



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

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Dr. Paul Ganster, Ph.D  
Chair, Good Neighbor Environmental Board  
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Dear Dr. Ganster,

I would like to thank you and the Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) for your December 20, 2022 letter to President Biden. We appreciate GNEB's thoughtful input on the critical question of drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure in the U.S.-Mexico border region. We look forward to reviewing GNEB's follow-up report elaborating on these important issues. As you know, access to modernized services in drinking water, wastewater, and water reuse are vital to our nation's health and environmental assets, especially in the face of water scarcity. The President remains committed to addressing the infrastructure challenges created by the unique geographic, economic, and climatic circumstances of this region.

### **Environmental Justice**

As GNEB indicates, the Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring Federal investments reach communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. In January 2021, President Biden established the Justice40 Initiative, which for the first time in our nation's history, set a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of Federal climate, clean energy, clean water, and other investments flow to disadvantaged communities. To advance the Justice40 goal, the Biden-Harris Administration launched the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), a geospatial mapping tool designed to identify disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. Using the CEJST, the Biden-Harris Administration can ensure that these communities will benefit from Federal infrastructure investments and national climate action. The development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure is one of seven investments included in the Justice40 Initiative, so GNEB's work is timely and well-received.

### **Tribal Nations**

The President is also committed to strengthening the relationships between the Federal Government and Tribal Nations—another of GNEB's valued recommendations. One aspect of fulfilling this promise is President Biden's [January 26, 2021 Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#). This Memorandum reaffirms previous policies on Tribal consultation and also directs

Federal agencies to consult with Tribal Nations in order to develop detailed action plans to implement the policies and directives of November 2000 Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. The 2021 Memorandum recognizes the importance of regular, meaningful, and robust consultation with Tribal Nations, especially considering the national health, economic, racial justice, and climate crises that disproportionately harm Indigenous communities. However, consultation is only effective when conducted with intention, which is why the President also issued a [Presidential Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation](#). This Memorandum is based on input received from Tribal Nations and will be implemented across all Federal agencies to address how Tribal consultations are conducted. These standards were part of a new set of actions released ahead of the 2022 Tribal Nations Summit to support Indigenous communities and create positive, lasting changes for generations to come. They fit well with GNEB's work.

We appreciate your recommendation for incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge into planning and project implementation in the border region, as this aligns with the Biden-Harris Administration's efforts to elevate Indigenous Knowledge in Federal scientific and policy processes. As part of his effort to respect Tribal sovereignty and self-governance, President Biden also acknowledges the importance of incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into Federal scientific and policy processes. The Biden-Harris Administration recently [released government-wide guidance](#) and an accompanying implementation memorandum on recognizing and including Indigenous Knowledge in Federal agency decision making. Indigenous communities have stewarded our lands since time immemorial, and carry observations, oral and written knowledge, innovations, practices, and beliefs crucial to addressing the ongoing climate crisis.

We additionally appreciate your suggestions on how to streamline delivery of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding, as we constantly strive to increase accessibility to these funding sources. The Administration has published guidebooks on both the [BIL](#) and the [IRA](#), including the recently released [IRA Tribal Guidebook](#). These function as both explanatory documents and roadmaps to available funding in order to help state, local, Tribal and territorial governments unlock the benefits of these investments.

### **America the Beautiful**

A notable example of how we are streamlining access to funding opportunities, including BIL funding, is the America the Beautiful initiative. This decade-long effort to support locally-led and voluntary conservation and restoration efforts across the country aims to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises as well as address inequitable access to nature. The America the Beautiful initiative includes our first nationwide conservation goal to conserve at least 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030. To support the initiative, the Biden-Harris Administration also created the America the Beautiful Challenge. The Challenge, administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, consolidates funding from multiple Federal agencies and the private sector into one competitive grant program to support conservation and restoration initiatives, streamlining the application

process through a one-stop-shop solicitation. The implementation of the Challenge represents just one way the Biden-Harris Administration is increasing access and making it easier to apply for Federal funding opportunities.

Addressing match requirements is another example of the work that the Biden-Harris Administration is doing to increase funding accessibility. As your letter highlighted, many underserved communities in the border region lack comprehensive administrative capabilities and financial resources, and are therefore unable to meet the matching requirement for Federal agency funding opportunities. The America the Beautiful Challenge is working with private partners to cover the match for Tribal awardees – a model that can be applied to other programs to help remove financial barriers for underserved communities trying to access funds. Federal agencies are also considering ways to make their respective funding avenues more accessible. For example, the Forest Service recently announced they will re-evaluate match requirements for their grant programs to address existing financial barriers to partner access and success. We will continue to look across Federal agencies for ways to improve access to transformational funding.

Finally, we recognize that streamlining the application process or addressing match requirements does not address all barriers to accessing Federal funds. Many agencies are targeting underserved communities through specific funding streams in order to increase accessibility. Just last month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced \$2.4 billion in BIL funding to support communities upgrade essential drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. This will protect public health and treasured water bodies like the Colorado and Rio Grande rivers. Nearly half of this funding will be available to help underserved communities invest in water infrastructure.

### **Charge for GNEB's 20th Report**

As you have highlighted in your report, underserved communities in the border region, including colonias and rural and Indigenous communities, and those living in poverty face large gaps in financial resources and therefore inadequate infrastructure. Concurrently, the Border Region will continue to face disproportionate impacts by climate change, threatening water security, and ecological and human health. Of particular concern are the approximately 300,000 border residents living in colonias or small, rural settlements, already struggling with infrastructure needs. We recognize that environmental changes will intensify in the coming years, making development of local capacity and resilience in colonias and rural areas an important issue for the Biden-Harris Administration.

As President Biden continues to address the impact of environmental injustices and the climate crisis on human communities, he will also seek to address how these issues affect wildlife and their habitat. Specifically, the Biden-Harris Administration is interested in conservation, enhancement, protection, and restoration of ecological connectivity and wildlife corridors. Not only does connectivity promote climate adaptation and resilience by enabling wildlife to adapt, disperse, and adjust to changes in the quality and

distribution of habitat, but by maintaining connected habitat, it also helps sustain ecosystem services that are intimately linked to our livelihoods, food systems, health, and therefore our own ability to weather the ongoing climate crisis. President Biden will continue to focus on the issue areas of environmental justice, climate, and biodiversity in order to promote healthy ecosystems, healthy communities, and healthy economies.

We recognize the significance of the issues you presented given the public health and environmental implications of both a warming climate and lack of adequate infrastructure in the U.S.-Mexico border region. Thank you, and thank you to the GNEB for your continued advice and the important work you do to enhance resilience in this region. We look forward to reviewing your forthcoming observations and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Mallory". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Brenda Mallory