



## Provincial Auditor's 2023 Report – Volume 2: The Ministry of Agriculture slowly assessing the health of leased agricultural Crown land

### Health of over 40% of Crown land leased to pasture associations not assessed yet

REGINA—December 6, 2023: In her *2023 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 12, Provincial Auditor Tara Clemett examined the Ministry of Agriculture's processes to manage the conservation of agricultural Crown land (2.8 million hectares) in Saskatchewan. She made eight recommendations.

The Ministry has over 7,000 leases on its managed Crown land (with individuals and pasture associations), some in place for more than 40 years. Healthy agricultural land can increase resiliency to drought and floods, as well as help to prevent the spread of weeds. The Ministry uses key actions (e.g., land health assessments, lease agreements, weed management plans) to manage the conservation of its agricultural Crown land. Land health assessments can identify invasive weeds, overpopulation of non-native species, or evidence of overgrazing.

The Ministry needs to complete land health assessments and communicate results to as well as make pasture associations act on recommendations in a timely way. The Ministry plans to complete all initial land health assessments by 2028 (i.e., started completing assessments in 2018) and conduct ongoing assessments every 10 years. The Ministry assessed about 650,000 hectares from 2018 to 2022—it has not yet assessed 44% of its 1.16 million hectares of Crown land leased by pasture associations.

"Properly managing and protecting portions of Saskatchewan's agricultural land helps to sustain land resiliency," said Tara Clemett. "Having a risk-based plan to complete periodic assessments, as well as sufficiently monitoring land trends and the use of Crown land over time keeps agricultural land healthy and productive."

Further, the Ministry of Agriculture needs to:

- Make implementation of key recommendations from its land health assessments mandatory, and determine consequences of non-compliance. When health assessments find land to be 'healthy with problems' recommendations for improvement are not mandatory or enforced, which increases the risk appropriate actions to conserve land (e.g., reduce overgrazing, control invasive weeds) are not taken.
- Conduct timely inspections on agricultural Crown land leased by individuals (e.g., about 1.6 million hectares) and centrally track results. Inspections of individually-leased land are conducted every 21–33 years instead of the every 10 years recommended.
- Monitor the implementation of land health assessment recommendations and required actions from its lease inspections to minimize further deterioration of land health.
- Formalize factors to consider when determining which Indigenous communities to consult with when proposing the lease or sale of agricultural Crown land.
- Track all critical habitat on Crown land under its responsibility.

Good land management contributes to biodiversity and wildlife habitat conservation. Agricultural land is used for the production of crops and livestock. Some types of agricultural grasslands, such as hay and pasture lands, not only provide forage and grazing for livestock, but also help to maintain wildlife habitat and act as carbon storage.

The full Provincial Auditor's *2023 Report – Volume 2* available online at [auditor.sk.ca](https://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.*

–30–

For more information, please contact:

**Tara Clemett**, CPA, CA, CISA, *Provincial Auditor*  
306.787.6313 or [info@auditor.sk.ca](mailto:info@auditor.sk.ca)

**April Serink**, MA, *Communications Specialist*  
306.531.6163 [serink@auditor.sk.ca](mailto:serink@auditor.sk.ca) or [media@auditor.sk.ca](mailto:media@auditor.sk.ca)

- Agricultural land makes up 29% of total land in Saskatchewan
- Pasture association leases average 5,000 hectares compared to individual leases averaging 250 hectares
- More than 20 qualified staff conduct pasture-land health assessments on Ministry-owned Crown land
- The Ministry spent \$4.8 million in 2022–23 on managing conservation, conducting land assessments, and selling and leasing Crown land