



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session

Standing Committee
on
Community Development

Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Consideration of Main Estimates

Monday, March 5, 2012
6:30 p.m.

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The 27th Legislature
Fifth Session**

Standing Committee on Community Development

Jablonski, Mary Anne, Red Deer-North (PC), Chair
Chase, Harry B., Calgary-Varsity (AL), Deputy Chair

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Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation Participant

Hon. Jack Hayden Minister

Also in Attendance

Hinman, Paul, Calgary-Glenmore (W)

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6:30 p.m.

Monday, March 5, 2012

[Mrs. Jablonski in the chair]

**Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation
Consideration of Main Estimates**

The Chair: Good evening, everyone. My name is Mary Anne Jablonski, and I'll be chairing this meeting this evening.

Note that the committee has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

I just want to remind you not to touch your microphones because *Hansard* will take care of that for us.

I'd like to go around the table for introductions, but I would ask the minister to introduce staff at the table as only members and ministers may address the committee. Minister, when it comes around to you, if you could introduce your staff, please. We'll start our introductions.

Mr. Hinman: Paul Hinman, MLA for Calgary-Glenmore.

Mr. Vandermeer: Tony Vandermeer, MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Amery: Moe Amery, Calgary-East.

Mr. Hayden: Jack Hayden, Drumheller-Stettler and minister of tourism. I have with me Deputy Minister Brad Pickering, Senior Financial Officer Cam Steenveld, Assistant Deputy Minister of Parks Graham Statt, Assistant Deputy Minister of Tourism Reegan McCullough, Assistant Deputy Minister of Recreation and Sport Development Tim Moorhouse, Acting Communications Director Katrina Bluetchen, and Susan Cribbs.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Mr. Goudreau: Hector Goudreau, Dunvegan-Central Peace.

Mr. Lindsay: Good evening. Fred Lindsay, MLA, Stony Plain.

Mr. Groeneveld: George Groeneveld, Highwood.

The Chair: Thank you.

According to Government Motion 6 and Standing Order 59.01(4) this is the sequence: the minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes; for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of the third party and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of the fourth party, if any, and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of any other opposition party represented in the Assembly or any independent members, if any, and the minister or the member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may speak; and, finally, any member may speak thereafter.

To note, committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate.

Department officials and members' staff may be present but may not address the committee.

Members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time.

A minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. Members are asked to advise the chair at the begin-

ning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule and we will adjourn; otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

We are ready to begin. Minister?

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to be here to discuss Tourism, Parks and Recreation's estimates for the 2012-13 and our 2012-15 business plan. I want to start by touching on our business plan, the goals that we're working on and what we're attempting to achieve with our budget. As the ministry's name would suggest, we really have three key goals.

First, of course, is that Alberta's tourism products are developed and expanded and that tourism from targeted local, national, and international markets is increased. The goal is closely tied to my mandate, ensuring that Alberta grows as a tourism destination. Our second goal is that the Alberta parks system provides opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism and conserves Alberta's natural heritage. The third goal is that Albertans enjoy a high quality of life, improved health and wellness, strong communities, economic benefits, and personal excellence and fulfillment through recreation, active living, and sport. Those are our goals, the outcomes we're investing in with this budget. I particularly like that the quality of life is captured in the third goal. In addition to helping Albertans diversify the economy, our ministry is very much about improving the quality of life of Albertans. That's increasingly important work in a province that's busy, growing, and looking to attract more skilled newcomers.

Let's get down to the brass tacks of what our investment really looks like and how and where it will be directed. The Tourism, Parks and Recreation total budget for 2012-13 is \$182 million. That represents an 11 per cent, or \$18 million, increase over last year. The increase is largely attributed to an additional \$5 million generated through the tourism levy, another \$5 million to cover maintenance needs at our parks, and about \$1.3 million in increased support for games, plus the dollars needed to cover the negotiated wage increases and changes to benefits.

Our budget will keep us on track to achieving our goals without reducing services or increasing fees.

Broken down by our core businesses, our budget will provide \$64.8 million for tourism, \$59.9 million for parks, and \$26.3 million for recreation and sport. In addition, \$7.2 million has been allocated for basic ministry support services.

Next, I'd like to delve a little bit deeper into each area, starting with tourism. Again, the budget for tourism stands at \$64.8 million, an increase of roughly \$5.4 million over the 2011 budget. This total investment will keep us with key initiatives like building on Travel Alberta's fantastic new and very compelling brand; developing new ways to engage with visitors through a variety of channels, including social media; advocating for better air access to Alberta; and also introducing a new tourism development strategy to help guide the creation of new products, experiences, and destinations.

The increase in our tourism budget is largely accounted for by the \$5 million increase in revenue from the tourism levy. This 4 per cent levy is collected by accommodation operators. There's a two-year lag between the collection and the allocation of that levy, so the dollars in our 2012 budget reflect the health of our tourism industry in 2010-11. That's a good sign to see that the levy is on

the upswing. It's also not surprising given that our economy and the global economy have been recovering. The total value of the levy this year is \$64.4 million, and these dollars will be reinvested in growing the industry that provided it. About \$50.5 million, or 80 per cent, of the levy goes directly to Travel Alberta. The remaining \$13.9 million, or 20 per cent, will be put towards research, investment, attraction, tourism development, product development, and visitor services.

In addition to the funding through the levy Travel Alberta will also take \$2.2 million from its sustainability fund for a total budget of \$53 million. That money will be used to attract visitors from our key regional and select long-haul markets. These are the markets that yield the highest return on investment. I should note that Alberta, of course, is one of them. In fact, Albertans account for more than 80 per cent of the visits to our tourism destinations and more than half of our \$5 billion industry. Other markets include Saskatchewan; British Columbia; Ontario; the U.S., of course; Europe; and the Asia Pacific.

In all cases we expect a strong return on our investment. An example is that it's estimated that the summer 2011 campaign generated more than \$45 for every dollar invested. Their industry partners indicated satisfaction with the services and the support provided by Travel Alberta. If you've seen any of the recent videos and commercials or the new website, you know that they're doing some great work. They're building our tourism industry, and they're also building our pride in Alberta. That's like creating 3.8 million ambassadors who are out there recommending the province to the world.

Outside of Travel Alberta the ministry's tourism expenditures are largely focused on research, visitor services, developing new opportunities, and providing some additional support, of course, to events that profile our province. For example, last year we provided \$5 million to help the Calgary Stampede develop new attractions and programs for its centennial.

6:40

Our ministry will also continue to lobby the federal government for more open skies and air service agreements to allow the market to determine the air services to and from Alberta. We know that providing direct air access is critical for a more competitive tourism industry. Just a few weeks ago we helped announce direct daily flights from Amsterdam and expanded service from Japan, the results of the work that we do with our partners.

Of course, one of Alberta's most popular tourist attractions is our provincial parks. Every year our parks welcome more than 8.5 million visitors. They contribute an estimated \$1.3 billion to our economy. They also, of course, provide Albertans with countless opportunities for recreation and relaxation. They also help us to protect and conserve Alberta's natural history.

Budget 2012 dedicates \$59.9 million to the operation and maintenance of Alberta's 478 parks and protected areas. This is an increase of \$8.5 million from last year. The bulk of the increase is due to the increased manpower costs and more visitors, of course, to our parks. But we're also investing in priority initiatives that include implementing the plan for parks; increasing access to our parks by visitors of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities; and upgrading, restoring, and expanding our park facilities.

I'd like to start with a look at our investment in maintenance of these facilities. There are some very good things happening out there. About \$9.9 million of our operating budget for parks is dedicated to the repairing of facilities and capital planning. Much of this will be dedicated to smaller but essential projects, simple things like painting and new picnic tables.

About \$1.5 million is earmarked for access and facilities planning at the new Glenbow Ranch provincial park.

In addition to the almost \$10 million for maintenance and planning, \$13.6 million will be invested in capital projects. These projects include expanding sites to accommodate today's larger RVs, paving and improving roads, and installing new water treatment systems.

In addition to maintaining our parks, we're also adding new revenue-generating services. Today about 23 per cent of the cost of running our parks is offset by the revenue they generate. This year our capital budget includes \$475,000 to develop three new revenue-generating services. The first is comfort camping. These facilities, including floored and furnished tents, will expand at Dinosaur provincial park and be created at Cypress Hills, Miquelon Lake, and Writing-on-Stone provincial parks. We're also going to offer seasonal camping at two less-utilized parks. This is going to allow campers to book a site for the duration of the summer.

Another idea we're exploring is RV and equipment storage. We would offer these services in parts of the province where they're not otherwise available. I want to be clear that it's not our intent to compete with the private sector. In fact, about 75 per cent of our parks are operated by private-sector operators, and they do a great job.

There are few cases this year where we're taking back the management of parks at an initial cost of about a million dollars, but that's offset by the revenue that's generated. This applies to Pigeon Lake while the site undergoes some fairly major construction and to Beaver Lake and Carson-Pegasus, where a cost-benefit analysis shows that it's a more efficient approach for us. That's a snapshot of our maintenance and capital investment in our parks.

We've invested, actually, more than \$270 million in our parks infrastructure since 2004. We'll continue to ensure that our parks are safe, welcoming, and accessible to visitors. I'm proud to say that in 2010-11 almost 95 per cent of the visitors reported a nice, satisfying experience with our parks. We're working to get more Albertans out to enjoy our system.

One of the ways that we've been improving access is through our online reservation system. This year we added eight campgrounds and 78 group camping areas and 16 heritage attractions, of course, to our award-winning service. We plan to further expand the system next year to include the remaining 50 or so group camping areas.

Currently users are charged a \$12 nonrefundable reservation fee per site. The service and its growth also receive about \$1.4 million from the ministry's share of the tourism levy. Going forward, our goal is to move towards cost recovery for the reservation service.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You have a lot to say – it's a wonderful department – but we have to spend the next hour with the Official Opposition.

I see that Harry Chase is here with us. Harry, would you like to go back and forth?

Mr. Chase: Well, to begin with, I'd like to put concerns on the table and at that point have the minister join in the response.

The Chair: Do you want to take the first 10 minutes for your comments?

Mr. Chase: If I may, please.

The Chair: Yes, you may.

Mr. Chase: I want to begin by thanking Linda Pushor, who is my constituency executive assistant, for putting together a considerable amount of the research and the questions that I'll be raising today. I also want to thank Stephanie O'Brien, who is our caucus researcher, who again contributed to putting together this presentation.

I think most members at this table are aware of the fact that I have a passion for parks. That passion comes from three years of running Cataract Creek provincial wilderness park in Kananaskis. In the second year of that time, while the Lost Creek fire was burning out of control, I watched Spray Lake, logging with government permission, clear-cut the entire area around Cataract Creek. If that wasn't enough, then Bell Pole was given the leftovers, and they clear-cut the rest. Not only did they clear-cut the rest, but they bulldozed the campsite and camp roads in order to access the timber, and that caused me great concern.

Since I was elected on November 22, 2004, I have brought forward my concerns about the way parks should be managed. I've pointed out the lack of management plans. In 2005 there were over 450 parks, and of those parks there were only 40 management plans. Things have not improved tremendously over the past eight years, and that concerns me greatly.

Just a degree of levity. I told my caucus members today that I'm not only presenting to this committee, but I'm also the vice-chair, so I have to listen to myself for the first hour. Hopefully, you'll listen, and if you require qualifications or repetition, I'd be glad to provide it.

I want to start by setting the tone, sharing with you a letter written by Dave McIntyre, Box 309, Crowsnest Pass. The letter is dated March 1, 2012, and it begins with a poem. You all know that I'm very keen on poetry. Chaos Calls The Shots is the title of his poem.

Folks went out to the Frank Slide
to trek the community trail,
AltaLink had been there
the place was smashed to hell

The path had been compacted
with wheels and ruts galore,
the folks ain't goin' back there no more

Folks went out to the Castle
to walk among the trees,
loggers beat them to the forest,
brought it down with Spray disease

The forest was on the highway
movin' up the Castle's northern shore,
the trees were in the forest no more

AltaLink's needless degradation of the celebrated Crowsnest Pass Community Walking Trail, a recently opened 23 km non-motorized trail, takes a back seat to the ongoing devastation caused by Spray Lake Sawmills' clear-cutting in the Castle River valley, but the two acts of disfigurement, while seemingly disconnected, reveal a common, across-the-landscape link: the complete and utter failure of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) to manage a world-renowned, Crown of the Continent, headwaters landscape.

I'm making this point because in my mind there is a crossministerial connection between SRD and parks. In my opinion environment, parks, and SRD should be within the same portfolio because they have direct impact on each other.

Instead of managing uses and protecting this world-class landscape, SRD . . .
Substitute TPR.

. . . has failed to live up to its mandate. What it has done is prescribe some of the land's worst abuses, while watching as other abuses spin – mud flying – out of control.

Today, society knows that this brand of management has cost taxpayers dearly. We know that it would take hundreds of millions of dollars just to initiate restoration efforts due to the off-road landscape abuses alone.

These abuses aren't just in the Castle. Look in the area outside of the designated McLean Creek. Look at Indian Graves. The lack of control, the lack of enforcement, whether it's not enough conservation officers, whether it's not enough SRD, whether it's not enough forestry staff, there is a responsibility. It's a shared responsibility, and unfortunately it's not occurring.

6:50

Here in the headwaters of the Castle, Crowsnest and Oldman rivers, we don't have time to sweat the – degradation-as-usual – small stuff. We don't have time to worry about ancient trees, endangered species, rare plants, or the litany of abuses that occur. We can't afford to lose sleep over landscape ruination, or bother to manage the off-the-chart strife that's created by an army of conflicting forest users. There are more important things to do.

To be fair, it isn't as if the managers planned it this way. They simply haven't managed to prevent this outcome. They haven't done what they've been paid to do.

Here in the Headwaters Wilderness, society's resource managers have taken a back seat, next to the exit. There, with hats pulled low, they monitor the situation by simply watching as the landscape's many abusers, all dissatisfied, wage war on center stage.

Standing in the spotlight, freedom-fighting mountain men (and women) write their own rules while pointing vindictive fingers at these same pantywaist managers: men and women who are paid to smile in the face of public ridicule and scorn.

I know from three years of running Cataract Creek that SRD officials care. Conservation officers care. But the amount of responsibility placed on them in the wilderness to maintain and uphold the few existing laws is simply an impossible task. What I've noticed over the years is a reduction in staff, so the job has become ever harder to manage.

Come on down. The show's free and it's playing daily. You, too, can join in this chaos. It's all part of a deviant fantasy. And don't worry, you can't upset this little applegart; it's already been flipped and smashed into a million splintered pieces.

Here in the Headwaters Wilderness, society's chanted demand is "Mountain Freedom." It's each person's undeniable right to do anything he (or she) wants on an anything-goes landscape. Here, on public land that's worth absolutely nothing, you can hike or ride your horse past screaming dirt bikes. You can smash beer bottles in the creek, camp wherever you like, set up your toilet on a stream bank, cut down trees, create your own roads, dig up rare vegetation and shoot anything your heart desires. Here in the Headwaters Wilderness you can simply throw away the rulebook and take charge. It's your landscape, yours to destroy any way you see fit.

This destruction is not restricted to Cataract Creek. It has happened in the Sheep. It has happened, as I say, in the McLean Creek area. It has happened in the Indian Graves area. SRD and conservation officers with the extra reinforcement of RCMP, especially on the May long weekend, try to control it, but what happens is that it moves from place to place to place and never gets actually shut down. It just moves.

Well, I must warn you of the existence of a single, rock-hard regulation: Forest users aren't permitted to stand in the path of industrial equipment that's been brought in to destroy the headwaters forest. In other words, "little" abusers must step aside wherever SRD has prescribed wholesale, industrial landscape desecration. Failure to step aside for heavy equipment

is a serious offence – it'll land you in the slammer, open your life to soaring legal costs and courtroom intrigue.

But if you're just here to tear up the landscape on your own, motor past the heavy equipment. Don't complicate your life. Find a new creek to play in.

Faux cowboys ride this free range on dirt bikes and quads. Their abuse is everywhere, and it's familiar in the way that a bad neighbour is familiar. But that's okay. That's how we like it.

Society, ever tolerant, tends to sugarcoat this maltreatment by rounding up some billboards and a few 2X4s to prop up false illusion: that the word wild still exists in the Headwaters Wilderness.

The message: At the base of this tree stump is a picture of the living tree that once grew here.

Despite alluring marketing, the Headwaters Wilderness is an industrial trash bag. It's lined and littered with smashed cans, broken bottles, old refrigerators and yesterday's oil change. There are tire tracks up the creek. And there, wallowing in what your grandfather called "the finest spring in the Rockies," is a herd of cattle.

I've experienced that three years running in Cataract Creek. The cattle guards weren't maintained; they were filled in with dirt. The fences were in total disrepair, and there wasn't Tourism, Parks and Recreation budget to repair the damage. So what I did for three years – 2002, 2003, and 2004 – was dismantle trails because there was no new money to repair them.

Don't worry. You can still hike through the heart of the anything-goes Headwaters Wilderness. You can climb the stunning mountains overlooking the magnificence of Cow Pie Reserve and Pipeline Provincial Park. Stay in Camp Clear-cut to savor its stark, denuded charm.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase. I'm not sure if I heard any questions in there.

Mr. Chase: No. You will shortly. I do appreciate everybody's tolerance. I know that I try people's patience, but very shortly you'll have one fewer trying person sitting here.

The Chair: Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond. When you're finished responding at this time, we'll move into the next 20-minute period.

Mr. Chase, I understand that at that point in time you want to go back and forth. Is that correct?

Mr. Chase: I would like to at least try, depending on the minister's availability of answers.

I just should say, Mr. Minister, that if for some reason it's not a fingertip fact because I'm asking too precise a question, I look forward to a written answer. I'm not expecting all the questions to be answered necessarily tonight.

The Chair: Minister, you now have up to nine minutes to comment.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I do want the hon. member to know that I appreciate the passion with which he speaks about a landscape that is very important to all of us as Albertans. I think it's also important to point out that the exercise that we are taking on tonight is the estimates for Tourism, Parks and Recreation, and the hon. member did not touch once on Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

I understand your frustration with the misuse of some of our natural areas, but I think it's important to point out that logging is not allowed in our provincial parks system at all. Period. None.

I think it's also important to point out that we have been working with the trail users groups. I do agree with the hon.

member that it's time we stopped the abuses that are taking place, especially on our eastern slopes but in a number of areas. My ministry is working very hard to put together the solutions along with the trail users that are going to help us in that area.

I think I need to respond just to a couple of things. The poem was interesting, no question. I remember going and cutting the ribbon and opening up the new Frank Slide Interpretive Centre and the huge government commitment that has gone into that area to protect that part of our history to make it a hands-on experience for visitors that go there.

Though it's not in our parks system, I also need to point out that one of the most beautiful and well-used and well-looked-after and maintained trails is in the Crowsnest Pass, by actual responsible off-highway vehicle users. We need more of that. We need a lot more of that.

Also not in my ministry but something that was talked about was, of course, the logging industry. In the province of Alberta we plant four trees for every one that's harvested and have done so for quite some period of time. I know first-hand about the landscape of Alberta and how it has been managed in the past and some of the things that are available. I'm concerned when areas are being abused and we're not using the land as we should, and I fully agree with the member that we need to rectify these things.

I also understand history further back than that. My family farm celebrates 102 years this year. At the time that my great-grandfather and grandfather moved out here to homestead, there were no trees. The First Nations people, as a practice to feed themselves, burned off completely the upland grass in our prairies in order for new grass to come back and attract the buffalo. Now I have a variety of species, far more species than have ever existed in my area, far more diversity than ever existed before. Both types of deer that are in the province, moose, elk: on and on it goes. More species are moving in all the time.

I think we do some wonderful things with our landscape. I think that government is responsible for a number of the wonderful things that we do, but I think that Albertans themselves have taken up the challenge and have made some amazing improvements to what we have.

Four hundred and seventy-eight parks. Just to get back to my ministry, everyone in Alberta is within an hour's drive of a provincial park. Fifty per cent of our parks are day-use parks, and there's no charge. There are interpretive opportunities for families to go in where some of our park staff can talk to them about the vegetation and the wildlife and all the different natural components of our park areas.

7:00

Our parks are actually oversubscribed in many areas now as witnessed by the opening day of our online booking for our parks system for the May 24 weekend. Albertans are making great use of our parks system, wonderful use of our parks system. We're blessed to have people coming from all over the world not to take a look at the degradation and the horror stories that our earlier conversation would suggest are out there but to see the most pristine environment that exists in the world.

We have five UNESCO heritage sites in our province right now and number 6 coming up. We're known in Alberta for the beautiful, pristine environments: the clean air, the beautiful skylines, landscapes, and cityscapes now. I think we've got a great deal to be proud of. I as an Albertan am very proud. I know we're taking good steps and important steps. I'm proud of the fact that we have seen that people with mobility issues are now able to access a number of our areas to enjoy the great outdoors. I'm proud to see that our industry is growing in a time when the

economies around the world are suffering badly and many other destinations are suffering badly from lack of visitors.

We continue to draw, and we're back on the increase again. In a recent conversation with the mayor of Banff he said that they were surprised and very pleased with the rebound that's taken place this year and the amount of business that's taking place in Banff and the fact that people from around the world are coming to see it. Two direct flights into Calgary, as an example, from China now. We're an approved destination. Of course, that's because we have a beautiful destination for people to visit.

We continue to improve our parks. We continue to improve our parks system. We continue to treat them as a very valuable environmental resource, which they are. We spend a great deal of time, energy, and money in waste-water treatment systems and freshwater systems for those parks. I'm proud of them. I think they're amazing.

I'm blessed as an Albertan, a fourth-generation Albertan, to have seen this province from corner to corner, end to end, top to bottom, side to side. I'm one of probably few people in the province that's ridden on horseback all the way from Banff up to past Nordegg throughout my life, part of it hunting elk and part of it just to take a look at the landscape. I can't imagine or picture a more beautiful environment anywhere, and I've been blessed to travel to a lot of places. Those are my eastern slopes.

The area of which you speak: I have friends that are landowners down in the area around the pass. I think it's important that we all understand that this is not a park that you're talking about; this is an area that's being managed. You talked about the Lost Creek fire. That's the situation we run into if we don't look after the situation with undergrowth and a number of issues that can cause us problems. We've done some remediation work in Cypress this year.

What we're doing right now in southern Alberta. We'll be replanting, and hopefully we won't lose great tracts of land because we haven't taken care of that resource. Our South Saskatchewan River Watershed Advisory Committee, of course, is going to make recommendations to us, and I'm sure there will be recommendations from my ministry with respect to how to deal with land in southern Alberta. I'll be pleased to look at them, but I think it's for Albertans to decide how they would like their land used and how they'd like to treat it, and I respect that very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. You had a minute left.

We'll move into the second 20-minute period for the Official Opposition. I understand, Mr. Chase, that we're going to have a back and forth.

Mr. Chase: Well, we'll try. I just have to respond to some of the minister's comments. First off, the reason the ministry through forestry, through SRD, plants four trees for every one it takes out is because they're so poorly managed that if one of those four survives, it's absolute luck. Again, I witnessed the reforestation efforts around Cataract Creek. When you take out everything, which clear-cutting does, then you don't have anything for the seedlings to take hold in.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, we're discussing the budget for Tourism, Parks and Recreation. The minister has already told you that this has nothing to do with his department. Because we're talking about the budget for this department, could you bring us back to questions that are relevant to this department, please.

Mr. Chase: Okay. The minister also talked about his pride of the trees that grew on his own land. Is that within the tourism budget?

The Chair: Mr. Chase, that was in response to your comments. Now we're on a new train. We should come back to the department because that's what we're here for.

Mr. Chase: All right. Let's try. As I say, we'll see how it goes. If I can't get everything answered within this next 10 minutes, then I'll use the final 10 minutes and provide a whole series of questions to be answered.

I note from your mandate letter that you don't appear to have a lot to achieve since it addresses only increasing tourism. Can you briefly advise how you intend to do that?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely. I think one of the most important things that's taking place right now is our new program with Travel Alberta. I don't know if the hon. member has had a chance to see some of the promotional advertisements that are taking place, but we're advertising, actually, a great deal in the European market and other markets on international flights that are coming in. So, yes, that is our goal, to increase those markets.

Just to give the hon. member a picture of what we're after, we're right now at about 5 and a half billion dollars in tourism. We employ close to 100,000 people in the industry, and we get about 25 per cent of our revenue from 7 per cent of our tourists which are international guests. So tourism definitely is in my mandate letter, and it's hugely important. We're taking on a real task. We're talking about a significant increase in tourism over the next three to four years.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I appreciate your conciseness. You partially answered my next question.

I note that on page 1 of your four-page ministry business plan for 2012 through 2015 you state one of your core businesses as "tourism research, marketing, product development, and visitor and industry services." Other than setting up tourist information sites in Germany, can you please inform us as to how Travel Alberta fits in with your ministry under this core business?

Mr. Hayden: Travel Alberta, of course, is a promotional component to bring people in from outside the country but also from outside the province and from within the province. That's where the ads are directed. But when we talk about improvement of the experience – and I'd be happy to spend whatever time you want on this – there are tourism opportunities throughout the province in probably underutilized areas. Northern Alberta is one of those examples where there are opportunities for hands-on experiences in the wild, but there are not accommodations. We do have business plan help for people that are out there for the development of the industry anywhere in our province, for that matter, but we've got certain areas where we do know that we are probably weaker than we need to be and where there are other opportunities. That's more hands on from my department than it is from Travel Alberta.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Can you please provide a financial breakdown of your ministry spending on tourism research, marketing, product development, and visitor and industry services?

Mr. Hayden: Certainly. Does the member want specific numbers for each category at this point? Is that what you're after?

Mr. Chase: Yes, please. Tourism research, marketing, product development, and visitor and industry services.

Mr. Hayden: Okay. I'll give you more than that. I'll go to all that are listed. Program support is estimated at \$600,000; visitor services, \$4.391 million; tourism destination competitiveness, \$3.644 million. Our online reservation service, which, of course, is our parks program that we initiated a couple years ago, \$1.4 million; major athletic events tourism services, \$500,000. Our research and investment in the product that's out there and the people that are out there in the industry is \$3.7 million. Of course, assistance to Travel Alberta, the corporation, is the figure that I stated in my opening remarks, over \$50 million.

7:10

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Now, with regard to, in quotes, tourism research, upon a thorough examination of your ministry website and other government of Alberta websites I found what might be considered a lot of research. However, I also found that very, very little research was ever followed up on, and there were a lot of statistics with no analysis appearing to have been done on the information. As an example, in 2002 a fairly extensive-looking body of research was completed, aboriginal tourism product opportunity analysis, with a consultant body. Nowhere can I find any specific follow-up to that research in terms of planning, implementing, and measuring outcomes.

In 2006 consultants completed a study of the current supply of fixed-roof accommodation in the Canadian Badlands region based on projected visitor demand over the next several years. The report assesses the need for additional fixed-roof accommodation in various communities throughout the Canadian Badlands region, your area. In 2010 Canadian Badlands Ltd. in partnership with Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation conducted a tourism development plan for Dry Island Buffalo Jump provincial park and surrounding area to identify tourism development opportunities that will enhance the role of the park as a core tourist attraction and optimize the economic benefits to the surrounding area. Again, no further information.

I found case after case of studies that appear to have had no implementation plans or outcome measurements. Have you established a scientifically based research program within a framework of tourism planning, development, and measurement? What is your budget for tourism research for this budget year? I didn't hear it quoted in the previous facts.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah, I did quote it. The research and investment component, as I mentioned, is \$3.7 million.

Actually, there are a number of areas that we've been working on. You talked about First Nation development of tourism opportunities. I talked about the opportunity for more investment in the north, and actually the Fort McMurray area and one of our newer provincial parks in that area is a co-operative approach with First Nations people. That approach and that type of park and tourism destination: the value of that, of course, is the hands-on experience. People can do the wilderness – hiking, camping, and those opportunities – and although most people don't know about it, we also have a wonderful resource in northern lights, that people can take advantage of in the winter.

You talked about Badlands. Of course, we work closely with Badlands. I know that because, of course, part of it is in my constituency. It's a huge area, by the way. We have over 60 municipalities now that are part of the Badlands tourism operation, and as I say, a good chunk of it is in my constituency. We've worked with them on the development of their business plans. We also worked with them with grant funding last year to

develop the economic plan that they're working on right now on how to go forward.

When you speak about the roofs, I expect you're talking about the accommodation component for tourism, but we do still see a fair amount of expansion taking place. In fairness, an awful lot of that is for the recovery that we've experienced economically. Just to give you an indicator, the area that you're talking about has the lowest unemployment rate in the entire nation at 3.8 per cent right now. Basically, if somebody is not working, you grab them off the couch and drag them to work with you because you've got too much to do yourself. That's caused a problem with the accommodation in our area.

I'd love to give you this part if I could read it. Maybe we'll leave it at that and take another question.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Well, I appreciate it. You know, being down to the music festival in your area and then seeing the Atlas mine and the way it's been restored are part of my enjoyment of your particular region.

You mentioned sort of a reference to work that had been done in parks and in the Banff area. It's important to put on the record that national parks make up 8 per cent of the provincial land use whereas provincial parks only account for barely 4 per cent. Going back to the Castle region for a moment, that used to be protected up until the 1930s as part of Waterton national park. There was a time in its life when it was protected.

Regarding the marketing, what information are you basing your marketing decisions on? I'm curious since I know a lot of attention has been paid in recent years to increasing tourism to Alberta from Asia, and your ministry has been involved in missions and visits to Asia. As Asia makes up only about 3 per cent of our tourism market currently, how has your ministry determined the return on investment required to make investments much larger proportionately than market share for these types of expenses or decisions?

Mr. Hayden: I think that we need to look at what goes into the development of new markets. I think it's also important to take a look at where our tourists are coming from right now because I think it's a surprise to a lot of Albertans when they find that out. Of course, the majority, as you would suspect, are people that live in Alberta and in the provinces that surround us, the two major ones being Saskatchewan and British Columbia. As far as our international visitors go, the United States is our largest international visitor, which we would also expect because we share a border with them. Then the surprises begin to come in. Great Britain is next, and then we have the Netherlands and people like Australia. Then, of course, we get down to Japan, as an example, as number 5 or 6.

We're into a brand new area now where relationships are very important. The fact that we have been one of the first in the world to be an approved destination for China I think is hugely important. Two direct flights from Beijing each and every week now. That's an area that we need to improve. The relationships that have been built up over a long period of time, of course, are the things that are going to make this better for us with the Asian markets.

Their economy, of course, is great. While I was over there, not on the tourism side but on the agricultural side, I couldn't believe it when I went into Beijing and 24 million people live in one city. I went to Shanghai, and over 20 million people live in Shanghai. The Yangtze River was just upstream from where I held my meetings, and there were 35 communities with over a million

people in each of them. It's just unbelievable the market that's there for us to tap into.

Some of the things that they love about what we have to offer are no lineups, the beautiful clean air, our amazing mountain parks. They also love cityscapes. Of course, Calgary and Edmonton have done so much, Edmonton with festivals, that there are so many opportunities for that Asian market. We'll continue to work with them, but basically we've just opened the door this year with those two flights, and I'm talking about the China market. We've had a lot of Japanese attention over the years, making them about number 5, but China, I think, is probably one of our largest growth areas. Then, of course, India is another area where there is disposable income and an amazing economy, so we need to open up to those folks. But it's relationships a lot.

Mr. Chase: I'm going to try and continue the cordial back and forth, but I have six more pages of questions that I'm going to at some point have to get in. So I'll try it for a little bit longer within this 10-minute exchange, and then I'm just going to beg your indulgence and put it on the record and have you respond in writing.

Do you have an accountability framework for decision-making and outcome measurement for Travel Alberta?

Mr. Hayden: I have expectations – but they're an arm's-length board – and they are to produce tourism opportunities and bring people into the province. Yes, there are measurements that take place, and they're internationally recognized as to what sort of investment we make and what return we get on it. Hon. member, even some of it I question because for each dollar invested, we see a return of \$45 in tourism dollars. Even though those are the measures that the industry uses, I would still question how many people go home and say: I had a beautiful experience; you had better go. In fairness, how much of it has to do with the advertising and promotional campaigns?

We're very, very successful in tourism in Alberta, of course, in the amount that we invest and what we get. The hundred thousand full-time jobs are important, but the 5 and a half billion dollars is a number that's hard to ignore.

Mr. Chase: You mentioned a bit from the various markets. Do you have a dollar figure for, say, China, Japan, Europe in general in terms of investments in the 2010-2011 year or projections for this year?

7:20

Mr. Hayden: We do. We have our projections for this year, that might be helpful to the hon. member, and I can break them down further if you would like. In U.S. marketing we're looking at \$9.8 million, a million-dollar increase. International marketing is \$8.7 million.

But I think you're looking for the breakout on how many dollars are actually going to come in. So the United States, as an example, was about \$565 million in 2010, the last figures that we have. I can break out the other key areas. As I mentioned, we're talking United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, the Netherlands. The United Kingdom, as an example, in 2010 was \$165 million. I can take a look and see if I can get the Asian numbers for you, but of course the Chinese market is brand new to us. That just started this past year with their first visits in. Now, as I say, we're into two nonstop flights per week into Calgary.

Mr. Chase: Going forward, have you attempted to lay out five-year and 10-year targets for each of the tourism segments, countries that you're hoping to attract? You've mentioned, for

example, that China and India, based on population, have unlimited demand. But right now the States is still going through a depression, and they've been our number one sort of supplier of American dollars to our Alberta coffers. Do you have those projections in terms of how you're hoping to realize the India and, for example, China components?

Mr. Hayden: We do. I think that rather than use up a whole bunch of time, I can give some indicators, but for the sake of time, because I know the member wants to go back and forth, maybe I can break those down for you and just get those numbers to you.

Mr. Chase: That would be great if you could.

Mr. Hayden: I think it's probably safe to say and for you to know that, of course, India and China are markets that we're developing. So while we're expecting growth, the type of growth that we're talking about we're not putting on the shoulders of those emerging markets all by themselves. We see some really good signs out of Europe, too, of increase in travellers. When you're in an economic wreck, a lot of people go to rubber-tired holidays, which shows possibilities for our American customers that may have flown elsewhere in the past that may now do the rubber-tire experience into Canada. So there are some opportunities there for us, too.

Mr. Chase: One of the problems of success, I would suggest, is the online registries. I believe there was something like a \$20 million initial investment, and based on its popularity, you know, it's not surprising that there was a crash in terms of the online registries. Are you concerned at all going into the future that if we become a successful destination for China, for India, for increased American enjoyment, it's going to be hard for an Albertan to find a camping spot?

Mr. Hayden: That's a very good question, and it gives me an opportunity to clear some things up for people. Actually, the vast majority of our camping sites you cannot book online. We do have some specific areas where you have to book online just because of the experiences they've had in the past with crowding, but the vast majority of our sites are open to people that just drive in and take in the experience.

I think something else the member might be interested in is that the program, even though we've invested in it, has been such a success that our neighbouring jurisdictions now – because we as a province own the rights to the booking system – want to pay us to use our system, which I think is a really good sign of what we've done. The fact that the lines were all plugged: I think we're maybe going to have to look at a system like others do, where you tell somebody approximately their wait time online. The May 24 weekend is a big deal, and we only go 90 days ahead because we want to protect those spots for the people that want to go and use them. If we went for the whole season, we'd book so big – I think I heard a buzzer.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We're moving into our third 20-minute period. I understand, Mr. Chase, that you want to take the full 10 minutes once again?

Mr. Chase: Yes, please.

The Chair: And then, Minister, you would have up to 10 minutes to answer.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I apologize for having the effect of a Gatling gun in terms of getting the questions onto the record, but I would very much appreciate having them answered.

I'm very curious. Your predecessors in conjunction with other ministries, NGOs, researchers, and a multitude of user groups invested considerable time and money into trail development across the province. However, we are now facing significant destruction of established trails through logging and resource development. I've mentioned the Castle, but you hear me on a daily basis expressing concerns over Bragg Creek. How can you allow your fellow ministers to make decisions that result in very large losses of multiparty investments with no consequences or compensation? Clear-cutting in Bragg Creek has a very direct cost in water filtration in Calgary, and those trees are not worth the difference. Is any portion of your budget used to follow ministry investments in projects and products to ensure that those investments are not made in vain and that the goals and objectives of TPR are not ridden roughshod over by conflicting interests? It's the crossministerial co-operation.

Have you allocated budget to ensure ongoing monitoring and mitigation of other departments' actions on Alberta's trail systems? A half a million dollars was recently earned and spent by individuals in the Bragg Creek area, and that area is currently being threatened by clear-cutting. What is the amount, and how is that used? What public reporting is there with regard to monitoring and mitigation of trail systems? What assurance can you give that any investment made in tourism industry development by your ministry or others will not be negated at any time in the near, medium-, or long-term future by conflicting interests? Do you have any allocation for a dispute resolution process development and use when conflicting interests intersect with your ministry's business?

In the Plan for Parks I don't recall seeing anything that suggested reducing the size of existing parks and protected areas for any reason. I think it's generally assumed that when an area is finally designated, it will remain that way. I want to point out specifically that when addressing commercial development in parks, there has never been an indication that it would be satisfactory to reclassify a park designation and remove park protection to allow commercial development. The intent was to allow commercial development within parks where it works under long-term leases for private operators that might invest in infrastructure. Hopefully, you can confirm that that assumption is correct.

Can you please tell us why, then, your ministry has moved to an albeit minuscule consultation on rezoning 50 acres within Hilliard's Bay provincial park to allow for a commercial development which will increase an already operating private resort on the shore of Lesser Slave Lake? Why has this not been publicized other than in the local region? Provincial parks represent protected land held in trust for all Albertans, not just locals and sport fishermen. Have there been any other instances similar to this where a protected land has been rezoned for private interest? Are there more planned? Why was this even contemplated? A whole strip of the park, a waterfront park, has been rezoned, and private operators are going to be getting the first crack at the funding for that park.

I have often heard in the Legislature my colleagues on the other side of the House saying that every Albertan lives within a maximum of one hour's drive from a park, and you mentioned that. In *Hansard* on February 13, 2012, you stated:

Mr. Speaker, we are expanding our parks system. We're adding new group camping areas. We have 480 provincial parks in this province, more parks than any other province in the country. There is a park within a maximum of an hour's drive of all Albertans. We're very proud of them, and we continue to invest in them.

That being the case, why is the 2012 business plan only targeting for 33 per cent of adult Albertans to visit a provincial park during the year? Again, with crossministry collaboration one of the best proactive, preventative, health-promoting activities is visiting a park and having an enjoyable experience while you're there. Could this be because camping fees have risen faster than the incomes of the majority of severely normal Albertans? For example, the online registration fee has gone from \$10 to \$12. A significant number of those camping spaces are bought up very early on, preventing other individuals from having access to them because they can be booked repeatedly over the summer to the point where it can almost become your private campground. You just have to keep shifting from site 17 to site 16 and back and forth.

7:30

What balance has the ministry set for the use of campgrounds between revenue generation and financial accessibility? What is the ratio of regular camping sites to large RV sites? How has that changed in the last 15 years, and what is the plan for the next five, 10, and 15 years?

When we updated our fifth wheel, we made sure that we had two of the biggest solar panels we could possibly have so we didn't have to rely on plug-ins. We were looking forward to that wilderness experience in our 32-foot, three-slided trailer.

In the 2010-2019 Plan for Parks priority actions, page 5, strategy 1 is to involve Albertans by creating a parks advisory council, a process for nominating new provincial parks, and ensuring accountability through milestones and deliverables. What is the status of these initiatives, and how much is directed to this priority action from this budget?

Strategy 2 includes developing a central reservation system; upgrading, restoring, and expanding park facilities; and refining the parks classification system. What was the installed cost of the online reservation system? What is the annual operating cost? What is the annual number of reservations made? What is the annual cost per reservation? How many reservations in total since operationality of the system have been made online? Have you or will you be undertaking an analysis and report of the fiscal responsibility of this initiative?

Don't get me wrong. Many Albertans love the system. However, I'm concerned that instead of delivering dollars to much-needed campground facilities and development of new parks, the money is paying for the system. Hopefully, like you said, Saskatchewan and B.C. will help cover our costs. Perhaps there is an opportunity to license and get some kind of financial return because I certainly don't want to think that campsite rentals will come close to covering even the operating costs.

Recreation, active living, and sport. Now, the first thing I have to address here is priority initiative 3.3, page 81 of the business plan: "Develop legislation to establish a user-funded provincial trails system that will generate recreational, environmental and economic benefits for Alberta." Firstly, user-funded: what stage of planning is this at? Who has been involved to date, and what future consultations are planned with the Alberta population in general before any decisions have been made? Even though I worked for a private park operator that was duly licensed by the province and had to undergo a review of the quality of their performance, my concern is the point where we start restricting land to private operators, who then charge a fee that restricts other Albertans from getting onto Crown land. Then I'm concerned.

How does the establishment of user fees for trail use by the public on public and private, presumably, land contribute to encouraging Albertans to be more active? Does the ministry

intend to implement user fees on all trails or on more intensive use, motorized access trails only? One minister at one point was suggesting charging seniors for cross-country skiing in the Kananaskis, and that lasted about five minutes. Hopefully, there aren't other programs such as that.

Your budget line for major athletic events is \$750,000. Can you please advise what that is for?

Recreation and sport services is a decrease from the actual, not budgeted, spending from last year. What was the reason for the overspend last year, and will this mean cuts to programs for this year? What, in particular, is included in this line item?

I'm very disappointed to see no increase in the budgeted amount for the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation. With inflation this is a cut. What is the justification for cutting dollars to the program?

Ministry support services, an increase of 9 per cent over the 2011-12 budget; a 12.5 per cent increase for the DM's office . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I almost made it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

Minister, now you have up to 10 minutes to respond to the questions. Of course, any questions that you can't answer, you can provide for Mr. Chase in writing. So 10 minutes.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you, Madam Chair. A number of questions that have been asked can be answered right now, and of course we will respond to the others. The \$750,000 that you referred to is directly related to FIFA. That's the world soccer, and we have the youth and the women's open, the second-largest sporting event in the world. We expect over 3 million viewers in Canada alone for that FIFA cup, and I think it's somewhere in the neighbourhood of 900 million viewers world-wide. The men's soccer, actually, is the only one that's larger than the women's soccer. So that's what that money is going towards. We're working co-operatively with the city of Edmonton, who are, of course, the people that are working to attract the event. Also, Calgary has facilities to do that, too. Hopefully, we'll attract a number of the games because that one is huge.

You mentioned the Castle again. There is no commercial logging in our parks system in Alberta. Period. None. And there's no intention on the part of this minister or the people that work with me in changing that. I think that you can take that to the bank while I'm there.

Also, there is trail protection that's taking place, and there's a lot of discussion that's taking place. I can tell you that we're a long way down the road on this. I hope that in the very near future we're going to be able to present something with respect to the motorized, off-highway vehicles that are really – and I think you mentioned it earlier – our biggest threat right now. If you want to make sure that there are linear parks, I'm going to call them, where you can direct them. When you live in an area where you have the highest concentration of off-highway vehicles per population of anywhere in North America, without developing opportunities for them, you can run into problems. We are working on it, and I think we're close to a solution with the different trail-using groups in the province.

We are in fact expanding our parks system every year, the amount of area for our parks system. I think it's important to note that there are more hectares of parks per person in Alberta than there are in any other jurisdiction in our country. We have a huge parks system. We're very conscious of the fact that young families that don't have a lot of disposable income can use our system. As

an example, 50 per cent of our parks are day-use parks, and there is no cost for families to visit them.

We're bringing new opportunities for families. One of them I mentioned earlier, and that's comfort camping. That's the new type of camping that we introduced a year ago in Dinosaur provincial park. We're expanding there and expanding elsewhere. To give the hon. member an idea of what we're talking about costwise, this is \$100 a night, and it will accommodate four people. It comes with a barbecue and a cooler for what you need. It comes with a protected porch. It's by a river. It's a wall tent, but you sleep on real beds. It's an amazing opportunity. At \$100 it's entry-level camping, I would say.

Actually, no, I won't say that because I believe in the real entry-level camping. Most of the camping that I've done over the years is the grass or the dirt that's underneath my tent. I've used wall tents and different types and packed them into the mountains. That's probably entry-level or the most rustic. I've even got caught out in the cold where I've had less accommodation than that.

But the fact that these new comfort camping opportunities are there at \$100 I think does show that there are opportunities. Of course, the less expensive opportunities, where there are tent platforms in our parks system, I think are well within the reach of most working Albertans and even the younger families. So those are there.

At the same time, we can't ignore folks like you and folks that have got the larger RVs. There are more and more of them all the time. You know, we could talk about the reason for that, but it's pretty plain to see what the reason is. We live in a province with the highest average household income in our entire nation. We live in a province with the lowest personal income tax, corporate tax, and industrial tax. We live in this province, and we're very blessed. People do have disposable incomes, and that shows up in the length of their RV. We have to produce opportunities for them to use them. [interjection] Thank you for that, hon. member. I'm glad your mike is not on.

7:40

So we are expanding some of those areas. As I said, we are expanding the number of hectares of park space that we have. Every year we increase it.

One of the other things that we're expanding is these group-use areas. I mentioned earlier that we're going to do more online booking of the group-use areas. These are proving very popular for family reunions. Where they in the past may have gone and used a community hall and camped around an area maybe in a smaller community or maybe even a larger community, now an awful lot of people are using those sites for those types of things, and the outdoor experience is great.

We are seeing an increase, of course, in the use by people in our parks system every year. The numbers continue to go up. I will agree with you. I would like to see more than a third of our population using them, but we have to introduce a lot of people to our parks system. What I mean by that is that since about '98 or '99 the population of our province has increased by one-third. So those are new Albertans that have come in to suffer with the rest of us, I guess, and enjoy living here. They have their disposable income and are discovering our parks system now and some of the opportunities that are out there. I think that over time we'll probably gather more of them. We have huge numbers that are there.

You asked about the reservation system. We do supplement the reservation system with \$1.4 million annually, and that comes out of our tourism levy that we have on our hotel accommodation throughout the province. I agree with the member completely.

That's not something that we can make self-sustaining in the user-pay. If we did that, quite frankly, it would put out of reach for an awful lot of people the opportunity to camp in Alberta. I think that it's as important, if not more important, for young families to be able to enjoy that opportunity.

The member talks about the horrendous increase in the booking fee to \$12. Well, I would suggest that \$12 is very reasonable. I would go further and suggest that it's too reasonable because we've run into situations where people will book an accommodation and then not show up. Their \$12 is spent, but they've reserved the spot, and that means that another Albertan doesn't get to use it. Hon. member, if you're mad at me now, you're going to get madder at me later because I think I'm going to try and push with my colleagues to actually move that number up to the full cost of that camping site because we are seeing some abuse out there. If you want to book it, book it and pay for it. Quite frankly, there are just too many Albertans that want to enjoy that opportunity, so we need to do something with it.

We are hooking up more water, waste water, and more power to a number of sites because the demand is there. There is a payback on those sites. We don't build them if the demand isn't there. Are we keeping up? I would suggest that we probably aren't. I would suggest that there's more demand for the luxury sites, I'll call them, where people can pull in and hook up to a waste-water system, hook up to a tap, and plug into the electricity. Some of the RVs and trailers that we see out there now are pretty palatial, and they want that type of a camping experience, so we need to continue to work on that.

I mentioned that on the trail system I think you're going to be very pleased when you see what we've been working on with the different trail user groups. I agree with you. We don't want to charge our seniors that want to go cross-country skiing for that opportunity. We do invest a lot of money, actually, in creating those opportunities. I think about the Canmore cross-country skiing. We've got a program in place now where they save snow up there. We work with the operators to cover that snow with sawdust so that we can actually put that snow out there earlier in the season and extend the season and the opportunities for Albertans to get out and enjoy healthy lifestyles.

I am so pleased to see the co-operative approach that the trail system people, the walkers and the hikers, have taken with the off-road vehicle folks because I think that co-operation is going to be really important in the future.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Any questions that you need to answer can be done in writing to the hon. member, and it has to be tabled in the House as well.

Now we move on to the third party. I see that Mr. Hinman is here. Mr. Hinman, would you like to take 10 minutes now, or do you want to go back and forth with the minister?

Mr. Hinman: Well, it always amazes me how fast it goes by. I'm going to try and say that we'll go back and forth, but I might take 10 minutes on my first little discussion.

The Chair: So then, Mr. Hinman, if you do that, that will be the end of your 10 minutes.

Mr. Hinman: I understand.

The Chair: Okay. Very good.

Mr. Hinman: Anyway, good to be here this evening. This is obviously an exciting ministry to discuss and to go over, and 10 minutes doesn't give one much time.

What I guess I just want to start off with is that I, like those 30 per cent of Albertans that do get out, do really love our outdoors and appreciate the beautiful land and the diversity that we have here in the province. We have some pretty neat provincial parks, from Writing-on-Stone to the new ones up in Fort McMurray, and I wish that I could say that I've travelled to and stayed in every one of them.

I have to kind of chuckle when you say that the high-end users are of more demand. I guess I spent my five-star accommodations on my gear last summer because I had the opportunity to hike the West Coast Trail. I spent a small fee to make sure that if my tent was four pounds, I bought a three-pound one. If I had a two-pound sleeping bag, I spent a lot of money to get a 1.5-pound one. I was doing everything I could to cut down on weight when others were enjoying the luxury of a fifth wheel with three sliders.

Anyway, it is interesting and quite enjoyable. I grew up in the Scouting program, went on to be a Scout leader, and have taken advantage of many of our parks and our lakes. Like I say, it truly is a wonderful blessing that we have here in the province. With that intent I guess we want to see that we have the best availability for Albertans. Again, you touched on one subject there, about making sure that it's affordable and having those tent spaces. It does seem like it is creeping up and difficult. Even as a Scout leader looking at going into different areas, the cost did get prohibitive in some areas, so I would continue to encourage you to try and keep down those bare-necessity areas as low as possible for entry for different Albertans for the different uses.

I have a few questions. You know, I'm very interested in – and you kind of commented on it once already – the strong return of \$45 for every \$1 invested. I guess I'd like to know how you arrive at those numbers. You kind of referred to this already, that, well, that is the actual money spent, but if ours went to zero, 30 times zero is zero. How do you decide that?

To expand a little bit further, how do you separate business dollars from actual tourism dollars? If you could explain a little bit more on how you do those calculations. We have an awful lot of business that goes out, whether it's hotels or restaurants. I'm just not sure, like I say, where you break down that \$5.5 billion that's being spent and why you allocate it to, say, tourism and the numbers that are coming in. If you could explain that a little bit, I'd be interested in that.

Again, because we always want to be the most competitive here in Alberta and ensure that we attract business and tourists and everything else, I'd also be interested in how our tourism levy compares to our neighbours east and west and to the south. I'm afraid I don't know. If you could share that so that we know relatively where we are, that would be interesting as well.

Maybe I'll wait for a few answers on those, and then we'll go forward.

Mr. Hayden: Sure. First of all, thank you on the cost of camping. I totally agree. We talked about that already. I think it is important that people get the experience and can afford to do it.

The tourism levy is actually placed on both business and tourist travel. Just as a point, we collect from hotel rooms, so there's no differentiation there. Most of the figures that we get with respect to tourism industry spending come from the hotel accommodation industry and, of course, the tourism operators. We depend on those people to get our numbers and also on Travel Alberta.

The \$5.5 billion that we say is in tourism is a number that comes from industry. The over 90,000, getting closer to 100,000 employees employed in the tourism industry is also a number from the tourism industry that comes back to us. It's not our number; it's theirs.

The breakdown on the \$5.5 billion and where it comes from: it comes from all the different areas that tourists go to. Of course, we've got, actually, the three major parks – you're aware of Waterton park – and we've got major sites. You mentioned Writing-on-Stone, which is one that's up right now for a world heritage site, that we're still discussing.

I can break down the economic model by where the investment comes back in, and we can give you that information. I'll forward that to you, where our numbers come from, if that's helpful to you.

I think those are pretty much the questions you asked.

7:50

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Well, those always spawn more.

Mr. Hayden: Sure.

Mr. Hinman: When you say the hotel industry, I knew there was a 4 per cent flat tax, but you don't actually keep track to realize that 70 per cent of occupancy is business versus 30 per cent tourism. Is there an actual number that we know? It just seems like too often in the province we pool a lot of things into one area when it's not necessarily there or that we actually extract out of one.

I think one area that Albertans don't appreciate enough is how much actual economic stimulus the province has from the oil and gas industry. We put it over into manufacturing, we put it over into tourism and those other areas; therefore, sometimes we almost want to point the finger of scorn at business when, in fact, it's being put over into other areas.

Those 90,000 workers: the same thing. You know, what is the real percentage? Yes, they have a restaurant, and people are coming in, but do we actually know whether it's 10 per cent or 60 per cent that are tourists and how we're grouping that? Sometimes it just seems like we grouped that in there for convenience so that we can say, "Oh, look how wonderful tourism is," yet we want to point the finger of scorn at the oil and gas industry, which has affected us.

I also just have to make one quick little comment, because of listening and learning, on the camp fees, the reservations. If someone is not doing that, perhaps it needs to be like going through a speeding zone: double one night's fee if they don't cancel so that someone can move in there or something. There's nothing more frustrating, and I often won't go to places where you can't make the reservation. You just don't want to gamble, to show up and wait. Where do you go? I don't know. That, to me, is a challenge to you, to make sure that there is some way that people can go and actually find a facility to camp in rather than get turned around and sent down the road.

One of the questions – and again, because time goes so quickly, I apologize for jumping back and forth – is on recreational sports facility grants, with no money budgeted in this year's program. Has there been a transfer to another ministry? I'd like to know a little bit about that. In Calgary one of the real challenges – and you talk about FIFA and the excitement there – is that I have constituents whose kids are getting up at 6 in the morning to play soccer. What's the provincial plan to try and have more facilities available, whether it's for hockey or soccer or swimming? It just seems like we have a shortage of recreational facilities and that we're pushing our kids to the wrong end of the limit. Even in our schools it seems like gymnasiums are being shrunk, so that's a concern.

Your high-performance athletic assistance: can you tell me how many athletes were helped in the last fiscal year for that \$997,000? You have an increase, so we're getting up there. How

many are going to be helped this year as an Olympic year? What's the breakdown for that?

The tourism destination competitiveness budget went significantly over budget, by \$5 million, yet you only budgeted \$3.6 million this year. Can you tell me what the anomaly was there, whether it's something coming again?

I'll switch back to you for a few minutes.

Mr. Hayden: Okay. Well, first of all, on the capital expenditures on facilities, that is not through my ministry and hasn't been for some time. It's actually through Culture, and it's lottery funding for the most part. Of course, we talk about the CIP grants and the CFEP grants and in the past, of course, the major facility grants, so that's where that is.

With respect to the high-performance athletes I guess that depends where you draw the line, but we can tell you that we do have world-class athletes, that number about 350, that have been helped by the training programs for high-performance athletes last year, for one year. I can also tell you that I would make that number larger. I came in today from the opening of the Arctic Winter Games. Though they're young people, though they're youth, they're unbelievable athletes. In the competition that's taking place in Whitehorse this week with approximately 400 northern Alberta youth, they're playing at a very high level, and the funding for training and officiating that comes through my department does a great deal to improve those athletes' opportunities.

Destination competitiveness: of course, the increase that you were talking about is \$5 million, and that increase was for the Calgary Stampede in celebrating their centennial year. That's where that money is associated. There was also through Agriculture an additional \$25 million for a new events centre that is for the promotion of our agricultural industry and to give people a hands-on opportunity down there for the ag sector, too.

Mr. Hinman: So it's back to me, then?

Mr. Hayden: Yeah. Certainly.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. I don't know. Maybe I missed it in trying to think because you were reading, but you didn't say what the levies were to the east and the west and the south for tourism and how we work competitively.

Mr. Hayden: I'm not certain. I can get back to you on that. I don't know if they do the levies, if Montana does it through a hotel system. Let me have a look. Let's see what we can do here. No, this is just the levies with respect to . . .

Mr. Hinman: I'll let you write back because time is going to run out. You can get that back to me, and that would be appreciated.

Mr. Hayden: If you want it from within the province, I can give it to you. Are you talking about our neighbours in Saskatchewan and British Columbia?

Mr. Hinman: Saskatchewan, B.C., Montana, and Idaho, the other areas or destinations where people might want to go, like down to Glacier park instead of Waterton because it's cheaper.

Mr. Hayden: We can check. Saskatchewan doesn't have a levy. Apparently, British Columbia does, and I don't know if Idaho or Montana do.

Mr. Hinman: So no Alberta advantage. How disappointing.

I guess I just want to go back, being the fiscal hawk that I am. Your government originally kind of toyed with zero-based

budgeting, and now it's results-based budgeting, which I personally find kind of comical because we can always say that we have good results for our budgeting. We have a \$3.1 billion cash deficit. Is there anything in your future, going forward, that you're looking at for next year's budget where you really feel that – you know, we talk about the 45 to 1 ratio that you're getting, which is phenomenal. It's better than the oil and gas. That's the best ratio I've ever heard. What are the plans, and are we doing the best we can with taxpayers' dollars to try and balance the budget? I see your full-time equivalents haven't gone up; they've stayed the same. Are there areas where you can refocus and we can actually get better bang for the taxpayers' dollar and shrink your budget? Have you looked at any opportunities in that area?

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely. We take a look at our budget and what we get. I guess you could call it the bang for the buck if you like.

You know, you talk about your deficit number. I'd disagree with that. That's not the number for this year. Anyway, that's the bigger picture.

Mr. Hinman: You disagree with the cash deficit? I guess that's because you want to count your infrastructure as money in the bank. Okay. We'll agree to disagree.

Mr. Hayden: Okay, and that's fine.

As far as starting from scratch and seeing that we get the results that we're after with respect to tourism, parks, recreation, and sport, I would suggest to you that it's one of the few ministries where the more that you invest in it, the more we get back. This is an industry in the province that's huge. While I readily admit that 45 to 1 might not be a good number, it's definitely a positive factor, what we invest in the promotion of our province, bringing people in.

Mr. Hinman: Do the other ministries agree with that?

Mr. Hayden: I believe they do because if you'll notice, I'm one of the few ministries that does have an increase this year, and I think that's important to point out. It's an area where I have a great deal of optimism for the future. That optimism isn't blind optimism; it's proven out by the increased numbers that we're seeing. Of course, those increased numbers aren't just by visitation of people that are moving into the province, that other hundred thousand that come in every year. This is people from outside and from all over the world.

I also mentioned earlier about the new Travel Alberta promotion that's taking place right now. We're already seeing the results. I don't understand all the terminology, but on YouTube apparently some of our commercials have gone viral. I don't know if hon. members have had a chance to take a look at them or not, but I know that the motto is Remember To Breathe, and I know that those landscapes do take your breath away. What we have here is just absolutely phenomenal. It's unbelievable.

Mr. Hinman: I prefer to see them in person than on YouTube, but I know what you mean.

Mr. Hayden: As do I, hon. member. I like to see them in person. When I look at them, some of the experiences – and this is just an aside. One of the pictures is of a lady on a horse riding through a canola field. For anyone that knows anything about agriculture, that's a very dangerous thing to do when canola is over \$12 or \$14 a bushel. Don't be caught riding in a canola field on your horse. But some of the pictures are absolutely phenomenal, and most of those pictures I've experienced.

8:00

Mr. Hinman: I've got to ask you: did you pay compensation for the canola field to film that one?

Mr. Hayden: I don't know. You know, it could be trick photography in that they might have been on a road on the other side of the canola field when they were riding.

Of course, some of the pictures that are in there are the badlands, too, in my constituency up above Drumheller. It's just unbelievable. It's really neat to be an Albertan and be able to tell you that I have actually been to most of the places that you see in those ads. It's unbelievable.

Investing in this ministry actually invests in and produces jobs and economic activity in the province. With respect to actually starting and taking a look at everything we do to make sure that we get a return on the investment and that we're actually achieving what we're achieving, I'm a full supporter of that approach. I think that in order to be progressive, you have to think about things changing, and things have changed in this province. We're up to 3.7 million and soon to be 5 million. Things change, and as they change, we have to change our approach so that we make sure the advantage goes to Albertans in the area of employment but also . . .

Mr. Hinman: I've got to ask you a quick question there, then.

Mr. Hayden: Sure.

Mr. Hinman: Are you making any plans because of the fact that only 30 per cent go to our parks but it is, for lack of anything better, overcrowded in some of them? Are you looking at expanding any of our parks? What are you doing to increase the number of facilities across the province? Do you have any long-term goals in that area?

Mr. Hayden: Yes, we do. We are expanding; every year we expand. We actually, as I mentioned, get extra hectares of parkland every year. One of the challenges that we face – and that was also in my introductory comments – is that we do have parks that are underutilized in the province. In some of those we've gone to yearly passes for them so that the local folks can take their trailer or RV or whatever and park it and use it there for the season.

One of the nice things about our new reservation system is that we're getting better utilization because when one fills up, people can phone in, and they know to go to another area. It's really leading edge what we're doing there, and I think that it's ensuring that people have a better experience. But we still have a number of unused spaces in our system throughout the province throughout the year, so we need to keep working on it.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Can I switch back to recreation facilities? You say that that's not in your ministry. Do you lobby at all for an increase in sports facilities in the province? Do you have any input on that, or what's your position on that?

Mr. Hayden: Well, because a lot of the funding for my ministry goes towards the training of officials and athletes, we do become familiar with areas where new facilities would be beneficial. We have a number of communities that are growing dramatically. Of course, it just stands to reason that with 100,000 people coming in this year, there's going to be a high percentage of those that are going to need to use recreational facilities. We're aware of it, and we do work co-operatively with our other ministries.

Mr. Hinman: Your parks funding has increased, but the tourism budget has only slightly increased. Why and where are these cost savings coming from your parks funding? There are concerns about areas in the budget where there's been a decrease in funding from the amounts that were budgeted for the previous year, but the forecasts show that you have overspent on your budget. Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Hayden: Thanks to the hon. member for that question. That's the \$5 million that I talked to you about, the funding for the Stampede centennial.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Why have you increased expenditures for visitor services? Have you hired more staff? Longer hours? What's the increase?

Mr. Hayden: Okay. It's services at our visitor information centres. It's our interactive displays and multichannel strategies.

Mr. Hinman: Okay. Then on your global marketing you've got a significant decrease from \$38 million to \$35 million. What's changed that that would have dropped? I would have thought that if anything, that would have been an area where you would have increased.

Mr. Hayden: Yeah, it's actually increased. Last year's budget was \$30,816,000, and this year it's \$35,150,000.

Mr. Hinman: Correct.

Mr. Hayden: So it's an increase.

Mr. Hinman: Oh, I thought it was \$38.4 million last year down to \$35 million.

Mr. Hayden: No. We spent that, but we budgeted at \$30.8 million.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Hinman.

We're going to take a six-minute break at this time. Then when we come back, we will be speaking with the independent member. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned from 8:05 p.m. to 8:11 p.m.]

The Chair: We shall resume the committee, and for the next 20 minutes we will be hearing from the member of the Alberta Party.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for that correction.

The Chair: Did you want to go back and forth?

Mr. Taylor: Sure. Yeah. We've got 20 minutes. I'm not even sure, Minister, if I'm going to take the full 20 minutes, but let's go back and forth. The conversation approach seems to work well.

Have some patience here, if you would, please. Indulge me a bit because this will get to items that I think directly impact your department. Can you explain for me the relationship between your ministry and the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Development when both of you have some shared responsibility over an area of land like the Kananaskis?

Mr. Hayden: Well, my ministry is responsible for the provincial parks. Sustainable Resource Development actually is the arm of government that is responsible for all public lands. I would say that that's probably the distinction that you would be interested in. The park system, the management and operation of the parks, is

under my ministry. The other public lands in the province are all managed by Sustainable Resource Development.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Just so I'm clear, there is no land that you both have some responsibility over, depending on the activity that's going on, for instance.

Mr. Hayden: There is some crossover. As an example, about 50 per cent of our provincial parks you are allowed to hunt in. There is some trapping that takes place in some of our park system to control, you know, the waterways in different situations that come along with that. Of course, those things fall under the responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development through their wildlife division.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. In Kananaskis Country outside the actual boundaries of, say, Peter Lougheed provincial park and so on and so forth do you have responsibility for anything like trail development or trail maintenance or anything like that in any of that public land space?

Mr. Hayden: I don't as an official line item with respect to a linear park capital commitment as such, but through my ministry we have worked very closely with the trails groups. As I mentioned earlier, we're talking about some proper legislation to protect our eastern slopes, and my ministry will be very involved in that part. I expect we'd be carrying forward legislation to help make it possible that we've got good, solid trail systems that would be outside of our parks and in Sustainable Resource Development areas, but they would probably be considered as linear parks. I'm not just sure how we're going to work with that definition, but I would expect it will fall under our ministry.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Of course, as a department that creates and maintains parks, I'm sure you have an interest in identifying areas that would make good additions to your parks inventory – right? – whether that's as provincial parks or wildland parks or whatever designation you'd want to put on there.

Mr. Hayden: Absolutely.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. This is where we come back to two issues that I do want to talk to you about. I wanted to establish this at the beginning so that we didn't get into any kind of conflict or confusion about whose budget this is actually in between Tourism, Parks and Recreation and Sustainable Resource Development. I do want to talk about both west Bragg Creek and the Castle wilderness because I think there are some conflicting views as to what that land should be used for.

Certainly, my colleague from Calgary-Varsity has made a pretty passionate case for the preservation of the Castle wilderness, and it has been designated a special place already. It's renowned for its unique biological diversity, as you know. Albertans, when asked, have been pretty clear that they don't want development in the area to move ahead.

I know the decision to approve logging in the Castle was not your ministry's or your decision, but I would argue that you have an interest in that. Because this province's unique geography has got to be one of our major draws for tourism – and you've made the case very effectively this evening that tourism is a tremendous economic boost to this province – I'll ask you because you're here although it's a more general question than just to your ministry. Why is the government continuing to move ahead with logging in the Castle, and what, specifically, is your ministry doing to try and change that?

Mr. Hayden: Specifically, I'm not trying to change anything. The logging industry in our province is a hugely important economic activity, and I would be misleading you if I was to tell you that I had the kind of expertise to make a determination where that logging should take place either for the prevention of forest fires or for actual conservation efforts. That's a call that I can't make. Where I think it is important – as an example, our South Saskatchewan River Basin Advisory Committee. I think that those determinations need to be made by Albertans and not by government. I know there are people in the area that want to preserve it as a park. I understand their passion, and I understand their connection to that land. I think that this land planning is going to be so beneficial to us in creating those kinds of areas.

Just to use an example, the lower Athabasca plan is going to increase our park capacity in the province by 27 per cent if we go with all the recommendations, and I don't know why we wouldn't because it's Albertans telling us what to do.

Mr. Taylor: It's anticipating the findings of the planning process in the South Saskatchewan, but do I dare ask you for a prediction in terms of extra park space in the South Saskatchewan basin?

Mr. Hayden: All I can tell you is that I think that there are some amazing opportunities down in southern Alberta in the South Saskatchewan basin. I know that an awful lot of our park system down there is close to capacity for people using it. I mean, the recommendations are out there in a paper now for people to make comment on. I would encourage all Albertans to do that, and we'll seriously look at the recommendations that they bring to us.

I'm going to put in the rider on that, of course, that we can't do anything that isn't manageable financially. We have to take that into consideration. I would think that there are other opportunities for us in the south.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Good. That's good to hear, and I am going to bring you back to your comment that the people of Alberta really should be making the decisions and should be consulted on the future of land-use planning in the South Saskatchewan or anywhere else in the province.

The number one concern in the west Bragg Creek area – and, again, I'm talking out of school about your colleagues in SRD, and they haven't approved the logging plans put forward by Spray Lake Sawmills yet. The number one concern of the residents in the area, of the user groups who use the trails, that I think you do have a hand in funding, in maintaining, in encouraging trail groups to build more trails – I was out there just last week. Many of those trails go through areas that are proposed to be block-cut, or clear-cut if you will, if the Spray Lake SRD proposal goes through. The residents, the users: none of them feel like they've been consulted properly. They feel that there's been absolutely no consultation with them on this proposal.

8:20

Now, SRD, I think, and Spray Lake Sawmills, at least if they were here in the room right now and if we put the question to them, would probably both argue: "Oh, no. Well, we had an open house, and it was very well attended. There has been consultation." In fact, there have been some specific groups that Spray Lake Sawmills have said that they've consulted with who have responded publicly: no; actually, that never happened.

The west Bragg Creek area has been logged before. It's not the holy of holies when it comes to an area that must never be touched by a saw or a feller buncher or anything like that, but there are sustainable and sensible ways of doing this, and there are senseless ways of doing this. The people who live in the area, the

people who live nearby the area, and that includes over a million Calgarians, and the people who use the area really feel that they can't tell whether this is a sensible or senseless proposal that's going through because there has been no meaningful consultation in the way they describe it to me.

I'm not saying that there needs to be absolutely no logging there, nor are a lot of the people who are complaining that they haven't been consulted. A few are, but not a lot. What I am saying is that if development goes ahead, local people need to have some sort of a voice and need to have some sort of a say as to the extent to which this could compromise the recreation and tourism and ecotourism prospects of the area, which has got to be in your ministry's interest. Comment?

Mr. Hayden: Yes. I think it's important for us to understand, of course, that no determination has been made at this point for logging. It's still in the consultation process, so I would expect that, you know, possibly for people that haven't been consulted at this point or don't feel they have been, that opportunity still is going to exist.

If it wasn't for my own personal connection to that area, I'd leave it at that and tell you that it's SRD's and that that's really where you should be asking the question. I'm going to throw caution to the wind anyway because I know that area, and I know that area actually quite intimately. I've ridden horses all the way back through the Kananaskis, and the Elbow Falls area. Unbelievable. It's beautiful. I can remember when my first-born, who is now 38 years old, before we knew enough to belt them in all the time, stood on the seat beside me in my Land Rover as I came from Kananaskis right through to Bragg Creek. I did so on forestry trails that crossed all the creeks and rivers through the area. The bridges had been taken out, but the practice at the time was to actually go through if you had a vehicle that could do it.

I guess the reason that I mention that is that that pristine, beautiful wilderness that we're trying to protect was all logged. It has all been logged all the way through that valley, and it's absolutely gorgeous. It shows some of the most unique vegetation, the amazing vegetation that we're protecting. The wildlife that's out there is unbelievable.

It comes back to the question of balance. We have to manage our lands properly. Because of the influence of human beings now and changing natural events that happen, with our forest fire-fighting abilities some of the safeguards that we've put in place have changed what happens in a natural cycle. A natural cycle could take the whole eastern slope out in a big fire, as it used to do on a lot of our prairie areas. A lightning strike, and we'd have 40 miles of fire.

Mr. Taylor: Not the entire Kananaskis has been logged. Not every tree that ever was there has been cut down.

Mr. Hayden: Not the entire area. That's true.

Mr. Taylor: There are some that date back as far as 500 years, not a lot but some.

Mr. Hayden: I'm talking about the valley from Bragg Creek right through to Kananaskis.

Mr. Taylor: Of course, it is all about balance, and it's all about how many trees you take or how big an area you log at any one time – right? – and all of that.

What sort of dialogue goes on between your office, between your ministry and the minister's office at SRD or the ministry itself on processes such as the consultation process that,

depending on who you're talking to, may or may not be happening the way it should in the west Bragg Creek area?

Mr. Hayden: I think I'd rather talk about things that are working. Recommendations from my ministry: as an example, you talked about trail systems that are in the Bragg Creek area. We have made it known to our colleagues in the other ministry that we want those trail systems maintained because there has been a lot of effort put into some of them. They are, as you mentioned, hugely valuable to the people around the Calgary area especially and, I mean, to all Albertans. I think that we do positively influence things like that.

Also, we would make SRD very aware of an area that was being proposed through recommendations from our regional plans, as an example. Whether it was a strong recommendation coming forward for the preservation of an area for a park or a protected area, we would make that known to our colleagues.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. How confident are you that they listen?

Mr. Hayden: Actually, very confident. I think the fact that we have 478 parks in this province means somebody has been listening. We've got more park area for people in Alberta than anywhere else.

Mr. Taylor: Do I have a commitment from you, then, that you'll continue to work with Sustainable Resource Development on this? Would you consider working with them to pause the approval process until the people of west Bragg Creek have been consulted with and feel they have been properly consulted with and properly listened to?

Mr. Hayden: All I can commit to you is that I, like all Albertans, would make sure and encourage Sustainable Resource Development that they follow the rules on any sort of land management that they do. Consultation is hugely important. As a landowner on a family operation that's 102 years old, land is extremely important to me, and the rights of Albertans on public land are extremely important to me.

Mr. Taylor: And the proper management of that public land in the public interest is extremely important.

Goal number 2 of your ministry in the business plan: "The Alberta parks system provides opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism, and conserves Alberta's natural heritage." Goal 2.2 is to "support implementation of the Plan for Parks by developing new parks legislation to ensure Alberta's parks continue to be sustained and enjoyed."

This takes us back to the fall of 2010, I believe, and if I remember the number correctly, it was either Bill 28 or 29 at the time. It was the proposed new Alberta parks act, which your government and your predecessor as minister of parks ultimately pulled for further consultation because the legislation was flawed in many ways. I'd like to know where you're at on new legislation, if anywhere, whether you're planning new parks legislation to be introduced, how you're going to ensure that it is less flawed than the prior attempt, and what level of consultation with different interest groups is going to be undertaken in developing this new legislation. A lot of interest groups were really taken by surprise by the last act, and they were quite horrified with what they saw, quite frankly.

Mr. Hayden: Plan for parks: there are a number of initiatives that are under way, and some of them we've already talked about. One that I think is a huge success is the online booking, so that's an

opportunity to make sure that we get maximum use for Albertans out of our park system.

Mr. Taylor: I'll give you high marks on that, but we're talking more about the replacement for a proposed piece of legislation that pretty much would have eliminated the special categories that we have for wildland parks, wilderness areas, and those sorts of things and lump them all into provincial parks and give them some kind of – I don't remember now whether it was going to be colour coding or a scale of 1 to 5 for the extent to which you could go in there and run rampant through an area that was previously very well protected.

Mr. Hayden: I understand your question. We want to keep our areas that are protected protected. I don't have plans at the moment for legislation that's going to affect that area specifically, but I do have plans, and I am working very hard with the trail groups. That's a portion of development that I think is going to positively affect all areas of the province when we give trail opportunities for people so that they're in their appropriate place and not messing up our environment.

Mr. Taylor: These are trails within parks or trails between parks?

Mr. Hayden: These would be trails within and outside of parks, but it'll be an area where we'll be involved because when those opportunities exist for people, they won't misuse our parks or our public lands like they do in some cases right now. The potential is huge for that because we really are a small population in a huge area. When we think about 3.7 million people in the size of a province like ours, two-thirds of our land base is public lands, as an example, so we've got a lot of protecting to do and a lot of planning to do.

Mr. Taylor: Especially when our population, though small, is growing by a hundred thousand a year.

8:30

Mr. Hayden: That's right. I mean, nowhere else in North America can anybody say that they've grown by a third since the end of the '90s. You know, it's unbelievable, the growth that we've experienced, and it shows no sign of slowing down. That's good for us, but it presents its own challenges.

An area that I just want to mention that I don't think we've spent enough time on tonight – there haven't been enough questions on it – is the access for people with disabilities and different situations that people find themselves in. I think that that's a big area in our parks system that we have to continue to improve on, and we plan to do that. I want to expand that as quickly as I possibly can because it's just not fair to not be able to share the amazing opportunities that we've got out there with our entire population. So that's an area that I'd like to spend more time on, too.

Mr. Taylor: Okay. You've had the opportunity to bring it up. I don't have any specific questions on that area. I mean, in principle I certainly, absolutely agree with that.

I do want to bring you back to this notion of the expansion of the trails system. Goal 3.3 says: "Develop legislation to establish a user-funded provincial trails system that will generate recreational, environmental and economic benefits for Alberta." [Mr. Taylor's speaking time expired] I'm not going to get the chance to ask the question, so maybe somebody else will.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Taylor.

We'll move on to Mr. Vandermeer. I understand you have some questions. You can speak for up to 10 minutes, or you can go back and forth with the minister.

Mr. Vandermeer: I'd like to just go back and forth.

First of all, I'd like to compliment you on your passion and your enthusiasm with this ministry and also how quickly you have established the knowledge of your department in such a short period of time.

I know we've talked about the online reservation system quite a bit already. I've experienced it myself. We camp, we boat, and we have not been able to do that for the last couple of years because we can't get into the campgrounds. I'll give you a couple of personal experiences. When I do go camping to, say, Long Lake, I know an awful lot of people when I'm there, and they all come and complain to me about the system, people that have been camping there for years and years and years, and I've seen them there for years. They're not happy with the system. Many times they say: yes, you can stay, but you have to leave by Friday. Then if you come back for day use on the weekend, there are all kinds of empty spots, and you go: why were we kicked out early, and we can't come back until Monday or Tuesday? That's one of them.

Also, in Kananaskis I experienced it one time. A beautiful spot we had right on the river – beautiful – but it was reserved for the weekend. So they said: okay; you can stay, but if the people come that reserved it, you have to move. In the meantime the campground is filling up, so I thought: shucks; we'd better get out of here, get to the overflow part. So now we go to the overflow part, and the people don't even show up in the beautiful one right on the river. I think it used to be \$8; now it's \$12 that they have to pay if they don't show up. I don't know what to do about it, to be honest, but it's a real frustration when I go to camping spots. People complain to me all the time.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you for the question. I do want to answer it. But I also want to answer the last question that I received from this hon. member, if you don't mind, and then I will answer your question.

Very briefly, we do have to make sure that we do have things paid for by the proper users. What I'm working on on the motorized off-highway vehicles is the user impact.

Now back to your question. Thank you very much for it because it's even better than that question. I'm going to need all my colleagues to back me on this one as we go forward because we do have to make some changes. The situation you talked about: there are some abuses out there. I think that if you had to pay the full price for that particular spot for the nights that you have booked it, that would stop the abuses. For the moment you can reserve a spot by telephone for 12 bucks a night, and that's just not acceptable when it's being abused. So we do need to move on that.

Some of the other things that you talked about within the system, where people are trying to get into their spots: we're a victim of our own success. This new booking system, you know, it leaves – there are always parking spots in the camps that can't be booked, where people can just drive in and use them, but the system to book does add some certainty for those that want to plan ahead. The only thing that I can suggest is that people pay attention to that 90-day rule, that they plan ahead and book their spot so that they've got it when they need it because they are in competition with the rest of Albertans, just like they've always been, for the best camping spots.

I remember in my youth – you know, they did have photography back then – some of the amazing spots that we used to go to. You didn't book anything, but if you wanted it, you'd better

get out there early, or you didn't get the best spots along the Elbow River and whatnot. So it's not a new problem. I think we've moved a long way to correcting it with our booking system, but we're working out the kinks on that. We're going to get better at it. It's been a really positive experiment so far. We just need to make it more user friendly.

Mr. Vandermeer: I remember in my youth, too, we used to haul a trailer out on the Tuesday or the Wednesday and leave it there so that you had the spot for the weekend.

Mr. Hayden: So it was you.

Mr. Vandermeer: Of the 478 parks roughly that you said, how many of them are online for reservations?

Mr. Hayden: This is just spots that are available. There are 6,535 campsites that are online. The number is 59 provincial campgrounds and 78 group camping areas. So 59 provincial campgrounds.

Mr. Vandermeer: Thanks.

Mr. Hayden: Now, just to break that down, out of the 478 about half of those are areas where people can camp, and the other half are day-use parks. That will give you an idea. It's a small percentage, really.

Mr. Vandermeer: Okay. Now, in your department you're encouraging tourism, correct?

Mr. Hayden: Yes.

Mr. Vandermeer: For seven or eight years now my family and my brother's family have gone downhill skiing, and we love to stay right on the hill. We can't do that in Alberta. We have to go to Panorama or Big White. There aren't really any places in Alberta where you just park your vehicle, you stay for a week, and you can go skiing. What are you doing to encourage that?

When I was in Panorama this year, my goodness, there weren't many English-speaking people there. There were a lot of French and a lot of German. The tourism dollars that you're losing. You're going to places, and when you're in the hot tub, wide open, looking at this beautiful country, their comments are: we just love it here because you can ski right to your door and you go for lunch. It's an amazing experience. We need to have something like that here in Alberta. Instead, we drive six or seven hours to get the experience.

Mr. Hayden: I think that there are opportunities. We need to work with our federal government because, of course, you're talking for the most part about our national parks system, which we as a province don't have control over. Nakiska is available. Of course, you can stay right on the hill at Sunshine, as an example, ski right down, take your skis off, and go into accommodation. But I think that there is a lot of room for growth there and for opportunities. We will see it in the future.

I'm learning things now about our ski hills that I didn't know before. I found out in England that they call us the champagne powder capital of the world. I don't know how many people know what that means, but apparently the type of snow that we have, the powder skiing that we have in Banff national park and in Jasper, the type of powder that's there is very, very unique. As you ski through it, you can go almost up to your knees – and you as a skier will know this – and you barely feel that you're going through snow. You can almost breathe it like a vapour. Apparently that's very unique within the world, and people come from all over to try it.

So the opportunities for the future could be great for on-hill accommodation, but for the most part it's a question for the federal government, for the national parks system.

Mr. Vandermeer: I know you said Sunshine. I don't want to pick on Sunshine, but you have to take the gondola up there first, which is a bit of an inconvenience.

The River Valley Alliance. I'm sure you're familiar with that group of people. I used to be on that committee. We want to have a river valley parkway from Fort Saskatchewan all the way to Devon. I think it was three years ago that the province gave them \$50 million to work at getting this park under way. What are you as a minister doing in your department to encourage this beautiful river valley parkway?

8:40

Mr. Hayden: Well, we do have an amazing river valley through this area of Edmonton. It's actually the longest undisturbed natural river valley in any urban centre in North America. The opportunities on either side of the city, of course, are huge. I can check into it for you to see where we are with the walkway. When you're talking about that, you're talking about a trail system. I can check into that, and I'll get back to you on where we are developmentwise.

Mr. Vandermeer: Okay. Thank you. I believe those are all my questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Vandermeer.

We have a few more questions from Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I realized when time ran out that I left you in a cliffhanging position, anticipating my next question and anxiously waiting to respond. Therefore, I'd like to briefly complete my questions. I'm sure you and I are of a similar age where we got to see a serial before the movie began, and one of the reasons we kept going back to the theatre was to see the next stage of the serial. Possibly I'm a little bit older, but you mentioned 38, and my daughter's turning 40, so I think we're of a similar vintage. Fine wine: vintage. Okay.

I'd like to give you an opportunity to expand on access for handicapped individuals to provincial parks. For a very good friend of mine and former colleague Weslyn Mather, who represented Edmonton-Mill Woods prior to 2008 and is intending to represent it again, one of her favourite destinations is down in Peter Lougheed park at William Watson Lodge. The reason for that is obviously accessibility as she's in a wheelchair. Formerly I believe Blue Lake lodge near Jasper had a similar easily accessible lodge experience.

Has there been any expansion of accessible parks, keeping in mind that there's the balance? For example, in Bow Valley, a park that I enjoy going to, there are paved trails there. Then there's the counterbalance of, you know: they pave paradise and put up a parking lot. So somewhere the balance between accessibility and wall-to-wall trailers blocking each other's view. If you can expand on accessible parks.

Mr. Hayden: Yes. Thank you very much. The William Watson Lodge near Peter Lougheed provincial park: the capital expansion that we're looking at for this year is \$5,280,000, and for next year we're proposing, not approved yet, \$17,910,000. The reason, of course, is the number of people that are using it. We do see that we need to make more spaces available, and of course that's really sought after. We have a number of other areas that we're going to get better accommodation in. Peaceful Valley Lodge near Pigeon

Lake is one that at the moment we're providing free accommodation to seniors and people with physical disabilities and the terminally ill. So there are opportunities there.

One of the things that I'm finding really interesting is our linear parks. We now have two kilometres of wheelchair accessible trails to explore areas in the valley. It is volunteers and host groups that are doing it right now, and they do it with a unique piece of equipment that a person who requires a wheelchair can travel in and actually experience it.

We're working on new accessible areas in our Cypress Hills interprovincial park. Also, at William Switzer provincial park we're trying to develop more accessible trails for the handicapped. In central Alberta near Camrose we're doing some upgrades to the Miquelon Lake provincial park. We're starting with the barrier-free washrooms and some paved access down to the beach.

So we're moving in that area. There is a huge demand, which is good. That's a good sign.

Mr. Chase: I very much appreciate the accessibility. As you mentioned, for individuals who have motor difficulties or, you know, are getting up in their years, the health that can be achieved by getting away from it all is very important.

Now, my last three questions have to do with ministry support services. I note that there's an increase of 9 per cent over the 2011-12 budget. There was a 12.5 per cent increase for the deputy minister's office. What is the reason for that increase?

Mr. Hayden: All of the increase is associated with manpower. With the deputy minister's office it's a transition, with employees going under the deputy minister's office from other areas.

Mr. Chase: Okay. So it's not an internal shift. It's more employees being hired to do the business of . . .

Mr. Hayden: It's the salary differential between the old staff and the new staff because there are different classifications for them and then the increases that were negotiated.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

A 25 per cent increase from the 2011-12 budget in communications. What accounts for that increase? I'll throw in sort of the other concern. How can you justify a 25 per cent increase for communications while cutting recreation and sport investment, with the exclusion of the major events funding?

Mr. Hayden: It's indicated that it's an additional position. It's manpower increases in the communications department, so it's internal. I expect that it's probably associated with specific projects, but I can get back to you on that.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

Then my last question has to do with \$135,000 being spent for the Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Development. How many times did this committee meet regarding your ministry in the past two years? What directives or recommendations or feedback have you received in return for the cost of this committee?

Mr. Hayden: I can get back to you on how many meetings actually specifically dealt with tourism, but it is a shared responsibility between ministries for the policy development. I'll find out for you how many actual issues of tourism.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'd appreciate it.

I know that a number of us have had a chance to talk with the MLA salary task force, and one of the concerns that I brought up was paying for committees at a thousand dollars a head per month

when those committees may not have met. Now, obviously, during this budget debate individuals are getting their money's worth, the taxpayers who are paying our salaries, but that's not always the case. So when they were talking about areas where we could have a potential reduction in MLA recompense, I said: well, look at the committees; you should only be paying for committees when they're actually meeting.

I'll look forward to your answers. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

Are there any other members wishing to speak at this time?

Ms Calahasen: I have a question.

The Chair: Yes, Ms Calahasen.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much. First of all, Mr. Minister, I want to say thank you to your staff because I think you've got some really great people on your staff who I know try to make sure that the community is heard.

My first question has to do with the way of consultation. I know that supposedly the open houses are to ensure that consultation does happen, so there is a process that you have identified. Can you identify that process relative to anything to do with parks that are potentially going to be going to the private sector?

Mr. Hayden: Actually, the process is no different for private sector or whether it's provincial. The first part of the consultation, of course, takes place where people can actually write in and make comments or recommendations to government, and then open houses are also a part of it. In the case of private-sector parks that would be initiated by the suggestion or recommendation from people that a park be expanded or a park be developed. So that would come to us, and if it was one that appeared to have the support of the community or appeared to be a viable operation in an area where we actually need more spaces, then we would move to the public consultation portion of it to find out how it would fit in an area.

Ms Calahasen: So then having known that, I was looking at the budget to see whether or not there is going to be any dollars that would go specifically to parks development and, more specifically, to paving of roads towards our good natural resource. What kind of dollars are you looking at to be able to ensure that we do pave roads to those resources, that are so vital to this province?

8:50

Mr. Hayden: I know we do have some funding going towards access roads this year, but I can't right off the top tell you exactly how much it is. I am aware of one three-kilometre section that's going in one area, and there's another . . .

Ms Calahasen: I hope it's mine.

Mr. Hayden: Well, we'll pretend for tonight that it's yours.

Ms Calahasen: Okay. Well, thank you. I'll hold you to it. So you're not going to say anything? I see that smile.

Mr. Hayden: Sure, I am.

Ms Calahasen: What if I just leave it at that?

Mr. Hayden: Well, there are road and parking lot repair projects that are taking place this year. Kananaskis Country is \$700,000, Wabamun Lake provincial park is \$250,000, and Gregoire Lake provincial park is \$200,000.

Ms Calahasen: So that doesn't have anything to do with my park.

Mr. Hayden: No, but as an Albertan you're allowed to go there.

Ms Calahasen: Well, you know what? I'm going to tell you that you should come and see our park as well because we have probably the only all-enclosed lake ever in the province of Alberta. I think that sometimes ministers of tourism don't understand the size of that lake, the beauty of that lake, and what a resource we have. So I would strongly recommend, Mr. Minister, that you and your staff come and see what we have there so that you will know that those dollars should be spent in Lesser Slave Lake for paving the roads, especially Hilliard's Bay.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you very much for the invitation. I'm really kind of partial to good steak, so I'll be there.

Ms Calahasen: With our population expanding and demands on our work life becoming more intense, Albertans want and need new parks to explore, recreate, and rejuvenate in. How are you growing the Alberta parks system with this budget, more specifically, parks like the parks that we have in my constituency?

Mr. Hayden: Well, we're growing our parks system, of course, all across the province. Pigeon Lake is one of the examples where we're doing some major construction projects and revitalization projects. Kananaskis Country is another area. But we're doing it right across the province.

With respect to your area I think that there's huge potential in the north for parks. We do have certain areas that are under-utilized, and that's where we're going to do seasonal passes, but there are other areas, too, where there are huge opportunities. You're right; your lake is beautiful, and I think there are some great opportunities there.

Ms Calahasen: Oh, you're so wonderful.

Okay. Let me then ask the next question. I've always been interested in aboriginal tourism. I know the potential is there, but we've never really looked at doing a feasibility study, nor have we looked at what the potential could be. I understand that your department has done that, so I'm wondering: what kind of feasibility study do you have planned to be able to look at the tourism prospects of aboriginal tourism? We have the Ukrainian Village; we have all sorts of villages, but we never have anything on the indigenous component of our culture.

Mr. Hayden: In the lower Athabasca plan, where we're going to have an expanded parks system, I think that there are all kinds of opportunities. We're currently working with Treaty 7 for opportunities for tourism and parks and outdoor recreation. So I think that there are some real good chances of things happening there.

If you go to YouTube and take a look at Travel Alberta's new program, you'll see a First Nations component to our promotion of the province. They're hugely important.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Hayden: You're welcome.

The Chair: Are there any further questions?

If not, I have one comment to make, Mr. Minister. You mentioned that you spend \$9.9 million for maintenance and planning the replacement of things like picnic tables. I would just like to mention that you might consider using part of that budget to replace the dock at Goldeye Lake.

Mr. Hayden: Thank you for your recommendations.

The Chair: You're welcome. It does need replacing. I've got five grandkids that are bouncing off that thing.

Anyway, seeing that we have no further questions, then pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5) the estimates of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule.

I'd like to remind committee members that this is the last meeting scheduled for the Standing Committee on Community

Development to consider budget estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2013.

Just one more comment on the vote because I didn't mention it earlier. The vote on the estimates is deferred until consideration of all department estimates has concluded and will occur in Committee of Supply on March 13, 2012, according to Government Motion 6.

Thank you, everyone. Have a great night, and travel safely.

[The committee adjourned at 8:55 p.m.]

