



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 30th Legislature  
First Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Resource Stewardship

Ministry of Environment and Parks  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Tuesday, November 19, 2019  
9 a.m.

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

**Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

Hanson, David B., Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul (UCP), Chair  
Ceci, Joe, Calgary-Buffalo (NDP), Deputy Chair

Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (NDP)  
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (NDP)  
Getson, Shane C., Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland (UCP)  
Issik, Whitney, Calgary-Glenmore (UCP)\*  
Loewen, Todd, Central Peace-Notley (UCP)  
Rehn, Pat, Lesser Slave Lake (UCP)  
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (NDP)\*\*  
Rosin, Miranda D., Banff-Kananaskis (UCP)  
Sabir, Irfan, Calgary-McCall (NDP)  
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Singh, Peter, Calgary-East (UCP)  
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Turton, Searle, Spruce Grove-Stony Plain (UCP)  
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\* substitution for Mark Smith

\*\* substitution for Lorne Dach

**Also in Attendance**

Phillips, Shannon, Lethbridge-West (NDP)

**Support Staff**

Shannon Dean	Clerk
Stephanie LeBlanc	Clerk Assistant and Senior Parliamentary Counsel
Teri Cherkewich	Law Clerk
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Michael Kulicki	Committee Clerk
Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
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Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

## **Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship**

### **Participants**

Ministry of Environment and Parks

Hon. Jason Nixon, Minister

John Conrad, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations

Justin Wheler, Executive Director, Regulatory and Compliance



9 a.m. Tuesday, November 19, 2019

[Mr. Hanson in the chair]

**Ministry of Environment and Parks  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the meeting to order and welcome everyone. The committee has under consideration the estimates of the Ministry of Environment and Parks for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I would ask that we go around the table and have all MLAs introduce themselves for the record. Minister, please introduce the officials that are joining you at the table. I am David Hanson, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul and chair of the committee. We will continue, starting to my right.

**Mr. Loewen:** Todd Loewen, MLA, Central Peace-Notley.

**Mr. Getson:** Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Muhammad Yaseen, MLA, Calgary-North.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** R.J. Sigurdson, MLA, Highwood.

**Ms Issik:** Whitney Issik, Calgary-Glenmore.

**Mr. Singh:** Good morning. Peter Singh, MLA, Calgary-East.

**Mr. Turton:** Good morning. Searle Turton, MLA for the riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain.

**Ms Rosin:** Good morning. Miranda Rosin, MLA for Banff-Kananaskis.

**Mr. Rehn:** Good morning. Pat Rehn, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Good morning. Jason Nixon, Minister of Environment and Parks. On my left is Ronda Goulden, who's the assistant deputy minister of the policy division at AEP. Directly to my right is Bev Yee, the Deputy Minister of Alberta Environment and Parks, and to her right is Tom Davis, the assistant deputy minister of the strategy and governance division.

**Ms Phillips:** Shannon Phillips, MLA for Lethbridge-West.

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

**Ms Renaud:** Marie Renaud, St. Albert.

**Mr. Feehan:** Richard Feehan, Edmonton-Rutherford.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I would like to note the following substitutions for the record: Ms Renaud for Mr. Dach and Ms Issik for Mr. Smith.

Please note that the microphones are operated by *Hansard* and that the committee proceedings are being live streamed on the Internet and broadcast on Alberta Assembly TV. 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. Standing Order 59.01(6) establishes the speaking rotation while the speaking time limits are set out in Standing Order 59.02(1). 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 his comments we begin a 60-minute speaking

block for the Official Opposition, followed by a 20-minute speaking block for the government caucus.

The rotation of speaking time will then alternate between the Official Opposition and the government caucus, with individual speaking times set to five minutes, which, if combined with the minister's time, make it a 10-minute block. Discussion should flow through the chair at all times regardless of whether or not the speaking time is combined. 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. If members have any questions regarding speaking times or the rotation, please feel free to send a note or e-mail to either the chair or the committee clerk.

A total of three hours has been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Environment and Parks. The scheduled end time of this meeting is 12 p.m. 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 have any opposition to taking a break? Seeing none, we will schedule that coming forward.

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. 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 the meeting clock will continue to run; however, the timer for the speaking block will be paused.

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 this evening. 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, and 20 copies of the amendment must be provided at the meeting for committee members and staff.

I now invite the Minister of Environment and Parks to begin with his opening remarks. You have 10 minutes, sir.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and good morning, through you, to all of the committee. Thank you for having me here today. I'm pleased to be here today to present the budget estimates for Alberta Environment and Parks, or AEP. This morning, as I mentioned, I am joined by Bev Yee, who's my deputy minister, the Deputy Minister of Environment and Parks; Tom Davis, who's the assistant deputy minister of the strategy and governance division; as well as Ronda Goulden, who is the assistant deputy minister of our policy division. There are a number of other people from AEP who are here today in the gallery. They'll be able to assist us with any questions the committee may have.

Mr. Chair, Budget 2019 delivers on the priorities of Albertans and the promises of our government and continues to position Alberta as a leader in environmental protection and environmental, social, and corporate governance, or ESG. Our budget ensures that Alberta's valued natural resources – our air, land, and water – are protected now and for generations of Albertans to come. In addition to environmental protection, this budget follows through on some of the core pieces of our government's platform. For AEP, this

budget focuses on reducing regulatory red tape and continuing to balance the needs of the environment and the needs of the economy.

Mr. Chair, I would like to stress that this budget represents a tightening of the belt for the department, which, quite frankly, is what our government promised so that we could tackle the province's out-of-control spending. After careful review and assessment of priorities and, frankly, after making many difficult decisions, AEP has been able to deliver a budget that reduces our overall spending without cutting programs. This year the overall operational budget for the ministry is \$651 million, and our capital investment is \$72 million.

Some of our budget highlights are as follows. Overall, capital investment is up more than 13 per cent when compared to last year's estimates. Not only have we increased funding; we have also focused this funding in high-priority areas that will deliver the best return on investment for Albertans.

Our government is continuing to invest in Alberta's parks systems. This money will primarily go to support parks' capital maintenance and renewal funding.

We are also increasing capital investment in fisheries management significantly. These funds will go towards maintenance and renewal funding of the Allison Creek Brood Trout Hatchery Station, the Sam Livingston Fish Hatchery, and the new Raven Creek brood trout station projects, which play an important role in growing and sustaining our province's fish populations.

I would like to stress that although our capital spending has increased, we have been very deliberate in our funding allocations so that we are spending funds in areas that are important to Albertans. Unlike previous governments, we are not spending for the sake of spending. Instead, we are allocating funds to priority areas.

The department's well-thought-out spending plan goes beyond capital investment and into our operating expenses. As promised, our government has committed to controlling spending and is working to tackle Alberta's debt. Mr. Chair, I'd like to say that this budget reflects current economic realities without cutting the programs Albertans expect from the department. Overall, through efficiencies we have found a way to reduce the department's spending by 7 per cent, and we've made these reductions in a way that will have limited impacts on Albertans and on front-line services. For example, we have achieved savings in manpower through attrition and anticipated vacancies, and we've also reduced discretionary spending and contracts. This is just one example of how this year's budget for AEP achieves budgetary savings while still focusing on key areas and services that Albertans have come to rely on.

The department continues to invest funds to ensure that our province's air is clean and safe to breathe. This year we will allocate \$20 million to ensure that the province's air quality meets our high standards for cleanliness and safety. With these funds Albertans can have confidence that the air is monitored and evaluated and that we continue to report the results of the testing. Our department will also continue to build collaborative relationships with industry and stakeholders to protect local air quality. Through our continued work with local airsheds, we will monitor local air quality and will continue to advance the government's clean air agenda. The department will also continue to issue regulatory approvals for new projects and will ensure compliance with existing standards. My department understands that rules and regulations aren't enough, that they must also be enforced, so this year's budget includes ample funding to make sure that citizens and industry are held accountable for actions which pollute our province's air, land, and water.

Our government is continuing to invest significant funds to ensure our province's land resources are managed in a way that ensures environmental protection while allowing businesses to grow. For 2019, we are investing \$53 million to ensure that our land resources are properly cared for and managed. This includes \$37 million for public land management and \$4 million for rangeland management. Our government values the conservation of Alberta's unique habitats and ecosystems, so we are dedicating \$3.6 million to rangeland and stewardship projects to protect Alberta's grasslands, mountains, foothills, and forest regions so that they can continue to thrive for generations to come. Overall, the funds for land management will allow for the development of strategies and frameworks and integrated regional and subregional land-use planning that balances environmental, social, and economic concerns.

Our department remains committed to protecting Albertans and their communities from the effects of flooding, so Budget 2019 includes more than \$43 million for 15 flood resilience projects across Alberta. These grants come from the Alberta community resilience program and will protect communities from Fort McMurray to Pincher Creek and Coalhurst from the devastating effects of overland flooding. Considerable work has been done to protect communities, and in the interests of fiscal responsibility AEP is currently assessing how to continue this work in a sustainable and long-term manner. In fact, through partnerships and federal funding, flood adaptation funding has increased by 48 per cent.

In addition to the capital grants, we are spending \$64.8 million on water management, water infrastructure, and on continuing collaborative partnerships with industry and environmental nongovernmental organizations to ensure that Albertans can continue to have access to fresh, clean water.

#### 9:10

We also remain committed to the recovery and sustainability of the many animal species that call our province home. In Budget 2019 our department is spending \$35.8 million to protect animals and animal habitat in our province. We are investing significant resources to protect Alberta's caribou herd and have recently begun working with three subregional task forces that are working to protect three of Alberta's most at-risk herds.

Our department is also spending \$7.4 million on fisheries management. Mr. Chair, action is needed in order to protect many of Alberta's trout species, so we are prioritizing funds to ensure their long-term survival. This funding for fish and wildlife will allow the department to continue its work to identify and contain whirling disease as well as our work on the aquatic invasive species program.

Budget 2019 also allocates \$15.3 million to conservation officers and to the AEP's support and emergency response team, better known as ASERT. This funding plays an important role in ensuring effective emergency responses, public safety, security, and lawful use of Alberta's parks and public lands and is part of the \$30.9 million we are allocating to integrated planning and resource management.

We continue to invest heavily in Alberta's parks system. In addition to the significant capital investment mentioned earlier, we are allocating a total of \$81.6 million to ensure that Albertans not only have access to our province's beautiful parks and outdoor spaces but also have a great and fulfilling visitor experience. Every year, Mr. Chair, there are 8.5 million visits to Alberta's 473 provincial parks and protected areas, and our government is allocating the funds needed to run and manage our parks in the most efficient and effective way possible. We are providing

funding to ensure that visitors are educated about park rules and regulations, and we continue to enforce rules for Albertans' safety, the environment, and the plants and animals that call our parks home.

In continuing with our province's history of environmental stewardship, Budget 2019 once again continues our \$50 million funding for the oil sands environmental monitoring program. We've also committed \$20.9 million to environmental science monitoring so that we track long- and short-term trends and improve our understanding of the environment and changing environmental conditions. This information is crucial as it gives our department the data it needs to inform policy decisions to protect Alberta's natural resources.

As proof of our government's commitment to emissions management, we are prioritizing significant resources to this area of the department. We are allocating \$100 million to the technology innovation and emissions reduction program, or TIER. TIER is a significant investment in technology innovation that will lead to emission reductions in the province's largest industrial emitters. TIER is the centrepiece of our department's and our government's climate change strategy. The program will achieve substantial emission reductions without burdening everyday Albertans with a punitive carbon tax and will give certainty to the province's job creators. To further support our emission reduction efforts, we've committed \$39.1 million to the oil sands innovation funding program. This program supports emission reductions at bitumen production facilities in the oil sands.

Mr. Chair, finally, because the department believes in proper oversight and review processes, we are continuing to allocate resources needed to maintain our department's quasi-judicial bodies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Board, the Surface Rights and Land Compensation boards, the Environmental Appeals Board, and the Public Lands Appeal Board.

Mr. Chair, as you can see, my ministry is committed to focusing on the priorities that Albertans have told us are important to them. The 2019 budget allocation addresses priorities while achieving the budget reductions needed to get Alberta's spending situation under control and to chart a path back to balance. I'm pleased to have presented a departmental budget that is cost-effective and does not cut any of the programs that Albertans need and expect.

Mr. Chair, I thank you for your time. Through you to your committee, I thank them for their time, and I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have over the next couple of hours. With that, I will turn it back to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

For the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak. The timer will be set for 20-minute intervals so that members are aware of the time. Your time starts now.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Great. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Member, would you like to go back and forth with the minister?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you.

I'm looking at page 97 of the estimates, line 1.4, corporate services. Can you explain the decrease from the 2018-19 actual and the budget, I guess, to the 2019 estimate?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, through you to the hon. member, just to confirm, he said page 97 of the estimates, line 4.4?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Line 1.4.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Line 1.4. Sorry. The 2019-20 estimate, as noted, is \$4.4 million lower than the 2018-2019 budget. That, Mr. Chair, reflects savings in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition and savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts. You'll find that that has been a focus of ours as we've worked to tighten the belt across the departments, to find efficiencies on the staffing side, primarily through attrition and vacancies, as we do our part to try to help balance the budget here in the province of Alberta.

**Mr. Schmidt:** How many FTEs are going to be eliminated from that section?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Overall, Mr. Chair, we have 110 FTEs that are anticipated to be eliminated in the budget. I don't have the specifics for that budget line.

**Mr. Schmidt:** You're not breaking them down by budget line?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair, we know that the number is 110 FTEs across the department. That's the number that we have.

**Mr. Schmidt:** What contracts are not going to be continued, then, through corporate services?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the officials will grab possibly a couple of examples of contracts, but obviously that's a large number. We're not going to have a list of every contract. There will be no closing of contracts, but there are reductions within existing contracts.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Reductions within existing contracts?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, procurement contracts, multiyear grants: we've reduced them over the three years, looking for reductions across the board. Again, you're asking for a list of every contract. That's not something we're going to be able to provide within the estimates document.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. It's my understanding that – I'm looking at the Environment and Parks business plan, page 75. Now, the targets for the out-years drop from this year to the out-years by approximately \$300,000. What's going to be reduced in that \$300,000 reduction in the out-years?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, again, to the hon. member – I'm in the business plan now; we jumped from estimates – what line item, sir?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Page 75.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Ministry support services overall shows an approximate \$300,000 decrease from the 2019-20 estimate to the targets for '21, '22, and '23. Where do you anticipate that \$300,000 will come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the \$0.3 million decrease the hon. member is referring to on that line item is primarily due to an increase in the management employees pension plan, or the MEPP, reduction in 2020-21.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Oh. So you're reducing employer contributions to the MEPP? Is that correct? Okay.

It's my understanding that corporate services manages the IT systems for Environment and Parks. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, it's consolidated in Service Alberta.

**Mr. Schmidt:** It's Service Alberta. Can you give us a sense – I know that the IT systems in Environment and Parks are incredibly outdated. What is the plan to upgrade IT systems in Environment and Parks?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The hon. member is correct. There are lots of outdated systems within Environment and Parks and, I'd submit to you, Mr. Chair, not just within Environment and Parks but across the entire government. Certainly, we have that issue with Environment and Parks.

We are working through upgrades to our systems. The reality is that those are going through approval processes. It has to be done in partnership with Service Alberta, but we are actively working, particularly in and around the area of approvals for water permits, disposition approvals, renewals, along those types of lines. Through those upgrades, within the technology side, we are anticipating in particular – I'll give you an example on water permits. About 80 per cent of our water permits are usually approved in longer than 400 days, and through the technology that we are adapting across the department, we've been able to reduce that to 40-some days. We'll continue to focus on that.

9:20

**Mr. Schmidt:** Do you have a timeline for implementation of the new IT systems?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I don't have a timeline for implementation today, within the context of estimates, but I can confirm that we are actively working on implementing that as we speak.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Now I'm back on the government estimates, page 97, line 2.2, air partners and stewardship. Line 2.2 shows an increase from the 2018-19 budget to the 2018-19 actual. What was the cause of that increase?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, just to make sure I'm on the same spot as the hon. member, I think he's referring to the 2018-19 actual being \$2.3 million higher. If that is the case – hold on. We're just going to make sure we're on the same spot. Yeah. Again, to the hon. member, he's referring to the \$2.3 million higher number? Did I catch that right?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes. That's right.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That's primarily due to the payment to airshed and the Clean Air Strategic Alliance grant. Our ministry is mitigating the impact of budget increases by providing our air partners with multiyear grant commitments that span to fiscal '22-23.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. That increase represents a multiyear grant to the Clean Air Strategic Alliance and the individual air stewardship groups. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That's correct. It's a payment to the airshed of Clean Air Strategic Alliance.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. The decrease in the 2018-19 actual to the '19-20 estimate, then: what does that reflect? Sorry. Same line, 2.2.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, there is a reduction, as you pointed out. We are achieving savings in that area through a reduction in supplies and services and a reduction in discretionary spending. That's what that number reflects.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. It's my understanding that through that line item we fund the Clean Air Strategic Alliance as well as the individual airshed partnerships. There are – what? – nine or 10 of them across the province. Could we get a written breakdown of what the grants are going to be to the Clean Air Strategic Alliance as well as each of the individual airshed groups?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I have no problem with providing that written breakdown.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much.

On to line 2.3, then, air quality management, that shows a decrease from 2018-19, both the actual and the budget, to the estimate. Where is that decrease going to be seen?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair, that line item reduction reflects savings we anticipate, manpower savings through vacancies and attrition as well as savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and reduced contract spending.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Contract spending in air quality management: would that be contracts to – are you contracting out air quality monitoring projects?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes, we are, Mr. Chair. We are contracting out air quality monitoring.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. What kind of impact on air quality monitoring will reducing the number of contracts and the number of manpower have on Alberta's ability to monitor air quality?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** We're not anticipating an impact on Alberta's ability to monitor air quality. That remains a priority of the department. We will continue to monitor the air quality across the province. As I said in my opening remarks, we think we'll be able to find some savings through efficiencies and partnering with our organizations that work with us on air quality and still be able to achieve the same level of front-line services on this issue that Albertans expect from us and that we were already achieving within the department.

**Mr. Schmidt:** What's the measure for success, I guess, for having a high-quality, reliable air quality management system? How will you know that these cuts won't have an impact on air quality management work?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair, we have continued reporting on results. We'll be able to have real-time data as we do monitoring across the province, and, you know, the measurement of success will be clearly attainable and transparent in the usual process that we use. We'll be able to know it, if we're seeing major reductions within air quality, because we continue to monitor air quality across the province.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. Where is air quality management data available? Where could I find that?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I refer the hon. member to our website at AEP. You know, if he's struggling to find that information, he'd be welcome to reach out to our department. We can help direct him in



the right direction for that. If he'd like a little bit more information, I'm happy to give it to him right now. We provide real-time air quality data and information to the public, Mr. Chair, through the air quality health index website, which the hon. member can find at [airquality.alberta.ca/map](http://airquality.alberta.ca/map). We also provide historical quality assured air quality data to all of Alberta through air data at [alberta.ca](http://alberta.ca). This will be replaced by a new air data management system in 2020, but that's where you can find some more information at this moment.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So there's a new air management system that will be implemented in 2020?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Data management system, not air management system.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Oh. A new air data management system?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Can you give me some more details about what that air quality data management system is going to look like?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again, an improved and updated IT system.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Now I'm going back to the business plan, page 75. Air is receiving an approximate \$700,000 reduction in the '20-21 target that'll be maintained through '22-'23. Where is that \$700,000 going to come from? Is that again from MEPP contributions?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, to the hon. member, we're not following what he's referring to. I just want to make sure. He's referring, on page 75, to the air line?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Of the business plan, the air line. The 2019-20 estimate is for \$20,011,000. The '21 target is for \$19,345,000, and that is maintained through the out-years. So that's an approximate \$700,000 reduction next year. Where will that money come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Thanks, Mr. Chair. That money is budgeted to come from two areas: first, \$0.6 million is anticipated through having savings from manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition and savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending on contracts and reduced discretionary spending; \$0.1 million of that is an increase in management employees pension plan reductions in 2020-21.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. So you're projecting another \$600,000 in savings from manpower. Will that impact your ability to deliver on this air quality data management program?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair, we're not anticipating any problems in delivering on the objectives of Alberta Environment and Parks, not only in air quality but across the board, as a result of the savings that we're working on with attrition and vacancies. We continue to believe and will ensure that we will be able to continue to provide the services that AEP provides to Alberta.

The other thing I would point out, Mr. Chair, when it comes to that line item, the target in – actually, I think we're okay. I think I answered the hon. member's question fine.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Now I'm looking at line 3.1 back in the government estimates, page 97. There is land policy. There is an increase in the 2018-19 budget line to the 2018-19 actual. What caused that increase?

9:30

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. The increase is \$2.2 million, and that is primarily due to a payment to the Mikisew Cree First Nation through a grant.

**Mr. Schmidt:** A payment to the Mikisew Cree First Nation for a grant?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Schmidt:** And what was that grant for?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, that grant would be, in my understanding, associated with a confidential memorandum of understanding between the government and the First Nation community.

**Mr. Schmidt:** That's confidential? Okay.

Then there's going to be a decrease, under land policy, from the 2018-19 actual to the 2019-20 estimate. Can you give us an idea of why that number is going down from last year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, a couple of things. Some officials have pointed out a little background on this line item. Right off the bat, if we're referring to 3.1, which is what I think the hon. member is referring to when it comes to land policy, our estimate is an increase compared to what the 2018-2019 budget's actual spending was at. To the hon. member, I'm not sure what he's referring to because it's not a reduction from 2018-2019 spending.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Fair enough, then. It does show an increase from the 2018-19 budget to the 2019-20 estimate. Why is that number going up?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, that reflects a \$1 million budget increase that primarily reflects a platform commitment from our government when it comes to protecting creeks and streams on the eastern slopes. We committed to an additional \$1 million investment in habitat protection by partnering with the Cows and Fish program. That budget line increases by that much to reflect that investment. We feel it's important not only to work with Cows and Fish specifically on eastern slopes stream protection but in general – Mr. Chair, from our platform I know that you know – to continue to increase our work with nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations across the board as we try to meet our environmental objectives. That's a \$1 million platform commitment with Cows and Fish.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you very much for that.

Line 3.2, public land management, shows an increase in the budget from 2018-19 to the 2019-20 estimate. Where will that money be spent?

**The Chair:** That's your first 20-minute segment.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Just to confirm, I believe the hon. member is referring to the \$1.4 million higher than the 2018-2019 budget. If that's the case, that's primarily due to increased spending for the Susan Lake gravel pit and the Fort McMurray resurveying dedicated revenue initiatives.

**Mr. Schmidt:** And what are those initiatives?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I don't think that we have that with us today in great detail, but we're happy to follow up with the hon. member in writing about what those two initiatives are.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much for that.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Actually, you know what? I do actually have an official, ADM Conrad – I never thought of that – who is here and can speak to those in more detail if the hon. member is interested.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes, please.

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, I'm John Conrad. I'm the assistant deputy minister of operations at Environment and Parks. It's a pleasure to answer the hon. member's questions. I'll start with Susan Lake. Susan Lake is an aggregate pit, a public gravel pit, that has been in operation since the mid-1990s, I think, '92 perhaps. The expenditures that are being referred to by the minister have to do with a very complex close-out of the gravel pit in terms of the surface material disposition being complete and a subsurface application with Syncrude coming online, so lots of complexity and lots of competing industry involvement there.

The second one, Mr. Chair, was the Fort McMurray resurvey. We are familiar, obviously, with the disaster of 2016 in terms of the interface wildfire that damaged much of many homes and changed many lives in Fort McMurray. It also eradicated the survey fabric of some of the properties in terms of where people had their houses and their yards. The expenditures on the resurvey were purely poured into the department and our director of survey going up there and re-establishing the survey fabric for those families and homes.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you very much.

I'm going to go back, then, to the business plan, page 75. There is a decrease in the 2019-20 estimate on the Land line of approximately \$3 million in the '21, '22, and '23 targets. Where is that money going to come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The list in regard to that \$3.1 million decrease is, first, a \$2.7 million decrease in funding for Domtar; \$0.3 million in additional savings in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition as well as savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts; and lastly, there's a \$0.1 million increase in management employees pension plan, MEPP, reductions in 2020-21, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So a \$2.7 million decrease to Domtar: tell me about the money that you're spending this year on Domtar, and why is that being decreased by \$2.7 million next year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, in previous years we had to do some work in regard to Domtar that does not have to happen inside this fiscal year. The proponent is doing work inside this fiscal year. Basically, that's what this comes down to, that this is an amount that the department had to spend in the previous fiscal year that the department does not need to spend in this fiscal year when it comes to the Domtar situation.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. So the money for the cleanup of that site is coming from the . . .

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** It's coming from the proponent, yes. Mr. Chair, that's correct. Again, in the previous fiscal year there were costs that had to be undertaken that do not have to be undertaken this year when it comes to Domtar.

**Mr. Schmidt:** What are the timelines for dealing with that site?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, the Domtar situation goes back a very long way, through many different environment ministers. If

you'd like to have a more detailed conversation during estimates on Domtar, I'm happy to call ADM Conrad back up, and he'd be happy to fill you in on that as best he can given the legal parameters that are around the Domtar situation.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yeah. I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

9:40

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, ADM Conrad, operations division of Alberta Environment and Parks. It's a pleasure to address the hon. member's question. I believe your question pertained to the existing timelines on the former Domtar site and when that site will be completely remediated and cleaned up. Some of this falls into the realm of conjecture because of the legal actions of the proponents and of the Crown that are involved on the site. We are currently trying to mediate with the proponents to optimize the outcomes on the ground. But, of course, where you have mediation, you have legal action, and we have two live ministerial orders in play. It's difficult to speculate.

I think the one concrete timing that I can point to is the two instruments, the ministerial orders, that are compelling both Domtar and Cherokee Canada Inc., the major developer. Those ministerial orders have concrete timelines that see the site being remediated by the close-out of this fiscal year, originally the end of this calendar year but, with some extensions, probably looking at the end of this fiscal year. Now, those are timelines on the ministerial order, and that's probably the most concrete thing I could say because there has been some slippage and some evolution on the file.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. A follow-up question, then, and I'm jumping ahead a little bit. Resource management, of course, is getting some cuts this year and in the out-years, and I understand that that's where the compliance and enforcement budget is found. How can you assure that the public will be protected if you're reducing enforcement and compliance, especially on the Domtar site?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, just to address the hon. member's question, I'm not a smart man, but I don't believe our enforcement money comes from the resources community. Resources refers more to our biologists and ologists, our specialists who inform on stewardship decisions. The enforcement pathway is more specifically targeted in the parks division with our conservation officers and also in the Justice and Solicitor General ministry, where the fish and wildlife officers are found.

**Mr. Schmidt:** You no longer have environmental compliance officers that are paid through resource management?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, certainly, we do have a compliance enforcement program. It's a separate business line from resource management.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry. Which business line is that?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, I'm going to have to phone a friend at the table for that business line. I'm happy to answer the hon. member's question. The question of sourcing and line is distinct and separate from the program. Maybe I'll hang out here, because I'm happy to answer.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sure. Well, we can come back to that in a while. I want to proceed with my other questions here. Thank you very much for the time being.

**Mr. Conrad:** You're welcome.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I want to go to line 4.2 now of the estimates on page 97, water partners and stewardship. There is an increase from the '18-19 budget to the '18-19 actual. Where was that money spent?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, that increase, the way I'm reading this, is actually to do with multiyear watershed grants. I believe that's what we're talking about. The 2018-19 actuals are \$4 million higher – I think that's what the hon. member is referring to, just to make sure we're on the same page – and that's to payment of watershed grants. It's what that is, if you asked what the item is.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you very much.

In that same line, then, the '19-20 estimate shows \$3.8 million. Can we get a written breakdown of what the individual grants to the WPACs and the watershed stewardship groups are going to be?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, through you to the hon. member, is he asking for a list of the grants for 2018-19 or for this upcoming fiscal year?

**Mr. Schmidt:** No. Sorry; for 2019-20.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** For 2019-20. We'd be happy to provide that. We'll note that there is quite a lengthy list of organizations that we partner with when it comes to watershed alliances, everything from the North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance – I could list them all right now, but I don't know if the hon. member wants me to.

**Mr. Schmidt:** That's fine.

The Alberta Lake Management Society, though: where does their grant money come from? Does it come from the same water partners and stewardship line item?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, I'm just confirming. My understanding is yes, but I'll just take two seconds here to make sure that we're correct about that. The answer to the hon. member is yes.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So the Alberta Lake Management Society as well?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yeah. If you could provide a written summary of what the grants are going to be to every organization that you work with under that line item, I'd appreciate it.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** We will do that.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much.

I'm looking now at the same page, page 97, line 4.3, water management. There's a significant decrease of approximately \$8 million in that line from the 2018-19 budget to the 2019-20 estimate. Where is that money going to come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the number is broken down in two ways. The first is a \$6 million decrease, which reflects a reduced budget for wetland replacement initiatives as the program is still ramping up.

In addition to that, there's another \$2.7 million decrease to reflect, again, savings in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition as well as savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts. We believe that we will be able to mitigate some of those decreases in contracts and manpower through opportunities to assess the relative benefits of various infrastructures and operations across Environment and Parks. Infrastructure that provides limited benefit may be decommissioned, Mr. Chair, or operations may be modified or

suspended to reduce costs where safety and/or socioeconomic considerations can be adequately managed. Some maintenance and investigation work may be able to be deferred without exposing the department to significant additional risk. The work can then be completed when the fiscal situation is better.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. The \$6 million reduction in wetland replacement initiatives: you said that the program is ramping up, yet you're reducing spending on that by \$6 million. Can you explain to me what goals the department has with that? Well, first of all, I guess, an explanation of what the wetland replacement initiative is would be lovely. Then explain to me how the program is going to move forward with the \$6 million reduction.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, first off, on the wetland policy, it was implemented on June 1, 2015. It replaced an interim wetland policy that did not benefit many areas across the province. It recognizes the diversity and value of all wetland classes in the province and aims to replace wetlands within the same region as originally lost, to ensure maintenance and replacement of local ecosystem service for the public, and, as well, guides activities to avoid, minimize, and reclaim wetland impacts. If permanent wetland loss is unavoidable, proponents can either replace wetlands themselves or pay a wetland replacement fee to the WRP.

In regard to the question about the reduction, as I said, the program is ramping up. We are well into the fiscal year. First of all, the department developed the dedicated revenue initiative in response to stakeholder input and the office of the Auditor General. The department has established clear controls to ensure the proper accounting for the collection of fees and expenditures on wetland replacement and core operations. It's taking time to set that up. As that process is going forward and the new system is being put in place to allow for those controls over wetland replacement outcomes, I anticipate that you will see that dedicated revenue source be used as the program is set up, but it is taking time in this fiscal year to set up those controls.

9:50

**Mr. Schmidt:** Is the department currently collecting revenue to support this wetland initiative or not?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I'm going to ask ADM Conrad to speak to that because he can give you a much more detailed answer on that.

**Mr. Conrad:** Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure to answer the hon. member's question. John Conrad, operations division. I don't have time to read this note, but in answer to your question "Are we currently collecting?" we are just at the cusp of beginning that. We have shaken hands with Ducks Unlimited. The minister has recently, in the past, I think, three weeks, signed off on the document that will see the department replace Ducks Unlimited as the prime collector of this dedicated revenue fund. We're just at the baton handover stage of that.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Then back to the business plan. Mr. Conrad, I suspect you might be the one to answer this question, so don't run away. I'm looking at the business plan, page 75, revenue. Which revenue line will the collection of the dedicated wetland money be reflected in?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, I know I cannot approach the table, but I'll let our corporate services ADM guide us on that one.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the line item would be premiums, fees, and licences. I'm referring to page 75 if you need some direction on that.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes. What do you anticipate the amount of revenue will be in the '21,'22, or '23 years?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair – forgive me, Minister; I'll just cut right in front of your lane there – what we anticipate is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$10 million.

**Mr. Schmidt:** That \$10 million is not currently reflected, then, in the '19-20 estimate. Is that correct?

**Mr. Conrad:** Mr. Chair, again I'll refer to the table. My binder is electronic.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, no, it is not, not that I'm aware of.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. Thank you very much for that, then.

Back to the water management piece: a \$2 million reduction in manpower this year. You said that you're making those reductions based on some kind of decision-making matrix or some kind of criterion for ensuring public safety. Can you provide the public with a copy of how you made the decisions on making those reductions?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, I'm totally interested if the hon. member has a question about our budget estimates while we're here, but if he wants to request documents like that, there are different processes to do that than at estimates. He's welcome to do it.

**Mr. Schmidt:** How would I go about getting that information, Minister?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, as an Official Opposition member for a long time I understand that you have processes to do that. You're welcome go about that, but we're here to talk about estimates.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Well, you know, the public is absolutely concerned about the effective management of our high-risk, high-consequence water management infrastructure, so we will be following up on that.

I do want to now go to 4.4, flood adaptation, page 97. Can you explain the increase from both the 2018-19 budget or actual to the 2019-20 estimates?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, there is a \$2.5 million increase, budget to estimates. That is primarily due to an increase in the national disaster recovery program, or the NDMP, dedicated revenue. The NDMP dedicated revenue will be \$3.7 million for 2019-20, is what I have here. I'm just checking if I'm right. That increase is from federal money.

**Mr. Schmidt:** It's from federal money. Okay. Thank you very much for that.

I want to now go back to the business plan on page 75. For the water line there's a \$3 million decrease in the 2019 estimate to the 2021 target and then a quite significant \$23 million decrease in the '21-22 target and still an overall increase in the 2022-23 target. Where is the money going to come from for those decreases?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the decrease for that line item would be \$22.4 million, which will be primarily due to the winding down of the Alberta community resilience program, or the ACRP, and the watershed resiliency and restoration program, the WRRP; 2020-21 is expected to be the final year for these two programs.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much for that.

I want to move on to line 5.2 of the estimates, fisheries management. Quite a significant decrease from the 2018-19 budget

and actuals to the 2019-20 estimates. Where is that money going to come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The money comes from a couple of different spots, Mr. Chair. First is a \$2.5 million decrease to the species at risk program, which is broken down in two ways: a \$1 million reduction to the native trout program and \$1.5 million associated with habitat restoration grants and aerial surveys. We have begun a multiyear, four-year funding relationship with the federal government when it comes to species at risk conservation programs around trout, which was being funded through that line item in this province in previous years. We've entered into a \$5.4 million funding arrangement with the federal government that is working towards that same objective, so we'll be working with the feds on financing that important work that's taking place.

Another \$1.2 million of that is a decrease, Mr. Chair, in the aquatic invasive species program, which is a one-time reduction in this fiscal year. There was a period of time in the open-water season as they were dealing with zebra mussels and different types of aquatic invasive species where the entire budget amount for the year could not have been spent because of caretaker mode between the transition of government. The nature of those types of invasive species is that as we moved out of open-water season, they weren't able to utilize the same amount, but we anticipate that to be a one-year reduction.

There's also an anticipated decrease of \$1.6 million in regard to whirling disease, and that's around labs and finding efficiencies in how we use labs for research and for disease research. I can talk about that more or one of my officials can if they would like.

Lastly is a \$1 million decrease to reflect savings and manpower through, again, anticipated vacancies and attrition, Mr. Chair, and savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you very much. You're anticipating, then, that the budget amount in the next fiscal year for aquatic invasive species will be the same as what was intended to be spent this year but wasn't spent. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Correct. We anticipate that to be a one-time reduction in this fiscal year, primarily, again, due to transition of government and the length of season. Aquatic invasive species, Mr. Chair, remain a priority for the government.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. The \$2.5 million reduction in the department spending for species at risk: is it fair to say that that's being offset, then, by money from the federal government?

**10:00**

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Correct, Mr. Chair. We're excited about the partnership that we're going to have with the federal government when it comes to species conservation programs. That partnership will contribute \$5.4 million over the next four years to our native trout program. We're going to keep doing that. We also are working to use the Alberta Conservation Association to make sure we're allocating nearly \$2 million generally for fishing licences to priorities of the department.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. The \$1.6 million whirling disease lab decreases: can I get more details on the lab efficiencies that you guys are finding?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The situation is that we have three labs that are currently in place in the province. One is for wildlife, another is for fisheries, and the other is for whirling disease. We're working to

bring the fisheries and the whirling disease labs into operating as one for efficiencies and to save resources.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I see.

Okay. Line 5.3, wildlife management: can you explain to me the decreases from the budgeted or actual items in 2018-19 to the estimate for this year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the bulk of that reduction, \$2 million if I have this right, is primarily due to a decrease to the management recovery of the provincial woodland caribou program. That said, that remains a priority for this government. In fact, I believe you're actually the chair of one of our subregional task forces.

We've begun that work on the caribou file going forward, but it's taken time as government has transitioned, so the full amount that would have been spent this year did not need to be spent this year. Caribou will continue to remain a priority for this government. We'll continue to push through with what we promised Albertans around the task force. We're looking forward to seeing the results of that. We will also continue discussions with the federal government to push them to participate in helping to finance the recovery of caribou in Alberta.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Then are you anticipating that that \$2 million will be restored to the budget next year? Is that right?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** We're not predetermining the results of the task forces. We're looking forward to seeing the work that comes out of those three task forces over the next few months. Certainly, their work will be taken into consideration as we figure out the budget that is needed for the woodland caribou in Alberta.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. I'm looking at the fish and wildlife numbers for the out-years in the business plan, page 75. You're showing increases from the 2019-20 estimate through '21, '22, and '23. Where can we anticipate to see those increases being spent, then?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, the numbers I have in front of me, Mr. Chair, that the hon. member is showing: a \$0.5 million increase is primarily due to an increase in the species at risk dedicated revenue initiatives.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Species at risk dedicated revenue?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So where do you collect dedicated revenue from to deal with species at risk?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, that's when the feds contribute money towards species at risk.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Then that's reflected in transfers from the government of Canada in the revenue section in the business plan. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, my officials are telling me that that is where it would show in the budget, for sure.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. I mean, overall, the transfers from the government of Canada are set to decrease significantly in those out-years, yet you're saying that you're anticipating a \$500,000 increase in species at risk. What reductions, then, are we anticipating in transfers from the government of Canada in the out-years?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** My understanding of the breakdown of those reductions would be that those reductions are primarily to do with climate.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So we're anticipating reduced transfers from the government of Canada because of climate change?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, that's correct. We're anticipating a decrease from a low-carbon economy leadership funds agreement with the government of Canada, which provides funds which support projects across the province, to do with our commitment to remove the carbon tax, that Albertans voted for this spring.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you very much for that.

I want to go now to line 6.1 on page 97 of the estimates. Resource management is showing a decrease from the 2018-19 actual to the 2019-20 estimates. Can you give us a sense of where that money is going to be taken from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, through you to the hon. member, just to confirm: line 6.1 on page 97?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Yes. That's correct.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, I believe that the hon. member is referring to the comparison of estimates to actuals or estimates to budget.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Either/or.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the budget to estimates variance, 2018-19 to 2019-20, line 6.1: the 2019-20 estimate is \$2.4 million lower to reflect against savings in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition and savings as well as supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Remind me again: what functions of the department are carried out, then, by the resource management budget line item?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the resource management department of Environment and Parks administers a variety of environmental and natural resources related legislation and programs. To meet this responsibility, a comprehensive, effective, efficient, and consistent resource management program is required to provide the necessary leadership and support to the department's policy development, monitoring, approvals, and compliance assurance programs.

Mr. Chair, this includes the development and implementation of regional and subregional plans; regional management frameworks for water, air, and biodiversity; as well as appropriate collaboration with other government departments, the Alberta Energy Regulator, through the integrated resource management system to manage social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Mr. Chair, the integrated resource management system is a crossministerial system – I don't know if the hon. member knows about that – that supports early and frequent engagement with the government of Alberta on policies and issues affecting natural resource development. Ministries that are a part of the IRM system are Environment and Parks, Energy, Agriculture and Forestry, Indigenous Relations, and the Alberta Energy Regulator. Resource management provides knowledge and professional expertise to manage and protect natural resources in the environment of Alberta. This program collaborates with divisions, key ministries, agencies, and stakeholders to ensure that resource management decisions are integrated and developed with the best available knowledge.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Thank you.

It's my understanding that the ministry has some concerns with the timelines for the issuing of industrial approvals and that sort of thing. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I'm not sure what the member is referring to, Mr. Chair.

*10:10*

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, earlier, with the question around IT, you said that you'd reduce Water Act approvals from 400 days to 40 days.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The first concern with that question, Mr. Chair, would be assuming that all Water Act approvals have to do with industrial activities.

**Mr. Schmidt:** No. Sorry. I'm not linking the two, but I am suggesting that your answer implied that you're looking at the timeline for approval completion.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Correct. I'm happy to answer that. Mr. Chair, we do have concerns in the department with how long it's taking to give water approvals. Like, some 80 per cent of water approvals coming from the department are over 400 days, some of them significantly longer. I know every member of the committee has heard from constituents with concerns over multiyear time frames to be able to get an answer when it comes to water permits. I do expect Environment and Parks to continue to be the department that sometimes has to say no to certain things and has to regulate, but we need to do that in a more efficient time frame.

The reality is that the department has looked at it. They've recognized that lots of it has to do with technology that is behind the times, and they've been working to adopt that through the department. When it comes to Water Act approvals, for example, Mr. Chair, the department has been moving from that 400 number in the 80th percentile to something like 48 days on average by being able to adopt new technology. We don't see that, though, just when it comes to Water Act approvals. We've seen it in other approvals the department has to deal with. Transferring of grazing leases, for example: the backlog is multiyear, not months but years, to be able to do transfers, even interfamily transfers, and lots of that is tied to the same type of issues. I have challenged the department over the coming months to look at ways to continue to use technology to be more efficient for Albertans while still protecting the environment but doing that in a way that doesn't slow down the economy.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Then with EPEA approvals, I assume, you're probably looking at the same sort of thing. How long does the average EPEA approval take? What is your target, I guess, for making a decision on an EPEA approval application?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** At this point, Mr. Chair, one of my priorities for the department is to look at the time frames around all approvals. I don't have any targets that I'm prepared to present today on EPEA, but I will continue to challenge the department to achieve their objectives of regulating and protecting our environment while doing that in a reasonable time frame for Albertans. The reality, again I want to stress, is that this is a department that has a responsibility to sometimes say no. It just shouldn't take several years to say no. People need to know what's taking place so that they can make decisions.

**Mr. Schmidt:** What do you anticipate the impact of reducing manpower by \$2.4 million will be on the ability of the department

to meet your objectives of accelerating decision timelines on these approvals?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair, first off, approvals staff are not just all within the line item that the hon. member is referring to. They're counted in other areas of the budget, including land, water, and air, not just in resource management. Staffing efficiencies in resource management will be reduced within the amount that we have articulated in the budget, but the reality is that we do not anticipate a reduction in the current staff that are around approvals. In fact, we will be looking at other alternatives in how we can meet the objectives of approvals, possibly with an increase in staffing if that's what's needed, though the primary thing that we've learned right now is that the number one thing that is needed is an increase in technology, which is what the department is focused on doing at the moment.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Is the same true, then, for compliance staff? Are they not . . .

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Member.

We will now turn to 20 minutes for the government caucus, followed by a quick five-minute recess and then back to the opposition members. Go ahead, government caucus.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can I go back and forth with the minister?

**The Chair:** If that's okay with the minister, I'm sure we can go that way.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** My pleasure, hon. member.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you for your hard work and your team's hard work to bring Alberta back on track as well as back to fiscal balance. We appreciate your efforts. Thank you for that.

This is a very important ministry. My question to you pertains to line 4.2 of the estimates, and that is water partnership and stewardship. I see a significant decrease from \$7.5 million to \$3.8 million as compared to actual versus our 2019-20 budget. Now, can you please explain the difference in funding levels as well as how it affects the priorities of this ministry?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, thanks to the hon. member for the question. First off, water partners and stewardship collaborates across the government. It collaborates with industry and environmental nongovernmental organizations to protect water resources and our waterways. The 2019-20 estimate is lower than the 2018-19 actual due to increased grants to WPACs in 2018-2019. The change in funding levels does not affect any ministry priorities, and we're still committed to working with our water partners across the board.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you. On the same page, the line below that for water management – and I think you alluded to it somewhat before to a previous question here – this budget line is to ensure the comprehensive operation and maintenance of water management infrastructure owned by the province, including the provincial dam safety program under the Water Act. Now, I see here a reduction by \$8 million compared to last year's estimate and a reduction of about \$7 million compared to last year's actual. Could you please explain why there is this reduction in your budget?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, again, thank you to the hon. member for the question. As you may know, water management

includes the operations of water management infrastructure, approvals to utilize water for agriculture, municipal, and industrial uses along with compliance and enforcement of the Water Act. To the hon. member's question: the 2019-20 estimate is lower than the 2018-19 actual, and that reflects savings of \$2.1 million in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition and \$4.8 million in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Well, thank you, Minister.

I will pass now to my colleague here, Mr. Turton.

**Mr. Turton:** Thank you, Minister. Do I have permission to go back and forth with you?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** For sure.

**Mr. Turton:** Okay. Excellent. I have two questions, mostly pertaining to the TIER program. First of all, can you elaborate a little bit on the TIER program itself and the impact that it will have on the climate strategy that your department is currently implementing?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, the TIER program, as you know, Mr. Chair, and as the hon. member knows, was a platform promise of the government and something that was spelled out very clearly inside the 2019 election. There was a contrast with the former government's approach to climate change around the carbon tax, as the hon. member knows. Our approach was going to be focused on the large-emitter side and heavy investment inside technology and innovation. We ran on a platform to adopt the TIER plan after we repealed the carbon tax. I know all members from the government side of the committee were excited to vote for that this spring. We've been able to accomplish that goal. Then we said that we would bring in TIER as a centre point of our climate strategy. That comes down to creating a structure for emissions, with 127 large emitters that we have in the province, something that has been regulated, quite frankly, since the early 2000s already inside the province. We went back to that approach. We created a regulation around that for compliance that requires those 127 emitters to either reach those levels of compliance or to pay into what has become the TIER fund. In fact, it passed the Legislature last night.

The breakdown of how that fund will be spent was spelled out as well inside the platform promise of our government: the first \$100 million going to innovation and technology, 50 cents of every dollar thereafter going to innovation and technology, and the other 50 cents going to deficit reduction to help do the part of beginning to clean up the previous government's fiscal problems. In addition to that, there was one other component of that, where \$20 million would go to what most of us have affectionately referred to as the war room, which is now the Canadian Energy Centre.

**Mr. Turton:** That creates a perfect segue into my second question. On page 104 of the fiscal plan the line item pertaining to deficit reduction and the Canadian Energy Centre, which you referenced, Minister: how much money collected from the TIER fund will go into deficit reduction itself?

10:20

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** My officials, as I talk about this, are pulling the specific line item on deficit reduction. At the end of the day, that will be more reflected within the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board's budget, but we probably have the numbers here anyway. So in 2019-20 we are expecting \$228 million for deficit reduction and the Canadian Energy Centre. In 2020-21 it'd be \$100 million

for deficit reduction and the Canadian Energy Centre. That reflects that there's a transition year here, where part of this year was being run underneath the former program, the CCIR program.

**Mr. Turton:** Perfect. Well, thank you very much, Minister.

I defer the rest of my time to MLA Singh.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. With the permission of the chair, I would like to go back and forth with the minister if it's okay with the minister.

Through the chair to the minister, firstly, I would like to commend the minister in representing the interest of Albertans in maintaining a balanced and healthful ecology. My question is in reference to lines 5.1 and 5.2 of the estimates. I notice that your total spending for fish and wildlife management has a total cut of almost \$6.5 million. Minister, while I realize that this government talks about living within our means, can you explain how much of this reduction was from finding efficiencies within the department, and as a follow-up are any of the savings related to the just-implemented reorganization in your department?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** On that total line item, Mr. Chair – we were speaking about it a little earlier – specifically to the hon. member's question, \$1 million of that is being found through anticipated vacancies, attrition, and manpower as well as efficiencies and reduction through supplies and services, through reduced discretionary spending and contracts.

The other portions of that are around three other issues in particular: \$2 million in the species at risk program because of the new partnership that we're pursuing with the federal government around trout habitat; the \$1.6 million reduction in whirling disease, which is around the lab issue that we were discussing previously; as well as the \$1.2 million in aquatic invasive species reduction programs, which is a one-year reduction because we weren't able to use the full amount while government was transitioning. But specifically to the hon. member's question, Mr. Chair, there's \$1 million of that number coming through anticipated efficiencies within the department.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister.

On page 98 of the estimates, can you explain line 5.2 under capital grants for fisheries management? What exactly is the \$250,000 grant for?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, just to the hon. member, we're on the right line item, but was he referring to budget to actual or budget to estimate?

**Mr. Singh:** It is in capital grants, 5.2.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the 2019-20 estimate is \$0.3 million higher to reflect, again, the species at risk native trout recovery dedicated revenue initiative, which is referring to partnerships with the federal government and a direct investment into that line item.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Minister, for answering.

**Mr. Getson:** Minister, permission to go back and forth with you?

The first section I'm looking at, Minister, is actually in the government estimates. Again, for the record, the TIER program: I love it. In the industry I came from, from midstream, it makes tons of sense. Also, the boilermakers' unions are big supporters of it, again, using technology to try to fix some of our problems.

In my area, obviously, we have a lot of rural residents, and we have midstream items and gravel pits, along those lines. The first one I want to talk about, if I can, in government estimates is line

11.2. It looks like there was an 86 per cent reduction. You know, I'm kind of struggling here a bit. Is the purpose of the program to assist landowners to resolve disputes related to compensation for surface rights? I guess that's the first part. Then I'm trying to understand how there was an 86 per cent reduction previously. Then can the minister explain the reduction, if he knows – if we can have assurance for landowners that it won't be negatively impacted by your government. You had a slight increase in the revenues in this area. There was a reduction of 86 per cent before and, again, some restoration of surface rights. How does that process work?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Just to make sure, Mr. Chair, 11.2, right? We're on the same line?

**Mr. Getson:** Yes, sir.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** As we're pulling out the numbers with that, I will point out that on 11.2 you're correct about the budget number, but the actual that was actually spent in that year was \$89,000. So if you look at our estimate, we're actually projecting an increase from the amount that was spent.

**Mr. Getson:** Yes. We had a big drop there. It looks like the budget was \$700,000, and we dropped down to \$89,000 for actual, and then we're topping it back up to \$100,000. I guess that if it was \$700,000 way back when, how is this going to impact the current system for surface rights? Are we going to be able to cover?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The line items reflect cost, not payments through the Surface Rights Board to landowners, just to make sure we have that clear.

I'm just trying to make sure I follow the \$700,000 number to answer your question, hon. member.

**Mr. Getson:** Okay.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I do know that the 2018-19 actual is \$0.6 million lower, primarily due to the lower than anticipated Crown debt collections and costs incurred as a result of the Surface Rights Board section 36 compensation payments. What I don't know right now is the \$700,000 number, so we may get back to you, Member, to clarify that so we're not wasting your time.

**Mr. Getson:** That's fine. No problem.

Then I guess, just for my edification and for my constituents, this won't negatively impact the surface rights compensation? It's going to still run smoothly, I'm assuming.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, we are statutorily obligated to make the payments that the hon. member is referring to. Nothing in regard to that has changed. That's the law, and it continues.

**Mr. Getson:** I appreciate it. Thank you, sir.

If I can just jump to the business plan on page 70 now, and I have the initiatives and supporting key objectives on the second bullet point. It speaks to the 2019-2020 \$4 million being allocated for wetland restoration. Can the minister share with the committee the total available funding for this and what the minister's plan is to address wetland restoration projects in priority areas? Again, this topic has been asked about quite a bit in my constituency, and we would better understand the program and how the money is spent and how the priorities will be identified.

If I'm speaking too quickly, it's because I've had a lot of coffee this morning, so I apologize for that.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Not at all, hon. member. Thanks again for the question. Mr. Chair, wetlands have a wide range of values for the public and stakeholders such as indigenous and Métis people, municipalities, and conservation groups such as Ducks Unlimited Canada. As the hon. member said, the wetland replacement program is currently under development. It will function as one of the government's new conservation offset initiatives, something we committed to inside our platform. We anticipate it will have positive environmental, public, and economic outcomes by paying landowners to restore ecosystems services via wetland restoration and construction. We believe it will deliver more diverse on-ground wetland restoration and increase jobs in environmental restoration fields and advance science and innovation in wetland restoration construction. We will test and refine program delivery through pilot projects in 2020-21, with full implementation of the program anticipated in 2021-22.

**Mr. Getson:** Perfect.

I'll turn over my time to the member from up north there, Mr. Rehn.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Okay, Pat.

**Mr. Rehn:** Thank you, Minister. I'd like to go back and forth with the minister if that's fine with you? Okay.

I'd like to look at page 72 of the business plan. You have allocated \$13.9 million to the fish culture program. Now, this objective goes on to describe some projects such as improving two Alberta hatchery infrastructures, establishing new fish populations in lakes, and adding trout to suitable lakes. I would guess that this has been going on for a number of years, yet we still hear about the lack of angling opportunities. What is different with the approach that you are taking?

*10:30*

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, hon. member, we certainly do hear about the lack of angling opportunities as well as some of the ecosystems and lake systems that are out of whack at the moment, particularly when it comes to walleye. We inherited government at the moment that fishing regulations for the year were already in place and are currently operating underneath the parameters that were set out primarily by the previous government.

However, we have begun to undertake broader conversations both within the department and the public about ways that we can move forward to manage our fisheries in a different way. Obviously, Mr. Chair, we need to protect species at risk, which is an important issue for all Albertans, as well as have a conversation about how we can better manage sport fishing situations for Albertans. Albertans were pretty clear with us that they wanted us to undertake that work, and the department is undertaking that work as we speak. These investments inside hatcheries are an important part to be able to move forward on increasing management of our sport fisheries across the province.

**Mr. Rehn:** Thank you, Minister. If I could just follow up on this, I have heard that over the last several years fishing licensing revenue has continued to drop as people are going to neighbouring provinces and spending money there. What I would like to know is: how much has our licensing revenue dropped, and what is the plan to recover the revenue, considering that one of this government's key platform points was increasing job opportunities in tourism?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the hon. member is correct. There has been a drop since the peak in fishing licences, which I believe was



in 2015. I'm not sure if we have the exact number of the drop up here. I'll wait to see if any of my officials do.

The hon. member is correct that there has been a drop since the peak. We have heard consistently from Albertans and those who have come to participate in fishing inside our province from other provinces that that is a direct result of their experience when they are inside the province. That is why, to the last question, we are spending time working with Albertans, the Alberta Fish and Game Association, and municipalities, which are actively involved inside that conversation, to begin to look at how we have been managing our sport fishing side of managing fish and wildlife inside the province. We anticipate that we will be coming forward this spring with a plan to be able to increase that opportunity going forward inside the province.

I'm just seeing if they have the exact reduction. I was right, Mr. Chair; as the hon. member knows, the peak of 300,000 anglers was in 2015, and the current level is just shy of 270,000.

**Mr. Rehn:** Okay. Thank you.

I'd like to pass it on to the hon. member Mr. Loewen.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you very much. I guess just kind of following on in the same vein that Mr. Rehn was talking about on the fish culture program and on key objectives on page 71 of the business plan, I know there are private trout farmers that are raising trout for private dugouts and things like that, and my understanding is that the government fisheries are doing the same thing. There's a bit of competition going back and forth between the government fisheries and these private trout farmers, and I wonder if there's any plan to change that moving forward. Will the government continue to be kind of in competition with the private industry when it comes to trout farming?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, interesting question, and I appreciate the hon. member asking it. I actually have never had this conversation in that context before. It's interesting, how much that competition may or may not be impacting that industry. I think that it's worth a conversation, as we're going through this process of consultation on the overall fisheries management side in the next few months, to make sure that we include that in there, but I don't think we have anything specific inside these estimates in regard to that.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I hesitate to interrupt. We will now have a five-minute break. We'll reconvene at approximately 10:40. Thank you.

[The meeting adjourned from 10:34 a.m. to 10:41 a.m.]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, everybody. We will get started again. Sorry; I was a minute late.

We will continue on with the opposition members for a 10-minute block.

**Ms Phillips:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to go back and forth if that is amenable to the minister.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** It's amenable to me, Mr. Chair.

**Ms Phillips:** All right. A few things. Let's start with the oil sands monitoring program. I see a \$7 million reduction. Can the minister update us on how many FTEs this reduction will involve?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, when it comes to the oil sands monitoring program, a couple of things: first off, we're

maintaining the \$50 million. That is our agreement with the industry. We consider it still a priority of the government, and we'll continue to fund that. As I said to some earlier questions, we don't have the breakdown of the FTEs per line item, but we do know that across the department it is 110 FTEs that are anticipated from the budget.

**Ms Phillips:** How many FTEs will work in the office of the Chief Scientist?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, I am not the Chief Scientist, so I'm not going to say this with a level of certainty other than – my deputy minister is informing me that she believes that it's six FTEs within the office of the Chief Scientist.

**Ms Phillips:** How many last year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, again, my deputy minister is informing me that she thinks that it is about the same FTEs within the office of the Chief Scientist.

**Ms Phillips:** Good.

What about the department's environmental monitoring and science division? We have a separate division from the office of the Chief Scientist that is responsible for environmental monitoring and science. How many FTEs there? That can be provided as a follow-up. That's fine.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, again, we have anticipated 110 FTE reductions across the board.

**Ms Phillips:** Okay. If that could be just undertaken as a follow-up.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I'm excited to answer any question the hon. member has about estimates.

**Ms Phillips:** Yeah. The FTEs are in the fiscal plan.

There are a couple of things around carbon pricing that I want to ask about. The campaign commitment was \$20 per tonne on the industrial carbon price, but then the budget has \$30 per tonne. Why?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, we worked through a consultation process with the industry in two ways. First, with our large emitters: the hon. member knows there are 127 large emitters, which is what our platform promise was around. As well, we worked with conventional oil and gas facilities across this province, about 35,000 facilities across the province, that were finding themselves in a position where they would be underneath the federal backstop as a result of us fulfilling our campaign promise to remove the hon. member's party's carbon tax on Albertans.

Through that consultation process two things were made clear to us by both the large emitters and the conventional oil and gas companies. They wanted to be regulated within the province of Alberta. They did not want to fall underneath the federal regulation and, through that consultation process with us, encouraged us to meet the \$30 target to be able to get to equivalency with the federal government and to keep our industry regulated at home.

**Ms Phillips:** When the minister talks about equivalency, equivalency to what?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, what I'm referring to there is meeting the level of equivalency with the federal government to make sure that there is no backstop put on our large emitters, first of all, as well as on conventional oil and gas facilities that choose to opt into the TIER program and not go with the federal regulation.

**Ms Phillips:** I've heard "backstop" and "equivalency." What piece of legislation is the minister referring to there?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, we are talking about TIER.

**Ms Phillips:** No. I mean federal.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, Mr. Chair . . .

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Member.

**Mr. Loewen:** I'll just quote, I guess, 23(b)(i): "matters other than . . . the question under discussion." She's talking about federal programs, not about this budget, obviously. I don't know that the minister is expected to respond to questions about federal programs when we're talking about estimates of the provincial government and of Environment and Parks in particular.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Member.

I would encourage members to consider that we're talking about provincial budget estimates. Stick to the fiscal plan and the business plan if you could.

**Ms Phillips:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms Phillips:** A major part of the revenue into Environment and Parks is based on a decision of \$30 per tonne in industrial carbon price, not \$20. What I'm hearing is that the reason for that was the existence of a piece of federal legislation. I was just wondering what piece of legislation that was, but I think I can move on.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, as I said, the reason for that decision, that is reflected within these estimates, is that after consultation with the industry and with the organizations that will be regulated under TIER, we were strongly encouraged by them to go to \$30 a tonne because they felt that that was the best way to ensure that they would continue to be regulated in Alberta under the TIER program.

**Ms Phillips:** Right. Based on, then, I guess, the recognition of an equivalency and the recognition of the existence of a backstop, do the out-years of revenue from the TIER program reflect an increase in the industrial carbon tax to \$40 and \$50 per tonne?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, it does not reflect an increase to \$40 or \$50 a tonne, and in no way have we made any decision along the lines of \$40 or \$50 a tonne. What we have made is a decision to do \$30 a tonne. We did that after broad consultation with the industry. Again, that's where our focus was. We came into government with a clear platform, as you know, that was voted on in record numbers by Albertans, to remove the carbon tax that was brought in by the previous government and to implement the TIER program, which is exactly what we have done. The only change from that platform promise was an increase to \$30 a tonne from \$20 a tonne for the reason that I have already articulated, which is because the industry felt that was the best way to continue to make sure that they were regulated under TIER in the province of Alberta.

**Ms Phillips:** Moving on to the climate change emissions management fund, there used to be a green loan guarantee program, structured kind of similarly to what was envisaged in the

Indigenous Opportunities Corporation, whereby the cost of financing obtained on commercial terms could be lowered through this green loan guarantee program. Is that still in existence?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes, it's still in existence, Mr. Chair, but let me be clear that our government ran on a very different approach. The former government's approach was . . .

**Ms Phillips:** Good. Okay. So . . .

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, if the hon. member wants to ask questions, she can stick around for the answers.

Our government ran on a very different approach than the former government did. The former government focused on taxing Albertans, taking money from Albertans, and spending it on subsidies. This government is committed to doing the exact opposite, not taxing everyday Albertans but, again, focusing on working with emitters, large emitters in particular, and then focusing on the investment side, on technology and innovation, to be able to meet our climate change objectives. Let me be crystal clear: Albertans voted clearly, and we are going to honour what they said and reduce . . .

**Ms Phillips:** Great.

I'm going to move on to administration for municipalities around property assessed clean energy loans. Previously Energy Efficiency Alberta had administered that program. It was something in the order of I think a million and a half dollars a year for municipalities. Is that situation still in existence? Can we assure municipalities that it is moving forward if they do in fact pass bylaws to this effect?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, currently the PACE program still exists. Interestingly enough, there has been minimal pickup from municipalities. They are possibly interested, and they're having conversations with both the Municipal Affairs minister as well as with our department, so we don't know where this goes yet. But the program still exists at this moment. Again, though, I want to stress that there has been no real pickup from municipalities at this stage.

**10:50**

**Ms Phillips:** Great.

I have heard from many of my own constituents who are members of the Piikani Nation that they are concerned about the future of the memorandum of understanding around comanagement of Castle parks. Is that MOU continuing, and where can I find the resourcing for it?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** I met with the Piikani First Nation a couple of times, Mr. Chair. I had a nice trip down there this summer. As well, the Piikani First Nation community's chief and their council travelled to my hometown of Sundre to visit with me just a few short weeks ago. The Piikani have significant concerns in regard to what has taken place down inside the Castle. They want to have an opportunity to be able to move forward with the partnership that they've created with a coal company down there. We will continue to have those conversations with them going forward. You know, the process needs to be followed in regard to implementing coal. As the hon. member knows, that's managed through the Alberta Energy Regulator, but we will continue to have those conversations with the Piikani First Nation.

I will say this, Mr. Chair. It was interesting to hear some of their frustrations, when they came and visited, with the approach of the previous government and the lack of consultation in regard to boundaries and certain things around coal down inside the Castle area. We will continue to listen to their concerns in the coming months on that issue.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

We will now move to a 10-minute block for the government caucus.

**Ms Rosin:** All right. I guess I will pick up. Well, thank you, Minister and everyone else, so much for being here. As I'm sure many of you know and have heard from lots of my entrepreneurial constituents, gaining permitting to operate any form of business within a provincial park, no matter how sustainable, is nearly impossible and riddled with delays. Some of my constituents, I know, have reached out and wanted to operate things as simple as a canyoning tour, where you pretty much put a rope down a mountain, and they can't even get that approved.

Section 7.3 of our government estimates document, conservation management, deals with permitting or the lack thereof, to be honest, and section 7.5, parks infrastructure, focuses on government upgrading and development of infrastructure in our parks. I see that both of these areas have received a budget reduction, and I do believe that our government has talked about working on a less subjective and more actionable and timely permitting process for operators in parks. I'm wondering if these budget reductions actually reflect a shift and a new direction in the way we are treating our provincial parks, perhaps away from overregulated areas and towards entrepreneurial places that entrepreneurs can help us grow our tourism economy in and that Albertans can enjoy.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, thanks, Mr. Chair, for the hon. member's excellent question. There are three key drivers behind what you see presented on page 105, which I think is the page you're referring to, hon. member?

**Ms Rosin:** I'd have to check, but, yeah, it's around there.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The first driver is to continue to seek operational efficiencies. I've challenged Bev and her leadership team to continue to pay very close attention to how every dollar is spent operating our parks. They will continue to ensure that staffing levels are optimized to both ensure good visitor experience while at the same time doing so in the most cost-responsible way possible. We'll continue to tweak staffing levels and operation hours to deliver a good experience but at the lowest cost that we can to hard-working taxpayers in this province. We're also going to look at reduction of costs through bulk contracting and making greater use of cost-saving technology, which we've seen throughout the government.

I do think the hon. member is correct, and this is why we have a platform promise around looking at parks legislation and all legislation associated with lands and having a review of that process to modernize the process. The reality is that when it comes to parks, we continue to use an act that is very, very old and has problems being able to manage the vast areas that we're now managing within the parks portfolio. Simple examples include, you know, that the parks act requires all dogs to be on a leash. The reality is that we now have parks where cattle are being grazed on grazing leases within the parks system, and of course our cattle operators utilize professional dogs to help them with their cattle operations. That ain't going to work, because you don't have to have a horse like Tank, like I do, to know you can't walk your dog on a leash while you're on horseback and working cows.

There are several areas where we're looking to modernize the way that we both regulate and legislate around parks to be able to make sure that we're able to meet our objectives in modern times, to achieve what we're trying to achieve with parks while using multi-use processes inside these landscapes.

**Ms Rosin:** Okay. Awesome. Thank you.

I guess I didn't ask if I can go back and forth. I have a couple more questions. Is that all right? Okay. Thank you.

On page 71, key objective 3.1 talks about our trails act and the establishment of the trail fee, which, obviously, we campaigned highly on. I'm just wondering if you can tell us a bit more about when you plan to introduce this trails act. I'd also like to understand the potential revenue from the trail fee we plan on generating. I believe our platform promised \$30 per year for the trail fee for users. I'm just wondering what the planning on the timing of implementation is and how the revenue that is generated will be spent.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. First off, staff in AP are currently in the process of scoping out what elements could be included in a potential trails act. The hon. member is right that we campaigned on that, and it's a platform promise and something that we intend to achieve. At this stage we think that consultation on that process will take place over the winter and spring of this year and into next summer, and we're looking at legislating around that sometime in the fall of 2020. I believe that is where it is currently on the schedule.

It's a major piece of legislation and change that has to make sure that we work with a variety of stakeholders across the province, including indigenous communities, municipalities as well as nongovernment organizations who already help us manage certain environmental aspects. But we do intend to continue with our platform promise of bringing in both a trails act and a trails fee to be able to get resources to trail maintenance but also to enforcement and to also help municipalities, like the municipalities that I represent and that you represent, who have extra burdens dealing with emergency response issues by being adjacent to large portions of Alberta's public land.

**Ms Rosin:** Awesome. Just to follow up on that, we talked a lot in the campaign about having the trail fee for OHV users, but lots of constituents out in my area – we've got mountain bikers, hikers, cross-country skiers, a bit of everything. I'm just wondering, for the improvements to the trails, in addition the reclamation of all of our trails, if this fee is going to go towards strictly maintaining OHV trails or if we're going to have a more multi-use approach to the trails and backcountry opportunities, that vast populations of Albertans use.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, an excellent question. One hundred per cent it's not just off-highway vehicle use when it comes to both the trails act and how trails will be managed through the fees. The promise on the backcountry fees also had to do with random camping as well. Specific to trails, which the hon. member is referring to, we have multiple uses for trails all across the province. The intent would be to help protect those trails so that Albertans can utilize them but also to provide funding sources to help Albertans maintain the trails that they're used to. We hear often from cross-country ski groups, for example – I know you do as well – that would like to see this happen. So, no, it's not just off-highway vehicles.

**Ms Rosin:** Okay. Sorry. Just one final on that, too. The money that's generated: will it be going towards the government maintaining those trails, or will any of it be funnelled down to local not-for-profits and organizations that deal with this? I know a lot of people say that in Bragg Creek they've built all the trail system, but it's harder to fund raise for maintenance than it is to continue building trails. I think they're looking for, potentially, some dollars

so they can help maintain the trails rather than passing the buck to the government.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the intent of the platform promise and what we are working towards is to get resources to nonprofit groups that are already helping the government deal with trail maintenance issues. The hon. member is correct: there are organizations all across the province who are helping maintain trails and putting in infrastructure for trails. The intention is to partner with those organizations going forward.

**Ms Rosin:** Great. Thank you.

With that, I will cede my time to, I believe, Mr. Sigurdson.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Through the chair to the minister, permission to go back and forth? I'm actually going to start off with – being from Highwood, I'm sure you've heard about our water issues, but shockingly my questions aren't about water. I just want to make one quick comment on your water approvals, on taking it from 400 days down to an average of 48 days. Being from an area of the province that has had water issues for many years and has had to go through this process, I just want to make a statement. This is going to save municipalities hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of dollars in this process, so I'm really excited about hearing that. That's a drastic improvement on the way water approvals have been dealt with over the past few years.

What I'd like to ask about, actually, is the TIER plan. As it was passed in the House just recently, I'm pretty excited about this. I always considered Alberta to be an innovator when it comes to emissions. I think we lead the world, and I think it's great that we're not just going to continue to copy how things are done around the world, that we're going to find new ways that are going to have a real impact.

My first question relates to line item 10.1 in the operating expenses. It demonstrates a reduction in regulatory and operations under emissions management. I was just looking to get a bit of clarification on if this reduction is due in part just to staff attrition or closure of the climate change office and, if so, what your intentions are and how you're going to continue to maintain the same level of emissions monitoring when it comes to emissions management.

11:00

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** First off, Mr. Chair, we have not closed the climate change office. We're just on 10.1. You're referring to – that reduced budget does reflect, though, an organizational shift in how the climate change file is integrated in the department. The reality is that previously the climate change file was a stand-alone office with its own dedicated executive team and support staff. We have adjusted that. The delivery of the climate change program is being streamlined and incorporated into the department – the policy side of the department, ADM Goulden's side of the department – which we believe will better reflect the priority of climate change for our government and will integrate the overall climate change file into the full policy division of our department.

**The Chair:** Thank you, members.

We will now return to the opposition members for a 10-minute block.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Great. Thank you. I'd like to go back and forth with the minister if I could. Line 6.2 of the government estimates on page 97, regional cumulative effects management: you're showing an approximate \$3 million decrease from the 2018-19 budget to the 2019-20 estimate. Where is that money going to come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the 2019-20 estimate is \$3.1 million lower to reflect savings in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition and savings to supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts. The regional cumulative effects management program, just so the hon. member understands, leads Alberta Environment and Parks participation in implementation of land-use frameworks focusing on Alberta's transition to an outcome-focused approach to managing cumulative effects of development on the environment, land, air, and water biodiversity.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Then can you give us a sense of how you're going to meet your priorities in advancing subregional planning within the SSRP and the LARP as well as advancing the North Saskatchewan regional plan and the other regional plans, the upper and lower Athabasca?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** We campaigned on continuing with land-use planning frameworks across the province. We continue to do so. The biggest way at this moment is through the two subregional task forces around caribou, which will have a significant impact on land-use planning within northern Alberta communities and the northern Alberta ranges.

Interestingly enough, the former government only did land-use planning in the last fiscal year around, I believe, well, the North Saskatchewan regional plan, though we could argue whether or not they were focused on the North Saskatchewan regional plan, Mr. Chair. They were primarily only focused around one area within the North Saskatchewan regional plan, that being the Bighorn side of it. There is a difference, though. We will continue with land-use planning – that's a priority of our government, something that we campaigned on – but we will be ensuring, as our platform said, that there will be socioeconomic analysis of land-use planning frameworks as we go forward, as we make decisions like that.

Second – and I think this is very important, Mr. Chair – there will also be environmental assessments on land-use planning frameworks, something that was not taking place underneath the previous system. Interestingly enough, when the Bighorn consultation was taking place west of Rocky Mountain House in my constituency, one of the big objections that many stakeholder communities had, including the four indigenous communities that call the area home, was that there were no environmental assessments done on habitat, decisions that were going to happen with some of the infrastructure upgrades that were proposed inside that plan.

We do reflect a significantly different approach than the previous government when it comes to land-use planning, but we are still committed to land-use planning going forward.

**Mr. Schmidt:** It sounds like you're increasing the scope of work for the people working on land-use planning. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Increasing the scope of work in the context that, yes, when we are doing land-use planning, we will be ensuring that socioeconomic considerations are taking place, which, Mr. Chair, I would argue always should have been taking place – I think Albertans were shocked that wasn't happening – and then environmental assessments will be taking place. We're confident, though, at this stage, that we can handle that within the current structure of the department.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Remarkable. Reducing the budget by \$3.1 million and expecting them to do more, faster. I look forward to seeing the results of that.

Line 6.3, environmental emergency response: can you explain the decrease in the 2018-19 actual to the 2019-20 estimates?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, just making sure I got this, you're referring to line 3.3?

**Mr. Schmidt:** No, no: 6.3.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The budgeted number is actually \$0.3 million higher for anticipated increase in emergency responses based on historical trends. The budget in 2018-19 was \$3.364 million, and the estimate in 2019-20 is \$3.691 million.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. There's a significant difference, though, between the budget and the actual number. What spurred that increase of approximately \$2.5 million in spending on environmental emergency response?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the 2019-20 estimate is \$2.2 million lower than the actual, primarily due to increased emergency responses in 2018-2019. Having said that, the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board has announced that we are working towards a different type of accounting when it comes to emergency response, and they have indicated within their budget estimates how they're doing that. I encourage you to talk to him about that if you'd like to.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you.

Now I want to move on to parks operations. Line 7.1 showed a \$7 million increase from budget to actual, and you're showing a \$2.8 million increase from budget to the 2019-20 estimate. Can you explain the differences in those numbers, please?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. The 2019-20 estimate, Mr. Chair, is \$2.8 million higher to realign funding to ministry priority initiatives. The Alberta parks land base has increased dramatically over the past 25 years. Since 1991 the parks system has increased from a land base of 3,500 square kilometres and an operational budget of \$77.4 million in 1990-91. We now have 43,000 square kilometres of park space, and we're operating a budget of \$84.9 million.

Not sure where you want to follow that question up.

**Mr. Schmidt:** I do want to follow up with questions on the business plan. You're retaining your commitment to achieve Canada target 1, which is to protect 17 per cent of Alberta's lands by 2020. Can you tell me more detail about what your plans are to meet that target? I've had a number of concerns from environmental stakeholders that protected lands aren't necessarily evenly distributed. You know, we do have some parkland regions, grassland regions that aren't adequately protected. So can you give me a sense, by ecosystem, where you intend to have protected parks to meet that 17 per cent target overall?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Yellowstone to Yukon and CPAWS sent me the same question, hon. member, that you're reading right now. My answer to them is the same as to the hon. member, Mr. Chair, which is that one of the fundamental differences between our government and the former government around this issue comes out in exactly how the hon. member framed the question, which is that parks are not needed to meet all of our objectives of protecting landscapes. Alberta protects landscapes all across this beautiful province, north to south, east to west, through many different mechanisms beyond just parks. Our department will continue to focus on ways that we can protect landscapes with multiple tools.

**11:10**

Parks will be one of those tools. We also have public land-use zones, that require restrictions. We're excited about the extended

tender for stewardship lease that we brought in place for our grazing partners across the province, that requires them to meet certain environmental standards on the grazing leases that they operate on that are owned by the Crown. Those are environmentally protected areas when they are managed right and are important for the ecosystem. I know, again, that the former government didn't see or appeared to not see that partnership as a valuable process, but I certainly do, and our government certainly does.

Back to public land-use zones real quick, I mean, the interesting thing around some of the land-use decisions that the former government tried to make on the eastern slopes in west-central Alberta: they didn't recognize that the public land-use zones that are all along the eastern slopes that border Jasper and Banff national parks already have significant restrictions that prevent industrial activity, prevent any motorized activity within those areas and certainly are already protected. Those will continue to be priorities of our government.

To be clear, parks is not the only tool that is in our tool box to protect important landscapes, and we'll continue to use all the tools available.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now move on to 10 minutes with the government caucus.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Once again, through the chair to the minister, permission to go back and forth? My second question, just a follow-up to my first. If you could locate line 10.3 on page 98. In relation to line 10.3, oil sands innovation, I'm just looking for some clarity. Could you just explain? I'm assuming that this is a new line item. If you could just clarify where the money is coming from and if this is tied into TIER specifically.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, our government has indicated that it will honour its existing commitments, as you know. This line item specifically represents a continuation of the commitments made in the oil sands innovation program, OSIF. The OSIF supports emission reduction facilities, facilities with the highest emission intensity bitumen production in the Alberta oil sands. This program is expected to make its first payment this year. This is why there is an increase from last year's actuals. Funds collected in the new TIER system will be used to support this commitment. The OSIF budget line contains funding for the first two fiscal years of the program, 2019-2020, 2020-21, to cover the period that the facilities can make claims under the previous carbon competitiveness incentive regulation.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Chair. I'll concede the rest of my time to Ms Issik.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, thank you for your comments today. Just looking in section 10, emissions management, there's quite a bit of shift amongst the different line items: 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4. Again, I imagine that this is due to our new method of working on the emissions issues. Specifically, I'm looking at 10.4, where we see a vast drop between the '18-19 budget to the '18-19 actual and then a further drop in '19-20 but then the addition of two line items, 10.2, technology innovations and emissions reduction, and 10.3, oil sands innovation. I'm just wondering if you could walk us through that because it looks to me like that's a shift in how we're operating and shifting budget to different line items. Is that correct?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, just to make sure that I'm referring to the same item as the hon. member, she's referring to 10.1 to 10.4?

**Ms Issik:** Yeah, 10.4. We note that there's a vast change between what was budgeted in '18-19, the actual in '18-19, and then the estimate in '19-20.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Most of that and the entire section, the way that we have it here, is lower to reflect decreases in spending on energy efficiency and bioenergy programs from the former climate leadership plan. Mr. Chair, as you know, we campaigned and have been able to fulfill that promise to Albertans, that they voted for, to repeal the carbon tax of the former government as well as to repeal the climate leadership program.

**Ms Issik:** Just to follow up, that's in 10.4, or is that 10.1?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** In 10.4.

**Ms Issik:** Okay. Thank you.

I'll cede my time to Mr. Yaseen.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you, Chair. I'll go back and forth again if it's okay. Minister, on page 98 of the estimates under capital grants, flood adaptation, 4.4, I see an increase of about \$20 million as compared, 2018-19 actual versus 2019-20 budget. This is a huge increase, Minister. Can you please explain why this is a priority for your ministry and what this funding would be used for?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chair and to the hon. member for the question. The 2019-20 estimates are higher than the 2018-19 actuals to reflect an increase for the Alberta community resilience program. The 2019-20 estimates include \$3.5 million for water resilience and restoration programs. This year flood mitigation, flood adaptation, and water resilience programs continue to be a priority of our government and something that we continue to fund.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Thank you. I guess my next question is a little bit on that. Is there any money allocated towards the Alberta community resilience program?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes, Mr. Chair. There's \$22.8 million for the ACRP.

**Mr. Yaseen:** Okay. Thank you.

I will pass it on to Member Turton here for the next question.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes. Thank you. Minister, I can go back and forth with you?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Uh-huh.

**Mr. Turton:** Awesome. As you know, I'm from the riding of Spruce Grove-Stony Plain, which has been voted by my kids as the most beautiful riding in the entire province, which I'm sure you'll probably agree with, Minister. I do actually have a couple of questions regarding air quality. As you know, Spruce Grove and Stony Plain are downstream of some of the highest concentration of power plants in the entire province. My first question is regarding line 2.2 and the operating expenses pertaining to the air partners and stewardship. The previous government went over budget by about \$2.25 million, while you are budgeting \$400 less than they spent. Can you explain the reason these funds were changed from last year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah, I can. And just to be clear: \$400,000 less than they spent. Thankfully, we're not down into the \$400 number on these. It would be a long day.

And just to be clear on the most beautiful riding, if you have time, we'll take you for a ride on the David Thompson highway, and we'll see who wins that argument.

Air partners and stewardship enables the collaboration of government regulations with industry to protect local air qualities. The department is working in partnership with the Clean Air Strategic Alliance to address complex air quality challenges and with regional airshed organizations who directly support the delivery of Alberta's ambient air quality monitoring activities in partnership with industry and in partnership with the government.

The 2019-20 estimate is lower than the 2018-19 actuals, and that reflects savings in air stewardship grants, manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition as well as savings and supplies and contracts and related discretionary spending.

**Mr. Turton:** Perfect. Thank you for that, Minister. Personally I'm more partial to highway 16A and the industrial park in Spruce Grove than the David Thompson highway, but we will leave that up to your own interpretation.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** To each their own, hon. member.

**Mr. Turton:** Yes.

Minister, on operating expenses, line 2.3, it shows that you have budgeted less than the previous government for air quality management. Now, obviously, as I said before, this is something that a lot of residents in Spruce Grove and Stony Plain are always interested in, just, again, being downstream of the power plants at Genesee and Sundance and Keephills. Can you elaborate on the reduction? Is it attributed to efficiencies that your department has found or maybe a different program change?

*11:20*

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yes. Thanks, Mr. Chair. The hon. member is correct. Just to confirm, the 2019-20 estimates are lower than the 2018-19 actual. That reflects savings in two ways. The first is \$0.9 million in manpower through anticipated vacancies and attrition as well as \$0.1 million in supplies and services and a reduction in discretionary spending. We are confident, though, that our air quality management operations will still be able to issue regulatory approvals, compliance as well as enforcement of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act to meet our government's agenda of clean air.

**Mr. Turton:** Okay. Excellent. Thank you very much for that, Minister.

I cede the rest of my time to Member Singh. Thank you.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Chair. Through the chair to the minister, moving on to page 69 of the business plan, performance metric 1(c), this shows a percentage of vertebrate species designated as at risk. Now, this report is every five years, and the risk increased from 3.4 per cent in 2005 to 4.2 per cent in 2015. What is your department going to do about reducing this trend?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, first of all, the federal government, provinces, and territories have agreed to focus on a pan-Canadian approach to transforming the conservation of species at risk, on priority species and priority places. Our province will be aligning several of its current programs with the federal priority species and priority places approach to enhance the overall program delivery. Recovery plans are recommended to the minister for approval after being reviewed by the Endangered Species Conservation Committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Sorry to interrupt, but we will now move on to a 10-minute block for the opposition caucus.

**Ms Phillips:** Sure. I'd like to go back and forth if that's all right.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yup.

**Ms Phillips:** Okay. To just build on what the member was talking about in terms of endangered species, we have a listing of the bull trout, as I understand it. At some point in August that happened. Can the minister just update the committee, then, where we might find the resourcing for the development of the recovery plan? Where in the budget can we find those resources, and what's expected in terms of the timelines for developing that recovery plan and submitting it to the federal government?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, Alberta's native trout recovery initiative is comprehensive, as the hon. member knows. Long-term fish conservation initiatives aimed at recovering populations of native trout in the eastern slopes of Alberta continue. The initiative includes work led by AEP's native trout recovery program and key partners, including the Alberta Conservation Association, Cows and Fish, as I talked about earlier, and Trout Unlimited. This initiative also aligns support programs that advance recovery actions, including AEP's watercourse crossing programs, recreational management programs, species-at-risk planning, and the implementation of others. We do not have an answer to the timeline question today, but that work continues within our ministry and remains a priority for this government.

**Ms Phillips:** Is there a timeline on a section 11 agreement with respect to caribou recovery in that conversation with the federal government?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the section 11 agreement: we continue to have conversations with the federal government. Those conversations were going well right up until the election was called and the federal government entered into caretaker mode. We will be waiting to see who the new federal minister is or if the current federal minister remains. We'll then continue the conversations around section 11.

In the meantime, as you know, we're not sitting back and waiting on caribou. We're excited to announce the three subregional task forces – you actually are a chair of one of those as well, Mr. Chair – and those task forces continue to do the work that we have assigned them, to begin to tackle the caribou problem provincially, while we wait to continue conversations with the federal government in the coming weeks once they swear in their cabinet.

**Ms Phillips:** I'm wondering if I can switch gears a little bit and talk about the Bow management plan. Where would I find any resourcing commitments to the city of Calgary for implementing the Bow management plan?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, can I ask the hon. member just to restate that question?

**Ms Phillips:** I'm wondering, around flood mitigation and adaptation, those kinds of lines: where would I find the work that has been done in terms of the three feasibility studies around the Bow management plan, right? There were three recommendations, and then those were sort of put out to a feasibility study, and that was funded. Then there were some steps subsequent to that, and I'm wondering where I would find the resourcing for that and what the city of Calgary can expect in terms of next steps around the

management of the Bow and mitigation, flood adaptation with respect to that river.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Specifically in regard to line items, that would be within section 4 of the estimates in regard to water. In regard to where the department is at on that, the hon. member is correct. The feasibility studies continue on potential locations for flood mitigation projects on the Bow. The money to do that is within this budget, and that work continues. The role, as the hon. member knows, for Environment and Parks when it comes to this issue is to go through the study process of potential locations. If and when the government moves forward with different flood mitigation projects, we then switch over to being the regulator of that process in Alberta Transportation, who'd be better to be talked to about specific construction projects. At the completion of any of those projects, the projects are returned to Environment and Parks to then manage them going forward.

Again, I want to stress that the work continues on. Progress has been made in Calgary with investment outside of the location of the sites of potential upstream on the Bow. There have been investments of \$50 million already in Calgary to reinforce riverbanks at more than 40 sites. We continue to increase the drawdown rate of the Ghost reservoir to be able to help with flood mitigation issues while we figure out long-term solutions for the city of Calgary. We're currently in negotiations with TransAlta to extend that agreement, which still proceeds while we go through it.

**Ms Phillips:** On the topic of capital grants and the ACRP program, we're going from \$65 million to \$23 million and then \$20 million and then zero. As part of the ACRP there was a commitment made to Calgary around those capital grants. Are those commitments still in place?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, to date the ACRP has provided over \$230 million in funding for 79 mitigation projects in 53 communities, including four First Nations. The city of Calgary certainly has been part of that. They have received \$69 million for 13 projects. I don't know if the hon. member is referring to any specific project. As I said, there are flood mitigation projects . . .

**Ms Phillips:** There was a multiyear commitment made, and I'm wondering if those commitments will be honoured or extended over a longer period of time or reduced or any of those changes made as a result of the ending of the ACRP program.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Our government is committed to the commitments that we made in regard to the ACRP program for this year and next year. As we go through this next fiscal year, we will evaluate where we will go forward in regard to flood mitigation projects. The city of Calgary will certainly be part of that conversation, but at this stage we have committed to this year and to next year.

**Ms Phillips:** Every year around the ACRP there was about \$65 million worth of capital grants that were given to municipalities. We would get way more interest in this program than we could possibly fund, and there was always a list of projects that were scored by the professional civil services as appropriate to fund but there was not enough funding to in fact meet those demands. I'm wondering if the department would be willing to share with this committee all of the projects that have been applied for in this fiscal year so that the committee can get a sense of the need that is out there for flood adaptation and mitigation work across the province.

**Mr. Loewen:** Point of order.

**The Chair:** Point of order noted.

Go ahead, Member.

**Mr. Loewen:** I think that again we have a situation here under 23(b), where the member is asking questions that are beyond what's under discussion here. Again, the documents are very clear, what's here in these documents. This is the estimates for Environment and Parks, and to ask for other documents completely unrelated to the documents on hand and the finances on hand for Environment and Parks is not reasonable. I suggest that the member opposite maybe rephrase the question and maybe not ask for documents that aren't relative to what we're discussing here today.

11:30

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

If we could stick to the business plan for the Ministry of Environment and Parks, it would be helpful.

**Ms Phillips:** Sure. I'll stick to page 98, capital grants section, mid-page, line 4.4, flood adaptation. What I'm querying is whether the minister would be willing to share the information of how many municipalities are interested in this program; they are typically rural municipalities. If he's not willing to do that, that is fine. I'll move on. I'm wondering . . .

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, we will be announcing all of the funding commitments that we've made within this budget, looking forward to doing that. I have already started to announce some of them. We're committed to the ACRP this year and next, and we'll certainly be providing information on the projects that we're going to be going forward with.

**Ms Phillips:** Moving on now, just a quick query about the Canmore Nordic Centre. I'm wondering if those upgrades will be made in time for – what is it? – the world biathlon and so on. They have a standing ask. I'm wondering where that's at.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, the answer to that question is that those upgrades will not be being done in this fiscal year. We've had to make priorities. We are increasing the capital spending with Environment and Parks, but that is not one of the priorities for this year.

**Ms Phillips:** Okay. That's too bad.

I have a further question around comanagement of the lower Athabasca regional plan parks, wondering where that's at.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, members.

We will now move over to the government caucus for a 10-minute block. Please go ahead.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, would you mind locating line item 10.4 once again for me? I'm just trying to get some clarity around the current year's estimate. Other investments: I'm wondering if that line item might include outstanding contracts that are just being finished off with Energy Efficiency.

I'm also curious about bioenergy projects that might be new. Are there new bioenergy projects in that amount?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, first off, to the first question, 2019-20, that number: \$81 million is available to honour existing programs and commitments for approved projects under Energy Efficiency Alberta. Our government campaigned on honouring previous commitments. I'm confident that the department will be able to do that, and we've been able to budget to deal with that.

Then, while I was looking for that, Mr. Chair, I didn't catch the member's second portion of the question.

**Ms Issik:** I'm just wondering, with respect to bioenergy, if you have any examples of any bioenergy contracts.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, we're committed to bioenergy and projects along those lines. Again, that fits well within the technology, innovative approach that we are pursuing when it comes to climate change. I was excited a couple of weeks ago to announce a bioenergy project that was being funded by Emissions Reduction Alberta which was taking bioenergy from the forestry industry and turning it into clean natural gas and putting it into the existing grid inside the province of Alberta. There are many examples like that, and we will continue to support those examples as well as increase investment from TIER. That goes into the innovation fund to be able to help with projects just like that.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you so much.

I cede my time to Mr. Singh.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question was already answered there, so I will let MLA Getson ask his question.

**Mr. Getson:** We're really polite on this side. It's going great today. Thank you, Minister. Permission to go back and forth with you?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Absolutely. Sorry.

**Mr. Getson:** Perfect. No problem. On page 98 of estimates, under Capital Grants I'm looking at item 6.2, the regional cumulative effects management. Minister, this one kind of jumps off the page. We had a \$165,000 spend. There was no budget allocated. We had an actual of \$165,000, and then there's nothing coming up in the future. Can you explain why that is?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, there was a \$165,000 grant that was provided to the Crowsnest Pass Quad Squad. The Crowsnest Pass Quad Squad is our large and active off-highway vehicle stewardship group, with about 600 members, in the area. They are the key summer motorized group in the area. The quad squad focuses on trails north and south of the pass and, historically, the Castle group. The quad squad has done substantial fundraising over the past two decades to invest in recreational infrastructure down there, particularly in the Castle region. The quad squad will continue to work with the department to put its efforts into the new Livingstone public land-use zone, the PLUZ down there, for projects that align with the new Livingstone-Porcupine Hills recreational management plan.

**Mr. Getson:** Okay. A second item, if I could. Another one that jumps off the page is item 12.3, and again it's under Capital Grants, same page. It just has a substantive downturn. We had budgeted, you know, \$10 million on it and another \$10 million, and then all of a sudden it drops down to \$110,000. It's under community stabilization.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The 2019-20 estimate is \$8.9 million lower due to a \$10 million decrease for a one-time grant to the Bassano dam in 2018-19, which was completed. I was down there a few weeks ago announcing the new spillway for the Bassano dam. That's what that project was last year.

**Mr. Getson:** Okay. Makes sense. Appreciate it.

I'll turn my time over to the Member for Lesser Slave Lake if he's available.



**Mr. Rehn:** Thank you. Minister, I wanted to look at the business plan, outcome 1, specifically key objectives. It talks about: “Collaborative and integrated regional and sub-regional land use planning and implementation effectively balances environmental, economic and social concerns.” Would this be why this government is not going through with the NDP’s plan in areas like the Bighorn, because the North Saskatchewan regional plan had not been completed?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That’s part of the reason, hon. member. The primary reason why we did not go through with the Bighorn plan is because the last government failed to secure any support from the local community. Every county that was involved within the area of the Bighorn rejected the NDP’s Bighorn plan, and every First Nation community that called the area home rejected it. The NDP attempted to pull out one portion of the North Saskatchewan regional plan, accelerate it through without looking at it in the full context, without working with the community. They also, Mr. Chair, didn’t do any economic assessments of the impact on those communities or of the impact on the resources that may have been stranded during that process and, as mentioned earlier, didn’t do any environmental assessments over the decisions that they were going to make in that area.

Our government is committed to completing the North Saskatchewan regional plan, but we’ll work actually in partnership with local municipalities as well as landowners and people that both make their living and recreate in, despite what my friend from Spruce Grove says about his area, in my mind, the most beautiful area in this province. We have a different approach, that we campaigned on – and we will make sure we bring that into land-use planning – with the focus on socioeconomic assessments, environmental assessments, working in partnership with communities when we make these large land-use decisions. In addition to that, we’ll be working hard to have an overall consultation process around the legislation and regulations that impact land-use management to make sure that we have the right legislation to be able to manage these large areas of multistakeholder groups, which, Mr. Chair, shockingly, continue to be dealt with through acts that are decades old and were primarily built to run campgrounds.

**Mr. Rehn:** Thanks, Minister.

As a follow-up, would finishing land-use planning prior to enacting major land-use changes such as parks or wilderness areas be this government’s priority going forward?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Yeah. Mr. Chair, our government has committed very, very publicly not to do what the previous government did, which is to just pick certain things outside of the land-use plan that fit with their ideological agenda or their hopes for pet projects, but instead continues to work with the communities to develop overall land-use planning frameworks for areas and then implement those frameworks in partnership with communities. It’s shocking to have seen the former government think that they could implement those land-use plans without even working with the people that actually have to live and work inside those communities.

11:40

**Mr. Rehn:** Thank you.

Just to wrap up, then, key objective 1.2 of the business plan talks about leveraging “traditional and other effective conservation measures in collaboration with non-government partners to develop and advance conservation projects and programs.” Would this be primarily about wildlife conservation, or are there additional aspects?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, it does have aspects in how we plan and manage fish and wildlife, of course, but it’s also about engaging with Albertans, First Nations, and Métis communities. It also speaks towards our commitment to collaboration and consulting with those communities. A good example of this would be our subregional caribou task forces. We have partnered with environmental groups, First Nation groups, Métis organizations, energy organizations, and forestry groups as well as local trappers in order to get first-hand and traditional perspectives as we make decisions about caribou management.

**Mr. Rehn:** Thank you, Minister.

I’d like to pass it on.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. Yeah. I’d like to talk about page 73, outcome 4, key objective 4.1.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Of the business plan, I assume, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Loewen:** Yes.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Okay.

**Mr. Loewen:** Now, I understand that you’ll be anticipating and responding and mitigating environmental events such as floods, droughts, and invasive species, and I recognize that some of these are acts of nature. But I just wanted to talk about invasive species a bit. As you know, this includes things like the Prussian carp, the flowering rush, and zebra molluscs, all of which can have devastating effects on our lakes and rivers. What plans do you have to mitigate these threats considering that the budget for fisheries management has been reduced? Do you have any special plans moving forward? Are there some previous plans that you’ll be working with? What are your plans going forward?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Currently Alberta – first of all, the good news – remains free of invasive mussels. However, other aquatic invasive species have become a serious issue in isolated parts of the province that require resources, and I’m happy to answer . . .

**The Chair:** I hate to interrupt. I look forward to the answer to that question coming up in the next round.

We’ll move on to the opposition caucus for 10 minutes, please.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Great. Thank you very much. I’d like to continue going back and forth with the minister. Section 7 on page 97 of the estimates, with respect to parks. Now, I’m told that there exists a park volunteer program that has a budget for campground hosts and park volunteer stewards. In which line item would I find that money, and is that program still being funded in this budget year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That is in line item 7.2 as far as we’re aware, and, yes, we are still using volunteers inside our parks.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Were there any budget reductions to that program this fiscal year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, line 7.2 . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Not 7.2 in general but that specific program, the campground hosts and the park volunteer stewards program. Will the funding available to those programs remain the same this fiscal year?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, this year is generally the same as far as I’m aware. I’m happy to bring the assistant deputy minister for

parks to the mic if the hon. member would like more information to that level of detail, but my understanding is that it's generally remained the same, and it's funded through the line item that I provided.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Thank you for that.

Parks public safety and security shows a \$120,000 decrease from 2018-19 budget to 2019-20 estimate. Where is that money going to come from?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, first of all, Mr. Chair, in fact, we're projecting an increase in our budget over the actual spent in the last fiscal year. As for where the difference would be in the estimates to the actual budget . . .

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry. Given that we're running short of time, if you could get back to me with a written response on that, I'd appreciate that.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, we're happy to answer it.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** The 2019-20 estimate is, as you pointed out, \$0.1 million lower, realigning funding to ministry priority initiatives primarily through, again, attrition and minor adjustments to contracts and discretionary spending.

**Mr. Schmidt:** And the parks infrastructure management reduction from the 2018-19 budget to the estimate? It's showing a \$1.9 million reduction there.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, again, the same thing. It's reflecting savings in manpower through lower seasonal hiring, anticipated vacancies, and attrition and savings in supplies and services through reduced discretionary spending and contracts. We're working in parks to maintain the same level of services by using everything from technology to watching where employees are working, having a look inside registration systems to make adjustments to where park staff are based on registrations that are taking place. For example, as you see things go down in September, certain areas within the parks department can adjust staff. So through those types of savings.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Okay. Now, the business plan indicates that there is planning money set aside for Big Island provincial park. Which line item is that reflected in here in the estimates?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, we are still committed to Big Island provincial park. We'll give you the line item. That remains a platform commitment that we intend to honour. Specifically, in consultation with my deputy, we think it would come from 7.1 and 7.5.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Great. Thank you so much for that.

Now, I want to go to section 10 on page 98 of the government estimates. We've talked quite a lot about this. Can you tell me about the number of \$100 million in line 10.2? How did you determine that number, first of all, and what will it be spent on?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** When it comes to projections on TIER, how we project emissions and the amounts paid, it's highly technical. I have an official here. I'd be happy to bring him to the mic, if you'd like, to get some more information on how they do projections.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Well, I guess a follow-up question, then. I see under emissions management that you're projecting decreases of

significant amounts: \$26 million from the '19-20 estimate to the '20-21 target and then further reductions in '22 and '23. Where are those reductions going to occur?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** What line item are you referring to?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sorry. I'm back on the business plan, page 75. Emissions management is showing significant decreases from the 2019-20 estimate to the targets in '21, '22, and '23.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, is the hon. member's question about how we project or the summary of where the programs are adjusting on money? Those are two different issues. One is very highly technical.

**Mr. Schmidt:** The second question. Where you are projecting those decreases to be seen?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Okay. I think I'm answering the question the hon. member is referring to; I'm sure he will let me know if I'm not. There's a \$7 million decrease in revenue to be collected from industry from compliance payments under the regulatory system; a \$2.4 million decrease primarily resulting due to a reduction in the shared service agreement with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry; a \$0.2 million decrease due to the anticipation of completion of the Fort McMurray resurvey for areas affected by the 2016 wildfire.

Are we talking about the same line item?

**Mr. Schmidt:** No, no. I'm looking at emissions management.

*11:50*

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, is the hon. member talking about revenue or expenses?

**Mr. Schmidt:** Expenses.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Okay. Thank you. The \$25.6 million decrease primarily reflects the windup of the prior climate strategy for energy efficiency and bioenergy programs.

**Mr. Schmidt:** So all of the decreases that you see in the years '21, '22, and '23 are going to be from the windup of the energy efficiency and bioenergy programs?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** That item is a \$3.1 million decrease, primarily to reflect the reduction in technology innovation and emission reduction programs based on revenue projections. We're on the same spot now. That's what I thought. It was revenue.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Further up the page, then, for the climate change and emissions management fund you're showing significant decreases in revenue that's collected from 2019-20 to '20-21, '21-22, and '22-23. What's driving the anticipation in the reduced revenue in the out-years?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Excitingly enough, we were able to repeal the former government's climate leadership plan and carbon tax. That first year, 2019-2020, reflects part of the year running under the former CCIR program.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Right. So for '20-21 the CCIR is no longer in place. For '21-22 and then '22-23: in those out-years you're still projecting decreases in revenue. Can you explain why?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Again, when we get to forecast models around emissions and payments into it, I'm happy to bring up my official, who will explain to you how they forecast if you would like.

**Mr. Schmidt:** Sure. Yes, please.

**Mr. Wheler:** I'm Justin Wheler, Environment and Parks, executive director of the regulatory and compliance branch. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. As far as where the reductions are coming from after the transition from . . .

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt. Sorry about that, sir.

We'll move on to the government caucus for seven minutes and 22 seconds.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. I just want to finish up my question. Earlier we were talking about page 73, outcome 4, key objective 4.1, and we were discussing the invasive species. I just wanted to get a little more outline from yourself, Minister, on how your ministry will be tackling the invasive species, things like Prussian carp, zebra molluscs, and flowering rush. If you could cover some of that, that would be great.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** We were just talking about how the good news is that we're still free of invasive mussels inside the province of Alberta though we need to continue to work hard to try to keep that the case. We've also got major infestations of flowering rush in more than one location in Alberta, as the hon. member knows. AEP and partners are exploring numerous control options. However, only hand-pulling isolated occurrences and targeted herbicide applications for larger tracts of flowering rush are effective for control. Lake Isle contains the largest infestation of flowering rush in Alberta, and AEP continues to work with local communities and stakeholders to find long-term and short-term solutions to the flowering rush issue.

In regard to mussels, we continue to do the programs, including the dogs that we have that sniff drains on boats and try to prevent zebra mussels from coming across the border into the province of Alberta. We continue advertisement to try to educate watercraft owners on the risks to our system. In addition to that, I've challenged the department and have spoken with my colleague the Minister of Environment in Saskatchewan as well, who is challenging his department as well, to work in partnership with ours, to look at other potential solutions in case the zebra mussel does get in, particularly into our irrigation system. We will continue to try to prevent zebra mussels from making it into the system. That's the number one goal, but both Minister Duncan and I think it's a priority to begin to have a solution ready, just in case we do lose that battle, because of the significant economic impact, not to mention the significant environmental impact, that that could have on our province.

**Mr. Loewen:** Okay. As far as using the dogs – you mentioned that, and I think it's great to be able to use our canines for that – is there any kind of program to keep the dogs current as far as having live mussels for them to work with so that they're kept current?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** My understanding is that they work off live mussels to get trained. Mr. Chair, I think that maybe what the hon. member may be referring to is whether or not there are live mussels within the province of Alberta for their training. My understanding is that right now – I'm looking at an official. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to bring up John Conrad to explain where they do the zebra mussel training. But they do train with live.

**Mr. Loewen:** Perfect. Thank you.

**Mr. Conrad:** It's a pleasure to answer the hon. member's question. At present we cannot bring live mussels in for that training. The

training is conducted in the United States. In terms of keeping the dogs current, notwithstanding out-of-province travel, it's a fairly efficient program, and we keep them right up to date, sur-le-champ, as they say in French.

**Mr. Loewen:** Thank you.

I'll turn the time over now to, I think, MLA Rosin.

**Ms Rosin:** Actually, I believe my question was quite thoroughly covered already in previous discussions, so I will also cede my time. I'm not sure who's next here.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Chair, to the minister, permission to go back and forth?

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Of course.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** In southern Alberta we've had impact, of course, from floods in recent years. Just building on the comments and questions of Member Yaseen on line 4.4 of the estimates, you established that there's a \$5 million increase in flood adaptation. I'm just wondering if you could maybe elaborate on what efforts or plans you'll be undertaking for flood adaptation in the future and moving forward.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Well, Mr. Chair, the flood adaptation includes the watershed adaptation and resilience branch, which is responsible, first of all, for identifying flood and drought mitigation projects across the province that will help build more resilient communities. The branch also continues some of the work of the flood recovery task force, created following the southern Alberta floods in the summer of 2013, of course, which impacted your constituency significantly.

The 2019-20 estimate is higher than the 2018-19 actual, primarily due to an increase in the natural disaster recovery program, both dedicated revenue and nondedicated revenue, and that's an increase of \$3.7 million this fiscal year.

As mentioned in earlier comments, Mr. Chair, flood resilience, flood adaptation, flood mitigation remain a priority of the government, and we will continue to work on that.

Another big way that we've been moving forward to partner with municipalities is that we've been moving forward on releasing flood maps, in partnership with municipalities, to be able to help them help us with the management of flood mitigation projects and flood decisions across the province.

**Mr. Sigurdson:** Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Chair. I'll cede the rest of my time.

**Ms Issik:** Thanks. Mr. Chair, just in reference to one of your key objectives, 1.1, in the business plan, page 68, if you want to find that, just speaking about regional and subregional land planning, I'm wondering how you're going to ensure an integrated approach. Specifically, I'm wondering how you'll do that on the basis of environmental concerns, economic concerns, and social concerns.

**Mr. Jason Nixon:** Mr. Chair, time draws short, so I'll try to answer that real quick before your buzzer goes off. It goes back to some of the comments that I made earlier in regard to land-use planning. We made clear platform commitments, that we in the department are putting into place, to make sure that socioeconomic assessments as well as environmental assessments form a large part of land-use decisions. Our government continues to believe that when we make large land-use decisions, we have to continue to find balance between economic needs as well as protecting the environment for future generations.

I think that one of the big differences between us and the former government is that we recognize that the best way to accomplish that is to work in partnership with local communities and people that are already on the landscape trying to protect these special areas and also with people that are making their living inside these areas. Both of those groups have to come together for us to be able to be successful on these large land-use decisions.

**Ms Issik:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Yaseen:** A quick question, Minister. On page 68 of the business plan, under Initiatives Supporting Key Objectives, the fourth dot says:

In 2019-20, \$21 million is allocated to Science and Environment Monitoring to provide scientifically sound environment monitoring, evaluation and transparent reporting to inform cumulative effects decision-making.

**The Chair:** I apologize for the interruption, Member, but I must advise the committee that the time allotted for this item of business has concluded.

I would like to remind committee members that we are scheduled to meet this afternoon at 3:30 to consider the estimates of the Ministry of Energy.

Thank you, everyone. This meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 12 p.m.]







