



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Province Needs Better Processes to Ensure Effective Long-Term Monitoring of Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture: Auditor General

(TORONTO) Environmental monitoring in Ontario needs to be improved in key areas like biodiversity, species at risk, protected areas, wild pollinator health and soil health, according to Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk in her *2020 Annual Report of Environmental Value-for-Money Audits and the Operation of the Environmental Bill of Rights*.

The audit focused on the three Ontario ministries that are most involved in environmental monitoring: the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (Environment Ministry), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (Natural Resources Ministry) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (Agriculture Ministry).

The audit found that these ministries do not have safeguards in place to ensure valuable environmental data is collected, analyzed and stored in an effective, useful way.

“The province spends a lot of time, energy and tax dollars collecting huge amounts of environmental data,” says Lysyk. “This data is critical to knowing whether the environment is getting better or worse, and whether environmental goals are being met. However, not tracking it properly hinders the ministries’ and public’s ability to gauge progress.”

The audit goes on to state:

- The Environment Ministry’s air and water monitoring programs are extensive and respond to legislative and regulatory requirements, inter-jurisdictional agreements and other commitments.
- Not all other programs have standardized monitoring protocols to ensure environmental data is collected in a consistent, comparable way over time and space.
- They do not have performance measurement frameworks, or consistently conduct program evaluations to ensure that environmental monitoring programs are actually being effective.
- They do not have data management plans to ensure that environmental data is stored effectively – and not corrupted, lost, stolen, or used inappropriately.

In addition, the audit found the Environment Ministry does not have a database to track the assignment, implementation and progress of government-identified actions to protect and recover Ontario’s at-risk species. As a result, despite being identified as a high priority for a sample of 16 endangered species, monitoring protocols had not been developed for 75% of them.

“We also found that because there is no specific direction from the Environment Ministry, monitoring in Ontario’s provincial parks and conservation reserves is variable and inconsistent,” Lysyk said.

The audit also found that despite a 2012 commitment, the Natural Resources Ministry has not developed an integrated, broad-scale biodiversity monitoring program.

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Visit www.auditor.on.ca to read the report.

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Background and Other Findings:

- This audit arose from our 2019 Overview of Environmental Issues in Ontario, which found that the province does not issue comprehensive reports on the state of the environment or progress in achieving environmental targets and objectives.
- Setting effective, time-bound targets is necessary for driving and assessing progress in meeting environmental goals.
- Environmental monitoring is critical to knowing whether the environment is getting better or worse, and whether environmental goals are being met. Monitoring also provides information for designing and improving environmental management programs, allocating resources and confirming compliance.
- The Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Ministries do not have working systems and processes to ensure the effective, long-term monitoring of Ontario’s environment, natural resources and agriculture, or progress toward meeting legislated and policy goals.
- Monitoring is wanting in several areas (e.g., biodiversity, wild pollinators, soil health, species at risk), and several monitoring programs lack standardized, documented processes for collecting, analyzing and managing data.
- Although the ministries are required to submit annual key performance indicators (KPIs) to Treasury Board Secretariat, many KPIs are not shared with the public. Moreover, few of the Natural Resources Ministry’s and Agriculture Ministry’s KPIs relate to the state of natural resources or the environmental sustainability of agriculture.
- The Environment Ministry, Natural Resources Ministry and Agriculture Ministry have not set targets in some important environmental areas (e.g., invasive and at-risk species, soil health, water conservation). The Agriculture Ministry cancelled its targets and plan to improve pollinator health. A lack of targets hinders the ministries’ and public’s ability to gauge progress in meeting environmental goals.
- Despite the Agriculture Ministry recognizing the need to improve the tracking of changes in the health of agricultural soils, little progress has been made to implement foundational actions in its 2018 Soil Health Strategy.
- The report says despite the importance of pollinators to agricultural production and wild plant communities, Ontario has no comprehensive, long-term wild pollinator monitoring program.