American Center for Environmental Information and Communication (CICEANA). Through the center, citizens--including representatives of the media -- will be able to use computers to gain access to the latest regional environmental information.

### **Transboundary Initiatives**

In signing the environmental side accord to NAFTA, we committed ourselves not only to improved cooperation, but also increased openness. For this reason, in the past year, we have given priority to the creation of mechanisms for more information-sharing and public participation.

**Access to Information:** Canada, Mexico and the United States this year took action to promote public access to environmental information by signing a resolution which will lead to specific actions for ensuring appropriate access to environmental information by the public in all three countries.

**Environmental Impact:** The NAFTA partners recognize that some activities undertaken in one country may adversely affect citizens of another. This year, officials from the three countries took the first major step towards reaching an agreement on the best way to exchange information and reduce the environmental impact of projects which may significantly affect a neighboring country.



## **Public Submissions**

Promoting public participation in cooperative efforts to strengthen environmental protection is a top priority for the NAFTA partners. The environmental side accord to NAFTA makes provisions for citizens to call attention to both local and regional environmental problems. Under Articles 14 and 15 of the NAAEC, the Secretariat of the CEC can consider a submission from any non-governmental organization or person who alleges that one of the NAFTA governments is failing to effectively enforce its environmental laws.

This year, in response to public requests for additional information and guidance on how to use Articles 14 and 15, we developed citizen guidelines on enforcement matters. Citizens had the opportunity this past summer to review and comment on these guidelines during public consultations in Ottawa, Washington, D.C. and Mexico City led by the Joint Public Advisory Committee of the CEC.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

### **Greater Public Participation**

The public is partner in North American environmental cooperation. Our commitment to this partnership is embodied in the high-level involvement of these groups in our cooperative programs. It is also reflected in the work of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC). In the coming year, their role will grow stronger as we consult the public with greater frequency and effectiveness.

### **Country Contributions**

To underscore the importance we place on regional environmental cooperation, we are contributing US\$9 million to the CEC for 1996. This contribution comes equally from the three NAFTA partners.

**For more information, contact the CEC: Rachel Vincent (514) 350-4308 or Corrie Castello (514) 350-4338, in Montreal, Canada.**