

JOINT STATEMENT OF COOPERATION ON THE  
GEORGIA BASIN AND PUGET SOUND ECOSYSTEM

by the Minister of Environment Canada and the Administrator of the United States  
Environmental Protection Agency

We see a special place ...

... where people of all ages can breathe clean air, drink clean water, swim on clean beaches, and enjoy unparalleled vistas of mountain, ocean and shore.

... where the integrity of wilderness is protected and the future of forests, wildlife, fish and marine mammals is secure.

... where the traditional values and knowledge of the Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound are honored and applied to new challenges.

... where our common goal of sustainable communities – embracing human well-being, economic opportunities and environmental quality – can be realized by today's generations and by those yet to come.

We believe that ...

... the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem is a unique and special place.\*

The Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem is one of the most diverse regions of North America: diverse in its ecology, in its landscape, and in its peoples.

A spectacular mountain and island landscape dominated by a bountiful inland sea, the ecosystem provides vital habitat for millions of birds that migrate each year along the Pacific Flyway. Its waters are home to five species of spawning salmon, whales, seals, and a rich variety of fish.

A hub of global trade and commerce, the region is a multicultural home to nearly 6 million people, drawn by the superb quality of life offered by the region – the beauty of the landscape and ocean, the mild climate, a richness of resources, and employment and investment opportunities. The region supports a wide range of agricultural, forestry, fishing, manufacturing, and recreational and tourism activities.

\*For the purpose of this Statement, the term “Georgia Basin” refers to that portion of the ecosystem located in Canada, and the term “Puget Sound” refers to that portion of the ecosystem located in the United States.

... the future of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem is threatened.

We cannot take the future of the ecosystem for granted.

The region's economic wealth has long been based on its abundant natural resources. Today, however, rapid population growth and associated human activities threaten the natural environment, which has made the region so special and attractive.

In the past 25 years, the population in the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem has more than doubled. In the next 15 years, it may double yet again, creating enormous pressures on the economy, society and environment of the region.

With rapid population increases, rich agricultural land is lost to housing and roads, wildlife habitat is lost or destroyed and some species are put at grave risk. More people have meant more cars, more vehicle emissions and lower air quality, more garbage, more sewage and more water pollution.

Concern for the future of the ecosystem does not arise from activities within the region alone –the region cannot escape the impacts of changes in the global environment. Of special concern is the potential for global changes in atmosphere and climate to affect the fragile and interwoven features of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem. Changes in rainfall patterns, for example, could affect agricultural production and the health of forests; warmer oceans could severely reduce fish stocks. Over time, climate change could affect human health and safety.

... it is not too late to save the ecosystem for our children and for their children.

We have today an opportunity for action as unique as the ecosystem itself. All the necessary factors for a successful ecosystem-wide effort are in place. Governments and the general public are aware of the many challenges to the ecosystem. We have the desire to preserve this special place. The sound science we need to make informed policy choices is at hand. The commitment to cooperation and partnerships is stronger than ever.

... protecting this special place is our shared responsibility.

With this Joint Statement of Cooperation, we are acting on the two federal governments' unique responsibilities to address the Trans boundary and global environmental challenges confronting the future of the ecosystem. But we cannot fulfill our shared vision of a healthy, sustainable ecosystem on our own.

The challenges ahead – from climate change to clean beaches, from urban smog to clean drinking water – are simply too complex and interconnected for any one level of government or any one country to resolve on its own.

All residents of the region, in Canada and in the United States of America, and all levels of their governments, share responsibility for protecting and enhancing the integrity and

viability of the ecosystem, so that this special place can be enjoyed by present and future generations.

We should find ways to work together on these shared concerns. We should engage the considerable skills, energy and resources of local and regional governments, community groups, educators, youth, workers, industry and business.

... the Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound have a special role to play in the future of the ecosystem.

The Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound have been stewards of the lands and resources in the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound region since time immemorial. And their knowledge, talents and energy should be part of the region's future.

To preserve and protect the region, we should work closely with representatives of the Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound in an atmosphere of mutual respect so that their special knowledge and unique perspective can contribute to our common efforts.

... we can build on the real progress made to date.

In our efforts to work closely together for the future of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem, we intend to build on the many worthwhile cooperative initiatives and excellent working relationships that have been established in the region. These include a range of existing Canada-United States arrangements, and multi-party initiatives led by governments, the Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound, universities and community-based organizations. In particular, we intend to collaborate with our partners on the Washington-British Columbia Environmental Cooperation Council to establish priorities and deliver environmental results in the ecosystem.

We believe in ...

... the need to translate words into actions.

Governments can serve as a catalyst for translating goals into practical, on-the-ground, in-the-air, and in-the-water actions that will preserve and enhance the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem. Immediate actions by our governments can lend momentum to wider efforts.

... the value of working at the community level.

We believe that a successful effort to preserve and enhance the future of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem should be founded on action at the community level.

We believe that concerned residents and organizations in the regions are among the best sources of information on the current challenges facing the ecosystem, and that they should be partners in efforts to shape the future of their region. They should have opportunities for providing input into government planning and decisions, and for participating in activities in their communities.

... working through partnerships.

We recognize the need to work on our common goals through effective partnerships that involve open communication, a commitment to cooperate, and the use of our individual strengths and capabilities.

We intend to ...

... actively work together on meeting common challenges for the future of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem.

Through this Joint Statement of Cooperation, we state our formal commitment to build on our long-standing and productive relationship to work cooperatively on our common vision for the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem.

The Joint Statement of Cooperation serves as a statement of our shared principles, goals and challenges. We intend to establish common priorities and better coordinate many of the exciting initiatives already underway and provide a framework for collaboration on future initiatives in the region.

Our immediate priorities for action should be the ones that residents across the region have consistently identified as their most serious concerns: clean air, clean water, the protection of habitat and species, and sustainable communities.

... translate our commitments into annual Action Plans.

To put into practice the goals and spirit of this Joint Statement of Cooperation, we intend to establish a joint Environment Canada-Environmental Protection Agency working group of senior-level officials. The goals of this group would be to develop annual Environment Canada-Environmental Protection Agency Action Plans to share scientific information on the ecosystem, develop joint research initiatives, ensure coordination of environmental management initiatives, and jointly consider longer term planning issues, such as air quality and climate change.

... involve residents and communities concerned about the future of this special place.

We intend to provide meaningful opportunities for all residents of the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem to participate in efforts to preserve and enhance the environmental quality and sustainability of their region.

Many worthwhile, proven cooperative mechanisms are in place in the region, both at the community and basin-wide levels. We intend to work through these cooperative mechanisms to the fullest extent possible to inform and involve local and regional governments, community groups, educators, youth, workers, industry and business. This will help ensure an open and transparent process of establishing priorities, identifying opportunities for effective cooperative action, and measuring progress.

We also intend to involve the Aboriginal people of the Georgia Basin and the indigenous inhabitants of Puget Sound through their traditional approaches for informing their peoples and making decisions.

... continually monitor our progress and address emerging challenges.

In seeking to preserve and enhance the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound ecosystem, we intend to work together in an open and accountable manner, and jointly monitor our progress and consider new priorities for action.

An annual Future of the Basin Conference, with participation from organizations and groups involved in Tran boundary initiatives in the Basin, could be an effective means of sharing information on progress and building consensus around emerging challenges.

Finally, we intend to meet on an annual basis to review progress under this Joint Statement of Cooperation and provide direction on future priorities.