

Chapter 19

Parks, Culture and Sport—Drinking Water in Provincial Parks

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By April 2025, the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport strengthened its processes to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks. The Ministry implemented the four remaining recommendations we first made in 2019. The Ministry:

- Documented procedures to operate its drinking water systems and monitor water quality. It established reasonable start-up and shutdown, and quality control procedures for drinking water operators. Also, its Safe Drinking Water Committee met periodically to monitor the provision of safe drinking water in accordance with its Safe Drinking Water Policy.
- Reviewed 83% of water quality test results we sampled within its expected 48-hour timeframe. Its newly established review process (e.g., time-stamped email evidence of review) significantly reduced delays in documenting review of water quality test results.
- Documented periodic water system maintenance expectations (e.g., daily, monthly). We found the Ministry started using its new maintenance checklists and continued to adapt the checklist template for each unique drinking water system.

While we found more work remains in regularly filling out maintenance checklists, the Ministry maintained completed checklists consistent with the new template for three of seven drinking water systems tested, and we found other processes occurring to monitor maintenance records (e.g., regulator inspections, supervisor reviews).

Park visitors rely on the Ministry to provide a safe supply of drinking water. Effective processes to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks help to ensure public safety.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport is responsible for managing the provincial parks system under *The Parks Act*. Where it decides to provide drinking water in provincial parks, it is responsible to ensure the drinking water is safe and for complying with provincial water quality standards over water used for human consumption.¹

¹ All drinking water is required to meet provincial water quality standards pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/126899/WSA%252B532%252BDrinking%252BWater%252BQuality%252BStandards%252Band%252BObjectives.pdf (10 September 2025).



At April 2025, the Ministry operated 43 drinking water systems—27 seasonally (May–September) and 16 year-round. These systems vary significantly in size and complexity. Its water systems include water treatment plants, distribution systems, and storage reservoirs (e.g., holding tanks). The Ministry spent about \$3.9 million in 2024–25 (2023–24: \$3.2 million) on capital and preventative maintenance for its water systems.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2019.

We concluded, for the 15-month period ended July 31, 2019, the Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport had effective process to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks, except for the areas outlined in our seven recommendations.² By 2022, the Ministry implemented three recommendations.³

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry staff about key actions management had taken since our 2022 follow up. We reviewed policies, staff communications, meeting minutes, and checklists to obtain an understanding of these actions. We tested samples of water quality test results as well as operational and maintenance records.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at April 30, 2025, and the Ministry of Parks, Culture, and Sport's actions up to that date.

3.1 Procedures Documented for Operating Drinking Water Systems and Monitoring Water Quality

We recommended the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport assign clear responsibility for preparing and maintaining written procedures necessary to operate its drinking-water systems. (2019 Report – Volume 2, p. 185,

Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 19, 2022)

Status—Implemented

² 2019 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 23, pp. 177–195.

³ 2022 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 18, pp. 199–206.

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport documented start-up and shutdown, and quality control procedures necessary to operate its drinking water systems, and implemented its Safe Drinking Water Committee to monitor drinking water quality.

For start-up procedures, we observed the Ministry included relevant information such as equipment checks, reinstallation of disassembled components during water system closures, filter cleaning, and reservoir filling. For shutdown, the procedures also included pertinent information such as draining distribution systems, cleaning components, sealing tanks and reservoirs, and shutting down the water supply. As expected, start-up procedures were noted to occur at the start of season/summer and shutdown procedures at the end of season/summer. We found these procedures appropriate.

We found, for the four seasonal drinking water systems tested, staff documented start-up and shutdown procedures conducted during 2024.

The Ministry's Safe Drinking Water Policy requires a committee to monitor the implementation of the policy to ensure safe drinking water. The Policy expects the committee to meet at least quarterly. We found its Safe Drinking Water Committee met quarterly from July 2024 to March 2025 and discussed key aspects of complying with its Policy (e.g., monitoring credentials of water system operators, reviewing water quality test results, maintenance expectations).

Its Policy also requires all its drinking water systems to follow quality control procedures in accordance with good practice (e.g., regular sampling and testing to assess compliance with water quality standards).⁴ We found four of five water systems tested had quality control procedures documented as expected. The water system tested without these procedures documented was a newer system.

Written procedures for key processes to operate drinking water systems help staff to understand Ministry expectations and regulatory requirements and ensure staff follow adequate guidance to operate drinking water systems consistently.

3.2 Routine Maintenance Expectations Established and Starting to be Documented Using New Checklist

We recommended the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport document routine maintenance expectations for its drinking-water systems.

(2019 Report – Volume 2, p. 188, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 19, 2022)

Status—Implemented

⁴ pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127562/epb542.pdf (10 September 2025).



We recommended the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport complete routine maintenance on its drinking-water systems consistent with documented routine maintenance expectations. (2019 Report – Volume 2, p. 188,

Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 19, 2022)

Status—Intent of Recommendation Met

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport documented routine maintenance expectations in templates for its drinking water systems. Park staff continued to work with the new templates to tailor maintenance expectations specific to each park's unique water systems. We found staff documented completed maintenance reasonably consistent with expectations for three of seven water systems tested.

The Ministry centrally established minimum expectations for routine maintenance of park drinking water systems in a template checklist outlining key daily, weekly, biweekly, monthly, semi-annual, and annual maintenance tasks. The Ministry expects each park to use the template checklist to document maintenance or adapt the template to specific maintenance tasks required for their drinking water system where needed. The template requires maintenance staff to initial beside the listed task when complete. We found the routine maintenance checklist template contained reasonable expectations.

We observed the Ministry provided its new maintenance checklist to park staff in March 2024, with guidance for park staff to tailor the checklist to each park's unique drinking water systems. The Ministry hired an additional central water-system specialist to assist each park with water system issues, including customizing the maintenance checklist.

We tested documented maintenance activities carried out in 2024 and found for two of seven drinking water systems tested, staff used maintenance checklists appropriate for the specific water system. A third drinking water system tested set specific routine maintenance procedure expectations and used a sufficiently detailed logbook to record completed maintenance activities. The Ministry indicated it is continuing to support park staff to adjust the new checklist for use.

In addition to detailed maintenance records, we found three other processes the Ministry uses to monitor maintenance completion.

First, the Water Security Agency—regulator of larger and more complex drinking water systems—completes routine onsite inspections. The Agency's inspections include assessing maintenance records and whether drinking water systems are in good repair.⁵ We reviewed eight Agency inspections completed in 2025 of the Ministry's drinking water systems and found the Agency did not identify significant issues.

Next, the Ministry's Safe Drinking Water Committee monitors compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Policy, including completed maintenance. We found the Committee required staff to internally review drinking water records (e.g., maintenance, water quality test results) in fall 2024 and address issues found. In March 2025, the Committee reminded staff to continue to tailor maintenance checklists to each park's unique drinking water system.

⁵ Water Security Agency inspection records available at waterquality.saskatchewan.ca/DrinkingWater (26 September 2025).

Lastly, each park manager or delegate (i.e., a supervisor) completes a checklist each month outlining the operational records they must review for each drinking water system. Some items relate to maintenance (e.g., calibrating water testing equipment, completing and documenting routine maintenance). For the seven water systems tested, we found the park manager (or delegate) completed the monthly review checklist as expected and did not note significant maintenance issues.

Having documented routine maintenance expectations help staff to complete routine maintenance appropriately. Completing sufficient routine maintenance keeps drinking water systems working effectively.

3.3 Water Quality Test Results Reviewed Timely

We recommended the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport document evidence of its review of water quality test results. (2019 Report – Volume 2, p. 190,

Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement October 19, 2022)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport generally documents its review of water quality test results in a timely manner.

The Ministry makes each provincial park manager (or delegate) who operates the drinking water systems responsible for documenting their review of drinking water test results within 48 hours of receiving those test results from the provincial laboratory. Park managers use time-stamped emails to document their reviews.

We observed significant improvements in completed reviews of water quality test results since our last follow-up audit. We tested management's review of water quality test results from five water systems for 2024. We found, since 2022, the number of lab test reviews not completed within the expected 48-hour timeframe significantly reduced from about 40% to about 17% in our sample results. In addition, compared to our last follow up, the average delay (not completed within 48-hour expectation) significantly reduced from 4–70 days to about one day.

Documenting timely reviews of the drinking water quality tests enable the Ministry to continuously track water quality, ensuring safe drinking water at its parks.

