

Environmental Sustainability Action Plan

Environmental Scan

Executive Summary

Bruce County's Environmental Sustainability Action Plan (ESAP) is grounded in a comprehensive Environmental Scan that establishes a roadmap for taking meaningful, practical steps toward a more sustainable and climate-resilient future. Informed by departmental interviews, internal strategy reviews, external research, and municipal best practices, the scan supports Goal #7 of the County's Corporate Strategic Plan, to build capacity to adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

This foundational analysis captures current County initiatives, identifies internal strengths and gaps, and explores opportunities for greater alignment, integration, and leadership. It is structured around seven key environmental themes:

1. Corporate Sustainability Leadership
2. Climate Resilience & Adaptation
3. Climate Mitigation
4. Forest Conservation, Stewardship & Agriculture
5. Sustainable Transportation & Mobility
6. Waste Management
7. Environmental Education, Engagement & Partnerships

Key Findings

Broad, disconnected actions undertaken independently

- Sustainability initiatives are already underway across most departments. Efforts range from energy efficiency retrofits, forest stewardship, to the regional transit partnership and clean fleet transitions. However, efforts often operate independently, without a corporate-wide approach, plan and implementation. Often these efforts do not have any data collection incorporated or means of measuring their impact. There are very few Council endorsed studies and plans focused on Environmental Sustainability.

Strong internal momentum

- Staff-led innovation is driving many environmental improvements. Departments are eager to collaborate. Transportation & Environmental Services (TES) is well-positioned to lead the ESAP coordination.

Capacity gaps and data needs

- Key barriers include limited staffing resources, inconsistent Greenhouse Gases (GHG) and environmental data tracking, and a need for more formalized tracking and reporting processes.

Opportunity to formalize governance and accountability

- While enthusiasm is strong, formal structures - such as sustainability committees, departmental leads, or reporting templates - are not yet fully established. Clarifying roles, responsibilities and creating formalized processes will support corporate-wide success and longevity.

Strategic alignment and funding readiness

- The ESAP will provide a framework to align existing work and position the County to access external funding. Many of the environmentally streambed funding programs require Council endorsed studies, plans and measurable outcomes as part of their eligibility requirements.

Emerging tools can accelerate impact

- The County is beginning to adopt performance management tools like ClearPoint Strategy and can leverage best-practice frameworks (e.g., International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI)'s Building Adaptive & Resilient Communities (BARC) program, Partners for Climate Protection (PCP) program, and green procurement standards) to support integration, tracking, and funding applications.

Best practices from comparators

- Lessons learned from peer municipal counterparts highlight the value of rural-specific strategies, internal climate change resources, performance management tools, and engagement frameworks.

The Environmental Scan also considers external influences, including regulatory requirements, environmental pressures, climate risks, Indigenous partnerships, and funding opportunities. These contextual elements reinforce the urgency and complexity of local environmental sustainability and climate action.

Path Forward

Bruce County is well-positioned to take a leadership role in rural environmental sustainability and climate action. The ESAP will build on the insights from this scan to establish short-, medium-, and long-term priorities, formalize cross-departmental roles, integrate performance tracking tools, and align internal efforts with external priorities and funding opportunities.

By coordinating County efforts and partnering with Indigenous governments and organization, local municipalities, Conservation Authorities, and regional organizations, Bruce County can model climate leadership, strengthen community resilience, and foster a more sustainable future.