Environment Canada Environnement Canada

Evaluation of the EcoAction Community Funding Program

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Report Clearance Steps

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Acronyms used in the report

ADM	Assistant Deputy Minister
CA	contribution agreement
CACs	criteria air contaminants
DG	Director General
DRAP	Deficit Reduction Action Plan
EC	Environment Canada
EDF	Environmental Damages Fund
FTEs	full-time equivalents
G&Cs	Grants and Contributions
GHGs	Greenhouse gases
ha	hectare
MIS	management information system
NCR	National Capital Region
O&M	operations and maintenance
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework
RDG	Regional Director General
SA	sub-activity

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The team was led by Susan Wharton, under the direction of Environment Canada Evaluation Director William Blois, and included Lindsay Fitzpatrick.

The evaluation was conducted by Goss Gilroy Inc., and the final report was prepared by Goss Gilroy Inc. and the Evaluation Division Project Team, Audit and Evaluation Branch.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the EcoAction Community Funding Program, conducted by Environment Canada's (EC's) Audit and Evaluation Branch between March and September 2013.

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the relevance and performance of the EcoAction program.

The EcoAction Community Funding Program is a Grants and Contributions (G&Cs) program, providing contributions to community-based, non-profit organizations to initiate community-based projects that will protect, rehabilitate or enhance the natural environment, and build the capacity of communities to sustain these activities into the future. The program supports projects that address the four themes of nature, water, clean air and climate change. Applicants must ensure that at least 50% of the total value of their project comes from sources other than the federal government.

Environment Canada's involvement in the EcoAction program is intended to contribute directly to the Strategic Outcome "Canada's natural environment is conserved and restored for present and future generations" and comprises Sub-Sub-Activity 1.3.3.1, EcoAction Community Funding under Sub-Activity 1.3.3, Community Engagement, in the Department's Program Alignment Architecture.

The study period for the evaluation is the 4-year time frame from 2009–2010 to 2012–2013; however, relevant activity in 2013–2014 is also included as appropriate. For the context of the evaluation, it is important to note that, in 2012–2013, in response to the federal government's Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP), several decisions were implemented that had a direct impact on the delivery of the EcoAction program. These measures were aimed at reducing the administration costs for the EcoAction program by 50%, and included a reduction of approximately 40% in full-time equivalents (FTEs) responsible for managing and delivering of the program, as well as changes to the program governance, national coordination and regional delivery.

The combined value of the program in 2012–2013, including administration costs and contributions, was approximately $5.9 million, or 0.6% of the Department's direct program spending.[1] This is anticipated to decline further to $5.6 million in 2013–2014 when the DRAP initiatives will be fully in effect. The program's annual allocation for contributions remained unchanged throughout the study time frame, at $4.525 million.

Findings and Conclusions

Relevance

The evaluation concludes that the EcoAction program continues to be relevant, as evidenced by a continued need for program activities and for federal involvement in this area, the consistency of the program objectives with federal priorities, and the appropriateness of the program with regard to federal roles and responsibilities.

There is a demonstrated need for community-based projects aimed at the protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of the environment, and for the federal government to

[1] Based on 2012–2013 Main Estimates.

support these types of projects. Evidence demonstrates that community investment and commitment are key contributors to achieving sustainable long-term benefits. No other national programs were identified that cover the same extensive range of environmental issues.

The EcoAction program is consistent with federal and departmental priorities related to sustaining ecosystems and community engagement. Recent changes to project selection criteria and performance indicators help ensure projects are aligned with departmental objectives in a measurable way. Additionally, the flexible nature of EcoAction enables it to quickly adapt to evolving national and regional priorities that fall within the program mandate.

EcoAction is consistent with federal roles and responsibilities, including roles and responsibilities as outlined in the *Department of the Environment Act*.

Achievement of Intended Outcomes

Evidence suggests the program design is appropriate and contributes to the achievement of program outcomes related to increasing the environmental benefits from community-based actions and engaging Canadians in sustainable activities to protect, conserve or restore the natural environment.

There is evidence that the program is effective and that funded projects are contributing to intended environmental outcomes in the areas of nature, water, air and climate change, as well as outcomes in the area of capacity building. Performance data indicates that completed projects met or exceeded targets for the majority of environmental indicators. There is also evidence that the EcoAction program successfully engages many individuals and helps build capacity, which supports the sustainability of projects. Additionally, the program has led to many positive unintended outcomes, including economic impacts and input in support of policy development.

Efficiency and Economy

The design and delivery of the program are generally considered economical and efficient, largely due to multiple changes that have been introduced since 2009, although some areas for further improvement were identified.

The program is still in a period of transition, given the changes in governance and resource reductions made in 2012–2013 as a result of the DRAP. The new organization structure and approval process are clearly documented and generally well understood. Some uncertainty was identified, however, related to how priority setting and decision making is expected to occur and regarding the long-term plans for overall program responsibility and the national coordination role. Additionally, concerns were identified related to the feasibility of fully delivering on certain national coordination roles, such as website management and MIS data coordination, given reduced resource levels.

The EcoAction program successfully leverages external resources and has made significant improvements in the degree to which it undertakes its activities in an economical and efficient manner. From an operational perspective, funding recipients are generally satisfied with the delivery of the program, and their assessment of many key program tools has improved since last measured in 2008. These improvements are likely attributable to a number of changes made to improve documentation and program

tools since 2009.

With the introduction of recent budget reductions, the program's administrative costs as a percentage of G&Cs expenditures are expected to drop significantly in 2013–2014 to levels that are in line with other programs. In response to the reductions in FTEs, various aspects of delivery were reduced or simplified, including support to applicants and project monitoring. However, these changes have not been consistently applied in all regions, and the full impact of these reductions is not yet known.

The timeliness of funding approvals remains an ongoing challenge, with late funding announcements causing significant consequences for project recipients in terms of their ability to deliver on projects as planned, and resulting in a history of lapsed funds. Although considerable improvements were seen in 2013–2014, and all steps relative to the program assessment and recommendation for approval were completed on schedule, delays in the departmental approval stages meant that the target of informing applicants by the end of April was still not met.

The evaluation determined that performance measures are in place and are being tracked in the MIS. However, consistent with findings from an evaluation conducted in 2008–2009, the program's management information system (MIS) capabilities were identified as an area of inefficiency. Data management for the program continues to be conducted in a highly manual fashion, as the program does not have an online application or reporting system for applicants and the program's MIS is, due to ongoing departmental changes, no longer integrated with the Department's Grants and Contributions (G&Cs) templates or financial systems. Previous program commitments to address the long-standing issue of the program's MIS were put on hold due to budget constraints and uncertainty related to the possible transition to new departmental or Government of Canada G&Cs systems. While the MIS is a valuable tool for project-level information, due to system limitations, it is not user-friendly for conducting analyses or reporting at the program level. Additionally, an analysis of the MIS identified gaps in the data that were perceived to be due to a combination of the program's high reliance on manual data entry and insufficient capacity to enter data on a regular basis.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed to the Regional Director General (RDG), West and North Region,[2] as the senior departmental official responsible for the management of the EcoAction Community Funding Program.

Recommendation 1: Review and clarify expectations and responsibilities related to national coordination and program management.

Recommendation 2: Review current regional program delivery procedures and best practices and establish acceptable levels of outreach, support to applicants and project monitoring in order to improve efficiency and national consistency.

[2] Prior to 2012–2013, there were five regional offices for the program (Pacific & Yukon, Prairie & Northern, Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic). As of 2012–2013, the organizations of the five Regional Directors General (RDGs) were consolidated into three new regions (West and North, Atlantic and Quebec, and Ontario).

Recommendation 3: Examine the use of technology to improve program delivery and support program-level performance reporting.

Recommendation 4: Revisit EcoAction processes to determine if additional adjustments could be made to improve the timing of notification of funding.

Management Response

The responsible RDG agrees with all four recommendations and has developed a management response that appropriately addresses each of the recommendations.

The full management response can be found in Section 6 of the report.

1.0 Introduction

This document presents the findings of an evaluation of the EcoAction Community Funding Program conducted between March and June 2013 by Goss Gilroy Inc. and Environment Canada's (EC's) Audit and Evaluation Branch (AEB).

This evaluation report is organized as follows. Section 2 provides a background description of the EcoAction program, including the key activities, governance structure and expected results. Section 3 presents the evaluation design including the purpose and scope of the evaluation, the methodological approach and associated challenges. Section 4 provides the findings of the evaluation. Section 5 presents the conclusions and Section 6 provides the recommendations and management response.

2.0 Background

2.1 Program Overview

The EcoAction Community Funding Program has been providing financial support to a variety of non-profit groups and organizations since 1995. While the program was formalized in 1995, its roots date back to 1989 and the Environmental Partners Fund.

The program is a Grants and Contributions (G&Cs) program, providing contribution[3] funding to eligible non-profit groups and organizations such as environmental groups, community groups, youth and senior groups, community-based associations, service clubs and Aboriginal organizations[4] to initiate community-based projects aimed at the protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of the natural environment and to build the capacity of communities to sustain these activities into the future. The program supports projects that address the four themes of nature, water, clean air and climate change. The maximum contribution for an EcoAction Community Funding Project is $100,000 and, in order to qualify for funding, applicants must lever a minimum of 50% of the total value of the project from sources other than the federal government. On an annual basis, the program provides approximately $4.5 million in funding (contributions), and supports approximately 100 new projects each year.

Examples of funded activities include projects aimed at reducing individual greenhouse gas emissions by reducing consumption and taking steps to improve home energy efficiency; improving water quality by reducing the amount of pesticides or household hazardous substances entering streams and lakes; working to reduce air emissions that contribute to air pollution; and restoring and protecting natural habitat.

2.1.1 Key Activities

Key activities involved in the delivery of the EcoAction program include

- promotion of the program within the recipient community, including communication of the program to potential applicants and the provision of information, advice and feedback on the development and submission of project proposals; and

[3] A contribution is a transfer payment subject to performance conditions specified in a funding agreement. (Source: TBS 2012, Policy on Transfer Payments)
[4] Businesses, educational institutions, individuals, and governments are not eligible for funding but are strongly encouraged to partner with eligible groups to support a project proposal.

- program delivery, including administration of the project review and approval process, financial tracking and management of EcoAction funds, preparation of funding agreements, and project oversight.[5]

The project review and approval process is the cornerstone of the Department's activity in support of the program. The key steps or milestones and approximate timelines for this process are outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: 2012–2013 Key Steps/Milestones and Target Timelines

Key Step / Milestone	Target Timelines
Program launch of request for proposals	September 1
Proposal submission deadline for applicants	November 1
Administrative review of proposals for eligibility by EC program project officers	November 1 – 15 *(2 weeks)*
Technical review by technical reviewers from outside the program area, as appropriate[6]	November 15 – December 1 *(2–3 weeks)*
Assessment of project proposals[7]	December 1 – January 15 *(6 weeks)*
Regional and ADM review and approval: • Regional recommendations: Regional Directors General (RDGs) (or Associate RDGs) in the three regions • Program recommendations: Responsible RDG (West & North) • Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) approval: ADM, Strategic Policy Branch	January 15 – February 8 *(3 weeks)*
Corporate Finance, Senior review & approvals	February 8 – April 8 *(9 weeks)*
Successful and unsuccessful applicants notified	Dependent on completion of previous step
Negotiation of contribution agreements and final project budgets, work plans and indicators	Dependent on previous step *(Established service standard is 40 working days)*
Contribution agreements signed and projects initiated	Dependent on previous step
Project management and reporting	Dependent on previous step *(up to 36 months)*

2.1.2 Changing Context

Several decisions and initiatives that have had a direct impact on the delivery of the EcoAction program have been implemented over the past few years.

Of particular note, in 2012–2013, in response to the federal government's Deficit Reduction Action Plan (DRAP), the Department introduced measures aimed at reducing the administration costs for the EcoAction program by 50%, including a reduction of approximately 40% in full-time equivalents (FTEs). Implementation of these savings resulted in changes to the program governance, national coordination and regional delivery.

[5] Project oversight refers to all aspects of making sure a project stays on track, including confirming that the planned project was implemented appropriately.
[6] The purpose of the technical review is to evaluate technical merit, potential environmental impacts, and consistency or overlap with other jurisdictions.
[7] The purpose of the program assessment is to evaluate aspects such as proposal feasibility, quality of indicators, activities, value for money, overall workplan, budget considerations, likelihood of success (or failure), and linkage to departmental priorities.

Additionally, in the interest of increasing efficiencies and ensuring measurable results that contribute to the Department's core mandate, two key changes were made in the focus of funded projects. As of 2012–2013, the program is placing an increasing focus on larger, multi-year projects, and targeting projects with clear and measurable environmental impacts, moving away from projects focused solely on capacity building.

Also of significance, the program is subject to recent department-wide process and policy changes to the financial and approval processes for Grants and Contributions (G&Cs) programs. The way in which Environment Canada delivers and manages G&Cs has been significantly revised since 2010, and the revisions are still ongoing. The changes were driven by the requirement to ensure Environment Canada's G&Cs complied with the new Policy on Transfer Payments, and a desire to look for opportunities to increase efficiency, strengthen accountability and improve consistency. Among other changes, the new processes incorporate revised tools, new G&Cs approval forms, revised approval authorities, new contribution agreement templates, and revisions to the financial reporting processes and payment timelines.

2.2 Governance Structure

Although EcoAction is a national program, it has a community-centered focus that allows communities to identify solutions to environmental issues at the local level. The program is regionally delivered by Environment Canada offices. Prior to 2012–2013, there were five regional offices for the program (Pacific & Yukon, Prairie & Northern, Ontario, Québec and Atlantic). As of 2012–2013, the organizations of the five Regional Directors General (RDGs) were consolidated into three new regions (West and North, Atlantic and Quebec, and Ontario). These recent changes also involved assigning the national coordination function, which previously had been provided by the NCR National Coordination Unit in the Environmental Stewardship Branch, to the West and North Funding Programs manager, with overall program responsibility held by the Regional Director, Strategic Relations, West and North and the RDG, West and North. The division of responsibilities for program delivery is as follows:

- Regional offices: Regional offices are responsible for managing and delivering the EcoAction program regionally. In addition to their EcoAction-related responsibilities, regional staff are also responsible for delivering the Environmental Damages Fund program and other Ecosystems Initiatives[8] programs appropriate to their regions.
- National coordination: In addition to regional coordination, the West and North Regional manager is responsible for the national coordination of the program, including program design, policy, planning and national operations. With support of the EcoAction management team, the National Coordinator develops program tools and communications activities (internal and external), coordinates program evaluations and renewals, and provides program results to senior officials.
- EcoAction Management Team: Composed of regional managers, the management team is the link between regional program delivery and management and national coordination. The team ensures national program consistency through regular meetings, conference calls and other forms of contact.

[8] Includes G&Cs programs that fall under the Department's Sub-Activity 1.3.4, Ecosystems Initiatives, such as the Atlantic Coastal Action Program/Atlantic Ecosystem Initiative, Programme Interactions communautaires/Zones d'intervention prioritaire and the St. Lawrence Action Plan.

2.3 Resources

The table below presents the resources for the EcoAction Community Funding Program. The table illustrates that direct program costs have steadily declined since 2009, with the most significant reductions expected to come as the program's DRAP initiatives come fully into effect in 2013–2014. As indicated in Table 2, total program costs that totalled $6.9 million in 2009–2010, declined to $5.9 million in 2012–2013 and are budgeted to decline further to $5.6 million in 2013–2014. As shown, reductions related primarily to decreases in FTEs/salaries, although reductions also occurred in operations and maintenance (O&M). In 2009–2010, there were 32 FTEs associated with the program, compared to a forecasted 13.5 in 2013–2014.

A more detailed discussion of program resources can be found under the discussion of demonstration of efficiency and economy (evaluation question 8).

Table 2: Resources

ESB Branch	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014 Budget
FTEs	3.7	2.9	2.3	0.2	–
Salaries	269,167	271,696	167,342	46,070	–
O&M	53,616	65,473	61,871	2,666	–

RDG Branch	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014 Budget
FTEs	28.5	26.5	20.8	13	13.5
Salaries	1,923,105	1,780,319	1,515,810	1,621,185	1,007,000
O&M	215,259	192,619	149,009	130,922	120.000
G&Cs	4,464,481	4,113,528	3,870,264	4,087,469	4,525,000

All Branches	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014 Budget
FTEs	32.2	29.4	23.1	13.2	13.5
Salaries	2,192,272	2,052,015	1,683,152	1,667,255	1,007,000
O&M	268,875	258,092	210,880	133,588	120.000
Total Direct Costs	**2,461,147**	**2,310,107**	**1,894,032**	**1,800.843**	**1,127,000**
G&Cs	4,464,481	4,113,528	3,870,264	4,141,003	4,525,000
Total Program Cost	**6,925,628**	**6,423,635**	**5,764,296**	**5,941,846**	**5,627,000**

Notes
1. FTE information for 2009–2010 to 2012–2013 extracted from EC's Salary Management System.
2. Other 2009–2010 to 2012–2013 data from EC's financial reporting tool DISCOVERER.
3. 2012–2013 salary figures include $526,000 for payments related to Work Force Adjustment.
4. 2013–2014 budget data from Environment Canada, April 23, 2013, Management of G&Cs, Analysis of Time and Direct Costs per G&Cs agreement, Draft.

2.4 Expected Results / Program Logic Model

The EcoAction program is intended to result in

- increased environmental benefits from community-based actions; and
- increased engagement of Canadians in sustainable activities to protect, conserve, or restore the natural environment.

The logic model used for the purpose of the evaluation can be found in Annex 5.[9]

3.0 Evaluation Design

3.1 Purpose and Scope

An evaluation of the EcoAction Community Funding Program was part of the 2012 Risk-based Audit and Evaluation Plan approved by the Deputy Minister. The evaluation was conducted in order to comply with the program's terms and conditions, which require that an evaluation be completed at least once every five years.[10] The evaluation is also necessary to meet the coverage requirements of the *Financial Administration Act* (for G&Cs) and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's *Policy on Evaluation* (for direct program spending).

The study period for the evaluation is the four-year time frame from 2009–2010 to 2012–2013; however, relevant activity in 2013–2014 is also included as appropriate.

The evaluation addresses the issues of relevance and performance of the EcoAction program. As a G&Cs program, EcoAction is subject to departmental G&Cs processes. While not a specific focus of the evaluation, these are discussed within the evaluation as appropriate.

3.2 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The methodological approach and level of effort for this evaluation were determined using a risk-based approach. Given the program's long history, the relatively low materiality of the program and the fact that recent assessments were generally positive, the program was not identified as having a high level of risk.

Two other considerations also played a role in the study design:

- As previously noted, the EcoAction program is currently transitioning toward operating within a new context of reduced resources and new processes. This changing context was a key consideration for the evaluation design. That is, the design ensured that the findings and perspectives from various time frames were considered. However, in order to be of maximum utility, the primary focus was on the new context in which the program will be operating.
- In its management response to an evaluation conducted in 2008–2009, the program committed to conducting a client survey every four years.[11] A survey had not been conducted since 2008 and, consequently, a client survey component was included in the design, thus providing both valuable insights to program management and contributing to the evaluation.

[9] These outcomes are identified in the program logic model dated February 9, 2010. In February 2013, the logic model was revised to address the change in focus away from capacity building; however, for the purpose of the evaluation, the logic model that applied for the majority of the study period was used.
[10] An evaluation of EcoAction was conducted in 2008–2009. Subsequent funding renewal for EcoAction was approved by the Minister under the guidelines of the 2008 Treasury Board Transfer Payment Policy, which allows the Minister to approve the continuation of the terms and conditions, with minor amendments, provided an evaluation has been conducted. The renewed terms and conditions (October 2009) apply for the duration of the program.
[11] EC, AEB. May 2009. Evaluation of the EcoAction Community Funding Program.

With these considerations, the following data collection methodologies were employed and evidence from these methods triangulated to develop findings and conclusions.[12]

Document and Literature Review

A document and literature review was conducted as part of the evaluation. Key documents were gathered, listed in an inventory and then each document was assessed in terms of its contribution to each of the evaluation questions and corresponding indicators. Information was captured for analysis using a document review template. Documents included Government of Canada publications; previous EcoAction assessments and evaluations; internal strategic and operational planning documents; tools for applicants and funding recipients; performance reporting documents; contribution agreements; administrative files; and financial data. The literature review covered both peer-reviewed academic scholarly articles, and non-peer reviewed sources.

Management Information System (MIS) Data Analysis

An extract of the EcoAction MIS database that included all relevant data for the study time frame was obtained from the program, reviewed and analyzed. The database contains program information on past and current projects, including information from application forms, reports of on-site visits and final reports. Among other fields, the database includes descriptive information, financials and data on both targets and actual performance related to key environmental and capacity-building indicators. Detailed data tables were developed based on a data review template that determined the analyses required to address evaluation questions. This data was used primarily for an assessment of the program's achievement of outcomes, but the individual project information contained in the MIS was also a primary source of data contributing to the mini-case studies (see below).

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were conducted by telephone with a total of 29 internal and external stakeholders to ensure that relevant stakeholder perspectives were captured regarding all evaluation issues and to provide a balanced view. More than 50% of interviewees were not directly accountable for the program's delivery and more than one third were external to the Department. The following provides a breakdown of the interviewees:

- EC senior management (n=2)
- EC program managers and project officers (n=11)
- Corporate support functions (e.g. Finance, IMIT) (n=3)
- Technical reviewers(n=4)
- Funding applicants (these interviews also contributed to the mini-case studies described below) (n=8)

A customized, open-ended guide was developed for each category of interviewee. Interviewees received a copy of the interview guide in advance of the interview, allowing them time to review and reflect on the questions beforehand. Notes from the interviews were typed into a matrix by interview question/evaluation issue, which enabled sorting of the information by interviewee category and evaluation issue for analytic purposes.

[12] The Data Collection Instruments Technical Appendix is available; it contains the instruments used for each methodology.

Online Surveys of Funding Recipients and Unfunded Applicants

Two online surveys were conducted as part of the evaluation: one with recipients of EcoAction funding, and a separate, shorter survey with unfunded applicants whose projects had met the eligibility criteria but did not receive funding due to finite program resources.[13] Both surveys were pretested with respondents from the sample population prior to finalizing the questionnaire. Respondents received an email survey invitation with a link to the online survey. During the survey period, reminder emails were sent and telephone follow-up calls made to those who had not yet completed the survey.

The purpose of the survey of funding recipients was to understand client perspectives on the efficiency and effectiveness with which the program was delivered, and to capture information on project impacts. This survey was sent to the project contacts for all projects receiving funding in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012. In order to reduce respondent burden, project contacts that received EcoAction funding for more than one project were only asked to respond relative to one randomly selected project. Data collection took place between May 24 and June 18, 2013. In total, emails were sent to 364 project contacts[14] and 171 funding recipients completed the survey, for a response rate of 47%. The final survey sample was similar to the population of all recipients in terms of regional distribution, year of funding and the incidence of multi-year projects, suggesting that the results can be considered reflective of the experiences and views of recipients overall.

The key purpose of the survey of unfunded applicants was to provide insight into the incremental impact of the EcoAction program by providing a comparison with funded projects. The survey was sent to the full population of project contacts for projects that were recommended or on funding B-lists, but did not ultimately receive funding. This was a relatively small list, representing 67 project contacts. In total, 25 respondents completed the survey, for a response rate of 37%. As with the survey of funding recipients, the sample of unfunded applicants was compared with the population of eligible unfunded applicants and found to be similar along key characteristics. Data collection for this survey occurred between June 1 and 20, 2013.

File Review / Mini-Case Studies

Nine mini-case studies were conducted in order to examine program delivery, outcomes challenges/successes and lessons learned in greater depth.[15] The projects were selected from among a larger list of projects identified by program representatives, to reflect a cross-section of funded projects by region, organization type, project focus/environmental issue, and length of project. These case studies were conducted to provide insight and illustration, and were not meant to be a representative sample of the program's projects. Each case study involved a review of project files and, with one exception, an interview with a project representative. Short summaries were prepared for each case study in order to provide illustrative examples of the types of projects the program supports and a better understanding of the dynamics and processes at the project level.

[13] The program maintains a list of unfunded projects that were nonetheless recommended for funding. A project from this list may eventually be selected to receive funding if more funds become available (e.g. if a selected project will no longer receive funding or requires less funding).
[14] These individuals represented 590 approved projects.
[15] 10 projects (2 per region) were initially selected; however, only 9 case studies were conducted as project documentation was not sufficiently detailed for one case study, nor was it possible to reach a project representative.

3.3 Challenges and Limitations

Challenges experienced during the conduct of the evaluation, as well as the related limitations and strategies used to mitigate their impact, are outlined below.

- Performance data was unavailable for a large proportion of projects funded in 2011 and 2012, thereby limiting the ability to draw conclusions about the performance of projects initiated in these years. While this issue was largely related to the fact that these years include a higher proportion of ongoing multi-year projects for which performance data was not yet available, the MIS database was also missing performance data (either targets or actuals) for project indicators in 20% of completed projects.[16] Projects with incomplete data were removed from analyses comparing target versus actual performance.
- Although the response rate for the survey of unfunded applicants was consistent with expected response rates for online surveys (37%), the sample size was too small to provide statistical reliability and should be viewed as illustrative and interpreted with caution. As described in the survey methodology, the sample of respondents was, however, compared to the population of unfunded applicants on a number of key characteristics, and found to be similar.

4.0 Findings

This section presents the findings by evaluation issue based on the various sources of evidence. For each evaluation question, a rating is provided based on the evaluation team's judgment of the evaluation findings. The rating statements and their significance are outlined in Table 3. A summary of ratings for the evaluation issues and questions is presented in Annex 2: Summary of Findings.

Table 3: Definitions of Standard Rating Statements

Statement	Definition
Acceptable	The program has demonstrated that it has met the expectations with respect to the issue area.
Opportunity for Improvement	The program has demonstrated that it has made progress to meet the expectations with respect to the issue area, but attention is still needed.
Attention Required	The program has not demonstrated that it has made progress to meet the expectations with respect to the issue area and attention is needed on a priority basis.
Not applicable	A rating is not applicable.

4.1 Relevance

4.1.1 Continued Need for Program

Evaluation Issue: Relevance	Rating
1. Is there a continued need for the Program?	Acceptable

There is a demonstrated need for community-based projects aimed at the protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of the environment, and for the federal

[16] Refers to projects that received funding between 2009 and 2012 and were completed by March 31, 2013.

government to support these types of projects. Evidence demonstrates that community investment and commitment are key contributors to achieving sustainable long-term benefits. No other national programs were identified that cover the same extensive range of environmental issues.

Evidence from documentation indicates that public awareness and involvement regarding conservation of wildlife populations and the ecosystems on which they depend directly contributes to preventing the loss of species.[17] Interviewees corroborated this finding by stating that community members who are directly involved in environmental action take ownership of the results, which in turn contributes to the sustainability of project outcomes.

Respondents from both the survey of funding recipients and unfunded applicants were unanimous in their support of the continued need for the federal government to support community environmental projects, such as the EcoAction program. Most unfunded applicants (82%) indicated that, in the absence of funding, their project was either not conducted (36%) or was reduced in size or scope (45%). This finding was supported by interviewees who indicated that funding partners from the not-for-profit and private sector have limited resources, which creates a need for cost-sharing with federal partners.

As noted by interviewees, although other programs exist with similar goals and objectives, no other national program covers the extensive range of environmental issues addressed by EcoAction (i.e. nature, water, clean air and climate change). Rather than focus on a single environmental issue, EcoAction takes a horizontal approach by allowing communities to identify and address local priority issues. In this way, the program is complementary to, yet differs from other departmental programs such as the Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) for Species at Risk, which focuses on supporting activities related to habitat restoration relative to species at risk; the Aboriginal Fund for Species at Risk (AFSAR), which focuses substantially on capacity building solely for Aboriginal communities; and the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, which focuses on a specific ecosystem. Further, in order to ensure that any potential for duplication is minimized, program staff communicate with colleagues to find the most relevant fit for project applications, referring applicants to another program if their project aligns better elsewhere.

4.1.2 Alignment with Federal Priorities

Evaluation Issue: Relevance	Rating
2. Is the program aligned with federal government priorities?	Acceptable

The EcoAction program is consistent with federal and departmental priorities related to sustaining ecosystems and community engagement. Recent changes to project selection criteria and performance indicators help ensure projects are aligned with departmental objectives in a measurable way. Additionally, the flexible nature of EcoAction enables it to quickly adapt to evolving national and regional priorities that fall within the program mandate.

[17] CSoP Research and Consulting. 2009. How Canadians Value Nature: A Strategic and Conceptual Review to Literature and Research.

At a broad level, the EcoAction program is consistent with the Government of Canada Economic Affairs Outcome Area, which includes "clean and healthy environment; program activities aim to ensure that Canada's environment is restored and protected, and that natural resources are used in a sustainable manner for future generations."[18] In addition, the 2011 Speech from the Throne acknowledged that "Canada's natural environment shapes our national identity, our health and our prosperity."[19] Further evidence of alignment with federal priorities was found in the 2013 Federal Budget announcement, which declared priorities that aligned with the full spectrum of the EcoAction mandate including climate change, water quality (i.e. the Great Lakes), protection of human health, and the environment (biodiversity, clean water, air quality). [20] All interviewees also reported that EcoAction is in line with federal government priorities, including working with communities, and environmental priorities. One EC representative added that EcoAction projects are visible examples of the government taking direct action in support of the environment.

With respect to departmental priorities, EcoAction is aligned with Environment Canada's Strategic Outcome 1: Canada's natural environment is conserved and restored for present and future generations, and aligns with activities under Sustainable Ecosystems and the Community Engagement Sub-Activity in the Department's Program Alignment Architecture. [21]

Further, during the study time frame, the EcoAction program has improved project selection criteria and performance indicators to ensure projects are aligned with departmental objectives in a measurable way. In response to recommendations from an evaluation conducted in 2008–2009, the list of performance indicators for EcoAction projects was reduced from 56 to 17 indicators that are aligned with departmental priorities and, as described in the project eligibility criteria, more emphasis is now placed on ensuring projects align to these indicators and clearly demonstrate measurable results related to at least one of the environmental priorities of nature, clean water, clean air and climate change.

Through the funding call, the program also has the flexibility to specify national or regional priorities that fall within the program mandate. For example, in 2010, during the International Year of Biodiversity, a national priority was given to projects with a focus on nature and ecosystems. For the November 2011 application round, and in support of the Department's efforts under the Water Annex Work Plan of the *Memorandum of Understanding on Environmental Cooperation in Atlantic Canada*, the Atlantic region placed a priority focus on projects that addressed aquatic ecosystems and/or the sustainable use of water resources in priority geographic areas, specifically the Bay of Fundy and the Northumberland Strait.[22]

[18] TBS (2013) Descriptors for Government of Canada Outcome Areas. Accessed in: http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ppg-cpr/descript-eng.aspx
[19] Government of Canada (2011) 2011 Speech from the Throne. Accessed in http://www.speech.gc.ca/eng/media.asp?id=1390 .
[20] Government of Canada (2013) Jobs Growth and Long-term Prosperity: Economic Action Plan 2013. Accessed in http://www.budget.gc.ca/2013/doc/plan/budget2013-eng.pdf .
[21] Environment Canada (2012) 2012-2013 Report on Plans and Priorities for Environment Canada. Accessed in http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rpp/2012-2013/inst/doe/doe-eng.pdf .
[22] EC. EcoAction funding priorities for the November 1, 2011 deadline for funding proposals (posted on the EcoAction website during the application period).

4.1.3 Alignment with Federal Roles and Responsibilities

Evaluation Issue: Relevance	Rating
3. Is the program consistent with federal roles and responsibilities?	Acceptable

EcoAction is consistent with federal roles and responsibilities, including roles and responsibilities as outlined in the* Department of the Environment Act*.

Environment Canada's participation in the EcoAction program is consistent with its roles and responsibilities as they are described in the *Department of the Environment Act*, which outlines the Department's responsibility for the "coordination of the policies and programs of the Government of Canada respecting the preservation and enhancement of the quality of the natural environment." It also states that the duties of Environment Canada (the Minister) include "the preservation and enhancement of the quality of the natural environment, including water, air and soil quality."[23]

4.2 Performance

4.2.1 Achievement of Intended Outcomes

Evaluation Issue: Performance	Rating
4. To what extent have intended outcomes been achieved as a result of the program?	Acceptable

There is evidence that the program is effective and that funded projects are contributing to intended environmental outcomes in the areas of nature, water, air and climate change, as well as outcomes in the area of capacity building. Performance data indicates that completed projects met or exceeded targets for the majority of environmental indicators. There is also evidence that the EcoAction program successfully engages many individuals and helps build the capacity that supports the sustainability of projects.

Overall, interview respondents agreed that EcoAction is an effective program, providing many examples of success stories and citing several reasons for this success. Key points raised were the program's ability to tailor regional priorities to adapt to local/regional needs and the fact that, as a community-driven program, EcoAction ensures that its project activities respond to an identified need and that impacts are meaningful for communities.

Case study evidence provides illustrative examples of the contribution of EcoAction projects to the quality of life in urban and rural areas and the ability of projects to enhance the awareness of citizens about various environmental issues. As an example, one case study showed how EcoAction provided support to design and develop a naturalized area in a school yard, including trees, a garden and a water retention system, thereby improving the school's environment and increasing awareness among students about the value of water and how it can be better managed (see case study 3 in Annex 4). In another case study, EcoAction support enabled a regional conservation authority to restore strategic shorelines by mobilizing volunteers and landowners to plant

[23] Justice Canada (1985) *Department of the Environment Act*: http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-10/FullText.html .

19,000 new trees and shrubs in order to improve the water quality in its area, impacting wildlife through ecosystem improvements, and human quality of life through improved quality of drinking water (see case study 4 in Annex 4).

Evidence of the program's effectiveness relative to each of the EcoAction program's outcomes, as presented in the logic model (see Annex 5) is presented below.

Direct Outcomes

Table 4 presents the targets for indicators associated with the program's direct outcomes, as well as the actual values observed for these indicators, as reported in the 2012 EcoAction Program Performance Measurement Framework (PMF). The average value over the study time frame, as calculated for the evaluation, is also presented in the final column. Looking at the values over the study time frame, the table shows that the program was somewhat below target for the indicator related to the number of quality proposals (52% versus a target of 70%), but exceeded the targets related to successful completion of projects (89% versus a target of 70%) and contributions of in-kind and monetary support (i.e. leveraging) (1:2.9 versus a target ratio of 1:1).The indicator regarding the annual number of individuals engaged could not be assessed, given that multi-year projects report on the total number of individuals engaged for the project duration as opposed to on an annual basis; furthermore, data for many of these projects are not yet available as the projects are still in progress.

Table 4: Targets and Actuals for Indicators Identified in the 2012 EcoAction Program PMF for EcoAction Direct Outcomes

Direct Outcomes	Indicator	Target EcoAction Program 2012 PMF	Actual Value per EcoAction Program 2012 PMF	Actual Value 2009–2010 to 2012–2013
Increased number of quality proposals[24]	% of proposals assessed as scientifically and technically sound and feasible to implement	70%	58% (based on 2009–2010 data)	52%[25] (545/1,043)
Successful completion of community-based projects that support action and capacity building on priority environmental issues at local, regional and/or national levels	% of projects successfully completed	70%	65% (486/750) (based on 5 year period from 2004–2005 to 2008–2009)	89% (307/344) (excludes multi-year projects not yet completed)
Contribution of in-kind and monetary support from non-federal sources for environmental activities of funded projects	Ratio of federal government to total partner contributions	$1 federal: $1 partner	$1 federal: $2.25 partner (average from 2004–2005 to 2008–2009	$1 federal: $2.90 partner
Engagement of individuals through community-based projects in actions to protect, conserve or restore the natural environment	Total annual number of individuals engaged in EcoAction-funded projects	400,000 engaged Canadians annually	403,297 (average from 2004–2005 to 2008–2009	Not able to calculate

[24] Calculated by dividing the number of projects recommended by the number of applications received, as per the 2012 EcoAction program PMF.
[25] The calculation excludes 48 projects that were not rated.

Contribution of in-kind and monetary support is discussed in greater detail under the discussion of demonstration of efficiency and economy (evaluation question 8).

Intermediate Outcomes

Environmental Outcomes

Performance data from the MIS provides a detailed view of the environmental impacts achieved by EcoAction projects. Table 5 presents the established project targets for all projects initiated during the study time frame, and both the targets and actuals for the subset of completed projects. According to results, actuals for completed projects exceeded or approached targets for 7 of the 10 environmental indicators that had project data. Further, the percentage achievement of project goals averaged 198% across all of these indicators.[26] Results were strongest in the areas of reductions in emissions of air contaminants; shoreline protection/improvement; habitat protection; and plant/tree planting. Results were near expectations for composting/recycling, and below project expectations in a few areas, including water consumption reduction, and GHG emission reductions.

Table 5: Performance of EcoAction Projects

	***All Projects* (N=545) TARGETS**	***Completed Projects*[27] (N=245) TARGETS**	***Completed Projects* (N=245) ACTUALS**	***Completed Projects* % TARGET ACHIEVED**
Reduction of emissions of criteria air contaminants (CACs, in tonnes (t))	3,046	1,020	7,033	690%
Climate change & clean air – Reduced emissions of greenhouse gases (e.g. carbon dioxide, methane, etc.) in t per year	272,345	208,373	120,305	58%
Amount of organics composted/diverted from landfill (kg)	1,502,092	964,134	881,646	91%
Area of habitat in which management or restoration actions have been implemented through project activities (ha)	660,869	12,636	16,730	132%
Habitat permanently protected (acquisition, easement, covenant agreement)	627,450	14,227	9,921	70%
Area of shoreline protected, stabilized or improved (ha) (total goal and total actual)	16,555	10,617	18,603	175%
Amount of indigenous plants, trees and shrubs planted	1,118,511	424,945	577,536	136%
Percentage (%) of indigenous plants, trees and shrubs planted that survived[28]	64%	72%	79%	109%
Reduction of water consumption (litres (l) per year)	132,304,382	77,934,217	43,428,343	56%
Clean water – stream/lake bank protected or stabilized (km)	241	72	330	458%
Aggregate Achievement (sum of all percentages /number of indicators)				**198%**

[26] EC 2013–2014 PMF identifies the sum of all percentages /number of indicators as the key performance indicator for the EcoAction program.
[27] Projects with missing data (n=62) were excluded from the analysis of completed projects.
[28] Values represent the average target and actual survival rates for projects with values for this indicator.

Capacity Building and Engagement Outcomes

EcoAction projects engage a number of individuals, including paid staff, volunteers and participants. Table 6 presents the program data from the MIS on the capacity building indicators. To date, about 215,000 individuals have participated in EcoAction activities for projects completed during the time frame, as volunteers participating directly in projects or as participants in activities. Based on the targets provided, it is anticipated that by the time all projects approved within the study time frame have been completed, more than 2.2 million participants will have participated in the projects, although it is likely that this number may double-count some individuals who participate in more than one year or more than one project. Based on targets, about 50,000 volunteers are expected to participate directly in the projects. Survey data confirms that this is likely to be a conservative estimate: according to findings, 30,600 volunteers participated in the 29% of all projects that were surveyed.

Table 6: Performance of EcoAction Projects – Engagement (2009–2013)

	All Projects (N=545) TARGETS	*Completed Projects*[29] (N=245) TARGETS	*Completed Projects* (N=245) ACTUALS	*Completed Projects* % TARGET ACHIEVED
Volunteers participating directly in projects	46,454	12,059	17,562	146%
# Participants in activity(ies)	2,248,255[30]	122,767	195,804	159%
Jobs created (person/year)	819	507	486	96%
People reached who indicated they would modify their behaviour as a result of project activities	39,044	12,130	9,095	75%

Source: EcoAction MIS database.

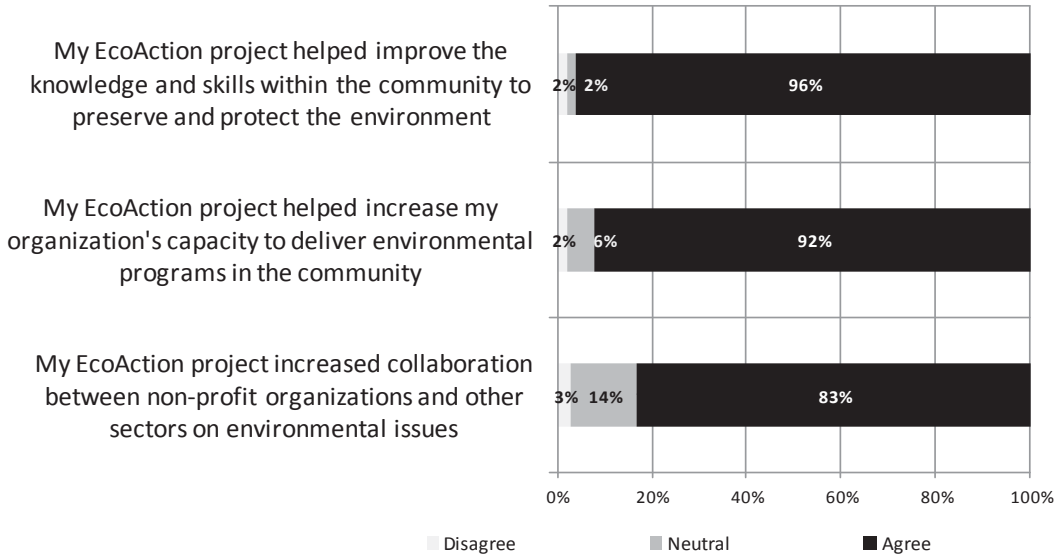
The survey of funding recipients conducted as part of the evaluation also provides additional information on the intensity of volunteer participation. According to survey data, project volunteers donated an average of 4 hours each to an EcoAction project. Based on the projection of the number of volunteers, this would equate to between 200,000 and 400,000 volunteer hours over the 4-year study period. As well, more than half (57%) of survey respondents indicated that their project created ongoing volunteer work positions focused on the project's environmental issue. Several case studies also illustrated how EcoAction projects have successfully mobilized many volunteers and participants to engage in environmental protection projects. For example, one project leveraged the help of 80 volunteers to help protect 65 ha of sensitive ecosystems by planting plants, trees and shrubs and establishing a native nursery. Another case study showed how a large corporation allowed 25 of its staff members to work for 3 full days, working beside 70 volunteers, to complete a project aimed at the naturalization of a school yard. (See case studies 2 and 3 in Annex 4.)

Survey evidence also indicates that community engagement is a key impact area of the program. The survey of funding recipients shows that 68% of projects identified community engagement/capacity building as one focus of their project.[31] As shown in Figure 1 below, the vast majorities of these projects were reported to have led to the improvement of knowledge and skills within the community to preserve and protect the environment (96%); an increase in recipient capacity to deliver environmental programs

[29] Projects with missing data (n=62) were excluded from the analysis of completed projects.
[30] A substantial portion of this target (1.5 million) were associated with one project.
[31] All but 3 of 171 respondents to the Funding Recipient Survey also identified one or more of the four environmental areas (nature, water, clean air, climate change) as a focus of their project.

in the community (92%); and/or increased collaboration between non-profit organizations and other sectors on environmental issues (83%).

Figure 1: Project Impacts on Capacity Building



Source: Survey of Funding Recipients (2013). Asked of project contacts for completed projects, which had included capacity building as one focus of the project (n=103).

Sustainability of Impacts

While EcoAction provides funding to projects for a specific period of time, there is evidence to show that many projects continue after funding ends. According to the funding recipient survey, more than 80% of the projects continued after EcoAction funding ended. In addition, 87% of all respondents with completed projects (n=108) indicated that partnerships developed during the project were continuing after the project's end, while a similar percentage (90%) indicated that relationships developed with project sponsors were continuing. Case studies provided illustration of these ongoing relationships. For example, one EcoAction project (see case study 8 in Annex 4) enabled a community ecological society to mitigate forest fragmentation, which disturbs habitat and interrupts the flow of wildlife, occurring in a major urban park. The ecological society was able to secure a key private-sector funding partner, which later renewed its funding after the EcoAction program funding ended.

Other ongoing impacts of completed projects, as reported by survey respondents, included the project guiding the community to identify a future direction/next steps for an environmental concern (64%), the project inspiring other organizations to "adopt the [project's] cause" (52%), and other organizations using the project as a model for new projects (40%). Additionally, creation of a website/Web tools that continue to be used after EcoAction funding has ceased (34%), and creation of an action-oriented group, such as a high school environment group (34%) were also noted.

Furthermore, data from the survey of funding recipients indicates that a number of the projects continue to have environmental impacts after project completion. Projects related to nature (n=67) reported the highest levels of ongoing impact, with 85% identifying ongoing impacts on conservation of wild fauna/flora, followed by projects with

a focus on water (n=40) (75% reporting ongoing impacts in the areas of water conservation and quality) and on air quality/climate change (n=40) (60% reporting ongoing impacts on air quality/climate change).

Evaluation Issue: Performance	Rating
5. Have there been any unintended (positive or negative) outcomes?	Acceptable

The program has led to many positive unintended outcomes, including economic impacts and input in support of policy development.

There is also evidence showing that some projects led to the establishment of future business opportunities. As an example, one project led to the creation of a vehicle-sharing program in Ontario. A case study also showed evidence of projects leading to other economic benefits, including a project where smart electricity-consumption meters were installed in homes, resulting not only in energy savings, but also leading to cost savings for these homeowners (see case study 5 in Annex 4).

Senior EC respondents noted during the interviews that the projects funded by the program have provided useful input to EC policy makers. Projects provide a pulse of community needs and priorities. For example, information gathered from the EcoAction program was mentioned as being useful in the development of the National Conservation Plan. Project participants have also been a useful resource when EC staff were identifying potential participants for consultations on policy issues.

4.2.2 Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy

Evaluation Issue: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	Rating
6. Is the program design appropriate for achieving its intended outcomes?	Acceptable

Evidence suggests the program design is appropriate and contributes to the achievement of program outcomes related to increasing the environmental benefits from community-based actions and engaging Canadians in sustainable activities to protect, conserve or restore the natural environment.

The program design supports the work of the non-profit sector in the completion of environmental projects, while also providing Canadians with an opportunity to participate in the creation of more sustainable communities. As discussed in section 4.2.1, this structure has effectively enabled the government to make use of local knowledge and expertise in the delivery of projects aligned with federal government priorities. The program's funding formula, where applicants must provide or ensure the provision of 50% of the project's resources, is appropriate, as it has successfully served to both extend the resources available to, and the number of partners supporting these projects, as evidenced by the program's high levels of partner contributions.

The evaluation also assessed various components of the program design. Preliminary evidence indicates that the move to an increased use of multi-year projects will have a positive contribution on the success and sustainability of projects. A recent study supports the use of longer project cycles in order to improve sustainability, to allow the

project time to adapt, make changes, and secure more permanent funding.[32] Program representatives also indicated that the multi-year funding enables organizations to develop the network and skill base, which has resulted in improved efficiency and effectiveness and enabled some organizations to expand the scope of their projects. Documentation also supported the importance of these benefits of the multi-year projects, noting that a strong network, with the support of a broad group of partners and human resource expertise, plays a significant role in the success and sustainability of projects.[33] On a related note, interviewees also indicated that permitting salaries as an eligible expense contributes to success, as the funding of project staff enables good project management, continuity and projects undertaken in a focused manner.

A key feature of the program is the review of EcoAction applications by technical reviewers.[34] According to several interviewees, the process of using technical reviewers contributes to the scientific rigour of projects through the recommendation of project improvements and ensuring that projects with the greatest merit are funded. Many interviewees stated that EcoAction utilizes internal and external reviewers with appropriate subject matter expertise, although it was noted that it is becoming more difficult to find internal reviewers since the implementation of work force adjustments stemming from the DRAP. Most technical reviewers felt the review process worked well, but suggested that, in order to support continuous improvement, they would benefit from receiving feedback regarding the projects they had reviewed, including whether or not specific projects they recommended for funding were ultimately approved, if recommended adjustments to projects were adopted, and the final outcomes of the projects.

Evaluation Issue: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	Rating
7. To what extent is the governance structure clear, appropriate and efficient for achieving expected results?	Opportunity for Improvement

The program is still in a period of transition given changes in governance and resources made in 2012–2013 as a result of the DRAP. The new organization structure and approval process are clearly documented and generally well understood, although there was some ambiguity related to how priority setting and decision making is expected to occur. Uncertainty was also identified over the long-term plans for overall program responsibility and the national coordination role. Additionally, concerns were identified related to the feasibility of fully delivering on certain national coordination roles, such as website management and MIS data coordination, given reduced resource levels.

As previously noted, the governance for the EcoAction program underwent significant change in 2012–2013 (described in Section 2.1). This new organizational structure and approval process is clearly documented and generally well understood.

A few EC representatives identified some areas that were lacking clarity, however. For example, some program representatives felt it was unclear how decisions regarding national priorities would be set with a national coordinator based in the region. Some

[32] Gesner & Associates. September 30, 2011. Final Report. Sustainability Study for Projects Funded by Environment Canada. p.13.
[33] Gesner & Associates. 2011. Sustainability Study. p. 8.
[34] Technical reviewers include experts from within EC and other federal departments, and experts from provincial organizations.

program representatives also felt that regional decision making was complicated by the merging of regions. In addition, uncertainty remains over how the national coordination role will be managed on an ongoing basis. In particular, EC representatives were uncertain whether the national coordination role would remain in West and North, or if it would rotate through the regions, and whether a change at the coordinator level would also mean a change to the lead at the senior management RDG level.

Most EC representatives stated that adding the role of national coordination to a regional manager's role represents a significant increase in workload for the responsible regional manager. In addition, the new structure does not account for administrative support. Although administrative capacity has recently been addressed to an extent, some EC representatives indicated that it is unclear whether sufficient capacity is in place to support all aspects previously conducted by the NCR National Coordination team on an ongoing basis. Examples provided included maintaining the website, updating program documentation, and MIS data coordination. At the time of data collection for the evaluation, EC management representatives stated that discussions were underway to attempt to resolve this uncertainty.

Evaluation Issue: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	Rating
8. Is the program undertaking specific activities and delivering products at the lowest possible cost? How could the efficiency of the program's activities be improved? Are there alternative, more economical ways of delivering program outputs?	Opportunity for Improvement

The EcoAction program successfully leverages external resources and has made significant improvements in the degree to which it undertakes its activities in an economical and efficient manner. With the introduction of recent DRAP budget reductions, the program's administrative costs as a percentage of G&Cs expenditures are expected to drop significantly for 2013–2014 to levels that are in line with other programs. From an operational perspective, funding recipients are generally satisfied with the delivery of the program, and their assessment of many key program tools has improved since last measured in 2008. However, despite recent improvements to both program-level and departmental processes, the timeliness of funding approvals remains an ongoing challenge impacting program efficiency and effectiveness and contributing to lapses in G&Cs funding. Additional challenges were identified related to maintaining national consistency in program delivery and the quality of program data, as regions adjust to reduced staffing levels.

The evaluation assessed the efficiency of the program through various dimensions, including the capacity of the program to leverage other sources of funding; the percentage of administrative costs of the program; and the effectiveness of its delivery structure.

Leveraging

According to administrative data, on average, EcoAction projects conducted during the study time frame far exceeded the minimum program requirement for 50% of leveraging from other non-federal government sources. Overall, EC provided 25% of all funding, compared to 75% that came from other sources. That is, $2.90 in cash and in-kind contributions were leveraged from other sources for every $1 from EcoAction spent, for

a leveraging ratio of 1 to 2.9. These data showed that the resources from other sources comprised 45% of in-kind contributions,[35] and 55% in cash contributions. Even if one limits the analysis to the cash contributions only, the funding ratio still exceeds the program target, with a ratio of 1 to 1.6.

Respondents from the survey of funding recipients reported slightly lower overall leveraging numbers than were seen in the program's administrative data, although the values still exceeded the program's minimum requirement. Survey respondents reported that EcoAction funds represented an average of 38% of the total funding of their projects (equivalent to a 1 to 1.8 leveraging factor, including in-kind resources).

Leveraging rates within these ranges are deemed optimal by program representatives, as they strike a balance in terms of maximizing the Department's investment while still maintaining an influence on the activities funded (which could be lost if the proportion provided by EC was too low). In order to support applicants with their efforts to leverage funds, EcoAction staff created an online searchable database for applicants to find leveraging resources (Green Source Funding Database[36]) on the Environment Canada website. However, according to program staff, due to a lack of resources, this database has not been updated in the last few years.

The significant number of volunteer hours that the program leverages further contributes to the economy and efficiency of the program. Using a conservative estimate of 200,000 hours of volunteering over the 4-year period from 2009–2010 to 2012–2013,[37] the value of volunteer time for the projects would be estimated at between $2 million (costing the labour at minimum wage) and $4.4 million (costing the labour at $22 per hour, a recognized value for volunteer time, according to literature on valuing the cost of volunteering[38,39]).

Analysis of Program Resources

The program's operational efficiency has significantly improved as a result of measures taken to accommodate reductions in salary and O&M expenditures stemming from the DRAP in 2012–2013, as well as earlier reductions in 2011–2012.

As can be seen in Table 7, the program underwent substantial changes from a financial perspective. The budget for 2013–2014 represents a reduction of 54% in total direct program costs since 2009–2010 (from $2.5 million in 2009–2010 to $1.1 million), although the program's G&Cs allocation remained unchanged at $4.525 million per year. The overall program costs are anticipated to decline by 19% from 2009–2010 to 2013–2014 (from $6.9 million in 2009–2010 to an anticipated budget of $5.6 million for 2013–2014).

[35] Note that for the purposes of assigning value to in-kind, the program assigns a dollar value based on the type of volunteering, e.g., tree planting is valued at minimum wage whereas technical expertise is valued against generally accepted TBS standards.
[36] http://www.ec.gc.ca/financement-funding/default.asp?lang=En&n=768DAFB1-1.
[37] This was described in Section 4.2.1, in the section on achievement of outcomes.
[38] The Independent Sector. Independent Sector's Value of Volunteer Time. http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time.
[39] Craig Alexander and Sonya Gulati. An Economist's Case For Volunteering. TD Economics, April 23, 2012.

Table 7: EcoAction Resources, 2009–2010 to 2013–2014

	2009–2010 Actuals	2010–2011 Actuals	2011–2012 Actuals	2012–2013 Actuals	2013–2014 Budget
Salaries	2,192,272	2,052,015	1,683,152	1,667,255[40]	1,007,000
O&M	268,875	258,092	210,880	133,588	120,000
Total Direct Program Cost	**2,461,147**	**2,310,107**	**1,894,032**	**1,800,843**	**1,127,000**
G&Cs Allocation	4,525,000	4,525,000	4,525,000	4,525,000	4,525,000
G&Cs Expenditure	4,464,481	4,113,528	3,870,264	4,141,003	–
G&Cs Allocation Lapsed	60,519	411,472	654,735	383,997	
% G&Cs Allocation Lapsed	1.3%	9.1%	14.5%	8.5%	–
Administrative Ratio (total Direct Program Cost/G&Cs Expenditure)	0.55	0.56	0.48	0.43	**0.25**
Total Program Cost	**6,925,628**	**6,423,635**	**5,764,296**	**5,941,846**	**5,627,000**

Notes
1. 2009–2010 to 2012–2013 data extracted from EC's financial reporting tool, DISCOVERER.
2. 2013–2014 Budget data from Environment Canada, April 23, 2013, Management of Grants and Contributions (G&Cs), Analysis of Time and Direct Costs per G&Cs agreement, Draft.
3. G&Cs Allocation represents ARLU allocation.

A common indicator of program efficiency is the administrative ratio, which is calculated as the ratio of operational costs (salaries and O&M) to G&Cs funding.[41] The EcoAction program has significantly reduced this ratio over the study period, from a level of 0.55 in 2009–2010, to a targeted level of 0.25 for 2013–2014.

While the previous administrative ratio would be considered high, the new post-DRAP ratio is comparable to other EC Grants and Contributions programs and falls within a generally acceptable range, although still on the high end of the range. As noted in a recent evaluation, the Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund had a ratio of 0.22, and the Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund had a ratio of 0.15 for the 4-year period from 2008–2009 to 2011–2012.[42]

Based on information from program management, the true value of the EcoAction administrative ratio is likely somewhere between 0.25 and 0.22. According to program management, the program's salary costs reported in the departmental financial system and identified in budget planning documents are somewhat over-stated. The same employees work on both the EcoAction and the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF) program. The allocation in the financial reporting system and in planning documents used for the 2013–2014 budget estimate a 75% / 25% split between EcoAction and EDF, respectively,[43] whereas regional managers estimate it to be closer to a 63% / 37% split. A recalculation of the administrative ratio, adjusting salary resources to reflect this reduced level, results in a revised administrative ratio of 0.22 for 2013–2014.[44] Table 8, below, presents the administrative ratio for EcoAction in 2013–2014 under these 2 scenarios, along with the administrative ratios for 2 comparable programs as calculated in a recent evaluation. [45]

[40] 2012–2013 salary figures include $526,000 for payments related to work force adjustment.
[41] In some instances this ratio may be calculated as total direct program cost/total program cost.
[42] EC, AEB. November 2011. Evaluation of Freshwater Programs Under the Action Plan for Clean Water. p. 63.
[43] EC. Draft April 2012 revised April 2013. New Program Model and Resources Dedicated to EcoAction and the EDF. Internal document.
[44] Note that these analyses did not include an assessment of staff time spent on various RDG ecosystem initiatives, which could theoretically reduce the ratio further.
[45] These ratios were based on the four-year average from 2008–2009 to 2011–2012, as calculated in the 2011 evaluation.

Table 8: Administrative Ratio for EcoAction Program, Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund and Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund

	Administrative Ratio
EcoAction post-DRAP, 2013–2014 Budget	0.25
EcoAction post-DRAP, 2013–2014 Budget *– adjusted to represent revised labour distribution estimate*	0.22
Lake Winnipeg Basin Stewardship Fund	0.22
Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund	0.15

Although there have been significant gains made in improving program efficiency, some areas remain that would benefit from further improvement. Despite a number of measures aimed at limiting the level of lapsed funds, the program consistently underspends on its G&Cs allocation each year (see Table 7). Lapses occur when projects do not proceed as planned—either a project will not be undertaken, or it is undertaken in a reduced scope. As identified in documents and key informant interviews, and supported by the survey findings, one of the key causes of lapsed funds for the EcoAction program is late funding approvals,[46] which, as is described in greater detail below, can have significant impacts on an organizations' ability to deliver its projects as originally planned. In an effort to limit the level of lapsed funds, each year the program develops a B-list of projects for possible substitution. Additionally, the program will often have a list of active projects that could potentially be amended to deliver on an expanded scope, should funding be available. While these measures help limit the level of lapsed funding, they are not sufficient to fully resolve the issue, particularly if the approval timelines occur very late.

Program Delivery

Project Support

In addition to disbanding the National Coordination Unit and shifting the national coordination function to the regions, other aspects of program delivery have also been affected by the recent resource reductions. According to key informant interviews, program staff maintained the core activities of the program by streamlining delivery and by making adjustments to the level of service provided by program officers, including playing a less direct role in conducting outreach to attract potential applicants, reducing the level of support to applicants during the application process and making fewer site visits. Based on interviews with program staff, it appears that this change in the level of support was introduced out of necessity and varies by region. Some program staff expressed concern that these changes could have an impact on the long-term effectiveness of the program either by having an impact on the types of organizations that receive funding (reduced number of newcomers who may require additional assistance), or the quality of the project design and implementation. Most EC representatives acknowledged that this is the new operating environment and they will continue to look for ways to operate effectively within it, although a few interviewees stated that further guidance on operating under the new structure would be beneficial.

Evidence from five of the case studies suggests that representatives of funded projects appreciated the level of support they have received, including site visits. As the service reductions have just started to be implemented in 2012–2013, it is still too early for the full impact of the new service levels to be fully understood.

[46] Note that funding approvals are impacted by both program-specific and department-wide G&Cs processes.

Funding recipients' and unfunded applicants' views on various aspects of program delivery are key indicators of operational efficiency. According to the survey results (see Annex 3), a large majority of funding recipients agree that the level of service provided by EcoAction staff during the application process met their needs (91%), and that services were offered in both official languages (91%). Survey evidence also indicates that the majority of recipients agree that eligibility criteria were clear (84%), that the negotiation process was efficient (75%), and that the applicants' guide was easy to understand (74%). Roughly two thirds provided positive ratings for the ease of navigation of the EcoAction website (65%) and the utility of the recipient guide (62%). Lower ratings were provided with respect to the ease of completion of the application forms (55%), and the reporting forms (44%), suggesting possible areas for further improvement.

As can be seen in Table 9, when compared to results of a similar survey conducted in 2008, ratings have improved significantly in a number of areas, including relative to the clarity of eligibility criteria and the degree to which various program delivery tools are user-friendly. [47] These improvements are likely attributable to a number of changes made to improve documentation and program tools since 2009, including use of standardized tools stemming from the Department's recent G&Cs reform exercise.

Table 9: Funding Recipient Assessment of Key Components of Program Delivery *(Percentage who somewhat or strongly agree)*

	2008 Survey of Funding Recipients[48] %	**2013 Survey of Funding Recipients[49] %**
Eligibility criteria easy to understand	69	84 (↑)
Application guide is easy to understand	57	74 (↑)
Recipient guide is a useful tool	53	62 (↑)
Notice of funding received in a timely manner	52	41 (↓)
Website easy to navigate	51	65 (↑)
Application forms easy to complete	41	55 (↑)
Reporting forms easy to use	32	44 (↑)

Relevant aspects of program delivery were also assessed with unfunded applicants. Although responses to this survey must be interpreted with caution, given the small sample sizes, results showed lower levels of agreement with respect to the quality of various aspects of the application process, such as the eligibility criteria being easy to understand (approximately 55% versus 84% of funding recipients), level of service meeting their needs (approximately 55% versus 91%), application forms being easy to complete (approximately 35% versus 55%) and funding decisions being received in a timely manner (approximately 30% versus 41%). The lower rates of agreement from these respondents in comparison to funding recipients likely reflect, in part, some discontent associated with their unsuccessful application; however, they nevertheless support the need for ongoing continuous improvement.

[47] EC. May 2008. Survey of EcoAction Funding Recipients. Final Report.
[48] EC. May 2008. Survey of EcoAction Funding Recipients. Final Report.
[49] Arrow indicates change in direction of results since 2008.

Timing of Funding Approvals

While ratings on many aspects of program delivery improved, the percentage of respondents agreeing that the notice of funding was received in a timely manner declined from 52% in 2008 to 41% in 2013. Many interviewees noted that the timing of funding approvals has been an ongoing issue for the program. Late approvals from EC have significant impacts on projects, several of which were cancelled by applicants due to their seasonal nature, which, as noted previously, contributes to funding lapses. Over half the survey respondents (88 out of 171) provided examples of the negative consequences encountered by late approvals, including difficulty planning, difficulty securing matched funding before the base funding from EC is secured, difficulty maintaining momentum with community groups, insufficient time to recruit students and volunteers, and missing the window of opportunity for time-sensitive projects, e.g., tree planting. Late approvals also lead to an increased workload for project managers as agreements have to be renegotiated or replaced because the initial project could no longer take place.

The timing of funding approval announcements is impacted by both program-specific and departmental approval processes and has been a challenge for many EC G&Cs programs. In recent years, EcoAction funding announcements have occurred in the middle of summer, including as late as the end of August, with additional approvals extending at times into the fall and even into the following January. The program introduced changes in the review process and, additionally, in 2012–2013, EC introduced new departmental processes for G&Cs, which had a positive impact on the timeliness of approvals for the 2013–2014 year. As described in Section 2.1.2, the project selection and approval process involves several steps, including an administrative review process, technical reviews, assessments, and senior review and approval (see Table 1). Process changes to improve timeliness included reductions in the number of people handling documents; streamlining/shortening documentation for technical reviewers; moving the deadline for completion of the technical review and program recommendation up to early January; obtaining agreement from key branches to compressed timelines (e.g. Finance Branch approval reduced from 90 to 30 days); and a move to a batch process for senior approvals.[50] These changes significantly improved timelines for the program, with more than half of successful applicants receiving notification of funding by the end of May. According to interviewees, in the 2013–2014 funding year, all steps relative to the program assessment and recommendation for approval were completed on schedule; however, delays in the final approval stages meant that the target of informing applicants by the end of April was still not met.

Data Management

Data management for the EcoAction program continues to be conducted in a highly manual fashion through all stages of the application and project cycle. Project applications are typically received via email and occasionally received in hard copy. Information is subsequently transferred manually by program staff from the application form to MIS, and into templates for internal project review, senior-level review, and contribution agreements. Whereas previously the EcoAction MIS was able to generate contribution agreement forms, following recent changes in departmental Grants and Contributions processes, this is no longer the case and the preparation of agreements is

[50] The Department moved from a single annual G&Cs approval package to the use of several separate approval requests per year in order to spread the workload and support individual program timelines.

now done manually. Similarly, reporting is also conducted in a manual fashion. Program staff identify that project financial information is particularly onerous to administer as it cannot be cut and pasted but must always be manually transcribed into financial tracking systems, regardless of the original format (i.e. email or hard copy). It is felt that moving to an online application and reporting process would significantly reduce the administrative burden and allow more time for areas in which staff feel they add greater value (e.g. engagement time with groups to identify quality projects, providing project support, validating project results). Reducing the number of data entry points would also likely reduce the number of data entry errors.

Evaluation Issue: Demonstration of Efficiency and Economy	Rating
9. Are performance data being collected and reported? If so, is this information being used to inform senior management/decision makers?	Opportunity for Improvement

The evaluation determined that performance measures are in place and are being tracked in the MIS. However, while the MIS is a valuable tool for project-level information, due to system limitations, it is not user-friendly for conducting analyses or reporting at the program level. Additionally, an analysis of the MIS identified gaps in the data that were perceived to be due to a combination of the program's high reliance on manual data entry and insufficient capacity to enter data on a regular basis.

In order to provide an assessment of program achievement, the EcoAction Program 2012 PMF report identified a number of performance indicators aligned to program outputs and direct and intermediate outcomes. Targets and reported values for these indicators were also reported in the program's 2012 PMF (see Table 4 for the values related to the program's direct outcomes); however, in many instances, the reported values were based on older data (e.g. from 2004–2005 to 2008–2009). This may be related to challenges (described in greater detail below) in compiling aggregate program data from the MIS. Additionally and, as described under the discussion of achievement of outcomes (evaluation question 4), the program's indicator related to the total annual number of individuals engaged in projects should be revisited in light of the program's move to an increased use of multi-year projects, to ensure the indicator aligns with the frequency of measurement and reporting.

The EcoAction MIS contains detailed project-level information on all EcoAction projects. A list of 13 key environmental and 4 capacity-building indicators were developed by the program in 2010 in response to a recommendation from a 2008–2009 EcoAction evaluation to reduce the overall number of project indicators, down from 56 indicators in 2009. At project start-up, the goals (targets) for the subset of these indicators that are relevant to the project are entered into the MIS. These goals are compared to actual achievement at the end of each project. An assessment of the extent to which funded projects achieve their planned environmental goals is a key measure for the program and is the focus for the measure in the departmental 2013–2014 PMF for EcoAction.

A few EC representatives indicated that the completeness and validity of performance data in the MIS is uncertain as recent staff reductions have had an impact on the ability of project officers to input data into the database in a timely manner. This concern was validated when a database review completed as part of this evaluation found that 20% of the 307 completed projects were missing data on either targeted or actual indicators, or

both. Approximately half of these projects (n=32) were missing data on both targeted and actual indicators, with the other half (n=30) listing targets but no actuals.

Program staff and senior management noted that shortcomings with the current MIS are well known. EC Corporate Services Branch representatives reported that the EcoAction MIS has been identified as a very dated system, noting that it is unpredictable and that the capability to make additions or modifications is felt to be limited. Some program staff also reported that a complex and labour-intensive process involving manual extraction and compilation of regional data is required to generate program-level aggregate reports, which must then be further compiled to present national-level results. With the disbanding of the NCR National Coordination Unit, this responsibility now falls to regional staff and the new national coordination role. Program representatives noted that this is an onerous task and some staff expressed concerns that there could be an impact on future data quality and the ability to respond to requests for information in a timely manner. Although the management response to a 2008–2009 evaluation stated that the EcoAction program would adopt the departmental online application and information management system, this has not yet occurred. This measure was to be undertaken to facilitate application, monitoring and reporting processes for both clients and program staff. Efforts to address this shortcoming have been delayed by budget pressures and departmental uncertainty around whether the Department will move to a common departmental or government-wide MIS system for G&Cs, and a desire to ensure conformity with applicable Government of Canada and EC technical standards.

5.0 Conclusions

Relevance

According to evaluation evidence, there is a need for the federal government to support community-based projects/actions aimed at the protection, rehabilitation and enhancement of the environment. There is also an evident need to create greater public awareness and involvement to conserve wildlife populations and the ecosystems on which they depend, and to prevent the loss of species.

Documentation and interviews indicate that there is no other program that assists communities across Canada through the same range of environmental projects. Other complementary programs tend to be targeted at specific species and/or ecosystems (e.g. species at risk/habitat stewardship programs). All respondents agreed there is a need for a flexible program that funds a wide range of environmental projects and that can adapt to specific local needs, as well as be a vehicle to help address emerging regional and national priorities.

The evaluation found demonstrated consistencies between the program's objectives, and various federal priorities and roles and responsibilities as expressed through expected outcomes statements, throne speech documentation, and legislation.

Achievement of Intended Outcomes

The evidence suggests that the program is effective and that projects funded by the program are contributing to intended environmental outcomes in the areas of nature, water, air and climate change, as well as outcomes in the area of capacity building.

A review of the project data from the EcoAction MIS show the percentage achievement of project goals averaged 198% across all environmental indicators for completed

projects, exceeding or approaching targets for 7 of the program's 10 environmental indicators for which project data existed. There is also evidence that the EcoAction program successfully engages many individuals and volunteers and helps to build organizational and community skills and networks, which in turn supports the effectiveness and sustainability of projects.

The program has been very successful in attracting funding from other sources, with EcoAction projects leveraging $2.90 in cash and in-kind contributions from other sources for every $1 from EcoAction spent during the study period.

During the last two years, the program has increased the number of multi-year projects it funds. This is viewed to be a positive change that, in addition to adding to program efficiencies, is also expected to contribute to project sustainability, as multi-year projects enable organizations more time to better plan and adapt their implementation plans and develop their network and skill base. It is, however, too early to fully assess the results of ongoing multi-year projects initiated in the past two years.

Efficiency and Economy

The design and delivery of the program are generally considered economical and efficient, largely due to multiple changes that have been introduced since 2009. Changes have included moving to a single-round selection process; the increased use of multi-year agreements; revised documentation for applicants and technical reviewers; improvements to the EcoAction website; and new departmental processes for G&Cs. Additionally, with recent budget reductions implemented as a result of the DRAP as well as previous reductions initiated in 2011, the administrative expenses for the EcoAction program relative to the contributions managed is now in line with other programs.

From an operational perspective, evidence from the survey of funding recipients indicated general satisfaction with the delivery of the program over the time frame covered by the evaluation, and recipients' assessments of many key program tools have improved since last measured in 2008. This is likely attributable to a number of changes made to improve documentation and program tools since 2009.

In response to the reductions in FTEs associated with budget reductions, various aspects of delivery were reduced or simplified, including support to applicants and project monitoring. However, these changes have not been consistently applied in all regions, and the full impact of these reductions is not yet known.

Coincident with the DRAP changes introduced in 2012, changes were made to the governance of the EcoAction program, including consolidating five regions into three and transferring overall program responsibility and national coordination to the West & North region. This new structure and approval process is clearly documented and generally well understood. Some uncertainty was identified, however, related to how priority setting and decision making is expected to occur and regarding the long-term plans for overall program responsibility and the national coordination role. Additionally, concerns were identified related to the feasibility of fully delivering on certain national coordination roles, such as website management and MIS data coordination, given reduced resource levels.

The timing of announcements of funding decisions has been an ongoing challenge, with late funding announcements causing significant consequences for project recipients in terms of their ability to deliver on projects as planned, and resulting in a history of lapsed funds. Project review and approval processes at both the program and departmental

level have been recently reformed and, as a result, the timing of announcements in 2013–2014 was considerably improved, although target dates were still not met.

Consistent with findings from an evaluation conducted in 2008–2009, the program's management information system (MIS) capabilities are an area of inefficiency. Data management for the program continues to be conducted in a highly manual fashion, as the program does not have an online application or reporting system for applicants and the program's MIS is not compatible with the Department's current G&Cs templates or financial systems. As a result, a significant burden is placed on program staff as they must manually enter and re-enter data. While the program's MIS is generally a good source of project data, it is not conducive to developing aggregate program-level results. In addition, gaps in project data were identified, with as many as 20% of completed projects missing information on project targets and achievements. Previous program commitments to address the long-standing issue of the program's MIS were put on hold due to budget constraints and uncertainty related to the possible transition to new departmental or government-wide G&Cs systems.

6.0 Recommendations and Management Response

The following recommendations are directed to the RDG West and North Region, as the senior departmental official responsible for the management of the EcoAction Community Funding Program.

Recommendation 1: Review and clarify expectations and responsibilities related to national coordination and program management. The evaluation identified that the program remains in a state of transition, continuing to adjust to the new governance model and the disbanding of the NCR National Coordination Unit. While many of the previous national coordination activities continue to occur under the new model, others have not been fully addressed. Recognizing that there will necessarily be some reduction in support relative to that formerly provided by the National Coordination Unit, EcoAction management should review its requirements in this area and ensure expectations and responsibilities are clearly identified. This should include, but not be limited to, responsibilities associated with

- establishing national and regional program priorities;
- maintaining the website and updating program documentation as required;
- developing program guidelines for MIS data coordination; and
- responding to requests for regional and national performance information.

Management Response to Recommendation 1
The RDG West and North agrees with the recommendation.

Management Action
As noted, the program is currently in a period of transition, adapting to the new, post-DRAP governance model, including the disbanding of the former NCR National Coordination Unit and the considerable reduction in staff and loss of historical expertise and knowledge. The RDGO is seeking ways to ensure that the critical national coordination role for EcoAction, plus related G&Cs coordination with Finance Branch, and management of the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF) with ESB, is effectively balanced across regions. The RDGs have taken preliminary measures to address workload concerns by ensuring that the national coordinator is dedicated to the EcoAction program. Recognizing that the current resource levels cannot be

exceeded, the RDGs will review the EcoAction national program responsibilities to determine which activities are necessary for effective and efficient program management, and implement an appropriate and manageable distribution of responsibilities to ensure they can be addressed with available resources. These newly outlined roles and responsibilities will then be communicated to regional managers, for further communication to program staff as appropriate.

Timeline	Deliverable(s)	Responsible Party
September 30, 2014	Finalized, approved document outlining national coordination roles and responsibilities communicated to regional managers.	RDG West & North

Recommendation 2: Review current regional program delivery procedures and best practices and establish acceptable levels of outreach, support to applicants and project monitoring, in order to improve efficiency and national consistency.
While management has identified several possible areas where effort can be reduced, clear guidelines have not been established and it appears that these changes are not being implemented consistently across all regions. The program should develop guidelines outlining acceptable levels of outreach, support to applicants, and project monitoring, including site visits and the collection and input of project data.

Management Response to Recommendation 2
The RDG West and North agrees with the recommendation.

Management Action
Coincident with DRAP reductions, several efforts were taken to introduce efficiencies, including the consolidation of RDGs' offices, the introduction of revised application and review processes, and adjustments in the levels of support provided to project applicants and funding recipients. The RDGO agrees that further steps are required to continue to identify areas for improved efficiency and to support consistent delivery of the program across all regions. Measures have been adopted to ensure effective interregional communication. In support of this, the National Coordinator chairs weekly meetings with the regional managers. Additionally, periodic conference calls are held with the extended program staff and the program hosts a national planning session with all staff once a year. During the annual meeting held in June 2013, operational issues were discussed, including the sharing of best practices and development of a detailed action plan, to identify and manage transitional issues for the coming years. These meetings will be leveraged to develop a national operational procedures document for regional program staff, which provides guidance on key components of program delivery while ensuring the flexibility necessary to respect regional, cultural and linguistic uniqueness. The document will include recommended national internal procedural service standards related to outreach, support to applicants, project monitoring, site visits, and the collection and management of project data.

Timeline	Deliverable(s)	Responsible Party
September 30, 2014	National Operational Procedures document approved by RDG and distributed to regional	Director of Strategic

	managers and program staff	Relations, West and North

Recommendation 3: Examine the use of technology to improve program delivery and support program-level performance reporting. Shortcomings associated with the current EcoAction MIS are understood and acknowledged by program management. However, previous plans to introduce online application and information management systems have been put on hold awaiting the transition to new departmental and Government of Canada systems. The evaluation identified that the current MIS requires a significant amount of manual entry and re-entry of application and project report data, and noted gaps in the availability of program data as data are not entered and updated in a timely and consistent manner. Further, the current MIS is not conducive to generating aggregate performance reports for the program or to transferring information into the Department's current G&Cs templates or financial systems. In light of the increased need to find program efficiencies, and in order to improve the availability of quality program performance data, options should be explored to find a more timely solution to these data management issues while awaiting the ultimate transition to the departmental or government-wide systems.

Management Response to Recommendation 3
The RDG West and North agrees with the recommendation.

Management Action
The RDGO acknowledges that implementation of an online system to receive applications is an important requirement for efficient program delivery and an important step toward realizing the recently announced vision for Blueprint 2020 of a world-class public service making smart use of technologies. The long-term vision remains to introduce a common system for all G&Cs programs in the Department. Consequently, any significant investment of resources must be transportable to the new system. That said, the RDGO also recognizes the need for more immediate steps to address the MIS shortcoming and, to that end, the program has recently reinitiated discussions with departmental IM/IT representatives to examine what short-term measures could be implemented to ease the burden in the interim period and improve the quality and availability of data. Program staff will work with Corporate Services Branch to identify priorities for upgrading and repairing the current MIS system in a manner that would reduce manual operations related to project intake, project operations and program reporting. Further, program staff will ensure that the Operational Procedures document (see response to Recommendation 2) clearly outlines the necessary procedures to address current shortcomings associated with data not being entered or updated in a timely and consistent manner. Additionally, EcoAction program management will continue to actively contribute to departmental G&Cs planning discussions to ensure that program needs are fully understood by the developers of any new system.

Timeline	Deliverable(s)	Responsible Party
January 31, 2014	Request for confirmation of commitment from Director, EC Corporate Services Branch, to assess modifications to the MIS to enhance its	RDG West & North

	continued use until its replacement by the new system (email or record of decision from meeting)	
September 30, 2014	Documentation of EcoAction business requirements for MIS upgrades provided to Corporate Services Branch	Director of Strategic Relations, West and North

Recommendation 4: Revisit EcoAction processes to determine if additional adjustments could be made to improve the timing of notification of funding. Given the seasonal nature of EcoAction projects, late notification of funding has a significant impact on the ability of funding recipients to deliver on their project proposals and are also the key reason for lapsed contribution funds. While process improvements introduced for the 2013 funding year resulted in significant improvements, the timing of funding notifications continues to fall short of the early April target. Acknowledging the significant gains made in 2013 in this area, the program should conduct an additional review of processes to determine if additional adjustments could be made to allow the program to improve the timeliness of funding notifications.

Management Response to Recommendation 4
The RDG West and North agrees with the recommendation.

Management Action
Timing of funding approvals and notifications are influenced by both program and departmental business processes. The G&Cs approval times were improved in 2013–2014 as a result of newly introduced process changes. The RDGO is committed to reviewing program processes to identify whether any further adjustments can be made towards meeting the goal of informing all project applicants of funding decisions in a timely manner. Program-specific processes will be revisited again, and a proposal developed to identify any possible areas for modification, including the possibility of changes to the application deadline in future years. Further, in addition to the continued participation of the National Coordinator in the appropriate departmental G&Cs committees and process review sub-groups aimed at finding further efficiencies in departmental G&Cs approval processes, the RDGO will initiate discussions with Corporate Finance to explore the potential for other opportunities aimed at improving the timeliness of EcoAction approvals.

Timeline	Deliverable(s)	Responsible Party
November 30, 2013	RDG W&N to meet with DG Finance and RDG Atlantic and Quebec (responsible for some aspect of the G&Cs reform) to explore opportunities to improve timelines for EcoAction within departmental G&Cs processes (record of decision from meeting)	RDG West & North
July 31, 2014	Review of program approval processes within RDG span of control, for possible implementation during funding round 36 (November 2014 application)	Regional Managers

Annex 1: Performance Indicators

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS		
Performance Indicator	**Description**	**Unit Measure**
Reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions	Includes: Carbon dioxide (CO_2); methane (CH_4); nitrous oxide (N_2O); HFCs, PFCs and SF_6.	# of t (CO_2 eq.)
Reduction of emissions of criteria air contaminants (CACs)	Includes: Sulphur oxides (SO_x); nitrogen oxides (NO_x); particulate matter (PM); volatile organic compounds (VOC); carbon monoxide (CO); and ammonia (NH_3).	# of t
Amount of energy conserved	Amount of energy calculated using GJ, kWh, m^3, litres, kg (as relevant). Calculated using usage rates.	# of kW/h
Amount of organics composted/diverted from landfill	Total kg of organics composted/diverted. May be converted to GHGs using the EC GHG Calculator for Waste Management.[51] Includes: Recycling, composting and anaerobic digestion (a treatment that digests organic waste in the absence of oxygen).	# of kg
Reduction or diversion of kg of toxic or harmful waste (per year)	Measured by weight (kg) of material sent to hazardous waste collection, items not used, items properly disposed of.	# of kg per year
Reduction of water consumption (per year)	Measured as number of litres of water reduced, reused, conserved. May be assessed via water metering (pre/post) or using standard estimates.	# of l per year
Area of shoreline protected, stabilized or improved	Converting linear km to area by capturing the depth of work and not just the shoreline.	# of ha
Percentage of recommendations from environmental management plans implemented	Only implemented recommendations will be captured.	% of recommendations
Area of habitat protected	Protected: to maintain the status or integrity of habitat (e.g. land secured through stewardship agreements). Protection noted if done within the time frame of the project or if firm commitments provided.	# of ha
Area of habitat in which management or restoration actions have been implemented through project activities	Includes improvement or restoration actions. Examples of types of actions taken: debris removal, vegetation plantings, erosion control. May include aquatic/terrestrial habitat. Converting linear km to area.	# of ha
Amount of indigenous plants, trees and shrubs planted	Projects will have built-in conditions to help ensure survival of plantings.	# of plants/ trees/shrubs
Percentage of indigenous plants, trees and shrubs planted that survived	Number of total plantings / Number of plants surviving over at least one winter.	% of plants/ trees/shrubs
Amount of installed structures used by wildlife	Total number of structures installed.	# of structures

[51] Greenhouse Gases (GHG) Calculator for Waste Management: http://www.ec.gc.ca/gdd-mw/default.asp?lang=En&n=D6A8B05A-1

CAPACITY-BUILDING INDICATORS		
Performance Indicator	**Description**	**Unit Measure**
Participants in activity(ies)	Total number of individuals reached via project activities.	# of participants
Jobs created (person/years)	Paid employment generated directly by funded projects. Jobs created include full-time, part-time, temporary and contract employment generated by the project. Calculated annually and reported in person/years.	# of jobs created
Volunteers participating directly in project	Volunteers are individuals with a role in implementing the project. Calculated annually and reported in person/years.	# of volunteers
People reached who indicated they would modify their behaviour as a result of project activities	Assessed via pre- and post-project surveys as part of project. Calculated annually and reported in person/years.	# of people

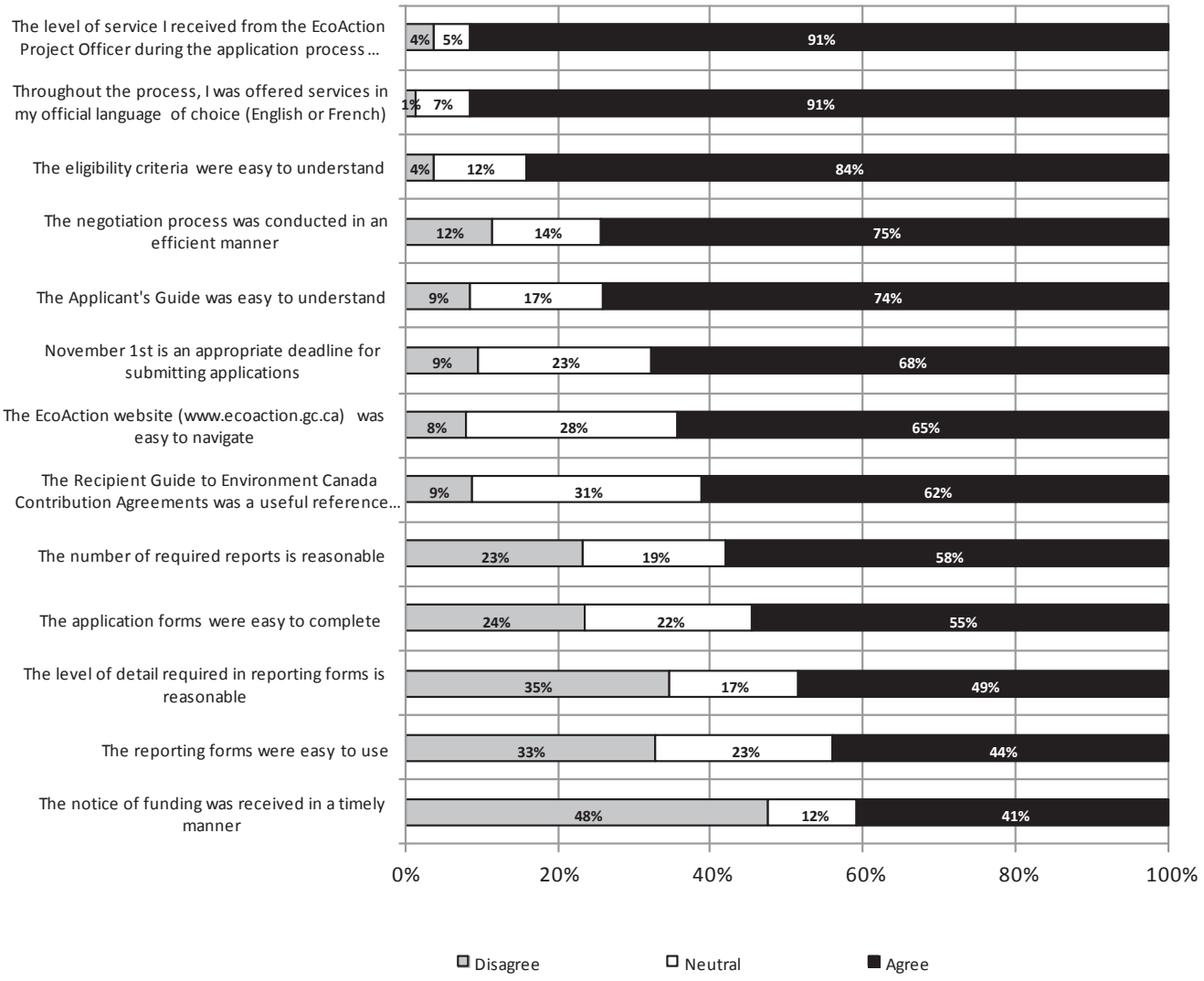
Annex 2: Summary of Findings[52]

RELEVANCE Evaluation Question	Acceptable	Opportunity for Improvement	Attention Required	Not Applicable
1. Continued need for the program	●			
2. Aligned to federal government priorities	●			
3. Program consistent with federal roles and responsibilities	●			

PERFORMANCE Evaluation Question	Acceptable	Opportunity for Improvement	Attention Required	Not Applicable
4. Achievement of intended outcomes	●			
5. Unintended outcomes	●			
6. Program design appropriate for achieving its intended outcomes	●			
7. Governance structure clear, appropriate and efficient for achieving expected results		●		
8. Program undertaking activities an delivering products in the most efficient and economical manner		●		
9. Performance data collected, reported, and used to inform decision making		●		

[52] The rating symbols and their significance are outlined in Table 3 on p. 11.

Annex 3: Assessment of Key Components of Program Delivery (Funding Recipients)



Source: Survey of Funding Recipients (2013). [53]

[53] The data shown in this figure excludes "Don't know" responses and those who did not respond in order to limit the analysis to those who had experience with the aspect of program delivery in question. The three questions related to reporting were only asked of recipients whose projects were completed.

Annex 4: Case Study Summaries

Case study 1: Engaging citizens to help protect a migratory bird

The Chimney Swift is a migratory bird listed as nationally threatened under the federal *Species at Risk Act*. It is estimated that its population has declined by 95% since 1968, in part due to deforestation. One EcoAction project consisted of engaging schools in the Maritimes to increase awareness about this threatened species and what can be done to protect its habitat. Apart from trees, Chimney Swifts use urban structures, especially chimneys, as roost and nest sites. Teachers and children observed swifts and materials were distributed to families to increase awareness of habitat protection measures that homeowners can apply to save this unique bird (e.g. not sweep or renovate chimneys during breeding season). Participants also learned about the value of the Chimney Swift as it is known to consume over 1,000 insects each day, making Chimney Swifts a highly beneficial bird in terms of pest control.

Case study 2: Community stewardship project

This community-based project engaged landowners to enter into habitat stewardship agreements to protect ecosystems. With the help of 80 volunteers (590 volunteer hours), 65 ha of sensitive ecosystems were protected through stewardship agreements (exceeding the target of 5 ha); 1,800 plants, trees and shrubs were planted (exceeding the target of 475); and a native plant nursery was established to support future conservation work. In addition, the project led to training that has contributed to the capacity of the organization to undertake further action.

Going forward, follow-up work conducted by the organization with stewardship agreement holders will ensure longer-term results. In addition, the group will encourage stewardship agreement holders to enter into conservation covenants, or donations of land over the long-term.

Case study 3: Naturalization of school yard project

A school in western Canada received EcoAction support to design and develop a naturalized area in a school yard, including trees, a garden, a water retention system (cistern), and an area where school children can grow crops of native grains on a small scale. The project enhanced the school's environment and is used for learning projects for the children. For example, special school projects allow the children to learn about the value of water and how it can be better managed. In addition, younger children can observe/draw various insects and flora under the guidance of their teacher in their own school yard for projects.

The project also engaged many community members. A large corporation contributed cash and allowed 25 of its staff members to work for three full days to complete the project, local merchants donated materials, and over 70 volunteers from the community worked on the project.

Case study 4: Shoreline protection project

A regional conservation authority in Ontario received support to restore strategic shorelines in its area. The project was highly successful in engaging landowners and mobilizing volunteers to improve the water quality of key water sources by replanting along the shorelines. EcoAction support enabled the organization to plant 19,000 new trees and shrubs along 7 km of streams and creeks. Environment Canada's support added credibility to the project and facilitated leveraging of funds, recruitment of volunteers, and encouraged more landowners to participate in the project. In addition, the project representatives noted that they are likely addressing additional environmental indicators that they have not reported on (e.g. GHGs reduced, area protected in hectares).

Case study 5: Savings derived from the installation of smart meters

A non-profit organization in the Maritimes received funding from EcoAction to recruit 100 homeowners who volunteered to have smart electricity-consumption meters in their homes. These meters provide various instant statistics to the home owners, including power usage in various periods of the day. The meters were also connected to a central system that allowed the project organizers to monitor power usage. According to the results of the project, the homeowners became more aware of the energy they consume and changed their behaviours as a result of this information. According to findings, they reduced their energy consumption by 15% over the full year of the project's time frame. This represents a substantial impact on the environment as the electrical power in that area is largely fossil-based. The project also generated substantial benefits for the consumers, as by reducing their electricity bill by 15%, the savings represent an approximate value of $240 per household per year (a conservative estimate), or $24,000 in total for the project (100 households × $240). This proof of concept impressed the provincial power company and the power company is now considering the installation of these smart meters across the province. This has the potential to lead to greater economic benefits, from both the installation of the meters and from the savings generated by the homeowners of that province, and would likely represent many millions of dollars in savings in the short term for the homeowners of that province while reducing the overall energy consumption and GHGs produced.

Case study 6: Actions to reduce GHGs and energy use in First Nations communities

The funding recipient is a First Nations and Inuit (FN/I) organization that has worked to assist FN/I communities in their region to move towards sustainable development since 2000. The goal of the EcoAction-funded project was to increase awareness of the need for specific actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in different FN/I communities and to encourage behavioural change. The project included presentations to band councils and in schools and the creation of a green action planning tool for use by community decision-makers. A website was also created to provide information.
The project had many successes. Green action plans were adopted by decision-makers in six communities. Action plans tailored to households were also distributed to an estimated 2,600 individuals. A total of 212 children received presentations in schools in 11 different communities. Further, 161 council members or organization representatives in 23 different FN/I communities were engaged. Estimates based on self-reported behaviour change from participants in some of the project activities are that 6.13 tonnes

of greenhouse gas emissions were eliminated. Seven communities, however, could not be visited because of budget constraints, lack of interest in the project or political instability. Unfortunately project organizers also found it was impossible to engage adult community members as they had proposed and thus changed the project scope to focus on youth in school. It was reported that this captive audience was likely more receptive to changing behaviours than some adults. Lessons learned for this project included the need for flexibility in scheduling site visits with FN/I communities to take into account internal requirements and constraints. A focus on youth in school was seen as more realistic for these types of awareness projects as recruiting adult participation for community forums was less successful.

Project representatives indicated that the tools developed and links established with communities will allow the organization to continue to increase awareness and modify behaviour in the communities. Green committees were created as a result of the green action plan in some of the communities. These committees continue their work towards decreasing greenhouse gas emissions. Overall, project organizers used EcoAction funding to launch an ongoing greenhouse gas emissions reduction program.

Case study 7: Pond wetland biodiversity enhancement project

The objective of this project was the restoration of a wetland to create a riparian wildlife habitat. This was to be achieved through the planting of 22,000 native plants and installing river stone riffles. To do this, the organization planned to involve the public through volunteer planting days, demonstration days, and information sessions.

The project was very successful. A steering committee was formed, outreach packages to recruit landowner participation were created and distributed and information sessions were offered to youth. Overall the project met or exceeded all its targets. For example, it planted 32,000 native plants, restored 8.5 ha of wildlife habitat (8 ha were planned) and 8.5 ha of shoreline habitat (4 were planned). The organization could not build the planned riffle, however, because the local municipality planned construction on the site where the riffle needed to be built. The organization chose to install more shoreline habitat for further river bank stabilization and to add more plants with the funding for the riffles. The funded organization was able to build capacity to undertake other environment-related projects that would require community engagement. The funded organization continues to undertake projects related to restoration and long-term sustainability in the region. Furthermore, the project's partners were expected to continue water conservation activities as well as advocacy activities through specific programs.

Case study 8: Park fragmentation restoration

An ecological society for a major urban park implemented a project to mitigate forest fragmentation that has occurred in the park. The ecological society recognized, through the results of a state of the park report, that forest fragmentation disturbs habitat and interrupts the flow of wildlife in the park. The organization used an evidence-based approach to identify the forest fragments to target. The project exceeded targets by mobilizing 349 volunteers and 1310 other participants to close unsanctioned trails by posting signs, planting trees, and installing other natural physical barriers. In addition, the group installed culvert systems to support the flow of wildlife. The project reached 102 individuals who indicated they would modify their behaviour as a result of project

activities. The project was viewed as highly successful, in large part due to the sustainability of the project. For example, a native plant garden was established, which will support future projects. In addition, a key private-sector funding partner renewed its funding contribution after the EcoAction funding ended. Furthermore, the organization's relationship with the park board was significantly strengthened through this project.

Case study 9: Breeding biology of wild and captive released Western Burrowing Owls

A natural history group in central Canada works to foster an awareness and understanding of the environment through discussions, field trips and participation in conservation projects. The group is annually involved in organized bird counts, National Wildlife Week, bird festivals and recovery projects for birds listed as species at risk (SARs), and various other conservation projects across Manitoba. The group identified a need to implement new and improved methods for reintroducing Burrowing Owl populations to southwestern Manitoba. The project also intended to raise public awareness of this endangered species while increasing the numbers and range for Burrowing Owl populations in southwestern Manitoba. The need was exacerbated by challenges in securing funding under programs targeted at SARs. For example, a favourable technical review was completed by the EC Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP), yet HSP could not fund the project due to geographic constraints to their funding.

The project increased the Burrowing Owl populations in Manitoba through a modified reintroduction program. It also led to new recovery strategies and long-term action plans for this species. Due to the extremely precarious nature of this population currently, even an increase of one documented breeding pair would be considered a success story. The key results from this project included a) increased population – Observed successful nesting of 5 captive released pairs; b) capacity building – reached 100 people who indicated they would modify their behaviour as a result of the project; c) habitat restoration – Installation of 25 nesting structures used by wildlife; d) participation of 25 volunteers; and e) creation of 6 jobs.

Annex 5: EcoAction Community Funding Program Logic Model