



Accountability Report

2023–24

Environment and Climate Change



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Contents

Accountability Statement	2
Measuring Performance.....	3
Sustainable Prosperity	3
Climate Action	4
Land Protection	6
Circular Economy	6
Sustainable Development	7
Protecting Human and Environmental Health	7
Financial Results	9
Financial Summary and Variance Explanation	9
Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act	10
Annual Report under Section 18 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act	10

Accountability Statement

The Accountability Report of *Environment and Climate Change* for the year ended March 31, 2024, is prepared pursuant to the *Finance Act* and government policies and guidelines. The reporting of *Environment and Climate Change* outcomes necessarily include estimates, judgments, and opinions by *Environment and Climate Change* management.

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of *Environment and Climate Change* management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the *Environment and Climate Change 2023-24* Business Plan.

Original signed by:

Original signed by:

Timothy A. Halman
Minister

Lora MacEachern, K.C.
Deputy Minister

Measuring Performance

The Department of Environment and Climate Change (the Department) has a mandate to support a clean and healthy environment, protect land, advance a clean economy, address the climate crisis, and guide the province towards a sustainable and clean future where all Nova Scotians can thrive.

In 2023-24, through legislation, regulation, enforcement, programs and investments, the Department worked to fulfill this mandate by continuing work in the areas of sustainable prosperity, climate action, land protection, circular economy, sustainable development, and protecting human and environmental health.

Sustainable Prosperity

The Department of Environment and Climate Change is responsible for the Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act which sets the course for Nova's Scotia to seize opportunities to drive sustainable prosperity, create jobs, preserve our environment, and build the clean economy of tomorrow for all Nova Scotians.

In 2023-24, the Department has advanced government's commitments under the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act* and supported sustainable development by:

- Approving 12 renewable energy projects – 10 wind and 2 green hydrogen, through the environmental assessment process; projects that are critical to meeting our climate goals and transitioning off coal.
- Creating a Youth Climate Council to give youth leaders a voice at the table to directly advise government on climate change issues and concerns.
- Continuing robust engagement with the Minister's Roundtable on the Environment and Sustainable Prosperity for effective advice, included a Roundtable meeting attended by the Premier, as per our commitment under the Act.
- Doubling the funding of the Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund to empower more communities to take action and build climate resiliency.
- Collaborating with other departments and our partners to publicly report on our collective progress and supporting departments who are responsible for legislated goals. In July 2023, Government released its [second annual progress report](#) to outline the work happening under the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act* and the Climate Change Action Plan for Clean Growth. This report detailed progress in:
 - Climate action, clean air and water, modernizing environmental assessment, food and aquaculture, circular economy and waste, supporting business and youth, education and training, and diversity, equity and inclusion.
 - Profiled work spanning multiple sectors to advance our climate goals and contribute to a clean economy, healthy environment and resilient communities.

Also, the Department has undertaken significant efforts to advance its 2023-24 legislated commitments and regulatory initiatives to protect the environment including work related to environmental racism, climate action and land protection, further detailed below.

Recommendations to Address Environmental Racism

Our Government is taking action on our commitment under the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act* to address environmental racism and climate change inequities impacting equity deserving communities. Government created the Environmental Racism Panel in 2022, appointing eight experienced community leaders with a broad range of expertise to make recommendations to Government on actions to address this historic wrongdoing.

The Panel has undertaken significant time and care to develop recommendations to address inequities with racialized and marginalized communities and shared their draft report with the Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Office of Equity and Anti-Racism. Government is taking the time to thoughtfully consider the draft report and recommendations.

Climate Action

Nova Scotia is facing a climate emergency and government is responding to help protect the health of Nova Scotians. Our [Climate Change Action Plan for Clean Growth](#), with its 68 actions, sets out the path to fight climate change and create healthy, resilient communities. In 2023-24 the Department, in collaboration with other departments, continued to advance work on coastal protection and implementing the Climate Change Action Plan for Clean Growth:

Coastal Protection

Government is committed to climate action, including coastal protection and adaptation. In February 2024, government released [The Future of Nova Scotia's Coastline: A plan to protect people, homes and nature from climate change](#). The plan is part of a holistic approach to climate action that builds on the foundation of the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act*, and our Climate Change Action Plan for Clean Growth. The 15 comprehensive actions under the Coastal Protection Action Plan empower informed decision making, support municipal leadership and align government resources with coastal protection. The plan includes releasing the [Coastal Hazard Map](#), and [Resource Guide for Property Owners](#), tools which are available now. A team of Navigators, through Clean Foundation, are also available to point Nova Scotians to additional resources on coastal hazards and potential options to address them, and to support understanding of new information as it is rolled out through the Coastal Hazard Map.

Government is also supporting the actions in the Coastal Protection Action Plan and municipal leadership with its investment of an additional:

- \$1.6 million in municipal flood-line mapping so people and municipalities have more information, more quickly, on flooding risks and to support municipalities in better zoning land to reduce coastal and inland flood hazards
- \$1.6 million for the [Community Climate Capacity Program](#). Administered on behalf of the Province by Clean Foundation, this program was created in 2023 as a pilot to help municipalities, First Nation communities and community groups build climate change response capacity.

Implement the Climate Change Action Plan for Clean Growth

Government is committed to implement and report on progress under [Our Climate, Our Future: Nova Scotia's Climate Change Plan for Clean Growth](#). In July 2023, Government released its [second annual progress report](#) highlighting the work and accomplishments across departments and various sectors to meet our legislated and climate plan commitments.

In 2023-24, additional areas of focus included the following:

- Fully implement Nova Scotia's new output-based pricing system to help the province meet its target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 53 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, and net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Increase capacity to support local action through the [Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund](#) (SCCF), which is administered by the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities, by doubling our investment in the fund to \$30.4 million in September 2023, and extending the fund until 2028, so that more communities can benefit. To date, \$7.8 million has been awarded to 26 community-led projects reduce GHG emissions and adapt to climate change. Additionally, [the Community Climate Capacity program](#), referenced above, was awarded \$5 million in May 2023 and an additional \$1.6 million in February 2024 to build local climate change response capacity.
- Support and fund solutions that address systematic inequities and discrimination related to climate change. We recognize that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect people who are experiencing other inequities. That is why at least 15 per cent of our now doubled Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund is allocated to First Nation and African Nova Scotian communities to fight racial inequities by empowering them to build internal capacity to become stronger and more resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Engage youth leadership. Youth have long been at the forefront of leading climate action. In May 2023, the Minister of Environment created the Minister's Youth Climate Council to give youth across the province a formal, direct and dedicated way to offer their leadership and advice to government on climate change challenges and opportunities. Nova Scotia needs our youth and that is why, through the [Clean Leadership Program](#), we are giving youth across the province the experience, on-the-job training and skills to set them up for success in the clean economy and make a real difference in our fight against climate change.
- Build climate change adaptive capacity and resilience in industry and communities through adaptation planning, projects and partnerships by:
 - Working with the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture to support the sector to develop climate change vulnerability assessments on important infrastructure and create sector-specific adaptation plans.
 - Working with the Department of Agriculture to support farmers to adopt clean technologies through our Clean Technology for Agriculture Program.
 - Supporting cattle and sheep, Christmas tree and horticulture sectors to hire adaptation coordinators, implement adaptation strategies, and undertake projects to address climate hazards (e.g. acquire drones to monitor for insect infestation, create a Climate Smart Agriculture web portal).
 - Advancing work to update Nova Scotia's provincial risk assessment by the end of 2025 and continuing to develop and implement adaptation plans for government departments.
- Continue to support companies developing green hydrogen facilities and other renewable energy projects to ensure that the regulatory requirements are clear, so that innovative projects like these can proceed, while ensuring the environment is protected. We can do both and do both well.

Land Protection

Protecting Nova Scotia's outstanding natural heritage, scenery, and significant ecological areas improves our quality of life, supports our mental and physical health and well-being, gives us clean air and clean drinking water. Natural areas and our economy are intertwined, and we cannot have a strong economy without a healthy environment, and vice versa.

Land protection is also important for advancing reconciliation with the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia. An important example of reconciliation through land protection took place in January 2023, when Minister Halman signed the Shared Understanding Agreement between the Province and the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources for the Kluskap Wilderness Area, which includes the sacred Mi'kmaq site Kluskap's Cave.

For all these important reasons, Government committed to protecting 20% of Nova Scotia's land and water by 2030 in the *Environmental Goals and Climate Change Reduction Act*. In collaboration with the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables, the following actions toward achieving this goal took place in 2023-2024:

- 14,000 hectares within 23 new or expanded wilderness areas and nature reserves were protected. This included designating five new wilderness areas and nine new nature reserves and expanding eight existing wilderness areas and one nature reserve. These designations protected 115 kilometres of coast and 3,680 hectares of coastal ecosystems.
- In October 2023, Minister Halman signed the Canda-Nova Scotia Nature Agreement and secured \$28.5 million in federal funding to support conservation activities in the province. The agreement supports the development of Indigenous Protected and Conserved areas and Mi'kmaq-led conservation efforts.
- The Department is collaborating with Parks Canada, Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia Nature Trust, and Mi'kmaq communities to explore the creation of a National Urban Park in the Blue Mountain Birch Cove Lakes Area, including the provincial Wilderness Area, near Halifax. The partnership will produce a conceptual proposal for the proposed park in 2024-25.
- Work continued to advance designation of the remaining sites in the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan, including working with the Mi'kmaq to develop additional Indigenous Protected and Conserved areas, working with partners to advance other effective area-based conservation measures, and support the work of the Crown Share Legacy Trust to protect ecologically significant, threatened, and irreplaceable natural areas on private lands.

Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy

The Department released the [Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy: An Action Plan for Achieving 20 Per cent](#) in December 2023 to guide the Province's work in achieving the goal to protect 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's land and water mass. More than 600 Nova Scotians provided input to inform the strategy, which includes guiding principles and 24 actions under four solutions to protect more land, water and wetlands.

Circular Economy

A circular economy minimizes waste by keeping resources in the economy, out of landfills and helps to mitigate against climate change. In 2023-24, the Department supported the circular economy by announcing regulations for new extended producer responsibility (EPR) programs for batteries,

lamps, and small household electric appliances (e.g. irons, counter-top cooking appliances and hair dryers), as well as packaging, paper products and other blue bag materials. Producers will now be responsible for paying to have these materials collected and recycled and will be required to meet recycling targets annually. These programs take effect over the next two years, making producers accountable for end-of-life management of their goods, improving recycling and supporting our waste reduction goals.

Sustainable Development

As a regulator, the Department plays a critical role in enabling sustainable development in the province by ensuring that our strong regulatory requirements are clear to industry, and our processes are efficient and effective, so that traditional and new and innovative industries can thrive in Nova Scotia, while ensuring the environment remains protected. Through the *Environment Act*, the Department regulates over 150 activities that require ECC approval, including road building, renewable energy projects, mining and large industry.

In 2023-24, the regulatory efforts of the Department supported sustainable development by:

- Evaluating and approving over 20 projects for environmental assessment, including 12 renewable energy projects in 2023: 10 onshore wind projects and 2 green hydrogen facilities. Completing over 15,000 inspections and audits to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.
- Continuing the work to modernize the environmental assessment process to incorporate cumulative impacts, diversity, equity and inclusion, independent review, Netukulimk and climate. The Department invited the public, Mi'kmaq organizations and communities, businesses, industry representatives and others to share feedback about Nova Scotia's environmental assessment process. Work is on track to meet our legislative deadline by the end of the 2024.
- Continual process improvement efforts to reduce undue regulatory burden by updating processes to be more efficient and effective.

Regulatory Clarity and Client Service Excellence

The Department further supported sustainable prosperity through modernizing processes to remove undue regulatory burden and by helping companies navigate regulatory processes:

- The Department's Business Relationship Managers helped companies navigate the province's environmental regulations. In the last two years, they worked with over 80 clients involved in energy, sustainable economic growth, circular economy and green technology projects.
- Approval processes were streamlined by implementing a new online application and payment option for pesticide certification.
- Guidance was published to help business and proponents understand the regulatory process, including developing new guidance documents for emitters, new noise assessment and monitoring guidelines, an air assessment guidance document, and an infographic for solar developments.

Protecting Human and Environmental Health

The Department is committed to delivering a healthier, cleaner, more sustainable Nova Scotia. In 2023- 2024, the Department continued to protect human and environment health by:

- Continuing to develop approaches to modernize ambient air quality standards by using feedback from engagements with industry to refine the proposed approach. This work is on track to meet our legislative deadline of 2025.
- Advancing development of provincial water quality objectives to guide activities that affect water quality. This work is on track to meet our legislative deadline of 2026.

Financial Results

Financial Summary and Variance Explanation

Departmental Expenses Summary (\$ thousands)

<u>Programs and Services</u>	<u>2023-2024 Estimate</u>	<u>2023-2024 Actuals</u>	<u>2023-2024 Variance</u>
Administration	1,075	1,086	11
Policy	5,925	5,890	(35)
Inspection, Compliance, Enforcement	15,743	15,769	26
Sustainability and Applied Science	8,844	13,547	4,703
Climate Change	8,858	15,437	6,579
Total - Departmental Expenses	40,445	51,729	11,284
Additional Information:			
Ordinary Revenues	3,184	12,903	9,719
Fees and Other Charges	2,176	2,299	123
Ordinary Recoveries	185	4,504	4,319
Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries	5,545	19,706	14,161
TCA Purchase Requirements	0	9,429	9,429
Funded Staff (# of FTEs)			
Department Funded Staff	305.5	290.3	(15.2)

Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation: Department of Environment and Climate Change expenses were \$11.3 million higher than estimate due to fully recoverable expenses, primarily related to Federal Agreements \$5.1 million, Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund (SCCF) extension \$5 million, 2023 Wildfire Recovery – Well Water Testing costs \$500K, and other operational pressures of \$700K.

Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries were \$14.2 million higher than estimate primarily due to \$13.6 million in new and amended agreements with the Federal government, \$0.5 million in increased revenues allocated from the Resource Recovery Fund Board, and \$0.1 million in additional revenues and fees collected.

TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation: TCA Purchases were \$9.4 million higher than estimate due to additional land purchases under the amended Target 1 Challenge Fund, and two new federal agreements: Nature Smart Climate Solutions and Canada NS Nature Agreement.

Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation: FTEs were lower than estimate primarily due to temporarily vacant positions.

Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

Annual Report under Section 18 of the Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act

The *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act* was proclaimed into law on December 20, 2011.

The Act provides for government employees to be able to come forward if they reasonably believe that a wrongdoing has been committed or is about to be committed and they are acting in good faith.

The Act also protects employees who do disclose from reprisals, by enabling them to lay a complaint of reprisal with the Labor Board.

A wrongdoing for the purposes of the Act is:

- a) a contravention of provincial or federal laws or regulations;
- b) a misuse or gross mismanagement of public funds or assets;
- c) an act or omission that creates an imminent risk of a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons or the environment; or,
- d) directing or counselling someone to commit a wrongdoing.

The following is a summary of disclosures received by Environment and Climate Change:

Information Required under Section 18 of the Act	Fiscal Year 2023-2024
The number of disclosures received	0
The number of findings of wrongdoing	0
Details of each wrongdoing (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	NA
Recommendations and actions taken on each wrongdoing. (Insert separate row for each wrongdoing)	NA

NA – not applicable