



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session

Standing Committee
on
Alberta's Economic Future

Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 15, 2023
3:30 p.m.

Transcript No. 30-4-9

**Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 30th Legislature
Fourth Session**

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

van Dijken, Glenn, Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock (UC), Chair
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (NDP), Deputy Chair
Bilous, Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (NDP),* Acting Deputy Chair

Allard, Tracy L., Grande Prairie (UC)
Armstrong-Homeniuk, Jackie, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (UC)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (Ind)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-West Henday (NDP)
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (UC)
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UC)**
Rowswell, Garth, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright (UC)
Stephan, Jason, Red Deer-South (UC)
Walker, Jordan, Sherwood Park (UC)

* substitution for Nicole Goehring

** substitution for Jackie Armstrong-Homeniuk

Also in Attendance

Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (NDP)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (NDP)

Support Staff

Shannon Dean, KC	Clerk
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
Trafton Koenig	Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Philip Massolin	Clerk Assistant and Director of House Services
Nancy Robert	Clerk of <i>Journals</i> and Committees
Sarah Amato	Research Officer
Christina Williamson	Research Officer
Warren Huffman	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
Aaron Roth	Committee Clerk
Rhonda Sorensen	Manager of Corporate Communications
Christina Steenbergen	Supervisor of Communications Services
Shannon Parke	Communications Consultant
Troy Rhoades	Communications Consultant
Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Director of Parliamentary Programs
Amanda LeBlanc	Deputy Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Participants

Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism

Hon. Todd Loewen, Minister

Dan Lux, Assistant Deputy Minister, Forestry

Shannon Marchand, Deputy Minister

Shane Schreiber, Assistant Deputy Minister, Parks Operations

3:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

[Mr. van Dijken in the chair]

Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism
Consideration of Main Estimates

The Chair: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone in attendance. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024.

I'd ask that we go around the table and have members introduce themselves for the record. Minister, when it comes to your turn, please also introduce the officials who are joining you at the table. My name is Glenn van Dijken. I'm the MLA for Athabasca-Barrhead-Westlock and the chair of this committee. We will begin, starting to my right.

Mrs. Allard: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon. Pleasure to join you. My name is Tracy Allard, MLA for Grande Prairie.

Mr. Rowswell: Garth Rowswell, MLA, Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright.

Ms Rosin: Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

Mr. McIver: Ric McIver, MLA for Calgary-Hays, number one in your hearts.

Mr. Walker: Good afternoon. Jordan Walker, MLA, Sherwood Park.

Mr. Stephan: Jason Stephan, MLA, Red Deer-South.

Mr. Loewen: Todd Loewen, MLA, Central Peace-Notley, Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism. On my immediate right I have Shannon Marchand, deputy minister. To his right I have Darrell Dancause, assistant deputy minister, financial services and senior financial officer. To my immediate left is Shane Schreiber, assistant deputy minister of parks, and to his left is Dan Lux, assistant deputy minister of forestry.

Mr. Bilous: Good afternoon. Deron Bilous, MLA, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Sweet: Good afternoon. Heather Sweet, MLA, Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Schmidt: Marlin Schmidt, Edmonton-Gold Bar.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to note the following substitution for the record: Ms Rosin for hon. Ms Armstrong-Homeniuk.

A few housekeeping items to address before we turn to the business at hand. Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* staff. Committee proceedings are live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. The audio- and videostream and transcripts of meetings can be accessed via the Legislative Assembly website. Participants in the room that wish to get on the speakers list should signal to the chair. Please set your cellphones and other devices to silent for the duration of the meeting.

Hon. members, the standing orders set out the process for consideration of the main estimates. A total of three hours has been scheduled for consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of

Forestry, Parks and Tourism. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation and speaking times. In brief, the minister or member of Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf will have 10 minutes to address the committee. At the conclusion of the minister's comments a 60-minute speaking block for the Official Opposition begins, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for independent members, if any, and then a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus. Individuals may only speak for up to 10 minutes at a time, but speaking times may be combined between the member and the minister.

After this, speaking times will follow the same rotation of the Official Opposition, independent members, and the government caucus. The member and the minister may each speak once for a maximum of five minutes, or these times may be combined, making it a 10-minute block. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please send an e-mail or message to the committee clerk about the process.

With the concurrence of the committee I will call a five-minute break near the midpoint of the meeting; however, the three-hour clock will continue to run. Does anyone oppose having a break? Okay. Seeing none, we will try to accommodate that around the middle of the meeting.

Ministry officials may be present and, at the direction of the minister, may address the committee. Ministry officials seated in the gallery, if called upon, have access to a microphone in the gallery area and are asked to please introduce themselves for the record prior to commenting.

Pages are available to deliver notes or other materials between the gallery and the table. Attendees in the gallery may not approach the table. Space permitting, opposition caucus staff may sit at the table to assist their members; however, members have priority to sit at the table at all times.

If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the ministry's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and the committee will adjourn.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and individual speaking times will be paused; however, the speaking block and the overall three-hour meeting clock will continue to run.

Any written material provided in response to questions raised during the main estimates should be tabled by the minister in the Assembly for the benefit of all members.

The vote on the estimates and any amendments will occur in Committee of Supply on March 16, 2023. Amendments must be in writing and approved by Parliamentary Counsel prior to the meeting at which they are to be moved. The original amendment is to be deposited with the committee clerk with 20 hard copies. An electronic version of the signed original should be provided to the committee clerk for distribution to committee members.

Finally, the committee should have the opportunity to hear both questions and answers without interruption during estimates debate. Debate flows through the chair at all times, including instances when speaking time is shared between a member and the minister.

I would now invite the Minister of Forestry, Parks and Tourism to begin with your opening remarks. Minister, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, and good afternoon, everyone. I'll take this opportunity again to introduce the ministry representatives joining me. At the table to my right I have Shannon Marchand, deputy minister. To his right I have Darrell Dancause, assistant deputy minister, financial services and senior financial officer. To my left I have Shane Schreiber, assistant deputy minister of parks, and to his left I have Dan Lux, assistant deputy minister, forestry.

Other ministry staff in attendance are Heather von Hauff, assistant deputy minister of lands operation; Leanne Niblock,

communications director; Drew Hiltz, chief of staff, deputy minister's office; and Kara Claypool, CFO, Travel Alberta. Also in attendance are minister's office staff Patrick Malkin, chief of staff, and Samantha Steinke, press secretary. Thank you all for being here.

The 2023 Forestry, Parks and Tourism operating budget meets the changing needs of Albertans and the economy by increasing funding that responsibly maintains our provincial parks and Crown lands while developing sustainable recreation opportunities, advancing Travel Alberta's mandate to grow and promote Alberta's tourism sector locally and internationally through increased funding, and providing for the continued sustainable management of our forests and public lands to ensure that they continue to provide social, economic, and environmental benefits to future generations. Resources allocated in this budget will be instrumental in ensuring that the department succeeds in this complex and important task, taking the actions necessary in order to achieve the results that Albertans expect and deserve.

Forestry, Parks and Tourism's 2023 operating budget is \$385.1 million, an increase of \$22.6 million from Budget '22. Budget 2023 also contains \$85 million in capital investment, an increase of \$31 million from Budget 2022. Budget '23 reflects a decrease in revenue from last fiscal, \$334.8 million, down from \$355.3 million in 2022. This variance is primarily due to market conditions that have caused forest product price fluctuations and lower 2023 federal funding within our cost-shared federal-provincial agreement for mountain pine beetle control. Now, that's a bird's-eye view. This year's budget provides essential resources that support our continued progress on key mandate items.

Our provincial parks and recreation areas are sought-after destinations for those seeking to explore the great outdoors. Budget 2023 reflects our commitment to sustainable outdoor recreation in Alberta's provincial parks and on our Crown lands. We estimate that Alberta parks received over 11 million visitors in 2022, with over 639,000 camper nights provided. Increasing access for Albertans, Alberta families, and visitors to our provincial parks while ensuring their future sustainability is a priority for our government.

The capital plan 2023 includes \$210 million over three years to improve and expand recreation and access in parks and across Crown lands. This includes \$500,000 for year 1 and \$51.5 million of capital funding over 10 years to develop new campgrounds and priority locations, with the goal of creating 900 new campsites and four new locations for comfort camping.

We have also committed \$57.8 million to upgrade and refurbish existing campgrounds and parks infrastructure, with another \$5.2 million for additional parks assets as part of the lower Athabasca and South Saskatchewan regional plans, and \$4.4 million for upgrades in parks and public lands recreation areas in the David Thompson corridor. Year 1 also includes \$2 million as well as an additional \$33.7 million of capital funding over seven years to build and improve our trail system.

We're also working to improve the visitor experience by increasing operational staff to oversee and enhance the day-to-day operation of our parks and Crown lands. Across summer and winter operations in 2023 we're prepared to recruit a total of 566 seasonal wage staff for positions that maintain front-line park operations, facilitate personnel and visitor safety, and provide environmentally responsible recreation opportunities in our parks. These staff directly support government platform commitments to promote tourism, development, and conserve our environment.

3:40

We recognize that interpretational programming is an important and enriching component of the visitor experience, too. Budget 2023

completes the restoration of this programming to core prepandemic service levels throughout Alberta.

In tandem with our efforts to enhance visitor infrastructure and experience, we're working hard to develop and maintain a vibrant tourism sector for all of Alberta. As Travel Alberta's mandate to drive growth for our visitor economy through promotion broadens, Budget 2023 ensures that the agency has the resources it needs to succeed. In order to be a successful champion of our tourism industry, the resources that government commits must reflect the size and scope of the sector's urgent needs. In 2023 Travel Alberta will receive \$71.9 million in funding as it fulfills its roles and responsibilities under this strategy. That's an increase of nearly 14 per cent over this year to address our government's additional priorities to advance tourism. This includes allocating \$10 million over two years for rural tourism programming and \$15 million over three years for enhanced marketing and promotional initiatives in Travel Alberta.

Additional funding approved in Budget '23 also commits \$3.5 million to support a successful air access expansion strategy. These investments reinforce the strategic direction of Travel Alberta to drive the growth of Alberta's visitor economy through the development of new tourism products, marketing to increase consideration of Alberta as a travel destination, and efforts to ensure visitors have access to Alberta's destinations and experiences.

Travel Alberta is leading engagement with tourism partners and communities to accelerate the development of opportunities in areas outside of mountain parks, supporting government's regional economic development and diversification goals. Early engagement is under way, and destination development plans are anticipated soon. Exciting must-visit opportunities for tourism abound throughout our province, and it's critical that we showcase these alongside our better known legacy destinations.

In addition to ensuring funding for destination management, organizations, and other important provincial tourism initiatives on Crown lands, my department is working with Travel Alberta to ensure that important components of our tourism strategy integrate with applicable Crown land planning and management processes. Throughout this collaboration we have been engaging with tourism-sector partners and advocates to ensure that our shared goals are met. Our volunteer, parks, and public lands management partners are a valued part of Alberta's Crown land history, and as respected contributors to the delivery of recreation opportunities in the province they've been clear with government that trail management work should be supported by sustainable funding.

Alberta's government has responded with long-term recreation partner funding associated with the Trails Act. Budget '23 provides \$4 million for this program for '23-24, which will continue in future years, of which \$3 million is committed to supporting official trail managers, including the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association, the Alberta Snowmobile Association, and other hiking, mountain biking, cross-country, and nonmotorized trail partners as they maintain, operate, and improve recreation on Alberta's public lands across the province.

Managing our working landscape to sustain environmental and economic benefits and the protection of our forested Crown lands from natural threats is a priority for my department. Nearly two decades of mountain pine beetle infestations have left their mark on our forests, but Alberta's control programs are working. Just this past December we were pleased to report a 94 per cent total decline in beetle populations in the key areas of importance, the eastern slopes and west central part of Alberta.

As well, crucial funding is allocated to maintain and increase Alberta's preparedness throughout the 2023 wildfire season. This budget commits \$100.4 million in wildfire management funding that provides for seasonal firefighters, support staff, and contracted

Indigenous fire attack crews; the ongoing maintenance of Alberta's wildfires capital infrastructure, including 33 fire bases, 13 air tanker bases, 127 wildfire lookouts, and 65 weather stations as well as specialized aircraft and over 1,000 pieces of other contracted heavy equipment. Ahead of the 2023 wildfire season we awarded a new 10-year contract with an estimated value of \$60 million for the operation, maintenance, and storage of the province's fleet of four CL-215T air tankers.

Alberta's forested public lands are a source of prosperity for communities throughout the province. Properly managed forests are a renewable resource, and the forest jobs action plan is this government's commitment to provide secure fibre access for forest companies, maintaining forest jobs and ensuring proper, sustainable forest management. Forest management agreements and other forms of forest tenure provide forest companies with the right to harvest Crown timber in exchange for responsibilities such as forest management planning and inventory to standards set by government. Last year our government renewed forest management agreements with Weyerhaeuser Pembina, Weyerhaeuser Grande Prairie, and the High Level joint FMA, including Tolko, West Fraser, and the La Crête sawmills.

I see I'm running out of time, so I'd like to conclude by saying that Budget '23 strives to address the diverse and evolving needs of Albertans.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. Hon. members, you will be able to see the timer for the speaking block both in the committee room and on Microsoft Teams. Members of the Official Opposition, would you like to combine your time with the minister's?

Mr. Bilous: I would, yes, for the first block.

The Chair: Okay. Member Bilous, you may proceed, if that's okay with you, Minister?

Mr. Loewen: Do I have a choice to change back and forth, or for the 60-minute block I have to choose?

The Chair: For the 60-minute block you choose whether to combine your time or to do block time. It will be for the 60-minute block.

Mr. Loewen: Okay, I'll go block time, then.

The Chair: Okay. Member Bilous, you may proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Chair, are you sure that the minister can't choose for each 20-minute block?

The Chair: What we have in the standing orders . . .

Mr. McIver: Does anyone object to the minister taking . . .

The Chair: Order, please.

What we have in the standing orders is that we have the opportunity for the minister and the members of the Official Opposition – for the hour that follows, they may speak. When I ask the question at the beginning, it's: members, would you like to combine your time with the minister's? We don't necessarily divide them up into 20-minute blocks. We have 60 minutes for debate or for discussion. The maximum any one individual can speak is 10 minutes. I think what we need to ensure is that we have a way to proceed without interjecting at every speaker.

MLA Sweet, you have a comment?

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In past practice in other estimates, when the speaker and the person asking the question changes, the opportunity is to ask the minister again whether or not they want to go back and forth. We've done that in other committee meetings. I'm just wondering if there is a will of the committee to be able to do that. I can put a motion forward saying that when the speaker changes, the minister has the prerogative to decide whether he wants to go back and forth.

The Chair: The committee clerk leads me to believe that if we move from changing from combined to block time, it's in between different blocks of time. So we've got a 60-minute block at this time, and then we'll move to a 20-minute block for independent members, a 20-minute block for government caucus members, and in each block we can consider those at that time.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: So for now, for this 60-minute block, we will proceed with block time.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Excellent. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister and to your officials, for being here and for all the work that they do. You know, I'm very proud of our civil service that we have here in Alberta, that delivers a high quality of service to the people of Alberta. That needs to be recognized.

I'll start off in this first block asking questions around Travel Alberta. I want to state that I've been talking to many people in the tourism industry who have nothing but accolades for Travel Alberta. Where the entity, I think, has done a really good job is in reinventing itself; it is very different from the Travel Alberta of 10 years ago. I know that many of the dollars that flow through Travel Alberta are flowing to communities and throughout the province.

3:50

My first question will be: can the minister outline some of the projects that Travel Alberta is investing in, again recognizing that the entity is doing destination development in addition to marketing? That is something that was introduced under the current UCP government, which we as the opposition supported. I believe Alberta is only one of two jurisdictions in Canada that has the same entity that does marketing as destination development.

I'm curious to know if the minister can give a breakdown on how many dollars are being partnered with Indigenous Tourism. I know for a fact that the CEO of Travel Alberta was just in Winnipeg last week with the CEO of Indigenous Tourism to announce a joint partnership on the federal stage. If the minister can provide some detail as to some of the projects that those investments will be going to. I'm very interested to know how the partnership agreements are structured with Indigenous communities. Again, shared ownership, equity stakes: is it dollars that just flow through? If the minister can comment on some of the projects specifically with Indigenous Tourism but also other destination development that Travel Alberta has targeted.

I believe this is year 3 of destination development, the additional \$20 million that Travel Alberta has been receiving. I appreciate that this year's budget, Minister, is almost \$72 million. Is there a commitment or has there been a commitment for funding over a several-year period, or are the dollars for Travel Alberta for destination development only for this current budget? I believe we're on the third year of three from a previous commitment. If the minister can clarify that, that would be wonderful.

The minister commented on \$3.5 million air access expansion strategy, which, again, I think, you know, off the top sounds good. Most tourists come to Alberta via air. They don't drive across. If

you count the handful from Saskatchewan and the handful from B.C., then, yes, but the majority of our travellers come through our airports. I'm curious to know what kind of partnership agreements are going to take place between the ministry and YYC and YEG to help with that. I know that the former Premier had an agreement announced with WestJet to help improve air access. I'm curious if any of this \$3.5 million has been allocated from a previous announcement or if that's where some of the money is going for that agreement with WestJet.

The \$15 million over three years for marketing: if yourself, Minister, or Travel Alberta can talk about the priority markets for travel. Again, I know that there have been a number of campaigns that are going on, recognizing, again, that the tourism industry was hit harder than any other sector in COVID, recognizing that we, unfortunately, lost many restaurants. Hoteliers suffered significantly. I know the campaigns in the past year have been focused on attracting Canadian travellers to Alberta. Now, obviously, we're launching international campaigns. If the minister can give some detail on that.

I'd also love to know, with all my questions, Minister, if you can share with the committee what the metrics are or how we measure success. What are the targeted outcomes that we're anticipating? Again, how do we define success when we look at travellers? Again, I'm not sure if the metric that Travel Alberta uses is in passenger numbers or if it's in expenditures or dollars that are spent.

If we could get a bit of a breakdown as well on forecasted tourism or people participating in the visitor economy and a breakdown or a breakout between Canadians and the numbers of travellers in Alberta. On the tourism dollars that are being spent, how many of those are Albertans spending money in our own province, and how many of them are Canadians coming to Alberta to spend money? Then how many are international travellers, which, I would imagine, helps inform Travel Alberta's strategy on where to target? I am very curious to know which markets globally.

If the minister can also comment on: how is his ministry leveraging Alberta's international trade offices? We have strategic offices located globally. They do many things in the trade offices, but obviously promoting Alberta is one of them. How does the Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism work with our trade offices directly? I don't know of this, but I can tell you that I know that Agriculture has policy or program officers in some of the international offices that are from Agriculture and know that file, so I'm just curious if there are any from this ministry that are embedded in any of our trade offices. How do we ensure that our trade offices are properly marketing Alberta?

Minister you commented on destination development plans that are coming soon. Again, I appreciate that. I would love to know a bit more of a timeline. If there are any that you can share at the moment, that would be very, very useful.

How am I for time? Three minutes.

In one of the blocks later on I think we'll get into a bit of a discussion on Crown lands. I know from conversations with the Tourism Industry Association of Alberta that they're very interested in looking at how we can make use of our Crown lands to develop more destinations for tourism. I know that they are focused on a sustainable plan. We're talking about using the surface; we're not talking about digging, you know, holes in the ground and ripping up important Crown lands. How can we develop them responsibly and sustainably to be able to promote tourism while also balancing conservation?

There was a – no. I'll jump to that one later. Yeah.

Really, Minister, it's questions – I know organizations have reached out just wanting to know if you can comment on: how do we balance conservation with economic development? How do we

ensure that if we're developing new product, we are doing it in a way that is as sustainable as possible, respecting, obviously, the lands that we've been blessed with but recognizing that tourism is a real opportunity as an economic driver?

In my last minute and a half here, in key objective 2.1 the objective is to "minimize regulatory and process barriers to improve service delivery, reduce red tape, support economic opportunities on crown lands and forests." If you could flesh that out, through you, Mr. Chair, to the minister. What are some of those barriers? How is the department working with – I would imagine that some of the approvals are still over in Environment, so if the minister can talk about that.

You know, one of the concerns that I had with the ministry of environment and parks being split into two is that now we've got two different ministries that are dealing with things like regulatory approvals, and my concern is that we've heard stories of some approvals taking long periods of time to get over the finish line. This division: I'd love to hear what impact it's having so far. My concern is that it's going to have a negative impact on those timelines. I don't know if the minister can comment on if there are specific targets that are now embedded in the decision-making process. Obviously, we want due process, but we don't want them to take too long.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Member Bilous.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, and thanks for those questions. I appreciate that. You started off by talking about the good work that Travel Alberta is doing, and I agree. They are doing some great work there when it comes to the projects that they've invested in and with Indigenous Tourism and everything.

I just want to maybe talk a little bit about some of the things that they're doing. As the destination management organization Travel Alberta's programs are focused on helping businesses develop memorable tourism products and experiences, marketing those experiences to potential visitors, and ensuring that visitors have access to and within the province. Some of the notable past investments include the River of Death and the discovery dinosaur museum society at Wembley. Travel Alberta invested just under \$25,000 to support that new experience at Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum. Another thing: Travel Alberta has invested \$500,000 in growth funding towards the installation of the alpine mountain Canyon Coaster. That's in the Canyon Ski Resort in central Alberta. There are a lot of jobs that have been created with those projects.

4:00

Now, we talk about support to rural tourism, talking about \$5 million a year for that. Travel Alberta's tourism investment program provides \$50 million in annual funding to support tourism operators. In the past fiscal year the program supported 166 projects across 73 communities. About 75 per cent of the projects and 70 per cent of the funding were in smaller urban and rural areas of the province. The funding for each project ranged from \$5,000 to \$1.2 million, with an average funding of about \$90,000 each.

Travel Alberta has been directing \$6.5 million a year to support an air access expansion strategy. That's also been very successful. I think later on you ask about the metrics to define success when it comes to that. What they have found is that, I think, that increased – the actual travellers that have increased to Alberta has been 46,000 that they've seen. That's how they're measuring success, by actual people in the seats travelling to Alberta. So I think that's been a great success. There are plans, of course, to continue that going forward.

Now, when it comes to Indigenous Tourism, I believe there's some money that's headed to Métis Crossing, I think \$500,000. I believe there's an agreement that they're working on right now that, I think, will increase the – so that's, yeah, \$500,000 towards that. But I think there's an agreement coming forward that they'll increase their past investment with Indigenous Tourism. I don't know if that's been announced yet, so I don't want to get ahead of myself on that one.

Mr. Marchand: They announced it.

Mr. Loewen: Oh, they announced it. Okay. I think it's \$2 million a year for Indigenous Tourism, which I think is a great opportunity. Indigenous tourism is something that's very attractive for people from outside of our country, and it's something that attracts a lot of attention world-wide. So I think we're in a good position there.

Now, the \$72 million. I think the question was: is that just this current year? No. I think that's planned to continue on into the future, and I think that's reflected in the budget as far as the next couple of years.

Okay. Oh, the \$3 million air access program with the partnership agreements. We do have an MOU with WestJet, but that doesn't involve any money going to WestJet. That MOU with WestJet has provided them the opportunity to call Calgary their hub and move the number of aircraft, from 60 aircraft to 100 aircraft, that are stationed in Calgary. So that's been good on that memorandum of understanding. But the overall air access plan includes all airlines that are bringing people into the province.

Okay. You mentioned about tourism suffering through COVID, and you're absolutely right. I mean, things have recovered a lot, but there are still some sectors of the tourism industry that haven't recovered yet. We're looking forward to trying to get things back on track across the board. You're right. We lost a lot of businesses. People lost a lot of jobs and lost a lot of money during that time.

Let's see here. A breakdown in forecasted tourism. Oh, sorry. As far as the number of people that are coming in and what the breakdown is, Canada versus Alberta versus international, if I remember rightly – and we will probably find those numbers here – 56 per cent, I think it was. Okay. This is kind of broken down into regions, but I believe overall it was that 56 per cent were Albertans. I have a regional breakdown, but I believe there's a provincial breakdown on it, too. I want to say – and this will be just speaking off the top of my head – that about 56 per cent were Albertans, 25 per cent were Canadians, and 20 per cent international, if I remember rightly. I could have the 25 and 20 mixed up there, but just to give you an idea, anyway. I have seen those numbers, but I just don't seem to have them in front of me right now.

We talk about – let's see – Crown lands, to develop more destination opportunities. I think that when we talk about development on Crown lands and within parks and doing that in an environmentally safe way, we do have rules and regulations where we have, you know, policy frameworks. The government does have the regional plans and the subregional plans. We do have vision documents and other documents that we have to follow as we develop, and we want to make sure that we do that in an environmentally responsible way. It's part of my mandate to develop an environmentally responsible policy framework for recreation on Crown lands and to invest in campgrounds and trails to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality, low-cost recreation sites for Albertans. Increasing access to our provincial parks while ensuring their future sustainability is a priority for this government. All development in parks is already subject to strict environmental and cultural reviews, so a part of this environmentally responsible framework is reaffirming the vision for Alberta Parks, keeping

parks for people, sustaining the environment, and supporting tourism and recreation outcomes.

Our provincial park system benefits every Albertan, supporting physical, mental, social well-being while attracting visitors. The Crown land reclamation framework will define goals related to outdoor recreation to ensure government is working towards common outcomes across the diverse landscape, provide an updated and consistent lexicon for recreation across Crown lands, and identify and define distinct recreation settings described and differentiated based on their character, accessibility, natural characteristics, usage, and on-site operations. These can be analyzed spatially to identify forest priorities, forecast priority areas for planning and development.

You asked about the interaction with international offices. Forestry provides data to trade offices for potential investors, also promotes sustainable management frameworks. So there is that communication going back and forth with those international offices.

Let's see here. There was a comment on red tape reduction. When it comes to red tape reduction, we have – oh, and actually we have that document here. We're working on the timelines on permits. That was something that was brought up. When it comes to timelines on permits, that's something that we focused on right from the start, when I became minister. They have reviewed approval time items and timelines and identified opportunities to shorten existing service standards and establish service standards where they do not already exist. These changes will ensure timelier review in decision-making processes. We have done a lot on that. I think you will find that the people of Alberta that have to deal with the government on those kinds of approvals will have seen a marked improvement. Again, I think there's still work to do. I don't believe we're done there, but I think, looking forward, we've seen some of these approval timelines drop dramatically, and we'll continue to see that happen as we go forward.

There are some changes going to be happening to the digital regulatory assurance system, or DRAS, as it's called. That's something that has helped and will help in the future to shorten the timelines by having things done more online.

I'm just trying to think of any other questions that we may have missed. I guess we are kind of running short on time here.

Oh, you talked about working with the other departments and with Environment and Protected Areas. We have a lot of connectivity between the two departments even though they're split into two ministries. The departments themselves are working well with each other. Environment and Protected Areas deals more with policy, and we deal more with operations. I think there's a great relationship there that's been developed and continues to happen there.

I think that's it. Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I'm going to ask the committee clerk to pause the block time clock at this time. I want to provide some clarification with regard to the determination for speaking times as a block versus combined times. Parliamentary Counsel has essentially instructed us that we can do combined time for some, speaking blocks for others, but what it is going to require is for each member, when they're done with their time that they want to speak, if they're going to cede their times to another member, to through the chair cede the time. Then the chair will ask the member if they want to be combined time or block time. Each time that we move into a position of deciding with a new member asking questions, making comments, then we'll have to ask the question: do you want to have combined time or block time? We will allow that to occur. As we move forward, members

will cede their time but then give time for the chair to actually ask the question of whether or not we're going to continue with combined time or block time. Sorry for the inconvenience for the first 10 minutes.

We will now start with the next set of questions from the Official Opposition. Okay. MLA Schmidt. Combined time or block time?

4:10

Mr. Schmidt: If the minister is amenable, I would like to combine time.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Loewen: I'll stick with block on this one.

The Chair: Block time? Okay. We will proceed with block time.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you to the minister for coming to answer some questions. First of all, let me congratulate him on his appointment. I note that it was a year ago that his predecessor told him in the Legislature: "What a joke. That's why your career is over." Now you're here answering questions and he is not, so congratulations on that.

A bunch of my questions have to do with the Trails Act. First of all, outcome 3, key objective 3.2 in the business plan includes the implementation of the Trails Act. Now, on April 20, 2020, your predecessor issued a ministerial order designating trails, but this designation occurred with no public input, no consultation, and the ministerial order was issued without notice. I'm wondering why the public was shut out of the process of this trail designation, and I'm curious what the minister can tell us about what process will be used to designate trails in the future.

My second question is related to trail density in southern Alberta. A recent report shows that about a quarter of the trails that exist on the landscape in southern Alberta, particularly in areas like Kananaskis and the Ghost public land-use zone, don't appear on any official maps. That amounts to about 6,000 kilometres of undocumented trails that, if they continue to be used, will put the health of the land, the water, and our wildlife at risk. I'm curious what the minister can tell us about why his government has failed to properly manage recreation in southern Alberta and what he's going to do to enhance sustainable outdoor recreation, particularly in the area of southern Alberta, where use is so intense.

I have some boring procedural questions about the Trails Act. The Trails Act clearly spells out the requirement to develop trails management plans for designated trails subject to the regulations. Now, almost a year after the trails were designated by order, that I mentioned in the first question, there are no trail management regulations and no trail management plans. Why has the government failed to follow its own law for a year? Where can I find the regulations related to trail management plans? If they aren't available, when does the minister expect that those will be made available? Now, the business plan quite clearly says and the minister said in his opening statements that trail management plans are being developed. What's the process for developing them? Who will be involved with their development, especially in the absence of regulations? Unless the minister chooses to inform us about what the regulations say here today.

My next question is about the designation of trails managers. On February 17 the minister announced the designation of the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association as trails managers. The act clearly states that these appointments can only be made subject to the regulations, yet as I said, again, there are no regulations. How were trail managers

appointed before regulations were published? Can the minister speak to the legal mechanism for appointing these trails managers? Is it by order in council? Is it by a ministerial order? Is there some other appointment process that the department has to follow to designate these trails managers?

I'm asking the minister to not only provide us the legal instrument by which these appointments were made. What was the process followed to select these organizations as trail managers? How can future potential trail managers expect to be considered to be appointed as trail managers, especially in the absence of any clear process or regulations in this case? Again, the same February 17 announcement went on to say that trails management agreements are being developed with these trail managers, the Alberta Snowmobile Association and the Off Highway Vehicle Association. The Trails Act clearly requires that trail management agreements have to be developed subject to the regulations. Where are the regulations? In the absence of regulations, what is the process for developing the trails management agreements?

My next question is about the money that will be assigned to trails managers. The announcement on February 17 said that the Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association will each get \$4 million, totalling \$8 million. Now, it's noted that hikers, bikers, cross-country skiers have to pay the K Country pass to use the trails in K Country. The Off Highway Vehicle Association and Alberta Snowmobile Association don't pay any fee to use the trails in K Country, and the hikers, bikers, and cross-country skiers who do get money from the K Country pass don't get nearly as much as the Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association have received in the past. I'm wondering if the minister will either start charging off-highway vehicle and snowmobile users a fee to use trails in Kananaskis Country, or will he scrap the K Country pass so that fairness is restored to the fee system for using Alberta's outdoors, particularly K Country?

My next question is related to the opening statement that the minister made. He indicated that this budget contains \$4 million for implementation of the Trails Act, \$3 million for off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles and others. I'm wondering if the minister can clearly tell us who the others are, how much each organization will get, how these organizations were chosen, and will they get the same level of ongoing funding that the Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Snowmobile Association are getting?

Now, the minister also said that there was \$4 million designated for use in the Trails Act, but only \$3 million would be given to the Off Highway Vehicle Association, the Snowmobile Association, and others. What's that other million dollars for? Who will spend that, and who will oversee that spending? Can the minister tell us which line items in the estimates this money appears in? Because it's not clear to me which particular line item or line items on – I assume it's page 99 of the estimates that this money for implementation of the Trails Act will come from.

My final questions for this block are related to the K Country pass. We know that the department is paying \$2 million a year to a private company to enforce the K Country pass. The K Country pass last year collected around \$12 million, so about 20 per cent of the fee is just going to pay for the enforcement of the fee. I'm wondering what the minister will do to ensure that more money collected from the K pass is going towards providing the things that the government promised when they introduced the K pass. That's recreational facility enhancement, increased enforcement, all of those kinds of things. Last year I asked your predecessor for a full accounting of the K Country pass. Now, he continued to imply or state directly, in fact, that the K Country pass was earmarked revenue. That is false. Can the minister confirm that the K Country does indeed go

into general revenue? But can he also confirm how much is planned to be collected and exactly where that money is going to go?

4:20

My final question is related to, again, K Country pass spending. Now, I note that in the fiscal plan of the government schedule 22 lists that the full-time equivalents of the Forestry, Parks and Tourism department are going to be increased by 104 staff. How many of those staff are being funded from the K pass? How much money is that? And how many of those additional staff are going to be working in K Country enforcing compliance with the regulations and environmental protections that are there?

I look forward to the minister's answers.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, MLA Schmidt.

Minister, you have up to 10 minutes to respond.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much, and thank you to the member for the questions. Thanks for the congratulations, too. I appreciate that. We started off really nice there, so that was good.

You start on the Trails Act and the implementation and things like that. I just want to kind of go through, you know, the Trails Act here. The Trails Act establishes the foundation for a sustainable trail management system on public land, allows trails to be designated for specific uses such as hiking or riding on off-highway vehicles, enables improved trail planning, strengthens protection of trails by designating them as a Crown resource so they can be protected and managed, and facilitates a larger role for partners in maintaining trails.

Outdoor activities and opportunities are something Albertans look forward to at all times of the year, which is why our government is investing \$6 million in trails through Budget 2023. To help keep trails safe and accessible for all Albertans, we officially appointed the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Snowmobile Association as trail managers. Both associations have done important work across the province for years, and their continued work will ensure the sustainability of some of the province's most popular trails while conserving the landscape and protecting the environment. These first two trail agreements will be evaluated and used to develop similar agreements with other organizations across the province in the future, including hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and other trail users. The appointments align with the mandate letter commitment for trails to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality, low-cost recreation sites for Albertans.

I think some of your questions revolved around, you know: why the amount of money for the off-highway vehicles versus others? I think we have to realize – and it seems like you seem to be concerned also about off-highway vehicle use and how it affects the environment. Obviously, we need to make sure that these funds are being used to protect the environment, to develop the trails in an environmentally responsible manner. I think the funds that are used there are well spent. When we use organizations like these, they use volunteers to do a lot of the work, so we actually get a lot more done for the taxpayer's dollar by using these organizations like that. The use is substantially different between hikers and off-highway vehicles.

You mentioned about, I think, the \$1 million between the \$3 million and \$4 million, the \$1 million dollar difference. That goes to internal trail management. You also asked about where this is found in the budget. It's under element 4.1 in the budget, that outlines the amount of money for the trails partnerships.

As far as other organizations that are included that we are working with, we have the Alberta Hiking Association, the Alberta Equestrian

Federation, Crownsnest Pass Quad Squad, Bragg Creek Trails, the Great Divide Trail Association. I won't go through the whole list, but there's a lot of – yeah. The Alberta Equestrian Federation Society has received money for different things; the Hinton Mountain Bike Association, the Great Divide Trail Association. These haven't been confirmed or publicly announced, so some of this stuff is, I guess, somewhat sensitive. I can't give amounts and give a complete list, but once that's final, then it will be public, and you'll be able to know what's happening there. There are, again, lots of organizations, not just the ones outlined as trail managers, that will be on the receiving end of some of these funds.

I just want to kind of go back. Okay. We're going to go to – okay. Maybe I'll just turn the time over to Deputy Minister Marchand to cover just a couple of those questions, too.

Mr. Marchand: Sure. Thank you, Minister. Just in terms of the delegation of the trail managers, my understanding is that the act allows the designation subject to regulation. The trail managers, obviously, I think, as the minister has said, need to align with the approved land-use plans. Agreements have been being developed with the two organizations that, as the minister identified, have a long-standing working relationship, but agreements for the funding, so there's a clear understanding of what the objectives are for the use of that funding and alignment to all the environmental protections.

Just a little bit more additional information on that. I'll turn it back to you, Minister.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much.

There were comments on and questions on the conservation pass. I just want to go through a little bit there. I am committed to reviewing the conservation pass. Meanwhile the KCP remains in place and continues to be enforced. KCP funding is supporting outdoor recreation and conservation partnerships in Kananaskis. I'm committed to ensuring that the review is thorough, fair, and considerate of the region's future. All aspects of the pass are under review, and all options are being considered. It is important to ensure our review reflects the diversity of opinions while prioritizing affordability and promoting outdoor recreation and tourism.

Rushing our review would be a disservice to those who love Kananaskis Country. It continues to be a destination for Albertans and visitors from across the country and around the world, with more than 4 million people exploring the area annually, so it's important to ensure that we have the right solutions in place to support outdoor recreation, public safety, and conservation. As the owners of Kananaskis Country Albertans can and should expect that the fees collected for visiting the area are being reinvested to support the area. Fees should not be cost prohibitive or prevent Albertans from accessing our provincial parks and recreation areas.

A portion of the pass revenue supports grant funding to improve recreational opportunities for hiking, biking, equestrian activities, and skiing and support the shared conservation outcomes for fish and wildlife and maintain partnerships in the delivery of conservation projects; \$300,000 in partnership grants are planned for '23-24. We're grateful for the work of our partners and the dedication, collaboration, innovation in the sustainability of our provincial parks and protected areas systems. As mentioned, in 2021 the KCP generated \$12 million in revenues that were reinvested in K Country.

I'm just going to go through here. Forestry, Parks and Tourism is currently spending \$1.3 million on staff and service contracts. It's actually expected in '22-23 to earn \$11.5 million. Some of those initiatives are new conservation initiatives: grants, partnerships, research, \$500,000; conservation and human-wildlife coexistence, \$450,000; expanded investment in local trail organizations to

improve partnerships in trail stewardship, \$940,000; maintaining 1,600 kilometres of trails, \$1.2 million in total, so in the summer \$700,000, in the winter \$500,000; public safety and dispatch programs, \$1.5 million; Crown land enforcement via conservation officers, \$1 million; recreation management, including approvals and permitting, park rangers, planning, admin, and management, \$1.5 million.

It's improving access to protect the land as well as supporting use by increased numbers of visitors, so supporting operations of specialized facilities, including Canmore Nordic Centre, \$1.1 million, and William Watson Lodge, \$750,000; completing facility infrastructure maintenance and operations, about \$500,000; then, as you mentioned, the enforcement of \$2 million. You mentioned about the enforcement. I think one thing that we wanted to be sure of is that we didn't divert staff from their front-line duties and their important duties that they have right now for enforcement. That's why the contract was made with an Alberta-based Global Traffic Group.

The other options were considerably more costly and less efficient, including things like road booths and parking lot kiosks, which are resource intensive and create additional issues such as traffic congestion.

4:30

Again, we have a lot of good work being done in Kananaskis Country. I think that when we look at the total amount of money that's spent in Kananaskis, I would say that we're roughly spending \$50 million a year in Kananaskis both with operational money and capital money. I think that in the past it was \$18 million to \$20 million a year in operational. Now it's up to \$23 million. In the past there were, you know, some figures in the \$20 million for capital, and I think this year we're around \$30 million in capital expenditures in Kananaskis. So there is a significant amount of money and resources that are being spent in Kananaskis. In that light, I can't understand your concerns on that, making sure that Kananaskis is taken care of properly, because it is, you know, considered a crown jewel by many in this province.

I'm just trying to think if there are any other questions that we may have missed. You talked about the 104 new approved FTEs: 84 for parks; 51 FTEs will help meet the government's mandate priorities pertaining to Alberta's parks system, including high-quality visitor experiences that are affordable; 10 for new capital infrastructure development.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Minister.

MLA Sweet, would you like combined time or block time?

Ms Sweet: I'd like to go back and forth if the minister will allow.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. We will proceed in that manner.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate going back and forth. I think we get a lot more conversation happening, and it gives us a little bit more detail.

I'm sure it's not a surprise to anybody that I'll be focusing on forests and forestry, page 99 of the estimates, lines 2, 2.1, and 2.2, and then looking at page 57 as well as 56 of the business plan, I think, just to keep it simple.

First off, I'm just curious when we're looking at the business plan, outcome 1, key objective 1.3, to "protect the health and resilience of Alberta's forest resources through . . . wildfire management including the exploration and adoption of innovative technologies." That's on

page 56. First, there's almost a \$1.5 million decrease in the budget from 2022 to 2023 towards wildfire management. However, the initiatives supporting this objective claim that \$4 million will be allocated to wildfire innovation. Why is there a decrease in funding in this area? Then we have this inconsistency between the decrease and the \$4 million.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. The decrease is because of capital moving from one year to the next. I believe it's a difference because there is some decrease, some increase, but the balance ends up being \$1.5 million.

Ms Sweet: So it's more related to the split of the ministries, then? No?

Mr. Loewen: Go ahead, Deputy Minister.

Mr. Marchand: It's the split of the vote between what shows up in operating versus capital.

Ms Sweet: Oh. I see.

Mr. Marchand: It had to move in-year.

Ms Sweet: Okay. That makes sense.

What are you classifying as wildfire innovation?

Mr. Loewen: Okay. There are several projects on the go right now when it comes to wildfire fighting. One of the things is camera technology to detect smoke and improve response capabilities. There's a predictive modelling program using artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance wildfire prediction efforts and allocate resources more efficiently and long-range drone technology. That's in partnership with an organization called Pegasus Imagery. Also something that is new that could be a real game-changer is helicopter night operations, being able to operate helicopters at night when it comes to wildfire suppression.

Those are some of the things right now that we're working on. Full integration of these emerging technologies into Alberta's wildfire management program will be formalized through revisions to standard operating procedures and operational directives and will be subject to cost-benefit analysis and operational assessment. These projects will continue during the 2023 wildfire season, so the evaluation will continue. To enhance wildfire fighter respiratory protection: that actually has to do with some different masks that they're looking at, too.

There are several different things with innovation that we are working on.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Interesting about night helicopter observation.

Has the ministry also explored bringing back our rappel teams, our wildfire fighters and the rap attack program?

Mr. Loewen: I'd say that we're still looking at all options there, but again, when it comes to being able to operate the helicopters at night, I think that can be a huge advantage because a lot of times the thunderstorms happen at night. Being able to respond in the night would be a big advantage to be able to take care of the fires in a timely manner.

Ms Sweet: Okay. We had a concern last year when it came to hiring up and being able to ensure that we had enough firefighters on the ground in the time that we needed to. There was a delay last year around being able to be fully staffed. Can you tell me where we are today? How many FTEs have already been filled? We know, like,

the wildfire season has already started. Are we ready to go, and do we have all of our FTEs and all of the positions filled?

Mr. Loewen: Okay. I know that we're already working on hiring and prepping for the new season, but maybe I'll let Dan speak specifically to that if you don't mind that.

Dan Lux, the assistant deputy minister of forestry.

Mr. Lux: Thank you. Thank you, Minister. Yes, we're actively recruiting our seasonal staff right now for the wildfire season. Some of them are going to be returnees from last year. We've implemented a new program to get them back in the system a bit more easily. About 50 to 60 per cent of our seasonal staff will be returnees, so it actually gives them a little more certainty on the jobs and gives us some certainty of having those resources available.

Right now what we're looking at is having by May 15, which is really when we have our biggest push for the wildfire, about 432 seasonal firefighters. We also are looking at about 280 fire tech contractors, which are Indigenous contracts that also support our wildfire efforts, and 330 people for support staff, things like doing logistics for us, communications, as well as the equipment and our contractors. So far we're still doing our recruitment. Right now, you know, we're doing the big push for recruitment. They're going through the training. They have to do the fitness testing, and we expect to have them up and ready by May.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Thank you.

Pine beetle, since it does relate to forest fires. I noticed a decrease. I am very happy to hear that because of our cold weather we were able to inoculate a percentage of that. I mean, I think the harvesting that happened as well has helped around the management of that. There used to be a transfer from Saskatchewan to Alberta in regard to managing the pine beetle program. I see here that there is a reduction in the budget, and I'm curious if – two parts. The first part is: is part of that reduction because we are recognizing that in the management of the pine beetle, funding may not be required to be as high? Also, are we still receiving those transfers from other provinces to help manage the program?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I believe we're still receiving some money from Saskatchewan. I don't think it's as much as it has been in the past. I just want to say off the top of my head that it was around \$500,000 for this upcoming year, but there also was a decrease in the fed funding, though I think that was to do with – I might have somebody else take over on that one, but there was a slight decrease from the feds' funding on the mountain pine beetle.

You're exactly right. The pine beetle situation has definitely improved across Alberta. We are still concerned in the southwestern part of Alberta, in the Bow Valley, in the Calgary area. That's one area that we're still keeping our eye on heavily. I guess we're keeping our eye on everything, but that is one area where there still seem to be issues. Across the rest of Alberta it seems like it's dramatically decreased. Yeah. Does that answer?

Maybe I'll have the deputy minister . . .

Mr. Marchand: Yeah. It is just a reduction in the federal funding. In the first year of the federal agreement – it was signed very late – some funding was pushed into this current fiscal year, increasing it. What's reflected in the budget this year is the amount that was the annual amount agreed with the federal government of \$20 million, but it was \$25 million this current year because of underexpenditure in the first year of the agreement.

Ms Sweet: Okay. I just want to follow up on a comment, actually, around the land-use agreements that my colleague was talking

about with rec activities and that you're currently in negotiation on for terms. I'm wondering what the relationship on those terms looks like in regard to those who have FMA agreements and the fact that some of that land is going to be the same land. Who would be the junior in that contract, in that relationship? And, ultimately, how are you protecting the FMAs so that if there is damage being done, the forestry industry isn't at risk of being held accountable for any of that? Are the FMA holders being included in those negotiations when it comes to trail management, development, and off-road access? Because we already have conflicts with FMAs when it comes to grazing leases, fencing, road access, like, many different rights-of-way, I'm just curious what this conversation looks like from that perspective.

4:40

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I think the use of the trails would be a pretty limited impact on the fibre for the forest companies. I guess one thing that's helped by having this department together as it is that we have people in the same department working together on issues like this. But, again, you're right. I mean, when we have something like a grazing lease, which is, you know, thousands and thousands of acres, that can have an impact on an FMA, but an ATV trail going through the woods isn't near the impact as the 8 million acres of grazing leases.

Ms Sweet: I think the concern that I would have, Minister, is that there is an environmental impact component, and when trails are being developed, like, if a fenceline is moved for a grazing lease, let's say, on an FMA, there is conflict sometimes between: "Did forestry do that? Who did that? Who's putting the fence back up?" All of the things. Let's just say one of these trails is developed, and it actually goes through a waterway, and there's contamination or something happens, that ultimately is part of the responsibility of the FMA. So who's the junior? Who's responsible when we have agreements being made between the ministry in regard to cleanup responsibilities? I hope I'm making this make sense, but now we're starting to see even more conflicts between land management agreements.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. I'll have Deputy Minister Marchand just take a quick look at that. But I think, you know, we do have land-use plans that we have to follow, and we do have to work to incorporate all different things into forest management plans. I think that work is continually being done.

Deputy Minister, do you want to add?

Mr. Marchand: Yeah. I would maybe just add, I think, that we are continuing to work. Like, the AFPA was consulted with in the development of the Trails Act, and that work and those discussions are continuing. I think the basic premise is correct, and it's not just with trails and forestry; it's with everything happening on the land. You know, we're trying to be as clear as we can up front, but then I expect there will be a certain amount of adjudication as issues arise – right? – as always is the case, about, if there's remediation required, who ultimately was responsible for trying to, you know, manage those issues up front.

Ms Sweet: Is there a structure currently in place within the ministry to have those adjudications occur if there happens to be an issue? Like, I do think that there are going to ultimately come conflicts, and it's not about timber access; it's about land access and whether or not there's damage being done that could potentially impact the forestry sector being able to access or the concerns that they have when it comes to SARA and their responsibility with buffer zones. The FMAs are very complicated when it comes to ensuring that

they're following the federal expectations, and less amount of conflict around those dynamics, I think, is only in the best interest of supporting the forestry industry. So I just want to make sure that as these – and I appreciate that AFPA has been consulted. But I think that if there's an acknowledgement that there probably will be a conflict, I'm curious what the ministry's response or strategy is in regard to how those will be resolved.

Mr. Loewen: I think that's, again, probably advantageous because we have the multiple departments in the same ministry. We have an ADM of forestry, we have an ADM of lands, so that communication can go back and forth, I think, fairly smoothly to address those concerns as they come forward. I think we're in good shape there. I appreciate the concern, though.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Let's move on to your forestry job action plan, key objective 2.2, page 57, "through implementation of the Forest Jobs Action Plan, ensure long-term access to a sustainable and secure fibre support for the forestry sector." Minister, I am curious because I look at your key objectives on this page to address outcome 2. One is about Travel Alberta, and the other one is about the soft lumber litigation negotiation. I don't see anything in regard to value-add support for innovation or expansion in the forestry industry. From what I'm hearing from current producers in the province, there's a lot of potential coming out of B.C., and there are a lot of opportunities around looking at new value production with existing pulp mills and existing sawmills and looking at some net-zero components becoming cogens, also being able to use pressure board differently and do some value-add around that. I don't see anything in your budget to support the industry in moving forward in their innovation and value-add expansions.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Yes. I think what we're noticing here is that when we look across the forestry landscape and the forestry industry across Canada, we're seeing that Alberta does seem to be the place of choice to invest, and that's because of a lot of things: because of our tax regime, our access to fibre, and how we've been managing our forests over the years. I think when we look at the investing in the forest jobs action plan, that's the government's commitment to providing secure fibre access for forest companies, for maintaining forest jobs but also ensuring proper sustainable forest management, so supporting our province's value-added wood manufacturing industry through the Alberta value-added wood products program grant, that promotes research, innovation, and new product market entry. By providing funding through the Canada wood grant, Alberta participates in supporting technical development and promotional marketing to establish growing long-term offshore markets for Alberta wood products.

Again, we have these programs in place. We have opportunities here in Alberta, and again we're seeing that the forest industry is investing in Alberta. I think in this recent slowdown or, I guess, the lowering of prices for forest products, we've seen very little mill slowdown in Alberta and a lot of mill slowdown in British Columbia. I think that's because the industry realizes that their investment is better and safer here.

Ms Sweet: Yeah, and definitely far more fibre access here given the wildfires that have happened in the Okanagan and the interior. I don't disagree. Those innovation grants that you just spoke of: are they federal? I don't see them.

Mr. Loewen: They're Alberta.

Ms Sweet: Where are they in the budget? What line item do they sit under?

Mr. Loewen: Maybe 2.2. We're just going to look here.

Ms Sweet: Okay. So if it's 2.2, it was \$75.85 million in 2022-23. That number has gone down to an estimate of \$69 million. So there's been a decrease in that. There's a lot going on in 2.2 besides – like, pine beetle, then we're looking at trade exposure, and then we're also looking at the grant. What is the value of that opportunity fund or the grant fund? It's not very much by the looks of it.

Mr. Loewen: Dan, do you want to take that?

Mr. Lux: Sure. Yeah, right now the grant to Wood Works! is \$2.2 million, but it's a three-year grant, so we want to see . . .

Ms Sweet: Oh, to Wood Works!.

Mr. Lux: Yeah. It's with Wood Works! through the AFPA. We want to see how they perform. We're working with a lot of the value-added producers through that grant just to understand what their needs are in order to grow, so we want to see where they're coming from and then the grant . . .

The Chair: Good. Thank you. That concludes the first portion of questions for the Official Opposition.

We will now move to the government caucus for 20 minutes of questions from the members. Who will begin? Member Rosin, would you like to combine time?

Ms Rosin: I would love to combine time if that is all right.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Chair: You may proceed.

Ms Rosin: Perfect. Well, thank you, Minister, so much for being here today, and welcome to the new role and to cabinet. We're very excited to have you in our committee. Certainly, I know as your parliamentary secretary – it's been such a pleasure and an honour to work together over the past few months. This is kind of my moment because I know in the Chamber I'm not allowed to ask too many questions, so your full interrogation gets to come now.

I wanted to start off talking about the language that's used in your budget because I really believe that language can be powerful. It can be very intentional and carry a certain weight to it, and if we look at the language in your budget, especially to the potential for Crown lands and tourism, I think it's quite groundbreaking. It's proprietary. It's something new, and I think it's very deliberate, and I want to give you the opportunity to talk about that. We see language in your budget around jointly supporting biodiversity and conservation and economic development on Crown lands, which is a concept that perhaps other members or certain organizations cringe at when they hear. We know as Conservatives, and I think as many recreators and users of the outdoors do, that these concepts can coexist, that we can love our outdoors, love using them, love enjoying them while also conserving them and protecting the biodiversity of them.

4:50

We also see that in outcome 2 you discuss creating a business environment where tourism and parks can "thrive and achieve their economic potential," to "support diversified economic prosperity . . . minimize regulatory and process barriers to . . . support economic opportunities on crown lands." This language is certainly, like I said, a very notable shift in policy direction, which I know myself and so many tourism operators appreciate and have been looking to see for some years now.

If we look at places like British Columbia, who, of course, is kind of Alberta's main competitor in this sphere, they've coined the phrase "beautiful British Columbia" because they recognize that they can have beautiful landscapes and mountainous regions while also allowing people the opportunity to enjoy them and explore them, but when we look at Alberta's landscape for the past Lord knows too long, whether you want to run a guided tour or, you know, build new trails, expand an existing venture you might have, obtain a new lease, we've heard from operators for years that it's challenging, it's burdensome, that the processes are lengthy, and there have been a lot of, I'd say, inhibitors to economic growth and potential on Crown land.

I just want to preface my question with recognizing the language you've used in this budget because I know that it's deliberate, and I know that it's certainly appreciated from myself, from all users of the land, whether they be recreation enthusiasts, business operators, entrepreneurs, trails associations. We certainly appreciate the language in this budget.

My question, all of that said, is that I'm wondering if you can just speak to the economic potential on Alberta's Crown and park lands and how that might compare to other provinces under the recognition that I think they are certainly underutilized right now, and there's a lot of potential that we have yet to realize but we are hoping to realize. I'm wondering if you can just speak to what that potential may be.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Yes. Thank you very much. You talk about the conservation and recreation happening on the same landscape. We have that now. We have to be able to continue that, and we know that they're not mutually exclusive. Our provincial park systems benefit Albertans, supporting physical, mental, and social well-being while attracting visitors from around the world and contributing to our economy. More than 10 million visitors explore our provincial parks every year, so that brings 10 million people to parts of Alberta that might not get visited otherwise. I think it's great for those local economies. We have one of the busiest provincial park systems in Canada, with visitation numbers similar to that of Ontario. We have 2,000 more campsites than British Columbia, for instance, in their provincial parks.

Now, the current value of Alberta parks to the Alberta economy is close to a billion dollars in GDP, so about \$325 million in labour income and nearly 9,000 jobs per year. So the value of provincial recreational infrastructure on Crown land is approximately \$2.6 billion. It does make a big difference. It's a major economic driver in Alberta.

Albertans spend \$2.3 billion on Crown land recreation annually and another \$376 million on recreational equipment. So we're making significant capital investments in our Crown land recreation infrastructure because we know it needs to be grown, it needs to be environmentally sustainable, but we need to have that support to support our objective of having tourism expenditures double in Alberta. We would like to have that grow from \$10 billion to \$20 billion. The value of provincial recreation infrastructure is approximately \$2.6 billion. Again, we're making significant investments in Budget 2023.

Our Crown lands, consisting of parks and public lands, encompass over 60 per cent of Alberta. We have a huge land base there. We need to be able to make sure people have the opportunity to enjoy it and to travel across Alberta, to all parts of Alberta. A lot of times we focus on, you know, kind of some of the main tourism areas in Alberta, but we know that there's lots to see all across Alberta, from the far north to the far south, so we need to make sure that we unlock that potential to improve our existing tourism areas, growing new

areas in the province while making sure we balance the other needs on the landscape such as conservation.

Ms Rosin: Thank you for that answer.

Just to confirm, I believe I heard you say to one of the members earlier that Alberta either had or was planning to in this budget create 900 new campgrounds or campsites. Can you just confirm if that 900 total is forthcoming or if that was already created?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I think that's in the plans to develop those ones right now. We are in the process of developing more campgrounds and improving campgrounds right now. A lot of the campgrounds were built in the '70s and '80s even, and camping styles have changed dramatically since then, so we are improving some of those campgrounds, too.

Ms Rosin: Okay. To confirm, then, the intent would be for Alberta to actually have nearly 3,000 more campgrounds than British Columbia?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Yes. Exactly. We'd like to have – you know, I guess B.C. is one of our biggest competitors when it comes to tourism, and we want to make sure we have our share of those tourist dollars and tourist individuals.

Ms Rosin: Thank you. I appreciate that and certainly appreciate the need for Alberta to continue to be increasingly competitive with British Columbia and other jurisdictions that have similar tourism interests to our own.

Speaking of recreation opportunities, I also note in your budget – and I believe this has been touched on a little bit already – that there is a \$17.1 million allocation to refurbish and build recreational trails. Certainly, in areas like where I come from, whether that's Kananaskis or West Bragg Creek, Bow Valley provincial park, other areas – and that's just my region specifically – our trails networks support, really, our entire local economy. If you go to a place like Bragg Creek, I believe visitation there has increased 350 per cent in the past couple of years. That's primarily because they built out this expansive trail network that has attracted so many new people to the small hamlet who then stay for ice cream or to shop at the local stores and grab dinner or a pint later. We know that trails and a recreational economy can have such a significant economic impact and can really build out communities that would otherwise probably not build out or have such a thriving tourism economy.

Looking at that \$17.1 million investment into refurbishing and building trails specifically, I'm just wondering if you can comment on how significant of an increase that is comparative to other years and what we can expect the economic return on investment to be with regard to that specific investment.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. What we've done is that we've committed – when it comes to Crown land, recreation trails we've committed \$2 million in year 1 and then \$33.7 million of capital funding over seven years, and that's so we can build and improve Crown land trails. Now, we're starting slow on it because it takes time to make these plans, and there's a process that we have to go through to build and improve trails, so we've got to go through that process. That's why we can't just spend, you know, a lot of money in year 1. We need planning to move ahead with that. It has several priority projects for recreational enhancements, and most of them are targeted along the eastern slopes sites, but we do have plans to do some development all across Alberta.

Another thing we've done is allocate \$1 million annually to the Alberta Off Highway Vehicle Association and \$1 million annually to the Alberta Snowmobile Association for the next four years to

build and grow our provincial trail system. We also look to support nonmotorized users of our trail systems. In the coming days we'll be announcing some more coming on that. This funding is new funding to improve our parks, build campgrounds and trails. It's part of the government's commitment to strengthen our recreation assets and amenities across the province and enable a better recreational experience on our beautiful Alberta Crown lands.

Ms Rosin: Thank you.

I believe, again, this was also addressed in part earlier, but I'm just wondering if you can list any specific investments besides the AOHVA – I believe that is the acronym – investment recently. I'm wondering if you can speak to any other investments that have already been made in either trail upgrades or in trails associations, whether that be through grant programs or whatever means it may be and where those are located.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. These are some of the ones that so far have been announced for the – there were, you know, partners in '22-23. We got Bragg Creek Trails Association, \$300,000; Moose Mountain Bike Trail Society, \$100,000; Friends of Kananaskis Country Cooperating Association, \$340,000; Canmore and Area Mountain Bike Association, \$100,000; Calgary Mountain Bike Alliance Fellowship, \$25,000; Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation of Canada, \$50,000; and Elbow River Watershed Partnership Society, \$25,000. That's almost a million dollars right there that was given to different organizations to help maintain trails and do other great work for Albertans in a partnership design.

Ms Rosin: Okay. Thank you.

I know something else monumental that was done, I guess, sort of by your former department before it shifted around was the Trails Act, which I know has been mentioned today, which, I think, for those who don't fully know or understand it, for all the people watching estimates this afternoon, was really a remarkable shift in policy direction with . . .

Mr. McIver: Both of them.

Ms Rosin: Yeah. My parents probably are the only two people watching right now. Hello to them. They watch. Similar to MLA Fir, who acknowledged her parents this afternoon, my parents also watch every hour of legislative procedures. They love it. They live for it.

I think the Trails Act was a notable shift in direction as well because for the first time it, through policy, allowed for the government to designate trails as Crown assets, which really was the government's way of recognizing that trails are no longer, you know, paths through the bushes. They are recognized as economic drivers and contributors to Alberta's tourism economy and something that the government values and strives to protect. I'm just wondering if you can give a progress update, I suppose, on the Trails Act, if there is any work being done to begin designating trails as Crown assets, and if so, what regions we're looking at doing that in?

5:00

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Obviously, there's currently work being done on trails right now. As you mentioned, I mean, the Trails Act is important because we need to be able to recognize these trails and be able to make sure that we have them maintained and taken care of properly. That's why we've developed the partnership program where we develop these partnerships with different organizations. Again, by working with these organizations, those are the people that are on the ground. They're local in the area. They understand

what the needs are. They want to make sure that those areas are protected and that they're not damaging the environment. They want it to be taken care of properly. Of course, they work with volunteers so that they can actually leverage more dollars or time to make sure that the job gets done rather than have government try to do it all. I think it's better to have these organizations, where the people truly care about it and truly work towards the common good. The Trails Act has been able to facilitate that and actually be able to recognize these trails, not just the ATV and snowmobile trails but the hiking trails, the biking trails, and all the trails together. It's important that we look at all of them and take care of their needs as need be.

Ms Rosin: Thank you.

Moving on, I want to look at your parks budget. I find this budget just remarkable. I hope that everyone across the province gets a chance to see it. Specifically, I want to highlight that there are increases in nearly every single area. You know, if we look at parks operations, 10 per cent increase, \$6 million; if we look at the parks' visitors experience budget, 22 per cent increase, or \$2.3 million; most notably, if we look at the conservation budget, an 8 per cent increase, or half a million dollars to parks conservation; infrastructure, \$1.2 million, or 10 per cent increase; and a 40 per cent increase for capital from last year's estimates. Your parks budget is quite strong, and I really want to recognize that. This is an acknowledgement of significant investment in nearly every area across the provincial park system. I'm just wondering if you can comment on, specifically, where some of those investments in infrastructure will be made, noting that, again, I believe it was quite a significant increase.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah, it is a significant increase. The capital plan 2023 includes approximately \$210 million, including capital grant, over three years to improve and expand recreation access in parks and across Crown lands. That includes \$500,000 for year 1 and \$51.5 million of capital funding over 10 years for new camping development, increasing campgrounds, and developing more recreational and tourism opportunities; \$2 million for year 1; and \$33.7 million of capital funding over seven years to build and improve Crown lands trails; an additional \$700,000 in year 1 and \$26.3 million over three years of new funding for capital maintenance and renewal projects. All development in parks is already subject to strict environmental and cultural reviews. This environmentally responsible framework will set a renewed vision for Alberta Parks, keeping parks for people, sustaining the environment, and supporting tourism and recreation outcomes, which supports the increase in conservation funding.

Currently there are approximately 150 capital maintenance and renewal projects that will refurbish and upgrade recreational opportunities, including projects for trails, campgrounds, and day-use areas across Crown lands. These projects will be under construction or completed between 2022 and 2026.

Ms Rosin: One hundred and fifty is quite a lot.

I also want you to just go a little bit deeper on the conservation funding. As I noted, specifically your conservation budget has increased by \$500,000 for provincial parks. I'm just wondering if you can additionally speak to what initiatives will be funded through the increase in conservation funding, what targets we may be seeking to achieve, and in what regions of the province that funding increase will be directed to.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. The increase in conservation funding supports our work to develop an environmentally responsible policy framework. All development in parks, again, like I mentioned

before, is already subject to strict environmental and cultural reviews. This will set a renewed vision for Alberta Parks and make sure that we can support the increase in tourism opportunities and increase of traffic coming into our parks and public lands. The budget increase will help fulfill the mandate to develop an environmentally responsible framework for recreation on Crown lands and invest in campgrounds, trails to ensure there are sufficient high-quality and low-cost recreation sites for Albertans.

The policy framework includes the development of the Crown land recreation framework that will define the goals related to outdoor recreation to ensure government is working towards common outcomes across the diverse landscape, identify and define distinct recreation settings based on their character, accessibility, natural characteristics, usage, and on-site operations. What we can do is we can use this as a consistent approach to identify priority areas for planning and developing.

Ms Rosin: Okay. Thank you.

I guess my final questions will be focused around Travel Alberta. I know some of this, again, has been discussed already, but certainly you and I share a great appreciation for Travel Alberta and the work that they do and the role that they will play in our government's targets of doubling visitor expenditures in the province by 2030. If we look at the Travel Alberta budget, I remember a couple years ago, or maybe it was just last year, we were so excited to triple that budget to \$60 million. This year we see an additional increase up to \$72 million, which I believe is the highest amount it's perhaps ever been or at least in recent history that I'm aware of.

We know that budget has increased in part in response to their expanded mandate, which we also gave them, to venture into destination development and to expand tourism product offerings across the province. I know you already spoke to what metrics you're using to track the return on that investment. I believe one of them was seats or visitation increased to the province. I am just wondering if there are any other metrics we are using to track that or if there is a projected return on investment we expect for that increase this year specifically, recognizing, of course, the long-term return.

Mr. Loewen: You know, we have that increase of funding; \$5 million of that is for investment in rural tourism programming. That's going to encourage the tourism going to other parts of Alberta rather than just the main core areas that we consider. We got \$3.3 million for visitor information centres to make sure that people have a place to stop in and see on their way into Alberta, \$3.2 million for enhanced marketing initiatives, and \$0.2 million to address the cost-of-living adjustment inflationary pressures within the within the industry.

Starting with Budget 2023, Travel Alberta has been directing \$6.5 million a year as part of the three-year strategy to the recovery and enhancement of the key U.S. international routes, and that's what we talked about. I think that's put 46,000 people in seats coming to Alberta, so that's been a great success. Again, as we go through and we look at, you know, the results of this amount of money being spent, I think we have a great organization in Travel Alberta that has been doing good work as far as developing and promoting Alberta as a destination. We know that this will have a positive impact in communities across the province.

So, no, I think we're actually in good shape here. Travel Alberta will be monitoring things as they go forward, too. Again, they've been providing a good result for Alberta for quite some time. I think that the change from not just destination marketing but destination management has been a good change for them. I think it's been productive for Alberta also. You know, it's exciting to bring people

here, but it's even more exciting to have them have a great experience while they're here so that they can go back, tell others, come back themselves again, and make sure that we can keep the promotion of Alberta going stronger around the world.

Again, when we look at what's been happening so far, we've almost recovered from the downfall of COVID, but there's more work to do. Certain sectors still need some help, but we're willing to look at that and make sure that we get things back.

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Minister. That concludes the government members' first block of questions.

Now we move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. As mentioned, members are asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their rotation if they wish to combine their time with the minister's time. Please remember that discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not speaking time is combined. MLA Bilous, would you like to combine time?

Mr. Bilous: Yes, very much so.

The Chair: Minister? We will proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Minister. I have a number of questions I'll try to get through fairly quickly. Earlier when you were replying to MLA Sweet about the forestry predictive modelling AI mapping, was that at that same company, Pegasus, or which company is doing that for the GOA?

5:10

Mr. Loewen: Pegasus was the one; the drone technology for wildfire protection, I guess.

Mr. Bilous: Is that the same company that's doing the AI modelling? Can you share with us?

Mr. Loewen: I'll turn it over to the deputy minister.

Mr. Marchand: Thanks. That's working directly with Technology and Innovation, significant enhancement in our base IT system that we use for the administration of the wildfire management. Predictive modelling and AI: as you know, you need to have data, and you need a lot of it, and it needs to be solid. We have a lot of data going back years and years in terms of wildfire. What it is doing – and we piloted it last year, and it's available to our incident commanders. As they're making their wildfire plans for the day based on the hazard conditions, the technology is providing them with the potential assessment of what it would suggest based on all the data in the past, what the risk of wildfire looks like. That doesn't necessarily drive the decisions of the incident commanders, but it is another piece of information for them to consider. It's integrated into the system.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. I think it's great. My question was just around: are we using an Alberta company? I would imagine the GOA doesn't have the resources, like, the actual AI software. It is an Alberta company is what I'm hoping you're going to say.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Go ahead, Dan.

Mr. Lux: I do believe so. Yeah. It's going through – as Shannon mentioned, it's an exciting opportunity to put all that data together to help our duty officers make that assessment. As Shannon mentioned, we've kind of trialed it as a redundant system based on the experience of the existing systems we have with more and more reliance as we get more familiarity with it.

Mr. Bilous: That's great. My hope is that, as much as possible – procurement is not necessarily your department's area – we're using Alberta companies and employing Albertans rather than going elsewhere. So that's great.

Quick question, Minister. I talked to a couple of your colleagues about that. Does your department do any tracking of the tourism impact when it comes to productions? Let me give you a great example. Obviously, *The Last of Us*: huge success. Do we have a sense if the ministry does any tracking on the economic impact of that production being filmed here, again, recognizing that it's multiple communities? It was shot all over Alberta. If they don't, I would love to hear if that's something that – because I know that Jobs, Economy and Northern Development, which is where the film tax credit is, is not tracking that. I asked Minister Jean, so wondering if you folks track it at all.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. That's mostly probably tracked through Culture is what I would think. I know there are always figures associated with any programs like that or any big-ticket items like that that are happening in Alberta because everybody wants to see what the economic impact is. I've seen those figures. I don't have them off the top of my head, but I know Culture is . . .

Mr. Bilous: Maybe Shane has got them off the top of his head.

Mr. Schreiber: No, just on the economic impact of the film tax credit.

Mr. Bilous: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

Mr. Bilous: Yeah. Something that, again, you know, if Culture is tracking it, I think it's just great for different regions to be able to see the direct impact but also the knock-on impact to the different communities.

Mr. Loewen: I think Travel Alberta is seeing the results of these things, and they do have a way to kind of track that. The Travel Alberta website has seen an 800 per cent increase in engagement since the launch of the series *The Last of Us*. With the popularity of the show, tourism operators are looking to capitalize and draw new visitors to the province. Travel Alberta has developed a map of the locations featured in the show as a travel itinerary for visitors. We are taking advantage of that, too. Again, I think there's lots of talk and lots of discussion on how much that generates.

Mr. Bilous: Okay. Two last questions, and then I'm going to throw it to MLA Sweet. Labour attraction. Again, I've had great discussion with several ministers that have labour within their space, but just curious, Minister. I'm sure you've heard this as well, that the tourism sector or the visitor economy is also struggling to find workers. I know that so is agriculture, so is tech. I'm just wondering if there's anything within your ministry specifically that you're looking at, and I appreciate and applauded the minister for the work that she has done to increase the Alberta advantage nominee program. That number has jumped up. That's great news. Is there anything in your ministry that you could point to that you folks are doing, initiatives to try and draw more workers to Alberta?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. We've been working with the other ministries on that issue because it is an issue, there's no doubt. You point that out, and you're absolutely correct that the tourism market – when it comes to labour, there is a need, for sure, so we need to have that labour attraction.

Part of my mandate letter was to work with the Minister of Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism so that we can seek solutions for the labour challenges and try to establish expedited tourism, hospitality, immigration streams. We've been working together with that and working on a plan because it is a priority of our ministries. We'll be presenting findings soon. That should be this month, I think, because, again, it is important. I know I've talked to some people that have talked about having a tourism training program here in Alberta. That's been kind of exciting to hear, and we'll see how that develops over time, because if we can bring people here to train for tourism jobs, then the likelihood of them staying here is greatly increased.

Mr. Bilous: Significant. I agree, Minister, and I'm sure, you know, you've heard from the same ministry people as I've heard from that Alberta could be that centre of excellence and, again, showing people in K to 12 and also postsecondaries, you know, good careers in hospitality.

The last question I'll ask is just – so this is coming from TIAA, that was asking about infrastructure on Crown lands. The initiatives to supporting key objectives in the business plan state that there is \$178.7 million that's allocated to refurbish and enhance buildings on Crown land, other areas. So I'm just curious, Minister, because I know that number is a big bucket. How much of that \$178 million is allocated for Crown land development or – yeah, "development" is probably the best word.

Mr. Loewen: I guess the simple answer is 100 per cent. But when we look at \$63.5 million capital investment for parks operating maintenance and regional planning and new campground development, \$2.2 million capital investment on Crown land trails and capital investment for Crown land vehicles for the operations, we just go through and there's significant all the way through.

Mr. Bilous: Would you be able to provide a bit of a breakdown in some of those, you know, the buildings? I'm just curious. Like, what types of buildings are you investing in on Crown lands?

Mr. Loewen: As far as buildings – it's mostly trails and campgrounds. There aren't really buildings per se.

Mr. Bilous: Oh, okay. Just because the . . .

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Bathrooms, I guess, maybe might be the only buildings that it might include.

Mr. Bilous: Okay.

Mr. Schreiber: Here's a list with some examples that we could read out.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah, I could give you a few. Let's see. Here's one in Bow Valley: develop and upgrade to sustainable designated trail reclamation of unofficial trails, improved signage, minor work to complete trail compaction and hardening, modernized campground and scope to include creating separate cooking and food storage locations, formalized tent pads, separated equestrian use from hiker sites, replace toilets, formalized trails. That's also in Bow Valley.

Mr. Bilous: These are just low-impact, smaller buildings.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

Mr. Bilous: With these 40 seconds I'm going to throw it to MLA Sweet.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. So generous today.

The Chair: MLA Sweet, would you like to combine time?

Ms Sweet: Sure. Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Minister is that okay?
You may proceed.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Thanks. In 25 seconds or less can you please give us a quick rundown on the key priority around the agritourism industry? I don't really see it as an outcome indicator here specifically. There were substantial financial pieces that were moved from the ministry of agriculture over to tourism, yet I don't see it reflected in any of the business plan or outcomes.

Mr. Loewen: When we look at . . .

The Chair: Okay. Thank you. That concludes the Official Opposition's block of time.

We will take our five-minute break at this time to come back at 5:25. We will start with a 10-minute block for the government caucus.

[The committee adjourned from 5:20 p.m. to 5:25 p.m.]

The Chair: Welcome back.

We now move to five minutes of questions from the government members, followed by five minutes of response from the minister. MLA Rowswell, would you like to combine your time with the minister?

Mr. Rowswell: I'd like to combine time if that's okay.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Chair: We will proceed with that. You may proceed.

Mr. Rowswell: Thank you very much. Well, congratulations on the job, and I'm still enjoying your cooking at the Legislature.

You know, Albertans are really proud of the landscape and the beautiful areas we've got, from the mountains that Miranda lives near and on through the grasslands and everything else that we have. It's interesting. How many MLAs live in the most beautiful part of Alberta? It's always a competition, that's for sure.

I know Albertans are always excellent stewards of the land and want to see our lands protected appropriately. Looking at outcome 1, the topic of effective stewardship, and there's been some talk about Crown land here, and I was just curious, like, you know: what per cent of Alberta is provincial Crown land? I don't know if you've got a number for federal Crown land and a combination of the total. What is that? I know it's a big chunk, but I was just wondering if you had that number.

Mr. Loewen: It's about 100 million acres, or about 60 per cent, of Alberta consists of Crown lands. These Crown lands include our parks, protected areas, and public lands, so it kind of encompasses all of them. These lands are managed to the desired land-use outcomes outlined in legislation, regulation, and management plans, whether that is for tourism, recreation, conservation in our parks, or multiple-use outcomes on our public lands. You know, we need to manage them for all the different uses and make sure that we do that appropriately, and it is complicated. I mean, there are multiple uses on the landscape that we have to accommodate, so we work on that, and that's part of the job and part of the challenges of government, making sure that we manage those things properly.

Mr. Rowswell: That 60 per cent: is that just provincial? Would Crown be on top of that as well?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Exactly.

Mr. Rowswell: Do you have, by chance, though, the number for that?

Mr. Loewen: No, I don't know that number offhand. I'd have to check, look into that.

Mr. Rowswell: Just curious. I just thought I'd ask.

You know, we always talk about effective stewardship of Crown land and making that a priority, so why is that important? Why is it important to have effective management of our Crown land?

Mr. Loewen: You know, effective stewardship ensures that these lands and values and resources and experience and goods and services that they produce are maintained for today and for future generations, too. They sustain our environment, our economy, and society. To thrive, we need to ensure that we have that proper stewardship for Albertans. Again, we need to make sure that we do it for future generations. Everything that we do on the land, we have to make sure that it is sustainable and make sure that we can look to the future. We want our kids and grandkids to enjoy the same things we have, and I think that's incredibly important.

Mr. Rowswell: There are quite a few people that are involved, like, different partners that I imagine you have to work with. Well, one, I guess, the federal Crown land: I don't know what involvement you have with them. Maybe you could explain that part and the Indigenous communities and any other community partners that you deal with. I'm sure it's quite a long list, but just maybe tell us how you go about doing that.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Partnership is definitely a key component of effective environmental stewardship. You know, government can't do these things alone. That's why we partner with municipalities, nongovernment organizations, and Indigenous communities across the province to ensure that we maintain our lands.

One example of this is the recent appointment of trail managers under the Trails Act. This will help ensure that trails and public lands are well managed and meet the environmental outcomes required to be sustainable and provide excellent experiences for those who use them.

Another example is the forestry division collaboration with agencies such as the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta, or FRIA, and grantees such as FireSmart Alberta, the University of Alberta, and the Forestry Research Institute to promote effective environmental stewardship. Through the work of organizations like FRIA – like, FRIA has the following initiatives. Since 2006 the province has provided an average of \$4.2 million annually through the wildfire reclamation program to support about 3,000 hectares of reforested land destroyed by wildfires. Annually the numbers vary widely from as little as a few hundred hectares destroyed to in excess of 12,000 hectares, depending on the severity of the wildfire season. Another thing is that the mountain pine beetle program has been granted some \$2 million annually over the past five years. Since its inception in 2007 and as of 2021-22 about \$35.7 million has been used for a variety of tasks to support mountain pine beetle detection and control efforts.

The free FireSmart program supported some 78 projects in '21-22. It brings the total number of projects to 417. These projects support community protection from wildfires. In '21-22 just over \$3 million was paid out to project partners to bring the total

expenditures since the program's inception to just over \$39 million. Through the research department they funded several projects, including \$300,000 in support of the landscapes in motion program. The objective of the program is to learn how the frequency and intensity of fires shape the landscape over time and to develop tools for analyzing large-scale landscape change.

We have a commitment of \$200,000 to the LandWeb simulation modelling program. This program uses spatial simulation modelling to generate historical range of landscape conditions across the western boreal Canada. Again, we've got joint funding with the mountain pine beetle ecology program with the government of Canada. Again, we just have lots of different partnerships that we work with in government in order to do what we need to do to maintain the landscape that we have.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Great. Moving down to key objective 1.1 in the business plan, which is to "ensure environmental outcomes, such as biodiversity and conservation, are achieved while supporting use and access for indigenous, social, and economic benefits on Alberta's crown lands." Like, I know you're an outdoors guy. You taught me the difference between a guide and an outfitter, and I now know what that's about. Can you tell us your approach to balancing conservation with recreation? You can conserve and never use it, but that would be a waste of a beautiful place.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Exactly. I just want to kind of go back to your last question, one of your last questions on the federal Crown land. About 10 per cent of Alberta is federal Crown land. That includes military bases and national parks.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Great. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Just to kind of give you an idea that the feds definitely have their share of Alberta already, so I'm sure they don't need any more.

When it comes to, you know, having an environmentally responsible policy framework, we conduct parks planning that accounts for the dual mandate of the parks system. Any development is recommended within the conservation context and values of the park site. The demand for recreation is steadily increasing, and we expect it will continue to grow. It is important for our government to respond to this demand by making strategic investments in our sites and facilities in an environmentally responsible way.

The balance is achieved by recognizing that there are trade-offs throughout our landscapes. We have places where our focus is towards conservation values and other areas where recreation is the focus. We balance this by implementing the land-use plans that consider these trade-offs and ensure we are maximizing both recreation and conservation values on the landscape.

Mr. Rowswell: Okay. Thank you very much.

My last question is – and it was handled to some degree – relative to wildfires, and we'll be going into that pretty soon. You know, Albertans are always worried about wildfire preparedness and management, so I was glad to see that objective 1.3 of the business plan is to "protect the health and resilience of Alberta's forest resources through effective wildfire management, including the exploration and adoption of innovative technologies." That was talked about a little bit, and one of your answers was how you hire people and that type of thing. I just – it came up. I didn't want to repeat questions, but just: how do you prepare? Like, how do you forecast what you're coming to relative to the wildfire season? And

then, obviously, you have to adjust if it gets worse. How is that managed?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. That's actually a great question. You know, it's still too early to predict what the 2023 fire season is going to be like. We're monitoring conditions, including the snowpack and long-term forecasts, and preparing our resources in anticipation of the start of wildfire season.

The greatest factor affecting the dryness of environment is spring precipitation. Spring dip, a period of extremely low moisture content in forest vegetation, occurs between the end of winter and the start of the seasonal growth, so before things green up. Forests are especially susceptible to fire during this time because trees and grasses reach a point of extreme low moisture content before the greening up happens, which actually increases the moisture content. The period of highest flammability occurs during the moisture content dip, and this is coincident with the timing of the most extreme fire behaviour. That's something that we're watching all the time to make sure that we have an idea of, you know – and we focus on that time frame to make sure that we're protecting and doing the work that we need to do to make sure that we're ready for fire when it happens at that time.

5:35

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

We now move to five minutes of questions from the Official Opposition. MLA Schmidt, would you like to combine time or . . .

Mr. Schmidt: I would.

The Chair: Minister?

Mr. Loewen: We'll go block time.

The Chair: Block time?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah.

The Chair: Okay. Five minutes, MLA Schmidt.

Mr. Schmidt: What did I ever do to the minister to be the only person that he deals block time?

Mr. McIver: Fifty-four, 53, 52, 51, 50 . . .

Mr. Schmidt: So a number of – well, I guess that's my first question. What did I ever do to the minister to deserve block time?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. We don't have enough time for that.

Mr. Schmidt: My second question, if the Member for Calgary-Hays would keep his trap shut for a second. On page 99 of the estimates line 5 allocates . . .

Mr. Stephan: Point of order.

The Chair: A point of order has been called.

Mr. Stephan: That's unparliamentary, to tell someone to keep their mouth shut. Chair, that's just not appropriate. There should be an apology, actually, for that kind of language.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The hon. member opposite actually has not referenced a standing order to speak to the point of order, but in clarifying, I do also believe that, through the chair, respectfully, there was some conversation going across the floor. I think it would be ideal that this is not a point of order but, in fact,

just remind members to be respectful when other members are speaking.

Mr. Stephan: Standing Order 23(j), using language that is abusive and insulting.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, MLA Stephan.

I will not find this as a point of order. I give great latitude towards speech within the room. I will remind members, encourage members to ensure that their comments – and we might consider them heckles – be appropriate and try to withdraw from any of that interaction.

With that, MLA Schmidt, you may begin again.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that ruling.

On page 99 of the estimates line 5 allocates \$13 million to hunting and angling. I take this to mean that the department operates the licensing for hunting and fishing in the province. I have some questions around the minister's special licence program. Now, some changes were recently made to the minister's special licence program that allowed for year-round hunting of a number of species, including bighorn sheep. Can the minister explain why these changes were made, why nobody other than the Alberta Outfitters were consulted in the process for making these changes? Can the minister tell us who will be the primary beneficiaries of the changes to the Alberta special licence program? And what science, if any, was used to justify the year-round hunt of species like bighorn sheep, who are particularly vulnerable in the winter? What science was used to justify the change to allow this to happen?

Related to changes to the special licensing program, I note that on page 101 of the estimates hunting and angling is estimated to bring in \$7.5 million. How much of that money comes from the minister's special licence program, and who were the special licences awarded to? How much did they pay for these special licences, and how does the revenue for special licences compare to previous years?

My next question is related to a question that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster-Wainwright raised. Can the minister explain his connection to the outfitters community? In relation to his appointment as a minister he was asked by reporters what his relationship to the outfitters community was and whether or not this might create some perceived conflicts of interest; he said that he was seeking an opinion from the Ethics Commissioner. Why was it that he was seeking an opinion from the Ethics Commissioner, and if he has received that opinion, can he share it with the committee? Given that the minister may continue to be or was a member of the outfitters community and can reasonably be expected to go back to that community whenever he exits this position, isn't it reasonable for the average Albertan to perceive that there is a conflict of interest with the minister's appointment into this role?

My final question. I want to circle back to the issue of the regulations under the Trails Act. I appreciate that the minister and the deputy minister tried to answer the question. In fact, the deputy minister said that he was giving additional information, yet there was no additional information given. It's a simple yes or no question. Do regulations under the Trails Act exist? If yes, where can they be found? And if they're not public, will the minister commit to making those public?

Then I have time for one more question. A couple of years ago there was a high-profile appointment to our trade department, former MLA Dave Rodney. He was pulled from Houston. We suspect that he is now employed in the ministry that the minister is chairing. Can he tell the table what his title – can he confirm that he

is working for the ministry, what his title is, what his job responsibilities are, and what his annual salary will be?

I think that about does it for the questions. Thank you to the minister for his attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, you have up to five minutes to respond.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much. I guess, on the first question, "What did you ever do?" it's really nothing personal. I think it's a choice that I have to make, whether we go back and forth or block time, and I choose block time. I think that's pretty simple.

But getting into some of the other questions here, you talk about \$13 million in hunting and angling revenue for licensing on page 99, line 5. I'm not sure if that was more of a commentary than a question on that one.

We talk about the minister's special licence. You asked quite a few questions on that. The minister's special licence is something that started, I believe, in 1997. I think we've had 25 years of minister's special licences. The point of the minister's special licence is to provide opportunities for people both in Alberta and from around the world to be able to come to Alberta and hunt. The licence is exactly that. It's a licence. There are 12 tags through six different species. Basically, two hunters a year will get these licences for each species. There are hundreds of thousands of hunting licences sold in this province. This is something that happened while the NDP were in government. They had the minister's licences. They were sold in auctions in the U.S., and then there were an equal number of tags raffled off to Albertans in a lottery-type situation where you could buy a ticket. So each Albertan has a chance to do that. Just like when the NDP was in power, these licences had special seasons that extended beyond the regular season. That is still going on.

The year-round licence is something that started last year, so this isn't anything new. This is something that's been going on. I don't remember anybody complaining about last year, when it happened. But I do know that there's an election coming up this year, so I guess that might have something to do with why it's become an issue now.

I think that probably kind of covers that. Again, we have hundreds of thousands of licences. Albertans, for instance, can buy a sheep licence for \$55. Any Albertan can do that. The minister's special licences, again, were developed to raise money for conservation, and that's exactly what they do. The licences that have been sold so far in Alberta have raised almost a million dollars. That money comes back to Alberta for conservation, just like it did when the NDP was in power. That money came back and was used for conservation. I think it's actually a great-news story that Albertans have a chance to benefit from those conservation efforts. That money has been spent on things like wildlife surveys and things like that that benefit all wildlife and benefit all Albertans. Again, I think that's a great story, and again it continues on through multiple governments and multiple plans. I think that's good.

5:45

I'm just trying to think where else you headed here. I think you did ask: who awarded those special licences? Obviously, again, it goes back to 1997. The revenue compared to other years: I think this has probably been one of the best years as far as revenue generated. The change this year has not increased the harvest. It's only increased the value to Albertans that's coming back to this province, so I think that's a good thing.

Let's see here. Okay. Then my involvement in the industry, the outfitting industry: as you well know, no minister can be a shareholder in any company. You were a minister at one time, so

you know that. I don't think it's any news to you or anybody else that I'm no longer in that industry, because I can't be. That's one thing that's required with the Conflicts of Interest Act. I think that's that.

You know, you mentioned that, well, I could go back to that industry, but I think that's the same for any minister. They could go back to whatever they came from. Quite often we have an ag minister that has an ag background. I think it's fair that we could have a schoolteacher as an Education minister. I think it's fair that we could have a doctor or nurse as a minister in . . .

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We now move to the government caucus members. MLA McIver, would you like combined time or block time?

Mr. McIver: Block time, please.

The Chair: Block time? Okay.

Mr. McIver: I think that's much better. A heads-up for my colleagues: I probably won't take the whole five minutes. I'll look to pass the puck here soon.

Minister, thank you for being here. I'm looking at key objective 3.3. I hear the folks across talking about the K pass quite a bit. We all know that the money is earmarked to make the park sustainable and to provide better services. Along those lines, I guess, do you have any idea how much revenue is generated due to the K pass, and can you give a few examples of investments made into the area as a result of that money being available through the K pass? I certainly heard lots of complaints from people, before the pass was in place, about garbage not being picked up and one thing and another. I'm interested in what kind of progress we're making.

On page 59 I see a drop in transfers from the government of Canada, from \$25.6 million in the '23-24 estimates to \$6.2 million in the '24-25. Can you tell us why the federal government is giving us that much less money?

There it is. I will I cede my time to the birthday boy, MLA Walker, who was born in the ides of March.

Mr. Walker: There you go.

The Chair: Just for clarification, we have block time. We have five minutes allowed to a member.

Mr. McIver: You're not allowing us to pass the puck?

The Chair: I am not allowing us to pass the puck. I'm ruling you have up to five minutes as an individual member.

Mr. McIver: Well, no. I'll just give it to the minister. There you go.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much. You talked about the K pass. That generated \$11 million in '22-23. Last year it generated \$12 million in revenues, and it was reinvested into K Country. They're expecting that 2023 is slightly lower than year 1, with slightly lower postpandemic visitation levels in Kananaskis and ongoing capital improvements of high-use areas, which meant that some of the more popular trails were closed. That kind of accounts for why there was lower revenue there. Low snowpack levels have impacted winter visitation, especially for skiing. The visitation in Kananaskis Country in 2021 was 5.1 million compared to 4.3 million in 2022.

Now, the year 3 net revenues are projected to reach about \$15 million, an increase forecast largely based on expected trail

openings and usual snowpack levels. As far as how the money has been spent here: \$1.2 million to maintain over 1,600 kilometres of trails; \$500,000 in grants to support local trail organizations; \$1.5 million to support the public safety and dispatch program; \$450,000 for human-wildlife coexistence efforts; \$1.5 million for public safety and mountain rescue support; \$1.5 million for additional Crown land conservation enforcement efforts; \$1.5 million for recreation management, including parking control; \$1.9 million for specialized facilities, like the Canmore Nordic Centre; and \$0.5 million in facility maintenance and operations, like keeping the visitor centres open. The funding goes to partnerships in K Country to do conservation and recreational work on the ground with groups such as the Friends of Kananaskis or Bragg Creek Trails.

You mentioned about the drop in revenue from the federal government, and I think that has to do with a drop in revenue coming in from the federal government for mountain pine beetle. We've seen a drop in transfers from the government of Canada, from \$25.6 million to \$6.2 million, so basically it's a \$19.4 million decrease in the target.

For 2024, it includes a \$20.7 million decrease due to the completion of the federal funding support agreement to the province for the mountain pine beetle control activities; a \$1 million increase estimated for the Indigenous Services Canada agreement, with wildfire management up for renewal in '24-25; a \$0.3 million increase proposed for junior forest ranger support, with agreement renewal in '24-25. That kind of gives a bit of a background.

I don't know if you want to maybe get into that in more detail, Deputy Minister, on the federal money going back and forth on the pine beetle.

Mr. Marchand: Yeah. I mean, I think that big reduction, the significant reduction that was identified, is because the agreement is expected to, really, come to an end. It was about \$20 million annually, and that's what accounts for that big drop in the mountain pine beetle funding.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Yes. Thank you very much, Deputy Minister, for that.

I think we've kind of covered that, but again, when we look at the K pass, for instance, there is a lot of good work that's being done with those funds. We have organizations that we work with like the Bragg Creek Trails Association, the Moose Mountain Bike Trail Society, Friends of Kananaskis Country Cooperating Association, the Canmore and Area Mountain Bike Association, the Calgary Mountain Bike Alliance Fellowship, the Whitebark Pine Ecosystem Foundation of Canada, and the Elbow River Watershed Partnership Society.

They've received funds, anywhere from \$25,000 to \$300,000. We appreciate the work that our partners do in working with the Alberta government and providing the service that they do for all Albertans. I think it's important that we work with these partners, because, again, they're the people that are on the landscape. They know what needs to be done. They care about it, obviously, because they're volunteering. They're active in their communities there, and they want to make things better. I think it's great to have these partnerships and have these funds go to these organizations.

Again, it leverages more work than what we could do as government just by paying for the service to be done. Again, they use their volunteers and their organizations, and they have people volunteer even equipment use, where we wouldn't have that volunteering happening through the Alberta government. These are good partnerships, and we appreciate the work that they do. Some of these associations have a lot of volunteers. You know, one

organization, Bragg Creek Trails Association, has about 10,000 volunteer hours, so when you look at that . . .

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Minister.

We will now move on to the Official Opposition caucus. MLA Sweet, combined time or block time?

Ms Sweet: I'd like to go back and forth if the minister will allow.

The Chair: Okay. Combined time.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to go back to the \$2.2 million that was referenced for Wood Works!. I appreciate all the work that happens through that organization. I recognize it's Canada-wide and that each province sort of does their own breakdown of how they want to be the advocacy and the educational group and all of those things.

My question, though, when we we're talking about looking at supporting the industry and value-add and rural economics and things like that, is: is there – I don't see it within the ministry – any other type of support when it comes to job creation, expansion, value-add, production? Right now the only key objective is, like I said, the softwood lumber litigation and negotiation, yet there is a whole forest jobs action plan. But even when I look at the jobs action plan on the government website, it doesn't necessarily speak to anything outside of fibre and harvesting, doing that sustainably.

5:55

In fact, I would challenge that it really is the focus on how to make sure that all of the allocated timber that has been provided to industry is being utilized, which I find a little bit ironic only because it really is up to industry and their FMAs about when they decide to harvest and that their planning around ensuring harvest is being done in a sustainable way and regeneration of the forest. Like, there's a whole plan around that, yet when I look at this, the immediate actions are working with companies to ensure utilization of the allocated timber and then auctioning off in a competitive process the annual allowable cuts.

Can I, I guess, get walked through the job action plan and then how it is that the government is actually supporting value-add? There are many sawmills and pulp mills who are looking at doing expansion into biofuels, looking at biomass, doing other types of production, yet we see in the budget, in the capital plan, huge investments in oil and gas, the irrigation networks, which are federally supported. We have APIP. Yet under Agriculture and Natural Resources, page 106 of the capital plan, forestry isn't even mentioned. So what's the plan, Minister? Where's the money?

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Yes, I just want to mention that we do have to be cautious on how we approach things here because of the softwood lumber dispute that we have with the U.S. We are cautious that we make sure that we don't inflame anything on that issue.

But when it comes to the forest jobs action plan, it's a commitment to provide sustainable, long-term fibre access to forest companies. That is important, and that is what we're focused on doing in order to make sure that we have the forest companies keep the people working, keep their mills going, and keep operating on the landscape.

Again, as you mentioned there, you know, we develop forest management plans in conjunction with the forest companies, and there are other things on the landscape that are affecting them – of course, endangered species and things like that – that have to be worked through. There are a lot of issues, when we're developing

those plans, that have to be worked on. We've got to make sure that we have proper, sustainable forest management.

Forest management agreements and timber quotas are some of the ways Alberta provides forest companies with secure, long-term rights to harvest Crown timber in exchange for responsibilities such as forest management planning and inventory standards set by the government. When we look through the benefits of the forest industry, we have 17 communities that are relying on the forest industry for at least 10 per cent of all local salaries and wages. That makes a huge difference in those communities. The industry directly employs 17,000 workers and supports an additional 24,000 jobs with contractors, suppliers, and workers in the industry. The employer compensation in 2021 was \$1.6 billion, which is an increase of about \$200 million from 2020. The province's gross domestic product for forestry in 2021 was \$3 billion.

Now, the forest industry paid the government of Alberta in 2022 \$175 million, but forest timber royalties and fees for 2023 we're expecting to be \$158.8 million, and that decrease is driven by an overall decline in market prices for forest products. Again, I think one thing that we can point to, as far as the situation in Alberta versus other jurisdictions, is that forest companies are here, they're investing money, and they're spending money because they know that this is a low-tax environment. That's something that attracts business. They know that they have secure fibre access here in Alberta, too. That's why – again, I think I mentioned it previously – when the price of forest products dropped here recently, the forest companies shut down more in B.C. than Alberta, substantially more. I think we have a pretty good market here for the forest companies. We have to continue to work with them and make sure that we continue to do that.

I'm not sure if the assistant deputy minister wants to talk more about the value-added projects there, too, if you don't mind.

Mr. Lux: Sure. We have some other tools to derisk some of the innovation, especially around the dues system. There is some flexibility there. When companies are actually entering the market, making things like laminated veneer lumber, for example, you know, we do have the ability to derisk some of that from the dues that they actually pay the province until that market gets established, and then we can make a market-based system. We've done that for some companies. The other thing . . .

Ms Sweet: Sorry. Just to clarify the dues. What you're saying: that's how you – I couldn't hear you very clearly.

Mr. Lux: Oh, sorry.

Ms Sweet: So how are you devaluing it?

Mr. Lux: Not devaluing; derisking . . .

Ms Sweet: Sorry. Derisking it.

Mr. Lux: . . . some of that market development for some innovation for some of the companies.

Ms Sweet: Yeah.

Mr. Lux: When they're making a brand new product, our dues systems right now are based on the product, the price of the product and what they're getting, that value.

Ms Sweet: Yeah.

Mr. Lux: If a market hasn't been that established, there are some tools that the minister has employed in order to make sure those

dues are at a reasonable level so they can actually derisk and invest. Once the markets are established, then we readjust and go into the back of the market-based system.

Ms Sweet: Interesting. Okay. Thank you for that.

I just want to comment. I haven't said anything on the record that isn't publicly printed. I was actually reading immediate actions right off the Alberta job action plan that was printed in May. I'm very sensitive to the soft lumber dispute conversation, and I believe there's nothing that's been discussed here that would imply or influence that at all at this point.

I do want to emphasize that I do think that there is an opportunity here to be supporting the industry in a different way to bring in that value-add and that I think that there are creative ways that will not impede the discussion around the softwood lumber, that would not be in contravention of any of the agreements or anything like that. I think, in fact, if we look at what's happening in the United States right now, they would be hard pressed based on some of the things that are happening in some of their new legislation.

I do want to talk about the regulations again in the Trails Act, though, because I don't think we've actually gotten there, and I know my colleague has asked about it before. I appreciate that you said that AFPA has been in consultation when the legislation was drafted. Are they part of being consulted on the regulations and ensuring that – like, how are the regulations being developed? Are they developed, and who is being consulted in regards to that development? It needs to be a cross-sector conversation. It impacts agriculture. It impacts forestry. It impacts parks. It impacts oil and gas. Like, the complexity of land management is a concern, so I'm just wondering how those regulations are being done. Like, "Are they finished?" I guess would be the other part.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. I just wanted to go back to the softwood lumber dispute there. I think, just so we're clear, that the issue is that if there's anything viewed as a subsidy or subsidization of the industry, that's what's going to trigger the U.S. to possibly respond. That's the concern there.

When it comes to the Trails Act, I mean, the Trails Act is enabling legislation to actually do the work that's planned there. And I'm not sure – the deputy minister will add something here, too.

Mr. Marchand: Two comments. No regs have been established yet, so I can be clear on that point.

Ms Sweet: Thank you.

Mr. Marchand: As implementation of the Trails Act continues, we have within government or the integrated resource management system, that is about the co-ordination across all of the land management groups, Energy, agriculture, ourselves, Environment and Protected Areas, the Alberta Energy Regulator . . .

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

We now move to government caucus members. MLA Walker, would you prefer combined time or block time?

Mr. Walker: I would like combined time with the minister.

The Chair: We will proceed with that.

Mr. Walker: It is my birthday, so I appreciate it. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Hays for the special birthday wish. Really appreciate it, really nice. I'm the big four oh, Minister, I would say through the chair, and feeling really good. Also, I would

just say that, going back to Member Rowswell's comment, I also quite enjoy your cooking. Again, thank you and great to see you, I would say through the chair. Also, Minister, thank you so much for the big announcement we had in Sherwood Park recently, that you had done via your ministry. Sorry I couldn't make it, but just thanks for making the time to do that announcement in Sherwood Park.

6:05

I want to begin, Minister, by talking about the mountain pine beetle infestation. If you move down to performance metric 1.b – this is on page 56 of the business plan – which refers specifically to measuring new areas that are impacted by the mountain pine beetle infestation, we know that the mountain pine beetle infestation is a threat to the health of our boreal forests, and I'm glad to see the government measuring the impact of this. Two questions here, Minister: one, can the minister highlight some ways his ministry is working to combat the mountain pine beetle infestation, and is there any dedicated funding for this?

I think I'll just start there, Minister. I'd like to hear your comments.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Yes. Thank you very much. Happy birthday. I remember 40 like it was, well, maybe not yesterday, but I do remember it still, so it wasn't that far ago. Yes. I appreciated being able to have that announcement in Sherwood Park. That was important. I appreciate that you couldn't make it, but that was a great community to have that happen.

As far as the mountain pine beetle Alberta's management of the mountain pine beetle is based in forest science and the most current information on beetle biology, impacts, and mitigation measures. The current provincial program is recognized internationally as an effective and efficient program that has significantly reduced the beetle population and averted the economic and environmental disaster experienced in B.C. Management of the mountain pine beetle in Alberta has relied on assessing the current status and risk spread, determining immigration of the beetle populations, and pursuing achievable objectives.

Alberta's management program employs a short-term, beetle-focused strategy and a long-term, pine-focused strategy. The short-term strategy consists of direct beetle population management through single-tree control treatments. Alberta's aggressive survey and control program has seen the number of infested trees decrease in areas where infestations are actively managed. The long-term strategy is focused on reducing the amount of suitable pine hosts on the landscape through harvesting prior to infestation while considering other important forest values. In the long term a more age-diverse forest may be achieved. Alberta uses various management measures like population monitoring, risk assessments, cutting and burning infested trees, and the harvesting of highly vulnerable pine to reduce the impact of mountain pine beetle on our province's forests.

Alberta also administers the pine beetle municipal grant program. This program assists the department in the control, suppression, and eradication of the beetle on municipal and private lands. Municipalities are key partners in relation to these management activities. Impacts to timber resources can have catastrophic effects on communities with forest-based economies. In addition, the protection of high-value pine trees is a genuine concern of municipal governments and landowners. This grant program provides a mechanism to increase the effectiveness of the province's management program. In addition, it positions the department as a willing partner in the fight against mountain pine beetle outside the forested public lands. The program provides funding to support the cost of control operations and expert advice to municipalities that support this management on municipal and private lands.

Just to kind of summarize, obviously, we work with others to make sure that we have that opportunity to control the pine beetle. Across the province the numbers have dropped dramatically in the last few years. We've had some weather that's been helpful for that, too. We still are concerned about the Bow Valley and Calgary area, and we're keeping and monitoring that as with the rest of Alberta, but it is a pretty good story now compared to where we were just a few years ago.

Mr. Walker: Overall, so far this year or in the last year, let's say, it's been a pretty regular year in terms of, you know, dealing with the pine beetle?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. We've kept up the work on it, but the numbers have just been steadily declining. The effects on the trees have been declining also. The number of trees that we're finding infected is dropping. Like, the density has decreased from 3.5 trees per square kilometre in 2019 to .13 trees per square kilometre in 2022. That's a dramatic decrease in the number of pine beetles across the province. Again, we're still focused on it. We're not taking the foot off the gas. We're still making sure that we're watching that situation.

Mr. Walker: Well, great. I'm glad to get that feedback, that we're reducing the mountain pine beetle infestation.

It's great because now I'm segueing to reducing red tape, right? Our government has a great story to tell there – and you referenced it earlier, Minister – on how that's helped restore and renew the Alberta advantage. We're booming again. We're leading the country. We are the economic engine, as we should be.

With regard to red tape and reducing it in perhaps your areas of jurisdiction, Minister, in your ministry – now, as the MLA I hear all the time about: you know, what's the government doing to reduce red tape? We were proud to recently get, I believe, an A-plus rating, I think from the CFIB as a government; some red tape reduction organization, anyway. I'm so proud to be part of a government, Minister, that's been cutting red tape aggressively – I sit next to a red tape cutting warrior, the Member for Red Deer-South – and unnecessary regulations, regulatory burdens for Albertans.

Now, key objective 2.1 on page 57 of the business plan is to minimize regulatory and process barriers to improve service delivery, reduce red tape, and support economic opportunities on Crown lands and forests. Can the minister give us an overview of how the ministry is still looking for ways to reduce red tape while keeping our forests and Crown lands protected?

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Actually, we have a great success story in this ministry. The Alberta government is committed to cutting the red tape count by one-third, saving Albertans time, money, and resources while protecting the environment and keeping the public safe and healthy. As of January 2023 Forestry, Parks and Tourism has reduced its red tape by 42.96 per cent . . .

Mr. Walker: That's good.

Mr. Loewen: . . . exceeding the Alberta government's overall target reduction of 33 per cent.

To reduce red tape and improve the timeliness of permit approvals, the parks division launched an online permit portal in June 2020, which has reduced its red tape reduction count by 545. Permit costs are kept low to avoid burdening businesses, operators, or other visitors wishing to enjoy Alberta parks. The following permits are now available for application via the online permit portal: firearm discharge permits, tree-cutting permits, special events and wedding permits, guiding and instructing permits, and research and collection permits. Again, those are all available online now.

The parks division will continue to transition additional permit application processes to the online portal, making the application process easier and more streamlined for applicants. As application processes move online, forms and web content are reviewed and updated to support business needs, reflect the feedback from applicants, and are reviewed for red tape reduction considerations.

Forestry, Parks and Tourism is also working to improve the speed and efficiency of current service standards. The department has thoroughly reviewed approval times and timelines and identified opportunities to shorten existing service standards and establish service standards where they do not already exist. These changes will ensure timelier review and decision-making processes. For example, the forestry division has identified a suite of approval items where the service standard can be shortened or can be established for items without a service standard. Engagement with the forest sector on the proposed new service standards is ongoing.

Our forestry division is also currently working with the Aboriginal consultation office to implement an improved digital service system that will help Alberta forest companies input Indigenous consultation information more easily and reduce review timelines.

Alberta also administers – sorry. Lands operations is taking deliberate steps to address red tape and modernize approvals on Crown land. Actions under way include addressing the public land sale backlog, which will be fully addressed within the next year, speeding up the process time for disposition of renewals and transfers, and clarifying requirements for our applications. Recent successes to highlight include fully addressing the grazing renewal backlog. Grazing renewals are now processed prior to expiry. We are working towards assignments of grazing leases being completed within seven days. That's down from, I think, 11 months just a year and a half ago.

Mr. Walker: That's good. Yeah.

Mr. Loewen: The department is also modernizing through a digital regulatory assurance system. The first phase for lands will be released later this year. Modernizing our digital services is a key component to ensuring timely access to our programs and services and delivering our regulatory oversight mandate. We continue to work with Alberta Technology and Innovation to streamline information technology applications in an effective, streamlined system.

Mr. Walker: Well, thank you for all that. I'm also really happy to hear that the grazing lease – I guess I would call it a backlog or something – has been corrected and it's greatly reduced, from 11 months to seven. I remember a few years ago that you and I had talked about that, and you had expressed your frustration. We want to expedite that and reduce that red tape there, so I'm glad to hear that's been resolved.

Thanks for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we move on to Official Opposition members. MLA Sweet?

Ms Sweet: If we could go back and forth, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Loewen: Yep.

Ms Sweet: Okay. I'm going to ask one question that's a little bit off from the rest of my questions. The special licensing: do you have the responsibility for the wild boar program, with the ears?

Mr. Loewen: I believe that's with Agriculture because it is. . .

Ms Sweet: The one out of all of them.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. We call them wild boars, but they are domestic. They're feral, I guess.

Ms Sweet: Well, we need to come up with a strategy around those guys.

Mr. Loewen: Actually, I'll have the deputy minister respond.

6:15

Mr. Marchand: Yes, they have been designated as a pest officially under the Wildlife Act or under the – I can't remember what piece of legislation it is. But they have been designated as a pest. Agriculture has a wild boar management program in place. There's a whole sounder trapping program. The most effective way to capture them is by doing sounder. There are connections with grants and municipalities as well.

Ms Sweet: Okay. I just wasn't sure if – like, with the moves I wasn't sure who, and I honestly didn't have time to ask the minister last time. Okay. That's my random question. It's not related to the rest of my questions.

I want to talk about carbon. I'm going to list it back to outcome 2, which is to effectively support diversified economic prosperity. The ministry seeks to create a business environment and infrastructure upon which the forest – yada, yada, yada – and all the sectors can thrive and achieve their economic potential. It also is to provide timely transparent decisions to support environmentally sustainable forestry, natural resource, and tourism economic opportunities. Is there a discussion or has there been a discussion in relation to looking at voluntary and regulatory carbon markets in relation to forestry and bringing them in as a partner in addressing the carbon capture conversation that's happening both at the federal level and the provincial level?

Mr. Loewen: Yes. EPA has the lead on this because it's Environment and Protected Areas' part of their mandate there. But we are in discussions with them.

You know, in the fall Premier Smith tasked our government with delivering on a number of items through an updated mandate. This included developing a made-in-Alberta climate strategy and standing up against federal intrusion into Alberta's jurisdiction over resource management. In my ministry we are actively moving on this mandate by investing in forest health and wildfire prevention and mitigation, specifically our forest health and adaptation programming and the FireSmart program, working with industry on a strategic approach to use adaptive rangeland management and disposition holder stewardship to maintain the health and biodiversity of provincial rangelands under disposition and developing an environmentally responsible policy framework for Alberta's parks and Crown land recreation system.

Ms Sweet: Yeah. I appreciate that. I do think – okay. I appreciate, looking at the carbon market, that it's either happening under TIER or they're doing it under possibly something else. I get that. I guess there are other strategies around the carbon capture that I believe forestry could be looking at with support of maybe some research and understanding: you know, looking at wildfire management, looking at whether or not we're leaving debris on forest floors, those sorts of strategies, and whether those are being built into a carbon conversation for forestry. I think that they can be a big player in the conversation. I think that there's a lot of opportunity when it comes to education and people understanding the carbon capture component when it comes to wood buildings as well as just harvesting practices. So I would encourage the minister to be able to come up with that as part of the carbon strategy and the carbon

conversation. I know when we've been in at AFPA, we've had conversations around sort of, like, "Could there be a consideration of a cover crop idea that's similar to what they're doing in agriculture?" and those sorts of things.

The other piece around that is that if we could maybe chat a little bit, too, just around the environmental sustainability. There are, obviously, conflicts around SARA in the context of endangered species, and I'm just wondering what strategies you're doing to support the work around caribou, bear, there's a bird now – it's really bad; I should know who the bird is, but I forget the bird – the trout. We've got lots of animals in Alberta that are now on the list, which I think is having significant impacts on making sure that we are addressing the environmental components that need to be – whether it be the buffer zones, whether it be looking at nesting and measuring over the year, the different things that happen, like with the bird's migration patterns and all the things. Again I can't remember the bird's name. Maybe you can walk us through a little bit on that part.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. Endangered species do fall under EPA also. But we are working with the feds and with EPA on some of these issues. The federal government has introduced measures under the Species at Risk Act to provide protection for three cold water trout species as well as update the Migratory Birds Convention Act regulations. These measures could have significant impacts on the management of Alberta's forests, delaying harvest, reforestation operations, and increasing operating costs of the forest sector.

Again, we're working alongside Environment and Protected Areas, and we continue to engage with the federal department of fisheries and the Alberta Forest Products Association to identify opportunities for better alignment between the two regulatory bodies.

The bird that you were thinking of is the pileated woodpecker, which is something that just came up. Interestingly enough, Woody Woodpecker is a pileated woodpecker, just for interest's sake.

Ms Sweet: Oh, really?

Mr. Loewen: Yes.

Ms Sweet: Well, there you go. Definitely have to take care of that woodpecker.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. The fish that are of concern are the westslope cutthroat trout, the Athabasca rainbow trout, and, of course, the Alberta bull trout, which is the Alberta fish.

Again, these issues do, you know, create challenges for the forestry industry. We understand that, and we want to be able to work with the EPA and the feds to make sure that we have the best solutions possible.

I think we can agree, you know, on forests being a huge carbon sink and that there are some things that we can do to help with the issues of carbon, with fire management, and debris control, and things like that. I think there are a lot of things that we can work together on with that.

I'm just trying to think of anything else there in kind of your comments, but I think that's probably it. Yeah. I think that's good. Again, looking back to those species at risk, we also have the caribou, of course, which are of great concern to industry and to Albertans as a whole as far as making sure that we can have caribou on the landscape but also have industry working, too.

Ms Sweet: Okay. Let's go into your area of the province. Let's chat about the north for a bit. Let's talk about jobs in the north. I mean, I think we're hearing it all across the province around the labour

shortage concerns, and I know that part of the target is working with Indigenous communities and, you know, building relationships, looking at being able to incorporate different programming and things like that in regard to working with stakeholders and Indigenous communities. I'm curious, from a jobs perspective, if there's a strategy happening. You spoke a little bit about tourism but in partnership with forestry but also other communities, so not just the Indigenous communities, but, I mean – Minister, you would know this better than I – like, there's a significant Mennonite community. There are other communities up in the north that may be able to be supported in learning about forestry and being mentored in working into those programs. Just wondering. Like, I know Work Wild, all those things. I can probably list off those programs. But I'm just curious what's happening in the north and how we can support the industry up in there.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. You brought up the Indigenous sector. We have the 280 fire attack crews. I think there are 35 different crews that have 280 Indigenous people working on the fire attacks. So I think that's a success story there.

When it comes to the other communities, again, when we look across the landscape in the north, you're exactly right; we do have labour shortages there, too. We have lots of different sectors that are needing employees. When it comes to trying to serve those people – you know, you mentioned some of the communities in the north like the Mennonite community, and they're highly active in the logging and forestry industry.

We also know that when it comes to rural tourism development, we're spending \$5 million a year for that kind of development. That's funding that goes to Travel Alberta to make sure that we . . .

The Chair: Good. Thank you, Minister.

We now turn the floor over to the government member caucus. MLA Stephan, do you wish to combine time?

Mr. Stephan: Combined time, yes, for the last five, Minister.

Mr. Loewen: Yup.

The Chair: Go ahead, MLA Stephan.

Mr. Stephan: Thank you, Minister, and thank you. I'm so excited to talk about what a wonderful ministry you have the opportunity to serve in. Alberta is such a beautiful place, and I'm so glad that we have a minister with some unique competencies and background experience that he can contribute to making this ministry in Alberta even better.

6:25

I know that we're short on time. I just have two questions, Minister. First of all, I wanted to – I was excited to hear as you were talking about page 58. It talks about \$178 million to refurbish and enhance outdoor recreational opportunities, natural features, and buildings on Crown lands. You, in particular, mentioned the David Thompson corridor. I'd sure be interested in a little bit of information about that and in the west country in general.

I enjoy recreating in the west country, as do many families and individuals in central Alberta. Kind of a unique story. There's a trail that you can take an off-road highway vehicle on. It's only open to those vehicles in December and January, but you can go quite deep in, and there's a place called 40-mile patrol cabin, and it's an asset of the province of Alberta. When we went there, we observed that the Alberta flag there needed to be replaced. Kind of a neat story, and I think this is kind of – you know, there's a lot of collaboration, words, and partnerships with other organizations. I

know an individual, I think, that co-ordinated with your ministry, and we replaced the Alberta flag there, got a new one up, and just that kind of experience where we have these blessed areas that we can recreate in and that 90 – you know, the vast majority of users of those wonderful, beautiful resources do want to make it better. I would be interested in just some specific investments that are being looked at for the David Thompson corridor.

I remember as a father as well using the Rockies helicopter service to take my young sons on backpacking trips. We would be flown into some of these remote lakes: Landslide Lake, Lake of the Falls – what a beautiful name; it's such a beautiful place, too – Michel Lake, one of the only places where you can fish for golden trout. Then we would hike out because they were pretty young, and it was a long way to go. It was downhill; it was a little easier.

Then just connected with those investments, I just want to know – you know, while the vast majority of users are responsible, unfortunately, there are some who are not. I just want to understand a little bit about making sure that people are respectful of these beautiful resources when they use them and some of the efforts and initiatives on that front for the small minority who aren't respectful, to make sure that these resources are available for the vast majority of Albertans who are respectful in the use of them.

Mr. Loewen: Okay. Thank you very much for that. I appreciate that. You started by talking about the great Ministry of Forestry, Parks and Tourism, and I agree. I'm proud to represent this ministry and proud of the people that work within the ministry and the good work that they do.

When it comes to the spending, you know, it's always hard as conservatives. We always try to figure: "Okay. Should we be spending this money on these things or not? Well, how much, and where should it go?" That's always a balance. But we know that Albertans appreciate the outdoors, like you mentioned. The vast majority of Albertans appreciate the opportunity to go to these great places, and it's just great to be able to have some facilities for them to enjoy. And it's actually better for the environment to have the facilities there rather than not have the facilities for them to use while they're out there.

When it comes to the David Thompson corridor, in the capital plan I think we have about \$4.1 million. The upgrades are focused on developing parking lots, access roads, toilets, signage, staging areas, rustic camping areas, and bear lockers. With the provision of this infrastructure it is expected to start to address the pressures and safety issues that have been observed and experienced in the area. Again, when we have so many people going to these great areas – and you listed off so many beautiful parts of our province, just one after another there; 40-mile patrol cabin, which I haven't been to yet, but I know it's on my list of things to do. I look forward to going there and seeing the flag that you guys hung up there, the new flag.

The Chair: I apologize for the interruption, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for consideration of the ministry's estimates has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet tomorrow, March 16, 2023, at 9 a.m. to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure.

Thank you, everyone. I think we had a good meeting this evening. We covered many aspects of the ministry, forestry and the trails. We even talked about saving Woody Woodpecker and what we have to do about invasive wild boar. Thank you, everyone, for your participation. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 6:30 p.m.]

