

Rapid Growth Communities Team

Context

The demand for Saskatchewan's resources has created extraordinary economic growth and development in the province. Over the past five years, Saskatchewan's population has grown by nearly 80 000 people.

The growth of several of the larger urban municipalities is primarily from in-migration and from servicing smaller communities in the vicinity. Outside of city regions, this growth is focused in nodes around the locations of resource extraction, such as oil and gas fields, or mines for potash, diamonds, coal, gold, and uranium.

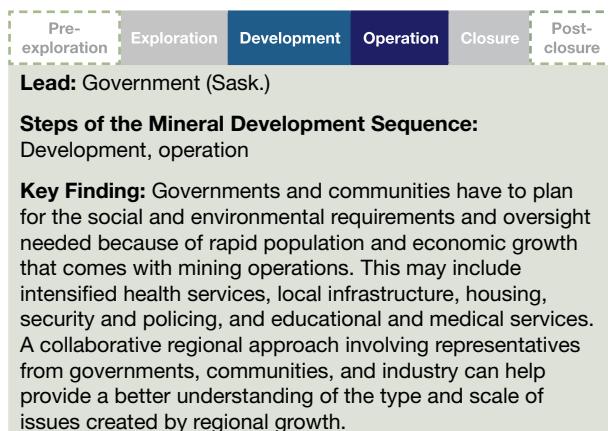
Local governments in these sometimes thinly populated regions are often sparsely staffed and challenged to respond to local growth, let alone support the strategic management of regional growth.

A growing population increases pressure on infrastructure such as water and waste-water systems, and transportation and housing infrastructure. Large capital projects like these can strain the capacity and expertise of some municipalities. The Saskatchewan Plan for Growth, announced in October 2012, directed the establishment of a multiministry rapid growth communities team (RGCT) to assist municipalities experiencing rapid growth and assigned its coordination to the Ministry of Government Relations. The team's purpose is to provide a more coordinated, efficient, and streamlined effort to assess and address the impacts of growth on regional services and infrastructure.

Description of Measures Implemented

The Humboldt-Jansen region was selected to pilot implementation of the team because of its experience in managing growth, coupled with the increased economic activity associated with the BHP Billiton Jansen potash mine development.

The team's initial makeup includes eight ministries and five Crown corporations. It is a first-of-its-kind working group of agencies that have a frontline role in helping meet the challenges of growth. A representative of BHP Billiton worked directly with the team throughout its development and deployment in the Humboldt-Jansen region.



BHP Billiton's Jansen potash mine development

The region served by the team is an area encompassing 22 municipalities adjacent to the Jansen potash mine development. The team initially focused on assessing priority provincial and local public infrastructure and services that could be affected by the new Jansen mine development.

Results

The team was formed in early 2013 and held a number of meetings with local officials and BHP Billiton in the Humboldt-Jansen region through the spring and summer. High-level assessments in 13 categories of priority provincial and local infrastructure and services were completed in September and findings were shared with local officials. The team released its Humboldt-Jansen Region Assessment report in December 2013.

The capacity assessments revealed that while the region is generally well positioned to manage growth in many of the infrastructure and service areas assessed, challenges still exist. Several broad priority themes emerged for further discussion at a more technical level: housing, transportation, and water and waste-water infrastructure.

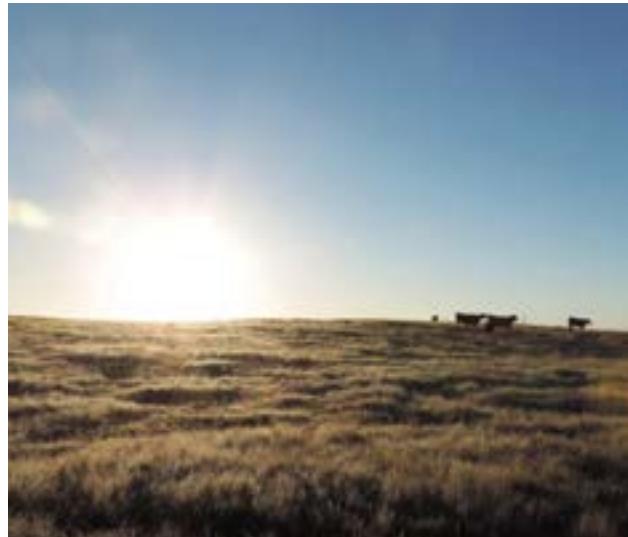
The team has identified preliminary and potential next steps applicable to each assessment. Team members are now meeting with local officials in the region to begin more focused collaboration and to provide technical assistance where possible on housing- and transportation-related issues, municipal water and waste-water infrastructure, municipal borrowing, infrastructure financing, development levies, and servicing agreements.

Lessons Learned

As this innovative approach is a first for the provincial government, and the pilot project is still under way, the lessons learned and the team's role will continue to evolve.

The members, however, have already gained experience in working as an "enterprise-wide" team and have gained better insights into the challenges and issues facing the communities in this pilot project. Teamwork has also strengthened relationships between provincial experts and municipal officials.

It is expected that the assessment report and follow-up activities for the Humboldt-Jansen pilot project will provide a better understanding of the type and scale of issues affected by growth in Saskatchewan. This knowledge can be employed in future RGCT projects across the province to strengthen community readiness for the increased economic activity related to mineral resource development.



For more information:

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