

Chapter 12: Agriculture—Conserving Agricultural Crown Land

Why It Matters

The Ministry of Agriculture has over 7,000 leases on its managed Crown land (with individuals and pasture associations), some in place for more than 40 years. Sufficient monitoring is key to ensuring proper use of agricultural Crown land over time. Healthy agricultural land can increase resiliency to drought and floods, as well as help to prevent the spread of weeds.

Why We Did This Audit

Properly managing and protecting portions of Saskatchewan's agricultural land helps to sustain land resiliency. Good land management contributes to biodiversity and wildlife habitat conservation while keeping land healthy and productive.

Key Facts and Figures

- The Ministry owns 2.8 million hectares of agricultural land in Saskatchewan
- Pasture association leases average 5,000 hectares compared to individual leases averaging 250 hectares
- The Ministry spent \$4.8 million in 2022–23 on managing conservation, conducting land assessments, and selling and leasing Crown land
- More than 20 qualified staff conduct pasture-land health assessments on Ministry-owned Crown land
- The Ministry assessed about 650,000 hectares from 2018 to 2022—and has not yet assessed 44% of its 1.16 million hectares of Crown land leased by pasture associations
- 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

What We Found

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.

Our Recommendations

The Ministry of Agriculture needs to:

- Make implementation of key recommendations for improvement from its land health assessments mandatory, and determine consequences of non-compliance
- 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