



# **Accountability Report**

## 2023–24

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Natural Resources and Renewables



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Accountability Report 2023–2024

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## Accountability Statement

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

We acknowledge that this Accountability Report is the responsibility of Department of Natural Resources and Renewables 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 Department of Natural Resources and Renewables 2023-24 Business Plan.

**Original signed by:**

Hon. Tory Rushton  
Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables

Karen Gatien  
Deputy Minister

## Measuring Performance

The Department continues to make substantial progress on each Government commitment identified in the mandate letter for the Minister of Natural Resources and Renewables. Our staff also worked tirelessly to fight the largest wildfires in Nova Scotia's recorded history.

Our Department looks forward to building on our work this past year to help achieve Government's goal of 80 percent renewable electricity by 2030, and net-zero by 2050. We will achieve this through our pursuit of clean energy solutions including wind, solar, green hydrogen, and eventually offshore wind. Following the passage of legislation (Bill 404) in the Spring 2024 Legislative Session, work continues to modernize our electricity system to ensure Nova Scotians have clean, reliable, and affordable electricity.

The Department also continues to focus on the protection of biodiversity, wildlife, and species at risk as the province transitions to ecological forestry and renewable energy. Crucial work will continue in geoscience and mines, following the release of the Critical Minerals Strategy in March 2024.

### Priority Areas:

#### Advancing the Development and Sustainable use of Renewable Energy

- Released the Clean Power Plan, the Province's roadmap to achieve 80% renewable electricity by 2030 through investments in onshore and offshore wind, green hydrogen, batteries, and more.
- Received Royal Assent for Bill 404, which is based on key recommendations from the Clean Electricity Solutions Task Force. The legislation modernizes Nova Scotia's electricity system and enhances public utility regulation in the energy sector.
- Launched the Community Solar Program, which helps people unable to install their own solar panels access this clean energy. Community groups and businesses will be able to install solar gardens and sell renewable electricity to subscribers.
- Released the Green Hydrogen Action Plan, which contains seven goals and twenty-three actions to build this new industry and advance the transition to this clean energy source.
- Launched the Critical Minerals Strategy, which supports research and the development of a robust critical minerals industry, creates new job opportunities, attracts investment, builds value chains, and drives sustainable economic growth.
- Released the Offshore Wind Roadmap, which sets a vision for the offshore wind industry and outlines the regulatory path for businesses to invest in projects.
- By passing required regulations, enabled Nova Scotia Power's three large-scale battery projects to move forward to the Utility and Review Board (UARB) for approval. The utility is spearheading these projects with support from the Canadian Infrastructure Bank and in partnership with all 13 Mi'kmaw communities.
- Funded communities around the province to lead clean energy projects that cut greenhouse gas emissions through the Low Carbon Communities Program. The program supported 31 projects in 2023-24.

- Signed a contribution agreement with Natural Resources Canada to install more electric vehicle chargers across the province.
- Launched the Clean Fuels Fund to give industrial and business sectors the support they need to begin making the shift toward cleaner energy. The Fund started in 2023-24 with \$3 million for seven ready-to-launch projects in a quick-start stream. Another \$3 million will be invested through an open call for eligible projects in 2024-25.

### Implementing the Independent Review of Forest Practices and Conserving Wildlife

- Updated the management system for species recovery, showing compliance with the *Endangered Species Act*. (<https://novascotia.ca/natr/wildlife/species-at-risk/>)
- Initiated the Species at Risk Policy Renewal Project to provide the framework for development and implementation of biodiversity conservation tools needed to meet legislated conservation and protection requirements. This is expected to be a multi-year initiative.
- Signed the Nova Scotia Nature Agreement with the Federal Government, which helps the Province increase the amount of protected and conserved areas, and advance an integrated approach to the protection, conservation, and recovery of biodiversity, including habitat, species at risk and migratory birds.
- Undertook work with local rehabilitators to develop the process and protocols necessary to rehabilitate orphan bear cubs.
- Continued the ten-year 2 Billion Trees program in coordination with the Federal Government to increase forest cover and sequester greenhouse gases in support of climate change mitigation targets and creating green jobs. In year one of the program, a program framework was established; areas were identified and prepared for planting; and work was completed on increasing seedling production and capacity at the Strathlorne Nursery.
- Continued the Woodland Owner of the Year program to recognize their important role in maintaining our forests and advancing ecological forestry.

### Maintaining the Provincial Parks System and Achieving Land Protection Commitments

- Along with Environment and Climate Change, sought input, developed, and launched the Collaborative Protected Areas Strategy. It outlines the approach for protecting 20 percent of the province's land and water by 2030.
- Supported Environment and Climate Change to protect 14,000 new hectares, including New Island Lake Wilderness Area.
- Designated 15 and expanded two provincial parks under the *Provincial Parks Act*, resulting in legal protection of more than 60% of park sites identified in the 2013 Parks and Protected Areas Plan.
- Undertook upgrades to several provincial parks with funding from the 2023-24 capital plan:
  - Trail improvements at Blomidon
  - Campsite and water system upgrades at Caribou-Munroes Island
  - Beach access upgrades, new washrooms and paving at Lawrencetown Beach
  - Road upgrades at Whycomomagh
  - New nature-based play spaces at Blomidon, Dollar Lake and Ellenwood Lake
  - Campsite improvements and road upgrades at Dollar Lake

- Accessible beach mats at Dollar Lake, Rainbow Haven Beach, Point Michaud Beach, and Port Hood Station
- Continued repairs at Rissers Beach Provincial Park which was severely damaged due to post-tropical storm Lee. Work included construction of a new access road, entry gate, and beach access.
- Continued repairs at Smileys Provincial Park which was damaged due to flash flooding. Work included construction of a new bridge, road repairs, building upgrades, water and septic repairs and signage.
  - Damaged parks are being rebuilt with climate adaptation in mind.

### Managing Crown Lands for Public Benefit

- The Department entered into an agreement with Natural Resources Canada, which will see both governments spending \$12.8M in wildfire equipment and training in the province over a five-year period, 2022-23 through to 2026-27.
- Increased fines for dumping on Crown land. Fines are now \$812.50 for a first offence and up to \$2,422.50 for repeat offences. Previously, the fine was \$352.50 for both first and subsequent offences.
- Responded to the flooding in July 2023 with disaster financial assistance.
- Collaborated with Public Works to support implementation of new rules for off-highway vehicles to access trails and services via designated road shoulders and roadways.

## Financial Summary and Variance Explanation

<b>Departmental Expenses Summary</b>			
<b>(\$ thousands)</b>			
<b>Programs and Services</b>	<b>2023-2024 Estimate</b>	<b>2023-2024 Actuals</b>	<b>2023-2024 Variance</b>
Senior Management	1,378	1,296	(82)
Clean Energy	33,349	21,394	(11,955)
Subsurface Energy Development	8,150	8,973	823
Forestry & Wildlife	33,166	41,994	8,828
Geoscience and Mines	6,903	6,046	(857)
Regional Services	48,136	96,353	48,217
Policy and Corporate Services	7,800	9,649	1,849
Land Services	3,697	3,375	(322)
<b>Total - Departmental Expenses</b>	<b>142,579</b>	<b>189,080</b>	<b>46,501</b>
<b>Additional Information:</b>			
Ordinary Revenues	13,059	12,103	(956)
Fees and Other Charges	2,714	3,085	371
Ordinary Recoveries	25,755	22,360	(3,395)
<b>Total: Revenue, Fees and Recoveries</b>	<b>41,528</b>	<b>37,548</b>	<b>(3,980)</b>
TCA Purchase Requirements	16,415	11,498	(4,917)
<b>Funded Staff (# of FTEs)</b>			
<b>Department Funded Staff</b>	<b>741.7</b>	<b>701.0</b>	<b>(40.7)</b>
<b>Departmental Expenses Variance Explanation:</b>			
Expense Actuals are \$46.5 million higher than authority due to a \$30.2 million increase in additional remediation costs for abandoned mine sites, \$15 million increase related to wildfires including large scale wildfires, \$8 million Fiona cleanup costs, \$1.1 million for reforestation efforts, offset by a decrease in Federally funded programs due to changing cash flows \$7.9 million.			
<b>Revenue, Fees and Recoveries Variance Explanation:</b>			
Revenue is \$956 thousand lower than authority primarily due to less than expected mineral royalties. Fees and other charges are \$371K higher than authority primarily due to the sale of nursery trees. Recoveries are \$3.4 million lower than budgeted, related to cashflow shifts in Home Heating Oil Transition \$8.1 million, cashflow changes in Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program \$600K; offset by wildfires \$3.6 million, various other recoverable programs \$800K, wildfire equipment \$497K, and 2 Billion Trees \$416K.			



**TCA Purchase Requirements Variance Explanation:**

TCA is \$4.9 million lower than authority due to delays in Parks Projects \$3.5 million, Shubenacadie Complex Renewal \$2 million, Shubenacadie Operations Centre \$987K, and Land Envelope \$373K; offset by increases in wildfire Equipment \$1.8 million, Graves Island Causeway \$64K, and Vehicles Envelope \$30K.

**Provincial Funded Staff (FTEs) Variance Explanation:**

FTE variance is 40.7 less than budgeted 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.

Please use the following format to satisfy the disclosure obligation:

The following is a summary of disclosures received by the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables:

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