

Saskatchewan Environment



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Rick Bates, Director of Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment, Saskatchewan Environment



In partnership with the people of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Environment has the provincial responsibility to manage, develop, and protect Saskatchewan’s environmental and natural resources for conservation, economic, recreation, and social purposes and to ensure they are sustained for future generations. The organization manages more than 37 million hectares of Crown resource lands, including 35.5 million hectares of provincial forest. It helps protect the province’s air, water, and land from contamination, provides provincial forest fire suppression services, and operates 34 provincial parks, 150 recreation sites, 22 protected areas, eight historic sites, and three ecological reserves.

To help manage this broad mandate, Saskatchewan Environment employs 1,300 people at over 52 field locations. Executive oversight of such a geographically dispersed organization with such a broad mandate proved challenging. Initial efforts for improvement involved development of a paper-based reporting system, which, although a step forward, was labor-intensive and slow. Saskatchewan Environment chose to implement Cognos 8 Business Intelligence (BI) to provide a more efficient means of executive oversight and to help streamline reporting.

Challenges faced

“We needed a solution that could produce reports rapidly,” explains Sarah Gammell, Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment at Saskatchewan Environment. “Our paper-based system was inefficient, so we were looking for a way to improve it.”

Prior to Cognos, all reporting was done through a word processing program. Producing the organization’s seven yearly reports, specifically the quarterly reports, was labor-intensive and required a great deal of interaction

Industry:

- Government

Geography:

- Canada

Information needs:

- Web-based platform
- Scalable
- Self-service capabilities
- Sorting capabilities
- Ease-of-use and flexibility
- Robust communication features

Platforms:

- Windows Terminal Server
- Microsoft SQL Server

Solutions:

- Cognos 8 BI

Benefits:

- Improved communication within the organization
- Enhanced executive oversight and governance over projects
- Faster reporting process and the ability to easily address ad-hoc requests in a timely manner
- Ability to sort data for multiple views of progress

between Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment and the other areas of the department. Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment would first request data from the 14 branches, compile each branch’s information into one document, and then send it back out to the branches for editing.



THE NEXT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE™

Equally important, Saskatchewan Environment is often approached by other agencies for updates on projects they are involved in. These ad-hoc requests were creating a strain on the Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment unit and the department.

Strategy followed

Saskatchewan Environment sent out a request-for-proposal to evaluate BI vendors. The agency wanted a scalable, flexible, easy-to-use, Web-based offering that provided sorting and self-service capabilities. The agency also needed a solution with robust communication features.

After evaluating the submissions, the agency chose to implement Cognos 8 BI because it met the organization's technical requirements and offered a timely deployment schedule. The organization entered the Cognos 8 BI beta program and was the first organization to go live with the product in North America.

"Cognos had everything we were looking for in a BI solution. In addition to being easy to use, Cognos had the strong communication features that would help us improve access to information for staff across the department and gain a better understanding of how the organization was performing in terms of implementing our key projects," states Rick Bates, Director of Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment, Saskatchewan Environment.

Saskatchewan Environment went live with its Cognos solution in January 2006 and was able to roll out Cognos 8 BI to its department of 1,300 users ahead of schedule. To help them get the most from their new solution, Saskatchewan Environment used services from Cognos Consulting, Training, and Support.

The organization partnered with Cognos Consulting to determine the best way to convert its data from its old system. Cognos Consulting also conducted on-site training with 30 managers to get them up to speed quickly.

"Cognos Consulting was amazing," praises Gammell. "They spent the time to really learn our business and directly applied this information when mentoring our team. We learned quite a bit."

Saskatchewan Environment took advantage of five classes offered by Cognos Training to gain in-depth knowledge on topics such as metadata repositories, reporting, and scorecarding. Saskatchewan Environment also relied on Cognos Support to help troubleshoot issues the organization experienced while updating its system. "Cognos Support has been great. They are very responsive and helped us resolve issues quickly," notes Gammell.

Moving forward, Saskatchewan Environment plans to develop an executive dashboard and improve the integration of its measures and overall performance management system.

Benefits realized

"There is a good appreciation for Cognos, with everyone benefiting from the improved oversight of department activities by our executive, and improved communication between executive and staff on our plan," explains Bates.

Based on Cognos solutions, Saskatchewan Environment has been able to improve executive oversight and background information. Executives are able to monitor project implementation easily and view metrics on a broad range of activities, which they were not able to do previously. Saskatchewan Environment executives can grasp a project's status relative to objectives quickly using the easy-to-read graphic displays in Cognos 8 BI.

"With Cognos, we have improved executive oversight," states Bates. "Now executives have a clear picture of the organization's progress towards objectives on key projects. At a glance, they are able to view the status of key projects, and from there, determine next steps for projects that are off-track."

With Cognos, Saskatchewan Environment has been able to improve its reporting process and provide users with data that is more accurate, timely, and accessible. With the self-service capabilities in Cognos 8 BI, users are now able to enter information directly from the source, eliminating Strategic Planning and Corporate Assessment's involvement in the process and saving the organization a significant amount of time. "Cognos has saved us at least a couple of weeks per report," says Gammell. "We are also able to produce ad-hoc reports very quickly."

Another benefit Saskatchewan Environment has realized has been its ability to monitor initiatives by organizational structure as well as by goal or objective. Using the sorting feature, the organization can now gain immediate insight into a project's progress and see how metrics in different branches relate to one another. Prior to Cognos 8 BI, Saskatchewan Environment had to manually scroll through results to find keywords, a time-consuming and frustrating process.

"With Cognos 8 BI, results can be filtered by project, showing all metrics related to that plan and providing different views of the organization," notes Gammell.

Gammell sums up the organization's enthusiasm for Cognos. "We are happy with our Cognos solution and look forward to continuing to expand its functionality."

