

Legislative
Assembly
of Ontario



Assemblée
législative
de l'Ontario

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

E-22

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

E-22

**Standing Committee on
Estimates**

Ministry of Natural Resources
and Forestry

1st Session
42nd Parliament

Wednesday 4 November 2020

**Comité permanent des
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère des Richesses
naturelles et des Forêts

1^{re} session
42^e législature

Mercredi 4 novembre 2020

Chair: Peter Tabuns
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Peter Tabuns
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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



Service linguistique et des publications parlementaires
Salle 500, aile ouest, Édifice du Parlement
111, rue Wellesley ouest, Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

ISSN 1181-6465

CONTENTS

Wednesday 4 November 2020

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry	E-419
Hon. John Yakabuski	
Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark	
Ms. Tracey Mill	
Mr. Craig Brown	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ESTIMATESCOMITÉ PERMANENT DES
BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Wednesday 4 November 2020

Mercredi 4 novembre 2020

The committee met at 1544 in room 151 and by video conference.

MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND FORESTRY

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Colleagues, good afternoon. A charming discussion; on to other things.

We're going to resume consideration of vote 2101 of the estimates of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. There is now a total of four hours and 29 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates.

Before we begin, we have the following members in the room: MPP Harris, MPP Gates and Minister Yakabuski. The following members are participating remotely: I see MPP McKenna, MPP Cuzzetto, MPP Khanjin, MPP Monteith-Farrell, MPP Parsa and MPP Pettapiece. Are there any others out there? No, that's it.

Okay. Any questions before we start? Minister.

Hon. John Yakabuski: If I may, Chair, I have some answers for the questions posed by MPP Monteith-Farrell yesterday. If they want me to answer them, I can. I have some information that was requested yesterday. It's up to them if they want me to answer those questions, I suppose.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I will ask MPP Monteith-Farrell. MPP, would you like to have answers to the questions that you posed yesterday?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I believe the answers to those questions were basically numbers, and so a written report probably would be sufficient.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Okay, thanks. If we can have a written report given to the Clerk, we'll circulate it to all the members.

With that, we will go to questions. I am assuming, MPP Monteith-Farrell, you will be carrying this. You have nine minutes and 39 seconds. It's yours.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. Thank you, Chair. The first question is one regarding wetlands. A number of developers have recently asked for and received from this government a minister's zoning order to allow development on provincially significant wetlands which would otherwise be prohibited. The ministry zoning order to allow Durham Live to pave over a Duffins Creek wetland in Pickering is the latest example. Some of these requests describe an offsetting scheme where the developers would pay compensation for the right to destroy the wetland.

In 2018, the Auditor General released a scathing report criticizing the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority for promoting a similar offsetting scheme for the Thundering Waters wetland. The auditor noted that the scheme had no scientific basis and that wetlands are sensitive environmental systems that cannot simply be replaced at a different location for a fee.

How can the government justify allowing developers to pave over provincially significant wetlands as enabled by an unappealable minister's zoning order that bypasses public consultation and evidence-based planning processes that normally would be required? What is MNRF's involvement in this process, and can you explain?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Minister?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell. MZOs are not signed by or issued by my ministry but by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as you would know. But I will address this issue with regard to the MZO and what I'm aware of with respect to the minister's zoning order. We are getting shovels in the ground faster on the next phase of the Durham Live development through a minister's zoning order, otherwise known as an MZO, at the request of the city of Pickering and with the support of the region of Durham. Every single minister's zoning order issued by the minister on non-provincially-owned land has been at the request of the local municipalities. MZOs are a tool that our government uses to get critical local projects located outside the greenbelt moving faster.

With the wind-down of the Pickering nuclear power plant and the Oshawa General Motors plant, combined with the impacts of COVID-19, the 10,000 or more jobs created by this project are critically important for the region's recovery. This project will include a casino, hotel and performing arts centre, which are already under construction, as well as a film studio, a mixed-employment zone, and a warehousing and logistics zone.

In addition, the city of Pickering and the region of Durham have signed a development agreement to ensure that traffic issues and infrastructure work is completed. The city of Pickering will still maintain site plan control approval, which would enable them to set out conditions of development approval, including environmental studies.

The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the TRCA, and the proponent have also signed an agreement for compensation that would lead to the creation of ecological benefits that meet or exceed any loss to the

natural system. Our government's commitment to the greenbelt has not changed, and the minister is not prepared to consider any requests for a minister's zoning order for development within the greenbelt.

1550

The town of Pickering passed a resolution on May 12 supporting the request for an MZO. The town of Pickering sent a letter to the minister requesting an MZO on May 25. The region of Durham passed a resolution on October 29 supporting the request for an MZO. On October 22, the town of Ajax passed a resolution to oppose the request of the MZO and notified the town of Pickering on October 23.

That's what I can tell you, MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: [*Inaudible*] location, but I believe that the role of MNRF is also to—once a wetland is gone, it's gone, and we know how significant they are for flood control and for habitat. How can the government allow developers to offset wetland loss itself by paying into a fund and saying they're going to do something else somewhere else? And what guarantee is there that the money will go to its intended purpose, especially when considering how, since the election, this ministry has failed to publish an annual report disclosing how cash was spent from the Fish and Wildlife Special Purpose Account? From what I see, no report has been done, as required in the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, since 2016-17. What I'd like to ask is, why wasn't it published, and will you, in this estimates process, give me the level of detail on the spending that would have been covered in the report?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for the question, Judith. I will turn that to the deputy.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Good afternoon. Deputy Rolf von den Baumen-Clark. Tracey Mill is our ADM of provincial services division and has responsibility for the Fish and Wildlife Special Purpose Account. Tracey, would you be able to speak to the report that's required and some of the questions around estimates?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Yes, thank you. It's Tracey Mill, assistant deputy minister for provincial services. Hello.

Thank you for the question. You are correct that the last annual report for the Fish and Wildlife SPA that has been tabled is 2016-17—tabled in the Legislature and now available to the public. The ministry has been working on the subsequent annual reports, and we are still under development in those right now. We're looking at the content and the format of those reports to make sure that the information that is contained is easily accessible and understandable for the public in terms of the information regarding the Fish and Wildlife SPA and also the activities that the ministry is spending those funds on.

We're hoping to provide that information shortly, and in the interim, we do have other means that we're communicating to anglers and hunters and the public. As you probably are aware, we have a fairly active social media program, so information about annual spending and activities from that fund go out through our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram reports, as well as updates to about

800,000 of our anglers and hunters who have provided us with their email addresses for our newsletter updates. So that's another mechanism that we're trying to use in order to be transparent about the funding and activities under that account.

If there is a specific question about one of the years that you're looking for, I can try to provide you with some of the financial information there.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: We didn't have the information for the last two years and the areas that were covered in the reports in the past, so maybe I'll read into the record and I can request that in the form of a question to you. Since you're working on this anyway, maybe it will be readily available.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): One minute left.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The categories are wild-life education and communication, prevention and management of human-wildlife conflict, marketing and operating costs, public outreach, hunter education, fisheries and local incident management. Then I have other questions that I'll save for later.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Okay.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Do you have those numbers available, or is it—

Ms. Tracey Mill: I don't have the specific service categories that you're referring to, but we can certainly provide those to you in a written report if you'd like that.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, please.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Okay, and with that, your time is up. We go to the government. MPP Harris—no, sorry.

Interjection: Mike Parsa.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you. MPP Parsa. My apologies. The floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Chair, thanks very much. Can you hear me?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes, you're quite clear.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, I want to start off by thanking you for being here and for appearing before our committee and for all the hard work during some very difficult times. I also want to thank the deputy minister and the entire team at MNRF and, of course, your ever-hard-working parliamentary assistant as well.

Minister, as you know, Ontario is renowned for its exceptional wildland firefighting programs. Each year, your ministry coordinates the protection of some 90 million hectares across our province. So I'm really curious if and I'm hoping you would be able to describe the magnitude of this undertaking.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Michael. That's a great question and one that I'm very pleased to be able to respond to. Wildland firefighting is something that Ontario is world-renowned for. I've had the opportunity, and many other members of the Legislature would have had the opportunity as well, to see first-hand—and some of the northern members certainly would have seen the impacts of wildland fires on their communities and the resources, particularly in northern

Ontario, the forestry resources in northern Ontario. Often-times those fires can threaten people and property. We know on many occasions—Pikangikum First Nation was evacuated twice last year. In the Red Lake area, with the Red Lake fire this year, there was an evacuation as well of a First Nation, and of course, the town of Red Lake had to be evacuated this year as well. So we know the impacts that these wildland fires can have.

As I said, I've had the opportunity to—not this year, which I don't regret not having viewed forest fires because we'd rather not have them at all of course, but they are inevitable and they're a fact of life in summertime in northern Ontario. We know we're going to have them, so what do we do to protect the people of Ontario and its assets when those inevitable events take place?

What we have in place, a crew, our forest firefighting services—we call it the AFFES, Aviation Forest Fires and Emergency Services. Of course, I'll say we think it's the best in the very world. We have highly trained professionals, about 800 fire rangers who fight on the ground. Their work is supplemented with an additional 80 private-sector crews, another 320 personnel when needed.

I've had the opportunity to be up there, and Assistant Deputy Minister Mill has been there with me, as well as the deputy. Last year, we were able to fly over Red Lake. We hopped to Kenora, then we went to Dryden, and then we flew out of Dryden on a Twin Otter up to Red Lake, and then we got into a couple of helicopters to view the work that was being done at Red Lake. We lost, this year, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 15,000-and-some hectares due to forest fires. The fire at Red Lake in 2019 consumed approximately 100,000 hectares itself—one fire. I don't have the exact amount, but I know that I'm relatively close in the number that that fire consumed. We had the opportunity to be up there as that was near its end and to see the impacts and the area that had been affected.

1600

I'll tell you, we also got a chance to see our crews and the work that they do. Boy, what an uplifting experience that is, to see the commitment, the professionalism and the dedication of those people who dedicate their efforts to protecting us on an ongoing basis through that season.

You know, it's not just the fact that I think we've got the best people, we also have a tremendous system. That, quite frankly, is something that would have been developed over many, many years. Our techniques, our way of forecasting and our way of responding is something that we should all get a chance to experience.

Before I had been up there to see them in action on an active basis, I had a chance in the late fall of 2018 to go to Sault Ste. Marie to where the equipment was then basically hangered and beginning to be prepared for the next fire season that we know is going to be coming. I had a chance to see them working on the CL-415s, the water bombers and the helicopters.

We have a number of helicopters of our own. I think we have eight helicopters that we own at MNRF, but we also lease a large number of helicopters during the active season, because we have to be prepared to respond whenever and wherever we're needed across a vast amount of

territory. Anybody who looks at a map—if you think it's a big distance between places here in southern Ontario, and some days it feels that way, just get up to the north. Mike, you know how big it is up north. So we have to be nimble enough to be able to respond whenever and wherever we're needed.

We have seven main operating bases and six seasonal facilities. That's 13 operations centres in the active season that we have space to power about in the northern part of the province so that we can respond quickly when they're being needed—nine CL-415s, which I think is one of the best planes we have. We're also blessed by nature as well. One thing I saw when I was travelling over the north is the amount of water that we have access to. Not every part of the world—for example, they're fighting the wildfires in California; they don't have the same ability to have water bombers that we have here in Ontario. So we're blessed in that regard as well. Our fleet of nine CL-415s are indispensable in fighting forest fires.

I could go on for some time, but it's an amazing system. If there's another question on it, I may expand upon that, but I want to give MPP Parsa an opportunity for another question as well, or another member, so thank you.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much, Minister. I appreciate the very detailed response, and for leaving me time to ask another question. I really appreciate that.

You won't be surprised, Minister: You know that Ontario is party to numerous mutual aid agreements with provinces across Canada, as well as countries around the world. These agreements typically allow for the sharing of resources, especially during critical forest fire seasons. Minister, you did not send firefighters to California, but you did send personnel to Oregon. This was one of the three states where the impact on people and buildings was critical as well. I'm wondering if you would be able to tell us why, and what was the difference?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I could, but I think the deputy would be able to give a better explanation of the differences in the terrain and also some of the COVID concerns that may have been issues there. So I'll pass that on to my deputy, please.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Good afternoon. Tracey Mill is our ADM for the financial services division and of course is very much involved in our firefighting services. Tracey, can you provide a description of that information that the minister has requested?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Yes. Thank you, Deputy. Thank you, Minister.

Thank you for the question. You are correct. We did send firefighters down to Oregon, as part of our mutual aid agreements. We work nationally, so the decision about sending resources down to the United States to assist them with their current wildfire season was based on a national decision. One of the critical factors that we were focused on was ensuring that we could maintain the safety of our own fire rangers as we went down to the United States so that they were able to adequately support the efforts down there, as well as to be safe when they returned to Canada upon the end of their deployment.

It was determined after doing an assessment that we would only be able to maintain what we call the “Canadian bubble” by having a very specific location and parameters that were available in Oregon in terms of the deployment that we were being asked to consider. So that took some of our concerns away in terms of the health and safety for our fire rangers.

As the minister alluded to, some of the other factors that we need to consider when we deploy our resources is whether they are familiar with the types of fire and terrain that they may be encountering. In California, they have some different forest types and land terrain that our firefighters are not as experienced with. It’s a little bit different than what we experience here in the northern part of Ontario. But it was determined that in Oregon they had a lot more similarities to the fires that we’re used to fighting when we go out to British Columbia and the other western provinces. So from that perspective, we were going to best be able to provide assistance to the state of Oregon and the particular deployment area there.

Hon. John Yakabuski: MPP Parsa?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Any more questions?

Mr. Michael Parsa: Sorry, Chair. I was trying to un-mute myself. The control is on your side, on the technical side. Can you hear me now?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates): Yes.

Mr. Michael Parsa: All right. Thank you very much. I appreciate it, ADM and Deputy Minister. Thank you so much.

Minister, if you don’t mind, can I just go back to the earlier question that I asked about our wildland fire management system? You touched on this earlier, and you mentioned that Ontario has one of the best management systems in the world. I know that COVID has impacted everything. I just want to know, COVID-19 and the circumstances that it has presented when it comes to fighting forest fires and for our team to have to adapt and to react quickly—I’m just wondering if you can tell us how MNRF prepared to keep Ontarians safe during this past wildland fire season, in particular during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Michael. That’s an excellent question. I’ll try to answer some of it myself. I may turn some of it over to the deputy as well.

The timing of the fire season and the preparation almost coincided with the beginning of the lockdown in Ontario. We knew that we were going to have some serious decisions to make with regard to COVID-19. Quite frankly, earlier on, we had to even be concerned about whether we would be able to put together our crews of firefighters to be prepared for the season.

1610

One of the first things we did—and to be fair, we got some pushback on it; I don’t know all of the history—is we instituted straight off the bat, at the beginning of the fire season, a fire ban across the area of the province that MNRF is responsible for when it comes to wildland fires. One of the reasons we did that was to protect not only the

people and property, but to ensure that our crews would not be put into situations that would put them in harm’s way, with respect to COVID, for unnecessary fires in the early part of the season.

When the winter first ends, it can be a very susceptible time for the land because all of that dead matter is sitting on the forest floor from the previous year—the leaves, the debris. The forests have not greened up as of yet, so you can have some really dry conditions. We wanted to make sure that we were protecting our forest firefighters. And then, of course, we had to take the additional measures right through the season to ensure that we were following COVID-19 protocols to protect them. So we had additional work to be done with regard to housing them, about keeping crews together so that there wasn’t as much interaction between other people, almost a cohort system as well.

I know that my deputy would have some more to say about that. We’re at the upper level of those decisions, but the operational ones are handled by our top-notch people. I’m going to ask the deputy to perhaps elaborate on that a little bit.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. As the minister has said, safety was of paramount importance to us for our staff and, of course, the safety of the communities in which we work. So there were quite a few protocols that we had in place. I’ll ask Tracey Mill from our provincial services divisions to articulate some of the safety provisions that we put in place to ensure the safety of our staff, as well as the communities they worked in.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you very much for the question and your comments.

The minister alluded to a number of the steps that we took to protect both our staff as well as any of the other emergency responders and community members that we might have come into contact with. Certainly our staff were equipped with appropriate PPE and cleaning procedures. As the minister alluded to, we followed a system of cohorts, so we were required to keep certain crews together and not have as much interaction across groups as we might have normally done.

This was particularly important with respect to some of our critical services, like our pilots, that are a limited and skilled resource for us, and the aviation maintenance engineers. The minister referred to the CL-415 water bombers. One of the particular procedures that we followed this year was keeping those crews very separate, so one aircraft, the two pilots and the aviation maintenance engineer to keep that cohort bubble secure. We followed the rules that were provided to us by Transport Canada in terms of masks on aircraft and ensuring there was a sufficient supply of PPE in the event that we were needing to undertake any evacuations.

As the minister will know, we followed a process of what we called in the program “find them early and get at them fast,” which was moving to a more aggressive system for detecting wildland fires, particularly any near communities or any values on the landscape, and then

moving resources to them quickly to suppress them at earlier stages so that they didn't grow into larger fires and risk the requirement of additional emergency services being pulled away from communities that were dealing with the pandemic at the time.

So those were some of the additional examples of the safety protocols in place, but also the change in our response in order to try to keep people safe during this—I think, Minister, you called it an emergency within an emergency yesterday that we were dealing with this fire season.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Thanks very much. Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have about 45 seconds.

Mr. Michael Parsa: Okay, perfect. I'll be very, very quick.

Minister, when it comes to the mutual aid agreements, with limited personnel and with a pandemic, how do you differentiate between where to be able to send our resources? How does that get coordinated?

Hon. John Yakubski: We probably don't have time to answer that question in 45 seconds, but as you know, we did send, I think it was about, 120 firefighters to Lac Saint-Jean in Quebec this year as well and last season. And, of course, it kind of works that Australia's summer is our winter and vice versa, so we also sent personnel to Australia when they were experiencing historic wildland fires there, as well as last year. But those are operational decisions—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): And you're out of time, I'm sorry to say, Minister.

With that, we go to the opposition. MPP Monteith-Farrell.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I always love to hear about firefighting and the great work they do. But now I'm going to ask some more questions about what would have been included in the special purpose account, because there is a lot of money that is being allocated to different categories and I think it's interesting where that's reflected in the estimates. I would like the specific line items to be addressed, so I'm going to continue that.

What is the current year's spending for outdoors cards and licensing? And will you provide a breakdown by category: licensing automation system, licensing and client services, private issuer costs, contact centres and outdoors card production?

Hon. John Yakubski: Yes, those are questions that I will have to pass on to the deputy. They're quite specific and will require the garnering of information that I, quite honestly, wouldn't have off the top of my head.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: No, no. That's fair.

Hon. John Yakubski: So I will pass it to the deputy.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I'll pass that over again to Tracey Mill, provincial services division, and we'll see if she can provide those details right now or if we will have to come back with those. Tracey?

Ms. Tracey Mill: I'm sorry. I don't have the specific line-by-line for you right now, but I'll include that with the

major service categories and then some of those specific lines that you requested. It was outdoors cards and the licensing system, as well as the licensing automated system and the issuers, I think is what you were looking for?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: And you can always refer to the Hansard for the ones that I listed, because those were the ones that used to be reported on in the report.

What is the current fiscal year's projected spending on population health, rehabilitation and enhancement? And will you provide a breakdown by these categories: fish culture, fish and wildlife ecosystem maintenance and reporting, invasive species management and control, wild fur management, fish and wildlife disease monitoring and rabies management? That's another area that was in the report. Do you want me to just carry on? You probably don't have the specifics in front of you.

Hon. John Yakubski: I would certainly not have them, but I'm sure that the deputy will be able to access those for you through ADM Mill.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Tracey, those items listed, would you be able to deal with those individually at this point in time, or will we need to come back on this as well?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Yes, for the specific line-by-line, we would need to return to them.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. And they will be provided in writing, correct?

1620

Ms. Tracey Mill: Yes.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: What is the current fiscal year's projected spending on species and ecosystems science? And will you provide a breakdown by these categories: fisheries management research and monitoring, game wildlife research, Great Lakes fisheries population and habitat monitoring, commercial fisheries management, moose aerial inventory and hunter surveys?

Hon. John Yakubski: All of that information, MPP Monteith-Farrell, I will have to refer to the deputy. I certainly don't have that information at hand.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: I'll ask Tracey Mill again, our provincial services division ADM, if we have that available at all at this point in time or if we will need to include that in the report back in writing.

Ms. Tracey Mill: Yes, we'll include that in the report back in writing.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: The other area is, what is the current fiscal year's projected spending on conservation officers and enforcement, and will you provide a breakdown by these categories: salaries and benefits, field operations, IT and communications and safety watch?

Hon. John Yakubski: I will also pass that to ADM Mill.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: All right. And what is the current fiscal year projected spending on planning, policy and regulatory—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Sorry, MPP Monteith-Farrell. One second. You had asked the question—

Hon. John Yakabuski: And I said I would pass that to ADM Tracey Mill.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes, and we need to go to the ADM for her response.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Right.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): ADM Mill?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you very much. I can provide you the current year's spending for our conservation officers, our enforcement branch, and then the more detailed section breakdown that you requested I'll provide in the written report.

The estimated spending for our enforcement branch for this current fiscal year is \$31.989 million. I will provide the section breakdown for you in writing.

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

What is the current fiscal year projected spending on planning, policy and regulatory services? And will you provide a breakdown by these categories: fish and wildlife legislation, regulation and policy development; commercial fisheries management, regulatory; fisheries management plans and allocations; fish and wildlife information and information technology; wildlife habitat and population planning and authorizations; recreational fisheries management; fish habitat management; baitfish management; provincial committee and zone council support; moose projects; and aquaculture management?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I will also pass that to ADM Mill—and I hope you're quick with the pen, Tracey, because there's a lot there. I'll pass that to ADM Mill.

Ms. Tracey Mill: I am going to rely heavily on Hansard to make sure that I get all of the lines that you are asking for, and I will need to provide those in the written report. Just for clarification, this is spending under these section items from the fish and wildlife SPA, correct?

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Correct, and traditionally were reported on in the report that is—

Ms. Tracey Mill: The annual report.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: Yes, the annual report. I think that level of detail is good because that money is collected from the public, and so it's good to know where it's going and how it's being spent. That's why I'm asking those questions.

The next area I want to talk about is the flooding and the advice that was given, the recommendations of the special adviser. The minister was chatting yesterday about how they chose this person and that they appreciated the work they did, but we want to make sure that those things, those recommendations are acted on.

The last recommendation is interesting. It's recommendation 66 in that report. That recommendation says, "That the province maintain, at a minimum, the current level of funding in departmental budgets and programs related to everything flood." It says, "i.e. existing approval processes and associated policies and technical requirements, floodplain mapping, maintenance of flood infrastructure,

satellite imagery, etc." I guess he was giving examples of where he was recommending we maintain at least the current level.

Will MNRF continue to fund conservation authorities for flood hazard funding at the current level?

Hon. John Yakabuski: That's not a question that I could answer at estimates because that's a budgetary decision, but we are absolutely committed—and you'll know in my address yesterday—about the investments that we've made and continue to make, along with our partners at the federal and municipal levels as well, in flood mapping, flood forecasting, working with conservation authorities, who, by the way, have been able to manage quite well this year. They've managed quite well this year on their allocations, because one of the things that we made clear is that we wanted them to focus on that core mandate of flood forecasting and mitigation. That is something that conservation authorities have done.

Our commitment to protecting the people of Ontario and their property is absolutely ironclad. That's why not only did we commission Mr. Doug McNeil from the province of Manitoba with his vast experience to do a flood report as a special adviser on flooding, but then we followed that up with a flood strategy here in the province of Ontario. That's something that I'm sure that you have read, Judith, and there's no question that we made it clear that we're there to protect the people.

We can't prevent flooding; I don't think there's anybody out there who is going to argue that point. I know that sometimes it does get kicked around as a political football, and people make the statements that somehow governments at one level or another can actually prevent flooding and then, quite frankly, control nature. They know that's not the case, and Mr. McNeil made that quite clear in his report. But that doesn't exempt us or any other level of government from our responsibility to do what we can to assist in the forecasting, the mapping, the measurements, using newer technology, which we've invested in and are continuing to invest in and will continue to invest in. We've made multi-year commitments in that regard, to provide that information so that we're in a much better position.

Should 2021 be a season of high water, we'll be in a better position than where we were in the past, as will every community that we work with and the conservation authorities and other levels of government—and individuals because we're also talking about the ability for individuals to take steps with regard to protecting their own property, expediting permitting where people can make changes to their property that will help protect them in the event of a flood. We are definitely fully engaged in making sure that every partner that is in the system, whether it's the federal government; us, the provincial government; municipalities; the conservation authorities, where they exist; and the public—to ensure that we will be better prepared, more resilient and able to react more quickly if flooding happens. As a government, we're committed to making sure that we respond in helping people in the aftermath of a flood.

1630

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: There, the line item, or is it reflected anywhere that the flood hazard funding will stay at its current level?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Well, that's a matter for the budget tomorrow, I suppose. But our commitment to fund conservation authorities to the extent that we see necessary—you have to remember, as you know, that we're a very small part of the funding envelope for conservation authorities. In many cases, we have negligible, if any funding at all. In many cases, it's a few points; some places, a little higher. But the average, I believe, is about 8%, I think, that the province funds. I could be wrong on that, and a deputy will certainly correct me.

But we're not the big source of funding for conservation authorities. The municipalities and the partner municipalities that are part of any given conservation authority, they're the ones that provide the bulk of their funding. So our commitment to them is absolute. Our commitment to the people who are served by those conservation authorities and the municipalities they partner with is absolute.

We're going to continue to do our part not only to prepare the people of Ontario and the communities they live in for flooding when it happens or helping to forecast when it may happen, but also responding to it in the best way possible, as a member of that partnership, and also supporting them in the aftermath of one of these flooding events.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: In that recommendation, it also references capital spending, such as technology and maybe hazard management, satellite imagery. Are there any plans by the ministry for capital spending, as recommended in the report?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I thank the deputy for this information.

For 2020-21, the ministry has invested \$5 million for capital projects of conservation authorities through its water and erosion control infrastructure transfer payment program, under the conservation authorities infrastructure transfer payment line. So for capital projects this year, 2020-21, we've invested \$5 million for those capital projects, working with those conservation authorities. As we say, provincial funding to conservation authorities in support of hazard management and critical water and erosion control infrastructure maintenance is being maintained.

Capital funding is also provided to conservation authorities via transfer payment through the MNRF's Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure Program, or the WECI. I'm sure you've heard that acronym before. Capital funds must be spent in eligible categories, including major water and erosion control infrastructure repairs—for example, dams, dikes, shoreline channels—and technical studies that support these repairs. WECI capital funding is provided annually through a competitive, application-based process. Conservation authorities can apply to receive funding for high-priority repairs and studies related to infrastructure that is critical to public safety and natural hazard prevention.

Provincial funding is matched by local funding 50-50 to reflect the priorities of conservation authorities and municipalities. So, as I said, we're working with, as a partner, municipalities and conservation authorities on those projects, funded on a 50-50 basis under the WECI Program. We're continuing with those programs because we know—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Two minutes left.

Hon. John Yakabuski: —that flooding is not inevitable every year, but it is inevitable. It will happen again. Flooding has happened in the past; it will happen again.

I've experienced it in my own riding on a repeated basis in my now 17 years as an MPP, and it's never fun. It's never something you look forward to, because whenever there's flooding, there are people who are hurting. As a government, we're committed to those people. It doesn't matter where they live in the province of Ontario, we're committed to their welfare.

I as an MPP, and any other MPP who has experienced it within their own communities, know full well the impact it has on their people, and the impact it has on them as an MPP, because you can't live in an area and see what people are going through and not feel empathy for what they're facing. In some cases, the MPPs may be affected by flooding themselves. I, personally, have not been, but I know of many, many people personally who have been, friends of mine who have been affected by flooding. When those things happen, you'd have to be pretty cold not to recognize what they're going through, and we're there to help them.

That's one thing I can say about our fire crew as well. We didn't talk about the fire crew, the response that they had in 2019. The members of our firefighting crews came to different parts of the province, including my area in the Ottawa Valley, to help the people with the sandbagging efforts, particularly, and other things to deal with the flooding at that time. We're there in this ministry in every way possible. Thank you.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I guess we're out of time, or—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Yes, you just now are out of time. Thank you.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: That's what I thought.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Before we go back to the government, we've been joined by MPP Pang. MPP Pang, I—we will unmute you at a later point.

Interjection: Do we need to confirm he's in Ontario?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): We do. MPP Pang, can you hear me? No. I think we'll come back to him at a later point.

It's now in the government's hands to ask questions. Who will be asking questions at this point? MPP Pettapiece, the floor is yours.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: It's great to be here, especially talking about something that's a great interest of mine: the MNRF. Certainly, in rural Ontario, we do value your service and we—oops, my thing just fell down here.

Anyway, Minister, I want to ask you a question about the commercial fisheries in Ontario. Commercial fisheries

contribute about \$200 million to our province's economy annually, creating good jobs and opportunities in many rural and coastal communities across the province. Sadly, as is the case in many other sectors, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically affected the ability of Ontario's commercial fisheries to remain solvent. Can you tell us what steps the government of Ontario has undertaken to support Ontario fisheries during this exceptional time?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Randy, for that question. That's a great question. Most people—I'm not suggesting anyone in this room—when they think of commercial fisheries, they think of the west coast and they think of the east coast. There's no question about it; those are massive operations in British Columbia and the Maritimes that provide a tremendous amount of economic stimulus and jobs for the people of those areas and, indeed, a big part of the GDP of the industry in Canada as a whole.

What they probably don't think of is of Ontario as a commercial fishery. But we're blessed with the Great Lakes, and particularly when it comes to commercial fisheries, mainly Lake Erie. Ontario actually is home to the largest freshwater commercial fishery in the entire world. We know the Great Lakes are the greatest contiguous freshwater resource in the entire world, and they are home to the largest freshwater commercial fishery.

So when the pandemic hit, it hit the commercial fisheries particularly hard, because the Ontario commercial fisheries are not the fisheries that provide the kind of fish that you see mainly in boxes of frozen fish on the supermarket shelves under various brand names. They're more of a niche market, mainly Lake Erie perch and walleye or pickerel, depending upon where you're from—some people will call it pickerel; some people will call it walleye. It's a premium product sold mainly directly to restaurants.

1640

What happened this year on or about the middle of March—I think it was around the 16th of March—basically the country went into lockdown and the border was closed. So the customers of these commercial fisheries essentially, for all intents and purposes, were out of business overnight. The restaurants that they would sell their products to were out of business overnight. I'm not talking about Canadian restaurants. The majority of that fish is sold to restaurants in the United States, if I'm correct, Deputy. The majority is sold to restaurants in the United States, so with a closed border and restaurants closed, essentially this whole industry, like that, was out of business.

We recognized that this is not where somebody is going to have to make some adjustments to a tightening market. This was catastrophic for the commercial fishery. So we acted quickly. We set up meetings—and by the way, that's one of the wonderful things about being the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry: You get a chance to actually see these operations. I had the opportunity to visit some of the processing plants, and also on a fishing boat as well when they came in with their catch, to see the jobs, the people, how it impacts lives in those communities down in southwestern Ontario.

When those businesses essentially were closed, it put a lot of people out of work. But those businesses themselves, we had to do something to help them as well. As things started to slowly reopen, these businesses needed to have some time to adjust. One of the things we did was that, first of all, we put a—I'm stuck for the word, but we froze the royalties for a period of six months. Subsequent to that, we actually put a waiver on for the royalties to assist them through this period. In fact, we made it such that not only did we waive the royalties that would be due through that season, but we refunded any royalties that had already been paid for 2020 to try to get them over the hump. We recognized just how challenged this sector was, how important it is to Ontario, and we took the steps.

Now, there may be some other information that I have not provided, so I'm going to ask the deputy if there's anything that she would like to add to that, or from our other ADMs.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. So Tracey Mill, our assistant deputy minister—

Hon. John Yakabuski: It's the Tracey Mill show.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: —for the provincial services division also has oversight over our Great Lakes fishery and commercial fishing. Tracey, is there anything else that you want to add to the minister's comments—

Hon. John Yakabuski: Or correct him.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: —around what provisions were put in place to help during COVID?

Ms. Tracey Mill: Thank you. I will not correct you, Minister. You had all the right information there.

I think, really, the only thing that I would add to your response in terms of the waiver of the royalties is to also identify the work that you did with your federal counterpart to gain access to some federal funding programs to support individual fishers. There were a number of relief programs that were identified federally, which initially our freshwater, inland lake fisheries were not eligible for. But further to representations that you made with your federal counterpart, we were able to gain access to the Fish Harvester Benefit and Grant Program, which ultimately was accessed by about 240 of our Ontario fishers, allowing them to receive about \$1.5 million in federal funding, which was also a critical aspect in helping them this year.

In addition to that, fishers were also now eligible to access a number of regional economic development funding, which, again, was previously only available to the coastal fishers but is now being made available to allow them to have funds to cover things like PPE for their crews and also for any capital upgrades that they may need to make, given this particular point in time—for example, the building of cold storage facilities.

I think that those were two additional initiatives that you and the ministry facilitated on behalf of the commercial fishing industry here in Ontario. Thank you.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Tracey, and thank you for reminding me of that. I had a number of conversations with Minister Jordan at the federal level to

ensure that the federal government didn't forget about Ontario's little commercial fishery—I say that somewhat facetiously, because it's big for us. In the big picture of things, it may not be as big as the coastal fisheries, but the impact that it has on the communities here—thank you for reminding me of that, Tracey, because we were able to make progress with the federal government on behalf of our commercial fisheries. Thank you very much.

Thanks for that question, Randy.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Thank you, Minister. Thank you for that answer, and I want to thank your staff for those answers that they gave too. It certainly helps. I think I've told you this before: I grew up in that part of the country. Actually, I was down in Essex county making an announcement about the Internet the other day, on expanding Internet services, and I had a nice plate of perch when I was down there. I always enjoy going down there and tasting the fresh fish that the commercial fisheries in Kingsville and Wheatley and other areas can provide to us. I can compare it a little bit to the agricultural community, where we raise food too in the agricultural community, as do fishermen who catch the fish, and so we're very similar in a lot of ways in that we provide good, fresh and safe products to the people of Ontario.

My next question is about the aquaculture industry. It's one that is showing itself to be an important economic driver throughout the province, especially in rural and remote communities. Can you tell us what steps the government has taken to help this emerging industry succeed?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Can you please repeat the question, Randy?

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. It's about the aquaculture industry. It's one that is showing itself to be an important economic driver throughout the province, especially in rural and remote communities. What steps has this government taken to help this emerging industry?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Our job is to regulate the industry, but a lot of the direct work, if I'm not mistaken, comes under OMAFRA as well. OMAFRA has a role to play with the aquaculture industry as well. We regulate it, and yes, it is a growing industry here in the province of Ontario. I would have to probably ask the deputy if we've got more information on that particular sector itself today. But our job is to assist in the regulations, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs is also very much involved with the aquaculture industry.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Perhaps I can ask if there's some specific information you'd like on some of the policies or how we regulate, and we'll be happy to assist with some further information.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Certainly regulations are an important part of an industry, and regulations that don't hamper an industry—I understand that, and I do understand that OMAFRA has a role to play with this industry. In fact, I've actually met with some of the representatives about the aquaculture industry in the province. It certainly is one that can grow and one that we want to see grow. As I understand it, their sales are—they sell out all the time.

They don't have enough product to supply the market that they have.

1650

Maybe I'll move on to another question. The Ontario government is committed to protecting the province's lakes and rivers from invasive species and fish diseases that pose a serious threat to Ontario's fisheries and biodiversity. The use of bait is one route for the potential spread of fish-based diseases—I'm going to try to pronounce this; it's called viral hemorrhagic septicemia—and invasive species, such as the round goby, across Lake Ontario. Likewise, Ontario is home to a thriving baitfish industry worth \$23 million. Minister, can you tell us what steps the government has taken to protect Ontario's lakes and rivers, as well as fisheries, including the baitfish industry?

Hon. John Yakabuski: We recently embarked upon a consultation. It was begun by my then parliamentary assistant, Toby Barrett, and finished and wrapped up by my current parliamentary assistant, Mike Harris, who is here with us today as well. That was precisely for that reason, to ensure that people could still enjoy the pastime of sport fishing using live bait, but regulating in a more adequate way where that bait could be used, how it could be transported, etc., so that we could protect our lakes and rivers from a species that shouldn't be in those bodies of water. I know that that has been a subject of consternation for many years here in the province of Ontario.

But I think, for some of the details, I'm going to pass that on to the deputy, who will be able to give you more details on those changes.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Hello. I'll pass it over to Craig Brown, who is our ADM of the policy division. He can speak to some of the changes we made around invasive species.

Mr. Craig Brown: Thanks for the question. Craig Brown, assistant deputy minister of policy at MNRF.

The province released its final baitfish management strategy in July of this year. In it, we outlined ways to protect the province's lakes and rivers from the threats of invasive species and fish diseases while supporting the province's baitfish industry. If you're not familiar with this industry, live bait, or baitfish, that is harvested in one area of the province is often shipped or sold and later used in another region. If unused bait is not disposed of properly, invasive and other illegal bait species that may be mistakenly mixed in with the bait or fish infected with disease like VHS have the potential to establish new populations or infect other fish in the new water body.

To prevent the spread of invasive species and fish diseases through the movement of live bait, we're establishing four bait management zones across the province. This is designed to limit the movement of most bait to the same bait management zone where it was harvested. Individual anglers who wish to use live bait outside of their own bait management zone will be required to purchase bait from a licensed commercial bait operator in the zone where they will be fishing. There will be some limited exemptions to this zonal approach, and I

can provide some detail if there's interest. But the objective of the strategy here is to help protect Ontario's fisheries and the industries that rely on them from these ecological threats and at the same time support the province's anglers and baitfish industry.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay, thank you.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Minister, I guess what I want to do is talk turkey with you. It is something that's come up to me by different constituents, especially those who are interested in the hunting business and the harvesting of our natural resources.

A number of years ago—in fact, I can remember when MPP Bert Johnson, who was the member here in the Mike Harris years, helped to release wild turkeys into our area here in Perth–Wellington. It has been a very successful program. In fact, it is getting to be a bit of a concern that maybe overpopulation is happening certainly in this riding and maybe in some other areas. There are a number of different factors concerning this. Farming practices have changed over the years. In fact, a lot of farmers don't plow anymore. They leave their trash from the corn after they've harvested corn or soy beans on top of the ground, so the birds have had a bit of a smorgasbord over winter, and certainly their numbers have not only multiplied, but have thrived with the different farming practices that we have seen over the years in the agriculture business.

I wonder, sir, if you could give us an idea of how MNRF is trying to manage wildlife populations, not only with turkeys, but the deer population is very healthy here. The hunting season just started a couple of days ago in this area and in other areas of Ontario, and from what I understand—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I'm sorry to say that your time is up, MPP Pettapiece.

We're now going to go to the official opposition, but before I do that, MPP Pang, you're with us. If you could identify yourself and note that you are in Ontario. MPP Pang? I don't think we're connecting. Okay, I will try and introduce him when we come by for the next round.

I want to note that MPP Mamakwa has joined us here, and with that, I will turn the floor over to MPP Gates.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Just a couple of questions; I know my colleague wants to ask some questions as well. In the last round, when Judith asked you questions, you talked about flooding. I want to say I disagree with your comment around there's nothing we can do about flooding.

Hon. John Yakabuski: I never said that. I said we can't prevent flooding.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I guess it's the same thing. Do you think it's fair to say if you protect our wetlands, it would decrease flooding? And the importance not to develop over wetlands, because that was a big issue in Niagara.

My other couple of questions—you can answer them all at once so I can get it done quickly: We've had several destructive flooding events along the Lake Erie shore in Fort Erie. The events in the past years have caused some

private and public property damage at a large cost to the municipality. Does the ministry have any allocation of funds for assisting communities that are dealing with flooding issues from Fort Erie?

The second one is, because it's very similar, in the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, they have experienced growing erosion issues along the shore of Lake Ontario. The erosion has eroded portions of a Niagara-on-the-Lake golf course where a national historic site sits and has had damage for private property owners. Once again, this has become a large expense for the municipality, which was turned down on the funding to address the problem. Does the ministry have allocated funds for erosion damage along the Great Lakes and flooding for Fort Erie? Thank you.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, MPP Gates. First, I do want to clarify: I have never said we can't do anything about flooding. You used the words "we can't do anything about flooding." They're not my words. The words of Doug McNeil, the special adviser, who has spent a lifetime managing water and flooding, his report made it very clear that we can't prevent flooding. Flooding will happen. If we could prevent flooding, we would have done it decades ago. Decades ago, engineers would have found a way to prevent flooding all across the world—not just here in Canada, but the United States as well, where they are subject to many, many more flood events than we are. You see them each and every year.

1700

So I will take umbrage with that comment, that you said my words were that we can't do anything about flooding. We do a lot about flooding and continue to do a lot about flooding. We will—

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm just going to jump in, because I don't want to tie up a lot of time. My issue is that if we protect wetlands, we can protect flooding in municipalities like the ones that I represent. You only have to look at Houston and the incredible flooding they had when they paved over the wetlands in Houston. So that's my issue.

If it was not your exact words—that's my issue, that we protect our wetlands, because we talked about development. We talk about development up here, around the casinos and stuff. They are destroying wetlands.

Wetlands protect. They make sure the flooding doesn't get into municipalities that I represent. It's awful when that flooding happens. I appreciate your comment to clarify, but my issue is: If we protect our wetlands, we have less flooding. I think that's the issue around wetlands. So I appreciate that. Thank you.

Hon. John Yakabuski: And I agree with you. We have wetland policy. We do enhance and protect wetlands. That's part of what we do. And as part of development, we also ensure that municipalities have the opportunity to develop within their boundaries as well.

I'm not sure if you've got a specific question, but science has shown that wetlands and wetland protection are something that we all share in that responsibility. There's no disagreement there. The reason I clarified that is because if you're going to ascribe something that I said,

then I feel I also have not only the ability but the right to clarify—

Mr. Wayne Gates: Minister, that's fair comment. Could you please move on, because I want to make sure my colleague gets his questions in? Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you so much. I just want to note that MPP Skelly has joined us here in the room.

With that, I turn the floor over to MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Good afternoon. It's good to see you, Minister. This week is Treaties Recognition Week. I come from a territory of Treaty 9. In 1929, Ontario signed the treaty in Big Trout Lake to be part of Treaty 9, whereby making an agreement to share the land with First Nations and with the federal government. So what are some of the policy approaches that are overarching when we talk about sharing the land? What are your positions on those?

Hon. John Yakubuski: They're pretty broad. A lot of them would come under my colleague's ministry. But when it comes to our ministry, the Ministry of Natural Resources, we have a number of revenue sharing agreements with First Nations. We work with First Nations. A number of First Nations and Indigenous people are deeply involved in working with us on forest management plans. We consult with them before we approve the forest management plan.

There are so many different things. You're not really asking me something very specific; it's very general. Indigenous relations and consultations: Not only are they a requirement before we proceed with something, it's something we believe deeply in because they're a partner. We're partners with them in development in the north. Particularly in the north, in the area of First Nations, everything that we do, we do also with a lens to the economic benefits that are going to come to the First Nations as well.

You know as well as I do that we're making changes to the Far North Act, working with First Nations, Indigenous people, working with my colleague the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Minister Rickford, to make those changes that will give Indigenous people much more say and carriage over development in the areas, particularly the areas in the Far North above the area of the undertaking, that they've been asking for for years. In fact, when the previous government brought in the Far North Act, they were completely opposed to it, and I believe that your party also campaigned on changing if not eliminating or ending or dissolving it. You also campaigned on making changes to the Far North Act so that First Nations would have more say in how economic development went on in their areas.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I understand what you're saying about—it's like we're asking the government to approve whatever positions we may have on the Far North Act. We don't need to ask. We've been here for thousands of years. When we talk about IBAs, when we talk about 2% of whatever is coming out of the economic development, that's peanuts. That's not sharing. When we talk about Treaty 9, the way my forefathers understood it is to share

the land, and it's not sharing. I just wanted to make that point.

The next question will be with respect to—you brought up the Far North Act. How will the MNR ensure that there's transparent, fair and robust consultation for any possible changes to the Far North Act for any communities affected?

Hon. John Yakubuski: We've already had consultations, and my colleague Minister Rickford is deeply involved in those as well, with Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of the Nishnawbe Aski First Nation, so we've continued to have that dialogue. Most recently, I would say within the last, maybe five weeks—I don't know the exact date—we had a further consultation with them where we covered more issues with regard to the Far North Act, and both Minister Rickford and I were personally involved in those meetings. This is an ongoing process done respectfully and recognizing the role and the integral part that we share with First Nations in the Far North.

They asked for changes in the Far North Act because the Far North Act, as it exists, does not respect their sovereignty. So we have had continuing negotiations and continuing discussions with them, and want to find ways that as development takes place in the north, and there is great potential—we want to make sure that First Nations are the big beneficiary, because they're the ones who live there. It's their territory, so we want to make sure that they're beneficiaries of that development when it takes place.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I went just north of Upsala, north of Thunder Bay. I drove into this Treaty 9 territory this past fall. This was about a month and a half ago. I drove up the forestry roads, but I got lost. I've been there every—for the last four or five years, and I got lost. Do you know why? Because all of a sudden, I came across a tree cut, and I didn't recognize it with the way it was before. So I got lost. I had to take several turns.

When I got back into the city, I mapped it out to see where it was, and I found a forestry plan. Within that forestry plan, when we talk about First Nation engagement, do you know what it said? "To be determined." That's what it said. And when we talk about engagement, when we talk about talking to First Nations people, none of that is happening when we talk about these forestry plans. And it was a final report; it was a final plan. I found it online. That's what—if that's what you guys are doing. I was kind of shocked. This is Treaty 9 territory. When we talk about sharing—that's just me going out. I'm not sure if I understand. I think you have your own definition of engagement, and I'm sure everyone has their own definition of engagement. We have our own definition of engagement.

1710

The other thing is Bill 197; I want to jump on that. When we talk about responsibility to consult First Nations before allowing logging on their territories, what is your belief on that? Can you explain what that means to you? Elaborate on that engagement, rather than just dropping names, whether it's First Nation organizations or First Nations.

Hon. John Yakabuski: As far as the forest management plan—I have to know exactly which plan you’re referring to; we have a number of them. If you wanted to provide us with that, we might be able to give you more details. I don’t know when it was written, whether it’s one that’s soon to expire or one that’s recent or any of those details, Sol.

But on the issue of logging and First Nations, we have a duty to consult and we respect that duty, and we will continue to respect that duty. I can’t answer specifics if I’m not aware of all of the circumstances, but that is a guiding principle. I know it may not be direct enough to satisfy what you’re asking about here today, but all I can say is that it’s something we are committed to and we believe in, and we have that duty. It’s not an option; we have a duty to consult. I can’t say that the consultations are going to end in everybody being happy, but we do have that duty to consult. That’s one of the responsibilities that the crown has when it affects and is part of the partnership and involvement with any First Nation.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay, so I’ll go back to my hunting trip.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Your what?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I’ll go back to my hunting trip where I went.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Oh, okay.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: One of the things, as it’s part of my treaty territory, Treaty 9: What is your operational policy on building a hunting cabin on treaty territories across Ontario?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I’m going to refer to the deputy on that one.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. I will pass that along to Craig Brown, who is our ADM of policy division, who can speak to building hunting cabins on crown land.

Mr. Craig Brown: Just for clarity, you’re referencing a First Nation cabin, or are you talking about other personal—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Hunting cabin, trapping cabin.

Mr. Craig Brown: Sorry, by a First Nation or by others?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Individual.

Mr. Craig Brown: You do require a permit from the ministry in order to construct a cabin if it is on crown land. If you’re referencing First Nations constructing cabins on the landscape and if it’s done in accordance with section 35 rights, we have worked out protocols with some communities where that information is shared with the ministry, so we have awareness of where it is on the landscape to ensure that we don’t take inadvertent action against those structures.

Whenever any permit is issued on the landscape, as the minister said, we do have a duty to consult. We do assess whether or not the permit would have an impact on a section 35 right—an Aboriginal or a treaty right—and we would engage communities appropriately.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Thank you for that. I think some of the approaches that the communities are doing is that

we would just notify you that individuals are building those cabins. I don’t think we need to apply that we are going to be doing that; I think it’s our right as a treaty partner to build those hunting cabins, not to apply. But I think that’s the position that some First Nations are starting to take, because we’ve been here before MNRF, before Ontario even existed. I don’t know why we would need to apply.

I’m going to talk about revenue sharing again. I know you talked about it a little bit, Minister. What are your ministry’s plans to expand existing agreements to share mining and forestry revenues with First Nation communities across Ontario? And a sub-question would be: What is your ministry’s timeline to reach agreements with eligible communities?

Hon. John Yakabuski: What is the ministry’s what? Timeline?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Yes, timeline.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Two minutes left.

Hon. John Yakabuski: On revenue sharing: I don’t have a list in front of me. We have a number of revenue sharing agreements with First Nations. I know that, as part of some of our new forest management plans, we’re negotiating more revenue sharing agreements. I know that on the mining side of it—again, it’s not my ministry—the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, as well as the Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Minister Rickford, is working with Marten Falls as far as revenue sharing agreements when the mine at—what’s the big mining development? I’m stuck on it, a loss of words here—the Ring of Fire. I went blank there. When the Ring of Fire actually gets activated and they’re actually producing there, my understanding is they’re working on agreements with those First Nations as well. We’re not the ones that are directly working with that, because it’s the mining resources that are going to be part of it. But I know there are tremendous economic opportunities for those First Nations once those mines are active.

I know there are some forest management plans that we’re working on currently. We’re committed to expanding resource revenue sharing to include additional First Nations, Métis and northern communities. The province signed agreements with 31 First Nation signatories represented by the Grand Council Treaty 3, the Wabun Tribal Council and the Mushkegowuk Council to share resource revenues from mining and forestry. The first payments of mining and forestry revenues under the resource revenue sharing agreements were made in December 2019. The second payments are scheduled to be—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I’m sorry, Minister, but you’re out of time.

With that, we go to the government. MPP Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: Minister, it’s my favourite part of estimates, where we get to talk about hunting and fishing now. I want to talk a little bit about licensing and what your ministry does in regard to that. I think we have somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$1.8 million

outdoors cards that are sold or renewed every year. I'm just wondering, as our government takes steps in modernizing many government facing systems and programs here in the province, what your ministry is doing to help do that. I know, obviously, we have a new deer tag system online. We're able to have fishing licences on our phones. At this point, I'm just wondering if you could elaborate on some of those things.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mike. The digitization through our FAWLS is something that we're very proud of. I know that no new system ever gets off the ground without having a few growing pains. There's always some resistance as well, because change is the one thing that people find difficult sometimes. But the online system certainly has been working. People are becoming more and more used to it. It's convenient. You can do it from the comfort of your own home: Print your tags, print your permits, put your permits and tags and licences and everything right onto your own phone.

I remember when we first brought it out, my brother-in-law—he was looking for things to complain about, and he says, “Well, what am I supposed to do now? My licence is going to get all wet as soon as it rains,” and this and that, and I said to him, “Have you never heard of a Ziploc?” He dropped it right there, because he was realizing—that was somebody who was very resistant to change about the system.

1720

But it's also that we're constantly looking at ways that we can better manage the resource, and having better information, more timely information, having the requirement now to report back. After each season, we expect the people who hunt deer or moose or some others—bear—that they must report back on their activity. It helps us immensely in being able to manage the resource.

Is it okay if I drift off a little bit and answer MPP Pettapiece's question from the last session on turkey?

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, that's fine. Not a problem.

Hon. John Yakabuski: MPP Pettapiece was asking about the abundance of turkeys and how much they have multiplied since they were first reintroduced into the province some years ago. In fact, I think your dad was the Premier when we brought turkeys in; we traded some moose for turkeys with Michigan, I think. Was it not Michigan?

Mr. Mike Harris: I think so, yes.

Hon. John Yakabuski: They've multiplied quite successfully. To Randy's question, we are always evaluating, analyzing, taking data, taking surveys, trying to determine what might be our best next steps. Our scientists, our people, our biologists are all constantly monitoring the populations—through the people, as well. That's how we determine how many tags we're going to issue for deer in a season, for moose in a season, for bear in a season. We're constantly monitoring those populations.

Turkey, I suppose, is no different. There's no reason why we can't look at the situation. I know there's a lot in my area too. You get complaints sometimes. Sometimes you just about clip a few on the windshield too. In fact, I

busted a side-view mirror once hitting a turkey on my truck.

Those are the kinds of things, with regard to hunting and fishing—and I know you enjoy it. I do it, as well. My children do it. We're always trying to find better ways, and some of the changes we've made—you know, for 2021, we have a whole new system with regard to moose tag allocation. I can't give you every bit of the details, but anybody who has hunted moose this year has already, I believe, been sent all of the new changes through our electronic system advising them of what changes will take place for 2021. We've had great feedback on that.

As I say, it's change. Some people will always be resistant to change. We also listen to the people. We established the BGMAC, the Big Game Management Advisory Committee, which took into consideration much of what the people were giving us in feedback. Our original proposal, what we laid out as an original proposal, is not where we finished off, because we let the BGMAC also—then we put it out for comment from the public. The BGMAC came up with some suggestions and proposals and recommendations, and then we also heard from the public as well.

But one of the changes that I think is most universally accepted is the tagging allocation, because we heard from people that for 20 years, maybe even longer—some of them had never received a moose tag; never received one. Other people had received a number of them in the same time period, or maybe even a shorter time period, because it was a lottery-type system. So you rolls the dice, you takes your chances. For some people, it came up in their favour more often than for others. Now the system is going to be a points-based system, so that if you aren't successful, you get a point. If you're unsuccessful on a repetitive basis, you're accumulating points which count toward your ability to get a tag in subsequent years.

Mr. Mike Harris: I want to ask you quickly, with just some of the remaining time that we have left here: Obviously, COVID-19 has been a challenge across all ministries in trying to work with stakeholders and, in this case, our resource-based tourism operators. They've been hit pretty hard by the border closure, of course.

We have a lot of hunters and fishermen who come from the US and come and enjoy our bush and our water. Hunting in the province contributes somewhere along the lines of \$560 million to our GDP. A little over \$200 million of that is specifically from moose hunting, and fishing is about \$1.6 billion. So that's fairly substantial change, especially when we talk, and you were speaking yesterday, about our ministry having such a small budget. In the greater scheme of things, those are pretty big numbers for our ministry.

I know that you've done some consultation with some of the resource-based tourism operators. I was wondering if maybe you could share a little bit more about how that consultation went and some of the steps that the ministry has taken to help those folks.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Very early in the pandemic, we established a number of ministerial advisory councils, I

think we call them, and one of them was—we had forestry, we had aggregate, we had commercial fisheries, we had resource-based tourism. And you're right. We've also worked closely with Minister MacLeod on this as well because of her connection with the tourism industry. Hers is the broad tourism industry of every kind; ours is more specific to resource-based.

But there were few, if any, that could have been hit harder than resource-based tourism. Outfitters in the north, particularly, absolutely depend on non-resident hunters, particularly from the United States. They pay big money to go up there to hunt. It's a huge business, and it was wiped out completely because of the border closures. It wasn't a matter of moving products across the border; it was a matter of moving people.

So we worked with them very closely and we worked with the land use permit fees. I might get one of the deputies to give some of the details. We also waived some other fees to ensure that they could get through this time. We also worked to promote hunting within Ontario. Now, that is going to have limited success because you're not going to turn someone into a hunter overnight. Plus, even people in Ontario were not travelling the same distances that they would have in the past. But working with them on fees and the waiving of fees had a huge impact. I know I had a number of different conversations with Laurie Marcil, who was also on our MAC committee, working with those people.

But I'm going to ask the deputy to perhaps give us some more details of how we worked with the outfitters in resource-based tourism through the pandemic.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. Minister, you're correct. We did waive the fees for resource-based tourism operators. This includes bear operator fees, baitfish operator fees and commercial outpost camp land-use fees issued under the Public Lands Act for the 2020 calendar year. A valid licence or permit is still required for those activities. That was something that was put forward this year as a result of trying to address some of the pressures from COVID.

1730

Hon. John Yakabuski: So all of that revenue from non-resident hunters was lost this year. Not only did we lose the revenue of the permitting fees, but all of those outfitters lost the revenue of coming up and staying for a week to hunt bear or moose at a northern outpost. The impact for them was absolutely significant, because they don't have another market. It's hard for them to create new customers in the short term—next to impossible, quite frankly.

Mr. Mike Harris: Minister, we know it has been challenging for the outfitters themselves, but we have obviously many communities in parts of northern Ontario and rural Ontario that rely on these folks coming and gassing up their trucks and their four-wheelers or their bikes, depending on where you're from, or gassing up the boat, spending some money at the grocery store, buying some pop and chips and snacks etc.

In your estimation, what does it mean to really have that thriving resource-based tourism sector up and running,

fully functioning? What does it mean to some of these communities that are really relying on that? What are your plans, as minister, to try and push some of that agenda forward?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thanks, Mike. You have touched upon it. You have touched on the multiplier concept of basic economics and how a dollar moves around and affects so many different things.

I have said before, if you're in the north and you're not in forestry or mining, you're likely in resource-based tourism or you don't have work. That's the reality. I mean, there would be some smaller inputs of others. But every time that you create a job in one of those industries, you create a job for someone else. If the forestry company is not working, the Ford dealer is not selling trucks either, or GM, Chrysler, Dodge, Ram, whatever—they're not selling vehicles. The building supply company is not selling materials because nobody can afford to put that deck on their home or do the renovations, new windows, whatever—so all those kinds of things.

When you lose your stock and trade, so to speak, as a resource-based tourism operator, it's not just you that's going to hurt. It's going to be everybody around you. So those communities that really have been built around one, a nuclear industry of some sort, when we have something like the pandemic—and I think it showed everywhere how interconnected we are. There's the old saying, "No man is an island unto himself." I don't think anything illustrated more clearly than the pandemic how interdependent we are on one another and other activities. One action leads to another action, and so on and so forth. We've seen that in spades throughout the pandemic.

Our government has taken—not necessarily in our ministry alone, because we're a small part of it. But look at the \$30 billion that our government has invested in helping businesses and communities and individuals. The federal government has significant investments to help allow things to actually keep going through the pandemic so that everything didn't, quite frankly, come to a screeching halt, because we recognize that—it's like that KerPlunk game, you know: You pull enough of those sticks out and it just falls apart.

That's why it was absolutely necessary to try to defend the economy by assisting people and businesses throughout this pandemic, because you just can't invent the—and I think that's happening now, where there's a lot of emphasis being directed at encouraging consumer spending as a way of getting out of the pandemic and getting out of the situations that have been created as a result of the pandemic, because in every recession in living memory, it's consumer spending that lifted the economy out of it. So I think that there's a lot of attention being paid to that dynamic to get people comfortable and excited about when this pandemic is going to end. It can't end soon enough, obviously, for everybody, but we have to be aware of what kind of economy we're going to have on the other side of it, and I think governments will have a significant role to play.

Mr. Mike Harris: How much time left, Chair?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two and a half minutes left, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Mike Harris: All right; thank you.

Does the ministry have any plans to help with advertising or looking at ways to get Ontario residents out and about and looking at ways that we can try and encourage people to explore the province? I don't know, maybe working with Minister MacLeod's ministry: Are those conversations that have been had?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I haven't had a conversation specifically about advertising. Having said that, I don't know—my department may be having conversations with other ministries as well. But we do have promotional campaigns that are ongoing—

Mr. Mike Harris: Yes, maybe I should have rephrased it a bit better. Sure, promotional campaigns or something along those lines.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Yes, those are ongoing things through government. I'm not party to specific campaigns that we have going with regard to tourism, with regard to resource-based tourism, but the industry itself is its own best promoter, of course. We do have social media channels as well as that, but I'm going to ask the deputy if there's information that I'm not fully aware of that may be helpful to MPP Harris.

Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark: Thank you, Minister. You're absolutely correct, Minister. As a result of the recommendations that came through from your ministerial advisory council, we sent them over at your request to our sister tourism ministry, who has been working closely with us in trying to build that into some of their COVID responses as well.

Mr. Mike Harris: Good to hear. That's it for me. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You're done? Okay. Is there anyone else—

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): There are 30 seconds.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Thirty seconds; I'm going to stand up and stretch my legs. How about that?

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Done. I think we can—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Now we go to the opposition. MPP Mamakwa.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Meegwetch. Earlier you spoke about consultation, you spoke about engagement and you spoke about Nishnawbe Aski Nation and how you worked together with them on the Far North Act. One of the things that I think should be very clear is because it's a political territory or organization, they are not rights holders to the land. They are not. The First Nations, the individuals, they are the rights holders, not an advocacy group like that. When we talk about engagement, that's not engagement when you talk to a group like that. I just wanted to be clear on that.

I'm going to talk about this declaration order MNR-75 that "requires the local MNRF district manager to have

discussions with local Indigenous peoples whose communities are situated in a management unit. The intent of the discussions is to identify and implement ways" to achieve "more equal participation by peoples in the benefits provided through forest management planning."

Can you speak to me about the difference between co-management and participation? If you can elaborate on that, or if you could talk about that.

1740

Hon. John Yakabuski: Again, Sol, I think I might ask you the same question: How do you see it? I'm not sure it's really, here in estimates, the venue to speak about these kinds of policies, because I'm not briefed or prepared for these kinds of discussions. But if you talk to 10 different people, they might have 10 different definitions of the specific words. I think it's something that the ministry worked with First Nations on, in developing the verbiage of those policies.

I think that anyone can make the word suit their own purposes, but the word is clear, and I don't have it in front of me; you have it in front of you, the order. I think that the spirit of the intent is clear, that we want to work co-operatively. If that is the guiding principle, then I think the opportunity to be successful in any one of those discussions—the odds of that go up significantly.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: So what is the process then, and how do you co-create policies to be able to do those engagement approaches that you may have?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Through discussions, I would suppose. Without dialogue, you won't be able to get together on any matter of any kind, if you're not willing to sit down and have those discussions.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. Let me go to the next one. If we talk about long-term goals for the ministry, when we talk about forest management units, when we try to shift more into the co-management with First Nation communities, what's that approach? How far do you see that happening? In the next year? In 10 years?

Hon. John Yakabuski: I don't see it doing anything but growing, because that, quite frankly, has been made pretty clear, that First Nations want to be an integral partner, particularly with new forest management plans. I think we're engaged more than ever. There is no question that we're engaged more than ever with First Nations in the development of these plans.

Just as I said I'm not going to get any younger, even if the Chair said I'm working on it, the reality is that the clock only goes in one direction—same thing. We made a tremendous amount of progress on these issues. It may not be enough in the eyes of some, but it's way farther progressed than it was in the past. I think the commitment to continuing to have those dialogues and those engagements, regardless of how you define that, puts us in a positive frame, so that as long as there's an establishment of partnership and trust, then I think progress will continue to be made.

That's a personal view. The minister is not directly involved in the design or management of these forest management plans; it's people who have expertise and

years of work within the industry and understand the resource far better than I do from a professional point of view who would be working on that. But as the minister who wants to see continued improvement and advancement with the relations that we have with First Nations, I think it's clear that we want to make sure that we continue to have that kind of progress.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Earlier, we spoke about resource revenue sharing. In my home community—I've seen it online; I can't remember where I've seen it—my First Nation of Kingfisher Lake has this revenue sharing agreement on the Musselwhite mine.

Hon. John Yakabuski: On what?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: The Musselwhite mine: It's a gold mine just north of Pickle Lake, north of Sioux Lookout. It's about 40 kilometres south of Kingfisher Lake. Their revenue sharing agreement is that they get \$750,000 per year, but I don't know how much gold comes out of there.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Neither do I.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I don't know how much tax comes out of there. I don't know if that's—I've never been involved with impact benefit agreements or resource revenue sharing. For that amount, \$750,000 per year, with the damage that they do to the hunting—because I used to go hunting about 10 kilometres from there, and I could hear people working. Do you think that's fair?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Sol, I don't know. I'm not familiar with the operating—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: When you partner with First Nations, when you're treaty partners, and when you sign the treaty as Ontario, as the crown, as the federal government, do you think that that's fair?

Hon. John Yakabuski: But, Sol, I don't know anything about the agreement.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. Do you think 0.05% of whatever the revenue is that is coming out of there is fair?

Hon. John Yakabuski: Is that what it is? I don't know.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: I don't know; I'm just asking you. You say, "We don't know," but I'm just asking you.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Yes, I know, because you're asking me a question, and we don't even know if the figures are correct.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: No, no, no. I'm just asking you.

Mr. Mike Harris: Point of order, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Please.

Mr. Mike Harris: I think we're getting a little off topic when we're supposed to be here talking about the Ministry of Natural Resources estimates. With all due respect to the member opposite—I have the greatest respect for him, to be very honest. But I think we're getting a little bit off topic.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I appreciate that. If you can tie this more closely into the operations of the ministry, member.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. This is going back to Bill 197, when we talk about responsibility to consult the First Nations before allowing logging in their traditional territories. Can you tell me about your belief in having that responsibility?

Hon. John Yakabuski: We know what our responsibilities are. And actually, Sol, I'm going to appeal to the Chair as well. The member is asking me for my personal views, and I respect—

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Your minister's views—I'm talking to you as a minister—not your personal one.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): I had understood it was your ministerial position as well, Minister.

Hon. John Yakabuski: Well then, I would say that—could you repeat the question?

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Do you believe, as a minister, you have a responsibility to consult with First Nations before allowing logging on their traditional territories?

Hon. John Yakabuski: It's not a question of belief. We have a responsibility to consult.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: Okay. My next question is, do you intend to halt plans to open up these areas to logging until consultation is completed?

Hon. John Yakabuski: We have a responsibility to consult, and we respect that responsibility. We take it extremely seriously, and we will certainly follow the expectation of adhering to that responsibility. We have a duty to consult—it is not an option—and we will continue to consult.

Mr. Sol Mamakwa: That's all I have for now.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Okay. Thank you, Mr. Mamakwa.

I will ask the critic first, unless—

Mr. Wayne Gates: It's up to her, because I have a couple that I didn't get answered. It's whatever she wants to do.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Ms. Monteith-Farrell, would you like to turn the floor over to MPP Gates or do you have questions that you would like to pose?

1750

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: I believe MPP Gates had another question that he wanted to ask. I have lots of questions, but since he's there and is dying to ask them—

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Then I'm fine with that.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I don't know about dying, but—it's a very harsh word.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Maybe eager.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Maybe eager, but "dying" is a harsh word.

Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell: "Eager" is a better word, yes.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): And just a note: If you're not speaking, if you would wear your mask, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I'm going to go back to the two questions—I had asked three, and then we got into a cross debate about the importance of protecting wetlands.

I'm going to read the questions out from my riding, because it's important. As everybody knows, I have a great riding. I know the minister has been down to my riding many, many times, which I appreciate—just visiting, not trying to take it away from me, just down visiting. But I do appreciate him coming down.

I'm going to read this out again, because you didn't get a chance to answer it, in fairness. We've had several destructive flooding events along the Lake Erie shore in Fort Erie. Events in the past years have caused some private and public property damage at a large cost to the municipality. Does the ministry have any allocated funds for assisting communities that are dealing with flooding issues from Lake Erie?

Hon. John Yakabuski: My understanding is that we do not. It doesn't fall under our ministry. If there is funding, it comes from sometimes the federal ministry, but if it would come, it would come under MMAH, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. When there is a disaster, they provide the funding to effect the repairs from those disasters. We have a disaster fund—what's the iteration of it right now? I'll have to get the acronym. But the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing is the ministry responsible for responding in that way.

The responsibility of planning for, making changes in advance, is the responsibility of the municipality. I know there have been programs where they can apply for funding through the Ministry of Infrastructure, or whatever iteration the government of the day has, for those programs. But it is not through our ministry.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I appreciate that, because it is a big issue in Fort Erie. Lake Erie is flooding all the time. I think if you saw down by the USA bridge the bad flooding that we had because of the ice jams and stuff—and as it melts, it comes over the walls, the ice, right over the walls, which was interesting to me, because the ice was taller than me. So I actually stood on top of the ice. A lot of people from the community came in, so it just shows how that's happening on our Great Lakes. It's why I ask the question. It's a serious issue in Fort Erie, and I know Mayor Redekop would appreciate me raising it as well.

The other issue that we have—and it may be a similar response, but I think it's important to raise it here when you get an opportunity to talk about these issues. In the community of Niagara-on-the-Lake, and I know you've been down there for sure, they have experienced growing erosion issues along the shores of Lake Ontario. The erosion has eroded portions of the Niagara-on-the-Lake golf course—I don't know if you've ever golfed there, but it's one of the prettiest golf courses in all of Ontario—where a national historic fort site sits and has damage from private property owners. Once again, this has become a large expense for municipalities, which were turned down on funding to address the problem. So they did apply; it was turned down. Again, I'm going off the top of my head, so I might be out by a few hundred thousand dollars here, but I think it was close to \$1 million that it cost to fix that up, and it might be more than that. Does the ministry have allocated funds for erosion damage along the Great Lakes? I would think that may fall under your—

Hon. John Yakabuski: No, we don't have funds.

Mr. Wayne Gates: Do you have anything around erosion? Because I heard you talk about it earlier today. I'm not sure if it was you, the minister, or one of your co-workers here who has spent the afternoon with us.

Hon. John Yakabuski: My understanding is, if the municipality was in search of funds, they would apply through one of the programs, probably through infrastructure if—we have a Ministry of Infrastructure currently; sometimes there wasn't. It is not something that the Ministry of Natural Resources has a budget for in our ministry.

Mr. Wayne Gates: So you don't put a sum away that I can try and get for my municipalities?

Hon. John Yakabuski: No.

Mr. Wayne Gates: It might be something you should start maybe, to help the municipalities out. But, anyways, that's—

Hon. John Yakabuski: There are ministries that are involved in it. Regardless of which ministry it is, if a municipality applies through a program that is active at the time, I'm not saying they'll be successful, but there certainly have been programs that municipalities have applied for that kind of funding for.

Mr. Wayne Gates: No, they were turned down and that's why I raised it again, because I don't believe they should have been turned down. I really don't. I think it's the responsibility, whatever that responsibility is, whether it's your ministry, whether it's the province, whether it's federally—these types of things are happening more and more, and municipalities, quite frankly, can't afford to pay it. It's gotten to a point where we're talking millions of dollars when this happens. But whether that's property owners or whether that's the shorelines or what's going on, it's a big issue.

I know I've only got a couple minutes left—I don't know if Judy has time—but I will go back to the wetlands. I think I've only got a couple minutes left.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): You have two minutes.

Mr. Wayne Gates: My reason for raising that: In Niagara, we had a really big issue with the NPCA, where they tried to have the developers say, "Look, we'll get rid of the wetlands and we'll create wetlands over here somewhere and we'll make three times the acreage allowed." You can't create wetlands. They take hundreds and hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years to create. They are the most important thing for making sure that we don't have flooding in our municipalities. We need for the rain to go somewhere, and if there's nowhere for it to go, it's only going to go up.

To be developing over wetlands makes absolutely no sense. I understand where some municipalities, to your point, which is a fair comment, are saying, "No, we want the development because we want the jobs." So I understand what the argument is, but my feeling is our wetlands are so important; we should protect our wetlands.

I used Houston as an example. Houston paved over all their wetlands—you can look this story up—and then they had severe flooding because the water had nowhere to go but—where? Help me out here. Minister, help me out. Where does the water have to go when there are no wetlands, they've been paved over and all that's there is housing? It has to go up. That's what happened in Houston when they had their incredible flooding.

I just wanted to again say, in your ministry, you have to talk about the wetlands, talk about how important they are for the overall health of, obviously, our environment. I don't think it's more important to develop over wetlands than it is to protect the wetlands. I wanted to at least get that on the record so you knew what I was talking about. It wasn't where I was trying to corner anybody.

The wetlands, I think, are so important to our environment and to making sure that my kids and your grandkids

have the type of lives that we've enjoyed for the last while. It's not really a question, but I wanted to make sure you understood where I was going with the wetlands, and I appreciate it. I'm probably out of time.

The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns): Thank you, member. With that, you are out of time, and that's the time all of us have available today. The committee is now adjourned until Tuesday, November 17, at 9 a.m.

The committee adjourned at 1758.

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