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Office of the Auditor General

Nova Scotia

AUDITOR GENERAL – July 28, 2020 Report of the Auditor General

Acting Auditor General Terry Spicer issued a 2020 performance audit report today, July 28. The audit examined the Province's processes for identifying and managing contaminated sites it is responsible for and followed up on the recommendations from the June 2010 audit, Management of Contaminated Sites, at the Department of Environment.

The key conclusions are:

- The Province does not have a coordinated approach to assess and manage risks for the contaminated sites it is responsible for.
- The Province has a process to ensure it identifies the contaminated sites it is responsible for; however, there are weaknesses in monitoring.
- The Department of Environment did not implement all recommendations from our 2010 audit on managing contaminated sites.

The audit found that there is no oversight body responsible to develop a provincial approach to ensure appropriate action is taken on potential and known contaminated sites the Province is responsible for. "The lack of a coordinated approach was evident as we found that each department had different processes to identify sites, not all potentially contaminated sites were tracked, and historical information was not readily available," said Mr. Spicer.

The audit focused on the departments of Lands and Forestry, and Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal. The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal had a process to assess and prioritize operational bases in 2010; however, this process did not continue and there were weaknesses in monitoring the sites and tracking work done.

At the Department of Lands and Forestry the audit found that work had begun to assess potential risks and prioritize work at 69 abandoned mine sites. "I am pleased that planning is underway; however, Lands and Forestry should have taken steps to determine if mine sites were in compliance with the Contaminated Sites Regulations when they were released in 2013," said Mr. Spicer.

The audit also followed up on recommendations made in the June 2010 Management of Contaminated Sites audit and found that 4 of the 16 recommendations made ten years ago were not complete. The recommendations were last followed up in May 2014, at which time one recommendation was assessed as no longer required and was removed from future follow-up assignments, and 11 of 16 recommendations were assessed as not complete. "Additional work is still needed to address the risks identified in 2010," said Mr. Spicer.

The report contains a total of four recommendations - three addressed to the Province in relation to contaminated sites the Province is responsible for and one to the Department of Environment to ensure inspectors have appropriate oversight. All four recommendations have been accepted by government.



The performance audit report, along with a short summary, highlight video, statement to the media, and questions Nova Scotians may want to ask government is available at <<https://oagns.ca/publications/2020>>

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