

### **Education Tax on Property**

One longstanding issue for SARM and rural municipalities and property owners was addressed in the 2009 Provincial Budget, being education tax on property. Beginning in 2009, mill rates for education tax on property are being set by the province. There is only one rate for each sector, province-wide. The result was a \$103 million, or 14%, total saving for property owners in 2009. The projected share of the operating costs for pre-kindergarten to Grad 12 education paid by the Province in 2009 was about 63%, up from last year's provincial funding of 51% in 2008.

### **Municipal Operating Grant Program**

The Province's Revenue Sharing program for municipalities was renamed the Municipal Operating Grant (MOG) program in the 2009 Provincial Budget and is now tied to the provincial sales tax (PST). For the 2009-10 budget year, the total funding under the program for all municipalities will be 90% of the revenue generated by 1% PST. Rural municipalities received \$48.5 million under the program in 2009. In future years the amount dedicated to the program is to be calculated based on 100% of the revenue generated by 1% PST.

### **Municipal Economic Enhancement Program**

Rural municipalities received \$19.17 million from the province under the one-time Municipal Economic Enhancement Program (MEEP). The program was meant to provide per-capita funding to municipalities to enhance the provincial economy through investment in local infrastructure improvements.

### **MREP Program**

SARM assumed responsibility from the Province for the administration of infrastructure funding under the Municipal Roads for the Economy Program (MREP) in 2009. The program combines the former Heavy Haul & High Volume road program, the Roads to Resources program, the Clearing the Path road program and the Bridge program. Provincial funding to the program was increased to \$40 million in 2009 along with another \$7 from the Federal Government's Infrastructure Stimulus Fund. A Program Management Board with representation from SARM and the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure is responsible for management of the MREP program. Further information on the MREP can be found in the annual report under "Municipal Roads for the Economy Program MREP".

### **2010 Federal Budget Submission**

SARM tendered its budget submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in August of 2009. President Marit appeared before the Standing Committee on Finance on October 18<sup>th</sup> to formally present SARM's submission. The main request in the submission was for the re-introduction of a federal rural roads program similar to the Prairie Grain Roads Program which expired in 2006.

## **Economic Development**

The SARM Board continues to consider economic development for rural Saskatchewan as a high priority. An Economic development component is included in convention and division meeting agendas whenever possible. SARM is represented on various groups involved in the promotion of economic development in the province, including the Enterprise Saskatchewan Board of Directors. As well, SARM is a member of the Saskatchewan Economic Development Association (SEDA) and Sask Tourism.

## **Nuclear Industry**

Vice President Jim Hallick represented SARM on the Province's Uranium Value Added Partnership. The twelve person committee was established to advise the government on further development of Saskatchewan's vast uranium resources. The committee released their final report in early 2009. Following the release, the province organized public hearings around the province for organizations and individuals to present their views. Director Daryl Senecal gave a presentation at one of the public hearings at which he re-stated SARM's support in principle for the development of nuclear energy in Saskatchewan. Directors Doug Steele and Don McCallum have been representing SARM on the national Nuclear Waste Management Committee. This committee is investigating opportunities regarding what to do with spent fuel cells left over from nuclear power generation.

## **Federal Lobbyist**

In 2009, 174 rural municipalities participated in the SARM lobbyist fund. SARM worked with Hill and Knowlton in many different areas. Some of the work they do for SARM includes assisting in the preparation for Ottawa meetings, suggesting lobby strategies and making meeting arrangements with key federal officials both in Ottawa and otherwise. At the 2009 Annual SARM Convention delegates passed a resolution to eliminate the separate collection of the federal lobbyist contributions and make it part of the SARM membership fee.

## **Navigable Waters**

SARM President David Marit appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment in May 2009. He addressed the committee on the concerns SARM has with certain sections of the *Navigable Waters Act*, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a "navigable water." The presentation was well-received and the committee asked several questions about the impact that the definition of navigable waters has had upon development in rural Saskatchewan.

## **Green House Gases**

SARM was active on the Green House Gas mitigation file this year. Directors Ray Orb and Don Taylor attended meetings with members of the Ministry of Environment. Directors Orb and Taylor provided the province with the perspective of rural Saskatchewan regarding ways to reduce carbon emissions particularly as it relates to agriculture. The province will be holding consultations

on its environmental legislation and offset protocols (Bill 126) in March or April. Bill 126 has gone through first reading and will likely be passed into law this summer.

### **Energy in Saskatchewan**

SARM was also invited to appear before the province's hearings on the future of energy in Saskatchewan. President David Marit appeared before the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies at which he spoke of the need to maintain reliance on coal-driven baseload power with the gradual development and introduction of alternative sources of energy like wind, solar, or nuclear.

### **Environment Legislation**

Director Don Taylor attended several meetings throughout the year on proposed changes to a few of the Acts governed by the Ministry of Environment (*The Forest Resources Management Act*, *The Environmental Management and Protection Act*, and *The Environmental Assessment Act*). The proposed changes to these Acts are expected to be introduced by 2011. The Ministry of Environment is currently undergoing a thorough overhaul and modernization and has conducted a series of stakeholder meetings to ensure the public is involved.