



Canadian Council  
of Ministers  
of the Environment      Le Conseil canadien  
des ministres  
de l'environnement

## Canada-wide Definitions and Principles for Cumulative Effects

### Definitions

**Cumulative effect** is a change in the environment caused by multiple interactions among human activities and natural processes that accumulate across space and time.

**Cumulative effects assessment** is a systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and evaluating cumulative effects.

**Cumulative effects management** is the identification and implementation of measures to control, minimize or prevent the adverse consequences of cumulative effects.

### Principles for Cumulative Effects Management

**Knowledge-based:** Knowledge is needed to assess the cumulative effects of activities on air, water, land and biodiversity. Effective science and monitoring systems and networks provide the information needed to measure performance and support the development of outcomes and objectives.

**Outcomes and environmental objectives-based:** Cumulative effects management is driven by defined outcomes or objectives for the desired quality or state of air, water, land and biodiversity now and in the future. Cumulative effects approaches recognize the economic, environmental and social (may include cultural and spiritual) implications of meeting those objectives.

**Future-focused:** Cumulative effects denote the combined impacts of past, present and reasonably foreseeable future human activities on the region's environmental objectives. It requires a broader, forward-looking approach to planning and management that balances environmental factors with economic and social (may include cultural and spiritual) considerations.

**Place-based:** Cumulative effects management is place-based or site-specific and intended to bring people and their activities together and build relationships among stakeholders to support shared stewardship within an area. Any outcomes must support and reflect the interests of the area being considered and its people.

**Collaborative:** Collaboration is a significant and challenging component of a cumulative effects management approach.

**Adaptive:** Cumulative effects management includes a shared responsibility to adapt and take corrective actions if outcomes or objectives are not being achieved.

**Comprehensive:** Uses both regulatory and non-regulatory approaches.