

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Prairie Grain Roads Program (PGRP) is a federally funded program that addresses federal policy decisions with respect to rail freight rate changes under Bill C-34, *An Act to Amend the Canada Transportation Act*. The policy shift has led to an increased use of high throughput elevators, an increase in heavy truck traffic, and incremental damage to prairie grain roads across the Prairies. The program, which provides funding to provincial governments and municipalities for road modification projects, will be administered by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) on behalf of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). Eligible projects will improve road durability and safety for increased heavy truck traffic needed to transport grain and related commodities. In general, road upgrades include activities undertaken to widen, resurface, level, extend or realign an existing roadway.

As AAFC is providing federal funding through PFRA for these projects, PFRA is a Responsible Authority (RA) under the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (CEA Act)* and must ensure that the requirements of the *CEA Act* are met before making funding decisions that would allow projects to proceed. In order to streamline the environmental assessment process, PFRA has developed a Model Class Screening Report for prairie grain road projects undertaken in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

### 1.1 Class Screening and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*

The *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* was brought into force in 1995 to establish the Canadian environmental assessment process and applies to projects in which the federal government has decision making authority. The purpose of the *CEA Act* is to consider environmental consequences of projects before irrevocable decisions are made.

A Federal Authority (FA) “triggers”, or initiates the need for an environmental assessment when it performs one or more of the following duties, powers or functions in relation to a project:

- proposes the project;
- grants money or other financial assistance to a project;
- grants an interest in land for a project; or
- exercises a regulatory duty in relation to a project, such as issuing a permit or licence that is included in the *Law List Regulations* as prescribed in the *CEA Act*.

The majority of projects subject to *CEA Act* are assessed through a screening level assessment. Screenings are self-directed assessments, where the RA (as proponent, land administrator, funder or regulator), is responsible for the environmental assessment. Where there are a large number of projects that: deal with similar issues, are relatively small in scale and size, and have predictable and mitigable environmental effects, Section 19 of the *CEA Act* provides a mechanism for similar projects to undergo a “Class Screening”.

The class screening has been developed as a two-part assessment process involving the Model Class Screening Report and the Class Screening Project Report:

Model Class Screening Report (MCSR) - Sets out an environmental assessment process for projects within the class. The MCSR typically includes the rationale for the projects included in the class, the rationale for the scope of those projects and the factors and scope of the factors to be considered in determining the environmental effects of projects, typical environmental effects, mitigation measures and follow-up and monitoring requirements. A MCSR also describes the process and procedures under which future projects will be assessed, including responsibilities, documentation requirements, amendment mechanism and public consultation requirements.

Class Screening Project Report (CSPR) - Project specific screening report which is prepared in accordance with the procedures outlined in the MCSR. These reports contain additional site specific information to supplement information contained in the MCSR. The CSPR, together with the MCSR provide the basis for meeting the requirements of the *CEA Act*.

The *CEA Act* also includes provisions for the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (Agency) to declare, when requested, Class Screening Reports to be models for conducting screening of projects within the class.

## **1.2 Purpose of the Model Class Screening Report for Prairie Grain Road Projects**

Grain road projects undertaken by provinces or municipalities have similar planning process requirements, a generally predictable range of potential environmental effects and a generally standard suite of mitigation and impact management measures. This MCSR has been prepared in order to streamline and simplify the environmental assessment process for these types of projects. Importantly, the MCSR has also been designed to facilitate the coordination of information requirements for the various approvals required for grain road projects in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. The MCSR and the screening process provided in the report will enable the consistent consideration of the environmental effects of grain road modification projects in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and of the application of appropriate mitigation measures.

Streamlining and simplifying the environmental assessment and approval process for grain road projects in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta has been achieved through the class process in the following ways:

- The MCSR defines the process to be followed by the RA and project proponent (provincial government or municipality) in preparing a CSPR thus ensuring clarity, consistency and efficiency in the environmental assessment process for road projects across the prairies;
- The MCSR provides criteria to determine which grain road projects can be assessed under the class screening;
- The MCSR compiles information on a) environmental conditions, b) activities involved in the construction, repair, upgrading and maintenance of grain road projects; c) typical environmental effects; d) standard environmental mitigation practices, e) residual and

cumulative impacts that may result and f) follow-up and monitoring thus reducing the amount of documentation required for project specific reporting;

- The MCSR was developed in consultation with other potential government stakeholders. Standard mitigative measures were developed for certain types of projects and activities thus reducing (although not eliminating) the need for project specific referrals to other government departments; and
- The CSPR streamlines the project reporting process and ensures consistency through the implementation of a standard reporting format.

### **1.3 Organization of the Model Class Screening Report**

The Model Class Screening Report is organized as follows:

#### **Section 1 - Introduction**

Describes the Prairie Grain Roads Program and the rationale for application of a Class Screening Process.

#### **Section 2 - Development of the Model Class Screening Report**

Describes the process used to develop the Model Class Screening Report for projects under the PGRP.

#### **Section 3 - Prairie Grain Road Projects Covered by the Model**

Defines the type of grain road projects covered by the model and identifies projects not suitable for class assessment. This section also includes a description of specific project activities covered by the model (i.e. road upgrades; bridge deck modifications; borrow and aggregate pits, asphalt plants, etc.).

#### **Section 4 - Environmental Review of Prairie Grain Road Projects**

Presents an environmental assessment of prairie grain road projects in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta that includes a description of the environment, environmental effects and their significance, standard environmental mitigation practices, cumulative environmental effects, and follow-up and monitoring.

#### **Section 5 - Role of Other Federal and Provincial Authorities**

Identifies other potential Federal Authorities and provincial authorities with an interest in prairie grain road projects. This section discusses the various permits and approvals that may be required, and outlines how the MCSR can be used to coordinate mechanisms for attaining the permits and approvals.

#### **Section 6 - Application of the Model Class Screening Report**

Describes the process through which the MCSR is implemented for individual projects, including the procedures used to prepare a Class Screening Project Report (CSPR).

**Section 7 - Amending the Model Class Screening Report**  
Outlines procedures for amending the MCSR.

**Section 8 - References**

List of reference materials used to complete the Model Class Screening Report.