



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
Third Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Tourism, Parks and Recreation

Wednesday, March 17, 2010
8:30 a.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 27th Legislature
Third Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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| Susan Cribbs | Executive Director, Policy Planning and Legislative Services |
| Jay Nagendran | Assistant Deputy Minister, Parks |
| Bob Scott | Assistant Deputy Minister, Tourism |
| Cam Steenveld | Acting Executive Director, Acting Senior Financial Officer, Financial Services |
| Bill Werry | Deputy Minister |

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8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to please call this Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order and welcome everyone in attendance this morning. I would advise guests that they do not need to operate the microphones because this is taken care of by *Hansard* staff. I would note that the meeting is recorded by *Hansard*, and the audio is streamed live on the Internet.

Perhaps we can quickly go around the table, starting with our chief researcher, and introduce ourselves for the record.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you. I'm Philip Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator from the Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Dallas: Good morning, everyone. Cal Dallas, MLA for Red Deer-South.

Mr. Kang: Good morning, everyone. Darshan Kang, MLA, Calgary-McCall.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Harry Chase, MLA, Calgary-Varsity. Noticing our turnout, I think we should go right to the vote.

Ms Cribbs: Good morning. I'm Susan Cribbs with Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Steenveld: Cameron Steenveld, Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Werry: Bill Werry, deputy minister, Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Nagendran: Good morning. Jay Nagendran, assistant deputy minister, parks division.

Mr. Bentz: Lloyd Bentz, executive director of the sport and recreation division.

Mr. Scott: Good morning. Bob Scott, ADM of tourism.

Mr. Arklie: Good morning. Graeme Arklie with the Auditor General's office.

Ms White: Good morning. Ronda White, Assistant Auditor General.

Ms Calahasen: Pearl Calahasen, Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Rodney: Good morning, everyone. Dave Rodney, Calgary-Lougheed and deputy chair. I just came from a meeting. We have others joining us very shortly, I trust.

The Chair: Okay. Can I have, please, an approval of the agenda that was circulated? Mr. Chase. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Chase that the agenda for the March 17, 2010, meeting be approved as distributed. Thank you. All in favour?

Approval of the minutes. Could I have approval of the minutes as

circulated? Thank you, Mr. Dallas. Moved by Mr. Dallas that the minutes for the March 10, 2010, meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. All in favour? Seeing none opposed, thank you.

Now, of course, this comes to item 4 on our agenda, our meeting with the officials from Tourism, Parks and Recreation. We are dealing this morning with the Auditor General of Alberta's report from April and October 2009, the annual report of the government of Alberta consolidated financial statements, the Measuring Up and business plan annual report as well, and, of course, the Tourism, Parks and Recreation annual report for 2008-09. I would remind everyone of the briefing material prepared for the committee by the LAO research staff.

I would now invite, please, Mr. Werry, deputy minister, to make a brief opening statement on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Please proceed.

Mr. Werry: Thank you, Mr. MacDonald. First of all, we're pleased to be here this morning, and thanks for accommodating the change in schedule. We were originally scheduled for the 14th of April but moved to this date, and we appreciate that. We're here today to share some of our financial results, our response to the Auditor General's report, and of course we'll give you some highlights of what we believe we accomplished in 2008-09.

The department consisted at that time of Travel Alberta, which was a part of the department until the end of that fiscal year; the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation; and, of course, the department itself. Our mandate is to create the conditions for a vibrant and successful tourism industry, to manage our natural landscapes for the enjoyment of current and future generations, and to promote active, healthy lifestyles through sport and recreation. All these activities help make Alberta a great place to live, visit, and invest.

We achieve this in a number of ways. Our first goal was to help develop and expand Alberta's tourism products and to increase tourism from targeted domestic and international markets. These efforts were funded based on revenue collected under the 4 per cent tourism levy in 2006-07. Our operating expenses for tourism development and marketing were \$65 million, which accounted for approximately 27 per cent of our operating expense.

One of our major achievements was the establishing of Travel Alberta as a legislated corporation effective April 1, 2009. The new structure was something that the industry was asking for and a model that's been successful in other jurisdictions. We are confident that this structure will put Travel Alberta in an even better position to respond quickly to shifts in this competitive industry. That's why we had Travel Alberta working on developing our presence at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games, one of the most high-profile events in the world. Although the majority of our activities were in '09-10, the Alberta train and Alberta House and Plaza had to be secured earlier, in 2008-09.

Closer to home Travel Alberta launched the Stay campaign. I think most of us have had an opportunity to see that campaign and see its impact. It is the province's biggest ever marketing program aimed at encouraging Albertans and our closest neighbours to stay a little bit longer.

We've also had good response to the resources we created in 2008-09 for a new festival and events planning manual which helps local communities go through a step-by-step guide in order to organize and operate successful events. We've also commissioned several studies with respect to RV campgrounds, water-based tourism, and other opportunities to foster tourism investment.

We met or exceeded two of our measures related to satisfaction

with the Travel Alberta visitor information centres and Travel Alberta contact centres. The most surprising result was the low number of users satisfied with Travel Alberta's website. Our target was 86 per cent. Satisfaction was actually at 39 per cent. When we looked into that further, we found that two factors were at play. Many individuals did not complete the survey. The number of people completing the survey actually dropped by 75 per cent, and many of the issues that were raised in the responses were not actually related to the website. The measure has since been removed, and we're working to resolve and develop a more effective measure on the effectiveness of our website.

In terms of our second core business, parks, our goal is to preserve Alberta's natural heritage and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. Just over half of the ministry's operating expenses in 2008-09 related to parks, more than \$123 million. It's important to keep in mind, however, that \$50 million of that was a flow-through grant to the development of the capital region river valley park, a concept under development that will benefit about one-third of Alberta's population. We also invested approximately \$49 million in parks infrastructure, including upgrades and renewal projects at a number of parks across the province. A major achievement was the continued work on our 10-year plan for parks, which was released in April 2009. It's now the blueprint that guides all of our parks programming and planning.

In addition, we also work to support the land-use framework. Work began on that in 2008-09. All divisions contributed to the preliminary work done on the land-use plans for lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regions. We also participated in other cross-ministry projects such as water for life and the responsible action plan for Alberta's oil sands as well.

We also worked to enhance accessibility to our parks and in 2008-09 implemented a program called the Access Challenge in Kananaskis, which gave disabled Albertans an opportunity to experience the backcountry. We also developed the nature as a second language program, which helps us to bring new Canadians more effectively into our parks system.

We had one performance measure related to parks in 2008-09. Visitor satisfaction with our parks was over 93 per cent, which exceeded our target. It's actually the highest result we've ever had.

Finally, in terms of our third core business, our goal was to have Albertans participate in sport and recreation and lead active, healthy lives. We committed more than \$51 million to this goal, approximately 21 per cent of our 2008-09 operating expenses. This included \$20 million to WinSport Canada, the second instalment of our three-year commitment to renew our winter Olympic facilities and create a Canadian centre for sport excellence at Canada Olympic Park. That amount also included more than \$1.4 million in grants to 250 municipalities to help improve local public recreation facilities, and we also look to improve other opportunities for outdoor recreation and to foster economic opportunities.

We committed \$1.5 million over three years to employ seasonal workers in rural areas to develop and maintain trails infrastructure, and in 2008-09 the recreation corridors committee continued to work to develop a trails designation program. The committee looked into issues like risk management and enforcement, and that information will be used in this fiscal year to move forward on a designation program.

We had one performance measure in the area of sport and recreation, which showed that more than 85 per cent of adult Albertans participated in sport and recreational activities. This was the highest result we have had in recent years, and it was higher than our target. However, we recognize we need to continue to emphasize the benefits of active living to maintain and increase the result in this area.

In terms of the Auditor General's recommendations in 2006-07 the Auditor recommended we work with Service Alberta to improve our IT control framework to mitigate risks for our information systems and data and to resolve service issues. There's a lot of co-ordination required to meet these recommendations, and we continue to work with Service Alberta to implement the required changes.

Thanks for your attention, and I look forward to your questions.

8:40

The Chair: Thank you very much. Appreciate that.

The Auditor General's office, Ronda White. Do you have any comments at this time, please?

Ms White: I'll just say very briefly that the results of our audit of the ministry are on page 327 of our report. The deputy has already referred to the one outstanding recommendation that we have, which is listed on page 343 of our report. With that being said, I would turn it back to you, Mr. Chairman, for the committee and be happy to answer any questions you might have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Appreciate that.

We'll start with questioning of the department for the fiscal year 2008-09, but before we do that, the chair would like to welcome Mr. Groeneveld and Mr. Fawcett. Good morning, gentlemen.

Mr. Kang, please, to start, followed by Ms Calahasen.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are around the airport tunnel, of course. In terms of cross-ministry collaboration has the ministry considered the millions of dollars that will be lost in hotel reservations when Calgary's Barlow Trail is closed to the airport?

Mr. Werry: Sorry. Can you repeat that question, please?

Mr. Kang: In terms of cross-ministry collaboration has the ministry considered the millions of dollars that will be lost in hotel reservations when Calgary's Barlow Trail, north of McKnight, is closed in 2011?

Mr. Scott: The actual operations of airports are covered by local nonprofit societies. Where we focus our efforts is on air access and working with carriers to bring more carrier service into airports throughout the province. At the moment we're looking at trying to add additional carriers into the marketplace. The operation of how those passengers are serviced when they get to the airport is outside the purview of the ministry.

Mr. Kang: Well, my understanding was that the ministry of tourism is working with the hotels and other entities to have tourism flourish in Alberta.

My second question is: has the ministry considered the increased costs and inconvenience to the tourist and the impact on the tourism industry and the loss of revenue to all the hotels, the service providers in northeast Calgary and in Calgary as a whole if the airport tunnel is not built?

Mr. Werry: Just to respond, we've been working throughout the history of the department very closely with the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association, and they've certainly raised those concerns. So in our role we have the opportunity to raise those concerns inside government, pass that information along, but when it comes to the decision-making process, those decisions are made in other ministries and by local authorities. We do make sure that Hotel & Lodging's concerns are passed on to those ministries.

Mr. Kang: That would be just passed on, or will you diligently work on them?

Mr. Werry: We always diligently work on tourism issues.

The Chair: We're moving on, I'm afraid. That's three questions. Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all, welcome. It's great to see someone who I've known for a while in this position. Thank you. Congratulations, too, on 2010. I think you guys did an awesome job, and we're very proud of what your department has done, so congratulations on that.

The question I do have is on page 82 of the annual report. It's 3.0.3, parks operations. It talks about the budget and the expenditures. Of course, my question has to do with comparison of expenses on equipment/inventory purchases. The actual expenditures of \$2.07 million are indicated against a budget of \$220,000. The result is a deficit of \$1.85 million. Could you tell me what would cause the deficit?

Mr. Werry: In 2008-09 we began work on the central campground reservation system, and there were some significant equipment costs associated with that reservation system. We were able to hold back in other areas in order to cover that cost. So on a line-by-line basis there was an overexpenditure, but as a department overall we did not overexpend. That was a project that we got started on kind of in mid-year, and that's why we got to that number.

Ms Calahasen: If the project was mid-year, does that mean, then, that there's more funding that'll come through, or has that been taken care of so that it's not a deficit in the next report?

Mr. Werry: That's right.

Ms Calahasen: My next question, then, is regarding the parks program again, budgets and expenditures on pages 81 to 83 in schedule 5. What information does the ministry have regarding the effectiveness of these expenditures, on the benefits of the expenditures in the park program?

Mr. Werry: Well, in addition to the work we do with our visitors – through our camper satisfaction survey, obviously, we keep track of how people are responding in each area with respect to the services that we provide. Our operations people are also monitoring on a continuous basis the effectiveness of those expenditures. Right now we're in a situation where, as I mentioned, we've had the highest response ever with respect to camper satisfaction. We're seeing much more positive response from folks to the investments we've made.

Ms Calahasen: There was a comment in your opening statement. You talked about a nature as a second language program that was brought into the park system. I think that's really a good program, and I'm glad to see that there have been some positive things happening there. Can you tell me: on this program was there any kind of program that would address the aboriginal component?

Mr. Werry: We don't deal with the aboriginal community through nature as a second language. That program is targeted to new Canadians and immigrants to Canada. We do, however, work closely with our aboriginal community in terms of our neighbours relative to our park sites, and we do have a series of programs where

we bring aboriginals into the parks to do work in southern Alberta. Treaty 7 organizations are involved with our parks in Cypress and Writing-on-Stone, and in northern Alberta, for example at the Hay-Zama complex, we do have aboriginal guardians who work with us in taking care of the stewardship aspect of the Hay-Zama complex.

Ms Calahasen: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.
Those were three lovely questions.

Ms Calahasen: I'll be on there again.

The Chair: Sure. Okay. No problem.
Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Referencing page 673 of the blue book ending March 31, 2009, what was the purpose of the \$4.5 million that the department paid to Sierra Systems?

Mr. Werry: That was the initial work we did on the development of the central campground reservation system. So that was the system design work done by Sierra Systems.

Mr. Chase: It was all to do with the system design. Okay. Can you provide a detailed breakdown of how these funds were spent?

Mr. Nagendran: Yes. Thank you. There was a combination. We had to put SuperNet into some of the sites. We had to do some winter trenching and so forth. We wanted it effective on May 1, so we had to do some work through the winter. The software development is the most advanced campground reservation system anywhere. It had to be all done in-house in Alberta. So those components of construction, SuperNet, developing the system, training the various folks at the sites: all of those components cost some money.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I note that there are increases in revenue as a result of the tourism levy, and I presume that all of those funds are directed towards marketing and development, but I don't see a level of detail in terms of where those dollars are actually being spent. I wonder if you could speak to that.

Mr. Werry: I'd be pleased to. In terms of the marketing component, with respect to the operations of Travel Alberta Secretariat in terms of the secretariat operation itself we spent in the neighbourhood of \$9 million. About \$3.8 million of that was for website operations for travelalberta.com, \$3.9 million was in relation to secretariat operations manpower and work with the Strategic Tourism Marketing Council, and some initial costs with respect to our Olympic program were incurred in '08-09. That was around \$2 million.

We have \$7.4 million in terms of regional marketing that went towards the Stay campaign and other regional marketing efforts; \$2.7 million was part of their contract with Travel Alberta in-province to provide training and support to tourism operators across the province. We had a further \$1.1 million that we spent doing work on market readiness and making sure that folks understood what the potential opportunities were.

8:50

On the international side we contracted with Travel Alberta International at that time. That work is now part of the new corporation. On that, \$5.7 million is with respect to project management services around all of our international marketing efforts. We spent \$21.5 million in international marketing and included examples of things that we've done with the Canadian Tourism Commission in partnership with CTC in markets like Mexico, United Kingdom, Germany, and Southeast Asia. We also worked in partnership with KLM to attract flights into Alberta, and we provided video spots in southeastern Australia in order to get access into that market. As well, we fund the tourism destination regions. As you are aware, there are regional groups across the province, and they receive \$6.8 million in terms of the funding out of that element.

Mr. Dallas: Great. The Stay campaign was fabulous, from my perspective anyway. There's a lot of interest in our area around trail development and enhancement and that type of thing, and I didn't hear you mention anything about investment in further development of our trail system. It's not contemplated with that fund?

Mr. Werry: In '08-09 we did use some of the development money. I gave you a breakdown of the marketing money, the 80 per cent. On the 20 per cent side we did do some trail development funding. We were able that year to do some trail development with some of that money. In addition, we also put some money behind mapping initiatives because one of the challenges that we have is helping people understand where there are trails and where they do have opportunities. So we've done mapping projects in a couple of regions of the province, and we have a couple of other of those projects under way now.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The chair would like to welcome Mr. Griffiths this morning as well to our committee.

Now we will go to Mr. Kang, please, followed by Ms Calahasen.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In reference to page 1 of the 2008-09 annual report what work was completed as part of the second instalment of funding to WinSport to renew the 1988 Olympic facilities in Calgary and to create a Canadian centre of sport excellence?

Mr. Werry: I'll ask Mr. Bentz to respond.

Mr. Bentz: Yes. With the second instalment to WinSport Canada there are a number of projects there, including development of a half-pipe international standard for snowboard. There were also upgrades to the freestyle ski venue as well as the start of construction in terms of the athletic and ice complex. Those were the major pieces to that.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. Are these projects still on track to be completed within the three-year investment time frame, or will they require additional funding or time to complete?

Mr. Bentz: A number of the projects are complete to date. The biggest one is the athletic and ice complex, and portions of that are to be completed by this coming fall. Some of that project will go

over, but we're not looking at additional funding at this time. It's just strictly a timing basis on construction.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you very much. On page 25 of the annual report it states that the performance measure on Travel Alberta website satisfaction was removed from the Tourism, Parks and Recreation 2009-2012 business plan. Why was this measure removed, and is it possible that it will be reintroduced at any time?

Mr. Werry: What actually happened with the measure was that it was a measure whereby people could choose to comment on the website. Previously we'd been getting about a thousand responses. In 2008-09 we had only 250 responses. What happened is that people weren't actually commenting on the website; they used the opportunity to comment on other things. So they'd raise other issues, complain about something that had nothing to do with the website. When we actually looked into it, it turned out that the measure itself was not a very good measure to begin with because of the methodology we used. So what we're doing now with Travel Alberta is actually tracking website visits as a more representative type of measure in terms of how the website is being used.

Travel Alberta is also now developing a methodology to try and track the leads that the website creates. As people come to the website, if they end up going forward to book a hotel or book attractions, Travel Alberta is now trying to track those leads versus simply giving people an opportunity to comment on the website. So the measure itself had some flaws in the way it was designed.

Ms Calahasen: That's good to know that you do change the measures so that they can accommodate or at least give us a sense as to what's going on.

My other question. You identified accessibility to parks. I'm so happy that we have that program going because I think that people, it doesn't matter who they are, should have access to parks. On the access to parks there's a different component, and that has to do with people who want to go to the parks and can't access it at the moment. What have you done in the past that would help those people be able to access those parks that are not accessible at the moment?

Mr. Werry: One of the things that we've done is that we're actually working with the education system and developing video access to our parks. As you are well aware, we have the boreal centre in Lesser Slave Lake, and they're now broadcasting their programming to schools across the province. So we're making those kinds of places accessible through online mechanisms. In '08-09 we really stepped up our consultation with communities around changes that we're making to parks. From time to time we have to close down parks as we do maintenance and repairs and so on, and we're working very closely with the surrounding community on that through consultation with folks as we go through those processes.

Ms Calahasen: Third question, Mr. Chair, or is it just two?

The Chair: Two. You'll be put back on the list.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Groeneveld, who has been very patient.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. With great anticipation I wait to hear the (c) part of Pearl's questions.

Referencing page 116 of the blue book ending March 31, 2009, can the ministry provide a detailed breakdown of the \$2.8 million that was paid to Brand Live Management Group Incorporated? I'll read my supplemental to give you a sense of the kind of detail I'm looking for. How was the company selected, and was there a competition process for this contract?

Mr. Werry: In terms of the payment to Brand Live, in 2008-09 the Travel Alberta Secretariat was beginning to look for potential sites in Vancouver, knowing that we'd want to have some kind of presence in Vancouver. They had previously worked with Brand Live on other marketing initiatives in the Lower Mainland, so Brand Live was approached to sort of begin the process of seeking out the sites. We were very fortunate in that Brand Live identified initially the site where we ended up, which is right across the street from BC Place stadium, where some 60,000 people a day went by Alberta House and Alberta Plaza this past year.

The initial payment was part of the site procurement costs, so the negotiations with the site that they identified for us. That site was an operating restaurant that we made arrangements with to take over for the period of the Olympics. There were some initial costs for securing that site plus the initial payment around the project management requirements of retrofitting that site for Alberta's needs. So that was the initial payment, and subsequent payments were made, obviously, in subsequent years.

Mr. Chase: The question, then, with regard to a bid process or competition: that didn't exist because I gather you sought out the company based on previous contracting?

Mr. Werry: Yeah. We did talk about that at that time. We obviously had time constraints at that point. The other locations in Vancouver were being locked down by other jurisdictions fairly quickly, so we had to move fairly quickly.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Groeneveld, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you, Chair. Good morning to you people this morning. Certainly, I'd just like to comment on your opening remarks. There you talked about performance measures. I'd like you to expand, maybe, just a little bit on what the ministry is probably doing to develop meaningful performance measures and what kind of improvements. You identified a flaw in one there, so I'd like to just expand on that a little.

9:00

Mr. Werry: I'm going to ask Susan to respond to that.

Ms Cribbs: I'd be very happy to. As we've noted, we keep an eye on our performance measures, and if we note that they're not working for us, if we're not learning from them, we change them. We are always working with the office of the Auditor General on that because changing performance measures isn't a quick process. You can't just introduce a new performance measure over one year. You have to have a valid methodology, it has to be tested over two or three years, and as I say, we make sure that the office of the Auditor General is satisfied before we introduce it.

That said, we are working on some new performance measures. We're looking, for example, at a performance measure on visitation

to parks, and I think we're ready to roll on that one. We're looking at one related to the quality of infrastructure in parks, measuring that, and we've got a new one on the sport and rec side. We only had a measure on the activity level of adults. Now we've got a new one on the activity level of children. That's where we're at on performance measures right now.

Mr. Groeneveld: Well, thank you. You've kind of shot into the next question for me. I've noticed that there are lots of performance measures here. In fact, I was going to comment: maybe overkill on performance measures. Now you're telling me you're going to have another one. I guess it's a good way, as you said, to develop, but is it necessary to have so many?

Ms Cribbs: Well, that's an interesting question because we can be criticized if we don't have very many. Then it looks like we're not examining our business and making sure we're delivering it in the most effective and efficient manner. So it's a matter of finding the balance. The other thing with performance measures is that you can't look at them over just one year; you have to watch them over a number of years and see the story they tell. So over time we may drop some or we may add some, but I think we do feel we need that number of performance measures to see how we're doing.

Mr. Groeneveld: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Rodney.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What specific type of collaboration has the minister had with her colleague in Sustainable Resource Development in the implementation of the land-use strategy to ensure an increase in parks and protected areas?

Mr. Werry: Thank you. We've been working very closely with Sustainable Resource Development. Tourism, Parks and Recreation as a department that has responsibility for land management is seen as one of the four key departments in the land-use framework, together with Environment and Energy and SRD, so we've been working with them on the development of the terms of reference for the land-use framework planning processes for both the lower Athabasca and the South Saskatchewan River basin. We've also been developing information to inform the land-use planning process through the land-use framework, so we have information about tourism and recreation features in each region about what kind of parks and protected areas we have in the region. We're providing data to the planning process, and we're part and parcel of the regional planning teams in relation to the land-use framework. So we're very involved.

Mr. Kang: How much funding was dedicated towards initiatives within the land-use strategy? Was there any funding?

Mr. Werry: We received some funding, I think, from SRD to assist us with extra staff. I think we've added three staff to our department to assist with the land-use framework process. The rest of our expenditures have been within our existing appropriation.

Mr. Kang: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodney has volunteered to allow Mr. Griffiths to now proceed. Mr. Griffiths, you can proceed before Mr. Chase.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much. I actually was a little disappointed in the performance measures for the department, not in the results, just in the depth of them. I think our chair has listened to me for three years talk about how you can have satisfaction surveys, which are performance measures, and then you can have outputs, which are a little deeper, but then you can have outcomes, which are the most meaningful level of performance measures. Most of these are satisfaction surveys; for instance, on page 30 the visitor satisfaction with experiences at provincial parks and rec sites. What about a measure of the actual quality of the parks themselves? Have you worked on developing one?

Mr. Werry: As Susan mentioned, we are working on a measure that will allow us to assess the quality of the infrastructure. Right now we have some information that tells us that about 72 per cent of our parks are in fair to good condition relative to infrastructure. We're working with the office of the Auditor General on that measure. As Susan indicated, we need to test that measure and make sure it's reliable and valid. That's one of the measures that we are working on.

Within our customer camper satisfaction survey work we have more open-ended questions in the survey, and we do what's referred to as data mining with respect to the written responses. So we have more of a sense of what people think about the quality of the experience through that data mining process, but again it takes a while to establish that as a legitimate measure. We are working on those.

Mr. Griffiths: I know they don't evolve overnight. I'm glad to hear they are coming.

What about the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation? Whenever we hand out money, I'm very concerned about whether or not we're getting a return for the investment. So what about a performance measure or evaluation about the grants sent out by the Alberta Sport, Recreation, Parks and Wildlife Foundation to see if we're actually getting a return on the investment for the parks and facilities that they help contribute to for Albertans?

Mr. Werry: Well, in the future context we are working on a policy for recreation, sport, and active living. We've got that work under way now. We hope to be able to be consulting with Albertans on that policy in the next number of weeks. Within that we've identified a number of outcomes in a number of areas. Once that policy is in place, we will be trying to build in some of that more rigorous look at what we're getting in those areas. We're going to be trying to tie the funding of the foundation to that policy. In addition, we've also just begun work on a program review of the foundation, looking at each of the programs and trying to assess their impact.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Can the ministry tell us what plans are in place to expand the network of provincial parks and protected areas and what specific areas are being considered for designation as a provincial park or designated area? You know my favourite, and that's the Andy Russell I'tai Sah Kòp Castle recreation area.

Mr. Werry: Thanks. In 2008-09 we were able to add both the Glenbow Ranch, which I'm sure you're familiar with, and the OH

Ranch as well to our system. Those were sort of the major acquisitions. We also in '08-09 were able to do some development in our system, adding loops in various sites, so more sort of site-specific kinds of expansions.

With respect to new parks in our plan for parks we've identified that we're working on a clear process to help that come along. That's why we're working so closely with the land-use framework. We believe that whatever we do relative to new parks needs to be set in the context of the land-use framework.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My supplemental. This comes from my experience at Cataract Creek in the Kananaskis. Can the ministry tell us what is being done to ensure that parks and protected areas have functional Texas gates and maintained, fenced-in borders to prevent free-grazing cattle from entering these areas?

Mr. Nagendran: I know, Mr. Chase, that you've asked that question before. We have some Texas gates, but it's not sometimes the only effective way of doing it, so we are looking at a wider scale of what we can do to avoid cattle movement. We don't have an extensive amount of Texas gates in our parks.

Mr. Chase: Can you talk about the barbed wire fencing? That's absolutely necessary in terms of maintaining the fences. Just like a rancher would do to keep his cattle in, the maintained fences keep the cattle out in the case of parks. Is there an annual sort of updating or checking of the fencing and facilities and repair? It didn't happen from 2002 to 2004, while I was there.

Mr. Nagendran: Right. Since 2004 we have invested over \$200 million. Our conservation officers and park staff are constantly inspecting these sites. Any disrepair, particularly if it has any human health risk, is attended to promptly.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

9:10

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. I wonder if we could turn to page 42 in the annual report, the consolidated statement of operations. Down in the third column, I guess you would say, there's a mention of valuation adjustments, and there are variances that I'd like to talk about. The first one is the provision for vacation pay and banked overtime. It looks like in '08, while there was a restatement, it was about \$394,000. For some reason, then, we come back with a budget of \$110,000 and actually incur expenses of \$423,000. While the number in gross, I guess, is a small one relative to the budget, it's a wide variance. Can you speak to that?

Mr. Werry: Some of that relates to the staff who were being transferred to Travel Alberta corporation. We needed to wrap that up. As we looked at year-end in '08-09, we knew that those people would be coming off our books and ending up in the corporation's books. We had a higher than expected payment in that area because we had to clear off the vacation for those employees that transferred to the new corporation.

Mr. Dallas: Well, I want to move to my next question, but I guess I am curious why we wouldn't have been accruing the appropriate amount of liability there as we moved along.

My next one is just two lines above that, the provision for

environmental obligations. It would appear that the same type of activity has occurred. We had an expense of \$608,000 in the '08 year, and then in '09 we come back with no budget and incurred an expense just over a million dollars.

Mr. Steenveld: I can answer that. With these provisions it's an estimate that we put in. In particular, that \$600,000 to the million is the provision we had to put in for Dinosaur provincial park. There was hydrocarbon contamination in one of the areas from an old fuel tank, so we got an estimate from a consultant as to how much it would cost us. At that time the low end was \$1 million, so we had to recognize it as a liability at that time according to the accounting rules. We didn't know it was there at the beginning of the year, so we couldn't budget for it. That's the reason that one went up.

The provision for the staff vacation pay. We assume staff will take their holidays every year. But increases in salary result in a bit of a creep because now the value of the liability increases, so we budgeted \$100,000 to increase that liability. That year fewer people took holidays because we had some vacancies we didn't cover off to satisfy some of the fiscal issues of the government that year, so we ended up with a larger amount being accrued for people putting in more overtime. They couldn't take holidays as much as we'd have liked. We try and manage it with our work-life balance initiatives in our ministry to try and get people to take their holidays. So each manager now has to make an effort to try and get that number down every year.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Kang: The 2007-08 annual report stated that 17 active living agencies were provided with \$1.6 million, and page 15 reports that in 2008-09 16 active living agencies were provided with \$1.6 million. What was the agency that lost provincial funding, and why are we not increasing the amount of funding given to active living agencies?

Mr. Bentz: In terms of the agency losing funding, to my knowledge there were no agencies that actually lost funding. We do have 17 agencies that we fund that provide a wide range of opportunities for Albertans, some that are very structured in terms of fitness certification agencies that are training fitness leaders and opportunities that are much more unstructured. In terms of funding to the agencies based on their allocations, we needed to maintain that level versus increasing it in that fiscal year.

Mr. Kang: My supplemental. The Fitness Industry Council of Canada indicates that the cost of inactivity to the health system could reach over \$1 billion by 2015. Given that sedentary lifestyles increase costs to the health system, what collaboration has taken place with the ministry of health to support active living?

Mr. Bentz: Our deputy had mentioned about the Active Alberta policy. One of the things we're doing is that we have collaboration with 10 other ministries around the whole area of increasing physical activity. Alberta Health is one of those agencies, but we have a number of other agencies, including, as an example, Municipal Affairs as well as Alberta Education and Advanced Education. Through that collaborative effort we want to continue to move forward on that policy and implement it to increase physical activity in all areas. Even though it's under a mandate of our department, we

are very much aware that there's a number of other departments that need to be at the table and assist in that area.

Mr. Werry: Just to give a specific example, with the department of health and the department of education we do work with an organization called Ever Active Schools. We jointly fund that organization. Their job is to go out and promote physical activity through the school system. We've seen some good success from the work they've done so far.

Mr. Kang: So there is some performance measure in place.

Mr. Werry: The Ever Active Schools group has actually done some research on the effectiveness of their activities and have been providing that information to us. We're starting to see some improvement in those areas where Ever Active Schools is working.

Mr. Kang: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

The chair would like to welcome Mr. Elniski this morning, please. You're on the list, sir.

Mr. Elniski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: But we will proceed now with Mr. Griffiths, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you very much. Again on performance measures. On page 35 of the annual report, participation in sport and recreational activities by adult Albertans. I read through the analysis and the description. How do you collect data and information to fill that performance measure? Where do you collect information to assess what percentage of Albertans are actively participating in sports and rec?

Mr. Werry: That information is collected in a number of ways. We work with an organization called the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, or CFLRI. They track self-reported activity levels of Canadians across the country and collect that information at the provincial level, so we get information through CFLRI. We also do a survey ourselves called the general recreation survey, which is a mail-type survey, a household-type survey where we collect information. Again, it's on self-reported levels of activity.

We know there are some weaknesses in self-reports. Surprisingly, people tend to overestimate how active they are when they self-report. We are working with folks at the national level to try and do, in particular for children, more objective measures, so actually putting pedometers on kids and keeping track of steps and those kinds of things. Those measures are evolving to things that are more objective than the self-report information we're using right now. We started using those measures as best available, and we're continuing to work with other jurisdictions in the federal Public Health Agency of Canada on more robust measures.

Mr. Griffiths: That's what I was wondering because people, I think, would self-report: you know, we all work out four times a week when somebody asks us; of course we're healthy.

Mr. Rodney: Why, you don't? You're on record.

Mr. Griffiths: Twice a week. Between chasing my kids and chasing my wife, I get lots of exercise. That was a Lloyd-ism, wasn't it?

My other question, then. When you talk about active participation, this is an interesting performance measure. What about developing a performance measure on the utilization of our recreational facilities? It would be interesting to know how often they're used by how many people. It would give us ideas on how much it costs, you know, to provide recreation services in different regions of the province or to the different areas, how well our services are utilized, and where they're more appreciated. What about some utilization measures? They wouldn't really be performance measures. Or does the department do that already?

Mr. Werry: We don't do that now, but we do work closely with the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association. Many of their members collect that information, so it's certainly something we'll be paying attention to as we move forward with the new Active Alberta policy.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Fawcett.

9:20

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Whether by online or over the phone the reservation process adds an extra \$10 to the overall registration fee. It provides convenience to the campers; it provides assurance to the operator. However, what portion of the entire parks registration fee is returned for maintenance, upkeep, at the specific park where the revenue is generated?

Mr. Werry: Those fees: with respect to the sites where they're collected, that money is returned to that site. It's returned to the operator. In the case of the \$10 reservation fee there's no central taking off the top type of process. If it's a contract operator, that money goes back to the contract operator, and it's intended to be used at that park.

Mr. Chase: So if it's a \$30 overnight fee, the operator gets that entire fee? The department doesn't receive any of that revenue?

Mr. Werry: No.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you. Is that something new?

Mr. Werry: No. In our facility operating agreements when we launched into the online reservation system, in order to attract our operators to using it initially, because there was some skepticism, I think, on the part of some operators, we made a business decision to say that we were going to provide that revenue back to the operator for their operations. That obviously increased the number of folks who got on board with the system.

Mr. Chase: I'm pleased to hear that. My experience was that only \$2 of the \$17 went back. Obviously, that's going to help.

My supplemental is: what external oversight does the ministry take to ensure that the park infrastructure is maintained for both safety and recreational quality regardless of whether it's contracted out or within the system?

Mr. Werry: A couple of things. In 2008-09 we actually moved to a system that we're tracking infrastructure and the sort of health of the facilities online now and also tracking our large assets of equipment and all that kind of stuff. So we've got a more robust system of information now. We spent a fair bit of time in '08-09

putting that system into place, so we have a much better sense of what's actually on the ground, what kind of shape it's in, all that kind of stuff. As well, you know that we did increase our permanent conservation officer staff complement over '08-09, and we've increased our surveillance, if you will, of what's going on on the ground.

Mr. Chase: I'm very pleased to hear that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fawcett, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Mr. Fawcett: Yes. On page 32 of the annual report it talks about the ministry providing 8 and a half million dollars in grants to support sport and recreation opportunities in communities through provincial sport and recreation organizations. It says that, additionally, another million was provided to these organizations under the associations support grant program. I'm wondering: it doesn't say in here how many organizations were provided, what type of organizations, I guess, what the range is of sports and recreational opportunities that those organizations comprised, and, you know, how many participants those organizations served. Do you have that information?

Mr. Werry: Yes, we do. The foundation funds over 100 provincial sport and recreation organizations and, in addition to that, as mentioned in our opening remarks, the 250 municipal recreation organizations through the MRTA program. So we are funding a large number of organizations. The overall number of participants that those organizations have when you look at the rolled up number: I think that close to 40 per cent of the population of Alberta is engaged in some manner with those organizations. So we do have all those numbers.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My supplemental question. You know, much like many programs in various other ministries in our government we do rely a lot on these community-based type of organizations to provide services, and certainly that's a policy issue all by itself. But my question is around accountability when funds are provided to these organizations. What sort of accountability mechanisms do you have in place on if the funds are being spent appropriately by these organizations, that they're contributing to the objective of your ministry, and, not only that, that you know that these various organizations are co-operating together?

Just one example. Certainly, I've been very involved with the baseball community in Calgary, but it seems to be a very divided community. There are all sorts of little groups with their own sort of fiefdoms. Are we funding all of those groups? Do we know if it would be better just to say, "Well, actually, you know, you guys need to get together first" so that maybe we don't need to fund all of them?

Mr. Werry: Just to respond to your question, at the provincial level we fund one organization per discipline. So we're not funding multiple organizations in a specific discipline. In the sport of baseball we fund one baseball organization. We do have a fairly rigorous profile process that people go through in order to access those funds, and there's accountability for the funds in that profile process, so each organization is accountable. We've had great success with the accounting side of this in terms of people spending the money on what they said they were going to spend it on and so on. We're trying to control that point of access with the one organization right off the bat. Now, you probably know, if you've

been involved in sports, that there's more politics in sports than there is in politics.

Mr. Fawcett: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Werry: You know, I think that there's a certain amount of competitiveness amongst those organizations. We work very hard with our staff to try and encourage that collaboration, but it starts with that decision of only funding one representative organization at the provincial level.

The Chair: Somebody else?

Mr. Fawcett: Well, yeah. I'll go on the list again, then.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Fawcett: Okay. The question is: how do you determine which organization gets which amount of money? For example, again, I'm involved in baseball, but it's a fairly small community as opposed to soccer, that has a lot greater participation of athletes.

Mr. Werry: I'll let Mr. Bentz respond to that.

Mr. Bentz: Yeah, in terms of allocation of funding we have a battery of questions both for provincial sport organizations as well as recreation organizations that really encompasses their size and scope. It's based on size and scope; funding is allocated on that basis. It looks at a number of factors in terms of the opportunities being provided to participants, also coaching development as well as officials development.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang: Referencing page 13 of the 2008-09 report, recreation and sport funding has been reduced by a significant amount. Why is the funding reduced by so much?

Mr. Werry: Well the main reason for that reduction is that the previous year there was a first payment to CODA or WinSport was \$40 million. That came down to a \$20 million payment in '08-09. That was major capital expenditures that had gone on in '07-08. Those payments were made. Those capital needs were not there in '08-09, so most of that was a reduction of capital funding.

Mr. Kang: Thank you. In reference to page 15 can the ministry provide details on its enhanced sport for underrepresented groups in the implementation of the Canadian sport for life concept?

Mr. Bentz: Yes. In terms of underrepresented groups we've been able to access some additional funding from Sport Canada, and there have been a number of initiatives that have been created looking at underrepresented groups such as the disabled population as well as in First Nations communities. Also, we find a lot of underrepresented young females in sport and physical activity. There have been some significant initiatives working with volunteer organizations that serve that community.

The Chair: Mr. Rodney, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Chair. First a question. We can't ask

about the Olympics because, as you gentlemen know, we must ask about last year and numbers only and no policy past, present, or future. It's tempting for people around the table to ask about this year's Olympics, but I do have to refer to last year's numbers.

The new program 2008-09 was meant to support Alberta's high-performance athletes. I just wondered, for the record and for anyone on *Hansard* now or in the future: what can you tell us about the high-performance athlete assistance program? What exactly does it fund? I'll have a part 2 that I'll ask for the common person, but I wonder if you could focus on exactly what the return on investment is with the high-performance athlete assistance program.

9:30

Mr. Bentz: Yes. The athlete assistance program assists high-performance athletes that are basically living and training within Alberta. In that program the maximum amount we fund is up to \$6,000 for the athletes. Often their training costs, as you can imagine, are much more significant, in or around \$100,000 or more. We base our funding along with Sport Canada funding, and what we will do is fund up to a maximum of \$6,000 of what Sport Canada will fund for high-performance athletes. But these athletes have to live and train within Alberta.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. Thank you very much. Just a clarification before my second question. We all know about active living, but I've heard of active Albertans: are they one and the same? Is it only active living at this point? I do have a question about whatever the program is called. Can you just clarify?

Mr. Werry: Yeah. As we're working forward on this, we tend to refer to three things in a string, if you will: recreation, active living, and sport. Just to make the distinction, when we say recreation, people tend to think of physical activity outside of work and outside of their normal life. When we think of active living, we tend to think of other things like people walking to work, taking the stairs, all of those kind of things that increase physical activity. So in our mandate as a department we're trying to work on all three things. We're working on organized amateur sport. We're working on recreational activities that people choose to do on their own. If you jump on your cross-country skis, although there's not much opportunity for that left now, and go around the neighbourhood, that tends to be considered recreation. And active living are the things we try to generate into daily life.

Mr. Rodney: Thanks for that. But, again, the clarification, and where this is coming from. I planted some seeds years ago on a program called active Albertans, and I wondered if it was actually being called that. I've got a domain name registered, and I'm happy to share it with you. I guess I'll just ask you to answer that, but I'll ask this question. We all know, everyone around the world, about obesity levels for people of all ages. People are especially concerned about kids because they have a shorter lifetime in many cases because of certain levels. You've told us a little bit about what you're doing, and I wonder if you can be a little bit more specific about what the ministry has spent. Again, we have to go with last year's numbers only. What was spent last year with respect to that, as specific as you can be? Again, do I hand over that domain name, or is it active living versus active Albertans as the official title?

Mr. Werry: Well, the official title I think is going to be Active Alberta. So we might be okay, but we'll check.

I'll let Lloyd speak to the specifics.

Mr. Bentz: Yes. In terms of the initiatives especially geared towards active living, we were spending about \$1.7 million specifically on initiatives to promote active living. In addition to that, a number of our sport and recreation organizations, as you can well imagine, contribute to that. But the specific initiative was \$1.7 million, and that was through the 17 active living agencies.

Mr. Rodney: Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Ms Calahasen.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. The multi-use versus priority-use concept is a threat to both ecological preservation and recreational enjoyment. Whether it's clear-cutting, irresponsible off-road vehicle use, or abusive random camping, war has been waged at Indian Graves, Ghost, Waiparous, and McLean Creek. Therefore, my first question is: how does the ministry maintain the balance between a variety of legitimate recreational pursuits, including the responsible use of off-road vehicles?

Mr. Werry: Well, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, we've set out, I think, fairly clearly in the Plan for Parks, which came into effect April 1, 2009, that we are about balance, that we have a mandate relative to giving people an opportunity to responsibly enjoy the land and also to conserve sensitive landscapes and areas that people value for their environmental value and for their ecological value. So we've made a commitment as a ministry to try and strike that balance. We recognize that we have a role to play in relation to providing staging areas for some of those folks who quite legitimately want to responsibly use off-highway vehicles or snowmobiles or those kinds of things. We recognize that we have a role to play. Again, we're working with SRD and others around the land-use framework to try and make sure we do a much better job of trying to channel that activity. It's very much a priority for our department.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. To quote Roger Miller: "Ya can't roller skate in a buffalo herd, but you can be happy if you've a mind to."

In conjunction with SRD has any planning been done to use existing cutlines and resource extraction roads to extend quad and snowmobile trails rather than ripping up the wilderness parks and riparian habitat?

Mr. Werry: Well, in 2008-09 we began to work on the trail designation program. We continue to work on that to this point in time. We do believe that the solution is to work with not just SRD but also local folks who have spent some time and energy around this issue of trails, so we're continuing to work with all interested parties to try and, again, channel that activity.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Calahasen, please, followed by Mr. Kang.

Ms Calahasen: I have to be so careful; I've got so many questions. A question I have is relative to visitor satisfaction with provincial parks. You do have a performance measure on page 30. It talks about visitor satisfaction. There seems to be an increase in there. I have a number of parks in my constituency, and I know that when the visitors can access them, they're really happy about them. Our problem is that when I look at your capital, I see that there are some

overexpenditures there, and I see that there's potential for development of parks. My question, then, has to deal with how we can increase the visitor satisfaction that you have identified here to include it into those parks that I have and those that don't have paved accesses such as the parks that I have in my constituency.

Mr. Werry: Well, that's a good question. As I think Jay mentioned earlier, we've spent a fair bit of money over the last four to five years on the infrastructure side of parks, so we've made a lot of improvements. I think the number is \$250 million going back to 2006-07. The other thing we've been able to do over the last number of years is try and leverage some of that money in the recent year past with money we've received from the federal government and so on. We're continuing to pay attention to the infrastructure issues and the accessibility issues. As you know, it's kind of on a case-by-case basis, and we move through as resources become available.

The other thing we've done this past year, though, in 2008-09, as a matter of fact, is that we launched a program that really looked at encouraging our visitors to tell us more about their experiences, so a responsiveness initiative in all of our regions to get people to tell us more about their experiences so that we can further refine what we're doing in our parks. So we just keep working at it.

Ms Calahasen: Continuing on the vein of performance measures, I know that Parks certainly works with a lot of different First Nations in the province of Alberta, and some of those First Nations need access to their areas through the parks. I don't see them anywhere here in terms of how you measure that kind of outcome as a result of working with those First Nations to be able to have access to their areas through the parks.

Mr. Werry: We don't have a specific performance measure relative to First Nations, but all of our areas do keep track on an anecdotal basis of the success stories in our working relationship with First Nations, and we're continuing to try and build on that.

Ms Calahasen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kang, please, followed by Mr. Elniski.

Mr. Kang: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was in India in December, and I was seeing all kinds of promotions from Scandinavian countries for tourism, from Singapore, from England. There are big tour groups going to Singapore, to Europe. Have we been doing some kind of promotion from your department as Albertans or as Canadians? I haven't seen much. India is the fastest growing economy, and there's a big tourism market out there.

9:40

Mr. Werry: We work very closely with the Canadian Tourism Commission when it comes to international marketing. One of the emerging markets that the Canadian Tourism Commission is just beginning to move into is India, so we have been working with them. We're working on what's called a wave approach. The Canadian Tourism Commission does the first wave of advertising, creating awareness of the Canada brand and how people can get to Canada. We're working with them, coming in with the second wave, which is the Alberta brand, and trying to promote opportunities for people to come to visit Alberta. India is very much an emerging market for both the Canadian Tourism Commission and for Alberta.

Mr. Kang: I understand. The Indian film industry from Bombay, you know, have been shooting lots of movies in Banff and Calgary, and they have been kind of promoting Alberta in the film industry. We should probably jump on that bandwagon and then promote Alberta through, maybe, the Bombay Bollywood film industry or something and maybe look into that.

Are there any airlines you've been working with so that we can bring some Indian airlines to Calgary?

Mr. Werry: As I mentioned earlier, we're working with the Canadian Tourism Commission. One of the things we did do this past year: sort of Bollywood's Brad Pitt was actually part of the Canadian torch relay, and those images were used to promote Canada and ultimately Alberta back to India.

With respect to air access I'll let Mr. Scott respond.

Mr. Scott: On air access we know that there's a significant growing market in the hubs out of Dubai, so we recently completed a mission of both investment and air access to Dubai. The Premier actually met in Abu Dhabi with Etihad and their senior staff, and we met in Dubai with Emirates.

As you've probably seen in the newspaper lately, there's a significant dispute between Emirates Airlines and Air Canada over access to that market. There's no question in our research that the market is dramatically underserved. If you look at the service that Emirates and Etihad are providing out of Toronto, the connection for passengers to India for visiting family and relatives is very significant. They're running a 500-seat A-380 at a 92 per cent load factor, so the demand is there, but they're restricted to only three flights a week, each carrier out of Toronto.

We've made several representations – Alberta, B.C., and Saskatchewan together – to the federal government to see if we can get that access increased, where both carriers could probably have daily access out of Toronto. Once they achieve that, which will help their operating costs, then they're looking at providing service out of Calgary and service out of Vancouver. They can operate, actually, Emirates airline out of Calgary nonstop to Dubai in 13 hours, an hour faster than out of Toronto, straight over the polar route, and then connect into their world-wide system. It will improve access to not only the Far East but also to points in Africa. So the air access piece, particularly additional carriers out of Calgary, is a very big priority for the government of Alberta and a big priority on the tourism side.

We also need, as the China market opens up, to get improved airlift out of China. There are two carriers designated now, Air China and also Air Canada, but they're running in excess of 80 per cent load factor. Through analysis that Boeing provides called spill factor analysis, once you get to a situation where your load factor is in excess of 75 per cent, you're actually denying transportation to people because the flights are booked up too far in advance on preferred days of travel. We need to look at the China market with other carriers. There are about five major carriers in China now operating out of other points besides Shanghai and Beijing and hopefully with direct service into Alberta.

That's an area that we're really concerned about, and we've got a lot of activity to try and get additional carriers. We'd like the federal government to designate western Canada as a totally open-skies market on a pilot basis for approximately two years and see where the market develops.

Mr. Kang: And Jet . . .

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang: Just a quick one.

The Chair: No. We're going to move on, I'm afraid.

Mr. Scott: Jet is one of the ones we're working on.

Mr. Kang: Jet Airways.

Mr. Scott: Yeah.

Mr. Kang: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: We will conclude with Mr. Elniski, please.

Mr. Elniski: I thank you very much for that, Mr. Chairman, and I apologize for arriving late this morning, gentlemen. I have two completely unrelated questions for you. I'll go to the first one. It has to do with respect to strategy 2.8, which is the department's support of the River Valley Alliance. My question that comes up with regard to this is: what is the department's position with respect to resource extraction in the river valley as it relates to development that's tied into the River Valley Alliance?

Mr. Werry: Well, first of all, in terms of our relationship with River Valley Alliance, we've provided them with a capital grant to get them started in terms of the development of that project. We know that there are resource extraction issues with respect to the river valley, in particular gravel, as we're aware of that. Most of those matters, because of the municipalities engaged, really end up initially as a municipal concern. They have to deal with it at that level. As a department we're working with the municipalities in that area to try and encourage them as they work through that project to protect, obviously, the landscapes that are there.

Mr. Elniski: Okay. That's fine.

I'll go on to my next question. We just had a bit of a conversation here with respect to Dubai and air connections in and out of Alberta. My next question is: what's your department doing with respect to a small-market, open-skies policy within the province of Alberta with respect to tourism?

Mr. Scott: Of course, the jurisdiction is federal. We work with the federal government. We had an open-skies forum a year ago. We're going to have another one this year, where we invite the major carriers and developers, a whole, wide range of people, to encourage new carriers to come into the marketplace. Following the forum here, where we identified five or six target markets that we should go after for access, B.C. held a forum, where the Premier was the lunch speaker. From that, a three-province declaration came out that went to the federal government saying: here are the priority markets for western Canada. Those markets are India, which we've already talked about, additional service to Mexico and through Mexico into south of there, service into the Middle East, and additional service in the Orient. Those are the priority areas that we're focusing on right now.

The biggest problem we have on the air side is that the gateway cities for a lot of tourists are either Toronto or Vancouver. Once they get those markets, we don't exactly control where they're going to go. Even though they may be booked on a multiprovince tour, sometimes they don't get here. We need more direct access into both Edmonton and Calgary. Then we know that once we have them here, we can channel their tourism activities within the province.

Mr. Elniski: Good. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Werry, we have other items on our agenda. We do have members that still have interest in getting information from your department, so we're going to ask them now to read their questions into the record. If you could respond in a timely fashion through the clerk to all members, we would appreciate it.

We'll start with Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. My final question has to do with accessibility to parks. William Watson Lodge in Peter Lougheed in southern Alberta K Country is feeling its age, and as far as I know, there are no designated overnight disabled sites in the north part of the province. At one point there was consideration of turning Blue Lake lodge, but the infrastructure was a concern. I'm wondering: what efforts are being made to have overnight facilities for disabled people sort of throughout the province as opposed to just in southern Alberta?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodney, please.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. As you said so well, Mr. Chair, this question is actually for the benefit of the members, and I hope it's not too much of a homework assignment. I trust it'll be more of a copy and paste because I'm sure you've had the question before. Gentlemen, you're pretty well aware of a little bit of history that I have with the tourism levy and the STMC. I won't state that here. But I believe there's a great return-on-investment story to be told. I wonder if you can just let us know what the numbers were for last year and the activities that corresponded with that.

We're allowed two for this, are we, sir?

The Chair: Sure. Read them all in if you've got more.

Mr. Rodney: Okay. This is only the second one. Again this is about return on investment: for members and Albertans to know any specifics that you haven't shared that you could share with respect to what was spent last year for this year's Olympics. Where did the money go, and what was the return on investment? I think it's a good story to tell.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kang: Mr. Scott was talking about Jet Airways. I'd like to know more about Jet Airways. You know, what efforts are being made to bring them onboard? That airline would be good to have, along with Emirates Airline.

My supplemental question is: can the minister provide details and the status of the implementation of the Alberta sport plan? What steps have been taken to integrate the Alberta sport plan with the active living strategy? How much funding was provided to Alberta's sport plan, and how was that funding allocated?

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of all members of the committee, Mr. Werry and your staff, we would like to thank you for your time and your visit this morning, and we wish you all the very best in your endeavours in fiscal year 2009-10. You can leave while we conclude the other items on our agenda. Again, thank you very much.

Now, hon. members, please, item 5 on our agenda, the research subcommittee membership. This is one item we need to discuss this morning in the limited time we have. At last week's meeting there was some discussion about the need to change the membership of the research committee. What is the committee's direction with regard to this matter? Mr. Fawcett.

Mr. Fawcett: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, I wasn't in attendance at the last meeting but did take a look at the notes. In talking with some of my colleagues, I wonder if it's not best if we scrap the whole idea of the subcommittee and deal with those issues here within the committee as a whole. I think that would require greater engagement from the current members of the committee, and I think it would serve the overall purpose of the committee, actually, a little bit better than having the subcommittee. I would actually like to make a motion that the subcommittee be disbanded and that all matters now be referred to and decided by the committee as a whole.

The Chair: Okay. Any discussion on that?

Mr. Chase: I realize a seconder isn't required for the motion, but I think we are a very functional committee, and we can handle those types of discussion in-house. It will of course require some potential extra time should that need arise, but I support the motion.

The Chair: Okay. Could we have that motion read into the record formally, please, before we vote?

Mr. Fawcett: I will say that I move that

we disband the research subcommittee and refer all matters of the subcommittee to the full Public Accounts Committee.

The Chair: Okay. Those in favour of Mr. Fawcett's motion? Those opposed? Seeing one, the hon. Member for Calgary-McCall, that motion is accepted. Thank you very much for that.

At any time any standing committee has the right to strike a subcommittee on any issue if they so choose. The chair would like to remind you that at any time, if there is a matter or a line item in a department that you would like to examine, you can set up a subcommittee with as many members on it or as few as you would like and get at it. So that takes care of that.

Now, we have meetings scheduled for Public Accounts through to the 14th of April, and session may last longer than that. Do any members have any departments that they would like to see brought before the committee? So far this year we've dealt with Education, Transportation, Children's Services, Infrastructure, Energy, and today Tourism, Parks and Recreation. Do you have your eye on any specific department that you would like to see invited in the near future? If the session were to end, they would be scheduled for the fall. It would carry over.

Mr. Chase: Hopefully, I'm not losing my concentration on the committees we've already seen, but I would like to see Advanced Education.

Mr. Rodney: We didn't see them in the fall. We did see Health. I wasn't here, but Health was before this committee in the fall, correct?

The Chair: Health and Wellness came with Alberta Health Services, and it was a 90-minute meeting. It's a massive budget; it's a \$13 billion budget. Advanced Education also has a significant budget. It's one of the larger budgets, at well over \$3 billion. Okay. So you want Advanced Education?

Mr. Rodney: We would understand that if session is completed before the 21st, we would see them in the fall.

The Chair: In the fall. And Health and Wellness? Do you want the Department of Health and Wellness back?

Mr. Griffiths: I'm inclined to Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, those two departments. I think it has been a little while since we've had them here.

Ms Calahasen: I would choose SRD.

Mr. Griffiths: And Environment I suggested, too. Much of the stuff they deal with goes hand in hand, so I always consider them coming one after the other.

Mr. Rodney: That begs the question – I hope I'm not opening up too many worms here. Because of what hon. Griffiths has mentioned, I don't think it has happened in the past in Public Accounts where we've had two ministries at the same time. I wonder if Environment and SRD could tag-team.

The Chair: No.

Ms Calahasen: It would take forever. We'd have to have the whole day.

Mr. Rodney: It's just that they're so related, and it might be nice to have them in the same room at the same time. At these conferences that we often go to, we hear about new and different things: "I haven't heard that. It was an idea. I think we'll discuss it at the next conference that we do have for good professional development." I'm happy to see them individually.

Mr. Dallas: Mr. Chair, we've identified at least three ministries – perhaps there has been another one or two in there – and I think those would be excellent ones to visit the committee. I wonder if for the discussion at the next meeting we could compile – I know there are a lot of entities of the Crown, and we started examining some of those last year. My sense is that I don't know that we've ever looked at a list and seen how we have done working our way through the ministries. I guess one that came to mind was Aboriginal Relations. There are some other good ones that have come up here.

In the two years that I've served on this committee, I think there are still a number of ministries that we have not yet visited with, and it might be good just to take a look at a list of those in terms of those that we might choose. It doesn't mean that we have to, but it might be good just to look at a list of those and see, you know, in the prior two years those ministries that we have not examined the reports from.

The Chair: The clerk and I look at that list frequently. We will provide that via e-mail to each and every member so that you can see the last couple of years. It has been a tradition that the bigger the budget, the more often you appear before the committee.

Mr. Dallas: I appreciate that. I would like to see that list.

The Chair: Okay. No problem.

Ms White: I'm just going to add, following Mr. Rodney's suggestion about the two ministries coming together, that while that may

be a bit cumbersome, what you might want to think of going forward is whether we've done an audit of a topic area that covers multiple ministries, where you might want to talk about the topic. Climate change, you know, is primarily the Ministry of Environment, but, for example, when we did seniors' care, that might have been a topic where you could have Health and Wellness and Seniors at the table to talk about that report. That may be something for the future that you'd want to think about. That's all. I'd just raise that.

The Chair: That's a very good idea, and we appreciate you bringing that up.

Mr. Chase: My only question was: did Health make it onto our list of ministries for review?

The Chair: No. We have Environment, we have Sustainable Resource Development, and we have Advanced Education and Technology. That would take us, certainly, through until probably the second week in May. Also, I would remind you – and Mr. Dallas brought this up – we can have out-of-session meetings again in the summer. I don't know when the fall session is starting. I'm told it could be in September this year, but we could certainly bring Alberta Health and Wellness or Alberta Health Services back at some point. Or do you want Alberta Health and Wellness on this list?

Mr. Chase: I just don't want to lose sight of it because Health and Wellness has been given a significant increase in their budget, and policy seems to be changing very rapidly. I didn't want to lose sight of that. Whether it's in the fall or out of session, just so it's on the list.

10:00

The Chair: Yes. But with this committee we would have to deal with fiscal year 2008-09, and in that annual report there is still a lot of information that we could address. You just have to look at the AG's report to see that there are still outstanding issues from that fiscal year. You're right.

In light of the time we are going to send a letter, and we're going to be flexible with the dates for Environment, Sustainable Resource Development, and Advanced Education and Technology to come. We're going to put them on the list after the meeting on the 14th of April. If they want to switch around, if one week is more convenient for them than any others. So that's agreeable?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Is there any other business committee members wish to raise?

Mr. Griffiths: One quick issue. Mr. Dallas raised it. We have had meetings out of session and talked to Crown corporations, agencies of this government. I think the point was missed. It would be nice to compile a list not just of the departments that we've had but all of the Crown corporations or agencies. I would love to see Horse Racing Alberta or the Wild Rose or an agency under the department we just talked to, parks and rec, whatever. They might be somebody we would want to call in. If we had a list, we could pick out some very interesting committees that we might like to bring in out of session.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Rodney: Just as an idea, perhaps we can have that list – you mentioned it would be by e-mail – before the next meeting. That could happen but also hard copies distributed at the end of the next meeting to be discussed at the end of the next meeting. It can't happen now. We don't have the list.

The Chair: We can make that part of the briefing materials.

Mr. Griffiths, I'm so disappointed that you have not read the report I tabled on behalf of this committee and its activities in the last year.

Mr. Griffiths: It's sitting on my desk. I haven't had a chance to read it yet. We have too many committees. I'm sorry; I haven't read your report yet. It's sitting on my desk in the Legislature. I will get to it this afternoon. Sorry about that.

The Chair: That's fine.

We will do that. We will get the list.

Okay. Now, the date of the next meeting is March 24 at 8:30 with Alberta Seniors and Community Supports.

Can I have a motion to adjourn, please?

Mr. Elniski: A motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much. Moved by Mr. Elniski that we're going to adjourn this meeting. All in favour? Great. Okay. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 10:02 a.m.]

