

2024 Annual Report

Western New Brunswick Service Commission

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Introduction

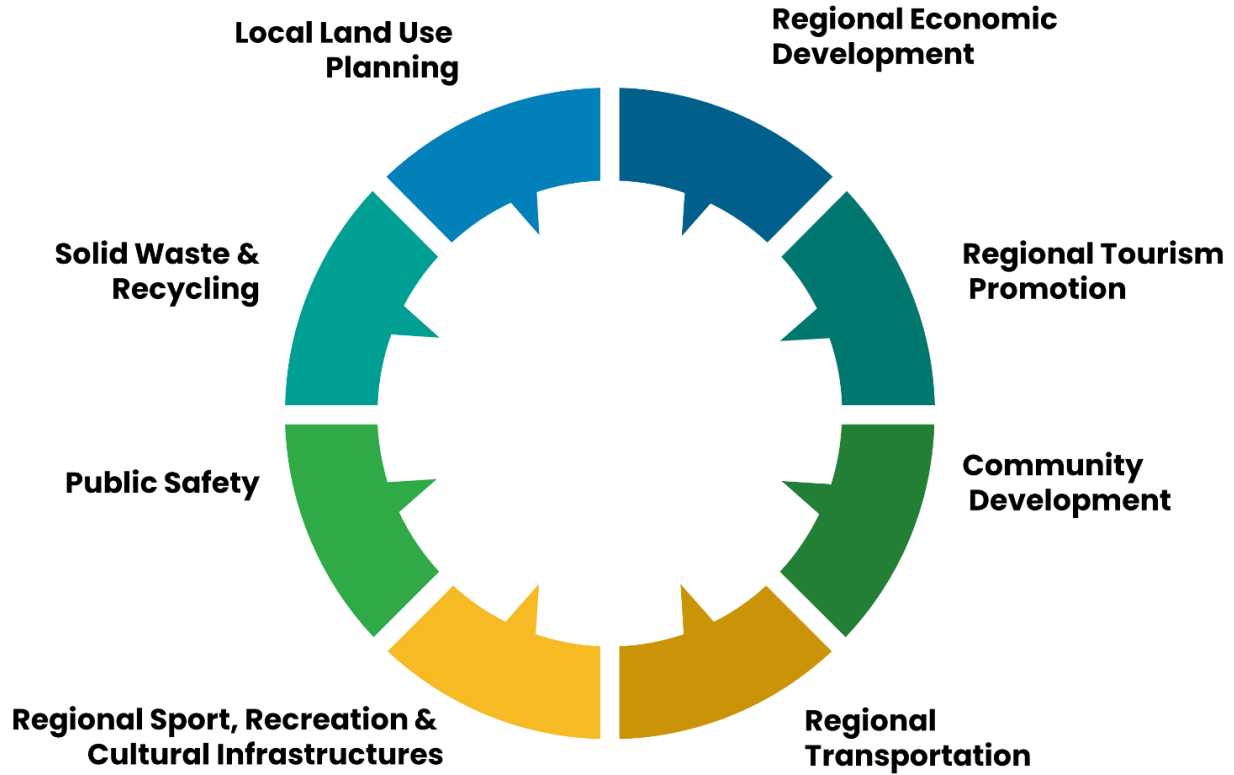
The Western New Brunswick Service Commission is pleased to present the 2024 Annual Report, which provides an overview of the Commission’s operations for the 2024 fiscal year, along with the Audited Financial Statements prepared by Lenehan McCain and Company.

History and Mandate

Following an action plan unveiled in 2011 for a new system of local governance in New Brunswick, 12 regional service commissions were created in 2013 pursuant to the Regional Service Delivery Act. This new regional governance model enables communities to work together by sharing certain services and a common vision of regional development. The new entity replaced the land use planning commissions, economic development agencies (the “Enterprise” network), and solid waste commissions across the province.

In 2020, the “Working Together for Vibrant and Sustainable Communities” initiative of the provincial Department of Local Government—including its White Paper and Green Paper—brought about a new definition of RSC accountability. The resulting legislative amendments led to a consolidation of the Regional Service Delivery Act, which redefined and specified the legislative framework governing the 12 regional service commissions. These changes resulted in the addition of six new mandated services and a restructuring of the Board of Directors.

Mandated Service



Regional Profile

The Western New Brunswick Service Commission is bordered to the west by the State of Maine. Forming part of the Upper Saint John River Valley, the predominantly rural region is home to a thriving and diverse series of communities that follow the meandering Saint John River through rolling hills, rich farmland, and picturesque scenery. The region has a total population of nearly 36,000, and agricultural production is central to its economy, alongside food processing, forestry and value-added wood products, metal fabrication, and the transportation sector.

The Commission is comprised of six municipalities, one rural district, and two First Nation communities (Tobique First Nation and Woodstock First Nation). Specifically, the Commission includes the following entities:

- The District of Tobique Valley
- The Regional Community of Southern Victoria
- The District of Carleton North
- Hartland
- Woodstock
- The Municipality of Lakeland Ridges
- The Western Valley Rural District

The presence of the Meduxnekeag, Tobique, and Saint John (Wolastoq) Rivers, along with numerous other waterways and expansive natural spaces, makes outdoor recreation a significant and attractive characteristic of the region. Proximity to regional trail networks and destinations such as Mactaquac and Mount Carleton Provincial Parks further enhances these opportunities. The region offers four-season adventures for all ages, and the communities throughout are well known for their small-town charm, community pride, and welcoming spirit.

Tourism assets such as the world's longest covered bridge and the Potato World Museum, combined with weekly farmers' markets, roadside farm stands filled with fresh produce, and a variety of festivals, provide Western NB with a wealth of tourism opportunities. The region also benefits from easy access to U.S. Interstate Highway 95 via the International Border Crossing at Houlton, Maine, as well as several secondary crossings, which help facilitate tourist travel.

Furthermore, the presence of several stable employers, a variety of amenities, and the modern services available in Woodstock, Hartland, Florenceville, Perth-Andover, and the nearby urban centres of Fredericton and Edmundston—together with surrounding rural areas—make the region highly marketable and a desirable place to live. Shifts in immigration patterns, cost of living considerations, and an East Coast way of life are all fuelling continued interest in the region.

Governance and Administration

The Commission is overseen by the Board of Directors, who are responsible for all governance-related decision making. The 2024 Board of Directors for the Western NB Service Commission was comprised of the following individuals:

- Andrew Harvey — Mayor, District of Carleton North
- Cindy McLaughlin — Mayor, Regional Municipality of Southern Victoria
- Lynn Hambrook — Representative, Western Valley Rural District
- Stephen Manuel, Supervisor of Lakeland Ridges (replaced mid-year Leonard Foster — Mayor, Municipality of Lakeland Ridges)
- Tom Eagles — Mayor, Tobique Valley
- Tracey DeMerchant — Mayor, Hartland
- Trina Jones — Mayor, Woodstock

The corporate administrative team, responsible for overseeing all operational elements of the Commission, is comprised of:

- Katelyn McGrath, CEO
- Andrea Callahan, Director of Operations
- Joan Kennedy, Manager of Finance

Strategic Planning

The Commission's Board of Directors adopted the Regional Strategy in October 2023, and the focus for 2024 was on implementing the strategic objectives contained in that document.

Several initiatives were undertaken across individual departments throughout the year. Board priorities did shift on some items, as limited staffing resources in certain areas necessitated delays, with budgeting and staffing adjustments planned for 2025.

The Commission sought to terminate its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ignite, the third-party provider of regional economic development services, with the intention of delivering those services through an internal department going forward. This decision resulted in a temporary pause in the delivery of the economic development mandate and services to member communities. However, the Board of Directors approved the CEO to advertise for the role of Director of Economic Development in late 2024, enabling the Commission to develop this service area beginning in 2025.

Department Reports

A. Local Land Use Planning

Due to the reorganization of municipalities and Local Service Districts into new municipal entities and the Rural District, as well as the addition of the LSD of New Denmark to the Commission (formerly part of NWRSC), a comparison with previous years' local planning data is not particularly meaningful. Accordingly, 2023 will serve as the base year for comparison in future reports.

In 2023, the Local Land Use Planning Department issued a total of 205 building and development permits, representing an estimated total construction value of \$38,587,462. The department also approved 103 subdivision applications and 117 planning approvals, and presented 22 discretionary planning reports.

B. Solid Waste

In 2024, the Solid Waste Department undertook several key initiatives, the most significant being the implementation of a new Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program for recycling. Pursuant to amendments to the Designated Materials Regulation under the Clean Environment Act, service commissions across the province transferred ownership and oversight of recycling programs to Recycle NB, which now oversees the Packaging and Paper Products (PPP) EPR program.

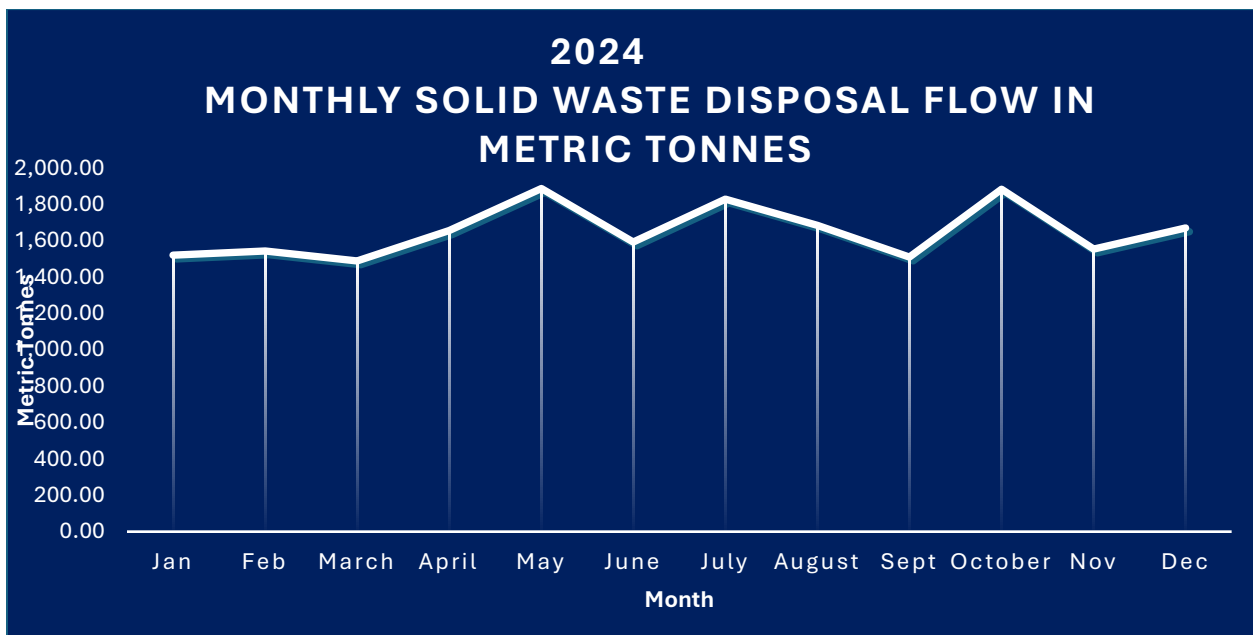
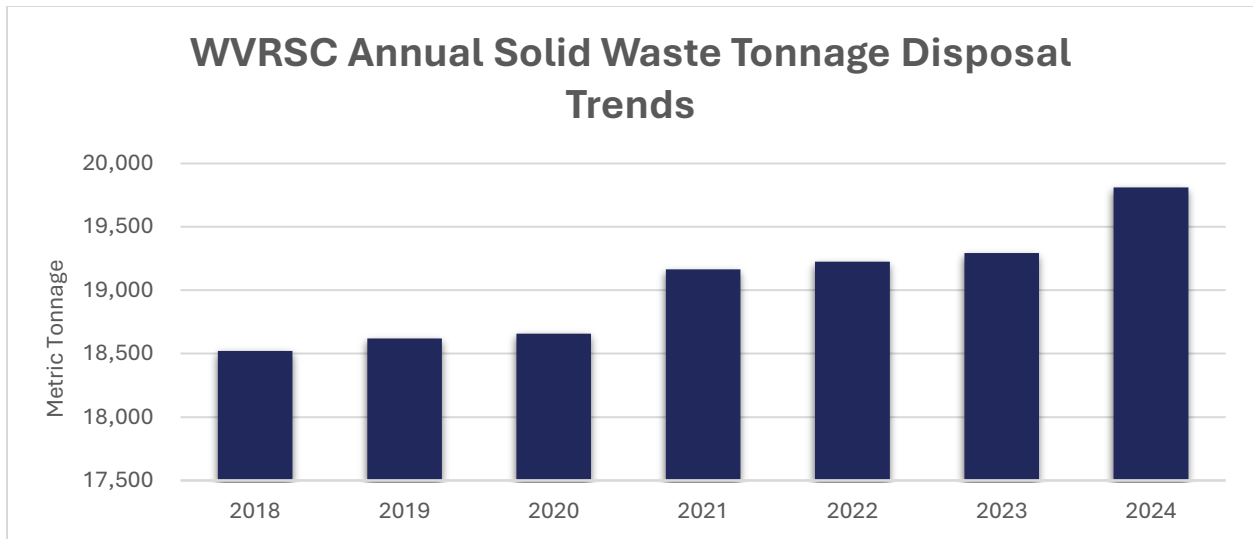
Circular Materials was selected as the program operator for New Brunswick, with a phased implementation of the PPP program beginning in May 2024 in the Western New Brunswick Service Commission region. The rollout occurred in two phases: the western half of the province in May and the remaining regions in November 2024.

The transition brought some unanticipated implications, particularly regarding the management of materials traditionally collected through community depots. Circular Materials does not accept materials from unsupervised community depots—which the Commission had maintained to serve residents without access to curbside collection, such as those living in apartments or on private roads. Consequently, the Board of Directors approved the removal of these depots, resulting in the loss of approximately 100 metric tonnes of recyclable material annually, equivalent to roughly 10% of the region's total recycling tonnage.

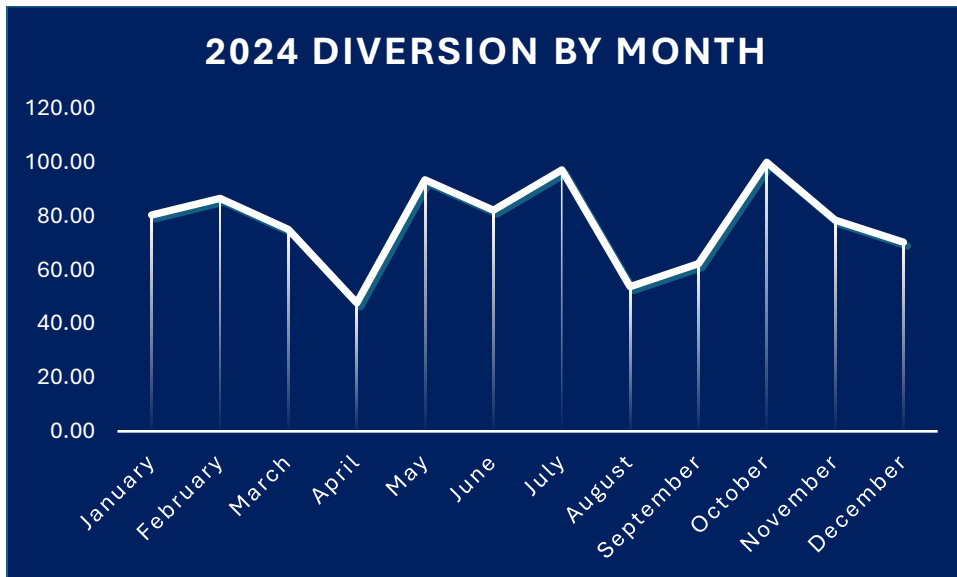
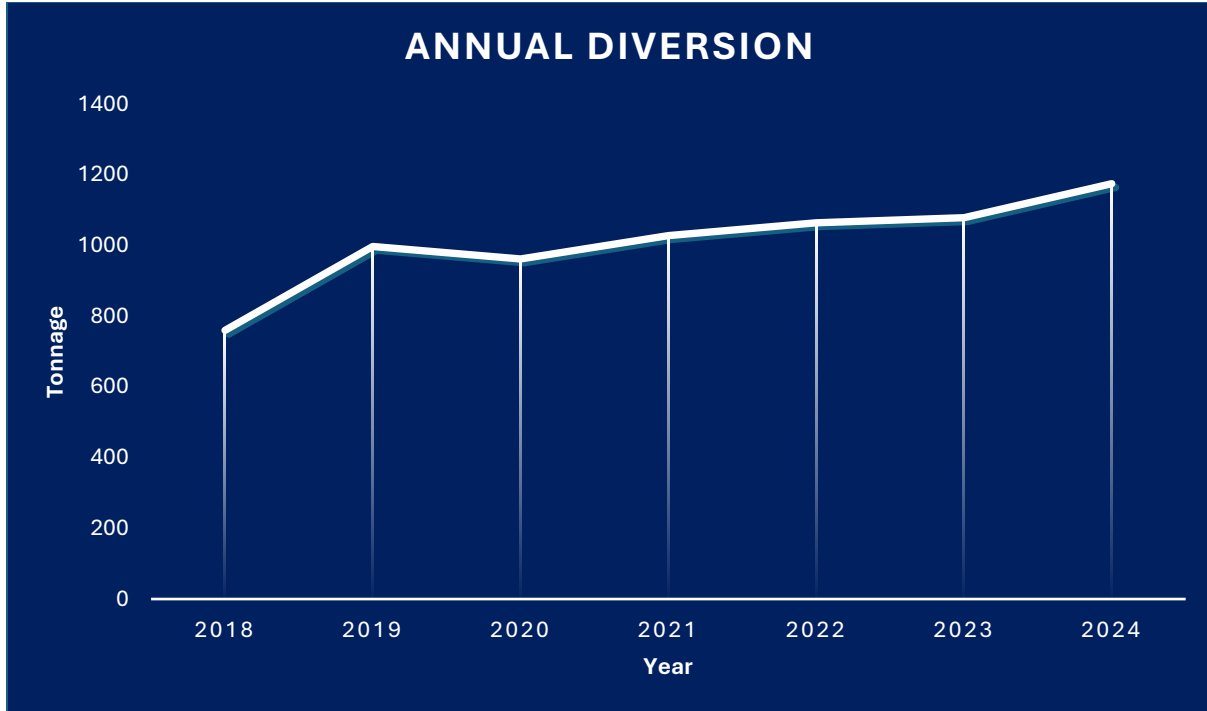
The region also experienced a notable decline in its overall diversion rate following the May 2024 program transition. As the Commission no longer manages the collection and sorting of recyclables, it is not positioned to control how the program is operated or to investigate the specific causes of this reduction. Responsibility for examining and

addressing the decline now rests with Recycle NB as the provincial oversight body for the PPP program.

Waste from Western NB is required to be disposed of at one of two provincial landfill sites, operated by the Northwest Regional Service Commission (NWRSC) and the Southwest New Brunswick Service Commission (SNBSC), with waste divided at a rate of 50/50 ($\pm 5\%$). In 2023, 48% of WNBSC waste was delivered to SNBSC and 52% to NWRSC. Overall waste tonnage for the region increased by 69 tonnes over the prior year, for a total of 19,924 metric tonnes.



Waste generated in the region is sourced from the residential, First Nations Communities, and ICI (industrial, commercial, and institutional) sectors. The annual diversion total for 2024 was 1175 metric tonnes—up 96 metric tonnes over the prior year and an increase of 178 tonnes over the diversion tonnage of 2019, the first full year of the curbside recycling program.



C. Community Development & Transportation

The Urban/Rural Rides program continued to operate throughout the region in 2024, with client numbers increasing to 171 as awareness of the service grew. Volunteer drivers provided a total of 772 rides during the year. Volunteer recruitment remained active throughout the year, beginning with 19 drivers, dipping to 17 due to relocations, and ending the year with 21 volunteers.

The service continued to serve seniors (55+) primarily with medical transportation, while also accommodating essential errands—such as grocery shopping, food bank visits, pharmacy needs, and banking—when arranged in advance with the ride coordinator. As the volunteer pool continues to grow, the service will expand to accommodate newcomers and low-income families, including stand-alone non-medical rides.

A driver training session and appreciation lunch were held in late November.

Relationship building and partnership development remained a core focus for the Community Development Coordinator in 2024. A major initiative was participation in the renewal of Overcoming Poverty Together (OPT), which included early-year training and the organization, promotion, and facilitation of community dialogues in Perth-Andover, Carleton North, and Woodstock. Each session drew engaged participants and received highly positive feedback. The insights gathered were analyzed and incorporated into the OPT4 document, shaping new provincial poverty-reduction priorities for 2025–2030.

A key highlight of the year was the planning and delivery of a Community Development Symposium in early December. Supported by special project funding from ESIC, the event offered regional non-profits a full day of professional development, including a grant writing workshop and a session on financial sustainability. Presenters from Porter O'Brien led interactive, collaborative activities, and NB211's Daniela Fernández delivered an additional presentation, contributing to the overall success of the event.

D. Regional Tourism Promotion

The focus of the Tourism Department in 2024 was the development of the West NB brand and a marketing strategy to support the launch of the region as a destination—something entirely new for Western NB.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) for the creation of the West NB Tourism website and the development of a branding and marketing strategy was awarded to WebSolution.ca in 2024. The final strategy was adopted by the Board of Directors in December 2024. The

website was developed during the year but had not yet launched to the public by year's end.

E. Economic Development

As noted above, the Western NB Service Commission moved to terminate its MOU with Ignite, which had been contracted to provide regional economic development services to the region. In late 2024, the Board approved the hiring of a Director of Economic Development—the first step toward establishing an internal department to deliver this service. The termination of the contract in July 2024, combined with subsequent discussions about the best path forward, resulted in a gap in service delivery during the second half of the year. A new Director of Economic Development was hired at the end of 2024, with a start date in the new year.

F. Public Safety

On December 11, 2024, the Public Safety Committee was relaunched with the election of a new Chair. The inaugural meeting included a broad discussion of policing, fire protection, and emergency measures planning, as well as overlapping challenges related to recruitment, funding, and border concerns arising from the then-pending American presidential election.

Throughout 2024, research, design, and content development for a Public Safety Guidance booklet was completed in draft form, with printing to follow in early 2025. The hard-copy version of the booklet is intended for residents who are not connected online, while a digital version will be made available to the broader public. The booklet consolidates guidance from provincial emergency services and supporting organizations into a single, regionally specific resource. Complementing this initiative, regular Facebook posts were published throughout the year covering common public safety topics and corresponding official guidance.

G. Regional Sport and Recreation Infrastructure

The Board of Directors has not, during or since Commission reform, identified any regional recreational infrastructure or facilities for WNBSC; therefore, no funding agreements were negotiated during the year. This mandate did, however, receive careful consideration under the development of the Regional Strategy, and several actions were identified for implementation in future years as opportunities for regional collaboration on recreation arise. One priority action identified was the development of a Regional Trail Strategy; accordingly, an RFP for this work was released in late 2024.

Financial Reporting

Regional Service Support Fund

The Western New Brunswick Service Commission receives financial support through the Regional Service Support Fund (RSSF). This fund enables the Commission to match member contributions and other revenue sources to increase funding for mandated services, provided that the activities and projects were identified within the Commission's Regional Strategy. The table in Appendix A identifies the funds received through the RSSF and how they were allocated.

Annual Financial Audit

The Board of Directors appointed Lenehan McCain and Company as the external auditor for the 2024 fiscal year. The 2024 Audit Report has been attached to this report as Appendix B.
