



2019 Report–Volume 2: Provincial Auditor Reviewed Processes to Manage Sustainable Fish Populations for nearly 400 Key Provincial Water Bodies

Strengthening of Ministry of Environment’s processes for freshwater fish sustainability required

REGINA, SK., December 5, 2019: In her *2019 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 21, Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, Judy Ferguson, recommends the Ministry of Environment strengthen its processes to manage freshwater fish populations in Saskatchewan.

Sustainable fisheries mean managing fish populations in balance with environmental, economic and social issues. Recreational fishing provides social and economic benefits, while commercial fishing also supports livelihoods.

The audit found the provincial *Fisheries’ Management Plan* comprehensive with a defined, risk-based approach to manage sustainable fisheries. However, the Ministry implemented actions much slower than the Plan’s timeframes, potentially compromising the effectiveness of its risk-based approach. As of July 2019, the Ministry has not yet implemented actions the 2010 Plan had expected be implemented by 2015—including an evaluation of the Plan’s effectiveness.

“Determining resources required to fulfill planned actions, as well as periodically evaluating whether it achieves these actions would better position the Ministry not only to meet expected timeframes, but also to assess its success,” said Ferguson.

Assessments of water bodies is the key way the Ministry collects data about the health of fish and water bodies.

The audit also found the listing the Ministry used to determine the frequencies of fish and water bodies’ health assessments incomplete and inaccurate. The overall priority categories and monitoring intervals on the list mismatched in some instances. For two prioritized water bodies with monitoring frequencies slated every five to seven years, the listing indicated their last assessments in 2002 and 2008, respectively.

In 2019, the Ministry assessed 15 water bodies; whereas, its risk-based approach expected assessments for at least 24 water bodies annually. The audit found half of 16 water body assessments from 2018 and 2019 took place between two and eight years later than expected.

“Doing assessments later than a risk-based approach suggests increases the risk of collecting insufficient data on fish populations and their health. Use of established, risk-based intervals, proven sampling techniques, and science-based protocols ensures timely detection of any potentially irreversible declines in fish populations or their health,” said Ferguson.

Estimated **50,000 fish-bearing water bodies**, primarily in northern Saskatchewan

Contain **69 fish species**

- 58 native species
- 11 introduced or invasive species

Primary species for fishing and harvesting, include: **pike, walleye, perch, lake trout and whitefish**

Ministry **assessed 15 water bodies** in 2019 rather than 24 as its risk-based approach suggests

Ministry prioritized 381 lakes as requiring assessments

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Additional recommendations include developing specific management plans for key high-risk species and/or high-usage water bodies, and preparing timely reports on assessment results, among others.

The full Provincial Auditor's 2019 Report – Volume 2 available online at www.auditor.sk.ca.

The Provincial Auditor is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Office promotes accountability and better management by providing Legislators and the public with an independent assessment of the government's use of public resources.

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Additional issues highlighted in the Provincial Auditor's 2019 Report – Volume 2 include:

- Chapter 10: Provincial Capital Commission
- Chapter 22: Co-ordinating the Appropriate Provision of Helicopter Ambulance Services
- Chapter 23: Providing Safe Drinking Water in Provincial Parks
- Chapter 24: Treating Patients at Risk of Suicide in Northwest Saskatchewan
- Topics from 44 other chapters

Accompanying news releases and backgrounder give further details regarding these key topics.

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