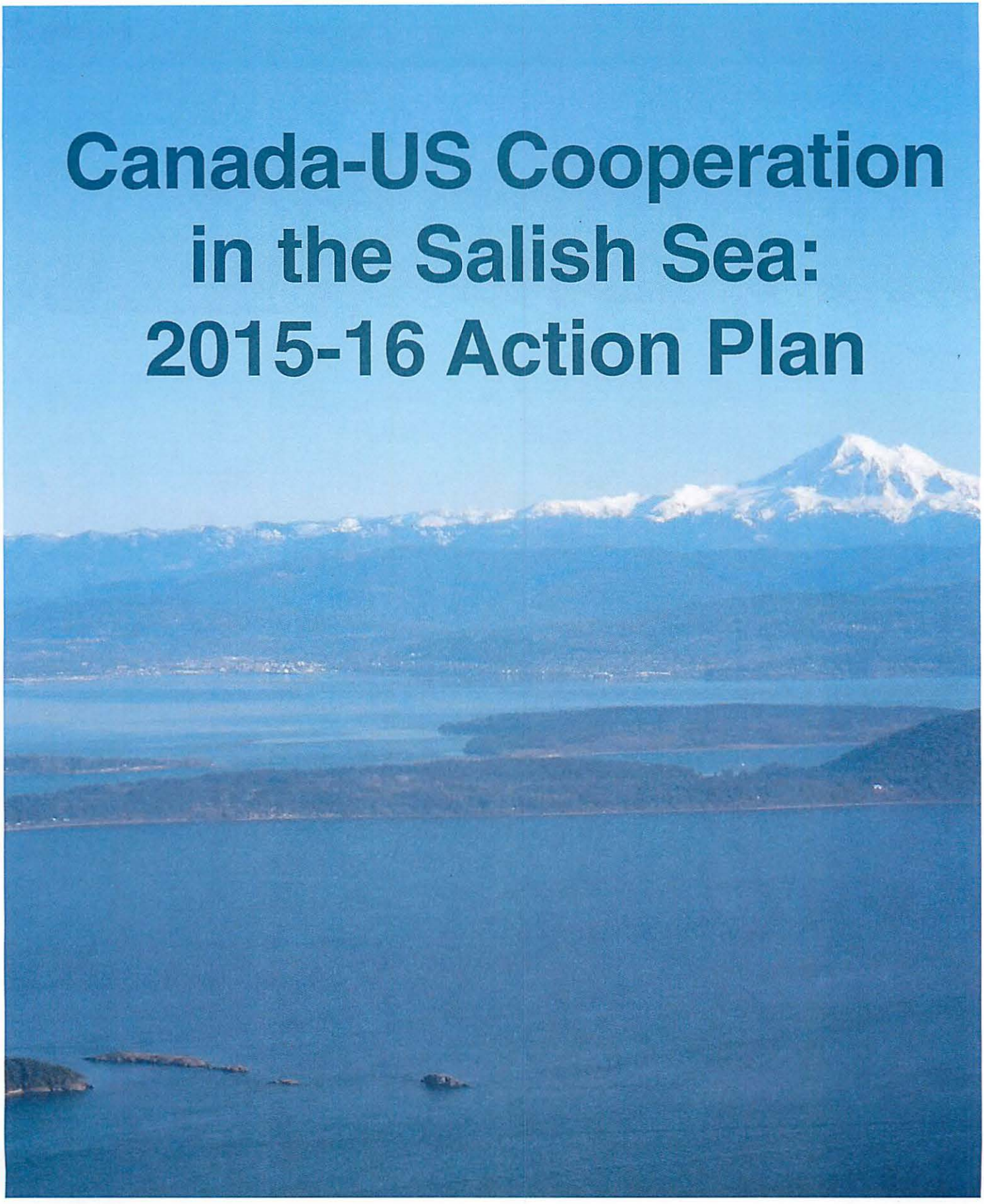
Canada-US Cooperation in the Salish Sea: 2015-16 Action Plan



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Fifteen Years of International Cooperation

The Salish Sea comprises Puget Sound, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Strait of Georgia and together with its contributing watersheds constitutes one of the most ecologically diverse ecosystems in North America. Currently, a population of more than 7 million inhabits the Salish Sea ecosystem, with some projections envisioning an increase to over 9 million by the year 2025[1]. The Salish Sea is the homeland of the Coast Salish people, represented by over 50 First Nations in Canada and more than 20 Tribes in the United States.

The Canadian and U.S. federal governments have a unique responsibility to address the transboundary environmental challenges confronting the future of this ecosystem. At the national level, agreements are in place between the two governments for addressing issues such as air quality, migratory birds, transboundary waters and transportation of hazardous waste.

On January 19, 2000, the Regional Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Minister for Environment Canada (EC) signed a Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Georgia Basin and Puget Sound Ecosystem ("Statement of Cooperation"). The Statement of Cooperation outlines common goals for the health of the ecosystem and commits the two agencies to work collaboratively to achieve these goals. EC and EPA co-chair a working group under the Statement of Cooperation which includes representation from Tribes and First Nations, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Washington State Department of Ecology, Puget Sound Partnership, and Northwest Straits Commission. The working group develops and periodically updates Action Plans to achieve Statement of Cooperation goals.

This document presents EC and EPA's 2015-16 goals under the Statement of Cooperation[2]. For 2015-16, EC and EPA propose that our Statement of Cooperation Action Plan focus on implementing the following key shared priorities over the next two years.

1 EPA-EC "Health of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Report," http://www2.epa.gov/salish-sea/executive-summary

2 In addition to efforts under the Statement of Cooperation, EC and EPA currently collaborate in several program areas. These activities may involve other partners, such as Tribes and First Nations, as well as other organizations, and include transboundary coordination under regional hazard response agreements; activity related to naturally occurring asbestos in the Swift Creek/ Sumas River system; transboundary elements of the diesel team under the West Coast Collaborative; and the Northwest Ports Clean Air Strategy.

Promoting Knowledge and Information Exchange

The two agencies have identified a joint goal of supporting knowledge and information sharing on transboundary ecosystem issues. Two ongoing major thrusts under this shared commitment include supporting the highly acclaimed regional Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference; and maintenance and dissemination of a unique suite of transboundary ecosystem indicators tracking the health of the Salish Sea.

The Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference is perhaps the largest, most comprehensive event of its kind in the region. The conference brings together scientists, First Nations and tribal government representatives, resource managers, community and business leaders, policy makers, educators and students to present the latest scientific research on the state of the ecosystem, and to guide future actions for protecting and restoring it. The first joint Canada-U.S. interdisciplinary conference focused on the Salish Sea was held in 2003 and has been held in 2005, 2007, 2009, 2011, and 2014. More than 1200 participants attended the most recent conference, selected highlights of which have been captured in a series of articles synthesizing key tracks of ecosystem research in the Salish Sea.

The Health of the Salish Sea transboundary indicator report describes trends in indicators that can help identify priorities for future action across the entire Salish Sea. The 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 beaches, and swimming beaches. These indicators help show where we are seeing progress in sustainably managing the Salish Sea ecosystem and its valuable resources, where conditions are declining, and where course corrections are needed. This work has recently been described in an article found at http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14634988.2014.980209#.VMq8jpU5AiQ.

For 2015-16 we reaffirm our commitment to strengthen information sharing across the border when such sharing can promote better protection of the Salish Sea ecosystem. We plan to continue active support of the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference and the Health of the Salish Sea Report, and we also plan to convene focused information sharing activities around current high priority topics such as water quality at the border and oil transport.

Our goals for 2015-16 are the following:

- Support the 2016 Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference
- Maintain/update the Health of the Salish Sea Report
- Support information sharing on current high priority topics (e.g., water quality at the border, environmental aspects of energy transportation) in the Salish Sea

Spotlighting Transboundary Demonstration Projects

Our historical goal in this area has been to promote targeted planning and actions through transboundary demonstration projects that contribute to positive change in air quality, water quality, and habitat and species health. In 2011, the EC and EPA co-chairs convened a session at the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference, "Transboundary Collaboration I – From Parallel Play to Integrated Play: Case Studies," showcasing several prominent transboundary projects and examining factors that led to their success. Panelists reviewed the Northwest Ports Clean Air Strategy; the WhaleWise boater outreach project; the Derelict Gear Removal Project; and the Coast Salish Tribal Canoe Journey Water Quality Project.

In addition, working group members either directly lead or provide other kinds of support to transboundary Salish Sea ecosystem efforts. Examples include leading transboundary demonstration derelict gear removal activities; providing funding for a joint U.S.-Canadian research program investigating factors affecting marine survival of salmonids; and providing funding for "green" shoreline development efforts.

In 2012, EC and EPA piloted a high resolution land cover change detection methodology innovated by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in a transboundary area within the Salish Sea ecosystem. In following years, this expanded to a partnership with the . University of British Columbia to explore landscape drivers of changes in water quality in the Abbotsford-Sumas area and the Boundary Bay catchment.

In 2012, EC and EPA also worked with the Swinomish Tribe to pilot an approach to demonstrate relationships between traditional ecological knowledge and environmental health indicators. This resulted in a partnership with the Tseil-Waututh First Nation and publication of a peer-reviewed article on integrating biophysical indicators of climate change to social science indicators of indigenous community health.

Our goal for 2015-16 is the following:

- To spotlight, where possible, transboundary demonstration projects that exemplify other goals specified in this document

Dennis J. McLerran
EPA Region 10 Administrator

Dr. Caroline Caza
Regional Director General, Environment Canada, West and North

Strengthening Coordination and Governance Mechanisms

Our historical goal in this area has been to improve functional coordination of transboundary plans and actions. Examples of past working group activity to improve functional coordination include the following:

1. Tribal and First Nation Coast Salish Gathering staff engaging in the working group;
2. Special sessions and panels highlighting challenges and achievements in transboundary coordination; and
3. Strengthening transboundary coordination mechanisms.

A fundamental tenet of the Statement of Cooperation is to work closely with Tribes and First Nations so that their knowledge and perspective can contribute to our common efforts. Since 2000, staff coordinators of the Coast Salish Gathering have represented and conveyed perspectives arising from this forum (http://www.coastsalishgathering.com/). The Gathering is an environmental policy platform where the tribal and First Nations governments, state, provincial and federal governments can discuss environmental strategies and practices. There have been more than five Gatherings, bringing together elected and traditional leaders.

More generally, working group chairs and members have actively facilitated dialogue on transboundary collaboration mechanisms. In 2009, the chairs led a session at the Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference, "Transboundary Ecosystem-based Management in the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin: Exploring Opportunities for Enhanced Collaboration." In 2011, the chairs led sessions building on this dialogue, including "Transboundary Collaboration II – Raising the Next Generation of Transboundary Projects." All these sessions were well-attended and stimulated active exchange.

Finally, the working group co-chairs worked with the Washington State Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) to improve coordination of transboundary plans and actions by encouraging formal Canadian participation in the Puget Sound Management Conference. In part as a result of these efforts, two Canadian scientists now formally serve on the Puget Sound Science Panel, and two Canadian entities (British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Fraser Basin Council) participate as ex officio members of the Puget Sound Ecosystem Coordination Board. This formalized Canadian participation should further strengthen transboundary communication and coordination on Salish Sea efforts.

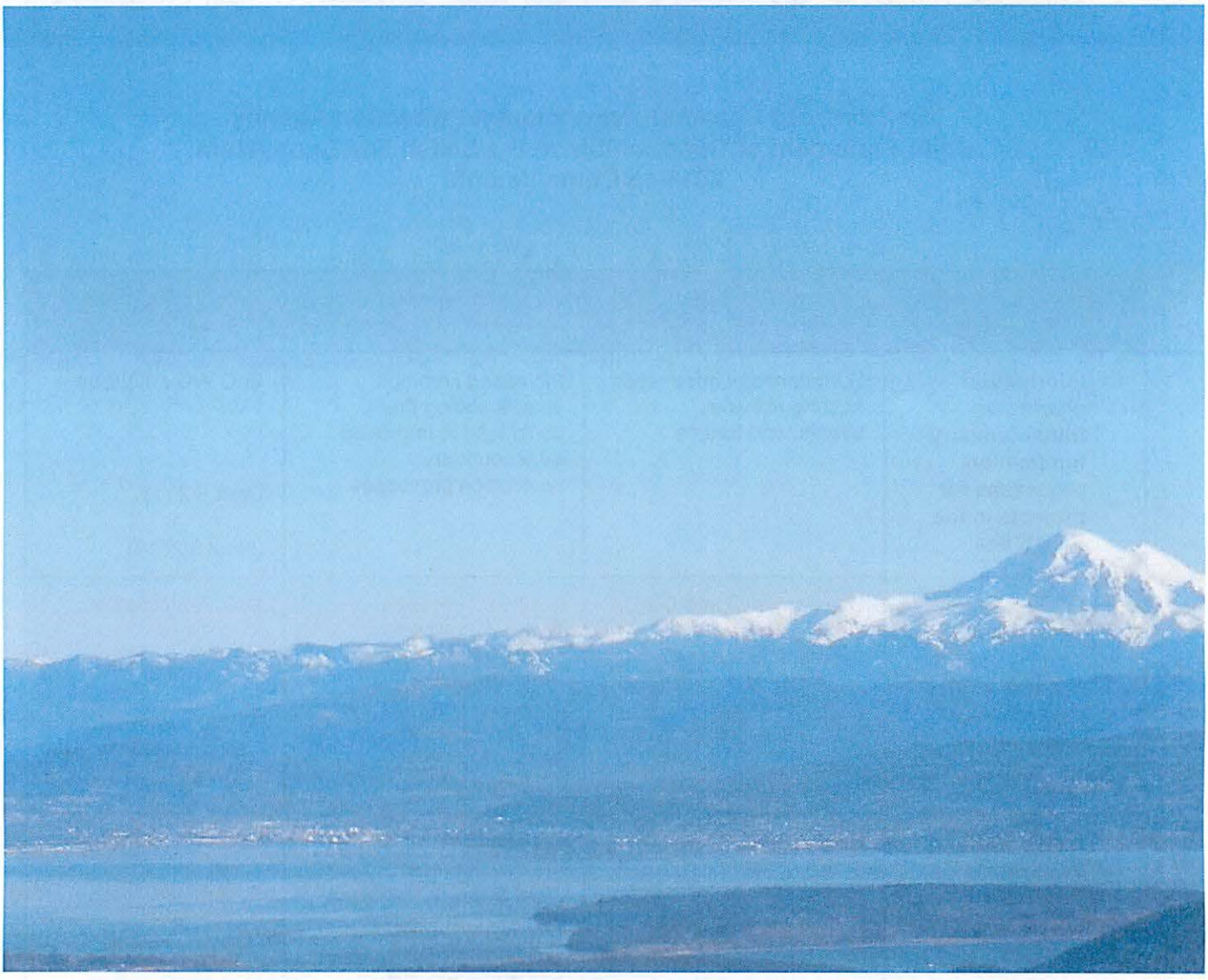
For 2015-16, our goals are to enhance the existing functioning of the SoC working group by establishing Terms of Reference for the group, with the objective of increasing its effectiveness in transboundary coordination and achievement of SoC objectives. We will also seek opportunities to advance information sharing on a complex area of transboundary governance and coordination – notification processes for projects with the potential for transboundary environmental impacts.

Our goals for 2015-16 are the following:

- Develop terms of reference for the working group
- Support information sharing activities on transboundary notification processes

Environment Canada-Environmental Protection Agency
Joint Statement of Cooperation on the Salish Sea Ecosystem
2015-16 Commitments

Priority Action Item (PAI)	Product	Outcome	Responsibility; Completion Date
1. **Information sharing on transboundary notification processes for projects in the Salish Sea**	Summaries of information sharing activities, events, and forums	Increased common understanding that could lead to improved transboundary notification processes	SoC WG subgroup Draft 9/2015 (Final 6/2016)
2. **Transboundary information sharing on upland-coastal water linkages in border areas**	Summaries of information sharing activities, events, and forums	Relevant agencies and stakeholders in Portage Bay/Boundary Bay watersheds are educated on terrestrial links to coastal water quality degradation in shared waters	SoC WG members Spring 2015
3. **Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference (SSEC) Planning Support**	Staff support	EC and EPA will support the development of the 2016 SSEC in Vancouver through participation in the Conference Executive Committee	SoC WG member(s) 1/2015 – 5/2016
4. **Maintain and/ or further develop the transboundary indicators for the health of the Salish Sea ecosystem**	Continue web presence of Salish sea indicator report and ensure its currency	Transboundary indicators are updated and/or expanded to measure trends in valued ecosystem components to gain insight into the current health of the ecosystem	SoC WG members Light scoping, CY15; initiate work, CY16
5. **Develop and implement SoC WG Terms of Reference**	Terms of reference document, and EC and EPA implementation of specified responsibilities, including convening WG meetings	EC and EPA joint Salish Sea priorities are identified and effectively pursued through the SoC Action Plan and WG	SoC WG co-chairs Draft 12/2015 (Final 12/2016)



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