

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

E-33

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

E-33

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Natural Resources
and Forestry

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 26 May 2021

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Richesses
naturelles et des Forêts

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mercredi 26 mai 2021

Chair: Peter Tabuns
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Peter Tabuns
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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House Publications and Language Services
Room 500, West Wing, Legislative Building
111 Wellesley Street West, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Telephone 416-325-7400; fax 416-325-7430
Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



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Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 26 May 2021

Mercredi 26 mai 2021

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1 and by video conference.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Good morning, honourable members. In the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair, it is my duty to call upon you to elect an Acting Chair. Are there any nominations? I have MPP Rakocevic in the room. If I can just get a nomination. Yes, MPP Monteith-Farrell?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Hi. I nominate MPP Rakocevic.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Thank you. Does the member accept the nomination?

Mr. Tom Rakocevic: Yes.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna): Okay. Are there any further nominations? There being no further nominations, I declare the nominations closed and MPP Rakocevic elected Acting Chair of the committee.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Good morning, everyone. I hope you're all well and that everyone is staying safe and healthy. I'll do an attendance check and go over some of the guidelines for our new format of committee meetings that include remote participation and physical distancing. I will start with the attendance check, and I will ask for attendance again at the end of our pre-meeting, in case anyone else has joined us.

I have here MPP Armstrong—okay, we don't see her. MPP Barrett? Can you confirm?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Toby Barrett, MPP. I'm in Ontario, in Port Dover.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. MPP Armstrong, I called your name earlier. I see you there now. Can you confirm that it's you?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, Chair. MPP Teresa Armstrong, in London, Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. MPP Cuzzetto?

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: It's MPP Rudy Cuzzetto. I'm here in Port Credit.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you very much.

MPP Monteith-Farrell?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: MPP Judith Monteith-Farrell, in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Great. MPP Michael Parsa?

Mr. Michael Parsa: It is Michael Parsa, and I am in Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. MPP Randy Pettapiece?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Randy Pettapiece, in Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. MPP Donna Skelly?

Ms. Donna Skelly: It is MPP Donna Skelly. I'm in Hamilton.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. We have some substitutions—MPP Mike Harris for MPP Jane McKenna. Are you there, Mike?

Mr. Mike Harris: I am. I am here in Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Awesome.

I also have the presence of MPP Guy Bourgoon in the meeting. Can you confirm you're here?

Mr. Guy Bourgoon: It's Guy Bourgoon in Kapuskasing.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Oh, I apologize—MPP Lorne Coe, can you confirm that you are in attendance?

Mr. Lorne Coe: I'm joining the meeting today from the great town of Whitby, Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thanks for being here.

I'm going to go over the participation guidelines. For the Zoom participants, please be aware that broadcast and recording will be controlling your microphones, as they usually would in committee. Depending on the version of Zoom you are using, you may have been asked to grant permission to unmute when you joined. If you accepted, the broadcast operator will be able to activate your microphone once I recognize you. Participants using older versions of Zoom may still get a request to unmute your microphone before you are able to speak. Please wait for the unmute notification before trying to unmute.

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As a reminder to all participants, all debate should be directed through the Chair. Should you wish to speak, please raise your hand, and I will acknowledge you and provide you with the opportunity to speak.

I will go over the voting process for clarity. If we have to hold a vote during today's meeting, it will be through a

show of hands. I will start by asking, “Are the members ready to vote?” I will ask, “All those in favour, please raise your hands.” The Clerk will count raised hands. I will then ask, “All those opposed, please raise your hand.” Again, the Clerk will count raised hands. I will then declare the vote. Unless someone specifically asks for a recorded vote after I have asked whether the members are ready to vote, the breakdown of the vote will not show up in Hansard.

Are there any questions? Seeing none, have any other members joined us since I did the attendance check at the beginning of this pre-meeting? Nobody? Okay, so I think we can begin straight into the meeting.

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We are going to resume consideration of vote 2101 of the estimates of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. There is now a total of 10 hours and six minutes remaining for the review of these estimates. When the committee adjourned yesterday, the official opposition had 14 minutes and 16 seconds remaining.

Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Armstrong has indicated she has a question or a comment through the icon.

Your question or comment, MPP Armstrong?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I only point this out because we’re on Zoom and I’m using my computer. When you asked if anybody had a question, of course, I’m muted, so I can’t say, “Yes, I have a question,” so it took me a little bit of time to get my hand raised. My point is, when you are giving us instructions, can you speak a little slower so we have time to respond, and if we’re doing a vote, after you say whatever it is we’re voting on, could you ask, “Does anyone need to hear that again?” in case somebody missed it? With the new technology, I’m finding it goes really quick, and by the time I get a chance to respond, I’m a little bit late. So that’s my ask. Thank you, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): My apologies. I kind of breezed through this one because I think we’ve all heard this about 100 times each now during Zoom, but point taken: I’ll definitely read slower.

MPP Monteith-Farrell, did you have a question or a comment?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: No, I guess I was starting the meeting.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Oh, okay. You were the one who was going to speak. Again, I will give a two-minute warning and a 30-second warning right at the end of your time. You can begin.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Good morning, everyone. There are no thunderstorms here in Thunder Bay today, so hopefully my Internet and everything else is going to work just fine.

I’m going to continue just in the vein of a little bit about invasive species. I’d like to ask, what kind of coordination

does the MNRF maintain with MECP to monitor invasive species activities across both ministries or both jurisdictions?

Hon. John Yakabuski: You can hear me fine, right? We changed the system up here for today because we were having some issues yesterday with feedback and stuff like that.

That’s a great question. Invasive species are a huge challenge, not only here in Ontario but everywhere these days, because the world has gotten smaller, and things that weren’t naturally occurring in one environment have now been transferred from other environments.

It’s a fresh year, and we added a number of species to the invasive species list this year, including wild pigs, which I’m sure you have heard plenty about in the last number of months. It’s one that we’ve been, quite frankly, focusing on, and we’re getting the word out that this is a real threat here in Ontario because of what we have seen happen in other jurisdictions here in Canada, particularly in Saskatchewan, where it has been described as out of control. They’ve lost the ability to deal with that situation because it has become so pervasive. We don’t want that to happen here in Ontario, so that’s one of the reasons we’ve been focusing on it. We recognize the importance of prevention, early detection and response and eradication. That’s one of the things we’ve advised people—that if they come across wild pigs, don’t attempt to shoot them or kill them themselves, because that’s only going to encourage repopulation. Our research tells us that they haven’t reached the point where they are reproducing here in Ontario yet, and that’s something we want to, clearly, avoid by having early detection.

0910

We work with the Invasive Species Centre—we have a significant contribution to them, but of course, all ministries that have anything to do with the land, we’re all inclined here.

I’m going to pass this on to Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, and she will give you more details on that question, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Good morning. I’m Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, deputy minister, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Thank you for the question.

Just before I answer that question—MPP Monteith-Farrell, I know you had a couple of questions for us yesterday that we didn’t have a chance to get back to you on. So I will offer that, on your Auditor General question, if you’d like us to come back to that one today, we’re happy to do so, as well.

As for invasive species, absolutely, as the minister said, we work quite closely with other ministries.

You mentioned wild pigs. We work closely with OMAFRA to discuss the importance of controlling that invasive species.

I will pass this question over to Craig Brown, our ADM for policy division, who can speak a little bit more about the work we’ve done on the basis of [*inaudible*] that we collaborate with.

Mr. Craig Brown: Good morning, everyone. I'm Craig Brown, the assistant deputy minister of policy at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. Thank you very much for the question.

As both the minister and the deputy indicated, we do work with several partners to control and mitigate invasive species in the province. Invasive species do pose a significant threat to the economy in Ontario. They pose significant dollars—billions of dollars.

An example of an invasive species that I think many people are familiar with—you'll certainly see it if you drive along the provincial highway corridors—is phragmites. It's a tall grass, and it has been expanding—particularly across southern Ontario, but you also see it now in parts of the north—over the past 10 or 15 years. We do work closely with a number of partners. MECP is one of them, and we work with them to register control agents that we use to help control the spread of phragmites. In this case, it's to apply an over-water herbicide.

Other ministries that we work with are OMAFRA—the minister mentioned wild pigs, and we work very closely with OMAFRA on that file; phragmites—we work closely with MTO. We also work with other agencies, including Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency. But again, that's to use over-water herbicide to control certain species. We also support work, too, by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the University of Toronto to identify other biological control agents for certain invasive species that are occurring in Ontario.

I hope that answers the question.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Partially; I've got more questions about invasive—it's proposed that we're to add 12 new species to the invasive species list in Ontario. What I'm wondering about is, what is the proposed plan to tackle these species, and will additional funding be diverted or required to do that work?

Interjection.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for that supplementary, MPP Monteith-Farrell. I'll go back to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to give you more details on the 12 species that have been added to the list and some of the steps that we're taking to recognize those further challenges.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Craig, if you can talk about the various species that we have recently listed.

I'll pass it over to Craig Brown, ADM, policy division.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thanks again for the follow-up question.

The majority of the species that have been identified are species that are not yet in Ontario, or at least they're not well established. Our goal is to be proactive and to keep them out or prevent them from being established in the province. Once an invasive species does become established, it is very difficult, often, to control its spread. Phragmites I've mentioned already. Zebra mussels is another one. Once they do become established in the province, they're very hard to remove. So we are taking a

very proactive approach by listing species that we know pose a threat to Ontario. We do look at neighbouring jurisdictions and the pervasiveness of invasive species in those locations, and want to ensure that we're taking action to prevent them from coming here into Ontario.

There's an aquatic species—forgive me, I don't have the list of the 10 in front of me right now, but one that I do recall is a fish, tench, and Prussian carp, I think, is another one, too, that we know could pose a threat to our ecosystem. We want to be proactive and prevent them from being established in the province.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Does it require additional funding to do this because we're expanding this proactive work?

Mr. Craig Brown: For the ones that are not yet established in Ontario, we can manage within our existing allocation. We don't have to take any responsive action to address them because they have not yet been established in the province.

0920

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: And the total amount of money that is being spent on invasive species, is that—as mentioned, it's MTO, MECP, yourselves. Is there any way that we measure that, as a government—all the money that we're spending on invasive species, since each ministry has its own—

Mr. Craig Brown: I will have to confirm that with you. We invest around \$2 million in our invasive species program. I'd have to follow up with respect to a global number.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: It's intriguing work. I'm fascinated by it, actually. I know that the federal government also has money invested in it. Just the cost of people being careless and bringing these pests into our environment—it's very costly, obviously.

Before we go forward with another line of questioning, did we want to finish off from yesterday—the responses?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): About a minute and a half.

Hon. John Yakabuski: The responses, yes; I'll allow Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to touch base with you on that.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: If I recall correctly, MPP Monteith-Farrell, you were asking about our work with First Nations. Is that correct?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: The audit that was carried out last year from the Ontario Auditor General with respect to conserving the natural environment with protected areas was led primarily through MECP, but there were components that were related to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. There were two related to working with First Nations. The first one was related to the Far North Act, and the recommendation was—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: —to continue to work jointly with First Nations and have timely

decisions around establishing protected areas and work to allow development in the Far North. So the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry indicated that we would continue to work with willing First Nations to complete community-based land use plans. As you know, community-based land use plans are a joint process between First Nations and Ontario, but planning is initiated by the—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're out of time.

We have 20 minutes to the government side. MPP Harris, please proceed.

Mr. Mike Harris: Good morning, Chair.

Thank you again, Minister, staff and everyone who's here participating in committee today.

We'll get right to it, because there's probably going to be a fairly lengthy answer to this question, and it's something that a lot of people in Ontario are probably going to be eager to hear.

When we talk about recreational fishing here in the province—it's big business. Yesterday, I think the fact was brought up that it generates about \$1.7 billion in economic activity, and the overwhelming majority of that goes to rural and northern Ontario.

I see that we have a couple of rural and northern Ontario members on here today, so they'll probably be pretty interested in what the minister and staff have to say about this.

When we talk about fishing and different opportunities that there are across the province, I know that fish stocking is obviously one of the things that makes up a big chunk of what the ministry does to help promote fishing opportunities here in the province.

I was hoping the minister and staff could give us a bit more detail on some of the efforts over the last couple of years when it comes to stocking programs—how those are being rolled out, how funding is being invested in those, and where you see them going in the future.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you not only for the question but for your advocacy on this issue and your leadership, particularly when it comes to fish and wildlife issues in our ministry. I know how passionate you are about fishing. So you're not only an MPP asking the question; you're wondering about your next catch too. We really do appreciate your leadership and advocacy on this thing.

When you've got over 250,000 lakes and countless rivers and streams here in the province of Ontario, when you think about that, that's just mind-boggling. As a result of that, we have one of the best freshwater fisheries in the world, world-class angling opportunities and some of the most sought-after game fishing you've ever had.

I know yesterday you were talking about watching episodes of North Woods Law. We don't see as many of these shows as we used to on television. There used to be a lot of fishing shows on television, and so many times those expeditions took place in the province of Ontario. We saw so many opportunities for trophy fish and getting strikes with every cast, so to speak, in so many of our lakes

that it really makes it a destination for tourism as well as local angling.

So if you want to make sure that that \$1.7 billion continues to flow into the pockets of northerners, rural outfitters and retailers, and everybody else who is part of the economic circle, if you want to call it that, who benefits from the fishing industry, you've got to make sure that our lakes continue to be targets for anglers.

One of the ways we do that is through our fish stocking program. We stock over eight million fish each year in the province of Ontario. Some people say, "Are you guys stocking anymore?" I hear that all the time: "Do you stock the lakes anymore?" Just to the tune of about eight million fish each and every year, to ensure that those populations are maintained.

I know we were hearing a story yesterday about a gentleman who has been fishing for over 80 years, and he talked about how the fishing was so much better 70 years ago. Well, we didn't have a \$1.7-billion fishing industry at that time either. So there's a great deal of stress and pressures on our lakes because it is so popular. That's why we have to maintain a rigorous fish stocking program.

I'm going to let Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark provide you with more details on the program here in Ontario.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister mentioned, more than 250,000 lakes and eight million fish each year are stocked. It's a very busy program.

Tracey Mill, our ADM, provincial services division, would be able to describe in more detail the work that's undertaken and what we invest in the fisheries. She not only has oversight into the commercial fishery but also the lake units that do fisheries assessment, as well as our fish cultures.

Over to you, Tracey Mill.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you very much, Minister and Deputy.

As the minister has noted, Ontario's fisheries do provide a tremendous social, cultural and economic benefit to the people of Ontario. I believe the minister mentioned yesterday that we have about 1.5 million active anglers who enjoy Ontario's recreational fisheries. And as the minister mentioned, we are looking at a \$1.75-billion-a-year industry through angling purchases as well as things like trips related to recreational fishing in Ontario.

The ministry has responsibility for managing this important resource and promoting it both from that type of recreational and commercial fishing activity, but also from a sustainability perspective, and ensuring that we have quality fisheries, not just for people who wish to enjoy that resource today, but also for the future.

As the deputy mentioned, Ontario has very diverse fishing opportunities, spanning from excellent salmon and trout fishing in the Great Lakes to walleye and pike in the north. More recently, we have been promoting urban fishing opportunities in the greater Toronto area for a wide range of species so that individuals who live in our urban

centres can actually start to enjoy angling opportunities closer to home.

0930

Recreational fishing, as you know, is a key tourism driver in Ontario, particularly for rural and northern Ontario communities. As we said yesterday, tourism has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. But at the same time, I wanted to offer a little bit of an optimistic view in terms of angling in Ontario, because what we did notice over the past year is, despite the pandemic, many Ontarians have turned to fishing as a safe and affordable outdoor activity that they can do with their families. We saw evidence through the sale of our resident fishing licences last summer. We had about 49,000 more anglers in 2021 versus the 2019-20 fiscal year. It has certainly been an objective of our program to encourage and promote angling opportunities amongst the residents of Ontario, so we are hoping that some of the challenges that people encountered this year with the pandemic and their opportunity to get out and to partake in fishing opportunities in Ontario is something that we can continue in the years to come.

The deputy also mentioned that part of our fishing program within the ministry includes our commercial fishery, and I just wanted to briefly speak a bit about that. In addition to our recreational fishery, perhaps a slightly not known fact for many Ontarians is that we have quite a robust commercial fishery, with more than 600 licensed commercial fishers across the province. Ontario's commercial fishery is one of the largest freshwater commercial fisheries in North America and, in fact, across the world. We have a total landed value of just over \$40 million each year, with spinoff economic benefits of about \$200 million coming from our commercial fishery, with Lake Erie's commercial fishery accounting for more than 80% of that total commercial fishing effort.

The commercial fishery contributes approximately \$2 million to the ministry, as well, through licence fees and royalties, but as the minister noted yesterday, in recognition of some of the challenges that the commercial fishing industry was facing, like other industries during the pandemic, we waived the commercial fishing royalties in 2020 and provided this relief to the industry. We also refunded any royalties that might have been paid last year. We're continuing to monitor the commercial fishery this year and to work with the Ontario commercial fishing industry and other commercial fishers to understand what the impact might be in this coming year. To support the commercial fishery in Ontario, we do conduct extensive monitoring of both the commercial harvest and the population levels of commercial species, and we use this information to annually set the sustainable harvest quotas.

One of the other things that we're quite proud of in terms of the commercial fishery is that in 2015, Ontario's commercial fishing industry obtained what is known as the Marine Stewardship Council certification for Lake Erie yellow perch and walleye. This certification is supported by a strong science and management system from the ministry. It's an internationally recognized eco

certification and eco labelling program, and it is an important marketing tool for our commercial fishery on Lake Erie.

One of the other commercial fisheries that I thought I would mention is the many Indigenous communities in Ontario that hold Aboriginal or treaty rights to fish, including commercial rights to fish. We have several First Nation commercial fisheries across Ontario, most of which have roots in traditional fishing culture, and the First Nation commercial fisheries are of significant economic and cultural importance to those communities. The most active Indigenous commercial fisheries are found on Lake Huron, Lake Superior and Lake Nipissing.

PA Harris has mentioned some of the important activities associated with fish stocking, which is one of the key activities to support fishing in Ontario. Fish stocking protects, enhances and rebuilds fishing populations. It creates additional fishing opportunities for recreational anglers by providing more chances to catch popular sport fish species like salmon and trout. It allows anglers to have longer fishing seasons for higher catch limits in some areas. In some cases, it also diverts the pressure away from popular angling spots or from species that are a little bit more vulnerable.

Fish for stocking are raised at nine provincially operated fish culture stations and one that is operated via our partner agreement. Those fish culture stations are found in Normandale, which is in southwestern Ontario; Dorion, up near Thunder Bay; Tarentorus, in Sault Ste. Marie; Blue Jay Creek, on Manitoulin Island; North Bay; Hill's Lake, near Timmins; Chatsworth, in the Owen Sound area; and White Lake. And Ringwood is the fish culture station that we operate in partnership with another stakeholder.

As the minister noted, each year MNRF stocks approximately eight million fish into more than 12,000 water bodies. I will mention that we invest about \$6.9 million, almost \$7 million, annually for our fish culture program. Half of the fish that we produce are stocked into the Great Lakes and half into our inland lakes. I will also mention that we provide young fish or eggs to several community hatcheries for their stocking efforts as well. Some of the species that are raised in our fish culture stations include much sought-after species like Atlantic salmon, brook trout, lake trout, lake fish, walleye and chinook salmon.

In addition to the fish stocking and the fish culture activities, to support recreational fishing in Ontario, we have been working extensively over the last year or so to improve our customer service and access to information and licence sales for fishing activities. In the past 10 years, we've made significant advances, moving away from a purely paper-based system to successively enhanced online and digital channels. But as MPP Monteith-Farrell noted yesterday, several of our communities in Ontario don't necessarily have widespread access to Internet or good bandwidth, so we have maintained our in-person channels for purchasing of licences and other products like that.

The ministry runs a great program to teach new—yes, PA Harris?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry. MPP Harris has his hand up.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Chair. How much time do we have left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Five minutes.

Mr. Mike Harris: I was wondering, ADM Mill, would we be able to talk a little bit about the Atlantic salmon stocking programs in the Great Lakes? I don't know how much information we've got on that right off the top, but I know that has always been a bit of a contentious subject. Maybe I'll be a bit selfish and try to get a little bit more information for myself on this one. Maybe some of the Great Lakes stocking programs—if we could highlight a little bit more about those, some of the efforts with the salmon species, whether that be chinook or coho salmon. I know there has been a great effort by the ministry over many, many years to try to reintroduce some of the natural Atlantic salmon populations into areas around the Great Lakes. I'm just curious if we might be able to pivot over to that.

Ms. Tracey Mill: I don't have the specific details with me right now. I can get you the more recent information regarding the numbers of salmon that we stocked. We're just sort of beginning that process this year, so what I'll look for is those numbers from last year to provide you.

The Atlantic salmon stocking program in Lake Ontario, I agree, has been a long-standing program, operated in partnership with a number of other partners that we have, including, at one time, Ontario Hydro. We do produce those fish in our fish culture stations and use both our own staff to stock into tributaries into Lake Ontario but also a number of volunteers.

So if you'll bear with me, I'll get some of those numbers for you from last season.

0940

Mr. Mike Harris: Well, yes, and we could talk about that a little bit off-line too. I would be curious to see how some of that stuff is going.

When we talk about fish stocking in the Great Lakes as well, obviously, it's interjurisdictional. So we're also dealing with our partners in the US. How involved are they? How much do we talk to them about what's going on with stocking? I would assume that they also do some stocking. You've also had an opportunity to sit, I believe, on the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, so you should, hopefully, be able to shed more light on that.

Ms. Tracey Mill: You are correct; one of the unique and complex factors of managing the Great Lakes fisheries is that we do that with international partners, with a number of the states. As many of you may be aware, we have divided the province, in terms of fisheries, into fishery management zones. The Great Lakes are part of that fishery management zone process. Part of the planning process for each of the fisheries is to engage with various advisory committees for the Great Lakes—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you—where we do have international partners. We work very closely with them, both

in terms of assessing the fishery's population and making decisions around stocking activities.

You are correct that many of the states also stock into our Great Lakes. But those decisions are part of a joint process that both our lake unit managers are part of—and as you referenced, are also part of an international joint commission known as the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. So decisions about what is stocked, quantities that are put in; decisions around what not to stock—because, as we've discovered, fish do not necessarily respect the international boundaries. We often do find times that fish that is stocked either by us or by our US counterparts end up being harvested on the other side of that boundary line.

So we do engage in very frequent, both informal and formal, processes of managing those fisheries with our international partners.

Mr. Mike Harris: That's great. I really appreciate the wealth of knowledge that you've been able to bring to the committee. I know that ADM Brown, as well, has been very good. We were having a little bit of a chat off-line with some of the other committee members yesterday, and they wanted to pass along a thank you for all the information that you guys have been able to bring forward. Thank you very much.

Chair, I'm pretty sure that's going to be close to our time, so we'll move on to the next questions.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Your internal clock is working very well. You were at seven seconds.

We're going to move to the official opposition side. MPP Bourgouin.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Good morning, everyone. My first question—I'm not sure if it was asked yesterday, but I'm going to ask it anyway because I wasn't here yesterday.

The reopening of crown land, you can imagine, Minister—and I thank the minister for being here this morning. You can imagine that our offices are being flooded with that question: “When will crown land be reopened?” For people up north, in northern ridings, crown land is our playground, is—if I can use the term—our golf course. And crown land is huge. The constituents can't understand why we can't access and go camping—because people go out there and they fish, they camp overnight with their families. Of course, they're wondering why crown lands are still not open. I know you gave us previous answers in some question periods, but the constituents are really asking, “Why can't we access and stay overnight when the crown lands are so huge in northern Ontario, or in Ontario, period?” When can we expect crown lands to be reopened?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Bourgouin, for that question, although I would say it's probably more appropriate for question period.

Those are discussions that we continue to have, particularly with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks and their decision to close overnight camping at provincial parks while we're under the stay-at-home order. We're working closely with them, because

one of the challenges we were concerned about was, if you have one closed and one open, you would drive significant numbers to the other.

It's better today than it was a few days back, but we're also in a very precarious position when it came to the wildland fires in the north. We're experiencing some terrible dry weather, which has certainly had an impact on our decisions and concerns with respect to penetration into the forest as well.

We continue to have those discussions at the ministry and the cabinet level. This would not be the place for me to be indicating when it may or may not, because I don't have that. Quite frankly, no decision has been made; I want to be clear about that.

I do understand the desire of your constituents, and in fact, all the members in the north's constituents, including my riding of Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke, which is about 50% crown land—not to the same extent as the electoral districts in the north in many cases, but certainly it has the largest percentage of any county in the province, in Renfrew county, I suppose other than districts, obviously, up north. So it's an issue for me as well. I hear about it every day. Hopefully, we'll have some answers in the near future.

We want to get the crown land back open, but we have to ensure that we're doing it in a safe and measured way.

Mr. Guy Bourgouin: Thanks, Minister.

I want to thank Madam Mill for the information on fisheries, because I'm an avid fisherman. I've stocked lakes with my kids, and I was part of a lot of clubs doing that. Even in Kapuskasing, with Les Scouts, we've stocked lakes in our region. So I can appreciate that.

My question is mostly around moose hunting and the new system. We're getting a lot of questions regarding the party hunting part of it, because a lot of people are concerned with the—we've seen tags go down in some townships or areas that tags are allocated. I have no problem with party hunting; au contraire, I party hunt with my group.

We've seen in other jurisdictions, when it comes to party hunting, once an animal is shot, there have to be so many tags on the moose. In other words, let's say for the sake of argument that you shoot a moose in zone 22; you're party hunting, and for one moose, you could allocate there need to be four hunters to tag this. You tag the moose, so four hunters have tagged. That means four hunters are out of the forest, not continuing to hunt. Right now, all that needs to happen is that we shoot a moose, the person who has a tag tags it, and the rest of the party hunters can continue going party hunting with another group. A lot of people say, "Well, they got their moose. Why are they continuing hunting with different groups?" Some are okay with that, but some have concerns with that. Other jurisdictions also say that they have to stop at a checkpoint to register that moose, so now the ministry knows what type of moose was shot, which township it was shot in and how many hunters are out of the bush—because if you get caught in the bush again, you could be fined.

I know that there was a lot of work done with the new—and I recognize there's also a lot of good from the new system. But that point has come over many times, especially because people are saying, "Well, on the one hand, we fear that the moose population is going down in some zones"—less tags. How is that going to help the moose population? Why was that not considered, or is that something that may be considered? I'd like to hear the ministry's perspective on this.

0950

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Bourgouin, on that issue. I'm not personally fully aware of all of the rules in other jurisdictions, but we'd be more than happy to look at those. If you can let us know what jurisdictions you're talking about, then we'd be more than happy to look into that. It's an interesting proposal.

I appreciate your positive comments on the overall changes to moose management, because it was something that was in need of a rethink, a retake for a long time. There had to be a way that would be considered more fair. I know that the flip side of the coin is, whenever you institute changes, there's a certain amount of angst on the part of the people who are affected by the changes.

We were very proactive. We appointed what we called our BGMAC committee, the Big Game Management Advisory Committee. After significant consultations throughout the province, they came back with a number of recommendations to us. So it wasn't something that was done in haste. It was done with a lot of consideration, and also taking into account the surveys and the population analyses that we had available to us. It's not a simple matter, as you know. As a moose hunter and as a northerner and a fisher, you understand the sometimes delicate balance that wildlife is dancing on throughout Ontario—everywhere, of course, but certainly in Ontario is what we're most concerned about for the purpose of these hearings. So we're always taking that into consideration.

Those changes have actually been met with a certain amount of opposition; it would be foolhardy not to recognize that. But for the most part, they've been quite well received by the public, because there was a definite belief that changes needed to be made. So we're quite comfortable with where we are.

But I'm the kind of person—and you know we've had discussions off-line, online, back-line, front-line—I'm never not available to talk about the things that people bring forward.

So that's an interesting proposition. I have not heard it as of yet. But I never rule out anything. I would also, right off the bat, say that that would be a discussion we'd be having with our officials—because let's face it, I'm not the moose hunting expert here. I rely on the people who compile the data, do the research. I can talk to folks in the field, but I need something that's more factual—being able to put the analytics to it. So I'm certainly open to those kinds of discussions, but I will give you more background on some of those changes and how we got there and familiarize people on the committee with what has been done.

I'm going to turn this over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thanks, Minister.

As the minister described, we went through extensive consultation before implementing the new rules. Mandatory reporting is a really important part of it. It helps ensure that we're accurately reflecting hunter success rates. And in combination with our moose aerial survey and our monitoring, it is an important part of our population management.

If you'd like to hear more about any of those details, I can pass it over to our ADMs.

Craig Brown, our policy division ADM—I'll pass it over to him first in case there's anything further he would like to add to that.

Mr. Guy Bourgoïn: Before Craig speaks, I'll elaborate more on the data that we get. I understand that we get it by mail from some people, where we have to fill out how many moose we saw, or wolves, which is fine. But wouldn't we get better data if, like in Quebec—and to answer your question, Minister, I was speaking to the Quebec jurisdiction. They do it a little bit differently, but they have to report the moose. They can get samples off the moose, get data off the moose that was shot, and also the individual who shot it. That's another way of getting data and seeing how the animal was—was it healthy, was it not, the age of the animal, and all that. The survey doesn't answer these questions. It tells you how many moose we saw; it tells you all kinds of stuff. Is it something that could happen? I think it would be a good system to bring into Ontario.

The question I asked the minister about some of these zones that are very low in moose—we've seen some of these management units that are going down low in moose population, and the tags show that. There are 20-some tags in some regions, and it used to be more. Hunters have to move into another area, so I guess they put more pressure on that.

Having a system that would say, "No, if you shoot a moose"—it could be a moratorium of a few years to help the population grow. I know these things came out in the consultation process, because I brought it forward, and I also heard other hunters say that. But we haven't seen that in your proposal; in fact, it didn't really change anything in the party hunting.

I am for party hunting; don't get me wrong. I'm just saying, for a period of time, to help the moose population—because this is what we kept hearing at these hearings: that the moose population was struggling—not in all places, but in some places. That would help the situation. You can go hunt in that same spot, but for a period of time, you maybe have to tag—a few hunters tag and get out, so you don't continue hunting in different areas and keep that pressure. Let's say I shoot a moose in zone 20 and then I say, "I was in a tag. I'll go hunt with another party in zone 20." There's more pressure on the animals.

If we're saying that we want to keep the population—I'm trying to say we need to look at a process, which a lot

of hunters support, by the way. Put in a moratorium and say, "For a few years, this is how it's going to work." Hunters are open to that kind of stuff. But at the end of the day, when we see the population come up, we need to go back to a system—maybe back to where we were. I'd like to hear more about that.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Fair enough. One thing I always say is, sometimes people are willing, verbally, to accept an amount of restrictions until they actually happen, and then they feel a little differently about it. It's sort of like somebody selling their house, and the fella says, "You listed your house for \$700,000. I'd have paid you \$1.2 million for that house." But he didn't sign a cheque, he didn't sign a contract; he was just talking.

I'm not being cheeky or anything; I'm just saying that sometimes, we do hear proposals—an "as long as it affects somebody else, not me" sort of thing. I wouldn't have seen everything that came before the committee, quite frankly, but I'm sure a lot of things came before the committee that they looked at and considered.

I always say nothing is etched in stone, except the stone that they're going to put behind me when they put me down there. That will be etched. But other than that, the world is changing every day. We have to be willing to adapt to the cards that we're dealt. So I appreciate any suggestions that are made that could lead to an enhanced, an improved, a better moose management system.

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Every day, we're listening to the public, and that's part of why we do the surveys. But I also accept what you're saying about—if there are other jurisdictions that extract more data from their surveys, we can certainly take a look at that. We also want to make sure that people are actually filling out the surveys. We've made it mandatory, but "mandatory" means different things to different people, to be quite frank. We want to encourage it to get as much information back on those surveys as possible.

I'm going to again turn it over to the deputy, and I think Craig Brown is anxious to give you more data.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You've got two minutes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'll pass it over to Craig and he can provide a few more highlights, including our calf tag [*inaudible*] managing calves. We're hoping as well to [*inaudible*].

Over to you, Craig.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you very much for the question.

You're perfectly right; we conducted a review back in 2019. It was an extensive review, and we began implementing changes to the moose management program in 2020. These are the most extensive changes that we've seen in this province for moose management since the 1980s, so it was a really comprehensive suite of changes. We did spend a lot of time with hunters, with the hunting community, to make sure that we found that balance—balancing sustainability as well as fairness to hunters. Foundational to the ministry is ensuring that we do have a sustainable moose population in the province.

One thing we have done that is new to promote recruitment, to your point, to continue to grow moose populations and to enhance sustainability is that we have implemented calf-tag quotas in all of our wildlife management units with a moose season. The calf season has been extended for the full length of the moose-hunting season. Calf tags will no longer be issued with a moose licence, but a wildlife management unit-specific calf tag can be applied for through the allocation process—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're out of time. We're moving back to the government side. Sorry for the abruptness. It's as awkward for me as it is for you.

We're moving on to MPP Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister, and your staff for your input today. It has certainly been an interesting discussion so far.

Minister, I'd like to talk to you about a disease that can affect the deer population, which includes white-tailed deer, caribou, moose and elk in Ontario. It's called chronic wasting disease. You may know that two of my sons hunt and they let me go along with them for this excursion in the fall. I help them mould their hunting stories when I'm there so that they're maybe a little bit more entertaining when they tell of the one they missed or whatever when they come out of the hunt. This is a terrible disease. I've never seen it personally when we're out in the bush. The animal actually wastes away, so that's why they call it chronic wasting disease. It looks like they're starving. They stumble around and they can't walk. I've seen videos of it when I'm doing my research. I've got pages on this disease, and it's terrible. Certainly, I don't ever want to see it. It's very similar to mad cow disease—although diseases aren't transmittable between cattle and deer.

Wildlife management is part of your ministry's mandate, and your ministry has a role in helping to protect wildlife from some serious diseases that threaten them, and certainly chronic wasting disease is one of them.

I wonder if you could please tell the committee about what the ministry is doing to protect Ontario's wildlife from this terrible disease?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Pettapiece, not only for the question, but I know that you and I have discussed this matter in the past, as well, and how scary it is to think that it could be just around the corner.

It has been detected in many states. Our biggest impetus was, quite frankly, having it discovered on a deer farm in Quebec. It has not been detected in Ontario yet, and that's why we've been extremely proactive in monitoring for this disease, and enlisting the public to alert us if they see anything that may raise concerns—that there may be a cervid afflicted with chronic wasting disease. There is no cure for it, there's no vaccine, and we don't want that, obviously, to get into our deer population—and it's not just deer; it's deer, moose, elk, caribou. We don't want it to get into our deer population here in Ontario.

I had the opportunity to visit Trent University, before the pandemic, to look at the work that's being done by our ministry in conjunction with the university in studying and

analyzing the brains of deer that have been harvested, and continuously monitoring from all parts of the province, to ensure that if it's detected, we know we've got a problem that we've got to be even more aggressive on.

As you say, it's scary, the impact that this could have. When we talk about this \$560-million industry, hunting across the province of Ontario, and what would happen to it if our herd was afflicted with CWD—the impact that would have not only on the herd itself, the animals, but on so many people who are dependent upon that industry, that sector for their livelihood. So we're very active on it, very concerned about it. It's one of the issues that we have, basically, almost a separate group dealing with, because getting it wrong or letting it take hold here could be catastrophic.

I'm going to turn it over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to provide more details on some of the research and some of the things that we've been doing and are continuing to do and will be doing to try to keep it from taking hold here in Ontario.

Thank you very much for the question.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister said, this affects deer, moose, elk and caribou, and there is no cure for it, so we're taking it very seriously. As was mentioned, we're conducting testing for deer, elk and moose.

I'll have Assistant Deputy Minister Craig Brown speak a little bit more about chronic wasting disease as well as the monitoring work that we're doing in testing, procedures and some of the economic impacts.

Over to you, Craig.

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Mr. Craig Brown: I'm happy to expand on the minister's comments.

Chronic wasting disease has the potential to severely reduce cervid populations. The disease is caused by infectious animal proteins called prions. Prions accumulate in the brain and other tissues and cause the death of the cervid. Chronic wasting disease is in the same family of diseases as scrapie in sheep. You've likely heard of mad cow disease in cattle and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease in humans. It's a progressive disease, which means that an infected animal may appear normal for several years before it develops symptoms.

Animals infected with CWD may exhibit a number of different signs. MPP Pettapiece, you outlined a few of those in your question. You will see severe loss of body weight and body condition, and sometimes observe abnormal behaviours, such as an indifference to human activity, tremors, stumbling, lack of coordination and even paralysis. Sometimes you see excessive drinking and urination, excessive salivation or drooling and drooping head or ears. So it is a devastating disease. We ask people who see wild cervids that display these signs to note the location of the animal and, if possible, to take photographs and then to contact the ministry.

It is highly contagious amongst cervids. It can be spread through the saliva, urine, feces and blood of infected

animals. There is some evidence, too, that the disease can remain infectious in the environment, such as the soil, for years. It's not in Ontario, but it is found in 26 American states and three provinces: Alberta, Saskatchewan and Quebec. It's also a global challenge. It has been found in South Korea and, more recently, in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Once the disease is present in wild cervids, it's extremely difficult to stop its spread, which is why it's so important that we be diligent here in Ontario. As the minister said, CWD would harm the province's wildlife and the economy.

I'd like to talk a little bit, as the deputy suggested, about the potential impacts to the economy if CWD were to be found in Ontario.

The primary cervid species that's hunted in Ontario is white-tailed deer. In 2019, deer hunters spent an estimated \$347 million in expenditures directly related to their deer hunting trips. An economic analysis prepared for the ministry to anticipate the potential economic impact should CWD be detected in Ontario was concluded a few years ago. The analysis focused on the primary economic impacts of CWD in wild deer, as well as secondary impacts in other sectors of the province's economy. Analysis showed that if hunters stopped hunting due to fears about CWD, or hunted less often, there would be wide-ranging economic losses. Hunters would certainly spend less, and it would create a ripple effect throughout the Ontario economy. It would also potentially have a significant impact on Ontario's farmed cervid industry. We do work closely with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and share information back and forth between the two ministries.

Our monitoring program is key to the early detection of chronic wasting disease. Hunter participation in the surveillance program—they participate by submitting the heads of harvested deer for testing. This is critical to our efforts to detect chronic wasting disease.

Each year since 2002, the ministry's CWD surveillance has taken samples from hunter-harvested deer in areas where the highest risk of chronic wasting disease might be. The sampling locations do vary from year to year, and locations are determined by a number of known risk factors. We look at proximity to neighbouring outbreaks. We look at deer and elk population density, the presence of cervid farms. We look at prior efforts, sampling efforts. We look at winter deer feeding areas and winter severity. Hunters who harvest a deer from a wildlife management unit with a testing location can have the animal tested free of charge by the ministry.

As I said, the ministry's CWD surveillance program has been running every year since 2002. Since that time, more than 13,000 samples have been tested, and CWD has not been detected in any sample.

I'm going to spend a couple of minutes talking about our testing procedures. Unfortunately, there are currently no reliable live tests, such as a blood test, that can definitively diagnose chronic wasting disease. At this time, chronic wasting disease infection can only be confirmed by testing tissue from an animal after it is dead.

Each year, the ministry communicates with hunters and the general public regarding CWD and the CWD surveillance program through media bulletins, through social media posts and letters to stakeholders and Indigenous communities.

In selected regions during firearm hunts, we have roving crews of ministry wildlife research technicians who visit hunt camps, and they do request samples from harvested deer. The research technicians will ask for the hunter's permission to remove a small amount of tissue from the head of the deer for analysis, and afterwards, the deer will be returned to the hunter. The sampling does not prevent hunters from consuming the meat or having the head mounted.

The ministry also needs samples from hunters who are not contacted by our field crews. Those hunters are asked to take the heads of yearlings or older deer they harvest to one of almost 20 freezer locations for deposit in an MNRF freezer. Freezer deposits must be made as soon as possible, preferably within 48 hours of harvest. We do advise hunters that if they can't drop off their sample within a 48-hour period, they can freeze the head and bring it to the drop-off location frozen. Hunters are asked to provide the date and location of harvest, as well as their contact information.

This is quite popular with the hunting community: The first 500 hunters in each surveillance area to provide a tissue sample from a deer taken in a surveillance area will be provided a participation crest. It is a small token of the ministry's appreciation for hunter support for this very important surveillance program.

We have recently updated our Chronic Wasting Disease Prevention and Response Plan. The update ensures the plan reflects current scientific knowledge, lessons learned from other jurisdictions and the evolving roles of government agencies. The plan sets out an adaptive, coordinated approach to the actions that will be taken in partnership with other agencies.

Our prevention and response plan has two goals. The first is to minimize the threat posed by CWD through an adaptive four-year approach. The second is to maintain the socio-economic, cultural and ecological benefits derived from Ontario's wild cervid population through a long-term management response to any detection of CWD. To achieve these goals, the plan sets out a number of objectives. One is to enhance CWD knowledge; CWD prevention and surveillance; rapid, effective response to CWD detection; ensuring effective long-term management of wild cervids; coordinating and collaborating our actions, working with partners; and informing the public, stakeholders and communities about CWD.

Our primary objective is to enhance knowledge of the disease. We are committed to ensuring informed wildlife disease monitoring through active participation in several collaborative processes involving public and academic agencies.

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We also take a pan-Canadian approach to wildlife health. This approach, again working with our partners in

other jurisdictions, sets out a vision for wildlife health, identifies challenges and opportunities, and provides actions to achieve a shared mission of wildlife health protection and promotion. It addresses this goal by enabling, sustaining and integrating wildlife health infrastructure and expertise in Canada.

At the core of delivering this pan-Canadian approach is the provision of strategic and operational oversight on wildlife disease monitoring and diagnostic services by the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative. The co-operative plays a key role in supporting Ontario's wildlife health program through a disease risk assessment, surveillance and monitoring, diagnosing and investigating outbreaks, provision of expertise, maintenance of a central wildlife health database, and training wildlife management personnel in wildlife health.

In partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative can help ensure we have ready access to wildlife veterinary and pathology services—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Craig Brown:—that we support the timely diagnosis of causes of wildlife mortality, and understanding if that mortality is because of CWD, and supporting an adaptive management approach as new threats and opportunities to protect wildlife health arise.

The second objective of the ministry's CWD plan is prevention and surveillance. We have a number of measures in place to reduce the risk of chronic wasting disease from entering Ontario. Effective January 1, 2021, the import of all species of live captive cervids into Ontario has been prohibited unless authorized by a ministry-issued permit. This includes importing from other provinces, states or territories. Also, as of this past January, restrictions now apply to the movement and transportation of live captive cervids between points within Ontario, and in some cases, the ministry issued permits required to move live captive cervids.

Hunters were also advised not to use natural attractants for hunting. They are illegal to have and to use for attracting wildlife for any reason in Ontario. This is because they may contain infectious material and could introduce chronic wasting disease into the province.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Craig Brown: Instead, Ontarians are advised to use artificial or plant-based products.

We have new regulations that came into effect on January 1, 2021, to help reduce the risk of CWD coming into Ontario through imported cervid body parts hunted in other provinces, states or territories—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're out of time.

We're now moving to the official opposition. Who will be speaking? Oh, MPP Mamakwa, before you begin, I just need to confirm your attendance.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: This is Sol Mamakwa. I'm in Ontario. Meegwetch.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you. You can proceed with your questions.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good day, everyone. It's good to see everyone.

Hi there, Minister. It's good to see you. I hope all is well.

I know the fire season is upon us. It looks like it may be a very busy season. We know that in Kiiwetinoong, there are a lot of issues related to where forest fire smoke becomes an issue, but I'll bring that up a bit later.

I know as a First Nations person and I know as an Anishinaabe, we have very different mindsets on how we think about the land when we talk about the lands and resources that are up in our territories. Some First Nation leaders talk about the term "crown land." That's a very colonial term for us, when we talk about crown land, because I, as a land rights holder, as a treaty rights holder and everybody else who is in, say, for example, Treaty 9—Ontario was a signatory to the treaty. Out of the numbered treaties, Treaties 1 to 11, Treaty 9 is the only numbered treaty that has the province's signature on it. I'm always to the mind that my forefathers are the ones who signed and said they would share the benefits, that they would share the resources with our partners—equal partners with Canada and with Ontario. That was the understanding. I always take these opportunities to bring it from my perspective. And I know the way these are set up right now. Also, the government put us in a reserve, which we now have—the First Nations reserves. These are basically tools to keep us away from the lands and the resources that are there and put us in reserves.

When I'm travelling all over the north, I'll hop on a plane and I'll fly, say, to Fort Severn. I'll fly to Sachigo Lake. I'll fly to Webequie. We are so rich—when we talk about the timber, when we talk about the lands, when we talk about the rivers, the waters and everything. I can tell that we are a very rich province. I can tell that we are a very rich country. But when I land, when I go into that community setting, I see the poverty that's there. I see the overcrowding. I see the boil-water advisories. I see people carrying buckets of water to their home to bathe, to cook, to drink. As a member of provincial Parliament, it's sometimes very frustrating when I come to the Ontario Legislature and I bring these stories and people talk to me about jurisdiction, people talk to me about, "That's not our responsibility," especially in the province. So that's an issue for me.

I just wanted to share those thoughts as a beginning. I'm going to go into some questions now about MNRF.

This government talks about economic development and economic prosperity quite a bit. But I still see what's happening in the communities, and we live it; our children live it.

I'm going to, from the forestry perspective, ask a question: As MNRF, how is the ministry investing in Indigenous economic development in the forestry sector? If you could answer that, that would be great.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Mamakwa. I appreciate you joining us today. You always

do bring a perspective that—sometimes it's challenging for me because I certainly don't have the history to be able to even have a fair conversation with you, because I'm not knowledgeable on the subjects that you may be knowledgeable on, and some of them do come, as the saying goes, way above my pay grade, with regard to the eventual outcome of discussions that I know are ongoing at higher levels than me.

1030

But I do certainly appreciate your advocacy for Indigenous peoples and First Nations. You've never failed to bring that with you to the Legislature, and I know that it's not only appreciated by me but it's appreciated by others who don't get an opportunity in our lives to interact at that level with someone not only with your background, but who also has achieved the honour of the office of MPP. So we appreciate that—although there are some things that having the discussion with you on, as I say, are beyond my level of either authority or knowledge. But I appreciate your bringing them forward.

On the issues of prosperity and First Nations: We are committed to working with First Nations. We continue to work with them on the issue of resource revenue-sharing. There is constant interaction with the First Nations. Many of them are employed as well, as you would know, in mainly the forestry operations throughout the area of the undertaking where the activity goes on. North of that, obviously, is more challenging with respect to the plummeted forestry, although some probably do come down to work in the mills in the areas of the undertaking.

We recognize and we know—none of us are oblivious to what we see. You see it personally. We all get a chance to see it on television, when they're talking about boil-water advisories and health concerns on First Nations and the poverty that exists there. We're not oblivious to it; I want to assure you of that. We'd have to be blind to be oblivious, because it's there for us to see. It's not something that doesn't present its challenges—because we haven't been talking about this for two weeks or two decades; we've been talking about this for many, many years, about what the solutions are and how, working cooperatively, we can address many of those things, not just at the level of my ministry, but at the level of the province and the level of the country. So I appreciate your bringing those forward.

On the issues of directly between MNRF and First Nations, I'm going to, because I want to make sure you're getting the information you may be looking for—maybe it won't be the information you're looking for, but it is the information we're able to provide. I want to make sure we get it right, so I'm going to turn this over to Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, and she will be able to add more details in the answer.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

I will have Sean Maguire, who is our ADM for forest industry division—because I recognize that your question is about investing in economic development, working with the Indigenous communities and, particularly, forestry.

Sean Maguire can provide some additional information on the work that we have ongoing with the First Nation communities.

Sean, over to you.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the question. I'm Sean Maguire, ADM of forest industry division with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. I'm happy to respond.

Before I get rolling, for clarification, so I get you the best information possible, are you interested in the fiscal, or are you interested more in participation in forestry, as far as a general response from me?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I think when we talk about investment in economic development—I think that's where I'm leaning towards. How is this investment increasing, if it is? Also, I think it would be important—my question will lead towards how you are even consulting with First Nations before logging in their traditional territories.

Mr. Sean Maguire: I'll start to respond in general, and then you can point me in the direction you'd like me to go.

Really, from my lens, our engagement with Indigenous people is through the forest sector strategy. When we look at the forest sector strategy—participation is more of an ongoing thing as we're working together to implement the measures to achieve the objects of the strategy. When we started the strategy, we started collaborating in its development with seven round-table sessions across the province, which included Indigenous community participants. We had an open-feedback email account where we accepted submissions, and all the feedback that we collected led to four pillars of the forest sector strategy.

Once we started working with those four pillars and we developed the strategy, we undertook consultation on the Environmental Registry, plus we held 10 engagement sessions with Indigenous communities. The sessions included 100 participants from 45 communities. All that is to say, from a consultation perspective, Indigenous participation is stamped into the DNA of the forest sector strategy.

Then, going from there on to some specific measures—there are many actions that intersect or fall completely under the strategy. The biggest one, from a financial perspective, is resource revenue-sharing, and that includes 35 signatory communities, including Grand Council Treaty 3, Wabun Tribal Council and Mushkegowuk Council. They're all participating in the program, which is budgeted for about \$11.8 million for 2021-22.

Additionally, the ministry has allocated about \$180,000 this year within its forestry initiatives transfer payments program, and these funds would be allocated towards capacity development of Indigenous people and communities to participate in forest-based economic development. We're working to contract the transfer payments under that category as we speak.

On a non-financial front, we're advancing Indigenous participation in the management of forest licences through the advancement of enhanced sustainable forest licensed companies, basically, where Indigenous participation is through the shareholder structure. We have a couple of

examples of that already on the ground, in Lac Seul and Boundary Waters. We're working towards finalizing the Missanabie, and then also the Kenogami is well under way.

Then, we have two local forest management corporations, including a newly minted one, where Indigenous representatives sit on the board and help direct how the agencies manage the business of forestry.

Then, another aspect that the forest sector strategy mentioned is traditional ecological knowledge. So the strategy flags it and makes sure that it's recognized that it's an important part of our forest management planning process, and so it's basically acknowledged and recognized and sets a stage for broader inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge in policy guides in forest management plans going ahead.

Then, beyond that, there are a number of soft supports, like economic development support for business planning. We have support and assistance for permitting and licensing, and we've done the establishment of some project working circles to support Indigenous business development.

Beyond that, there are the normal measures that take place under the forest management planning process that currently exists, which ensure Indigenous participation in forest management in Ontario.

I know I've touched on a lot of areas there and it has been a broad response, but I'm hoping I picked up some of what you're looking for.

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Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that, Sean. You spoke about some of the engagement sessions that you did and the round tables and the four pillars you came up with.

What metrics will the ministry use to ensure that the policies and the funding decisions are effective at increasing Indigenous economic development?

Mr. Sean Maguire: Right now, we don't have the metrics finalized. We established what's called a forest sector strategy committee, which has representatives from Indigenous communities and forest industry and municipal representatives. We've had our second meeting, and it's a process right now of getting its legs under it and figuring out what direction it wants to go in.

Essentially, part of the mandate of that forest sector strategy committee is to develop key performance indicators or metrics that we can use to monitor and measure ourselves against. That's the game plan right now. Of course, once we develop those materials, we'll be sharing them widely and getting input and feedback.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. Again, I want to delve into the engagement sessions. Let's say, for example, within the Treaty 9, within the NAN First Nations—you know that treaty area—there are about 49 First Nations. There are approximately 50,000 people.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: You had these engagement sessions, and one of the ones that you had had 100 participants there.

How will the ministry ensure transparent, fair and robust consultation for any possible changes to the Far North Act for any of the communities that are affected?

Mr. Sean Maguire: I think the Far North Act might land under a different ADM, so I will pass that back.

Interjection: You're on.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Am I on?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Yes. Please.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for that, MPP Mamakwa. I can assure you we've had robust consultations dealing with the proposed changes to the Far North Act. I know we don't have a whole lot of time, but we may get a chance to deal with that in a subsequent question.

We have been extremely engaged with First Nations and have substantive agreement on many, many issues that we're getting closer to bringing forward, because there has been such broad consultation with First Nations. I know that Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler has been the lead on behalf of First Nations and NAN, as negotiations on the changes and discussions and consultations about the Far North Act—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Minister, we're at time.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Yes. I didn't think we'd be able to get much into the details.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We could return to it later, in the next opposition round.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Sure.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're back to 20 minutes to the government side. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good morning, Minister, and good morning to all my colleagues.

I'm thrilled to be able to sit on this side of the committee room today, because I've been listening intently all morning and I have so many questions I'm anxious to ask staff and, of course, the minister.

As some of you may know, I grew up in northern Ontario. MPP Mamakwa will probably say it's not quite northern Ontario, it's more like central Ontario, but it was north of Sudbury—not quite as north as his riding. So I spent a lot of time in our forests and lakes. As kids, we didn't go to the mall—we didn't have a mall—we built forts and swam and truly enjoyed our outdoors. So I have a genuine appreciation of the work that you do and the work to protect our forests right across our province, in all areas of the province.

I'm also quite fortunate to be the great-granddaughter of a man who immigrated from Ireland and settled property in the Ottawa Valley. He had a farm. In fact, it's in the minister's riding, in God's country—real God's country—in the Ottawa Valley, and so I spent a lot of time on Golden Lake. Unfortunately, I think it was about three or four years ago—the minister can address this, can correct me—we saw floods, something that the local farmers said they hadn't ever witnessed.

This year it has been absolutely remarkable that the water hasn't raised. I think it was up by about four feet when I was there three or four years ago during that one particular flood, the worst I'd seen at Golden Lake.

What is the ministry doing to mitigate flooding in lakes right across Ontario?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Skelly. I certainly cannot argue with you in any way, shape or form on your description of the Ottawa Valley. Having been there my entire life, essentially, I agree with you 100%, and I may be biased on that.

Flooding is certainly number one when it comes to the cost and economics of the disasters in Ontario that happen, unfortunately, on an all too frequent basis. There is no ability to prevent flooding; there's only our ability to prepare for it and address it and become more resilient to it.

I want to speak a little more directly to your question on the Ottawa Valley and particularly, you living in the Bonnechere river system, as part of the Golden Lake part—not living, but you had property on the Golden Lake, which is part of the Bonnechere system. There were two significant floods in the last number of years, in 2017 and 2019, and 2019 was the worst by far all across much of Ontario, but the Ottawa, the Madawaska and the Bonnechere all reached record levels of flooding that season. Just to counter that, we [*inaudible*] issues, but, quite frankly, an issue of not enough of that. We're really experiencing drought conditions, almost, in those same areas that were flooded to historical levels only two years ago. So it is something that nature has the upper hand in and at the end of the day calls the shots on.

In order to address it as efficiently and effectively as possible, we did two things. After the flooding of 2019, we realized that this is something we have to have a program to address. We contracted with Doug McNeil from Winnipeg, Manitoba, an expert with all kinds of experience in the field, to do a flooding report—a report on the flooding here in Ontario. He did that and brought forth a number of recommendations that involved a number of ministries. I think probably 10 ministries or so are involved in our flooding strategy. It was the genesis of coming forth with a flooding strategy—the recommendations from Mr. McNeil that were given to us back in 2019.

We held consultation sessions across eastern Ontario to get people's feedback, because the amount of property damage—if you look at flooding versus forest fires, forest fires are devastating, but in general, for the most part, it's destroying forest, which is not a good thing, but it's not as likely to be having the impact on people's property, whereas when we have flooding—we are now in an era when so many people actually live or have seasonal homes on waterways, that that flooding is certainly the most devastating from a property damage point of view. I saw that first-hand in 2019. There was no getting away from it.

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Last year, in 2020, we didn't have flooding, and we're thankful for that as well, because the pandemic would have made it impossible to be able to deal with it the way we were able to deal with it in 2019, because we had, of course, many of our forest fire rangers assisting in dealing with the floods in the watersheds of the Ottawa, Bonnechere and Madawaska; we had members from the Canadian Armed Forces.

But one of the biggest components of assistance was volunteers. If we had had that same thing happen in the era of COVID-19, we just wouldn't have been able to marshal those volunteers, which would have had a huge impact on our ability to deal with the floods as they were taking place, because this took place over not days, but weeks. Once those waters started to rise, they continued to rise until they crested, and then it took weeks again for those waters to recede to the point where they weren't actually experiencing flooding.

The one thing about a forest fire is, when you put it out, for the most part, if you're monitoring it, it's not going to do any more damage. But the floods, they go up, they crest and then they recede. All through that time, the damage is increasing and then it's decreasing, but then it has already been done. Then you've got to deal with the issue of the aftermath, and that's where the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing comes in with our assistance programs for natural disasters.

As a result of that, as I said, we put forward a flooding strategy, and it is built on the fact that you have to be prepared. So we have done things to allow us to be far better in forecasting when and where those floods might take place. Our water monitoring system helps us to predict that—managing and measuring snow loads and water quantity in those areas. It allows us to be far better prepared than we would have been in the past.

I'm going to turn it over to Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to expand on the details of what we're doing to be prepared, react and recover from floods.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister mentioned, we spent a lot of time on consulting and developing the flooding strategy and are now implementing many of those recommendations.

I will pass this over to Craig Brown, ADM, to go into some further details.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you very much for the question, MPP Skelly.

Just a bit of context to start: As the minister suggested, flooding is one of the costliest natural disasters in terms of property damage in Ontario. We know that we can't prevent flooding; it is a natural process. We can only reduce the impacts when it happens.

In the spring of 2019, we did experience some devastating [*inaudible*] that impacted extensive areas of the province. That was a clear reminder that communities all around Ontario are vulnerable to these frequent and naturally occurring events.

The work that Doug McNeil did—he was our special adviser on flooding; the minister mentioned Mr. McNeil's report—has informed our approach to managing risks associated with flooding, and we do have a number of regulations, policies and technical guides that are implemented through partnerships with several provincial ministries, municipalities and conservation authorities.

The ministry's role in managing flooding focuses on preparedness, mitigation and early warning activities, and we do work closely with local conservation authorities and

municipalities to minimize flood emergencies. The ministry provides surface water monitoring and flood messaging to conservation authorities and to our district offices, and there are policies in the provincial policy statement and the Conservation Authorities Act to direct development away from flood plains and other hazardous areas.

As the minister mentioned, with the flooding strategy, we've taken a whole-of-government approach, and we've also called on the federal government, our municipal partners, conservation authorities, industry and Indigenous communities to work with us to implement the actions that were outlined in the strategy. So far, in the year and a bit since we introduced the strategy in March 2020, we have made steady progress toward the priorities and actions that are set out in Ontario's Flooding Strategy.

The Ontario government continues to prioritize its commitment to increasing public awareness and education about flooding and helping people in this province understand the risks posed by flooding and the steps that they can take to mitigate them.

Importantly, they're ensuring that Ontarians affected by flooding get the support they need by enhancing emergency response and recovery programs. We are committed to increasing public awareness about flooding and to helping people understand the risks posed by flooding and the steps they can take to mitigate them.

Implementation of the actions contained in the strategy does require support from all levels of government, from businesses and from residents. I'm pleased to report that implementation is under way for all the action areas that are described in the strategy. There are eight action areas. These are:

- enhancing flood mapping;
- increasing public awareness and education;
- clarifying roles and responsibilities;
- promoting sound land use planning decisions;
- enhancing flood forecasting and early warning;
- enhancing emergency response;
- reviewing disaster recovery assistance; and
- securing funding for flood risk reduction.

When the strategy was released in March 2020, the plan was for some individual activities to be completed within the first year and for other, more complex activities to be completed over a longer period of time. There are over 90 activities described under each of the action areas in the strategy.

This year, some significant progress has been made. We have made improvements to flood plain mapping guidance, and we've established a multi-agency flood mapping technical team to better identify hazard areas. We've improved disaster recovery assistance by investing up to \$2 million in additional funding to extend the Build Back Better pilot project through 2023, and we're helping eligible municipalities rebuild infrastructure damaged by extreme weather to a higher standard through the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance program. We've made improvements to the province's emergency response system so that Ontario is better prepared to handle flooding events. The emergency management software will improve tracking, reporting and management of incidents

and emergencies, and newly introduced software will also support engagement of the municipal emergency management coordinators' requests for assistance.

We've initiated a provincial climate change impact assessment that will provide a greater understanding of how climate change is expected to impact the province, including flood risk. We're continuing our province's partnership with the federal government to provide high-quality water level and flow information for watercourses across the province. This helps to determine the potential for flooding and aids in the provision of early warning messages for flooding.

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We provided ongoing support for municipalities through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, which helps small, rural and northern communities invest in local infrastructure and asset management planning to address their priority needs, including flood protection and climate adaptation.

We also conducted engagement with municipalities, watershed planners and other key stakeholders in Muskoka, Magnetawan and the upper Ottawa River areas on key water management and operational decisions.

Finally, we continued Ontario's support through participation on various committees of the International Joint Commission, which contributes to the ongoing management of water levels and flows in the Great Lakes.

There are no quick fixes when it comes to reducing the impacts from flooding, but Ontario's flooding strategy aims to improve preparedness for the long term. We will continue to position Ontario as a leader in flood management.

It's important in managing floods that we as a ministry work in partnership with other ministries, that we're working across government. We do work in close partnership with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, and the Ministry of the Solicitor General to strengthen our approach to flooding in Ontario, to ensure that our actions are well coordinated and effective at protecting people and property.

To date, the government has provided disaster recovery funding assistance of over \$13 million to 380 affected individuals, small businesses and not-for-profit organizations as a result of the 2019 spring flooding event.

We updated the Disaster Recovery Assistance for Ontarians program to make it more responsive to the needs of those affected by natural disasters.

We are also providing over \$14.5 million to 26 municipalities through the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance program and to help with recovery efforts, again related to the flooding event of—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Craig Brown: We are investing up to \$2 million in additional funding to extend the Build Back Better pilot project. This pilot project does help eligible municipalities rebuild structures and infrastructure that were damaged by extreme weather, like flooding, to a much higher standard

and better protect our communities from the impacts of natural disasters.

We've also invested more than \$4.8 million per year in the provincial hydrometric network. That enables flood early warnings and helps municipalities better prepare for flood events.

We've also reached out to the federal government, our municipal partners, conservation authorities, industry and communities across the province to work with us to implement the strategy. I've already mentioned the work that we do with the International Joint Commission, and other bodies like the Ottawa River Regulation Planning Board and Conservation Ontario, to better coordinate our efforts on flooding.

I think I am running out of time—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You're at 30 seconds.

Mr. Craig Brown: I do hope that answers your question, MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Thank you so much.

With the remaining time, I will just simply say that it has clearly had some sort of an impact—Minister Yakabuski knows how many people contacted me and, of course, his own office about the flooding that we witnessed in the Ottawa Valley. But, thankfully, we didn't have to see a recurrence of that. Clearly, some of the actions that we took played a role in mitigating this kind of flooding.

I think that's all the time we have. I'll go back to the Chair to pass it over to the opposition.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): The official opposition is up. MPP Mamakwa, please proceed.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you again, Minister. I know that we were starting a discussion on some of the issues with respect to the Far North Act and the engagement sessions that you have had. I'm not sure if you want to continue that discussion.

You had spoken to a lot of individuals, and also Nishnawbe Aski Nation. I think one of the things that we need to know and understand is that Nishnawbe Aski Nation is what we call a political territorial organization. They are not land rights holders. They are not treaty rights holders. The 50,000-plus people who live in NAN territory are those individuals—and I think, yes, they can help and coordinate those issues; they will make engagement, for sure, yes.

If you want to make some more comments on the Far North Act and see what the process is—and if your deputy or ADMs are able to speak on that.

Hon. John Yakabuski: We talked about the engagement sessions that we've had with NAN and others. The changes to the Far North Act are something that we both—in fact, it was part of your campaign, as well, that you were going to bring changes to the Far North Act, because it certainly did not represent what was the desire of First Nations in the Far North when it was brought in. It was brought in without consultation. It was brought in, basically, just by the dictatorial decisions of the previous

government, and it was not supported by First Nations. We recognize that.

This is about bringing economic prosperity to a part of the province that is sorely lacking in it, but it also doesn't have the same kind of opportunities as other parts of the province. So we've got to work together to find ways to bring that prosperity to that part of the province, and some of that will be through development and otherwise. That's why you need to have those conversations with the First Nations and Indigenous people, so we did go through that.

I'm going to turn it over to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark. She'll direct it to the appropriate ADM, and we'll get you more information on those sessions that took place and where it has brought us to now.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister mentioned, we've actually spent a couple of years now, I think, both in consultation and working collectively, together, on moving forward on changes to the Far North Act.

Our regional operations division and our ADM Jennifer Barton will speak a little bit more about some of the work that we've done in terms of those consultation sessions and the ongoing work that we're carrying out with the technical table. The minister is part of the steering committee, as well, with the Grand Chief and Minister Rickford.

So I will pass this over to Jennifer Barton, and she can speak a little bit further on this.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Jennifer Barton, assistant deputy minister, regional operations division. Thank you, Deputy, for passing it over, and thank you, MPP Mamakwa, for the question.

As you've mentioned, and as the minister mentioned, the Far North Act is that legislative framework for land use planning in the Far North. The act provides for community-based land use planning and sets out that joint planning process between First Nations and Ontario. The government did announce that it would undertake a review of the Far North Act, and so we've had a team in the regional operations division working on this since that announcement.

The ministry did quite a bit of consultation. The ministry consulted and listened carefully to feedback received from Far North First Nations, Indigenous organizations, industry, municipalities, as well as the public, on our review of the act. As a result, the approach was refocused to support economic growth and joint planning in the Far North.

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What we heard during those consultations was that the Far North does have considerable economic development potential and there are shared goals between the individuals we consulted with and the ministry to encourage economic growth, diversification, job creation and self-reliance in northern communities. The government and the folks who sat around the table have listened carefully to what the Far North First Nations, Indigenous organizations, industry, municipalities and the public have had to

say about the Far North Act review and have carefully considered all the feedback that was received through the engagement.

The ministry has hosted several in-person and virtual engagement opportunities with Far North First Nations and tribal councils, and more directly with Nishnawbe Aski Nation, to seek input on proposed amendments. We did hear from First Nations that NAN does not speak for them, and that's why we did consult directly with First Nations separately from NAN themselves on the recommendations to update the act. We did use NAN, though, to support some of the work that we were going through, so we did sign a terms of reference with NAN back in 2019 to basically establish a collaborative process for going through the act and reviewing some suggested changes, taking the feedback from the consultations and putting it into language.

There was both a technical table and a political table set up. The technical table not only had representation from this ministry but also from a number of our colleague ministries and from NAN staff specifically. The technical table worked together for five months. They developed some recommendations on proposed amendments to the act. Again, they used those virtual engagement sessions to talk about the recommendations and some of the thinking that they were working on. As part of this work, the table considered some amendments to the act. Really, those amendments were focused on any barriers to economic development, but also focused on that continued joint community-based land use planning process.

Comments and feedback from those engagement sessions were thoroughly considered in the discussions. You may know that an Environmental Registry posting outlining the updated proposal was posted back in November 2020 and closed in January 2021. So we are definitely committed to a path forward that is both responsive to the feedback we have received and that best serves the interests of northern communities.

The ministry will continue to work together with First Nations to promote sustainable economic growth in the Far North while continuing to consider and protect areas of cultural value, maintain ecological systems and biological diversity, and respect Aboriginal and treaty rights. A lot of work has gone into the consultation process. We've had a team working both directly with NAN and directly with First Nations communities.

Hopefully, MPP Mamakwa, that helps answer some of the questions you may have had.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch for that, Jennifer.

When we talk about engagement, when we talk about consultation, everybody has their own definition. Each community has their protocols, and governments have their protocols. "Consultation" is a word that's thrown around when we want to talk about how we consult with First Nations.

There was an elder a few years back who had come to me and was talking about consultation to me, and he started telling me a story about moose. He said, "There were these moose that were gathering. All the bulls were

getting together." He said they were trying to figure out when to meet annually, and the bulls were talking about, "We've got to meet in the summertime." And then the cow showed up and said, "What are you guys talking about?" The bull said to the cow, "We're trying to determine when we are going to have an annual meeting. We're going to get together in the summertime." So the cow said, "We cannot get together in the summer, because of all the mosquitoes, the black flies and the horseflies and everything. There are too many bugs. We've got to start gathering in the fall, when there's hardly any of that." Then, the elder told me, "And that's why the moose get together in the fall. That's consultation."

I thought that was a fairly good story, and I always remember that when we talk about consultation. That's who I am; sometimes I tell stories when I'm talking, to share a point. I think that's who we are.

I wanted to go into the operational policy on the building of hunting cabins on treaty territories in Ontario. What is the operational policy on that? And were Indigenous groups ever part of the co-creation of these policies? Anybody can answer that; that would be great.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thanks MPP Mamakwa, and I liked your story too. I share your view that sometimes one person's definition of something is significantly different than another's, and one's belief that we've arrived at a conclusion doesn't always agree with someone else's determination. We recognize that. That is part of the art of consultations and trying to figure out just when there has been enough or when there has been too much. But I do appreciate your analogy on that.

On the issue of cabins on treaty territory, I don't have much to say on that myself because I don't really know what the exact policy on that is. I don't have everything up here; there's not enough room. I'm going to turn that over to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to elaborate. Meegwetch.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I will have Jennifer Barton again, assistant deputy minister of our regional operations division, who can speak a little further about cabins on crown land.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thanks again, Deputy. And again, thank you, MPP Mamakwa, for the question.

I'll talk a little bit about the incidental structures. Absolutely, in certain circumstances, Indigenous communities may construct cabins or other structures on public lands without a work permit, under the Public Lands Act, if those structures are considered reasonably incidental to the exercise of the constitutionally protected Aboriginal or treaty rights. We work with a number of communities and talk a lot about these ideas of incidental cabins or incidental structures. The right to build and use an incidental structure on crown lands has been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada as a constitutionally protected right in circumstances where the structure is reasonably incidental to the exercise of Aboriginal treaty rights, such as hunting, fishing or other traditional activities.

The ministry and many members of my team work, as I said, closely with communities, so we are required to

assess requests and work with communities around the incidental structures in a manner that respects existing Aboriginal and treaty rights. We continue to encourage Indigenous communities to engage with the ministry when contemplating the construction of incidental structures to exercise their treaty rights. This really provides us with the opportunity to work together to confirm the location, purpose and intent of the incidental structures and to consider other resource users and values within the proposed area of interest including, potentially, environmental and safety concerns.

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It doesn't always happen exactly that way. Sometimes we do respond retroactively, when a structure is built, but we are trying to get the message out there to our Indigenous communities across the province to let them know that we're really open to the work and want to work with them to find those ideal locations that meet both the needs of the community but also stay away from other encumbrances that may be on the land or other values that may be in the area that they're looking to build on.

Hopefully, MPP Mamakwa, that helps give a little bit of a sense of how we work with communities and the fact that we understand and agree with their right to build the incidental structures.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Jennifer. Meegwetch, Minister.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Three minutes, 30 seconds.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. I'm going to make this quick.

At the beginning, I spoke about forest fires. Last year, at the Red Lake fire, Minister, you actually personally phoned me on a cellphone when that thing was happening that day, and I really appreciated that. I think when we talk about these emergencies and evacuations—sometimes with these issues we have to work together.

One of the things that has been happening is that—and I get lots of calls about it from First Nations in Ontario and especially in the Far North—sometimes we have fire crews that are coming in from other areas and other provinces, and you know when they're there. There used to be lots of people from First Nations who used to be part of the firefighting crews. I was at this training one time—I think it was Grassy Narrows—and they were teaching them SP100s. But they can't go out of province, either.

What is the plan for this upcoming fire season for our First Nations and Indigenous communities to be part of the firefighting crews, whether it's interprovincially, whether it's within the province?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Mamakwa. In the interests of time, I'm going to go directly to the deputy minister.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have just under two minutes.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Directly to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thanks, and I'll quickly pass it along to our ADM, Tracey Mill, so she can respond to your question. If we run out of time, please feel free to bring it back up to the next round and we'll answer it more fulsomely.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you for the question, MPP Mamakwa. You are correct; we rely quite heavily on many individuals from Indigenous communities to work with us and to assist us with fire suppression activities up in the north, so my thanks to all of the community members for that assistance.

We do have a number of private companies that we bring in to assist us during escalated periods of fire activity who do employ Indigenous individuals. We call them our type II firefighters, as you know. You've asked about the sharing of those resources across the country. I will say to you that at the national level, at the tables that I do sit on, this is an active discussion right now. One of the things that we are aware of as we share resources is that we do need to make sure that individuals meet, and have training that meets, the national standards, so that when they go to other jurisdictions, there is a smooth transition as they work with fire crews and enter the fire structures in those other jurisdictions—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry; we're out of time. Like I said, it's more awkward for me than it is for you. I do kind of let you guys go past each time. I just try to find that perfect time to end it, and it never comes.

We're going back to the government side. MPP Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I find these days of hearings quite interesting; you wonder why you'd want to be on a Zoom call from, whatever it is, 9 in the morning till 6 at night, but I appreciate the really comprehensive answers from the minister and from the staff at MNRF.

During the minister's opening remarks, he talked about the Forest Biomass Action Plan. I want to raise that issue. Actually, the minister talked a bit about the history of lumbering in his area and felt he wasn't really connected or related to some of those families, although rumour has it he may well be; I don't know. My brother-in-law, Mike Hourigan—I don't know if that name rings a bell; his grandfather was Martin Daly, Daly lumber, Barry's Bay, recently sold to the Murray brothers. They're all related. Sean Conway is related to both families, as is my brother-in-law, and they tell me there's some connection with the Yakabuskis as well up there.

History is so important. Lumbering built the province of Ontario, as we know. Minister, you know about the famous alligator tugs of the day—a book was written about them—produced in southern Ontario, down in Simcoe by the West and Peachey Co. Those alligator tugs were all over the north. There are even some down in South America, used in early lumbering.

You made mention of the forest biomass strategy and the action plan, the several points—marketing and dealing with demand, dealing with regulation, of course, Indigenous involvement, and to communicate, along with the industry, the tremendous opportunities. I'm very excited about this. Believe it or not, we have trees in southern

Ontario—on our farms, we've planted a couple of hundred acres of trees. We own a lot of bush, and it's a source of income for us and our neighbour. I should mention Norfolk county twice was designated the forest capital of Canada. A lot of those trees were planted after the dust bowl.

I know the focus is the north. As with farming and so many other primary industries, which are going to drive our recovery, new technology is much of the key.

I know I've only got less than 20 minutes, but I would really like to hear a bit more about the Forest Biomass Action Plan.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I have to at least comment first on the bit of history. I didn't know Martin Daly, but I certainly knew Murray Daly, who was the owner of Daly lumber, which would have come from his father. His machine shed could be seen from the back door of our house. We grew up with the Dalys and the Murrays and Conways. In fact, I'm related to Sean Conway, former MPP. His grandfather and my grandfather were brothers. So yes, it's that three degrees of separation or whatever they talk about all the time. Up in the valley, you're never too far away. People would wonder with a name like Yakabuski, but my mother was a Conway. So it would have been one of the few marriages in the day of the Irish and the Polish actually getting together. Usually, they were fighting.

1130

Anyway, back to biomass and the Forest Biomass Action Plan: As you know, there's a posting on the Environmental Registry right now and it runs till June 21. Biomass is an integral part of forestry. I know that MPP Bourgouin would be very interested in this as well, because we had discussions not that long ago when there was some concern about a power purchase agreement with a mill up in his neck of the woods. We worked closely on that one together along with the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, because the forest industry is so integrated.

It's not like the old days, MPP Barrett, when you, quite frankly, could cherry-pick, because the industry wasn't like it is today. Today, you've got to get every nickel of value out of every bit of wood in the forest, and the reality is that if you don't have use for the low-quality wood, you're going to be challenged in being successful and being competitive. So that's one of the things that we've done—embark on a biomass action plan to ensure that the lower-quality wood is being used so that our mills can keep working.

As I said, it's posted on the Environmental Registry right now; it will be until June 21, and we're eliciting comments.

Biomass is a paramount part of forestry in Ontario. It's part of our forest sector strategy, our biomass action plan; one was kind of the father of the other. When we brought out the forest sector strategy, a biomass action plan is encompassed in that. We've also appointed a committee to help work with us on that. That's where the posting has come from, and that's where the implementation will

come from as well, once we get all the feedback from the posting and take our next steps.

I really appreciate the question. I'm going to turn it over to my deputy minister to give you more details on what our proposal is.

Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. ADM Sean Maguire from forest industry division will be pleased to speak further about our Forest Biomass Action Plan as well as its contributions, and will look at the current and ongoing actions to support biomass use.

Over to you, Sean.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you to MPP Barrett for the question.

I'm happy to talk about opportunities for biomass and our Forest Biomass Action Plan.

I should probably start out by disclosing that I am not related to anybody in the Ottawa Valley, to the best of my awareness, and I don't know Sean Conway, but it seems I might be the only one.

With that being said, I'll start with the forest sector strategy. The strategy set out four pillars of action:

- promoting stewardship and sustainability;
- putting more wood to work;
- improving our cost competitiveness; and
- fostering innovations, markets and talent. Developing a Forest Biomass Action Plan advances commitments made under each of those pillars.

The draft Forest Biomass Action Plan identifies five objectives that will contribute towards the broader goals of job creation, economic development and a sustainable forest sector. Each objective is associated with a set of actions—there are 29 actions in total—that will be pursued over a five-year term of the action plan. The five objectives are:

- to identify pathways to markets for biomass;
- support demand for forest, bioenergy and bio-products;
- improve the business and regulatory environments for the use of biomass;
- support holistic, culturally relevant pathways for Indigenous community involvement in the forest biomass value chains to support reconciliation between Indigenous communities and the crown; and
- to communicate, collaborate and inform on forest biomass opportunities.

Wood is a versatile material for a wide range of uses. In addition to more familiar forest products like lumber, pulp and paper or particleboard, wood is also currently used to produce chemicals, including fertilizers, thickening agents and fragrances. There are also promising emerging uses for wood, including as a source for green solvents and other chemicals, paints and dyes, plastics and polymers, textiles, battery energy storage filaments, and even for use in 3-D printing.

This action plan focuses on two types of forest biomass that can be converted into bioproducts through new and existing industrial processes. The first is forest biofibre

composed of forest resources, which is essentially trees or above-ground parts of trees from the forests that are not normally used for conventional forest products. They're made available from Ontario crown forests under an approved forest management plan or sourced from private woodlots and other forested lands. The second are mill by-products composed of residues generated as a result of forest product manufacturing. What you're looking at there is bark and shavings and sawdust. Mill products and forest biofibre are often used as a renewable fuel to provide the necessary heat or electricity to make forest products, or to generate electricity for Ontario's electricity grid. This often leads to diverting the mill by-products that would otherwise be destined for a landfill to be used in energy production.

I should note, Ontario is also home to manufacturers which make wood pellets and wood chips for use in domestic and commercial institutional and industrial heating systems. Like those chemicals and the materials previously mentioned, there are promising emerging uses for wood as an energy source for modern wood heating, biodiesel and liquid biofuels, green hydrogen, community and district energy systems and other applications.

The forest sector is a leader in the emerging green economy. In fact, in the early parts of the 20th century, the forest industry was already producing a range of energy services and bioproducts using mill by-products from both solid wood processing and pulp and paper operations. Until lower-cost petroleum products were introduced in the 1950s, the wood pulping industry was one of the largest suppliers of specialty chemicals in the world. The forest sector played an important role in Ontario's phase-out of coal for electricity generation. Following a switch from coal to wood pellets at Ontario Power Generation's Atikokan facility, Ontario is home to North America's largest forest biomass-only electricity generating station. This action demonstrates how Ontario's forest sector can contribute to economic and environmental objectives, while positioning the province as a leader in the low-carbon economy.

By supporting job creation, reducing administrative burden and promoting economic growth and prosperity, the Forest Biomass Action Plan will play a role in building a resilient forest sector that encourages innovative uses of forest biomass that contribute to the province's forest management and environmental objectives.

The use of forest biomass supports a resource-efficient forest products sector and has advantages over other feedstocks because of the significant contributions it can make to Ontario's economy, communities and environment. The use of forest biomass can build Ontario's economy by diversifying product and revenue streams, attracting new business and investment in Ontario's forested regions, and creating new markets and trade opportunities. The province would also benefit from increased revenue and provincial gross domestic product and reduced facility energy and disposal costs.

New forest biomass uses can also support communities and livelihoods. Biomass use can create more local jobs

than fossil fuels imported from outside of Ontario, while providing energy security and expanding opportunities for infrastructure investment. In turn, those investments contribute to community capacity and resilience through new training opportunities and local business opportunities, particularly opportunities for increased Indigenous participation in forest sector supply chains.

Importantly, greater use of biomass can improve Ontario's environmental stewardship by reducing waste and disposal of mill by-products, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and providing alternatives to toxic and ecologically damaging fuels and chemicals.

There are several obstacles that currently make diversification of forest biomass use difficult. Emerging and future products from forest biomass often use specific components of wood, making consistency in feedstocks key to their development and commercial deployment. To convert wood into consistent feedstocks, processes like biochemical refining or thermochemical refining can be applied. However, additional work is needed to make these opportunities commercially viable.

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To enable new uses for forest biomass, the province must begin to lay the groundwork for commercialization of new bioproducts to be ready for future opportunities as they emerge. Part of the purpose of this plan is to gather information and build knowledge about maximizing the potential of Ontario's forest biomass, including the variety of products, both existing and in development, which can be produced.

Creating new business opportunities and initiating new projects that use forest biomass can play an important role in the growing economy, while sustaining existing forest sector businesses. Given continued global demand for forest products, consumer interest in sustainable products and movement to a more circular economy, and under the right operational and economic conditions, there is immense potential to increase the use of Ontario's sustainable forest biomass resources.

It's important to recognize that the steps identified in the draft Forest Biomass Action Plan support Ontario's status as a world leader in sustainable forest management. We know that for Ontario's forest industry to remain strong and vibrant for the long term, we need to ensure our crown forests remain healthy, diverse and productive. That's why the main pillar of Ontario's forest sector strategy is promoting stewardship and sustainability.

The Crown Forest Sustainability Act provides for sustainable forest management, including regard for plant life, animal life, water, soil, air, and social and economic values. Guidance for forest management includes specific direction to protect species at risk and their habitat. We continue to conduct collaborative research to ensure long-term ecological sustainability of forest biomass harvesting. The forest biomass in the action plan would be generated through activities under Ontario's existing forest management planning framework.

Ontario wood products are recognized around the world as coming from forests with rigorous sustainable forest

management practices. Forest sustainability is a key principle in the draft action plan, and remains the primary objective of our forest management practices. In the short term, we aim to have a better understanding of Ontario's forest biomass resources and to determine where our forest biomass opportunities are in the emerging green economy. Over the long term, this understanding will assist in stimulating new investments and complement government efforts to support demand and improve the business and policy environments for forest biomass use.

In addition to the actions contemplated in the strategy, it's important to recognize that the province has taken initial steps to encourage the use of forest biomass. Crown forest biofibre is managed according to the province's rigorous sustainable forest management framework. Projects that use forest biomass are considered in economic development and industry support programs.

Ontario has streamlined the regulations for wood combustors and adopted world-class standards into the province's air quality regulatory framework to enable the use of forest biomass in heating applications. Climate and environmental objectives laid out in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan identify the role that forest biomass can play in reducing emissions when used as bioenergy feedstock for other energies.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at two minutes.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Okay. So some of the other industries that we'd be talking about there would be steel, lime, cement—and also as a heating fuel for northern, rural and Indigenous communities.

Ontario has success stories illustrating the potential of biomass to support operations and sustain a circular economy, like with Resolute Forest Products in their north-western Ontario operations. Maybe just for the last little bit, I'll talk a bit about Resolute Forest Products.

In a circular economy, resources gain value as they're optimized through process improvements, waste reduction and repurposing. This creates new and innovative business opportunities while reducing products' environmental footprints.

Wood is harvested to produce pulp and paper at Resolute's Thunder Bay mill, and for lumber at their sawmills in Thunder Bay, Atikokan and Ignace. Wood chips generated from their lumber mills feed their pulp mills, sawdust generated from their lumber mills is used to create wood pellets at their Thunder Bay pellet mill, and wood shavings feed their wood-drying kilns. Other sawmill residues, harvest residues and unmarketable trees are consumed by their bioenergy generating station, producing heat for the pulp mill and paper mills and electricity for the provincial grid, with ash left over from the combustion process used by farmers for soil nutrient enhancement.

The bioenergy generating station is the heart of this integrated model, allowing Resolute to utilize renewable biomass and be at the forefront of a cleaner and more competitive circular economy.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Okay. To unlock Ontario's forest biomass potential, collaboration between all forest sector partners, including government, industry, Indigenous communities, northern and rural communities and research organizations, will be essential. This collaboration will help to diversify the forest sector's product mix, augment existing markets for forest biomass with new users, and expand supply chains. By using Ontario's advantages and existing economic base, a significant opportunity—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're out of time.

We're now to the opposition. MPP Mamakwa, please proceed.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch, Chair. I know we were talking about forest fires with Tracey Mill of the provincial services division, but I wanted to make a comment.

When we talk about the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, sometimes people don't understand what the land, the forest and natural resources mean to us as First Nations.

I grew up in Kingfisher Lake, and my parents would always take me out to the land and say, "Go camping," probably six months out of the year until I was about 13 or 14 years old, until I had to go to high school. That's where I learned the history of my people and the history of where they would camp and all that. That's where I learned all the bays, why they were called that, or the islands, the points, the rivers, the creeks, everything. I'm learning all this in my language; I'm not learning this in—and also, the fish and all the wildlife, the birds, the plants, the trees. Everything you learn there. As Indigenous people, we've always been caretakers of the land, and I think it's really important.

I only share that story because when we talk about natural resources, when we talk about northern development and when we talk about crown lands—these are our treaty territories. These are our traditional territories. Without the land, who are we? Without the land, once I—should we lose our language, where do we go? We can't go back to China; we can't go back to France if we lose our language. That's the importance of it. I think it's always important to realize that it's not like we can go back. We are part of the land; the land is part of us. I think it's important for people to understand that when we're doing policy development work and some of the legislation that comes down.

I want to go back to Tracey. She was talking about type II, and I know, working with Indigenous First Nations, sometimes they're given the lowest training whereby they can't be part of the firefighting, whether it's across Canada or whether it's in the region.

What is the work that's being done to make sure that they're up to par with the people who are in Sioux Lookout and with the people who are in Thunder Bay, the high-level ones? How do we get our people to be part of that system? What's the work that's being done?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you for your opening remarks, MPP Mamakwa.

It reminds me that I had the opportunity—we're talking about Indigenous fire crews—to hear a presentation about the traditional use of fire on the landscape. It does remind me of how important it is for us to continue to learn from the traditional knowledge that many of your community members have in terms of how we both manage fire and how we think about the benefits of fire on the landscape.

1150

It also made me think a little bit more about what I was going to relay to you in terms of some of the work we're doing to bring on Indigenous fire crews and train them. We have, for the last couple of years, been working with Indigenous Services Canada, which has funded us to undertake some training and hiring of Indigenous crews from about six communities in the northwest region of the province, and we're continuing that work this year.

To your point, that initiative is actually aimed at training the Indigenous crews up to that type I fire crew standard, which would facilitate the deployment of Indigenous crews across Canada through our mutual aid agreements, and also potentially internationally with those other countries that we have agreements with too. I agree that certainly type I crews are an important element in our fire suppression activities and we would benefit from greater opportunities to have Indigenous fire crews trained up to that level.

Having said that, we also rely very heavily on type II crews to support the initial attack work that type I fire crews do undertake. I'll just go back to that Indigenous Services—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You've got a minute, because we're going to have to break at—

Ms. Tracey Mill: —project for a moment and—thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry. We just have—

Ms. Tracey Mill: Sorry—to let you know that in 2020, so last year, we used those crews on 24 of the incidents of fires that were ongoing in the province.

With respect to the type II fire crews that are retained by us from private sector contractors, I started to mention that there have been discussions at the national level where we've recognized the importance of increasing our forest fire capacity by potentially exchanging type II fire crews as well.

Right now, what we're doing at the national level is collecting information from all of the other jurisdictions, so the other provinces and territories, about their use of type II crews. Our next steps would be to work collectively across the country to identify the health and safety needs and some of the training and certification processes that would be necessary to allow us to potentially exchange type II fire crews as well.

I hope that answers some of your question, MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): MPP Mamakwa, I just want to say I had earlier interrupted, and I think I checked the wrong time. So we do have just under seven minutes until our break at 12. My apologies.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you. I wanted to bring in a logging issue up in northwestern Ontario. There's an email that I had received—I actually received a bunch of them. This one is based on Whiskey Jack Forest and Kenora Forest, 2021-22, on your work plan.

This one is from the Whiskey Jack Forest issue, and it's from an individual from Perrault Falls. That's just between Ear Falls and Highway 17 at Vermillion Bay. I'm going to read it out and see how we can address this. The letter is written to me:

“I write to you today to voice my concern and opposition to the proposed logging of Wabaskang Lake Road, Sleepy Dog Road and the immediate surrounding area. My family have been property owners on Wabaskang Lake for 49 years, and it has been a great privilege of enjoying the pristine and breathtaking forests that surround this lake, including the road that delivers us to our summer home. We have faced many challenges over the years, from building and maintaining quality roads to receive hydro-electricity and telephone service.

“In my opinion, all the hard work, financial investment and quality of life will be severely and negatively impacted by logging operations on our only access road in the area. Our beautiful, quiet and restful evenings full of calls of loons and sounds of the forest will be replaced by noise of traffic on Highway 105, as there will no longer be any trees to naturally buffer this traffic noise, damage to our only access road, and bare and repulsive and unpleasant disappearance of clear-cutting that will surely not affect only our property values, but will also affect quality of life.”

At the end, he said, “It is my opinion that the proposed work scheduled in the Kenora and Whiskey Jack Forest encompasses a large area of land mass and that tree harvesting can be accomplished in a forest that cannot encroach on residents and property owners in the area subjected to them.

“I urge you to consider my position and the position of the like-minded fellow neighbours and property owners, cease all plans of logging operations on Wabaskang Lake Road and Sleepy Dog Road in Perrault Falls, Ontario. We are but a small section of residential land, but in a huge area of undeveloped forest proposed for harvest. Bypassing us would likely not have a significant impact on logging operations and the revenues; however, the remains of the logging operation on our roads will have consequences for future generations to come. Do not let this happen to our piece of paradise.”

I'm just wondering if anybody would have comment on that.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Mamakwa for the information. I hope you can forward us that email and we can take it off-line. I'd like to properly have a chance to actually see it and digest. I know we do have forest management plans that take into consideration the need to harvest as well as the health of the forest. A forest that is managed is a better forest than one that is not managed. But on the specifics, I'd like to be able to see that email, if you could forward that to me. I'd be more

than happy to pass it on to the officials, and we can at least respond.

I don't know whether this party has emailed us directly. Can you tell on the email whether that email has been sent to us as well? I haven't personally seen it, but can you tell by the email whether it was actually sent to us as well, or just to yourself?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: No, I cannot tell, but I will forward that email to you. You guys can deal with it and see if there's a reply, and that would be great.

It's certainly an issue that continues to happen when we talk about development. It impacts residents of Kiiwetinoong—not only just First Nations, but also non-Indigenous people who are our neighbours. Meegwetch.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): I think that's a good place to end it. We have six minutes and 44 seconds on the clock to the official opposition. We'll be breaking right now, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. When we resume, we will be in the Amethyst Room. We're not in the Amethyst Room right now—well, you're all elsewhere, but the point is, there's going to be a new Zoom link for you to reconnect. Please make a note of that. You might try to reconnect to the old one, and then poor Andrew Kleiman has to deal with that.

Anyway, have a wonderful lunch, everybody.

The committee recessed from 1200 to 1305.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Good afternoon, everyone. We're going to resume consideration of vote 2101 of the estimates of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. There is now a total of seven hours and 19 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates. When the committee recessed this morning, the official opposition had six minutes and 44 seconds remaining.

The committee will run until 6 p.m. Since I'm the only Chair in the room, at some point a few hours in, if we could recess for about five minutes, with your indulgence, would that be okay? All right. Wonderful.

We will proceed with the official opposition. MPP Monteith-Farrell, please proceed.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Good afternoon, everyone. Hopefully, everyone had a good lunch and we're raring to go for our marathon estimates meeting here.

Perhaps what we could do with the remaining six minutes is just let the assistant deputy minister finish her answer with regard to the ministry's response to the Auditor General's recommendations.

Failure of sound system.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: There we go.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I think you're good now.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Good.

And yes, I'll be pleased to finish on the other item from the Auditor General's reports, and then we can, as well, go back to a question you had, an additional question on smelt, I believe.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We can go to that too, if you'd like.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. Thank you.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: So the first one I mentioned was around the community land use planning with the Far North, and the other recommendation from the Auditor General was to confirm the province's position on Indigenous-led protected areas. They made a recommendation to our ministry as part of the broader audit. They recommended to MNRF to seek the necessary direction regarding the province's support for the creation of Indigenous protected and conserved areas, and if direction and approval are obtained, include it in its long-term protected areas strategy, which is described in recommendation 10, actions to recognize Indigenous protected and conserved areas.

Our response on that audit was that the Ministry of Natural Resources agrees with the Auditor General's recommendation and will seek the necessary direction regarding the province's potential to support creation of Indigenous protected and conserved areas. Should the natural resources ministry receive direction and approval for actions to recognize Indigenous protected and conserved areas, the natural resources ministry will include such actions in the long-term protected areas strategy described in recommendation 10.

Would you like me to go on to the smelt question now?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, please.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: In that case, I will hand it off to Tracey Mill, ADM, provincial services division.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Just confirming a few of the items further to your question about the smelt project, MPP Monteith-Farrell—thank you very much for that question. As I mentioned yesterday, we are working with the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. They are the lead for this project, looking at and/or determining whether there is contamination from PFAS in smelt in Ontario. That is the substance, I think, that you referred to yesterday. These are a group of about 4,700 human-made substances. They are things like lubricants and repellents for dirt, water and grease, and can be found in things like firefighting foam; textiles, including carpets; cosmetics; and food packaging materials. These contaminants or chemicals can be found very persistent in the environment and can bioaccumulate in both fish and humans.

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The chemicals have been shown to have potential adverse impacts on humans, and this is one of the reasons, of course, that MECP is looking into them. They are the ministry that provides a lead for Ontario in determining contaminant levels in fish, which they publish, if you recall, regularly in the Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish.

As I mentioned yesterday, we do a fair amount of fisheries assessment on both the Great Lakes and inland fisheries. Through our regular fisheries assessment, we do collect samples of fish from many species across the province that we provide—sample tissues and whatnot—to MECP for their analysis.

I believe that you referred to a report that was released, actually, in Wisconsin. They issued a consumption advisory regarding smelt in—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Ms. Tracey Mill: —Lake Superior, on levels with respect to PFAS. This is one of the impetuses for taking a stronger look at smelt in the Ontario waters of Lake Superior and Lake Huron. MECP did reach out to us and ask if we could collect samples of smelt for their analysis. Although we don't normally catch smelt in our assessment gear, we did take on the approach of partnering with anglers on Lake Superior and Lake Huron who are harvesting smelt during the spawning run. We did obtain samples for MECP for their further analysis.

I'm hoping that provides a little bit more detail with respect to your question, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Are we going to carry out those tests in our other fish or are we already doing it for that chemical?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Just under a minute.

Ms. Tracey Mill: As I did mention, as part of our regular assessment program, we do take samples of fish that we share with MECP for their further analysis, and they use that in order to determine safe consumption levels and publish that in their guide.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I guess we are probably at the end of our time, and we'll give our Chair a break.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You're going to see the clock? We're basically at time.

Just before we proceed to the next section—I don't want to eat into the government's time. MPP McKenna is here. Would she be able to confirm her attendance? Apparently, she's here for the afternoon session.

Ms. Jane McKenna: It's MPP Jane McKenna, and I'm in Ontario.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thank you.

We'll start the clock and proceed with the government side. MPP Skelly.

Ms. Donna Skelly: Good afternoon, everyone. I want to talk a little bit about the forest sector strategy in light of the fact that we have had and continue to see so much demand for a consistent wood supply. Post-pandemic, of course, the cost of that wood supply has also escalated.

Minister, could you speak to all of the challenges that face this particular sector, in terms of labour and skills shortages in the lumber industry, as well as the opportunities and the challenges working with our Indigenous communities, and how you went about compiling and creating this strategy—the round-table sessions that were involved, the stakeholders you consulted with, and what it ended up looking like?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Skelly. It's one of my favourite subjects, to be quite honest with you.

The development of the forest sector strategy is something that we embarked on early in our tenure and that we had committed to, because we had seen a forest

sector that was harvesting about 50% of the available harvest in the province on Ontario's crown lands with regard to forestry. That just wasn't making the industry sustainable or profitable. So we came into office and said, "There has to be a better way."

In fairness, the previous government did not see forestry through the same lens that we see it. We see it, quite frankly, as the permanent lifeblood for the north. Forestry, mining and tourism are the primary income-earners for the north. The forestry sector, which generates nearly \$18 billion a year, is clearly the leader in the north. There is not a community in the north, particularly in the areas of the [inaudible], and certainly in the areas of the [inaudible], that doesn't rely on forestry for their success. Coming to the ministry with a small fraction of the knowledge that I have today, and obviously a small fraction of the knowledge that many others still have in the industry themselves today—but I saw that there was tremendous potential here, if it was managed properly and sustainably.

We embarked on a tour of the province, essentially, and held round tables in seven different communities, getting feedback from industry representatives, municipal representatives, First Nations and Indigenous people—everybody who's involved or could have some involvement, and also those who have some issues with forestry. We toured the province and got that kind of feedback that we needed. Then we sat down with—I will use that term again—a blue-ribbon panel selected from people throughout the province, many of those who would have, at one time or another, sat on one of those round tables, and asked them to join us in the development of the forest sector strategy.

I have to give a shout-out to the ADM at the time. Just help me there, Deputy—

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Dave.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Dave Hayhurst was the assistant deputy minister. I'll give a shout-out to him, because his leadership on this file was absolutely instrumental in the development of the forest sector strategy. As the process went on, ADM Hayhurst reached that time in everyone's life when it was time to move on to other pursuits; namely, retirement and all of the lack of rest that that brings you. Anyway, it was working with the table that ADM Hayhurst—they came up with the draft for the forest sector strategy. The ADM who succeeded ADM Hayhurst, Sean Maguire, is now in charge of implementing that strategy.

It's one that I felt so strongly about because I don't think there's anything that is a greater waste than untapped potential. You hear that all the time, MPP Skelly and the other members of the committee. You hear that about people, and you hear that about athletes: "Man, this guy. Gosh, all that untapped potential. This athlete, all that unfulfilled potential." We had this forest sector here that we knew could do much, much better. We have the best programs. We have the best system of forest management, I believe, in the world. Some would argue, obviously, and I don't expect that they're going to assume that I'm

objective on this subject, and that's okay. But we think we do so many things right, and that's why we've had a forest industry that has gone on for generations.

In fact, I may have mentioned yesterday—maybe I didn't—that a company in my neck of the woods, in Renfrew county, Shaw Lumber, next year will be celebrating 175 years in business. That's in the same family—the Shaws started it, and the Shaws are running it today. That speaks to sustainability, not just from the point of view of a sector, but a family that is completely committed to ensuring the sustainability of that sector, because if you don't take care of your stock-in-trade, you're not going to be in business. The Shaws understand that, and our operators all across the province—none of them are in business as long as the Shaws, but they all understand how important sustainability is.

The first pillar of our forest sector strategy is stewardship and sustainability—if you take care of it, it will last you forever. That's the main pillar that we're based on, so that generations down the road we'll still be talking about a successful forest industry here in Ontario. You lay the groundwork, you start with a solid foundation, and that's what our forest sector strategy—it's exactly what we've done here. We've developed a strong foundation.

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It used to irk me when I heard the previous government talking about this being a sunset industry. Sunset industry? Wagon wheels are a sunset industry, I suppose, except in certain markets for antique products. When we invented the automobile, there were things that did sunset; we get that. But forestry is needed and sustainable in perpetuity. In fact, the United Nations themselves, which are not exactly the biggest promoters of forestry, believe that there will be a 30% increase in demand for forest products over the next 10 years. That is huge. And we see that right now in the pandemic. We see why the price of construction lumber has skyrocketed, quite frankly, because the demand is far exceeding the supply.

What do we do? We need to be able to start to make those changes, make those improvements and make those advancements to meet that supply, to meet that demand. I could go on and on and on, because, as I said, it will be something that I could talk about ad infinitum. I could talk about personal stories, I could talk about folks I've known in the industry over the years.

I'm going to now turn it over to my deputy, Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, to expand upon the impetus and the goals of our forest sector strategy.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I will have ADM Sean Maguire from the forest industry division go into a little bit more detail and explanation of our forest sector strategy, including the committee and some further information.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you, MPP Skelly, for the question. I'm happy to talk a bit about the forest sector strategy.

Before I get going, I would just like to express my appreciation to the minister for putting in a plug for ADM Hayhurst. I reported to him for 10 years, and I learned a

lot from him. I'm looking forward to trying to fill his shoes on the strategy that he led the development of.

The first commitment that was made under the forest sector strategy which I can speak to concerns the appointment of a forest sector strategy committee. The strategy identifies a vision and the four distinct pillars of action. Those four pillars—I think we've mentioned them before, but it bears repeating: promoting stewardship and sustainability; putting more wood to work; improving our cost competitiveness; fostering innovation, markets and talent. Each pillar includes a number of commitments which in turn are advanced through specific actions that are tied to targets for 2022 and 2030.

To assist with monitoring progress on the strategy, Ontario committed to develop key performance indicators for the actions identified under each pillar. Key performance indicators will include direct measures or outputs that, monitored over time, will track changes and trends and help to assess the effectiveness of the various actions or outcomes towards meeting the goals of each pillar.

Some commitments, like maintaining and attracting new investment and increasing forest growth, build on and continue ongoing practices in Ontario's forest sector, work which has built Ontario's reputation as a leader in the global industry. Others, such as enabling technology adoption, improving collaboration in managing our forests and growing talent in the forest sector, will directly shape the forest sector of the future.

These are important commitments, and to ensure we deliver on them, we need to review our progress and lessons learned, whether that directs us to familiar indicators or statistics or looking at capturing new information to ensure we go forward as effectively as possible.

The forest sector strategy committee, working in partnership with the government of Ontario, will provide input on the implementation of the strategy and will support the development of key performance indicators to measure progress on implementing the success of the strategy.

The forest sector strategy committee includes individuals from numerous organizations and communities, including those representing Indigenous peoples. The organizations and communities sitting on the committee are Animiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek First Nation, Columbia Forest Products, Domtar, Eacom, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities, Hec Clouthier and Sons, Lavern Heideman and Sons, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, Rayonier Advanced Materials, Weyerhaeuser, and Wikwemikong Department of Lands and Natural Resources.

Moving on from the committee, I wanted to talk a bit about another significant milestone since the release of the forest sector strategy, which is the draft Forest Biomass Action Plan, which I know I already spoke about, but it's so integral to the strategy that it probably bears a little bit more discussion. I believe the minister may have mentioned that this plan was posted on the Environmental Registry of Ontario on May 6.

Following the release of the strategy in August 2020, the ministry convened a working group of more than a

dozen members in the forest biomass supply chain to develop a draft action plan for public consultation. I just want to go through the groups that were represented in the working group: Atlantic Power, which is a biomass energy producer; the Canadian Steel Producers Association, which is a potential user of biomass energy as they move away from coal and other sources of energy; Constance Lake First Nation; the Cement Association of Canada, which was included in a similar capacity to the steel association; Columbia Forest Products; Domtar; Eacom; Hornepayne Lumber—well, basically a representative from Hornepayne Lumber and White River Forest Products; it was the same person because they're related companies—Lecours Lumber; Ontario Forest Industries Association; Resolute Forest Products; Sagatay Cogeneration and Sagatay Wood Pellets; Wahkohtowin Development GP Inc.; and Wiikwemkoong First Nation—so a pretty diverse group.

Discussions with the working group revealed challenges and opportunities associated with the use of forest biomass in Ontario that are reflected in the draft action plan. Valuable insights from these working group members underscored the importance of bioenergy to existing forest product supply chains. Maintaining and transitioning the province's existing bioenergy infrastructure will create a foundation for future forest biomass investment opportunities and support Ontario's forest-dependent communities.

The forest sector strategy identified a vision with two parts: that Ontario's forest sector is a world leader in making and selling forest products from renewable, sustainable and responsibly managed forests; and that Ontario is a preferred location for investing in commodity and innovative forest products and advanced manufacturing.

The draft Forest Biomass Action Plan echoes this vision across its five objectives, which I believe I brought forward before, but they bear repeating. They are:

- identifying pathways to markets for forest biomass;
- supporting demand for forest bioenergy and bio-products;
- improving the business and regulatory environment for the use of forest biomass;
- supporting holistic, culturally relevant pathways for Indigenous community involvement in the forest biomass value chains to support reconciliation between Indigenous communities and the crown; and
- communicating, collaborating and informing on forest biomass opportunities.

As you can see there, the pillars and the objectives are all intertwined together in a cohesive package.

Releasing this draft action plan not only demonstrates progress on the commitments made in the forest sector strategy, but it's incremental movement towards realizing the overall vision set out in the forest sector strategy. By supporting the use of forest biomass, specifically mill by-products and forest biofibre, this action plan will assist in achieving the forest sector strategy goals to the benefit of the province's forest industry; heavy industries such as steel, cement and lime; Indigenous communities; rural and remote communities; and the government of Ontario.

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In addition to seeking comments on the draft Forest Biomass Action Plan through the posting on the Environmental Registry of Ontario, the ministry is sending emails and letters to Indigenous communities and representatives within or adjacent to a managed forest. And in the Far North communities, the ministry will engage with interested First Nation and Métis communities on key elements of the plan.

Following closing of this posting—I think it's scheduled to close on June 21—feedback and comments will be collected and incorporated into the draft Forest Biomass Action Plan when they're applicable before finalizing the document. The feedback received from the public, Indigenous communities and forest industry stakeholders will help to create a well-informed final action plan that considers varied perspectives.

Successfully finalizing and implementing the Forest Biomass Action Plan will be an important milestone in building a more resilient forest sector that encourages innovative uses of biomass, which in turn contributes to the province's environmental and economic objectives.

Ontario is a world leader in sustainable forest management. We know that, for the forest sector to remain strong and vibrant—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two-minute warning.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you. That encourages innovative uses of forest biomass, which in turn contributes to the province's environmental and economic objectives.

Together we can build a bright future for the forest sector and the many people and communities who rely on it by utilizing our most important and valued asset: a sustainably managed forest.

Since I have a little bit of remaining time, I'll continue and just talk a bit about COVID-19 relief measures. Protecting the future of Ontario's forests also requires that we respond to the challenges that face us today, and the vital role of the forest industry has been especially evident during the COVID-19 outbreak. Both levels of government deemed the forest industry to be essential due to its role in supplying essential forest products for hygiene, medical supplies, food packaging and shipping materials.

Early in 2020, the province provided immediate COVID-19 relief measures to the forest industry including deferring stumpage revenue collection for six months, expediting the forestry roads funding program, and revising forest manuals and independent forest audits to modernize and streamline requirements and provide time savings for businesses. The province made \$3.5 million available for COVID-19 safety measures in tree planting to provide a safe work environment for those who are renewing Ontario forests and to ensure the tree-planting season could continue as planned. We also took advantage of opportunities to administer other targeted support for those businesses hardest hit.

Ontario has more than 1,900 small and medium-sized businesses in the forest sector, directly employing close to 35,000 people. These businesses are more vulnerable to

unexpected costs and may have less capacity to adapt in their operations than larger businesses.

By facilitating access to the Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund, Ontario helped reduce the financial burden on its small—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Sorry, we're at time. Sean, it's nothing personal; you seem like a great guy.

We're now going to move on to the opposition side. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Coincidentally, similar to MPP Skelly, I was thinking about the forests, and my next series of questions are related to forests and forest management.

Sean was just speaking of this: The ministry allotted \$5.3 million through the Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund to assist small and medium-sized forestry operations to cover the costs of COVID-19. How many operations of the 1,900 small and medium-sized operations in the province have actually been approved for the program? And how much of the fund is currently remaining after these approvals?

Hon. John Yakabuski: That's a specific question on numbers that I will turn over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister, and I'll turn it right over to Sean Maguire, whom you just heard, our ADM for forestry industry division. He has all the details on that program, and his division was intimately involved in management.

Sean, over to you.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the question.

I have a little bit of material here on the Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund, so maybe I'll just walk through all of it, because in addition to the numbers, there's some good material to learn about it.

On September 10, 2020, MNRF received notification from Natural Resources Canada that our allocation would be up to \$5.3 million. The key here is that the allocation was set by Natural Resources Canada and the funding was provided, and we distributed it. The program provides funding of up to \$75,000 per eligible applicant, calculated as the lesser of the actual costs incurred to implement COVID-19 health and safety measures at Ontario workplaces between April 1, 2020, and February 12, 2021, or \$500 per full-time-equivalent employee.

In addition, funding is also being used to reimburse the Forestry Futures Trust for the Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund—eligible applicants and costs paid out of the trust. What essentially I'm communicating there is that there were monies that were paid out of the trust to help out with industry with some of their planting costs and any of those costs that were eligible to be covered under the safety measures fund were also eligible for the federal funding.

The fund was launched on January 6, 2021, with an application deadline of February 26, 2021. My business area

presided over putting that together. It was an extremely challenging timeline to get everything up and running, get applications out and get paperwork and funding in place so that we could do the disbursement in order to collect the reimbursement from the federal government. We received a total of 177 applications, of which 165 were deemed eligible, with total eligible claims valued at \$2.6 million and then a further \$2.3 million supporting 11 additional companies under the COVID-19 FFT—Forestry Futures Trust—incremental horticulture cost program was eligible for reimbursement under the fund. The total amount of funding that we submitted to NRCAN and were subsequently approved for reimbursement was \$4.9 million.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for answering that. It's good that we have a good uptake and good that that money was available to keep people safe.

The next question with regard to the forest sector strategy is about the idea and the implementation of tree planting. I just would like an overview of what's going on. How does it compare to other years? What's the financial commitment that companies have to pay into? What are the taxpayers paying into it?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for that question, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Tree-planting reforestation is part and parcel of what we do. If we harvest, we plant, because that is the key to sustainability. You can't be sustainable if you don't replace what you're harvesting. That's an annual endeavour on the part of our ministry, working with our forestry partners.

For the details, I will turn this over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I'll ask Sean Maguire, ADM, forest industry division, again to provide a response and detail around tree planting.

Over to you, Sean.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the question. I am happy to respond.

As the minister pointed out, reforestation after harvest is legislated. Despite COVID-19 happening, the companies in the province continued on with that process. They do that on their own dime, so part of the monies that are remitted in the stumpage package are put into a Forest Renewal Trust, and the renewal trust monies are used to fund the replanting of the forest. Essentially, that system continued on and worked through COVID-19, as it was intended, and a full replant happened. The way that the province assisted that, because there were incremental costs experienced by the industry in keeping its workers safe and also deploying workers—the replant started just as the pandemic started last year, so there was a little bit of deployment disruption and figuring out what's going on. Some of those extra costs—we helped by creating a fund within the Forestry Futures Trust, which is also contributed to by the industry, and they were able to access those funds to cover off some of their incremental tree plant costs.

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Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: In the forest sector strategy, it says that we're going to expand the role of tree planting. Can you explain how that's going to happen?

Mr. Sean Maguire: As part of the strategy, we want to increase the amount of forest that can be harvested, so there are two things to that goal. One is, I believe the minister pointed out earlier, that within our sustainable harvest right now, we can cut 30 million metres of wood, and we're only harvesting about 15 million metres of wood. I think it's 16 years that we've been at or below 60% of our cut, which is not actually good for forest management as well as for economics. We want to boost the harvest, and part of that, as I spoke about, is starting to be able to use some of the parts of the tree that we're not able to use and some of the trees that aren't marketable. That's one way that we would increase the use of wood, and then we'd create more opportunities for renewal and renew the forests to a better and more quality forest.

Then the other part of it is looking at ways that we can increase the growth of the forest, through enhanced planting or through harvest measures that encourage further growth and continuation of the healthier stands of forest over the long term. Those measures, combined together, would increase the amount of wood that's available for harvest in the future.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you. This is a question that came from a concern from the elders in Red Rock First Nation. They co-own the Lake Nipigon Forest Management group, and have publicly expressed their opposition to the use of glyphosate within the Nipigon forest. Despite this, it has continued to be used via aerial spraying.

Has the ministry explored alternative approaches to pest control in managed forests or vegetation control in partnership with Indigenous land stewards? If so, can the minister provide estimated cost breakdowns for alternative measures?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell. The use of glyphosate has certainly been prevalent for some time. It has been approved by Health Canada and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. It's strictly regulated. We know that there is also opposition to it, but it's also very important that we're able to control the growth of unwanted species in the midst of the species that are most desirable for regrowth, for sustainability of a good forest sector industry.

We're always continuously in the real world, and we know that there are not only Indigenous groups, but there are some people who oppose the spraying, period—that exists everywhere. But the Forest Management Planning Manual requirements include First Nation and Métis community involvement and consultation, requiring sustainable forest licence holders to engage with communities on planned operations, including herbicide treatments, prior to implementing the annual work schedule. The ministry is currently exploring options on how to better understand the concerns of Indigenous communities.

I'm going to turn this over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, and she'll be able to expand on what we're doing about glyphosate and the issue surrounding concerns.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister said, we've heard some of the concerns that have been raised. I will ask Jennifer Barton, our ADM of regional operations division, to expand upon some of the work that we're doing right now to listen to and address those concerns.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thank you, MPP Monteith-Farrell, for the question.

As the minister mentioned, Ontario is recognized around the world, actually, for having one of the highest standards of sustainable forest management, which is designed to ensure healthy, diverse and resilient forests.

Part of our forest management framework does talk about the use of herbicides, so I'm going to give you a little bit of background and maybe talk to you a little bit about some of the things we've done.

The primary goal of a forest management plan is to achieve long-term direction for a healthy and sustainable forest ecosystem, which is vital to the well-being of the forests and Ontario communities. Consultations with stakeholders, including the public, Indigenous communities, local cottage associations, resource-based tourism operators, communities and individual landowners, are conducted. Input is reviewed when planning the areas for harvest and post-harvest silviculture, like herbicide application within a forest.

Herbicide programs in Ontario's crown forests are conducted primarily by sustainable forest licence holders. The public is informed about planned forest renewal areas as part of the public review done for the forest management plan, and planned herbicide application is always described in the annual work schedule.

Forest management plans and annual work schedules are accessible on the ministry's Internet page, and obviously the public can find out more information about what's planned for forests in their area each year. Public notices are also placed in newspapers 30 days in advance and seven days prior to any herbicide applications. When spraying is occurring, personnel are placed at key access points to keep people out of the spray box during spray operations.

The ministry and my division in particular are committed to finding a path forward to balance the concerns and interests of First Nations communities while also ensuring that Ontario continues to benefit from the healthy and prosperous forest industry. It is a balancing act, and it's something we do take quite seriously and spend a lot of time working on with our Indigenous partners as well as our forest sector stakeholders.

During the development of recently approved and implemented forest management plans across the province, multiple Indigenous groups did express concern about the approval of the use of herbicide in some forest management plans. The ministry understands that some Indigenous people are opposed to forest herbicide use for

various reasons. Some of the reasons that have been shared with us are potential damage to natural environment; belief that the practice is disrespectful to creation; potential for damage to foods—things like wild blueberries, medicinal plants and game animals; potential for human health impacts; and a number of other concerns that have been raised.

MNRF within my division has made a number of changes to forest management planning requirements that partially address some of the concerns of our Indigenous communities, including enhancing First Nation and Métis community involvement and consultation requirements, enhancing opportunities for involvement in strategic aspects of plan preparation and decision-making processes, working closely with the sustainable forest licence holder requiring those groups, the SFL, in particular, to communicate with communities on planned operations, including herbicide treatment prior to finalizing the annual work schedule to identify and update values or concerns.

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We have a number of communities that we're working closely with. There are a number of examples right across the province where we've worked to either reduce the amount of herbicides used in a particular area or to eliminate spraying from certain blocks where Indigenous communities have worked in the past to both demonstrate and to be clear about what their values are. I have a number of examples across the province, if it's helpful, but maybe I'll stop there and see if you want to direct me in a certain direction.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: That was very helpful. Thank you.

Are there any alternative approaches that are being considered in those areas where, let's say, no spraying happens in that area because they're harvesting their food in that area? Is there another approach that perhaps can be undertaken for those who are harvesting their food in those areas?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We have two minutes.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thanks for the follow-up.

As I mentioned, we do have a number of examples across the province where both the ministry and the forest industry are working with Indigenous communities to reduce the amount of herbicide applied on the forests. For example, Lake Nipigon Forest Management Inc. is really striving to reduce the amount of herbicides applied. The silviculture program for the 2021 to 2031 term reflects a reduction in chemical site preparation and tending a particularly aerial application towards a shift to ground-based manual activities.

So there are options and there are opportunities. I think that's a lot of the discussion that goes into the forest management planning with local communities, to really identify what the concerns are and where some of the areas of concern are that we can perhaps work around, and then working with the forest industry companies to look at some of the options—as I mentioned about the Lake

Nipigon Forest Management company—to reduce the spray where possible.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: That was the group that reached out to me. I see that they were successful—since they're co-managers, I guess—and that they were actually on board in getting something done there, so that's great news.

Chair, time?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Fourteen seconds.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You're donating it back, I guess.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Now we're moving to the government side. MPP Cuzzetto.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I want to thank the minister and MNRF for everything that you guys do.

I've learned a lot over these last two days. I didn't know that Ontario had a wild pig issue. The only time I ran into wild pigs and boars was in Italy. You're driving a little Fiat, and you see a 300-pound pig in front of you. It's pretty scary at night, especially when it's pitch-dark at night.

My question is really more on the forestry industry. How does that drive the growth of our economy, and what are we doing for our future generations? And what technology are we using to protect our forest industry?

Hon. John Yakabuski: That's a great question, MPP Cuzzetto. I want to thank you for not only being on the committee but also bringing forward that question.

I'm glad you survived the Fiat-pig fiasco, as they might have called it at the time.

I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I think wild pigs cause about \$1.5 billion in damage in the United States per year. So you can just see what kind of a mess or what havoc they can wreak on the economy and the farming community, the agriculture community especially. A couple of years ago, we had an E. coli outbreak that was traced to romaine lettuce, the kind we all have in Caesar salads, and apparently it was traced to wild pigs in one of the lettuce fields in California getting through the fences and doing what they do. That's what was the actual cause of the E. coli outbreak, from what I've learned. I can't confirm that here, but that's what I was told. I know this is not a question about wild pigs, but sometimes we just sneak it in.

I know your question is about the forest sector and what we're doing to ensure that it's an economic driver for future generations. One of the things, quite frankly, is forest sector practices, forest management practices, which were already, I think, world-class, among the best in the world. But we're even improving on those. The \$18-billion impact on the economy with a harvest at around 16 million cubic metres, if we can get that harvest up to what it could handle, which is 30 million cubic metres—not all of that will be top-grade wood, but much of the wood would be. The reality is that that contribution and that economic impact will only increase. With that kind of

impact, it's going to mean more jobs for young people in the north, more jobs all across the province.

We talk about forestry and how important it is in the north, but there's a tremendous amount of forest-related companies right here in the GTA, of which I know you're an MPP, that rely on wood products to generate their business—so it's jobs in the north, but it's jobs everywhere. And that's only going to increase with good forest management practices.

One of the things, for example, that we're doing is, improving our forest resources inventory, our ability to track and calculate and quantify our inventory. You can't have a successful forest management plan, you can't have a successful harvest, if you don't know how much you've got to cut, how much you've got to harvest. So by improving our methods there, such as lidar and other technological advancements, we're going to be able to ensure that we're getting to that extra harvest that has been missed through other ways of determining it and forest resources inventory management measures of the past. That's going to make it more of a certainty that we will be able to harvest the available timber, which transfers into greater economic activity and more jobs.

Every time you have an impact of a dollar, it really means an impact of several dollars to the economy because that all spreads about. People are working in the forest industry; they're buying things that they wouldn't be able to buy. The Ford dealer, the Chev dealer, the Ram dealer—I know I'm talking about trucks here, but we like trucks, eh, Rudy? They're not going to sell vehicles if people aren't working. It doesn't matter what industry it is, it doesn't matter what segment of the economy; if people don't have a job, they're not going to be buying those kinds of things. It doesn't matter whether it's vehicles or clothes or homes or whatever. More economic success is a benefit to every single one of us.

But we have to do all those things in a sustainable way. There's just no good to be like the prodigal son—my father used to always tell me the Biblical story of the prodigal son, who squandered his inheritance and then had nothing. You want to take care of that resource. It's no different in the case of a natural resource like our forests. You have to take care of that.

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So when we talk about sustainable forest management practices for the future, that is a bedrock, foundational pillar of this industry, full stop. It's a bedrock principle of this industry.

I'm going to turn it over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, who will be able to expand on our commitment and our focus on sustainability, because that's where the real success is found.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister said, our wood and wood products are globally recognized as coming from forests that are responsibly and sustainably managed. That sustainable forest management ensures our long-term forest health and continued prosperity.

I'm happy to pass this over to Craig Brown, our ADM for policy division. He can speak a little bit further about how the CFSA is our framework for ensuring sustainable forest management in Ontario and talk a little bit about things like third-party certifications, as well as stewardship and sustainability.

Over to you, Craig.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you very much, Deputy, and thank you, MPP Cuzzetto, for the question. I am happy to talk about our sustainable forest management framework. We've discussed forestry quite a bit over the past hour, and we recognize it's one of the minister's favourite topics.

Sustainable forest management provides for the long-term health of Ontario's forests, while providing social, economic and environmental benefits to Ontarians. Crown forests provide several things: They provide biodiversity, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities. Through sustainable harvesting, crown forests also support a forest industry that creates products we need and good jobs for people across Ontario, particularly in rural and northern Ontario.

We know that for the Ontario forest industry to remain strong and vibrant in the long term, we need our crown forests to remain healthy, diverse and productive; the minister discussed this at length in his opening remarks. Thanks to our robust forest policy framework, Ontario's crown forests are diverse and resilient, and the wood that we harvest from them is sustainably sourced and renewable.

Ontario's sustainable forest policy framework is globally recognized for its effective management of crown forests. It is a robust system, it's rooted in the best available science, and it's founded on an adaptive management approach of planning, implementing, monitoring and replanting, based on performance and the evaluation of new information, science and traditional ecological knowledge.

The foundation of the sustainable forest policy framework—and the deputy mentioned this—is the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. The act provides for the sustainable management of crown forests in a manner that must have regard for plant and animal life, including species at risk, as well as water, soil, air, and social and economic values.

The framework includes mechanisms and tools that maintain oversight and protect the environment and biodiversity in our managed crown forests. We have a forest management planning manual that prescribes a rigorous process that determines an approved level of harvesting and renewal and protects natural, cultural and Indigenous values. This process requires consultation with the public and with Indigenous communities.

We also have forest management guides that provide silvicultural practices and methods to conserve biodiversity and protect wildlife habitat, watersheds, cultural heritage and recreation. These guides are required to be reviewed at least once every 10 years, so that the latest science and consideration of evidence and expert advice is incorporated into forest management. They direct the type, arrangement and ages of forest and the landscape, and this

helps forest managers maintain habitat for wildlife, birds, fish and plants. The guides also determine if forest operations need to be modified to retain special features like decaying trees, protect sensitive habitats like bird nests, lakes, streams and wetlands, or support the conservation of water and soil resources—so a very comprehensive management framework.

We also have forest trusts that provide funding for renewing harvested and naturally disturbed forests, and a compliance program that ensures forest management operations align with approved forest management plans.

We have the Independent Forest Audit Program, which assesses whether forests are being managed sustainably, in compliance with all the regulations.

We have reporting on the status of forests and forest management to provide transparency and also information that we can use and that our partners can use to inform adaptive management. We also have information management systems that collect and maintain information on natural resource values and features, forest resources inventory and forest growth to support analysis and modelling of harvest scenarios and also consider the long-term changes to future forest condition and habitat. These critical parts of the framework are part of the adaptive management cycle that is repeated every 10 years on each management unit in the province.

The deputy referenced third-party certification. In addition to our rigorous forest policy framework, much of Ontario's forest industry uses internationally recognized and third-party forest certification systems. Forest certification systems applicable in Ontario have been developed by the Canadian Standards Association, the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. As of 2018, a total of 26.2 million hectares in the province were certified by one or more of these certification systems. This works out to roughly 77% of the crown forests managed in Ontario. By law, forest managers must renew and maintain all harvested areas to provide for the sustainability of crown forests. The ministry, industry and independent third parties monitor and assess the implementation of sustainable forest management practices, including renewal activities.

Compliance inspections and independent forest audits conducted at the management level help to ensure that forest operations follow approved forest management plans, and information about Ontario's forests is regularly collected by the ministry using a combination of ground surveys, aerial surveillance, satellite imagery and research programs. The ongoing collection of forest information is absolutely essential for continuous learning and for adaptive management.

You heard my colleague Sean Maguire talk about the forest sector strategy and the first pillar of that strategy, sustainable growth. Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy's first pillar is promoting stewardship and sustainability, and it identifies several goals, both for the short term, by 2022, and the long-term, by 2030. An initial area for action is to earn recognition for our sustainable forest management policies.

In global markets, Ontario collaborates with the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers' Forest in Mind Program to address market challenges by providing international customers with facts about Ontario's strong record in sustainable forest management.

In Ontario, we have the third-party It Takes a Forest initiative that is helping to make the public aware of our strong record of sustainable forest management.

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Our youth are our future, and we are increasingly becoming an urban province. So to support students' understanding of Ontario's forests and the role that forests play in the province, we have produced a series of educational tools, including lesson plans and immersive educational experiences like Forestry in the Classroom and Forestry Connects. These are tools that educators may use, and of course other resources are available to help students learn about forestry in their classrooms.

The province will continue to work with the forest industry, Indigenous communities and other partners to maintain and adapt the forest policy framework, including the forest management planning process and to sustainably manage Ontario's forests and enable a strong and vibrant forest industry now and into the future. Ontario will pursue strategic alliances with ongoing third-party certification systems to take advantage of extensive marketing tools to reach key groups.

We'll also undertake reporting that provides transparency to the public about the status of forest resources and forest management activities. Reporting also supports ongoing adaptive management efforts to improve forest practices.

We will also continue our practice of conducting applied research in best science informing evidence-based decision-making and policy—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you—and work with Indigenous peoples to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge in forest management. And we will continue to use best science and information to support forest management planning, including growth and yield, ecological land classification and forest inventories. Consistent with the principle of adaptive management, Ontario will continue to advance to make available forest research on the impacts of a changing climate on future forest growth, on wildland and fire and carbon storage in trees.

Part of our future commitment to sustainable stewardship includes working with Indigenous communities, organizations and businesses along with the forest industry and municipalities to further share the economic benefits from forestry. This is done by building the capacity of Indigenous businesses and workers to participate in the forest sector by providing training opportunities and supporting Indigenous business development. We're also promoting increased involvement through collaborative business partnerships and exploring options to expand resources revenue-sharing with more Indigenous communities and northern municipalities.

Ontario also recognizes that Indigenous communities hold Aboriginal and treaty rights and that many rely on healthy forests to exercise those rights. We also acknowledge the cultural significance of forests to many Indigenous communities. Forest management will continue to be sustainable and carried out in a way that respects Aboriginal and treaty rights and cultural values, and the protection of Indigenous values identified through forest management will continue to contribute to the sustainability of Ontario's forests.

I'm sensitive to time. I suspect I'm getting close.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You noticed me leaning forward, I guess. Yes, you're at time.

We're going to move to the opposition side. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Further on forests: There was something that I noticed in estimates. Can you explain how streamlining the forest management manuals will save \$9 million?

Hon. John Yakabuski: How will streamlining the forest management manuals save \$9 million? The short answer is streamlining; however, we have a much longer answer than that, MPP Monteith-Farrell. Streamlining, of course, is looking at every aspect of it, to look where there are efficiencies that can be found, and we do that in every aspect of life all the time. That's our job, right? Every day, you've got to be looking at, is there a better way to do things? You know the old saying, build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door, or something like that. That's what we're constantly doing in this ministry. We're finding better ways to do things and streamlining the manual; reducing some of the regulatory burdens that harvesters have to follow, with always having a keen eye on our number one pillar in our forest sector strategy, which is stewardship and sustainability.

I just did a little opening salvo there, and then I'm going to, as is my wont, turn it over to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for the question.

We have to be able to quantify and measure that \$9 million. So I will pass it over to Sean Maguire first to start. Craig may have some additional information. If we don't have the specifics on hand today—we do have them, and we will certainly bring them back at a later time. I'll pass this over to Sean to see if he's got the details on hand.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you for the question. I'm happy to respond. I don't have all the details, but I have some examples—or I think I can conceptualize it for you, if that helps.

Really, the way that the \$9 million is assembled is kind of an array of duct tape and Band-Aids, where we're just pulling together all the little bits of savings from all these different measures that we've taken under the burden-reduction actions that we've taken.

A few examples are: We've eliminated some redundancies between pieces of legislation that were competing with each other, which reduces permitting requirements and overlapping planning requirements, such as overlaps

between the Endangered Species Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act. One that's near and dear to my heart, although it's probably not the most high-profile one, is that we had some overlapping authority or approval requirements to start a harvest and then to haul unscaled wood, so we looked at how we could cover both with one approval, and we essentially eliminated one of the approval processes. It doesn't seem like a big amount of savings for an individual company, but if you look at every single company across the province every year, all year long, you can really accumulate a fair amount of savings just by eliminating one approval requirement. So it's a number of things like that.

A number of forms that we have: We took forms and we reduced—as tiny things as nobody uses faxes anymore, so we took the requirement to provide a fax number off the form. That in itself doesn't save a nickel for anybody, but accumulated across the province, across the number of forms we have, it does help to alleviate some of the burden. I would describe it as a laundry list. If we were to bring you the list, we could probably read it for hours, accumulating. It's not going to be many huge, big-ticket items. It's going to be an accumulation of tons of small items where the industry will experience savings. By virtue of the fact that it's effective, I think we and the minister received quite a great deal of appreciation from the industry for the efforts that we made.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: So there are a number of measures that you've taken throughout the organization to come up with that number of \$9 million, is what I understand from that answer. Well, that's significant. Congratulations. Hopefully, those are not all things that were redundant.

Next, I'd like to talk about the technology, because—and Minister, you'd mentioned the use of new technologies and purchasing new technologies at significant costs. My next question is a little bit about that.

Forest plans depend on forest resource inventories. This was historically done by aerial photography and to identify stands. The electronic FRIs that use lidar-like technology are inconsistent with the old data and surveying. Can you explain how this technology will reconcile older data with newer surveying methods?

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Hon. John Yakabuski: Of course I can't explain that, but I have people who can—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Oh, I don't know.

Hon. John Yakabuski: —and I am certainly going to pass it on to them at the appropriate time. But I do want to say that we're in a constantly changing world and we're in a constantly changing industry. As I had said earlier, the old way of determining our forest resource inventory isn't going to cut it—no pun intended—in today's markets. We've got to be better. If we want to harvest that allowable harvest level of 30 million cubic metres, we've got to do better. So there are a number of things that we need to do better in order to get there. ADM Maguire and ADM Craig Brown have talked about it throughout our sessions here, as well as ADM Barton of regional operations. All of the

ADMs have talked about the forest industry. Whether it's policy or regional operations or forest industry divisions, we're constantly finding better ways to do things, and that's out of necessity. As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. All of these new technologies didn't come about by accident. They came about because people needed better ways of achieving their goals and accruing the data that was necessary to be better. Lidar and other technologies are some examples of how the industry has changed and the requirements of the industry are being met by improvements to technology.

Innovation is the key to success in today's world. If you're not moving forward, you're getting left behind, right? If you're not going ahead, you're losing ground to somebody. So that's the whole impetus behind technology and improving the way we do things.

As I said, I wouldn't be able to answer that question, and I've spent a few minutes proving that I can't answer that question. So now I'm going to swing this by the deputy, Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, who will do a better job of getting you that information, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

As the minister said, FRI is absolutely critical to both business needs for forest industry but also for us to be able to sustainably manage the forests well. So we've been making some very significant improvements.

I'm going to ask Tracey Mill, who, in her division, as well, looks after science and research. She will give some further information.

Ms. Tracey Mill: I'll try to do justice to this question, MPP Monteith-Farrell, but if there is still further information after I finish, we'll follow up by getting some of our FRI experts to jump in and explain in a bit more detail.

You are right; the forest industry does rely on science and accurate imaging in order to provide that inventory upon which they will plan and do their work schedules to remain competitive in the market. You're also correct that we have recently invested in improving, as the minister said, our ability to do the forest resource inventory, particularly with the acquisition of lidar, or what's known as light detection and ranging. It is a more advanced remote sensing technology. This new forest inventory information will inform our forest management planning and decision-making by providing quantitative information on key forest structural attributes such as tree height and wood volume.

I will say that when we went out looking to modernize some of our technology regarding the forest resource inventory, we did look at various types of technology that were out there on the market, and we adopted lidar after evaluating several other imagery acquisition options in terms of what we felt would be best suited to the work the ministry is doing and for the forest industry.

I will also say that in choosing this particular technology, we were supported by the Provincial Forest Inventory Advisory Committee. You may be aware that this is an advisory committee consisting of industry representatives

and other experts in forest resources and technology. They were quite supportive of us moving to the use of lidar in our inventory. It does allow the ministry to reduce reliance on some of the field sampling, field crews and the photo interpretation, like what you spoke to, I think actually both yesterday and then today again in your question.

In terms of taking this new technology and reconciling some of the datasets between our traditional methods and this new work, we are actively researching processes to reconfigure some of our models in using lidar. We have projects under way that are being funded through Forestry Futures Trust Ontario's Knowledge Transfer and Tool Development Program to focus specifically on this.

We're also working with leaders in this field across the country, including some in other provinces, like the University of British Columbia, where the Canada Research Chair in remote sensing is based.

I know that we're also working closely with our lands and resources cluster in the ministry.

My colleague Rocco is also on the line here, who may wish to add some further information to the specific question that you're asking regarding some of the transition from one dataset to another dataset.

Mr. Rocco Passero: Rocco Passero, land and resources cluster within MNRF, chief information officer. Thank you, Tracey.

Yes, we're quite excited with this technology. A lot of what Tracey spoke to is actually how we're applying it with respect to inventorying our forests, and it's primarily being used by forest managers. When you think about this technology—it is typically flown in an airplane or a drone and tracked by a GPS satellite. It is used by the ministry to inventory its forest landscape. As part of that, it's applying not just the technology but also looking at data being—really, it's a new natural resource, if you think about it, and how we apply it to understanding the total wood volume within our forests. It is a three-dimensional image of the forests, and it provides an accurate and modernized landscape to help us with respect to managing and making decisions around not just the tree species but the composition, range, age and distribution of our forests.

As my colleague spoke to, the lidar project that we have under way is actually one of the largest projects in Canada. It's being used not just within the forest sector, but there are other common uses within the public service and other sectors. Some of those other uses would be in the agriculture sector, which includes the analysis of yield grades, crop scouting and seed dispersions.

The question was being asked around the data and how we are integrating that data, how we are using the legacy data based on how we've collected that in the past, and how that is informing our decisions when we begin introducing this new modern lidar data. I think what's important to understand is how we integrate this to our geospatial data services. The ministry plays a fairly significant role in coordinating partnerships to acquire, use and distribute foundational geospatial data services and data across governments, the BPS, academia that we heard about earlier, and the business sectors.

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As part of that, we are applying this geographical science—geospatial services and technology and digital geography—to enable the business modernization that we have well under way within our ministry. And when we look at integrating the new modern data as well as the data that we would have traditionally tracked and inputted into our systems, we have three lenses or ecosystems that we consider our enablers. The first enabler is about the content and how we use it to create geospatial available data to enable our program delivery. We then overlay both the existing data and the new data that we're collecting to apply analytics and visualization—or mapping, as we call it—for that timely decision-making. Lastly, the third enabler is the power and integration of location and how important that is when it comes to understanding our forest inventory.

I think what's really key—the minister touched upon this as well—is that the technology pace of change in this ecosystem is rapidly advancing with remote sensing. You would hear terms like “Internet of Things,” “open standards,” “cloud computing,” and the application of artificial intelligence, which is really helping us around—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Rocco Passero: And when we look at the science of where, we're not only applying it within natural resource management, but it's also being applied to other sectors: agriculture, as I spoke to earlier, mining, economic development, and transportation.

The “where” component is critically important for determining how we deliver the MNR services. We talked earlier about fire. We talked about flooding. We have some really cool geospatial applications online, like Fish ON-Line, which is a very popular geospatial app from our citizens and anglers. So I think when we look at the “where” component, place not only helps us understand the services we deliver but also shows us where and how to intervene, and the interactive online apps that we're now collecting through lidar and through some of our traditional data are playing an important role when it comes to the modelling that my colleague spoke to earlier—prediction as well as forecasting—and then service delivery of the existing landscape.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for that answer.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thirty seconds.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My quick question—it won't get answered, but it's just to think about: Is this significant investment good value for money?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You've got 15 seconds. Maybe we'll leave it to the next batch. Or if you'd like to start, go ahead.

Mr. Rocco Passero: Yes, I would definitely say it's good value for money, based on the application and how we're using it, and how it's going to inform some of our modelling going forward.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Perfect. We're out of time.

We're now moving on to the government side. MPP McKenna.

Ms. Jane McKenna: Minister, as always, it's a privilege to be here today with you. Ironically, I was just talking to one of my constituents in Burlington, Harry, and he wanted me to tell you that he appreciates all the hard work that MNR is doing for the people of Ontario. So I wanted to pass that along first. I also want to thank your parliamentary assistant, MPP Harris, for all the hard work that he has done in your ministry.

One of the questions that Harry asked me is—he's interested in your redesigned program. I know you recently redesigned the business support program for the forest sector. Could you just elaborate a bit more on that?

Hon. John Yakubuski: Thank you very much, MPP McKenna, for your participation and also for your kind words. You give our best to Harry—right back at him.

There was a previous iteration of a support program for the forest industry. Working with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, we felt there was a better way of supporting the industry and encouraging investment in innovation. We have a plan to build a future with a better quality of life and a higher standard of living. We're working together with the people of Ontario to make life more affordable, to prepare people for jobs, create a more competitive business environment and make government smarter. Ontario's forest sector is a significant driver of economic growth and prosperity, and we're committed to promoting growth in this key industry, which is such an important source of employment in rural and northern regions of the province.

In addition to measures like developing sustainable growth, Ontario's forest sector strategy, the release of our draft Forest Biomass Action Plan and our participation in the federal Forest Sector Safety Measures Fund, we've also looked to build Ontario up by improving the programs and supports already in place.

We redesigned the former Forestry Growth Fund, making it more streamlined, transparent and user-friendly to the forest sector industry. It's an important program which helps address the economic development challenges in the province's rural and northern regions, including access, cost of capital, a higher cost of doing business and greater difficulties attracting and retaining talent.

Together, these initiatives will offer better support for the industry, help us promote a stronger and more dynamic forest sector and enable us to make Ontario the most attractive place in North America to invest, grow business and create jobs.

MPP McKenna, I've had the opportunity to participate in the awarding of funding under the FSIIP program to a number of businesses at this point, and we're very, very happy with the uptake, the quality of the applications that have been submitted. We believe that it really is designed to enhance the abilities of so many businesses that are directly involved in the forest product industry, sustaining, maintaining and creating new jobs, which is absolutely—

that's our raison d'être in this government, as you know, to put more people to work and make Ontario the best place to live, work and raise a family. And the forest sector is a big part of that. The FSIIP program is designed to really do the same thing in the forest sector that matches our government's commitment to job creation right across the economy.

I'm going to turn it over to my deputy minister, Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, and she will be able to expand a little bit more on the details of the FSIIP program.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Sean Maguire, who you've heard from earlier today, our assistant deputy minister for the forest industry division, can provide you with some more detailed information on our Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program.

Sean, over to you.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy, and thank you to MPP McKenna for the question. I'm happy to speak a bit about the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program.

To start with, the objective of the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program is to support strategic projects that improve productivity and innovation, enhance competitiveness, support new market access, and strengthen supply chains in regional economies. The new Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program emphasizes the continued importance of regional economic development, business growth and job creation in forest-dependent regions across northern and rural Ontario. Along with its new name, the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program makes it easier for forestry businesses to gain access and apply for funding.

We heard from industry that there needed to be more diversification in the forest sector, a better use of wood supply and an expansion of export market opportunities. We heard that the high cost of equipment is a barrier to investing in Ontario's forest sector, and we heard that companies want support for research and innovation. We redesigned the program to make it more streamlined, transparent and user-friendly for the forest sector. This will help to create the right conditions to help the forest industry to innovate, attract investment and create jobs for all regions across the province that depend on forestry.

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By redesigning the program, we made it easier to apply. This helps more forestry businesses to access it. Working from the existing budget of the Forestry Growth Fund, the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program provides up to \$10 million annually to leverage strategic investments in forestry businesses currently operating in Ontario, or forestry businesses expanding into or establishing new operations here in Ontario. The Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program follows an open, competitive, rounds-based applications process.

Support is available under two project categories. The first is business projects with at least \$3 million in eligible costs undertaken by for-profit manufacturers and processors of wood and forest biomass across Ontario. This

includes sawmills, pulp and paper mills, secondary wood manufacturers and/or bio-economy projects.

The second project category is collaboration projects with at least \$3 million in eligible costs undertaken through a collaboration of forest sector for-profit businesses, not-for-profit research organizations, forest sector industry associations and academia. To be eligible, a collaboration needs to develop, diversify and transform Ontario's forest sector through innovation, technology, process and/or products, and a minimum of three partners are required, including at least one Ontario-based, for-profit forestry, wood products manufacturing or forest products company.

The new program emphasizes performance-based loans, with maximum funding for a project changed from 40% down to 30% of total project costs. This change is expected to result in funding being made available to a larger number of projects, allowing the government to stretch limited dollars. Grants continue to be available for collaboration stream projects to a maximum of 30% of eligible project costs or, in exceptional circumstances for business stream projects, to a maximum of 15% of eligible project costs.

The forest sector is a major employer in some of the province's most remote communities, and growing the forest sector through the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program will help these communities to thrive. The new program puts greater emphasis on the impact a project will have on a region, and it considers the importance of a project to Ontario's forest sector as a whole. Key project outcomes like job creation, innovation, productivity and product enhancement remain primary considerations.

The program redesign was well received by the then chief executive officer of the Ontario Forest Industry Association, Jamie Lim. She wrote the following about the program:

"The Ontario forest sector continues to innovate and adapt in a rapidly changing environment. OFIA is very supportive of a more efficient and accessible funding program that will incentivize investment, encourage integration and create jobs in all regions of the province. We are grateful for the commitment by the Ontario government to grow our sustainable and renewable sector."

Ontario's new vision and approach will help this important sector to grow and create good jobs, while increasing accountability and transparency. This focus on strengthening regional economies is part of our plan to build Ontario together. The Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program will help to address these concerns and encourage much-needed investment in the sector.

With all that description of the program, it might be helpful to talk a bit about the first recipient of funding under the program.

Last September, the government announced the first company to be approved for funding under the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program. The government provided \$2 million to the wood products company Oxford Pallet, which provides essential wood products

like crates, bins and mulch to many businesses ranging from packaging and transport to biofuel and farming. The money will help the Oxford-county-based company to expand its operations and introduce innovative robotic and vision equipment to boost productivity and create local jobs as part of a three-year, \$9-million project. The funding will finance construction of a new 54,000-square-foot building, plus add the new robotic and vision equipment. The investment is expected to create 20 new jobs, double the plant's production capacity, and increase lumber purchases from local, regional sawmills and lumber wholesalers in Ontario by more than 30%. and the innovative equipment and technology planned in the company's expansion is the first of its kind in North America's pallet industry. So in addition to more pallets, the company will be able to use waste material to make new products, like bedding for livestock. And the project levered \$2 million in federal funding, which is always a good thing for Ontario. So this investment will not only create jobs for the local community; it will support an industry that thousands of families across this province depend on.

I'll talk a bit about the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program application process. It's a two-stage process and takes approximately five months, which is a 50% reduction from the previous program. The forms and materials are available through a Web link, and applicants must be registered at Transfer Payment Ontario, referred to as TPON, to access application forms. As I said, it's a two-stage process.

Stage 1 is called preliminary assessment. Basically, that's a high-level assessment that determines eligibility and fit with the program objectives. So interested applicants complete an initial stage 1 eligibility checklist, an application form, which includes an overview of the project, its alignment with objectives of the program and a checklist to confirm the project meets all eligibility requirements. The program's objectives are to enhance productivity and competitiveness, increase innovation, create greater market access for Ontario firms, improve the competitiveness of Ontario's broader forest sector, and strengthen regional economies. Then the projects are assessed on whether or not they meet the FSIIP eligibility guidelines and how well the project aligns with the FSIIP objectives and criteria and how the project compares with other projects submitted through the program.

Passing through the preliminary assessment, they go to stage 2, which is referred to as project evaluation, which is an in-depth project evaluation, including independent third-party financial and technical due diligence. Projects are assessed on both qualitative and quantitative measures. Applicants that are approved to move on to stage 2 are asked to submit a stage 2 application, which includes a detailed business plan and supporting documentation that will allow for in-depth evaluation of the company and the project. The stage 2 application is evaluated and scored against the objectives and criteria of the program and includes independent financial and technical due diligence, project risk assessment and calculation of return on investment to the province. The return on investment

calculator estimates the return on investment to the province considering several factors, including provincial tax revenues based on new direct and indirect jobs created, new incremental stumpage fees to the province resulting from the project and the provincial rate of borrowing. The project is scored and compared against other projects seeking funding under the program.

It's worth noting here that this is a discretionary non-entitlement program with a limited budget, which means there are some projects that will meet eligibility requirements but may not be approved for funding because it's competitive. Within each round there's a competition, so the top projects win the competition.

Maybe I'll do a time check here before I continue on.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You've got just under five minutes.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Okay. I'll try and stay under that five minutes this time so I don't make you feel bad.

How about we talk about how we ensure proponents follow the rules and achieve the goals of the program?

Essentially, successful applicants must enter into a legal funding contract with the province. The contract would outline all the terms and conditions of funding, which include project milestones, investment targets, job targets and payroll targets, and funding is not provided unless terms and conditions of the contract are met.

All funding is provided on a reimbursement basis, aside from an initial advance, if it's used. When it's on a reimbursement basis, that means it's based on actual costs incurred by the company. The company must also provide documentation and reporting to the government and reporting to substantiate all the costs incurred, which the province conducts due diligence on to validate and make sure that they meet the eligibility for claims.

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There are clawback provisions in the contract tied to the investment and job and payroll targets. The other thing to note is that the clawbacks are applied if the company chooses to close or leave the province.

The other interesting thing about the program that I'll talk about—and I'm imagining this is a point of interest for everybody anyway—is that in this current year, we didn't spend out the program, but we were able to re-profile \$3 million from last year's budget into this year's budget. It's probably a good idea just to walk through why that's the situation and where we're at. The first thing to note is, based on the re-profile, this year's budget is actually \$13 million for the fiscal year. This re-profiling wasn't surprising to us who work in the funding program business, given that it's a capital investment support program and they take time to get rolling.

Companies that are interested in participating, when you announce a program like this, need to have a qualifying project in mind and they need to have internal capital allocations to support their part of the investment, and they're often synchronizing with other potential funding sources like banks and the federal government, so it's not—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Mr. Sean Maguire: —instantaneous. People aren't ready to go and instantaneously have projects to take advantage of a program like this, since it's focusing on big projects. It takes a while for a program like this to build an inventory of applicants who will be willing to move forward with viable projects.

Further to that, we rolled out the program, and as we were getting it going, we hit a pandemic, and that made it hard for companies to feel confident and comfortable enough in future markets that they were interested in investing. So we basically had a little bit of a lack of uptake at the very start of the program because of that, but we're currently building an inventory of applications, and we expect to see more approvals this year. Just for stats, we're up to 52 inquiries right now, and we have eight stage 1 applications received or in some form of evaluation.

As applications are approved, we also have to be conscious of the fact that allocating—if it's a three-year project and the funding goes out in a future year, that means we're going to use up future years' portions of the budget. So we'll have a layering situation, and multi-year projects can affect the availability of funds for new projects to come into the program. That's something that we also have to manage because we expect to get enough applications to be moving all the money in the budget.

To make a long story short, we had to profile a bit of last year's budget, but it's reasonable to expect that future year budgets will be used.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocovic): We're basically out of time. Thank you very much. I feel much better right now.

We're going to move back to the official opposition side. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm glad you're feeling better, Chair. We're all getting better with our timing and our microphones.

I want to go back to the question about the saving of the \$9 million. It was said that was like a laundry list of things that were streamlined or made more efficient or eliminated or whatever. I realize that you probably didn't want to read out the list; it seemed quite lengthy. But I was wondering if I could I get that in writing.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Let me pass that to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Certainly, we can prepare material that can be sent in to the committee.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you so much. And then on to a different topic: I'm looking at the conservation land tax incentives. What percentage of the 24,580 participants in the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program are actually audited to ensure compliance with the program's requirements?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I have that exact number right up—I'm just joking. I will actually, without any undue delay, pass that question on to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I will pass that on to Jennifer Barton, who

looks after the CLTIP program—but if I could ask you to repeat the question one more time, just so we clearly have it written down.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Okay. What percentage of the 24,580 properties that participate in the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program are actually audited to ensure compliance?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you. Jennifer Barton, ADM, regional operations division—like I said, that's the division that looks after the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program, so I will pass this over to Jennifer. Again, if we don't have all the details, then we can certainly come back to it, but we'll give you what she has at this point in time.

Jennifer, over to you.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thanks, Deputy.

Let me say a few things about the Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program, and then I may have to dig into your question little bit more, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

CLTIP is a voluntary program. It was designed to recognize, encourage and support long-term private stewardship of Ontario's provincially important lands. It offers property tax relief to landowners who agree to protect provincially important natural heritage features located on their property.

As you mentioned, MNRF does administer the program, but it is legislated under an MOS on Ontario regulation of the Assessment Act. Eligible portions of lands participating in the CLTIP are 100% municipal property tax-exempt. Identification of land does not change the underlying property class.

The role of our teams here at MNRF: We do review maps, and we do confirm the portion of the land of each landowner that falls under the program. Essentially, we review the mapping to ensure that properties are eligible, and we do follow up on tips and complaints, and investigate when property owners feel that they have eligible lands or should have more lands included.

I will have to look into your question a little bit more specifically in terms of what percentage of the properties we would actually do further analysis on each year. I don't have that right here at my fingertips, unfortunately.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Further to that program, can you speak more to how it actively benefits conservation efforts or environmentally significant areas? That isn't understood very well.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Yes, I can speak a little bit more to add to what I have already said.

The features that are eligible under the program: provincially significant wetlands; provincially significant areas of natural and scientific interest; and habitats of specific, regulated, endangered species for which habitat mapping guidelines exist and designated an escarpment natural area within the Niagara Escarpment Plan. Eligible natural heritage features are first identified and approved by the ministry, and then the ministry continuously reviews eligible natural heritage features to ensure that the most up-to-date information is used in identifying the eligible properties under the program. Eligible landowners then

receive application packages describing the program and are invited to voluntarily participate, and the ministry endeavours to notify eligible landowners annually and invite them to apply if they choose to participate in the program.

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CLTIP also provides tax exemption for community conservation lands owned by conservation authorities and charitable conservation organizations. For lands to be eligible, they must meet one of the 11 criteria that are outlined in the regulation. Eligible organizations must submit an application documenting how their lands meet one of the 11 eligibility criteria. Staff on my team then undertake a thorough assessment of all applicants from eligible organizations. Currently, this process involves verifying supporting documentation to ensure sufficient evidence is provided and the application demonstrates the property meets criteria outlined in the regulation. While some lands use activities that are not permitted while a property is participating in the program, there is no impact to landowners who choose not to participate.

Our CLTIP staff work closely with MPAC, the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., to provide the total acreage of individual properties to help ministry staff determine what portion of a property is eligible. CLTIP currently has more than 24,600, I think, as you said earlier, participating properties, conserving and protecting over 286,000 hectares of land right across the province.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The next question speaks to the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program. Part of my question was already answered in the previous discussion of that program, but I'm just wondering about the first recipient, the Oxford Pallet company. I think I got my answer, but I'll just make sure. I understand they're reimbursed the money, but how do we determine that the targets have been met? Is it self-reporting? Is there a timeline? What does that look like?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell, for the question. Those are good questions.

As I said in the previous question on the FSIP program, we're very proud of that program. I know that ADM Maguire filled you in with a lot more of the details of this while he was answering MPP McKenna's question, and he did speak about Oxford Pallet.

I happened to have the pleasure—it was during a period when we could travel—to be down there for the announcement of them being the successful recipient of the program. I'll tell you, it was a treat to see that company at work and the work that they've done and the work that they're doing to improve the production efficiencies using modern technology to, by leaps and bounds, improve the way that they're operating and the jobs that they're going to be creating as a result of being able to produce more—a 50% increase, I think, in their production was some of the numbers. I don't have the stuff in front of me, but it was pretty significant what they were going to be able to do and the extra jobs that would be created as a result of that. I was really pleased to see the program work that way,

because we don't see those applications ourselves. Our folks in the departments in the two ministries are the ones who gauge them and vet them. It was quite impressive.

Henk Vrugteveen, the president there, took us for quite a tour. It was really, really worthwhile, I'm going to tell you. It was something that I really was impressed with. I also had, of course, Minister Hardeman—and Minister Fedeli was there, as well, because MEDJCT is the over-arching ministry responsible for business incentives. It was a really good day we had down there. That was proof to me that this program is a good one and is going to add more value to this sector.

I will turn the question over to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark for more clarity.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for your question, MPP Monteith-Farrell. I understand you're interested in understanding how reporting is carried out and if targets are met.

Sean Maguire, ADM for forest industry division, can you provide a response to that question, please?

Mr. Sean Maguire: I can, Deputy. Thank you for the question.

In response to your question: In the first part of it, you asked if it was based on self-reporting, and the answer is yes. We do have annual self-reporting and requirements for reporting before any distribution is made. But then, once we receive the self-reporting, due diligence is completed. We do a verification process and ensure that the targets are met, that they have proof of payment and that they followed their part of the contract.

Then, your question about timelines: I don't know the specific timelines for Oxford Pallet, but all the timelines are pre-set in the contract, so the timelines, conditions, and the conditions under which a clawback would happen—it's all laid out in the contract itself when the agreement is entered. So they would be required to follow the terms and conditions of the contract to meet that.

This question has come up before in estimates, and I don't think I gave the answer justice, so I thought maybe it would be a good use of time for me to talk in generalities about how the ministry ensures they're getting value for money in any financial support program. There are just a couple of bullets I wouldn't mind running through, if you don't mind.

First of all, in keeping with the description of the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program, there's always a rigorous application process and a rigorous review of the applications in order to distribute public funds. Sometimes we come under criticism for taking too much time or being too bureaucratic, but it is an effort that we make in order to ensure that public funds are expended carefully and diligently.

Almost invariably, and especially in any large-scale program, there is an independent due diligence review to assess applications. In some cases, independent due diligence is performed before disbursements are made, especially in something that's really technical and where the ministry might not have the expertise to make sure that they're being responsible enough. But we do have expert

staff analysis. We have expert staff on many, many subjects, especially in the forest sector, so the proposals are always analyzed thoroughly by staff, and then the proposals are usually presented and endorsed by senior management before an agreement is entered. I sit on a few ADM committees where staff in different programs—and actually, some outside of forestry, so they try to have a diverse view of different business skill sets. What will happen is that in a program, if I sit on the ADM committee, they'll bring forward proposals, and then the ADMs can ask questions and give opinions, and that contributes to the approval process. But really, the meat of the expertise is happening at the staff level.

It's very typical for funding to be disbursed only upon evidence that milestones have been met and/or the proponent has expended the required funds that they're seeking reimbursement for. There is sometimes a provision in a program where we might advance a little bit of money for a specific reason, with guardrails put on that, but very, very typically, money only goes out after money has been spent and evidence has been obtained of that.

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And then, of course, there are regular program reviews. As with this one, when we see what's working and what's not working, they reformulate programs to ensure that they're fresh and they're meeting the goals of the current government and the goals of what Ontario's businesses need.

The long and short of it: I just want to emphasize that we're very, very diligent when we enter into funding programs and any arrangements that we enter. There are circumstances when money isn't reimbursed or the province loses some money, but it's not for lack of due diligence or irresponsible use of funding.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: When you were describing the program—and it is exciting that we're able to do that, but it seems that it would be a certain level of company that would be able to avail itself of this kind of program. It sounded as if a start-up company wouldn't be able to meet the criteria or even have the capacity to meet the criteria. I was thinking about that aspect of the smaller company—sometimes money is available, but they're unable to access it, because it has a lot of hoops they have to jump through. Often, the small operators don't have that kind of time. That was the impression I got. Other than that, it sounded great.

The other thing I was wondering: Do you have any equity targets on it, so much money put aside in this program for Indigenous-led programs?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Just over two minutes.

Mr. Sean Maguire: Specific to the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program, we don't have an Indigenous carve-out so that a certain amount of money goes to Indigenous businesses. It is a factor in the evaluation and it adds to the attractiveness of a proposal, but the nature of this program—there are a number of programs that have that. Many of them are carried under the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. But this

program is a big-dollar capital investment program, so it's designed and lends itself well to, as you point out, sometimes larger companies or companies with the wherewithal to carry a bigger investment package.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you.

Interruption.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: My house is very busy here today.

Chair, what are we looking at for time?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Just under a minute.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Well, I'll forfeit that minute, because I have to address a couple of things here.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): All right. So we're going to be moving on to MPP Harris on the government side. Please proceed.

Mr. Mike Harris: Thank you very much, Chair. You're doing a great job this afternoon. It's probably a little bit lonely in there, but rest assured, we're all very proud of you for the job you've done today and the yeoman's work that you're putting in.

Minister, I want to ask you a little bit more, given the current situations we have around forest fires right now. I know you've touched on it a little bit already, and we've heard from MPP Mamakwa about it. I think MPP Monteith-Farrell has touched on it a little bit, and I think one of the government members as well. I just wanted to know if you could give a little bit more detail about how the fire season went last year, what it was like for our forest rangers to be working within the pandemic. I know there were some struggles getting people into some of the more remote locations and making sure that everybody was properly trained to any of the new standards that there were. And how has that transitioned into this year, and what are things going to look like going forward in that respect?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, PA Harris, for that question.

We're right in the season now for forest fires. It's a little bit of an improvement over what it was last week.

Last year was a pretty unique year because, as everyone knows, we had this pandemic thrust upon us that no one planned for, no one expected, and all of a sudden, everything you do is affected by the pandemic itself.

We had some real sessions, discussions. ADM Tracey Mill was the lead on that, about how we were going to handle the wildland fires situation in 2020, quite frankly, because we didn't really know what we were facing with regard to personnel—whether personnel were properly prepared and, just as importantly, whether they were properly protected. So, many of the things that we would simply press repeat from the year before in getting ready for the forest fire season because it was really doing routine things similar to years before—of course, all the equipment has to be readied. I had the opportunity to be at the headquarters in Thunder Bay to see the preparatory work: the checking of the integrity of the hoses, rolling those out and making sure they were up to snuff, testing all of the pumps, repairing pumps. People who wouldn't

have ever been involved in something like that really would have no true appreciation of what goes into getting ready for the forest fire season.

Having said that, once the forest fire season ends, you're already starting to get ready—I get the forest fire rangers, that many of those are seasonal, but we have many people who are full-time, and the one season ends and they're already making sure they've got things ready to go the following season. That was going kind of normal up until the time the pandemic hit, and then a wrench was thrown into everything: How are we going to house these folks? Are we going to be able to ensure that they're safe? And you've got to remember that, last year, there was no such thing as a vaccination for anybody, anywhere in the world. So how could we ensure that people were physically distanced in their sleeping accommodations, their dining areas? You can't put people to work all day and not have some grub for them as well.

It's a very, very complex operation to make sure you've readied people to fight fires, because when they've got to go, they've got to go. The fire doesn't wait for anybody. That's something that you're prepared for every year, but last year was like—especially when you've done things one way, year after year, and all of a sudden: “Hey, this has just thrown us a gigantic curve.” But I'm not the one who can explain it best, that's for sure. Part of it I do because I'm trying to show my appreciation, Mike, for the work that was done in getting us prepared for a forest fire season last year.

I can assure you that things were learned last year that have been applied this year, and even when we, hopefully soon, put this pandemic behind us, I've got to believe that there are some things that we learned that will be of great value in preparing for forest fire seasons into the future.

But I'm not going to try to speak about that. I'm going to let those who know a whole heck lot more about what went on and what goes on than me take the reins on that one. So I'll pass it over to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: As the minister said, it was a very busy year last year, and on top of that, trying to fight fires in the middle of a pandemic made for a lot of extra challenges. Our folks were exceptional. They're already, as he said, so immensely organized and professional, but it's just amazing what we put in place and how they managed things last year.

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I will ask Tracey Mill, our ADM of provincial services division, to talk a little bit about our fire program, including what was done specifically last year as we fought forest fires in the middle of the pandemic. As the minister said, there are some lessons learned we're continuing to apply from last year to this year.

Tracey, over to you.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you, Deputy and Minister—although, Minister, I think you've done a very good job of describing the program and some of the measures we put in place.

Indeed, managing forest fires at any time can be challenging, but it was certainly a more unique circumstance

this past year, and again as we head into the new fire season this year, in terms of the context of the pandemic.

Our first priority when we're planning in regular times, but even more so during this pandemic, is to ensure the safety of the public and communities across our province and also to ensure the safety of our staff.

I might just take a moment to describe the program a little bit, to provide the context for many of the logistical challenges associated with managing the program in the context of the pandemic.

As the deputy mentioned, we do have a wildland fire program in the ministry. It is led by the aviation, forest fire and emergency services branch. But it cannot do the work alone; it is supported heavily by emergency response staff within our regional operations division—so both at the district and regional levels—and also by enforcement staff, conservation officers and managers, who help particularly if we are dealing in situations with evacuations, and many others across the ministry who support the activities of the program, including our communications staff, who make sure that the public and communities who live in the north and the fire region and, particularly, in remote locations are aware of and informed about the wildland fire situation.

Our efforts are coordinated through our ministry emergency operations centre, which is based in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. This centre has the responsibility of coordinating the protection activities for about 90 million hectares of crown land throughout the province. As you can imagine, that is not a small undertaking, especially considering the resources and personnel that are required to both detect and respond to fires across that landscape. We do that through 32 fire management facilities across the province. We have eight aviation bases and an inventory of various fire-suppression equipment, as the minister described—hoses and other equipment for fire suppression activity.

We have about 800 highly trained professional fire rangers and an additional 80 private sector crews, which is about 320 additional fire rangers, who come in as the fire season escalates over the summer.

We also maintain a fleet of specialized aircraft for the purpose of responding to fires. These are managed through our aviation services. We have nine CL-415 water bombers, six Twin Otters, five Turbo Beavers and eight helicopters. Supplementing our own fleet of aircraft, we contract both short-term and long-term contracts for services such as bird dogs, which assist our water bombers when they're up flying, and also helicopters to supplement some of our bucketing and other helicopter or rotary types of suppression activities. In order to maintain that fleet, we have highly skilled pilots and aviation maintenance engineers and an additional 500 staff to coordinate fire protection efforts from operations to management to logistics etc.

As I spoke to earlier, no one fire agency can necessarily respond on its own. As a result, we rely heavily upon the assistance of partners within the province, so across other ministries in Ontario, but also through our mutual aid agreements with the various provinces and territories

across Canada as well as our international partners that we have agreements with. That includes the United States, Australia and Mexico.

The minister referenced the fires of 2018 yesterday, I believe. That was a year when we saw perhaps one of the more extreme fire seasons in the last several years. That was one occasion when we learned the benefits, for sure, of our partners, when we had support from the United States and Mexico in responding to those fires.

We also export or deploy our own staff in order to support other provinces and countries. I want to talk a little bit about this, because it leads into some of the unique circumstances that we had to engage in with respect to the pandemic last year. We are a province that actually exports more staff or deploys more staff to support other provinces and jurisdictions than we necessarily import. An example: In late 2019 and 2020, our ministry deployed 35 fire personnel to Australia. You will recall the very severe fire situation that they were experiencing in those years. Last year, we also deployed 120 fire rangers and four support staff to Quebec to combat their massive fire near Lac Saint-Jean.

Later, we took the decision, along with a number of other provinces in Canada, to deploy a team to support the United States, on the west coast in Oregon. This was one of the places where, as the minister spoke to, we had to undertake a different type of assessment in the context of the pandemic. We sent an advance team down to the United States just to see what the conditions were and whether certain safety precautions could be provided for our fire rangers who would be travelling down there. What we actually established was what we called the Canadian bubble. In this case, our staff were housed on a separate piece of land close to the fires that they were going to be supporting. They had their own camping areas, even within the Canadian bubble. Our Ontario fire rangers were kept separate from other fire rangers from the other provinces. They worked in their team, as the minister spoke to. They had their own camps, their own meal tents, their own shower facilities in order to maintain that physical distance and ensure the safety of our staff while they were down there supporting their American colleagues. I am happy to report that we were able to provide assistance, and our staff were able to return and go through their two-week isolation period with no incidents to report on.

The minister also spoke to a number of the other activities that we planned for last year, something that was quite unique. The minister talked about a number of the logistical issues. We kept our staff in what we called cohorts so that the same teams of people were working together, to limit the interaction with other teams. This required looking at separate accommodation. It did require us to bring on additional fleet vehicles. We had special arrangements, personal protective equipment for staff who were going to be on aircraft. We took extra precautions for those staff with specialized skills for which it would be particularly problematic if we had exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

PA Harris, you mentioned some of the concerns about going into remote communities. Our staff, in many

instances, respecting some of the concerns of communities, set up camps just on the outskirts of communities so that they could still provide that protection and being in close proximity, but not to raise any concerns about the potential transmission of the virus into those vulnerable communities.

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One of the other steps that we took, as the minister said, being a little bit uncertain about what we might be facing, was to initially put in place, for the first time, a province-wide restricted fire zone at the beginning of the fire season. This was a prevention activity for us, or a mitigation activity for us. Early in the season, there is the risk of human-caused fires in the province, and it is also that period of time when our resources are really just coming on board. Because of the pandemic, we had to very quickly change our training and our onboarding and orientation, and so we were a little bit uncertain about the number of resources that we had. So the inclusion of a restricted fire zone for a period of time was meant to create all of the conditions to mitigate, manage or minimize any human-caused fires during that uncertain period.

We also took an approach to an early detection of fires in the province and being much more actively engaged in suppressing them, in an effort to try to keep those fires small and manageable, and not put any further onus on the broader emergency system in the province, as they were all really responding to that first priority, which was the health priority in terms of the pandemic.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you. I would like to say that all of the COVID-19 protocols are remaining in place this year, so we have daily assessments of our staff, we have full PPE for our staff, and we're continuing to determine whether any additional precautions are necessary.

One additional measure that we're working on right now to put in place is the rapid testing or the antigen testing, so that we have an early indication if there are any issues developing and we can act immediately on that.

I'm also pleased to say that we've been working closely with public health units in the north, who have been very supportive in trying to facilitate, to the greatest extent possible, the vaccination of our firefighters, as we are already in the midst of the fire season. As firefighters are eligible and the public health units are available to accommodate them, we are looking to have our firefighters vaccinated as quickly as we can.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Fifty seconds.

Ms. Tracey Mill: I'll just give you a quick update—
Interjection.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Go ahead, MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Sorry, ADM Mill. One thing that I'd love to hear from you is, what would it mean to be able to have the Johnson and Johnson vaccine available for some of our folks like our firefighters? It's a little bit harder to pin them down for a double dose. What would it mean for

them to be able to get that sort of “one shot and done” with the Johnson and Johnson?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Twenty seconds.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thanks. I think right now our priority is making sure that whatever is available for our firefighters is what we’ll do. We can move people around quite quickly, so if we’ve got a public health unit that’s able to work with us, we can get our fire rangers there to partake in any vaccination program.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): That’s time. Thanks very much, MPP Harris, for those kind words off the top. I can assure you, there’s a lot of excitement happening in here off-camera.

We’re going to be moving to the official opposition side. Please go ahead.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I hope that background noise—my neighbour is getting some construction done on his house. I guess I didn’t check with my work schedule. The WiFi in my office is terrible. I would have moved to there, but—anyway, I moved to a different part of the house, as you see from how the artwork has changed, to try to get as far away as possible from that noise.

PA Harris, I was going to ask about firefighters, because they’re near and dear to me. That was actually my next question, so thanks for asking that, and thanks for the response. I have family and friends who went through the program and worked in the organization, and students who did the training, so I appreciated my colleague MPP Mamakwa’s comments about training up Indigenous firefighters. That initial investment for parents is quite significant, because young people often can’t afford the training costs, and going through a hoop like that is sometimes problematic. But I know there have been initiatives to try to train people up and organizations that are taking that on. In this town, in this city—I call it a town; it’s a city—it is a big part of youth employment in the summer-time, and many people like that—and tree planting. Those are the two biggies for the summer months.

Since I can’t ask that question, I will ask about biomass. In the fall of 2020, the federal government committed \$13 million to clean energy generation projects, including biomass plants in northern Ontario reserves. Does the MNRF promotion of the use of renewable forest biomass as a heating fuel for northern, rural and Indigenous communities include specific financial or technical commitments to assist in the construction of these facilities? There’s some money there from the federal government. Is there a commitment from the provincial government to undertake and support biomass heating in remote First Nations?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Speaking of construction, you mentioned that your neighbour is doing a project there. Did they win the lottery?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: No.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Because with lumber, they must have won the lottery. I shouldn’t be saying that in the forestry business, but it’s pretty high-price stuff this day.

Somebody was telling me this story the other day where a fellow drives by with a half-ton truck full of two-by-sixes, and the other fellow says, “There goes a millionaire.” People are now worried about having their lumberyards broken into for theft, which was certainly never a problem.

Anyway, I’m not certain of what our involvement is with the federal program on that. You know where we are on biomass—because if there’s a program for biomass heating projects in northern communities, how could it not dovetail with exactly what we’re looking for in our strategy here? If there’s a place to be utilizing that biomass, the lower-grade products from our forests, in heating in those communities, of course we’re going to be involved in that because it’s the timber off the crown land that would be used, much of it, in those projects.

But I don’t have any specific information myself on our level of involvement in that issue, nor have I been briefed. So I think what I’m going to do is—I know this is going to come as a shock to you—I am going to pass this on to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Can I ask, MPP Monteith-Farrell, if you can repeat the question one more time as I pass it over to Sean Maguire who, as you know, is our ADM of forestry industry division, just so he can have clarity on the question?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Does the MNRF’s promotion of the use of forest biomass as a heating fuel for northern, rural and Indigenous communities include specific financial or technical commitments to assist in the construction of these facilities?

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Sean, can you provide an answer to that question?

Mr. Sean Maguire: Thank you, Deputy. I’ll do my best with the question.

Basically, our efforts on biomass right now are kind of pegged within the forest sector strategy and, underneath that, the Forest Biomass Action Plan, which is currently out for consultation. When we look at the five objectives of the biomass plan, I believe that what you’re describing, the specific programs and such that will be developed, will be the next phase of it. But we’re still in the process of finalizing the biomass action plan at the moment. We don’t have a specific funding program or financial supports tied as part of the implementation of our biomass action plan at this time because that’s a process that we’re working on right now.

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Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I suppose it’s something to think about, because rather than having to use diesel fuel—the environmental impact of that is far worse than using pellets, let’s say. I know there was an Indigenous community out of Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation that was undertaking to produce the specialized pellets that were used at the Thunder Bay generating plant, but then the generating plant was shut down. They went under because they didn’t have a market, really, at this point.

Mr. Sean Maguire: You’re absolutely correct. We are interested in developing that as one of the solutions

specifically for use of biomass, but also in combination with providing clean and environmentally friendly heating and energy for our remote communities. That definitely is a component, and we will be working towards that.

I see the deputy's hand moving like she has something to add.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Who will be answering?

Hon. John Yakabuski: We're just going to the deputy for now.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm just wondering again if this is maybe in relation to your question, MPP Monteith-Farrell. We are working with Neskantaga First Nation. Is that in relation to what you were interested in?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, some of that.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'm going to ask Jennifer Barton, because we have some information that we can provide on that. It's still in progress, but absolutely, we are working with that First Nation to look at options of replacing currently diesel-powered power generation with biomass and opportunity-utilized biomass. So certainly, I can pass that along to Jennifer Barton, who is our ADM of regional operations division. Our operations division has been actively working with that First Nation on this proposal.

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thank you, Deputy.

I don't have a ton at my fingertips on the project, but I will share, MPP Monteith-Farrell, what I can.

In partnership with the Mitigokaa Development Corp., the First Nation is looking to get off diesel-based energy sources and plans to establish a cleaner biomass energy facility for its electricity supply. Burning cleaner, renewable forest biomass instead of a diesel-based source has important environmental benefits and would help create jobs and income for the community. Therefore, the province and my team in regional operations division have been actively working with the community to help them move the project forward.

To support the project, the ministry is proposing to designate a management unit for the proposed Neskantaga forest to allow for the effective and efficient administration and delivery of forest management planning, forest operations and forest resource licensing. A forest management plan would identify an available wood supply in the proposed management unit to support the First Nation's desire to develop a biomass energy facility.

Hopefully, that provides you a little bit more detail and background in terms of what we're working on with that First Nation community.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, and thank you so much. There's some progress being made there, and probably when we meet in estimates next term, we'll have more to talk about in this area, anyway.

I want to go back to firefighting and, more specifically, on the aviation side—just an update, because we did have that one crash that happened. Thankfully, nobody was hurt.

What's the state of the aviation fleet for MNRF at this point? Of course, you're going to say it's safe, but are we

looking at maybe some money required to update it, or is there something we could be doing better?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for that question, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

The maintenance of our aviation division and the fleet and certainly the CL-415s is something that is part and parcel of operations. In fact, I think it was just last year that we re-signed a maintenance contract to maintain the fleet. The ADM will correct me, but I think it's like 20 years or—it's a long term. You've got to have 20 or 25 years. You've got to make sure you've got access to the parts and everything else.

These planes are maintained at the highest possible level because you can't take chances with something that's in the air, and we need them when we need them. It was an unfortunate accident, a malfunction from what I understand, but there's an investigation that is still ongoing with Transport Canada as well or the transport safety board or—there's an acronym there. That is an active investigation, but I don't believe that at this time we have received the full report on the investigation.

I can assure you that the maintenance program on our fleet—there are no corners cut. We're dealing with vital equipment and people who operate them. The level of maintenance is par excellence.

I'll ask Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to provide some more details on just what we do when it comes to maintaining our fleet of aircraft.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Tracey Mill, our ADM of provincial services division, could provide an update on that particular situation and, as the minister said, the progress on the investigation. I believe you are also looking for some financial information. As the minister alluded to, we certainly have various contracts that we have in place for maintenance, so I will ask Tracey to refer to that as well.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you very much for your question, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

We are thankful that our staff are safe with respect to that tanker that, unfortunately, had what we call a "hard landing" at Sault Ste. Marie during a training run.

As both the minister and the deputy have alluded to, we are very much committed to ensuring the safety of all of our aviation staff and our aircraft. I would also like to assure you that they are maintained and operated according to manufacturer standards and all of the regulatory requirements that are set out by Transport Canada. As an operator, we are required to meet a significant number of standards contained in our air operator certificate and in accordance with Canadian aviation regulations.

I alluded in an earlier comment to the fact that we have a number of aviation maintenance engineers. Aviation services does have a dedicated safety management unit that is comprised of these aviation experts in both safety and security. The team is responsible for maintaining the safety management system for all of the ministry's aircraft, and this is both a regulatory requirement as well as a standard for the ministry. It is as specialized as, our

aviation maintenance engineers are actually assigned to each tanker. They have complete knowledge of that particular aircraft. The aircraft themselves are required to go through standard maintenance. You know that during our off-season, over the winter, they are in for extensive maintenance and any repairs.

The minister and the deputy did allude to the contracts that we have. They're with Viking aircraft. Viking is a BC-based company. It obtained the rights to the water bombers that were previously De Havilland- or Bombardier-produced aircraft. We actually have two contracts with them. One is for what's known as the maintenance-plus, and another is a parts agreement with them, ensuring that all of the parts and service requirements are available when we need them.

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We are also in the process of working with Viking for an update to the avionics system. As they develop a new avionics system for this aircraft, we are working with them to ensure that our aircraft will also be part of that upgrade.

With respect to this particular situation, the minister is correct that under the Transport Canada rules, we did notify, and the Transportation Safety Board, or TSB, is reviewing the situation. We have complied with all of the requirements that they have provided to us so far, and we're working with them to facilitate that review and investigation. In addition, our own safety team is separately conducting its review to make sure that all of our procedures were in place.

I will provide for you again, just as an indication of the maintenance plan or program that these aircraft go through each year—on average, our aviation spend is approximately \$4.5 million each year on the CL-415 aircraft maintenance. That's a bit of an indication for you of the extent of the management of these aircraft. I will say that many have commented, Viking has commented that our aircraft are in good order. We have the benefit a little bit, too, of our geography here in Ontario, inasmuch as our aircraft are used on freshwater lakes, which is a bit helpful to us in terms of—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): A minute and a half.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you. One final comment: just letting you know that Viking has stepped up and has sent individuals to participate with us and the Transportation Safety Board in the review of that particular situation in Sault Ste. Marie and what might be needed to repair the aircraft.

I'll also assure you that we do have access to other aircraft through our mutual aid agreements to supplement our fleet right now, while that water bomber is out of service.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you very much. I think that's probably the end of our time—no time for another question.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We've got just under a minute, if you have a comment, a question or anything like that.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Just that I really am impressed. Thank you to everyone answering the questions. They've been very thorough, and I've learned a lot. Thanks for all your work.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We'll move to the government side. MPP Pettapiece, please begin.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It has been quite an afternoon—lots of questions asked and certainly some good information.

One of the things I'm sure, Minister, that you'd know—you were a businessman before you got into politics, and you know you have to plan ahead. It's something you need to do to make sure your business or your ministry is successful in the future.

I wonder if you could provide this committee with an overview of your ministry's plan for the coming year.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Pettapiece, for that question.

I'm always planning ahead. In fact, my wife would tell you that no sooner would we finish lunch on any given day than I'd be saying, "What are you planning to make for supper?" So, you see, I'm always planning ahead. It drives her crazy.

Anyway, this is an all-encompassing question, on the plans for the year. I'm going to turn over this one, because there's a lot of detail there. I thank you for the question, Randy. I'm going to turn this post-haste to Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you very much, Minister.

We're pleased, on behalf of the minister, to describe our ministry's plan for 2021-22. There are a number of commitments that we oversee, from protecting the public from natural disasters or emergencies; delivering direct services to the public and industry, such as fishing and hunting licences; promoting economic growth and job creation; supporting industries like forestry, aggregates and hunting; conducting monitoring, research and planning for the management and use of Ontario's natural resources; and developing legislation and policy and implementing programs to regulate the sustainable and responsible use and management of Ontario's natural resources and lands.

I would like to invite our CAO, Amanda Holmes, to run through the highlights of what is planned for the coming year that's in our plan for 2021-22 and cover off things such as our strategic plan and implementation of our various initiatives.

Amanda Holmes, if you could provide that overview, that would be great.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you, Deputy.

I'm Amanda Holmes, the chief administrative officer and assistant deputy minister for the corporate management and information division, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I'm pleased to take this question and to take a few minutes to talk about the ministry's plan for 2021-22. Our strategic plan contains clearly focused long-term goals and desired strategic outcomes that will guide MNRF and

focus efforts to advance the achievement of our mandate and priorities.

MNRF is committed to an emphasis on economic development, job creation, responsive customer service and fiscally responsible service delivery. MNRF continues to use evidence-based decision-making throughout its strategic planning and priority setting. As a result of these efforts, the ministry is improving its ability to more accurately measure its performance in achieving outcomes and value for money.

The ministry is undertaking several initiatives throughout 2021-22 to advance these priorities. The commitments include:

- driving further internal efficiencies, such as modernizing business processes and functions;
- innovative improvements to program efficiency and effectiveness;
- collaborative partnerships; and
- horizontal streamlining with other ministries.

A key priority is one of fiscally responsible service delivery. This means managing from within the ministry's approved allocation and promoting innovative strategies that enable more efficient and sustainable public service delivery that effectively maintains service level standards.

With respect to budget management, MNRF continues to be fiscally prudent, while also investing in important business improvements and modernization opportunities. This includes modernizing and transforming our processes and functions using Lean Six Sigma principles to ensure sustainable public services, improving business outcomes and continuing to sustainably manage Ontario's natural resources.

The ministry has increased rigour and discipline in expenditure management to identify efficiency savings without impacting service levels. Our commitment to using lean processes to develop efficient and effective nimble services is outlined in a lean strategy that focuses on communications, training and applying lean practices with a vision of actively seeking to continuously improve our business processes and work experience by challenging business-as-usual concepts. The ministry increased its capability to use lean processes by leveraging dedicated training and a community of practice to implement processes.

Another key priority is responsive customer service. We are committed to delivering services that are flexible, customer-focused and cost-effective, and to promoting service delivery modernization strategies that enable more accessible and convenient service delivery.

In terms of fish and wildlife licensing, the ministry continues to provide exceptional customer service to two million anglers and hunters, including licensing and big game draw services, contact centre support, social media and the fish and wildlife licence issuer network. In 2020, the Natural Resources Information and Support Centre handled approximately 76,000 calls and 21,000 email inquiries related to fish and licensing and/or hunting in Ontario.

With respect to natural resources enforcement, the ministry received approval for increased funding in 2021-22

and 2022-23 to hire an additional 25 conservation officers. This will allow the enforcement program to increase its focus on priorities such as the prevention of illegal moose hunting, promotion of hunting safety, prevention of illegal trade and commercialization of Ontario's animal and plant species, and prevention of the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species.

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The Natural Resources Information Portal continues to be implemented to reduce burden on businesses and people by providing them fast, accessible and secure online approval and activity reporting services. In 2021-22, the expectation is to expand online services to the aggregates industry and make further enhancements to support the forest industry.

Additional functionality will also be included to enable the ministry to undertake more efficient review and approval of applications.

In terms of approvals and authorizations modernization, the ministry is committed to modernizing services and approvals by reviewing 100% of all regulatory approvals under 23 pieces of legislation seeking to optimize delivery. This initiative underpins the ministry's commitment to service modernization and the plan to move to 100% of all approval types being available in digital channels, an increase of 88% over the next three years.

I will take the opportunity to highlight some of our key initiatives for 2021-22 under some of our key program areas. I will recognize that we've heard about some of these initiatives during our time before the committee yesterday and today, and some of them in fairly great detail. I will make sure that I am only briefly referencing those and focusing on some of the other incredible work we have planned for this year.

I will start with the forest industry program, which leads economic development for the forestry sector and implements initiatives to promote an economically viable forest industry in Ontario. The program oversees activities related to the allocation, use and pricing of crown timber; the management and collection of crown timber charges; and the delivery of business development policies and initiatives affecting Ontario's forest products sector. The program also includes the development and maintenance of sustainable forest management policy and programs that are critical to supporting a healthy forest industry, while protecting forests for future generations.

Key program initiatives for 2021-22 include leading the multi-ministry Ontario Bioheat Initiative to improve the business and policy environments for the use of biofuels for heat in Ontario. This initiative supports the increased demand for wood-based biofuels, which contributes to the economic growth in Ontario's forest industry by providing new markets for crown forest resources.

The program will also continue to defend Ontario in the ongoing softwood lumber dispute with the United States. MNRF works closely with representatives from Ontario's forest industry, as well as federal and provincial governments, to maintain market access in the United States.

We've heard a lot about the implementation of Sustainable Growth, our forest sector strategy.

There will also be the finalization—and beginning to implement the five-year Forest Biomass Action Plan that we heard Sean Maguire speak to earlier today.

They will also continue to deliver on the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program that the ministry currently has, that \$10-million annual allocation. Due to the COVID-19 impacts last year, several projects that were delayed or put on hold have resulted in \$3 million in unspent funds. The ministry was able to secure one-time approval to move the unspent \$3 million to this fiscal year, resulting in a total allocation of \$13 million.

Finally, they will continue to deliver the Provincial Forest Access Roads Funding Program to support rural road infrastructure in crown forests used by the forest industry, mining companies, utilities, railways, hunters, campers, anglers, Indigenous communities, and also supporting emergency preparedness.

Turning now to our natural resource policy: This program leads the development, guidance and evaluation of evidence-based provincial legislation, regulations, policies and programs. The program ensures that its activities meet the crown's rights-based obligation to consult with Indigenous peoples and communities, and engages relevant partners, stakeholders, government and non-government interests across the province.

Key program initiatives for 2020-21 include:

- implementation of the flooding strategy;
- developing policy to ensure the sustainable use and management of natural resources across Ontario such as crown land, forest, natural heritage, mineral aggregate resources, and fish and wildlife;
- implementing the Invasive Species Act;
- working with the Niagara Escarpment Commission to implement the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act and the Niagara Escarpment Plan to conserve this important feature and the social and economic benefits it provides; and
- continuing to implement risk-informed approaches to dam safety under the Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act, including streamlined approaches for low-risk dam repairs and agreements with qualified dam owners.

Our science and research program provides quality science services to inform natural resource management decisions that contribute to the economic, environmental and social sustainability of Ontario's natural resources. The program accomplishes this by leading, coordinating and developing applied research, developing and implementing provincial resource inventory and monitoring programs and information management analysis and reporting. MNRF also provides science support, including research, expertise and access to data and mapping resources for species at risk to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Key initiatives for 2021-22 include:

- utilizing new technology to inventory Ontario's crown forests; we talked about lidar earlier today;
- using applied aquatic research and broad-scale monitoring of inland lakes to provide information on the health

of Ontario's freshwater ecosystems and to support management of recreational and commercial fisheries;

—utilizing forest health monitoring to support forest pest management, including undertaking annual forest health surveys to assess the impact of forest pests, including jack pine budworm, spruce budworm and potential gypsy moth infestations.

Also, the program undertakes wildlife research and monitoring to help inform Ontarians about the health of wild game across the province, conducting aerial inventories of moose populations and monitoring of double-crested cormorant populations, delivery of Ontario's black bear population monitoring project, rabies control program, and testing to monitor for the presence of chronic wasting disease.

The mapping and geographic information program provides information regarding crown land surveying and information management services to government, academia, business and the public. In support of this program, Land Information Ontario ensures geographic data is effectively collected, managed, maintained and meets the objectives of Ontario's Open Data Directive.

Geographic data has many uses across public, private and academic sectors by supporting locational insight, place-based decision-making and navigation. In 2021-22, MNRF will provide public access to over 350 geographic datasets through Ontario GeoHub, a data discovery and access tool. By providing public access to government data, MNRF is supporting the government's open data initiatives as well as Ontario's digital economy, and ensuring Ontario is delivering simpler, faster and better services for people and business.

We provide survey advice to the mining, water power and construction industries to accurately delineate land boundaries and to support land claim negotiations.

Expanding external partnerships through our Land Information Ontario, we can collect and improve a range of foundational geospatial data such as land parcels, aerial photography, elevation, roads and water to avoid duplication, reduce costs and enhance data quality.

We also encourage Ontarians to participate in geographic naming decisions within their communities by completing online questionnaires to help identify historic, cultural and natural features on the landscape that are essential for mapping, emergency response, resource management, travel, tourism and law enforcement.

I'll now turn to our forest management program. This program enables a healthy and viable forest industry in Ontario by fostering a competitive business environment, jobs and investment opportunities for the province's forest and wood product sectors. The program accomplishes its mandate through intergovernmental co-operation on national forestry initiatives, crown forest management planning, renewal, protection from pests, monitoring, auditing, information management and public reporting.

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Key program initiatives for 2021-22 include drafting revisions to the Forest Management Planning Manual and to the Forest Information Manual, and associated technical

specifications, to provide for small-scale forest management in an area north of the current managed forest. The addendum will allow a First Nation to undertake forest management in support of community economic development and energy security.

We will also be undertaking a review of the forest management planning framework to identify additional modernization opportunities for the preparation of new forest management plans. Areas of consideration include broader-scale planning for some components of forest management plans, increased focus on professional reliance and allowing planning effort to be matched to the level of forest management activities; that is, reduced effort where reduced activities are occurring.

We will continue to develop strategic direction for managing forest pests in Ontario—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two minutes.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: —as well as continuing active participation in intergovernmental initiatives, such as the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, including involvement in the council's Forest in Mind program. Other initiatives include the implementation of the Canadian wildlife management strategy, updates to the National Forest Pest Strategy and participation in ministerial conferences to contribute to strategic priorities for future intergovernmental activities.

The Fish and Wildlife Program manages Ontario's fish and wildlife resources to ensure the sustainability of populations, the management of fishing, hunting and trapping opportunities for ecological, social, cultural and economic benefit. The program accomplishes its mandate through resource management planning, research and monitoring and the delivery of public services to sustain healthy fish and wildlife populations for Ontario's future.

As part of the MNRF's program review cycle, we have initiated a review of this program. The management of fish and wildlife is becoming increasingly complex as a result of environmental factors and the changing ways Ontarians are accessing and using the resource. In recognition of this, the program review aims to ensure that collective work across the ministry will strengthen the focus on client-centred service delivery and provide better value to the residents of Ontario while helping to achieve fish and wildlife resource management goals.

For 2021-22, key initiatives include managing the Great Lakes fisheries to ensure long-term sustainable economic and social benefits for both recreational and commercial fishing on those water bodies; providing fish culture services to maintain, enhance and create recreational fisheries through stocking and rehabilitating degraded native fish stocks; implementing changes resulting from Ontario's moose management review, including regulation changes, new moose tag allocation systems and client communications.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're at time. So we're now moving to the official opposition. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I'm going to be asking a few money questions, so sharpen your pencils.

There's a 45% drop in spending on capital assets in the public safety and emergency response category of the estimates briefing, and it appears to come from the reduced building assets, particularly the Dryden FMH. Will any of these funds be freed up for other asset improvement or requisition purposes?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Well, thank you very much for that question. That's a financial question that certainly we haven't had any discussions on recently, to my recollection. I'm going to ask Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to see if she can provide an answer for you.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I will ask Amanda Holmes, our chief administrative officer, to provide some additional information on the capital assets figures, and that can also answer the question about whether funding has been redistributed from that project that you referenced, which was the Dryden Fire Management Headquarters budget.

Over to Amanda.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you for the question.

Yes, we did have that decrease in the capital assets spending for 2021-22 as a result of the substantial completion of the Dryden Fire Management Headquarters. That major public infrastructure project didn't require the same level of allocation that it received in previous years. For example, in 2021, the allocation for that project was \$8.9 million, and it just requires a further investment of approximately \$1 million for the amount of work that remains to complete that project.

So we do certainly look to plan out our capital spending over a long-term plan, a 10-year plan that would see us prioritize projects and make investments in that fashion. Although the money, the expenditures do fluctuate annually, we do have a number of construction projects on other public safety buildings that are commencing in 2021-22 and would have several potential years of spending, depending on the complexity of each of those. Some of our forward attack bases, for instance, in fire are having some renovations done this year, and we're also spending on some aircraft betterments that include helicopter engine overhauls as well, so that would see us increase in spending for those items as compared to last year.

The money does tend to move between years and between capital assets and capital expense as things are planned and priorities are set.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for that. That explains it. There are always places to spend money, no doubt.

The next question is about money but in a different area. Can you provide a breakdown of the MNRF's revenue from hunting and fishing violations?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I think for the purpose of these questions, if they're all financial, could we just go directly to ADM Holmes rather than doing the circle? If they're financial, MPP Monteith-Farrell, then it may take her a moment to retrieve and compile the information. There are some she may have to get back to you on. But if these next questions are going to be financial, I think you could probably just go back and forth there, if that's all right.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. So do you want me to repeat the question?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: If you could, please.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Sure. Can you provide a breakdown of the MNRF's revenue from hunting and fishing violations?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you. I'm just pulling up that information now. I'm trying to see if I have it broken out by fines. I don't believe I have that number broken out at my fingertips, but I would be happy to take that away and get back to you. Apologies.

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Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. If you're going to do that, then I'm looking at what percentages are those fines, rather than licensing and fees and those kinds of things—what percentage is it of the ministry's revenue?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Yes, that's something that we can certainly take as a follow-up.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: And then this is related as well. It would probably take another line item. It says, "Do the fines issued for hunting and fishing violations offset the cost of enforcement? And if not, then what is the offset?"

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Yes, that's probably something that I might ask whether my colleague Tracey Mill has any information that she would have to be able to share on that. I think what we can say is that the funds that are collected and do go into the special purpose account, the fish and wildlife SPA, are utilized for—there are enforcement activities that are funded through the SPA funds. I'm not sure if Assistant Deputy Minister Mill has anything at her fingertips that would be more precise than that, but certainly we can look at whether that's something that we can provide as well.

Ms. Tracey Mill: MPP Monteith-Farrell, I will have to get back to you with the specific financials that you've asked for in terms of fines, but I can say that the fines don't offset the cost of enforcement. They're not intended to offset the cost of enforcement. As my colleague Amanda Holmes has identified, enforcement in the ministry is funded through two sources, one from our Consolidated Revenue Fund and the other from the fish and wildlife services fund. As you know, the money going into the fish and wildlife SPA is predominantly from licensing sales, and a smaller proportion is associated with any fines that are levied as a part of the conviction and the court system. But your question regarding the total amount of revenue that can be attributed to those fine payments—we'll endeavour to get that back to you.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you. Has the overall number of fines for hunting and fishing increased or decreased in a five-year period? Are we getting more of them or less of them? I'm wondering if what we're doing is working.

Ms. Tracey Mill: It is a good question. There are two elements to this, I guess. One is the actual number of violations that we find in a year and the charges that are laid, and then the other is around fines that are levied

through the prosecutory process and subsequently come back to the ministry.

I will say that the number of charges that officers are laying on an annual basis has stayed relatively stable. I would also say that the compliance rate we find, when we're out doing patrols and we encounter individuals, is also actually quite high relative to some other enforcement agencies, which I think speaks volumes to the clients we have, the individuals who are participating in fishing and hunting activities. They understand that complying with the rules benefits them as well in terms of the sustainability of the resource.

I will say, having worked in some other regulatory ministries, I do find it quite interesting and amazing that when we're at, for example, events where we do outreach, people are actually quite willing to come up and meet with and speak with our conservation officers and listen to understand what the rules are.

The level of fines and what comes back into the ministry may not be the best indicator in terms of compliance, but if you are interested, I can also endeavour to get you some information regarding the offences and charges that are laid on an annual basis.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I think I understand that, generally, the fines don't pay for the enforcement, but the fines are there as a tool for enforcement, to ensure that people are obeying the rules. That's the way we look at it. We don't look at it as a cost-benefit, that it's going to offset it; it's just that the organization wants to enforce the rules, and so it costs money to do that. The fines are just one of the tools in the tool box to ensure that people do that. Is that what we're seeing there?

Ms. Tracey Mill: That's correct. It is the disincentive part of the compliance spectrum. Usually, there are both incentives and disincentives, and the charging and the imposition of fines is that disincentive portion of it.

But in virtually every regulatory ministry that I'm aware of, the fines are not meant to be the vehicle through which to pay for the enforcement service. In fact, if we're doing a good job, we would get to the point where there should be no offences and no charges, and therefore no fines, and we'd find ourselves with no money to actually operate a compliance program. So, as I said, in our ministry we do have both funding from the Consolidated Revenue Fund for our officers, and also through the special purpose account, where the majority of the revenue coming into that fund is from our fishing and hunting licence sales.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: In better times, when we're doing education programs and going to fairs or going to places and doing public education, where does that money come from for the materials and for those kinds of things? Is that a certain line item?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Again, that would be part of our normal operation of the enforcement branch, and so, again, a portion is coming from the Consolidated Revenue Fund and a portion is coming from the special purpose account. I believe last year we provided you with some information regarding some of the line items in the special purpose

account. You will see that one of those service categories does deal with the outreach and educational events that our officers do engage in.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you for getting me that information. It was interesting to see what was in that. I know it was some work to pull it all together, so I appreciated looking at that.

How much time do I have left, Chair? I'm sorry.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Three minutes, 45 seconds.

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Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Okay, I'll save that other question, then, for the next round.

Here's another financial question: How much money is allocated to forestry auditing operations? I guess that would be Amanda who would probably have that response somewhere.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: I am looking for that. Thank you for the question. Auditing for the—could you repeat the question? Apologies. It was auditing for the forest—

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Sorry; I sort of jumped around there. I went from enforcement to—this is a different kind of enforcement, I guess.

How much money is being allocated to forest auditing operations, when we're auditing the forest management plans, I guess, and what percentage of operations will be audited this year?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you. I appreciate that. My understanding is that—and again, I'll see if my colleague ADM Jennifer Barton has any further details she'd like to provide—this is something that we do through contracts with service providers. I know that recently, our expenditures, what we're planning for—I don't know if she can speak to this year, but I can tell you that, on a five-year horizon, we look at spending approximately a \$4-million ceiling over a five-year period. The funding for the services and the contracts we have for the third parties to undertake the work is actually provided through the Forestry Futures Trust, and so it does not count as a line item in the ministry's budget itself—if that helps.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Does not appear in a line item, you said? Okay.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: I think the deputy has her hand up.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Yes. Less than a minute.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you. As Amanda mentioned, the audit work that is carried out is overseen by our regional operations division. So I'll just check if Jennifer Barton has anything further to add to Amanda's answer.

Amanda may have covered it all but, Jennifer, is there anything further you'd like to add to that?

Ms. Jennifer Barton: Thanks, Deputy. I think Amanda did provide most of the response. The only other thing I could add is that we do anticipate that approximately 20 independent forest audits—so three to five audits per year between 2022 and 2027, using the new vendor of record agreement—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're out of time. Sorry about that.

Actually, I want to commend the broadcast team. When the minister is highlighted on Zoom, the deputy minister is actually appearing on television. So I want to commend the team for doing that IT miracle.

We're going to now move to the government side. MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: Good afternoon, Minister, and good afternoon to the ministry staff. What a tremendous job you've done, both this afternoon and yesterday, in responding to the questions that we've posed to you thus far.

My question focuses on invasive species, Minister. We know that invasive species pose a significant threat to Ontario's biodiversity, recreational activities and tourism. It's certainly a challenge here in the region of Durham. What is the ministry doing, Minister, to prevent the harmful effects of these unwanted species?

Hon. John Yakubski: Well, thank you very much, MPP Coe, for your question and your advocacy on this issue. I know we've had conversations about this in the past. You know how important it is to protect our biodiversity from the threat of invasive species. Quite frankly, we're doing a lot. It's a significant issue in our ministry, which is the prime ministry responsible for the invasive species file, and I'm going to—well, I guess I could speak for a little bit about just the importance of it. There was a question, I believe from the opposition earlier today, about invasive species as well.

We're continuously monitoring the threats from invasive species, and I know that ADM Brown expanded on it—the number of invasive species that may not even be necessarily here yet or have not gained a foothold, but we're already aware and are monitoring the spread and the potential spread of those species. So we're not waiting until the house is on fire. We've got the smoke detectors out, we're armed, we've got fire extinguishers, and we've built a moat around the house to do what we can to stop them before they get here. That's part of the preventive side of it. But you can't prevent what you don't know is coming. So doing all the pre-work to know where the threats are and where those threats could be coming from is part and parcel of what we do.

As I know we touched on earlier, we've named, I believe it is, 12 or 13 new potential threats to Ontario, including one that has certainly been well publicized, and that is the threat from wild pigs. That's one that we've seen and have the evidence from other jurisdictions just how much damage they can do. I know it's well in excess of \$1 billion in the United States per year—the damage that is caused by wild pigs and invasive species. It likely started out as domestics and someone released them and they were able to populate. We know how prolific they are. Once they gain a toehold, they're extremely difficult to eradicate. Saskatchewan has basically been put into that position today, where they got so established that some people have described it as being out of control in that province.

I'm going to take the opportunity now, because I want to make sure you get the information you require, MPP

Coe, to pass it on to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark for more information on the subject.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I will ask Craig Brown, our assistant deputy minister for policy division, to speak in further detail about how we are working to prevent invasive species from establishing or spreading in the province, and a little bit more detail on some of the recent work we've been doing.

Craig. Over to you.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you very much for the question, MPP Coe. I talked a bit about this already, and I'm happy to expand on it.

As you're likely aware, hundreds of invasive species have infiltrated our lakes and rivers and forests, and this does put our native fish, plants and animals and their habitats at risk. As the minister has said, after an invasive species arrives, it is almost impossible to remove it, and this can cause irreparable damage to critical habitat and ecosystems and cause economic harm as well.

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I'll provide a bit of context here on what are invasive species. They are plants, animals and micro-organisms introduced by human action outside of their natural distribution area, whose introduction or spread threatens the environment, the economy and can even affect human health.

Aquatic invasive plants, one group of invasive species, can be free-floating, floating and rooted in sediment. They can be underwater. They can be emergent, partially under and partially above the water's surface. They could have a significant effect on recreational activities such as boating, fishing and swimming. They can displace native vegetation, slow down water flow and alter oxygen levels in water bodies.

Another group of invasive species is forest pests. They can have a significant impact on our forest ecosystem by degrading the quality of wood, eliminating wildlife habitat and also reducing the recreational and cultural value of a forest. Forest pathogens can be caused by several different organisms that might affect the whole tree, causing defoliation. It can cause root decay and things like stem cankers that reduce the distribution of nutrients throughout the tree.

Invasive fish species can impact our aquatic ecosystems by competing with native fishes for food and habitat, altering food webs and preying on sport fish eggs and larvae populations.

Examples of invasive invertebrates—these are crayfish, snails, mussels, clams, water fleas or mysids. They also could have an impact on aquatic ecosystems by competing with native species for resources, for things like food and habitat, and can destroy native fish spawning habitats.

Terrestrial plants in a forest ecosystem: These can be trees, shrubs or herbaceous plants that have been moved from their native habitat to an introduced area where they're able to reproduce quickly and crowd out native species.

Ontario has been and will continue to be susceptible to invasive species arriving and surviving due to the

favourable environmental conditions and the nature of our geography and of our province. We are industrialized. We're urbanized. We have a highly mobile population, and we have a high population density in southern Ontario. Our economy relies on large quantities of imports, and we have a significant goods-producing industrial sector. And our geographic location, our proximity to a major international shipping channel—the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence seaway—and multiple land and water entry points at Ontario's borders are all factors that make our province particularly vulnerable to invasive species.

Our high population, large population, supports an active, growing economy. We import more goods from more places in the world than any other province or territory, and we also ship many goods onward to other parts of Canada. This economic activity increases the chances of invasive species arriving inadvertently; for example, in packaging in containers on ships or in ballast water. In fact, around 64% of the overseas containers that arrive in Canada are opened in the Ontario portion of the Great Lakes basin.

A number of Ontario's invasive species populations were first established where people have settled. In many cases, these introductions have been the result of deliberate introductions. As our population has grown over the last 200 years, so has the number of invasive species—a direct consequence of increasing urbanization and the movement of people and goods around the globe and new transportation routes in the province.

Transportation routes can also contribute to the spread of invasive species. In southern Ontario, we have a high-density network of roads. This could be associated with increasing invasive species movements. Roads alter the landscape and act as pathways for the spread of invasive species. You heard me talk yesterday, I believe, about phragmites and how it has found its way along highway corridors here in the province.

For many in our province, the costs of invasive species seem intangible, but everything from knotweed to zebra mussels to wild pigs can impact the local economies that help our province prosper. The trilateral Commission for Environmental Cooperation—this includes Canada, the US and Mexico—has estimated that economic losses, the cost of environmental impacts caused by invasive species, exceeds \$100 billion annually in the US alone, so a significant impact on economies. The total impact of zebra mussels in Ontario is estimated to be between \$75 million to \$90 million a year. Cities like Windsor need to spend close to half a billion dollars annually on filtration systems to eliminate the taste and odour problems created by zebra mussels. Power producers spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to combat zebra mussels.

Currently, eight freshwater mussel species in Ontario are listed as endangered, and one is threatened in southern Ontario's rivers, streams and lakes. Zebra and quagga mussels directly threaten these native mussels by colonizing their shells and smothering them. The impacts are particularly pronounced in the lower Great Lakes, as zebra and quagga mussels have virtually eliminated native mussels from Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair.

The minister has touched on this in his remarks: We also know that the cost of wild pig damage to agriculture and the environment in the United States currently stands at \$1.5 billion annually, which is why we are working to ensure that wild pigs do not establish themselves as a population in Ontario.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is committed to protecting the province from the harmful ecological, social and economic effects of invasive species by investing in prevention and management activities. Early detection is especially important. Once invasive species become established, as I've said, it is extremely difficult to remove them, potentially causing long-lasting damage to our environment.

How does the ministry assess the ecological risks of invasive species? We rely on a science-based process that estimates the likelihood of an invasive species being introduced, spreading and becoming established, and the potential ecological consequences. The ministry also gathers information through consultations and postings on the Environmental Registry. We may use information from other jurisdictions, which will share information with us on their efforts to address invasive species.

The ministry continues to work with a number of conservation partners to coordinate prevention, control, research and management activities to help address this serious threat. The ministry invested more than \$2 million in 2020-21 to support ongoing research, monitoring and management of invasive species through programs and education across the province.

The Invasive Species Centre, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and the Nature Conservancy of Canada are just a few of the groups whose work helps to protect Ontario from the threat of invasive species. I'll give you some examples.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters: We work with them on Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program, which addresses the increasing threats posed by invading species in Ontario. Together, we generate public education and awareness of aquatic and terrestrial invading species, address key pathways contributing to invading species introductions and spread, and facilitate monitoring and tracking initiatives for the spread of new invaders found within Ontario. Working with them means we can reach boaters, anglers, property owners, gardeners, recreationalists—all people who can help prevent the spread of invasive species.

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In addition to programs, MNR has also been working on policy to create safeguards against invasive species. Currently, we have two proposals on the environmental and regulatory registries of Ontario regarding invasive species. The first is to draw up strategy to eliminate the threat of wild pigs in Ontario, and the second proposal would regulate 13 new species under the Invasive Species Act. This would prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species that can occur through the movement of watercraft overland to other water bodies in Ontario and to other provinces and states.

The Invasive Species Act was developed to enhance Ontario's ability to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species that pose a threat to the natural environment. The act includes various provisions to enable the establishment of prohibitions and restrictions on invasive species and carriers that facilitate the movement of invasive species in Ontario.

Decisions to recommend species for regulation are based on the risk that a species poses to Ontario's natural environment and socio-economic well-being.

I believe I've got around three minutes, not quite, left?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Two and a half minutes.

Mr. Craig Brown: I'll explain the difference between a prohibited and a restricted species. The decision to classify a species as prohibited or restricted is determined by the current status of the species in Ontario and the management objectives for that species. Species are classified as prohibited when the objective is to prevent their introduction and establishment in Ontario, so taking a proactive approach; and restricted is when the invasive species is already widely established in Ontario, and when the objective is to prevent further spread in the province. For a restricted species, the ministry may introduce regulations that would reduce the risk of that species being introduced or spread further in Ontario while allowing some activities to occur to manage the species, such as transportation during controlled activities.

Additionally, under the Invasive Species Act, it is illegal to import, possess, deposit, release, transport, breed, grow, buy, sell, lease or trade prohibited invasive species. It is also illegal to bring a restricted invasive species into a provincial park or conservation reserve, and to deposit or release the species in Ontario. And where appropriate, additional prohibitions may be applied to restricted species on a species-specific basis.

I'll wrap with this: In our latest posting, we determined that 13 new species have the potential to or are already causing negative impacts to Ontario's natural environment. That regulation, the Invasive Species Act, would improve Ontario's ability to prevent their introduction or spread.

I hope that addresses the question, MPP Coe.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I think we're out of time right now, Chair.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Thirty seconds.

Mr. Lorne Coe: I want to thank Mr. Brown for his answer as well as his and the ministry's collaboration with the conservation authorities across the province, as well as municipalities. The response I've been getting from my local conservation authority and upper-tier government, the region of Durham, has been very, very positive. Thank you so much for that response.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're going to go to the official opposition. I believe MPP Armstrong wanted to speak?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, thank you, Chair. I just want to ask a couple of questions this round, to give MPP Monteith-Farrell a bit of a break.

From the areas where there is \$7.4 million in capital asset savings that were found by the ministry during 2019-20, can the ministry provide a breakdown of how these savings were achieved?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I'm absolutely certain we can provide you with that information, but it won't be coming from me. That's pretty technical stuff and deep-diving into the books, so to speak. Thank you for the question, and I'm going to pass it over to Deputy Minister Rolf von den Baumen-Clark.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you for the question. I will be asking Amanda Holmes, our CAO, to see if she has the information that you requested. I just wanted to clarify and confirm: You said \$7.4 million in capital assets from 2019-20, not 2020-21. Is that correct?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I have it from 2019-20.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Okay. I'll just ask Amanda if she can find that figure and provide some information back. If not, we certainly will take it away and we can bring it back tomorrow or do a follow-up. I'll pass that over to Amanda Holmes, our CAO.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you for the question. I don't have 2019-20 numbers in front of me, so I think I will have to take that back to talk about what that specific reference was to.

What I did reference a little bit earlier to another question that will likely be similar for this answer is that our capital spending is planned out over a 10-year plan that does see fluctuations over the years, both up and down, depending on the specific projects that we have under way and the ones that are planned. At the start of a project, some of our larger multi-year projects, the expenditures can be higher in the early and middle stages of the project and then tend to potentially trail off at the end when we're doing the final stages of project.

It does mean that it varies over the course of that 10-year outlook, the way that we do work to prioritize our substantial capital portfolio to be able to put the money and the expenditures to the highest-priority areas as possible. We do have to be very strategic in how we do that. Barring the fact that I can't speak specifically to the number that you're referring to, we do tend to see that over a 10-year cycle the numbers do vary and go up and down as the nature of projects start, stop and then continue.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I mentioned the 2019-20. Do you have figures for a different year available?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: For instance, I could talk about the current fiscal year in comparison to last fiscal, so 2021-22 in comparison to 2020-21. In that case, we actually saw an overall increase of about \$5.2 million in operating expense for—no, sorry. Let me make sure I'm getting you the right information here.

1700

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: It's okay.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Sorry. Our overall increase was actually \$10.6 million in capital expense for this fiscal as compared to 2021, and that was due to an increase in planned and forecasted spending that relates to a number

of things. So the \$10.6 million is made up of a \$1.5-million additional investment in our leasehold asset management planning, which is our condition assessments on ministry-owned buildings; a \$2.2-million increase to support maintenance and repairs on our buildings and equipment; a \$1.3-million increase for infrastructure maintenance, repair to roads, bridges, dams; a \$500,000 increase to purchase enforcement utility vehicles and watercraft to support enforcement enhancements across the province; and finally, a \$1.5-million increase for the acquisition of other minor movable assets and equipment. So we did actually see an increase in our capital for this fiscal, and similarly, on the capital asset side, another small increase—relatively—of \$3.6 million, almost \$3.7 million, which allows us to spend on some additional capital for immediate infrastructure requirements and things like enforcement vehicles, roads and crossings—so, bridges—and our water control infrastructure work on several dams that are within the ministry's portfolio.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay. The question I have, and again, the years, you may not be able to—but I'm going to ask it anyway. After seeing administration costs drop between 2019-20 and 2020-21, ministry administration is estimated to cost almost 16% more in the upcoming year, with the majority of this coming from the new services costs. What specific administrative responsibilities and functions are causing this inflation, and are they one-time or reoccurring expenses?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you for that question. I can provide you with some additional information on that specific question.

It is about—well, not about—\$5.1 million of the increase that you see for this fiscal year is related to service modernization efforts. This is very specifically to address the digitization of approvals and authorizations. The ministry issues approximately 240 different approvals, authorizations, licences and permits under 23 pieces of legislation to clients ranging from citizens to large industry. So our digital service channels, at this time, account for approximately 25% of all of our authorization types, and the remainder are paper-based. So this increase of \$5.1 million of additional funding is to support that service modernization initiative to ensure that we can offer Ontarians reliable, timely and client-focused services any time, anywhere on any device by expanding our digital and online approval services for our permits, authorizations and licences. This really does support Ontario Onwards, Digital First and the Ontario Burden Reduction Act. Our goal is not only to meet but exceed the government's digital adoption targets. The government's target is to have 70% of services and 50% of interactions online by 2022-23, and MNRF's goal is to have 75% of services and interactions online by 2022-23 and 100% by 2023-24. So that does account for that \$5 million increase in the administration line item.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: So the service modernization, your digital—what you're going to do—was there a proposal put out for contractors or IT companies to bid? And is this service going to be run by a privatized company, or is it going to be by public service employees?

Ms. Amanda Holmes: My colleague ADM Marty Blake might wish to add additional detail to this, or the deputy as well. A plan is currently being developed, and there's likely a mix of some of them being I&IT related, which would be procurement-related requests. I think that one of my colleagues might be able to elaborate a bit further on what we know already for 2021-22 and what is still being decided upon in terms of a plan for the year.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We'd absolutely be happy to have Marty Blake, our lead ADM for our Recovery and Renewal Secretariat, which is looking after our service modernization, to provide some additional information, if you'd like.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Yes, I would. I just would like to specifically find out, if it's possible, when that proposal was put out to the public, how many people applied for the digitization of the modernization service that you're looking to expand on? I ask that because there have been some issues with the education file around that lawsuit that's happening. So that's what I'm curious to know—when it went out and how many people applied; where it's at, like you say; and will there be the privatization? If it's a combination, what's that percentage of privatization compared to public service for utilizing the digitization that you're referring to?

Mr. Marty Blake: Marty Blake, assistant deputy minister for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for the Recovery and Renewal Secretariat. Thank you for that question.

What I will say is that you're out in front of us a little bit. We are just now going through the approvals to procure consultants to help us build the product of what we're going to use as our service modernization platform. Our hope is that we'll develop the in-house expertise. We look at digitization of our work as being something that is going to be essential, and once we have built the product, utilizing an existing platform that we've been working with the forest industry and the aggregate industry with, called the Natural Resources Information Portal, then we, as public servants, would operate that platform and interact with our clients and sectors effectively, once it was all built and structured.

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Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: So you're building it internally? You're not already using something that's out to market?

Mr. Marty Blake: The platform that we're using is based on a Salesforce cloud-based program, so I would say, MPP Armstrong, that it's a combination of working with consultants to help us build our own program based on those technologies, and then we would operate that and support it once we've developed our own in-house expertise.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: So you're saying it's at a consultation stage and hasn't gone out to the public to bid on this digitization project? You're doing it through the government and hiring consultants before you actually put it out to the public to—sorry. I see you shaking your head, so I'll let you go ahead.

Mr. Marty Blake: Sorry for that confusion. We are just going through the process of putting out the procurements or the requests for proposals to bring on the consultants who will help us continue to build that product and also help us build our own expertise, then, to operate it once it is completely finalized over the next three-year period.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: And can you confirm—as Minister Yakabuski said, “What's for lunch?”—what's coming up for dinner? I'm assuming you're planning ahead, and you know what proportion or percentage of that will be public service employees or privatization and outside contracting.

Mr. Marty Blake: We are looking at, once it's up and operating, that the service would be run exclusively by the public service. Our own ministry would operate that, and we would interact with our clients utilizing that service. A lot of the digitization work, the permits and approvals, requires the expertise of the staff from our ministry.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Just under two minutes.

Mr. Marty Blake: We would look at them to be the individuals who would support the clients or the customers who would be utilizing the system to get what they require from a permit and approval type of process.

I think we've heard the terms already: They would be able to access that using any device anywhere at any time, they would be able to look at the status of their approval using that system—and part of the build of the product is actually going to be working with the clients and doing consumer research to see that the product is actually meeting their needs. That's where, at the end of the day, the system will work quite effectively in how we're looking at it, and it would be completely operated by our staff in 2024, when we hope to have it all completed.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: How much time left, Chair, please?

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): You have 24 seconds.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Okay, so I'm just going to make a couple of comments. I would say that in the customer review you're going to do, I would also include the people who are using your system, because oftentimes companies will change software for the people who use them and it doesn't meet the needs of the employees who use them. I say that because many times the Auditor General has gone into ministries in the past and has actually looked at the computer system, and it isn't meeting the needs of privacy; it isn't meeting the needs of long-term record-keeping and things of that nature. So I would just encourage you to ensure that that audit or that review is done internally as well as, you're saying, with your consumers.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're going to the government side. MPP Barrett.

Mr. Toby Barrett: As many will know, our majestic moose is truly an iconic symbol of Ontario, and moose hunting, for many people, is a very important part of their outdoor life.

I know that many of the hunters are from the south and my riding. Over the years, I have received comments—frustration with the system; in the past, it was the lottery, the tag draw. It was felt to be not as fair as it should be, and the bottom line was, many people just weren't being selected.

Some really good work has been done on this. It's a really tough problem. In fact, when I was parliamentary assistant, I said to Minister Yakabuski, "I'd love to do anything throughout the ministry, whatever it is, but don't give me the moose draw problem. I don't want to deal with that one." So I certainly commend some of the work that I'm aware of that has been done. It's very complicated.

I really would like to hear what we have accomplished to make the tag draw a much more fair system and, of course, while at the same time, ensuring that we maintain Ontario's moose population habitat. It's all to the end to continue to ensure that we have a sustainable hunting experience.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Barrett, for the question. You're absolutely right; the moose is an iconic animal, and it's something that really identifies us as Canadians and certainly us as Ontarians.

I do have to ask MPP Armstrong a question because she talked about lunch and dinner, and I was just curious. I might not have seen it clearly because her screen was a little foggy, but I was wondering what time the beagle gets fed.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I was hoping it was fuzzy enough you guys wouldn't see the beagle. She's very tenacious.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Yes, good. If she has any questions, we'd be pleased to take them as well.

Back to the moose: I have not personally bagged a moose, but our son Zachary has had success moose hunting. I have to tell you, his wife, Stephanie—they hunt as a group. One year—you don't mess with Stephanie—she was the shooter of two moose, two deer and two bear over one hunting season. She's a crack shot. Oh, sorry; one of the moose and one of the deer was by bow.

Anyway, you're absolutely right on the moose hunting. We made some pretty darn significant changes, and they were the first changes in practically 40 years to the moose-hunting system, because we heard repeatedly—and I'm sure you've heard the stories yourself, Toby—where some people just never got a tag. You can buy lottery tickets all your life and never win anything, and some people get very lucky and win—I'm not saying you win the big prize repeatedly, but some people are very lucky with tickets. Yet the odds of you winning and them winning are exactly the same going in: They're very low. We had this constant lament from folks who just never seemed to be successful in the moose draw, so we knew we had to do something to make that moose draw fair. That's why we embarked on making the changes. We appointed the BGMAC, had consultative sessions across the province, took that input back and came up with some changes. Some of them were enacted for the 2020 moose season, and the majority of them are enacted for this upcoming moose season, including the points system on the draws and how you get into

the draw. I know that one of our ADMs—I believe Deputy Brown—will expand on it once I've just had a few words.

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One of the things about getting into the draw in the past was, you had to buy your licence and then you applied for a tag. So it frustrated people when they'd buy their licence and not get a tag. One of the changes we made was that you can get into the draw for a nominal fee to see if you're able to be successful, plus all those 20 years that you never got a tag now count in your favour and increase your odds in the points system, so that you'll have a better chance. I can't say you're going to get one, but you will have a better chance because all those years of being unsuccessful have now counted for something. They haven't got you a moose tag or a moose, but they're increasing your chances of getting that tag.

So it's a number of changes, and they're all highlighted in the hunting regulations for this year. Everything is highlighted. All the changes are delineated so they're very easy for people to get online, and we do publish a number of booklets as well.

I'm going to again pass the issue over to my deputy minister, Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark. I've said that name so many times it's starting to confuse me, or maybe the day is just getting long. Anyway, off to the deputy, and she'll pass it on.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister.

We'd be pleased to share some additional information on our moose management program, and as the minister mentioned, Craig Brown, our assistant deputy minister for policy division, will provide some of that information.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thank you for the question, MPP Barrett. I'd be happy to talk about what the ministry has done to make moose hunting fairer across Ontario.

The ministry conducted a review in 2019, the moose management review. We heard from people across the province who wanted moose hunting to be fairer and more sustainable. Improvements started in 2020, and they continue today and include, as the minister has suggested, a new tag allocation process to replace the previous tag draw, a new licensing approach, bows-only seasons in some wildlife management units, and other changes that will support a sustainable moose population while making the moose hunt fairer and more consistent for hunters.

Now, 2021 is the first year for the points-based moose tag allocation process. The minister mentioned that as well. That process replaces the tag draw to distribute tags to resident hunters. To support moose population sustainability, we do need to maintain a healthy balance of the numbers of bulls, cows and calves. Further restrictions on calf hunting have been put in place so more calves have a better chance of reaching adulthood.

Wildlife management includes policy and regulation, research and monitoring, habitat planning, management and conservation allocation and harvest planning. The ministry administers the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act and supporting regulations that provide the framework for wildlife conservation and management in Ontario. The

act and its regulations provide rules about hunting and trapping of game wildlife, including licensing, seasons, limits and harvest reporting, the use of firearms, trapping methods and other gear types, keeping wildlife in captivity, transportation and possession, and purchase and sale of wildlife.

The goal, though, of Ontario's moose management program is to ensure sustainable moose populations and the ecosystems on which they rely for the continuous provision of ecological, cultural, economic and societal benefits for the people of Ontario.

We've developed a number of guiding principles for moose management, and I'll run through them. At the top of the list, moose have an intrinsic value within the natural ecosystem and for the people of Ontario. Moose and the ecosystems in which they occur will be managed sustainably to provide an optimal mix of benefits desired by the people of Ontario. Moose management will consider the best available knowledge, including scientific, local and Indigenous traditional knowledge, as well as social, cultural and economic values, and will include the management of both populations and habitat, with consideration of potential stressors such as climate change, predator-prey interactions and disease. An adaptive management approach will be taken for moose management and harvesting strategies.

Also, moose populations are generally managed at the wildlife management unit level to achieve management goals and objectives set out by the cervid ecological zone.

Moose management will respect Indigenous people's unique perspectives, traditional knowledge and practices related to moose and the exercise of their constitutionally protected Aboriginal or treaty rights.

All Ontarians will be encouraged to participate in planning and decision-making of moose management.

There are two moose management objectives. The first objective is to manage moose populations sustainably according to the broad, overarching directions set out in Ontario's Cervid Ecological Framework. Key management strategies that support this objective include legislation policy, population objectives, population management, population assessment, and habitat management.

The second objective is to provide an optimal mix of benefits from the moose population through harvest allocation and through the management of activities related to moose. Key management strategies supporting this objective are allocation, non-consumptive uses, enforcement, education, and human-moose conflict.

Moose management in Ontario reflects an adaptive management approach and harvest management strategies that are used to contribute to an adaptive approach. So population objectives are set to achieve ecological sustainability and provide for optimal benefits associated with moose and moose-related activities. Management strategies are then implemented to achieve these objectives. These strategies need to consider land use and resource management practices, and integrate moose harvest and habitat management strategies to ensure a cohesive and effective management regime for moose.

The moose population, annual harvest, and trends in moose habitat availability are monitored and assessed to determine if the objectives and associated benefits are achieved.

Science, including population status based on results from the moose aerial inventory, may suggest that changes to the harvest management strategy or other management actions are required. It may also indicate that the objective should be re-examined, and then our adaptive management cycle is repeated.

I think I've got about five or six minutes left.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Five minutes, 45 seconds.

Mr. Craig Brown: I'm going to talk about the Big Game Management Advisory Committee, which we call BGMAC. This committee was created back in 2019 to provide recommendations on how Ontario manages big game species. Both the province and BGMAC work together on the moose management review to find ways to make the draw fair, to maintain healthy moose populations, and to maintain sustainable hunting for years to come. The review conducted consultations. They held seven listening sessions across Ontario, as well as an online survey. All the advice, all the input helped inform BGMAC's recommendations to the minister.

1730

Ontario created a proposal on improvements to moose management in response to BGMAC's report. As part of the ministry's moose management review in 2019, hunters across Ontario told us they wanted management changes that would benefit moose populations and a fairer system for allocating moose tags. We are making improvements to how tags are distributed and making changes to ensure sustainable moose populations. Those improvements started in 2020, and as I mentioned earlier, more changes are coming in 2021.

The 2020 changes included additional areas with calf tag quotas, new bow-hunting seasons and quotas for moose. Then, this year, moose tags will be distributed to Ontario residents using a new points-based tag allocation process.

I'll spend a minute to describe how this process works. All hunters apply as individuals. There are no group applications. Hunters will start with one point for each year they applied for the moose draw since last receiving an adult tag. This is the case whether the tag was received directly through the draw or by tag transfer. For example, if a hunter applied for the draw for five years but didn't receive an adult tag, they will have five points beginning in 2020.

Previous draw applications do not need to be consecutive for hunters to receive points. For example, if a hunter applied for the draw four times in the past eight years, they will receive four points. Initially, points are calculated based on a hunter's draw history from 1993 through 2020. Draw history and points are available for viewing through a hunter's Fish and Wildlife Licensing Service online account.

Hunters will have gained a point in 2020 if they received a calf tag through the 2020 draw where unsuccessful applicants applied to—there's a code we've got—WMU 99Z because they did not wish to be issued a tag, received a surplus tag or made a tag transfer.

I do want to talk bit about the benefits of the licensing and fee changes. The new fees are expected to cost most resident moose hunters about the same as they previously paid when averaged over time, so about \$50 a year. But these changes address hunters' concerns about fairness by shifting costs from unsuccessful applicants to hunters who are awarded and claim a tag. A hunter's average cost per year may be lowered by claiming less expensive tag types, sharing tag costs in a larger party, purchasing tags and licences less frequently.

In 2020, the cost of a resident moose licence was about \$50. In 2021, hunters are no longer required to purchase a moose licence before applying to the tag allocation process, and the application fee for a tag is \$15. If a hunter is unsuccessful in the allocation process and elects not to purchase a moose hunting licence to party hunt with another tag holder, they'll save just over \$35 a year. If a hunter prefers not to apply to the allocation process, they can save \$15 and still purchase a \$35.29 moose hunting licence—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): One minute.

Mr. Craig Brown: —to party hunt.

In summary, the changes made to the moose tag draw system do make things fairer, more accessible and simpler for hunters. They also create more flexibility by allowing hunters to purchase only the products they need, and this approach shifts the cost from unsuccessful applicants to those who claim the tag.

MPP Barrett, I hope that addresses your question.

Mr. Toby Barrett: Yes, thank you very much.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We've got 20 seconds, just about enough time for the meaning of life—or not.

I guess we'll move on to the official opposition side, with 20 minutes. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Now we know everything about moose hunting and getting that tag. Thanks for that clarification.

I'm just going to follow up on some of the questions that MPP Armstrong was asking. We talked a little bit about it this morning but didn't go into as much detail, so that's sort of under some other questions.

There's a commitment of offering 100% of the services online over the next three years. In this morning's discussion, or it might have been yesterday's, I believe we said that we're still going to be offering in-person services and telecommunication services. Did I understand that correctly?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell, for that question. You did understand it correctly. The goal is to have all services online, but not exclusively online, which means everything will be online, but we're cognizant of the reality that not everybody is in a position to deal online.

We know that we're living in an increasingly digital world. It's moving more and more in that direction, and there's no turning back; there's no reversal. This is where we are, and this is where we're going to go. Having said that, we do know that there will be people who will require those services to be offered in the more traditional way. For some people, digital will be the traditional way, depending upon your age—not so much for me, but some people will have grown up in the digital world, so their requirements and their expectations are completely different than someone of my generation, where there was no such thing as a digital world, at one point, when we were requiring government services in various ministries, or in the private sector or otherwise. So it is certainly our intention to continue to move expeditiously in that direction, but as I said, not exclusively. We're not going to shut the door on providing services in other ways.

I'm going to ask Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark to expand on that.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: We're happy to explain a little bit more about what services we can also continue to provide that aren't digital. We still have services available through ServiceOntario, for example, so I'm happy to pass that over to Marty or, if it's specifically about hunting and fishing, to Tracey.

We're also happy to provide some additional information. I believe that MPP Armstrong was also looking for information around security. We have our chief information officer available to answer any questions that you may have further to that one as well.

I will pass this back to Marty for any other further information that he can provide in response to your question.

Mr. Marty Blake: I think the minister hit the nail right on the head.

MPP Armstrong actually alluded to the customer user experience. We are going to be going out and consulting with our users and getting an understanding of their expectations. That information will help us determine what is the right approach from the digital platform and that tool, but it will also inform us of other needs for those who don't have access to digital and how we can better provide them with what I would refer to more as in-house services.

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The other thing I will mention is that some services will continue to be delivered through ServiceOntario outlets, and then those more specialized approvals and applications that I had mentioned to MPP Armstrong—we will look at other ways of how we will continue to provide those services to those clients who will still require more of the in-house type of application to get them what they need.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I think that, increasingly, as the minister alluded to, there's less and less people, but there still is—especially in rural areas, sometimes it's access to or even the affordability of accessing digital services. More and more ServiceOntario sites are closing down as well in small towns—and often they're people who would use MNR services. When we receive complaints about different things, that's often the case. Around

any digital form of government, it's a barrier that's there; maybe in 10 years it won't be, but it is still existing. So it's good to hear that both will be offered.

We're moving in this direction. There must have been some kind of look at the short-term costs for designing these digital services, and then the long-term costs that you're predicting in maintenance and archiving and service management, so we don't undertake something this large without having speculation on what this will cost.

I think MPP Armstrong was asking, is that service management aspect all going to stay in-house or is it going to be an ongoing contracted-out cost that we will be having to pay for? Do you have any of those numbers, or have you done that kind of analysis?

Mr. Marty Blake: I'm happy to answer that question. I'll touch on this, and if I need to, I'll turn it over to ADM Rocco Passero, because Rocco is the CIO of our land and resources cluster. They're a support group that would provide us with the technology to operate and maintain the system that we would utilize for our digitization service.

We always have those ongoing operational costs with our platforms, and we would look to that land and resources cluster to provide us with that service and maintenance to ensure that what we are using stays fresh, stays up to date. We're pretty confident that it is going to be a platform that has longevity. That's one of the advantages of the cloud-based platforms. They are the newest and the greatest, and we shouldn't run into the same types of system degradation issues that we have run into with some of what we would call those legacy-type platforms that we started with when we were all young and new to the Internet and those types of services.

I don't understand completely what those costs will be to keep it operational, and I'm happy to turn it over to my colleague Rocco for him to provide the information for you, if he has it.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): Rocco?

Mr. Rocco Passero: Thank you for your question, MPP.

As Marty noted, the responsibility of my division is working with the ministry in partnership to technology-digital-enable business processes. When looking at that, we establish a project, as my colleague Marty noted, around service modernization, where we look, in a particular case, to basically modernize all the approvals and shift them to the online channel, respecting that, in some cases, there will be multi-channels that we need to support, given the digital divide, MPP, that you spoke to. We'll use contact centres, we'll use IVR types of technology, similar to when you need to access banking services. They have online services, and they still have the phone channel. So a similar type of approach is what we'll take there.

When we look at a project of this size and complexity, we are taking an agile approach, which is a modern way that supports the Ontario Onwards initiative and overall approach to breaking down our work. That's the one-time development work that we do in developing the business logic to move those approvals to be online. That business

logic that we develop then sits on top of a cloud platform. In this particular case, we will be expanding the use of the Salesforce platform. Salesforce is one of the top vendors in the world. The work that we're currently doing with respect to the COVID-19 vaccination deployment and the tracking of where we are with that is using the Salesforce platform—so just an example of how we're using modern technologies.

When looking at the service modernization project and back to that, there's the one-time cost and then there are the ongoing costs. Typically, the ongoing costs when using a cloud platform are subscription-based, because you're basically renting, if you think of it, a room or a service off of an existing platform that's well established and has all the privacy and security controls in place, where we're basically using that part of it. It typically is somewhere around 20% to 30% of the overall one-time cost that you've highlighted, but that will vary, because we are taking an iterative approach. Amanda, the CAO, spoke earlier around the fact that, over the next two to three years, 100% of the approvals will be online. However, the first year, we'll have somewhere around 25% of those approvals, so we would be paying a subset of that 20% to 30% of ongoing costs because we wouldn't have everything online, from a 100% perspective.

That, typically, is a best practice approach that we're taking. Based on the other applications and digital applications that we developed for this ministry, as well as some of the other ministries that my division supports, that, typically, is the rule of thumb that we apply.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: That's interesting. It's very similar to your iCloud, then, where you're storing your data. And the more space you need or the more capacity you need, the more money they—at any point, does that go down? Do you get a longevity—because they did the development costs. At some point, is it levelled off? It would seem to me that it would be forever growing, this huge bulk of data, and that would be very expensive.

Mr. Rocco Passero: That's the benefit of using cloud and the fact that, as more and more ministry departments and ministries use Salesforce or other cloud providers that we use, like Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud, Amazon, our contracts are designed that are volume- and subscription-based, similar to, actually, software, where we have large implementations of software where we negotiate volume-based types of contracts, either based on the type of use, which is consumption, or the number of users. Typically, when they increase in size, that generates economies of scale, which drives further efficiencies.

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Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: That makes sense. And so the support system to support people when things go wrong and all that—is that attached to the company, or is that something you can do in-house?

Mr. Rocco Passero: Yes. We look at different things. There is the service management aspect, MPP, that you spoke to earlier, and service management includes things like incident management—so when an incident occurs on the technical solution or the technology solution, what is

the role of the cloud provider, what is the role of the ministry, what is the role of the I&IT organization that I'm accountable for? That process is implemented, and within the contracts that we have with our cloud providers, that is very clear on who is accountable for what.

In some cases, we bake in penalties with our contracts, specific to our software vendors or cloud providers. They're typically tied with service-level agreements, and we base the incidents on severity. As an example, if we had a specific approval which had 30,000 clients using it and it was down for more than an hour, we would typically have a penalty associated to that.

Some of the other service management practices include how we roll out changes, new releases based on that agile approach I talked about, and clearly articulating who is accountable and the quality control associated to that. And then we have many application and privacy and security controls in place as well. Some of those are noted by the Auditor General, and some of them are based on the policies and controls that we have within our ministry that are based on the I&IT general controls. And so that clearly articulates the controls on who can access what.

Data tends to be an area of interest, and the data continues to be controlled and managed by the ministry. We ensure that controls are in place by those cloud vendors—things like ensuring encryption on data is in place either within the data and the databases that are in those cloud platforms or how the data is transmitted to the client, and ensure that encryption is in place and that we only have the key to open that if required.

Not only do we have service management practices and controls in place, but we do have policies and procedures around our privacy and data—residency around that, controls specific to that. And then we have a fairly large cyber practice within the public services file too, which looks at the ongoing operation of monitoring our network, monitoring the activity within the cloud providers that we use. They work very closely with other jurisdictions, particularly the federal government, the RCMP, and others regarding getting intel, and we basically design and bake all of those privacy and security practices into our applications by design.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Thank you. That was fascinating. I really enjoyed that answer and learning about that.

Mr. Rocco Passero: You're welcome. Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): We're now moving to the government side. We have about six minutes, so we're going to proceed with MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: I'll make it a very worthwhile six minutes.

Thank you, Rocco. I actually came from the cyber security sector before getting into politics, and it's really nice to hear some people speaking my language, so to speak. It's something that we probably don't pay enough attention to. Certainly, when we're trying to modernize systems over the next little while, looking at something as simple as Web-based services and SaaS solutions and different things that we can explore to make the ministry more efficient—I can say that I am all for it, so you and I

should probably have a conversation about some of the cool things that are going on.

With probably only five minutes left now, I want to pivot quickly over to Amanda Holmes. I know that she had a few things left, talking about some of the things that the ministry was getting up to over the next year, if you will, so I just wanted to give her a little bit of time to finish that off, and that will round out the day.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: Thank you, MPP Harris. I appreciate that opportunity. I do have a couple of program areas that I wasn't able to touch on at the last opportunity, and I will do that now.

One of the next programs I want to talk about is the Regional Natural Resources Operations Program, which is responsible for the localized coordination and delivery of ministry programs and services. Specifically, the program delivers public services through a network of regional, district and field offices that are located across the province via an interdisciplinary workforce. Services that the program delivers include land use planning, management and allocation of resources through agreements, permits, licences and approvals in areas of forests, fisheries, wildlife, crown lands, waters, wetlands, aggregates and the petroleum sector.

In 2021-22, some key initiatives include continuing to issue and maintain sustainable forest licences, to enable the harvest and the use of forest resources within a management unit and confer the responsibility for forest management activities on the forest manager; and continuing to implement and improve the ministry's Natural Resources Information Portal, which we've heard about, which does include the service delivery modernization for forest management planning, aggregate and resource management resource services and other natural resource approvals. This portal will make it easier and faster to exchange mandatory information with the forest and aggregate sectors, reduce costs and risks associated with outdated software, eliminate complex and confusing paper forms, and provide more effective online public engagement and access to natural resource management information.

In addition, the portal will provide a digital-first approach and be the central data repository to store submitted information, which will enable a more efficient and cost-effective approval process for forestry, aggregates and other resource approvals. The program is also working with qualified dam owners to streamline approvals for low-risk alterations, improvements and repairs to dams, to reduce the burden on the water power industry while enhancing dam safety.

Our Public Safety and Natural Hazard Emergency Response Program provides specialized wildland fire, emergency management and aviation services to protect people and economic values from seven natural hazards the ministry has responsibility for: wildland fires; floods; drought or low water; dam failure; oil, gas, salt solution mining and underground storage emergencies; erosion; soil and bedrock instability. The program aims to prevent loss of human life and injury—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): One minute.

Ms. Amanda Holmes: —and to prevent other losses and economic and social disruption. The program delivers front-line operations for wildland fire management and supports the Ministry of the Solicitor General, Emergency Management Ontario and other ministries in the delivery of their emergency-response responsibilities in Ontario, including the evacuation of residents and communities affected by fire, flood and smoke risks.

I will just say that for 2021-22, they will continue to promote the FireSmart program to educate the public and communities about how to prepare for the risk of wildland

fire, and they will also be promoting the understanding of the ecological role of fire and the use of fire to benefit resource management.

Am I close? Yes? Perfect.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Tom Rakocevic): I regret to inform you that this ongoing saga of estimates committee now must come to a temporary end. We have learned of many exciting things today, such as moose, zebra mussels and many other things, and the associated estimates—oh, and let's not forget wild pigs.

The committee is now adjourned, and you will be meeting again at 9 a.m.—I just won't be here.

The committee adjourned at 1800.

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