



Channel Clearing and Drainage Project Maintenance Assistance for Local Governments

2023-24 Program Guide

Program Profile

The Water Security Agency's (WSA) Channel Clearing and Drainage Project Maintenance Assistance Program is an essential initiative for Saskatchewan. The program provides cost-sharing for channel clearing activities, including the removal of obstructions caused by trees, brush, deadfall and other materials that can lead to flooding and erosion issues on roads and surrounding lands.

The program promotes water security by assisting local governments, including rural municipalities (RMs), small urban municipalities (SUMs), conservation & development area authorities (C&Ds), and watershed association boards (WABs). It also enables rural landowners to actively manage waterways on their properties, improving the health and sustainability of local ecosystems and reducing the risk of flooding and erosion.

Eligible activities under the program include obstruction removal, such as beaver dam removal, within natural watercourses or approved drainage projects. By providing cost-sharing for critical infrastructure maintenance, the program promotes the long-term health and sustainability of local waterways.



Program Eligibility

The program offers three streams of eligibility: beaver dam removal, natural channel clearing, and constructed drainage work maintenance activities. Each stream has specific eligibility requirements that must be met to qualify for funding. To determine eligibility for your proposed work, please refer to the relevant section below. Each application (and applicant) is limited to a maximum grant amount of \$100,000 in 2023-24.

Beaver Dam Removal Eligibility

1. Beaver dam removal must be completed in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Beaver Dam Removal fact sheet.
2. For applications that involve only beaver dam removal, Appendix A is not required.

Please note: Compliance with the fact sheet requirements is a necessary condition for receiving funding under this program.

Natural Channel Clearing Eligibility

Financial assistance for channel clearing activities is available only where the following criteria are met:

1. Work is conducted within natural watercourses that have not been constructed or otherwise modified to alter their natural flow pattern.
2. Deadfall, as well as standing trees and brush, may be cut at ground level and removed from within the banks of a natural watercourse.
3. Channel clearing involving removal of accumulated sediment is only eligible where:
 - a. the depth of sediment removed does not exceed 15 centimetres of total excavation over a five-year period, except for removal of significant point obstructions;
 - b. removing significant point obstructions is limited to 50 total linear metres of disturbance per kilometre of watercourse with a maximum total depth of excavation of one metre over a five-year period; and
 - c. the volume of water released must not be so significant as to result in damage to downstream lands.
4. Channel clearing must follow the *Aquatic Habitat Protection Guidelines for Channel Clearing & Drainage Project Maintenance* attached as Appendix A.
5. The proponent must have the consent of the owner of the land adjacent to the natural watercourse before starting the work.
6. Dams, control structures and water supplies authorized under provisions of *The Water Security Agency Act* must not be disturbed by work done under this program.



Constructed Drainage Project Maintenance Eligibility

Financial assistance for drainage project maintenance activities is available only where the following criteria are met:

1. Eligible drainage projects include those that have a drainage approval issued pursuant to *The Water Security Agency Act* and *Regulations*. It also includes projects approved under a previous regulatory program and have a memorandum of understanding or a Certificate of Chief Engineer.
2. Removal of obstructions including vegetation and accumulated sediment to restore a constructed or modified watercourse back to its approved design specifications (the original depth, width or slope). This includes activities within a previously channelized natural watercourse that was modified as part of the eligible drainage project.
3. Drainage Project Maintenance must follow the *Aquatic Habitat Protection Guidelines for Channel Clearing & Drainage Project Maintenance* attached as Appendix A.

Please Note: Where an eligible drainage project was issued an approval after 2016, and that approval contains specific maintenance conditions, those approval conditions shall continue to apply, and submission of Appendix A is not required.

4. Dams, control structures and water supplies authorized under provisions of *The Water Security Agency Act* must not be disturbed by work done under this program.

Please note: Grant funding for maintenance performed on constructed drainage projects is not available for urban municipalities.

Program Ineligibility Considerations

The program only covers eligible channel clearing and drainage project maintenance activities as described above. The following activities are excluded from this program and may be subject to other regulatory requirements, such as an Approval to Construct and Operate Drainage Works, as well as a project-specific Aquatic Habitat Protection Permit:

- Activities within a project that has been ordered closed or is subject to an ongoing Request for Assistance (RFA).
- Activities within approved drainage projects in extremely vulnerable watersheds, such as the Quill Lakes and Dead Moose/Houghton watersheds.
- Alteration, replacement or repair of structures, including siphons, culverts, approaches, check or drop structures, and erosion protection.
- With the exception of the removal of accumulated sediment, earthwork of any kind, including changes to the side slope or alignment of the watercourse.
- New ditch construction.
- New channelization of a natural watercourse, including deepening, straightening, widening, re-contouring (reshaping), or lining of the watercourse.
- Mowing ditches that are not part of a larger drainage network.

It is the responsibility of the proponent to obtain all necessary approvals, licences or authorizations required under municipal, provincial or federal legislation. This includes ensuring compliance with all relevant regulations and guidelines. Furthermore, the proponent must secure any required approval, consent or permission from affected landowners in order to access the work site. It is the proponent's responsibility to ensure that they have all necessary permissions and to engage in respectful communication and negotiation with affected parties.

Financial Assistance

Rebate

Financial assistance will be provided as a rebate of **50 per cent** of the eligible costs associated with channel clearing and drainage project maintenance activities carried out during the 2023-24 program year.

Please note: the rebate does not cover Goods and Services Tax (GST) or Provincial Sales Tax (PST).

To be eligible for the rebate, all applications for the 2023-24 program year must be sent to WSAWatershedServices@wsask.ca no later than **January 31, 2024**. The rebate payments will be processed and issued before the end of the fiscal year, by **March 31, 2024**. Note that only costs incurred between **April 1, 2023**, and **January 31, 2024**, will be considered eligible under the program. The program operates on a first come, first served basis. Small urban municipalities, with a population of **less than 5,000**, can submit their applications starting from **July 1, 2023**.

Rental rates for contract equipment or unit prices must not exceed rates that have been adopted by WSA and/or the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association.

The applicant must certify that channel clearing, drainage project maintenance activities undertaken, and any expenses claimed comply with program requirements. Projects may be audited to ensure they meet eligibility requirements.

Application Process

Step 1

Determine if your proposed work is an eligible channel clearing or drainage project maintenance activity.

Step 2

To ensure compliance with the guidelines, please submit the AHPP notification at least 14 days before commencing any channel clearing or drainage project maintenance work, and make sure to adhere to all the relevant conditions listed in the guideline. However, if your activities only involve beaver dam removal, you may skip Step 2 as long as you follow the guidance provided in the Beaver Dam Removal Fact Sheet.

Step 3

Submit the rebate application by **January 31, 2024**, along with all supporting documentation including invoices, timesheets, rental rates, etc.

Please complete the application form, included as Appendix B, and submit it with all necessary documentation of expenditures to the nearest Water Security Agency office listed at wsask.ca or by emailing WSAWatershedServices@wsask.ca.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is a natural watercourse?

A: Natural watercourses include any river, stream, lake, creek, spring, ravine, canyon, swamp, marsh or other flowing body of water, even if that flow is not permanent. It does not include constructed ditches or canals, or portions of a natural watercourse that has been altered to increase flow or improve drainage (e.g., by straightening, widening, deepening the original watercourse).

Q: What is an eligible drainage project?

A: An eligible drainage project is any combination of constructed or modified natural watercourses that have received a drainage approval pursuant to the *Water Security Agency Act* and *Regulations* or that was authorized under a prior regulatory program and has a valid memorandum of understanding or Certificate of Chief Engineer. Projects authorized under a prior regulatory program with a memorandum of understanding or Certificate of Chief Engineer but no drainage approval are not considered approved by WSA under *The Water Security Agency Act* although they are eligible for funding under the program. Applicants are encouraged to seek updated approval for these works to further secure their drainage works and to ensure eligibility under future funding programs.

Q: What costs are not eligible for rebate under the program?

A: Projects not eligible for a channel clearing or drainage project maintenance rebate include:

- any work completed within a large urban municipality;
- the modification, repair or replacement of any structure (e.g., a culvert);
- any construction of a new ditch;
- any modification of an eligible drainage project;
- any modification or channelization of a natural watercourse;
- any work in a drainage project or natural watercourse that is subject to an order or an unresolved Request for Assistance; and
- any work in a drainage project located within an [extreme vulnerability watershed](#) (e.g., Quill lakes).

Q: When should channel clearing or drainage project maintenance activities occur?

A: Channel clearing or drainage project maintenance affecting adjacent local governments should be coordinated and scheduled jointly to minimize impacts from accessing and re-accessing the waterway.

Channel clearing or drainage project maintenance must not proceed within the restricted activity period for your project location. Restricted activity periods are determined on a case-by-case basis according to the species of fish in the waterbody, whether those fish spawn in the spring or fall/winter, and whether the waterbody is in northern, central or southern Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan's timing windows can be found on Fisheries and Oceans Canada's webpage: [Saskatchewan Restricted Activity Timing Windows for the Protection of Fish and Fish Habitat](#). If the watercourse is non-fish bearing, there is no restricted activity period.

Q: How do you measure the depth of channel clearing?

A: The depth of channel clearing is measured from the surface of the accumulated sediment, prior to excavation, to the bottom of the excavated portion of the bed of the watercourse.

Q: Can channel clearing occur every year?

A: Yes, if you do not exceed the following guidelines.

- Over a five-year period, you can remove up to a total depth of 15 centimetres of sediment along the entire watercourse.
- For significant point obstructions you may excavate up to one metre total depth over a five-year period, provided the total area excavated is less than 50 linear metres per kilometre of watercourse.
- In either case, the excavation must not penetrate the natural bed of the watercourse.

Q: Do I need to apply for an Aquatic Habitat Protection Permit, or wait until a permit is issued for my project?

A: No, if the work is eligible under this program, you need to submit the notification form included in Appendix A. If you have not heard back from WSA within 14 days of submitting your notification form, you are free to proceed with your work by following all conditions included in Part 2 of Appendix A. Where an eligible drainage project was issued an approval after 2016, and that approval contains specific maintenance conditions, those approval conditions continue to apply, and submission of Appendix A is not required.

Q: Is it possible to get reimbursed for work performed by RM/C&D/SUM staff?

A: Yes, as long as the hourly rate submitted for equipment rental and wages is within the reasonable provincial rate typically identified through the Saskatchewan Heavy Construction Association (SHCA). The RMs/C&Ds/SUM can use their own equipment and personnel to do channel clearing work.

Q: What does the E5 number refer to on the Appendix A application form?

A: The E5 number is the beginning of a drainage file associated with a drainage approval from WSA. If an organization doesn't have a drainage approval, they are not required to submit an E5 number with their applications.

Q: Can channel clearing work be carried out on land that is not owned by the proponent?

A: Yes, the RM or other proponent can perform channel clearing work on private land, but it is the responsibility of the proponent to obtain the consent of the landowner before starting any work. The proponent must be able to provide proof of the landowner's consent if requested by the Water Security Agency.

Q: Is vegetation removal from a constructed drainage channel eligible for the program?

A: Yes, any tree, brush, cattail, or grass mowing within a constructed drainage channel is considered appropriate maintenance for the channel as it restores the channel to its designed capacity.

Q: Are roadside ditches eligible for the channel clearing rebate?

A: Roadside ditches are only eligible if they are part of a larger drainage network. Mowing roadside ditches outside of a larger drainage network is not considered eligible under the program.

Q: Why is population of 5,000 the cutoff for the program?

A: A population of 5,000 is used as a threshold for the designation of a city pursuant to Section 39 of *The Cities Act*. Additionally, municipalities with a population of 5,000 or more typically have a larger tax base and more resources available to manage their infrastructure and maintenance needs, which makes it more feasible for them to undertake channel clearing and drainage project maintenance activities without financial assistance from the program. By focusing on smaller municipalities, the program can help ensure that all communities in the province have access to resources for maintaining their waterways and mitigating flood risks, as smaller municipalities may not have the same capacity to undertake this work on their own.