

## Chapter 3 Environment—Evaluating Environmental Assessments

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

Environmental assessments for proposed developments are crucial for understanding and mitigating environmental consequences of development projects before they begin. At January 2026, the Ministry of Environment was reviewing 13 proposed developments.

Environmental assessments for proposed developments are submitted by project applicants, reviewed by the Ministry of Environment, and approved by the Minister of Environment depending on predicted environmental impacts.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, specialized staff from 10 other Government ministries/agencies help review technical aspects of environmental assessments through the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel.

We audited the Ministry of Environment's processes to evaluate environmental assessments of proposed developments that may have negative effects on the environment, natural resources, or public health and safety and found it had effective processes, except the Ministry needs to:

- **Consistently track and monitor environmental assessment terms and conditions.** Minister environmental assessment approvals set required terms and conditions. For nine approved projects tested, we found 11 conditions (e.g., submission of a water management plan) missing from its IT tracking system, increasing the risk monitoring is not occurring where required.
- **Obtain external experts to review certain environmental assessments.** We found two instances where the Ministry did not hire external experts when the Review Panel did not have required expertise.
- **Publicly report on key measures of success for its environmental assessment process** (e.g., process timeliness, effectiveness of minimizing negative environmental impacts from proposed developments), making it easier for the public to determine whether the process suitably supports development and environmental stewardship.
- **Set appropriate guidance as to when to inform the public about developments requiring environmental assessments.** For eight projects tested, the Ministry did not initiate public notice within its expected three business days after determining a project was a development; instead, it completed the public notice 1–6 months later.

Effective processes to evaluate environmental assessments help protect against unintended harm from developments to Saskatchewan's environment, natural resources, or public health and safety.

<sup>1</sup> *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 2(d), provides criteria on which projects constitute developments thereby requiring environmental assessments. The Minister of Environment makes a final decision to authorize a project development based on the significance of predicted environmental impacts, and includes terms and conditions along with the approval.



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Project applicants submit environmental assessments for proposed project developments for Ministry of Environment review. The Minister of Environment makes a final decision to authorize a project development based on the significance of predicted environmental impacts. The Ministry includes terms and conditions, with project authorization, to address issues identified during the environmental assessment process.

The Ministry received 14 project submissions for its review in 2025, including one application for screening, six environmental impact statements, and seven change requests.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.1 Environmental Assessments

The Ministry of Environment is responsible for activities related to environmental planning and impact assessments as described in *The Environmental Assessment Act*.<sup>3</sup> The Act provides principle-based guidance (criteria) on which projects constitute developments and therefore, require environmental assessments.<sup>4</sup>

#### Screening Projects

If a project meets any criteria in the Act, it is considered a development, and the project applicant is required to obtain a Minister-approved environmental assessment before the applicant can construct and operate the new development (e.g., mine). For example, a project that will impact any unique, rare, or endangered feature of the environment is considered a development and requires an environmental assessment.

Prior to contacting the Ministry, applicants may self-assess whether their project is likely to be deemed a development under the Act thereby requiring an environmental assessment. If a project appears to be a development under the Act, or if the conclusion is unclear, applicants submit a project description for the Ministry to determine whether it is a development and whether an environmental assessment is required by the applicant.

#### Requiring Environmental Assessments

Typical projects requiring an environmental assessment include energy projects (e.g., transmission lines, wind projects), industrial projects (e.g., landfills, mines), and water management projects (e.g., water diversion, dams).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> A project applicant applies to the Ministry of Environment when proposing changes to a previously approved development to determine whether the project requires an environmental impact statement.

<sup>3</sup> *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, section 2(d).

<sup>5</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/122636/Environmental%252BAssessment%252BInfographic.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/122636/Environmental%252BAssessment%252BInfographic.pdf) (31 March 2026).

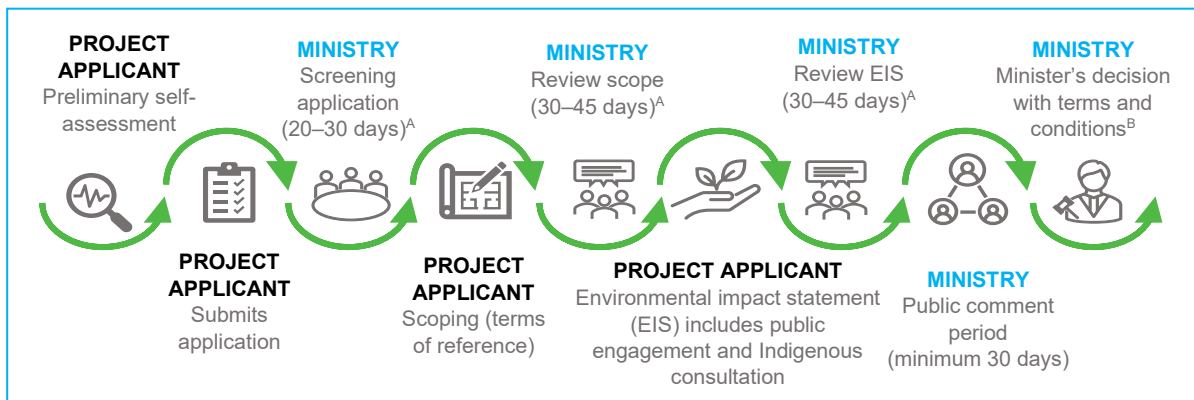
Project applicants conduct environmental assessments following Ministry guidelines to identify how they will minimize or prevent environmental impacts before any work gets underway.<sup>6</sup> The Ministry's Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch works with applicants to ensure they adequately address all pertinent environmental issues. If the project applicant cannot sufficiently mitigate all relevant environmental issues, the Minister will refuse project approval.<sup>7</sup>

Generally, an environmental assessment includes:

- Project proposal (application)
- Terms of reference (scope of environmental assessment), which lays out the types of assessments or studies to be completed such as a water availability study
- Environmental impact statement (detailed environmental studies and planned mitigation of negative environmental impacts)
- Proposed project footprint (location)

**Figure 1** summarizes the Ministry's environmental assessment steps and expected timelines (in business days) from its Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch Operations Guide. Typically, the entire process takes at least one year.

**Figure 1—Steps Involved in Environmental Assessment Process**



Source: Adapted from Ministry of Environment records and Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch Operations Guide.

<sup>A</sup> Each of the Ministry's screening and review stages include review by Ministry staff and the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel; the Review Panel is made up of staff from other Government of Saskatchewan ministries and agencies.

<sup>B</sup> There is no set timeline for the Minister to make their decision once the Ministry submits its recommendation and rationale.

**Figure 2** shows the Ministry completed its reviews and made 17 project determinations or decisions on various projects in 2025. At January 31, 2026, the Ministry was administering 13 development projects (i.e., after the screening application step).

<sup>6</sup> [www.saskatchewan.ca/business/environmental-protection-and-sustainability/environmental-assessment/submit-an-environmental-assessment-application](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/business/environmental-protection-and-sustainability/environmental-assessment/submit-an-environmental-assessment-application) (31 March 2026).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 2—Decisions Made for Various Projects by Project Stage from 2021–25**

| Year | Screening Determination | Minister Decision on Environmental Impact Statement | Change Approval <sup>A</sup> | Total |
|------|-------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------|
| 2025 | 4                       | 7   | 6                            | 17    |
| 2024 | 5                       | 1   | 3                            | 9     |
| 2023 | 5                       | 3   | 4                            | 12    |
| 2022 | 3                       | 4   | 1                            | 8     |
| 2021 | 2                       | –   | 2                            | 4     |

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Environment records.

<sup>A</sup> Change approval is the Ministry's approval of a project applicant's request to change an approved development after they completed an environmental impact statement. For example, a project applicant adding a new mine site to an existing mine and/or mill site.

As of January 2026, the Ministry's Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch had about nine staff responsible for evaluating environmental assessments and monitoring terms and conditions. In 2024–25, the Branch spent \$1.5 million (2023–24: \$1.4 million).<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Importance of Environmental Assessments

Environmental assessments are crucial for understanding and mitigating environmental consequences of development projects before they begin.

Evaluating environmental assessments for proposed developments assess the potential negative impact on air, land, water, biodiversity (e.g., fish, wildlife, plants), people, as well as on Indigenous use of lands. Benefits of effective environmental assessments include:

- Identifying and mitigating risks to protect human health and safety;
- Supporting a practical, comprehensive, and integrated approach to decision-making;
- Increasing accountability and transparency by providing opportunity for public input; and
- Contributing to the protection of the province's biodiversity.<sup>9</sup>

Generally, key challenges applicants face with the environmental assessment process include limited support for environmental assessment procedures, a lack of required expertise, limited environmental baseline information, weak consultation with the public and/or Indigenous communities, and limited operational support for monitoring approval requirements.<sup>10</sup> Challenges may also include high costs for applicants to prepare environmental assessments and time to complete requirements (e.g., environmental studies).

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Environment, *Annual Report 2024–25*, p. 15. The Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch also includes waste stewardship and recycling.

<sup>9</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/122636/Environmental%252BAssessment%252BInfographic.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/122636/Environmental%252BAssessment%252BInfographic.pdf) (30 September 2025).

<sup>10</sup> Arnold, L. and Hanna, K. (2017). *Best Practices in Environmental Assessment: Case Studies and Application to Mining*, p. 7.

People often have competing priorities for the environment (e.g., using land for farming or solar projects) and natural resources (e.g., water for municipal use, economic development). This increases public sensitivity to the Ministry of Environment's environmental assessment process.

Effective processes to evaluate environmental assessments help protect against unintended harm to Saskatchewan's environment, natural resources, or public health and safety from developments.

### 3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

**We concluded, for the period ending January 31, 2026, the Ministry of Environment had, other than the following areas, effective processes to evaluate environmental assessments of proposed developments that may have negative effects on the environment, natural resources, or public health and safety.**

**The Ministry needs to:**

- **Establish appropriate guidance as to when to inform the public about developments requiring an environmental assessment**
- **Strengthen its guidance around obtaining external expertise to review certain environmental assessments**
- **Consistently track and monitor environmental assessment terms and conditions**
- **Publicly report on key measures of success for its environmental assessment process (e.g., timeliness of entire process)**

**Figure 3—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach**

**Audit Objective:**

The objective of this audit is to assess whether the Ministry of Environment had effective processes, for the period ending January 31, 2026, to evaluate environmental assessments of proposed developments that may have negative effects on the environment, natural resources, or public health and safety.

The audit used the definition of a development defined by *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 2(d).

**Audit Criteria:**

Processes to:

**1. Properly screen project proposals**

- Communicate requirements to interested parties for environmental assessments consistent with legislation and good practice
- Assign qualified and independent staff to assess information (e.g., screening proposals, environmental impact assessments)
- Sufficiently evaluate project proposals to determine when environmental impact assessments are required (e.g., use appropriate criteria to make consistent decisions)
- Assess appropriate scope set for required environmental impact assessments (e.g., key impacts to study, plan for public consultation)



## 2. Determine adequate environmental assessments completed

- Make sure environmental impact assessments appropriately assess all key potential impacts (e.g., cumulative effects of development, engage experts when necessary)
- Evaluate whether sufficient public engagement and Indigenous consultations completed during environmental impact assessments
- Communicate results of environmental impact assessment reviews to project applicants (e.g., deficiencies)
- Approve environmental impact assessments timely with appropriate terms and conditions (e.g., mitigate identified impacts)

## 3. Monitor compliance with environmental assessment terms and conditions

- Conduct risk-based monitoring of compliance with terms and conditions (e.g., inspections, assess complaints)
- Address identified non-compliance timely (e.g., penalties, additional mitigation measures)

## 4. Analyze and report impacts of environmental assessments

- Assess actual environmental outcomes from past assessments (e.g., were actual outcomes from completed developments consistent with those planned, lessons learned)
- Report relevant information to the public about environmental assessments (e.g., outcomes, compliance with terms and conditions, enforcement actions)

### Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry of Environment's processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, reviews of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management and an external advisor. Ministry management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined Ministry requirements and guidance for project applicants to complete environmental assessments. We interviewed key staff at the Ministry and some Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel members. We tested a sample of environmental assessment applications, terms of reference, and environmental impact statements. We used an external consultant with expertise in the area to help us identify good practice and to assess Ministry processes.

## 4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Environmental Assessment Requirements Consistent with Good Practice and Communicated Sufficiently

The Ministry of Environment's environmental assessment requirements are consistent with good practice and sufficiently communicated.

The Ministry includes its requirements and guidance about the environmental assessment process on its website in various documents as listed in **Figure 4**.

**Figure 4—Public Guidance Documents on Environmental Assessments**

- Process Map and Guide
- Fact Sheet and Infographic
- Application Process
- Guidelines for an Environmental Assessment
- Technical Proposal Guidelines (i.e., detailed description of a possible development)
- Guidelines for the Terms of Reference and Environmental Impact Statement (i.e., detailed information requirements project applicants must include in these documents)

Source: [www.saskatchewan.ca/business/environmental-protection-and-sustainability/environmental-assessment/environmental-assessment-process](http://www.saskatchewan.ca/business/environmental-protection-and-sustainability/environmental-assessment/environmental-assessment-process) (24 March 2026).

We assessed the requirements for environmental assessments in *The Environmental Assessment Act* against the Ministry's guidance documents (i.e., Technical Proposal Guidelines, Guidelines for the Terms of Reference and Environmental Impact Statement). We found the Ministry's guidance aligned with the Act (e.g., definition of a development, requirement for Minister approval).

We also compared Saskatchewan's environmental assessment requirements against good practice (e.g., from the International Association for Impact Assessment) as well as other jurisdictions (e.g., Government of Canada, British Columbia) and found Saskatchewan's requirements generally comparable and aligned.<sup>11,12</sup> For example, the Ministry's guidance included requirements for an applicant to document a description of the existing environment, expected environmental effects of the project, and planned steps regarding public engagement.

One technical part of an environmental impact statement is the cumulative effects assessment, which evaluates the total, combined estimated effect of a project in combination with past, present, and foreseeable human activities in a region.<sup>13</sup>

The Ministry's guidance for environmental impact statements requires a project applicant to assess the cumulative effects associated with a proposed project, including:

- Combined impacts from all stages of the project lifecycle
- Effect of the proposed project when added to other past, present, or reasonably near future projects or activities in the area
- Total impact or risk of impact from operating the project over a prolonged period and considering the likelihood of extensions or expansions to the project's operating life
- Effect of ancillary facilities (e.g., pipelines, roads, transmission lines) that may not be part of the project, but are essential to the project proceeding

We found the Ministry's guidance on cumulative effects assessment aligned with good practice and referred to the Government of Canada's detailed guidance about completing this type of assessment. This approach is efficient, as it avoids duplicating guidance and may help applicants comply with federal requirements (if a project requires Federal Government approval).

We also found the Ministry's communications reasonably shared required guidance on the environmental assessment process, see **Figure 4**.

Having sufficient requirements help project applicants complete robust environmental assessments, so the Ministry can appropriately assess the environmental impacts from developments on Saskatchewan's environment. Publicly communicating relevant guidance allows project applicants to appropriately and consistently apply the Ministry's environmental assessment expectations.

<sup>11</sup> The International Association for Impact Assessment is an organization made up of over 100 countries that has guidance for good practice on the environmental assessment process.

<sup>12</sup> [www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-process/guidance-materials](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-process/guidance-materials) and [www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/services/policy-guidance/practitioners-guide-impact-assessment-act.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/services/policy-guidance/practitioners-guide-impact-assessment-act.html) (1 April 2026).

<sup>13</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf) (25 March 2026).



## 4.2 Staff Guidance Requires Clarification about Timing of Public Notice for Projects Requiring Environmental Assessments

---

The Ministry of Environment's staff guidance for evaluating environmental assessments is generally sufficient but needs clearer direction on notifying the public about proposed developments undergoing the environmental assessment process. It also needs further guidance for when to obtain external expertise to review environmental assessments (see **Section 4.3**).

In addition to the publicly available guidance documents as outlined in **Figure 4**, the Ministry uses its Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch Operations Guide to inform staff on the environmental assessment process. For example, the Operations Guide outlines how to evaluate a project application (e.g., whether to send documents to the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel for comment—see **Section 4.3** for further details on the Review Panel and its purpose). It also includes internal timelines for staff to complete reviews (see **Section 4.9** on whether the Ministry met its timelines).

We found the Ministry's policies in the Operations Guide aligned with requirements in *The Environmental Assessment Act*.

Section 10 of the Act requires the Ministry to immediately give public notice when it becomes aware that a project applicant must conduct an environmental assessment. The Act does not define "immediately". The Operations Guide requires Ministry staff to initiate the public notice process within three business days of determining a proposal is a development. Management indicated the Operations Guide does not reflect current practice because the Ministry has not recently updated it.

Public notice is an important component of environmental assessments, ensuring transparency and public participation in environmental decision-making. The Ministry uses newspaper and radio announcements, as well as posting on its website and social media accounts (e.g., Facebook) to provide public notice of a development requiring an environmental assessment. The Ministry translates some of these communications into other languages (e.g., Cree) depending on the location of the proposed development. By providing accessible information, public notice helps build trust and encourages engagement.

We found for all eight projects tested, the Ministry did not initiate public notice within three business days of determining the project was a development. Rather, the Ministry notified the public online 1–6 months after determining a project was a development and receiving sufficient project information to make available on its website (e.g., project proposal).

We determined one month to be a reasonable timeframe for the Ministry to receive sufficient information from a project applicant about a development to share publicly; however, it only notified the public for one project tested within one month with the others ranging up to six months. The Ministry needs to appropriately define what "immediately" notifying the public means given its current practice does not meet three business days or establish a reasonable timeframe (e.g., one month) following the determination of a project as a development.

Not having and following appropriate guidance for when to provide the public with notice about proposed projects requiring environmental assessments may result in staff initiating public notices inconsistently and may cause unnecessary delays in sharing information publicly. There is also a risk the Ministry does not comply with legislative requirements.

1. We recommend the Ministry of Environment establish appropriate guidance as to when to initiate public notices for developments requiring environmental assessments.

### 4.3 Qualified Staff Evaluate Assessments but More Consistent Use of External Expertise Needed

The Ministry of Environment uses qualified staff and Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel members to screen proposals and review environmental assessment documents (e.g., terms of reference, environmental impact statements). However, because the Ministry does not have adequate guidance for obtaining external experts to support its review process, we found inconsistent use of external expertise.

#### Ministry Staff

Ministry staff, referred to as senior environmental assessment administrators, manage the environmental assessment process for each project. This includes providing advice and comments to the project applicant, providing documents to the Review Panel, preparing recommendations with rationale (e.g., screening, whether to approve environmental assessment), preparing terms and conditions for Minister approval letters, and monitoring them.

The Ministry requires its six senior environmental assessment administrators to have an academic and professional background in the practice of environmental assessment or in science. This includes having a Master's degree in a science-related profession along with experience in environmental assessments, or an equivalent combination of education and experience. We evaluated the credentials and experience of two senior environmental assessment administrators and found they met the Ministry's requirements for the position (e.g., a Master's degree, a Doctorate, and at least five years of experience with environmental assessments).

We also found the two staff tested completed required conflict of interest training. The Ministry's conflict of interest policy provides guidance on what activities outside of work can lead to actual, perceived, or potential conflicts of interest.

#### Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel

The Ministry also engages staff from other Government ministries and agencies on its Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel to review technical aspects of environmental assessments. This includes screening applications (when the Ministry determines necessary) as well as reviewing terms of reference and projects' environmental impact statements and providing comments back to the Ministry.



The Review Panel provides the multidisciplinary expertise to adequately evaluate potential environmental impacts from proposed developments. See Figure 5 for a list of the ministries and agencies that make up the Review Panel. Each ministry and agency has an appointed member as the main contact. The Ministry of Environment asks the Review Panel member to provide input based on their knowledge and expertise, with the support of other staff within their ministry or agency (e.g., Water Security Agency contact will provide information and obtain comments from those with groundwater expertise within the Agency if development may impact groundwater).<sup>14</sup>

Figure 5—Ministries and Agencies Forming the Review Panel as of January 31, 2026

| Ministry or Agency                                | Branch, Unit, or Department   |
|---|---|
| Ministry of Environment                           | Climate Resilience Branch<br>Fish and Wildlife Branch<br>Forest Service Branch<br>Lands Branch<br>Environmental Protection Branch<br>Strategic Management Services Branch |
| Ministry of Agriculture                           | Environment and Resource Policy   |
| Ministry of Energy and Resources                  | Measurement, Emissions and Subsurface Engineering<br>Lands and Mineral Tenure<br>Strategic Planning Initiatives   |
| Ministry of Government Relations                  | Community Planning<br>Indigenous and Northern Relations<br>Aboriginal Consultation  |
| Ministry of Health                                | Environmental Health  |
| Saskatchewan Health Authority                     | Population Health   |
| Ministry of Highways                              | Operations Standards  |
| Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety | Occupational Health and Safety  |
| Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport              | Heritage Conservation<br>Landscape Protection   |
| Water Security Agency                             | Science and Licensing   |
| Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement            | Engineering and Sustainability  |

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Environment records.

We tested four ministries/agencies’ staff on the Review Panel and found them all sufficiently qualified to provide the expertise expected. Review Panel member qualifications were required for their regular government roles (e.g., Environmental Protection Branch utilizing environmental engineers, Water Security Agency staff included engineers who assess water availability [hydrology]), and the Ministry used these Review Panel members to review environmental assessment information.

We found the Ministry appropriately communicated the Review Panel’s role to members using the Technical Review Guidelines available online and provided presentations to members about the environmental assessment process. We also found some Review Panel agencies have their own internal guidelines that sufficiently explain their role in the environmental assessment process.

<sup>14</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/107152/107152-Tech\\_Review\\_Guidelines\\_June\\_2018\\_Revision.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/107152/107152-Tech_Review_Guidelines_June_2018_Revision.pdf) (24 March 2026).

## External Experts

In some instances, conflicts of interest exist or an environmental assessment requires specialized expertise beyond that of Ministry of Environment staff and Review Panel members, necessitating external expertise. The Ministry's Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch Operations Guide provides limited guidance for staff setting out when to obtain external expertise; the Operations Guide indicates staff should consider external experts where the development poses unusual circumstances or where there is a conflict of interest affecting a reviewer. It does not provide further information on what is an unusual circumstance; or whether an external expert should review only a project's terms of reference, or the environmental impact statement, or both.

We found the Review Panel does not have a mining engineer due to a vacancy at the Ministry of Energy and Resources since 2019. We found, for two proposed mining projects tested, the Ministry of Environment hired an external mining expert to review the terms of reference and environmental impact statements between 2019 and 2024. However, we found the Ministry did not hire an external mining expert to review the terms of reference for a third proposed mine expansion in 2025 even though the Review Panel did not have a mining engineer (the applicant had not yet submitted the environmental impact statement as of January 2026). The Ministry of Environment did not document its rationale for not hiring a mining engineer for this review. Management indicated they did not hire an external expert because this proposal was an extension to an existing mining project.

We found another instance where the Review Panel required an external expert. The Water Security Agency is the project applicant for a significant irrigation project at Lake Diefenbaker. By January 2026, the Agency submitted, and the Ministry approved, the project's terms of reference.<sup>15</sup> The Ministry appropriately did not send the draft terms of reference to the Water Security Agency as a member of the Review Panel because of the Agency's conflict of interest given it is the project applicant. The Ministry added staff with limnology (i.e., assessing water quality, aquatic habitat) expertise to the Review Panel to assess the terms of reference but did not add members with hydrology (i.e., assessing water availability) expertise.

The Ministry indicated it plans to hire an external expert to review the Agency's environmental impact statement for the irrigation project. We observed the request for proposal to seek this expert with hydrology and limnology expertise in January 2026.

We further evaluated the irrigation project's terms of reference and did not find any significant gaps (e.g., noted plans to assess water availability and quality). We also note that the terms of reference outline a plan for the environmental impact statement, and any gaps could still be identified and addressed during the Ministry's and Review Panel's review of the environmental impact statement once submitted.

The Ministry's guidance does not sufficiently detail when to obtain external experts to support its review of environmental assessments. The guidance should clarify at which stages the Ministry should use external experts (e.g., terms of reference, environmental impact statements). Without such guidance, there is a risk of insufficient expertise on the Review Panel, potentially leading to insufficient analysis of proposed developments.

<sup>15</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/153246/WIRP%252BTerms%252Bof%252BReference.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/153246/WIRP%252BTerms%252Bof%252BReference.pdf) (1 April 2026).



**2. We recommend the Ministry of Environment strengthen its guidance outlining when to obtain external expertise to support environmental assessment reviews.**

## 4.4 Project Proposals Appropriately Evaluated

The Ministry of Environment appropriately reviewed project proposals (i.e., applications) to determine if a project meets the definition of a development. It sent timely responses (i.e., within 10 days of making the determination) to project applicants with its decision.

The Ministry encourages potential applicants to self-assess whether their project is likely to be deemed a development under *The Environmental Assessment Act* requiring an environmental assessment review, prior to contacting the Ministry. A project is a development when it meets one or more criteria as outlined in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6—Development Criteria set out in *The Environmental Assessment Act***

- Have an effect on any unique, rare, or endangered feature of the environment;
- Substantially use any provincial resource and in so doing pre-empt the use, or potential use, of that resource for any other purpose;
- Cause the emission of any pollutants or create by-products, residual or waste products which require handling and disposal in a manner that is not regulated by any other Act or regulation;
- Cause widespread public concern because of potential environmental changes;
- Involve a new technology that is concerned with resource utilization and that may induce significant environmental change; or
- Have a significant impact on the environment or necessitate a further development which is likely to have a significant impact on the development.

Source: *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 2(d).

If a project appears to be a development under the Act, or if the conclusion is unclear, applicants submit a technical proposal (description of the project) for Ministry review. Ministry staff may provide technical proposals to the Review Panel for review (e.g., depending upon complexity).

We found the Ministry had sufficient guidance (e.g., through Technical Proposal Guidelines) for its staff and potential applicants to determine when a project would be a development in accordance with the Act. The Ministry's guidance provided more detail on each of the six criteria. For example, it further explained unique features of the environment (e.g., features with environmental value to Saskatchewan such as the Athabasca Sand Dunes, or features with unique cultural significance).<sup>16</sup>

Alternatively, a project applicant can skip the screening application stage in the process by self-declaring a project as a development and voluntarily go through the environmental assessment process. In the eight items tested, we observed five applicants self-declared their projects as developments.

<sup>16</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/137589/Technical%252BProposal%252BGuidelines.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/137589/Technical%252BProposal%252BGuidelines.pdf), pp. 26–34, (1 April 2026).

The Ministry relies on applicants to bring development projects to it, which we found consistent with good practice. Regulators (e.g., other Ministry of Environment branches) may remind applicants about the need to consider the environmental assessment process (e.g., while obtaining an exploration permit). We did not identify any development projects that came to the Ministry only because of other government regulators requiring the applicant to pursue an environmental assessment, indicating applicants are appropriately coming forward to the Ministry.

### **New Projects**

Saskatchewan's principles-based guidance on the definition of a development allows the Ministry to focus its efforts on projects with higher environmental risk. Similar project types may reasonably result in different determinations of whether they met the definition of a development depending on the risk of each specific project (e.g., location).<sup>17</sup>

Our testing of five new project applications found:

- Three applications where the Ministry appropriately determined the project did not meet any of the development criteria (e.g., no species of conservation concern, on private land with limited environmental impact).
- Two applications where the Ministry appropriately determined the project met the development criteria.
- The Ministry provided the proposal application to the Review Panel for four of five applications; the Ministry determined the fifth application was clearly a development.
- The Ministry sent timely responses to all applicants (i.e., less than 10 days from determination). The responses included detailed reasons for the Ministry's determination on whether the project was a development.

### **Project Changes**

Applicants also apply to the Ministry to determine whether a proposed change to a previously approved development requires an environmental assessment.<sup>18</sup> A project applicant must inform the Minister of a proposed change before proceeding.

Our testing of five development project changes found:

- One application where the Ministry appropriately determined it was a change in development and required another environmental impact statement
- Four applications where the Ministry appropriately determined the change did not require an environmental impact statement

<sup>17</sup> For example, the applicants for two recent wind projects self-declared as developments and went through the environmental assessment process. The applicant for a third wind project did not self-declare and the Ministry of Environment determined the project did not meet the definition of development, so it did not go through the environmental assessment process. The Minister of Environment denied a fourth wind project because the environmental risks could not be mitigated due its location.

<sup>18</sup> *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 16.



## Exemptions

The Act allows the Government of Saskatchewan to exempt a development from the environmental assessment process in an emergency.<sup>19</sup> We found the Ministry has sufficient guidance on when projects are exempt from the environmental assessment process.

The Ministry has only declared three projects exempt from the environmental assessment process since 1980. We tested two emergency projects and found they reasonably constituted an emergency as defined in the Ministry's guidance. Both exemptions related to mitigation activities to reduce the risk of flooding. We found the Ministry had appropriate Minister approval for both projects and obtained Orders in Council as required by the Act to exempt the projects from the environmental assessment process.

Appropriately determining whether a project development proposal has environmental risks reduces the likelihood of projects with potential negative environmental impacts proceeding without an environmental assessment. Timely decisions help project applicants understand next steps and proceed with the environmental assessment process efficiently.

## 4.5 Environmental Impacts Appropriately Assessed

The Ministry of Environment appropriately assesses project applicants' terms of reference and environmental impact statements to evaluate development project risks and planned mitigation steps.

### Terms of Reference

Project applicants prepare a terms of reference, also called a scoping document. Scoping identifies the key impacts to be studied and establishes what should be included in an environmental impact statement. The Ministry and the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel assess whether terms of reference include all pertinent information (e.g., appropriate information and methodologies for carrying out the assessment).<sup>20</sup>

We tested the terms of reference for eight proposed projects and found:

- All eight included all information required by the Ministry's guidelines. Each identified information about the existing environment (e.g., one identified three provincially rare plants and 25 wildlife species frequently found in the proposed development area). Each identified attributes of the proposed development area (e.g., air quality, water use and quality, vegetation, fish habitat, traditional land use) and outlined potential impacts on these attributes because of the development (e.g., wetlands and waterbodies, noise affect on wildlife), and how those impacts would be assessed in the environmental impact statement.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> An emergency is a circumstance requiring actions to prevent unacceptable environmental harm before an applicant can obtain Minister approval for those actions following the processes required by *The Environmental Assessment Act*.

<sup>20</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/89131/89131-EnvironmentalAssessmentProcessGuidelines.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/89131/89131-EnvironmentalAssessmentProcessGuidelines.pdf) (25 March 2026).

<sup>21</sup> Project applicants must include environmental attributes identified as having legal, scientific, cultural, economic, or aesthetic value.

- The Ministry reviewed all eight as expected and received comments from Review Panel members, which led to changes to the terms of reference for all eight proposed projects tested. For example, the Ministry asked the project applicant to add details on how they would monitor wildlife post-construction, so they added monitoring survey plans.
- For seven projects, the Ministry completed its review steps reasonably timely, consistent with its expectations (e.g., within a month). As of January 2026, the Ministry had not yet approved one of the terms of reference because it received a revised terms of reference in December 2025.

### Environmental Impact Statements

A project applicant of a proposed development must submit a draft environmental impact statement to the Ministry assessing and addressing the identified potential impacts outlined in the terms of reference. The Ministry and Review Panel evaluate an applicant's environmental impact statement assessing a proposed development's environmental effects.

We tested five proposed projects with completed environmental impact statements and found the Review Panel provided feedback that resulted in additional analysis or action to address environmental and social impacts such as asking for an estimate of water usage required for each phase of the project.

The applicants revised their environmental impact statements for the five proposed projects based on feedback from the Review Panel. We found the Ministry appropriately reviewed the updated statements and it appropriately sent the revised statements to the Review Panel when changes were complex.

For the five proposed projects tested, we also found each environmental impact statement included all relevant information as expected by the Ministry guidelines including mitigation plans for limiting negative impacts on the environment. We found for all five projects, the environmental impact statement:

- Estimated the proposed development's impact on the environment, predicted changes to the environment for each identified attribute, and outlined the approach used to estimate the environmental changes for each attribute. For example, one environmental impact statement studied whether an abundance of vegetation would be impacted throughout the project lifecycle.
- Identified potential accidents and malfunctions that could affect the proposed development, resulting in impacts on the environment, and identified safeguards to mitigate them (e.g., for a proposed uranium mine, the project applicant considered a transformer leak as a potential accident or malfunction, and developed a spill response plan).
- Included the results of public engagement and Indigenous community consultations—see **Section 4.6** for further details on consultations.



- Included preliminary environmental monitoring plans, including what, when, and how to monitor actual impacts on attributes. For example, a mine development included plans to monitor liquid waste, air emissions, and groundwater.

For these five projects, the Ministry did not always complete its reviews consistent with its expectations (e.g., within a month)—see **Figure 7** for further details on timeline expectations.

We assessed the cumulative effects evaluation for two of the five projects tested and found the applicants completed sufficient and appropriate analysis.<sup>22</sup> For example, one applicant's cumulative effects evaluation outlined environmental impacts (e.g., water use) from other existing and potential projects in the area.

One of five assessments tested also required Federal Government approval. We found the Ministry regularly communicated with the responsible federal agency to help ensure the final environmental impact statement met both provincial and federal requirements; the federal agency later approved the project.<sup>23</sup>

We found the Ministry provided sufficient information (e.g., determination, rationale) to the Minister to make a decision for all five assessments tested. We found the Minister approved four projects and rejected one.<sup>24</sup> Decisions for all five projects had appropriate rationale. We also found the Ministry communicated decisions to project applicants timely and posted them online.

Appropriately assessing the terms of reference and environmental impact statement helps prevent or minimize significant adverse effects that a development may have on the environment.

## 4.6 Public Engagement and Indigenous Consultations Occurring

The Ministry of Environment conducts public engagement and Indigenous consultations consistent with its requirements as part of the environmental assessment process.

Public engagement and Indigenous consultations are an important part of the environmental assessment process to make informed, transparent, and trusted decisions. Early on, the Ministry expects project applicants to share details of proposed developments and actively solicit interested parties and Indigenous community feedback regarding potential issues, interests, and concerns through meetings and/or open houses in local communities.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> A cumulative effects assessment evaluates the total, combined estimated effect of a project in combination with past, present, and foreseeable human activities in a region.

<sup>23</sup> Developments in Saskatchewan may also be subject to the Federal Government's *Impact Assessment Act*. The Federal Government requires environmental assessments for projects that meet certain criteria. For example, the federal *Physical Activities Regulations*, section 20, requires construction of a new uranium mine with an ore production capacity of 2,500 tonnes or more per day to obtain federal environmental assessment approval.

<sup>24</sup> The Ministry of Environment has only ever rejected one environmental assessment. [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/94179/94179-Chaplin\\_Wind\\_Energy\\_Project\\_MD\\_&\\_RfD\\_\(PubCentre\).pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/94179/94179-Chaplin_Wind_Energy_Project_MD_&_RfD_(PubCentre).pdf) (1 April 2026).

<sup>25</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf), p. 16, (25 March 2026).

We found the Ministry provides adequate guidance to applicants on public engagement and Indigenous consultation that refers to the Government of Saskatchewan's *First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework* when determining which Indigenous communities require consultation and the consultation process expected.<sup>26</sup>

### Public Engagement

We found, for five projects tested with completed environmental impact statements, all five applicants completed appropriate public engagement (e.g., meetings). For all five projects, the Ministry also published a 30-day public review notice including all relevant documents (e.g., terms of reference, environmental impact statements, Ministry analysis of technical information).<sup>27</sup> Public review of 30 days aligns with good practice.

### Indigenous Consultations

Where project applicants propose developments on Crown land available for the exercise of Treaty rights and traditional uses, the Government of Saskatchewan's Framework requires consultation with Indigenous communities. While the Government of Saskatchewan is responsible for fulfilling the Indigenous consultation requirements, the Ministry typically assigns procedural responsibilities of the process to the applicant during the environmental assessment process. The applicant can best explain the potential impacts of a proposed development and work with affected Indigenous communities to understand how to mitigate those impacts.<sup>28</sup>

We found the Ministry appropriately determined which of the eight projects tested required Indigenous consultation in accordance with the Government's Framework and documented the rationale for these decisions (e.g., potential disturbances to land and resources used by Indigenous communities). For three of eight projects tested, we found the Ministry determined the project did not require Indigenous consultation (e.g., on private land, no disturbances to land or resources used by Indigenous communities).

For five of eight projects that required Indigenous consultation, the Ministry determined which Indigenous communities the applicant was required to consult with based on the Government's Framework. The Ministry usually determined this through discussions with other branches and ministries familiar with the area of the proposed development (e.g., previous engagement with communities before signing leases on Crown land or approving exploratory mineral permits in the area).

For these five projects, the Ministry assigned procedural responsibilities of Indigenous consultation to the applicant such as:

- Informing identified Indigenous communities (e.g., First Nations community, Métis Local) of the nature of the proposed activities, any potential environmental impacts, and mitigation plans.

<sup>26</sup> The 2024 *First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework* was in place at the time of our audit. Some of the projects we tested followed the 2010 *First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework* because it was in place at the time the environmental assessment process occurred.

<sup>27</sup> *The Environmental Assessment Act*, section 11, requires a 30-day public review.

<sup>28</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/127268/TOR-and-EIS-Guidelines.pdf), p. 17, (25 March 2026).



- Consulting with Ministry-identified Indigenous communities to understand the communities' use of the land and resources in the development area and the specific potential adverse impacts of the proposed project on the communities' ability to exercise their Treaty rights to conduct traditional uses, such as hunt, fish, and trap for food.
- Arranging meetings by mutual agreement with identified Indigenous communities' elected officials or their formally authorized designate to discuss a consultation plan.
- Working with Indigenous communities to determine reasonable accommodations to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential adverse impacts on the Indigenous communities' ability to exercise their Treaty rights (e.g., restricting noise levels during construction at certain times of the day).

For the five projects tested, we found the Ministry sent letters to each Indigenous community identified as requiring consultation informing them of proposed projects, the assignment of procedural responsibilities for Indigenous consultation to the project applicant, and the Ministry's request to the applicant to consult with the community.

The Ministry requires applicants to include a consultation report in the environmental impact statement outlining Indigenous communities' concerns, how they addressed concerns, agreements with communities, and any outstanding issues. The Ministry and Review Panel include their comments on the consultation report as part of their review of the environmental impact statement.

Of the five projects tested, two applicants completed Indigenous consultations. The other three applicants had not yet completed this step as of January 2026 because they had not yet finished their environmental impact statement. For the two projects with completed Indigenous consultations, we found the Ministry sufficiently reviewed the applicant's consultation report and concluded the project applicant appropriately consulted the identified Indigenous communities. The Ministry also sent adequate letters to Indigenous communities informing them of the Minister's approval of the project.

Effective public engagement and Indigenous consultation support transparent decisions on the impact of proposed environmental assessment projects, and consider impacts to Indigenous communities' ability to exercise their Treaty rights to conduct traditional uses, such as hunt, fish, and trap for food.

## 4.7 Consistent Tracking and Monitoring of Terms and Conditions Needed

---

The Ministry of Environment appropriately sets environmental assessment terms and conditions. However, it does not track and monitor terms and conditions consistently.

The Minister decision letters approving environmental assessments set required terms and conditions related to the approval. We found the Ministry uses appropriate standard terms and conditions (e.g., follow applicable laws and regulations, inform the Ministry of any changes to the development, notify the Ministry when the development begins operation) that apply to all projects. The Ministry also sets project-specific terms and

conditions (e.g., submit a water and wastewater management plan, submit a woodland caribou mitigation plan, complete post-construction wildlife fatality monitoring) depending on the type of project.

Some terms and conditions include monitoring environmental outcomes. For example, for wind energy projects, the Ministry requires project applicants to monitor and report on bird deaths.

The Ministry also sets timelines for applicant reporting on their terms and conditions. For example, timelines may be prior to commencing operations, a specific date, or in a certain year of operations.

The Ministry tracks terms and conditions in its IT system. The Ministry's tracking includes the relevant project number, term and condition, due date, and completion date. The Ministry's IT system assigns the terms and conditions to the relevant Ministry staff to monitor completion.

The Ministry requires staff to assess compliance with terms and conditions at least every six months. The IT system provides staff with a list of terms and conditions assigned to them that are past due, and due in 60 days. We found the Ministry's monitoring process aligned with good practice.

We tested nine approved projects with environmental assessments (each approved assessment has various project-specific terms and conditions) and found:

- 45 terms and conditions in the IT system matched the Minister approval letters as expected. We found these terms and conditions appropriate for the type of project (e.g., wind energy).
- 11 terms and conditions from the Minister approval letters missing in the IT system, increasing the risk monitoring is not occurring where required. Of these, nine related to staff tracking required terms and conditions inconsistently over multiple years.
- Four terms and conditions in the IT system did not have updated due dates, increasing the risk the Ministry will not receive reports in the future as required.
- 22 terms and conditions had appropriate support to indicate completion.

We found the Ministry needs to track terms and conditions of projects with environmental assessments consistently in its IT system to improve its oversight. In addition, we found:

- Four closed projects and one cancelled project that still had terms and conditions showing as not completed in the IT system
- One project had three completed terms and conditions not tracked as completed
- Two terms and conditions without due dates



Without consistently tracking terms and conditions, the Ministry may not sufficiently monitor whether project applicants comply with environmental assessment terms and conditions, potentially leading to adverse impacts on the environment or planned mitigation steps not taking place as planned.

**3. We recommend the Ministry of Environment consistently track and monitor environmental assessment terms and conditions.**

The Ministry's Environmental Protection Branch performs environmental compliance audits for the Ministry. In 2025, this Branch audited three wind energy projects to assess compliance with terms and conditions. We found staff tracked non-compliance with terms and conditions identified through these audits (e.g., permanent fencing not installed around high-voltage equipment) in the Ministry's IT system.

The Ministry informs project applicants (i.e., conversations, verbal warnings) when they do not comply with terms and conditions. Ministry management indicated applicants are usually motivated to comply with environmental assessment terms and conditions so they can continue to develop or operate the development. *The Environmental Assessment Act* allows the Ministry to issue fines up to \$500,000 as well as allows the Ministry to make orders (e.g., prevent an applicant from proceeding with a development) or conduct investigations (e.g., determine an applicant's compliance with terms and conditions).<sup>29</sup> As of January 2026, the Ministry has never issued a fine related to environmental assessments.

## 4.8 Monitoring of Actual Environmental Impacts

The Ministry of Environment appropriately receives information to consider actual environmental impacts after environmental assessments are complete.

We found the Ministry's guidance appropriately requires project applicants to prepare preliminary monitoring plans in their environmental impact statements. This includes the applicant:

- Confirming or quantifying impacts anticipated in the environmental impact statement (e.g., containment of mine tailings from leaching into the soil)
- Evaluating the success of mitigation measures

We reviewed an annual environmental performance report monitored by the Ministry's Environmental Protection Branch. This report summarized the applicant's monitoring of emissions and water, compared results to previous years, and confirmed that the assumptions in the environmental impact statement remained valid. There were no unexpected environmental impacts identified in the report.

We found several Ministry branches meet monthly (including both the Environmental Protection Branch and the Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch) to share any significant findings from their monitoring activities that may inform future environmental assessment reviews (e.g., other environmental risks to consider in future projects).

<sup>29</sup> *The Environmental Assessment Act*, sections 18, 19, and 20(2).

The Ministry also meets regularly with other Canadian jurisdictions responsible for environmental assessment processes to stay current on recent or upcoming policy changes.

At January 2026, the Ministry is also reviewing its guidelines for wind energy projects. It plans to do a jurisdictional scan, conduct literature reviews, consult technical experts, and contact relevant parties to consider whether it needs to revise its guidelines.<sup>30</sup>

Considering actual environmental impacts can inform and enable the Ministry to monitor whether applicants mitigate environmental impacts as expected.

## 4.9 Appropriate Reporting to Senior Management

The Ministry of Environment appropriately reports to senior management about the status of projects going through the environmental assessment process.

The Ministry reports monthly to senior management on the status of projects. We tested four monthly reports and found these contained appropriate information about:

- Key projects
- Status (what stage in the environmental assessment process the project is)
- Critical issues, if any (e.g., potential issues identified during public engagement, status of mitigation steps identified during environmental assessments such as reducing impact on caribou)
- Milestones achieved (e.g., Minister approvals)
- Projected milestones (when the Ministry expects to receive applicant documents)

The Ministry also reports quarterly to senior management and the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment Review Panel. We tested four quarterly reports and found these contained appropriate information about current projects, completed projects, and possible future projects. We found these reports contained sufficient information to allow senior management and the Review Panel to monitor current and future projects.

We found the Ministry set timelines for the length of time it expected staff and the Review Panel to take for their reviews. For example, the Ministry expects the Review Panel to review a project applicant's terms of reference within 20 business days and provide comments back to the Ministry. The Ministry does not formally track whether it meets these timelines.

**Figure 7** shows for eight projects tested, we found the Ministry did not meet all its timelines. The Ministry may want to consider whether it has appropriate targets, why the Review Panel did not consistently meet its targets, or if process changes are needed to meet targets.

<sup>30</sup> The Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch is the regulator for renewable energy projects (wind, solar).

**Figure 7—Key Steps and Timeline Expectations for Projects Tested**

| Key Steps  | Timeline Target                      | Audit Results for Projects Tested <sup>A</sup>   |
|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Communicate Ministry decision on whether project is a development sent to the project applicant  | Within 10 business days of approval  | Met  |
| Review Panel reviewed and provided comments on draft project terms of reference to Ministry  | 20 business days <sup>B</sup>        | Reasonably met – the Ministry provided some extensions (longest delay was about seven business days) |
| Review Panel reviewed revised draft project terms of reference (after project applicant revised for Review Panel initial comments)     | 10 business days <sup>B</sup>        | Met  |
| Review Panel reviewed and provided comments on draft environmental impact statement  | 20 business days <sup>B</sup>        | <b>Not met (ranged from 23–42 business days)</b>   |
| Review Panel reviewed revised draft project environmental impact statement (after project applicant revised for Review Panel comments) | 10 business days <sup>B</sup>        | <b>Two of three not met (ranged from 5–31 business days)</b>   |
| Communicate Minister decision on whether environmental impact statement is approved  | Within 3 days from Minister decision | Met  |

Source: Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan.

<sup>A</sup> Five projects tested had completed environmental impact statements; seven of eight projects had approved terms of reference at January 2026.

<sup>B</sup> These timeline targets are specifically for the Review Panel to review the information and do not include Ministry of Environment staff review timelines as outlined in **Figure 1**.

The Ministry has a relatively low number of projects ongoing at a time (e.g., one monthly report to senior management had 15 ongoing projects). Senior management should be able to identify if a key step took the Ministry significantly longer than expected. The Ministry may want to consider tracking and reporting information to senior management on whether it met its key internal timeline expectations as this would help senior management know if staff and the Review Panel complete environmental assessment steps in accordance with the Ministry's expectations.

The Ministry also did not formally report on the status of project applicants' compliance with terms and conditions for approved projects. We considered this reasonable as we did not find any significant ongoing non-compliance.

Reporting relevant information to senior management allows adequate monitoring of projects, and the ability to take corrective action if necessary (e.g., escalate issues, adjust resources).

## 4.10 Enhanced Public Reporting Required

The Ministry of Environment provides appropriate information about environmental assessment projects to the public but needs to enhance its public reporting by conveying the success of its environmental assessment process.

The Ministry publicly reports on its website about specific projects requiring environmental assessments, including projects under review and completed projects.<sup>31</sup> We found this included appropriate documents (e.g., environmental impact statements), depending on

<sup>31</sup> [publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/categories/79](https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/categories/79) (23 March 2026).

the stage of the project. See **Figure 8** for a summary of project information publicly available.

**Figure 8—Project Information the Ministry of Environment Makes Available to the Public**

- Technical proposal (description of the project) and information sheet (high-level summary of the project)
- Decision of whether the Ministry requires the project applicant to complete an environmental assessment
- Public notice indicating the project applicant is preparing an environmental assessment
- Project terms of reference
- Environmental impact statement
- Technical review comments (Ministry's analysis of the technical information in the environmental impact statement)
- Minister decision approving or denying the project, including terms and conditions if approved

Source: Summarized from Ministry of Environment website.

We tested eight projects and found the Ministry made the appropriate information publicly available, depending on the stage of the project.

We determined there are likely two key measures of success for environmental assessments: minimizing negative environmental impacts from proposed developments and ensuring the environmental assessment process is timely.

We reviewed environmental assessment public reporting from four other Canadian jurisdictions and found two did not report any information other than detailed project information similar to what the Ministry reports as outlined in **Figure 8**. However, we found:

- The Federal Government publicly reports quarterly on the number of impact assessments it received and completed, and annually reports on four performance measures (e.g., percent of projects reporting mitigation measures set in environmental impact statements effectively addressed adverse effects of the development).<sup>32</sup> In addition, the Federal Government communicated it is revising its environmental assessment processes to target completing all assessment work within two years of receipt.<sup>33</sup>
- Ontario's 2024–25 annual report notes a performance measure targeting completing 85% of more complex environmental assessment reviews within one year.<sup>34</sup>

Ministry management indicated the timeline for environmental assessments can range from about six months to about five years, depending on how long it takes the project applicant to complete their portion of the required steps (e.g., environmental studies). For the five projects tested with completed environmental impact statements, we found the environmental assessment process took about 1.5–6.5 years.<sup>35</sup> Without assessment and reporting, the public does not know if the Ministry reviews environmental assessments in a timely manner.

<sup>32</sup> [www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/corporate/transparency/accountability-performance-financial-reporting/2024-2025-departmental-results-report/departmental-results-report.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/corporate/transparency/accountability-performance-financial-reporting/2024-2025-departmental-results-report/departmental-results-report.html) (2 April 2026).

<sup>33</sup> [www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/corporate/our-impact/impact-assessments-that-work/truths-misconceptions-federal-impact-assessments-canada.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/impact-assessment-agency/corporate/our-impact/impact-assessments-that-work/truths-misconceptions-federal-impact-assessments-canada.html) (2 April 2026).

<sup>34</sup> [www.ontario.ca/page/published-plans-and-annual-reports-2024-2025-ministry-environment-conservation-and-parks](https://www.ontario.ca/page/published-plans-and-annual-reports-2024-2025-ministry-environment-conservation-and-parks) (2 April 2026).

<sup>35</sup> Three of five projects tested took about 1.5 years, one project took about three years, and the fifth project took 6.5 years.



The Government of Saskatchewan has established economic plans that may result in more development projects going through the environmental assessment process. For example, the Provincial Government's critical mineral strategy sets goals such as doubling the number of critical minerals produced in Saskatchewan by 2030 and growing production of potash, uranium, and helium.<sup>36</sup>

Reporting sufficient information publicly increases transparency, making it easier for the public, as well as project applicants, to determine whether the environmental assessment process sufficiently supports development opportunities and environmental stewardship.

**4. We recommend the Ministry of Environment publicly report on key measures of success (e.g., timeliness) of its environmental assessment process.**

We found the Government of Saskatchewan provides the public with information on the condition (e.g., health) of the environment such as air quality and surface water quality (e.g., air pollution concentration) every two years.<sup>37</sup> This reporting helps the public understand the results of the Government's overall environmental assessment, monitoring, and regulatory efforts. For example, the Ministry reported in 2025 that air quality in Saskatchewan is typically low risk, and pollution levels are improving for two of the four pollutants reported on.<sup>38</sup>

## 5.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

Blakely, J., and Russell, J. (2019). *Trends, Issues and Insights in Cumulative Effects Assessment: A Review of International Academic Literature 2008–2018*. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan.

Government of Saskatchewan. (2023). *First Nation and Métis Consultation Policy Framework*. [publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/121767](https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/121767) (1 October 2025).

Noble, B. (2020). *Follow-up and monitoring in impact assessment: Synthesis of knowledge and practice*. Ottawa: Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia. (2011). *An Audit of the Environmental Assessment Office's Oversight of Certified Projects*. Victoria: Author.

Office of the Auditor General of Nova Scotia. (2017). *Report of the Auditor General to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly, Performance*, Chapter 4: *Environment—Environmental Assessments*. Halifax: Author.

Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. (2016). *2016 Annual Report Volume 1*, Chapter 3, *Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change—Environmental Assessments*. Toronto: Author.

<sup>36</sup> [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/139379/Saskatchewan\\_Critical\\_Minerals\\_Strategy-March2023.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/139379/Saskatchewan_Critical_Minerals_Strategy-March2023.pdf) (2 April 2026).

<sup>37</sup> [wsask.ca/recreation-environment/lakes-and-rivers-overview/surface-water-quality-data/](https://wsask.ca/recreation-environment/lakes-and-rivers-overview/surface-water-quality-data/) (8 April 2026).

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Environment, *2025 State of the Environment Report*, pp. 4–5.