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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, February 23, 2022****Members Present**

Hon. Diane Archie, Mr. Bonnetrouge, Hon. Paulie Chinna, Ms. Cleveland, Hon. Caroline Cochrane, Mr. Edjericon, Hon. Julie Green, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Johnson, Ms. Martselos, Ms. Nokleby, Mr. O'Reilly, Ms. Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Rocky Simpson, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms. Lesa Semmler):
Ministers' Statements. Honorable Premier.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 202-19(2):
ANNUAL STATUS REPORT ON THE MANDATE
OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES, 2019-2023**

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Madam Speaker, as we pass the mid-point for the 19th Legislative Assembly, it is important to take stock of where we are as a government, and the progress we are making in fulfilling the commitments we made in our mandate.

At the beginning of this Legislative Assembly, our government tabled the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories 2019-2023, which established the actions we planned to take to advance the 22 shared priorities set by this Legislative Assembly.

Madam Speaker, despite the ongoing challenges felt here at home and around the world because of the COVID pandemic, our government continues to make progress on our mandate commitments. In fact, we expect to be able to achieve the majority of our commitments within the life of this Legislative Assembly.

Later today, I will table our government's second annual status report on the implementation of the mandate. This report highlights some of our major accomplishments from the past year, as well as a number of expected achievements for the upcoming year. Madam Speaker, I would now like to share some of the highlights with Members.

In the past year, our government has continued to build and strengthen our relationships with Indigenous governments through the Intergovernmental Council and by establishing and

holding regular meetings with the NWT Council of Leaders, and the Modern Treaty and Self-Government Partners forum. These forums support our government's efforts to build stronger, more collaborative relationships with Indigenous governments.

One of the specific initiatives underway at the officials' working group level is advancing the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We are also in the process of undertaking engagement on the GNWT's draft Action Plan on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

A number of initiatives are also underway to improve social supports for residents and community governments. Most notably, our government signed an important funding agreement with Canada late last year to create 300 full-time equivalent affordable childcare spaces by 2026 and support increased affordability for existing spaces for children from birth to age five. This funding will support the Early Learning and Child Care Strategy, scheduled to be completed in the near future.

Important social programs, including On-the-land Healing programs, the Healthy Family program, increased social housing programs and increasing housing units, as well as many other programs and services continue to be expanded.

Madam Speaker, we are also taking action toward growing, diversifying and expanding our economy in the aftermath of the pandemic. The procurement review was completed last year, and work is underway to develop and implement the policy changes necessary to maximize economic benefits for northern businesses and residents. We completed major infrastructure projects like the Tlicho Highway in the past year and continue important work to advance others, including the Taltson Hydro Expansion, the Slave Geological Province Corridor, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway. In the past year, we have also secured federal funding for the replacement of the Frank Channel Bridge and the Inuvik Airport runway extension.

Madam Speaker, we are also continuing the transformation of Aurora College into a polytechnic

university. By passing amendments to the Aurora College Act, securing federal funding to support infrastructure planning and the development of enhanced research capacity, we are creating a strong foundation that will benefit northern students, communities, and our economy.

With regards to climate change, the NWT Climate Change Council was established this past year, including Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations, community governments, and other external partners. We have also integrated climate change considerations into our government's decision-making instruments.

This coming year will see the release of an updated 2030 Energy Strategy Action Plan to support the continued advancement of a number of projects aimed at reducing emissions, including transmission lines and the Inuvik Wind Project.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that new challenges likely lie ahead as we attempt to recover from the effects of the pandemic and adjust to a "new normal" where COVID is endemic in our society. It is therefore critical that we continue working collaboratively with our partners, including Indigenous governments, community governments, federal and interjurisdictional governments, industry, non-governmental organizations, and residents, as well as all Members of the Legislative Assembly, to address any new challenges and to continue to advance mandate commitments.

Madam Speaker, this represents only a small amount of the hard work our public service has done to deliver programs and services for the residents of the NWT. I am inspired by the way Northerners have pulled together through the last two years despite the many challenges. With a shared vision for our territory and a collaborative spirit, I am confident that our government will continue to make progress on our commitments as we enter the second half of our term. I look forward to discussing our progress on the mandate in more detail, and in continuing to work with Regular Members on our shared priorities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Ministers' Statements. Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 203-19(2):
PINK SHIRT DAY

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, today is Pink Shirt Day, a day when we take a moment to pause and reflect on how we treat one another.

Pink Shirt Day began in 2007 in Nova Scotia. After a male student was harassed for wearing a pink shirt, teenagers David Shepherd and Travis Price organized an anti-bullying protest in which they handed out pink shirts to the students in their school. Fifteen years later, Pink Shirt Day has become a global call-to-action as schools, communities and workplaces are flooded with pink in solidarity against bullying.

This year's national theme continues as Lift Each Other Up. It encourages us to support people, embracing their cultures, identities, and true selves by reminding us all to demonstrate greater acceptance, inclusion, and respect for everyone. I am happy to see so much pink around the House today, as we stand together on Pink Shirt Day.

We all share the responsibility to ensure our schools and communities are safe spaces - where bullying is prevented wherever possible, and addressed quickly when it does occur. Bullying is a complex issue that affects people of all ages in all settings, including schools, workplaces, and online. The effects of bullying can last a lifetime, causing fear, withdrawal, social distress, and severe physical and psychological harm.

During these long days, the second winter of the pandemic, we may be challenged at times to find the strength to lift each other up. The impact of COVID-19 on our collective and individual mental health is real. This strain affects students, teachers, parents, families and community members alike, as we adjust and re-adjust to the ongoing changes required to ensure our communities and schools are safe spaces. Yet, simple kindness, acceptance, and compassion for ourselves and others can make a real difference to the people around us.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment works closely with the Department of Health and Social Services to ensure counselling is available in every school and community.

Madam Speaker, throughout the pandemic, we have heard a simple message - be kind. When we see bullying, we need to speak up. And when we are being a bully, we must reflect on our actions and seek out ways to do better.

We are all role models, whatever role we play in our communities, and our youth look to us to set an example, so today and every day let us celebrate all the things that make us unique, let us be kind to one another, and let us lift each other up. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member for Hay River South.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 924-19(2): MENTAL HEALTH POST-PANDEMIC

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for letting me put my name in earlier today for this.

Madam Speaker, over the past two years the pandemic has taken over the lives of Canadians. It has created and encouraged division amongst many. It has successfully torn families apart, pitted friend against friend, promoted animosity within social groups – all this mostly caused by misinformation, imperfect communication, and fear.

Madam Speaker, elders are being confined to extended care facilities. Out of fear, some people are unwilling to leave their homes. Social fractures in the community are causing anxiety and distrust. Not being able to feed one's family due to loss of employment is affecting one's self worth. Loss of one's business is causing depression. Limited access to acute healthcare services are costing lives - all of this leading to further anxiety, fear, uncertainty, stress, and sometimes loss of life.

Madam Speaker, we may be turning the page on the physical harm caused by the virus, and it is now time to focus on the healing aspect by managing the mental health damage caused by the virus, pandemic lockdowns, and restrictions.

Reviewing information on both sides of the debate, my understanding is that there is an unknown when we talk about how the pandemic has impacted one's mental health. We see words being used that include post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, stress, irritation, frustration, anger, insomnia, suicide, substance abuse, addictions, guilt and intimidation - all being indicators associated with mental health.

Madam Speaker, those with mental health disorders are prone to relapse causing their condition to worsen and possibly leading to potential harm. The pandemic has only heightened it.

Our healthcare system is the only safety net many people have, whether it is for mental health or for the many other health issues that have been triggered by this pandemic.

It has been asserted that those that will be most affected are those who face social inequities – something not lost on us in a territory with many small have-not and isolated communities. Madam Speaker, people of the Northwest Territories will be looking for a plan from this government to address those health issues that have arisen due to the

pandemic and, more specifically, mental health issues.

For what it's worth, my advice to the Minister of Health and this government, if not already doing so, is to develop a post-pandemic mental health action plan that would provide residents with timely access to treatment. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Members' statements. Member for Nunakput.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 925-19(2): MENTAL HEALTH

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Day 1 of 20 on budget from Nunakput, Madam Speaker.

Today I'd like to see the spending in the Nunakput riding. Our housing supports, our mental wellness is the biggest need in my riding for my constituents right now. I have 13 percent of our homes that are overcrowded, 28 percent of our homes are -- needed major retrofits and repair, 25 percent of our homes are in core need.

As I stated yesterday, Madam Speaker, the Beaufort Delta, we face serious mental health challenges among our people and the most severe high rates of suicide. Madam Speaker, what do we do with -- what do our youth have to look forward to with nowhere to live and no little hope? Our families are small -- young families with small children are over staying with family members, overcrowded, overcrowding. It's really serious, and we need to fix this problem. The GNWT is going to spend money to address these problems in my riding, when? For 2022-2023, the Nunakput riding represents less than 5 percent of the total capital budget. Last year, five housing units in my riding for renovated, and this year retrofits are 17 housing units are planned. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, this does not meet the needs of our communities in Nunakput. I hear from my constituents that are waiting on the housing list for years to get a house, into a unit. We all need to know that it starts with housing. If you don't have a place to live and a safe place for your family, you have nowhere to go, and you're relying on others and putting pressure on family, and you're drawing lines in the sand, and it's really tough.

Housing, we have to work together, Madam Speaker. We have to have -- I know it's a big challenge, but I think our minister and our government is up to it, that if we work together we could get stuff -- good things happening with housing across our territory and especially in Nunakput. I will have questions for the minister at the appropriate time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Members' statements. Member for Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 926-19(2):
HYDROGEN POWER

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. As a member of the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment, I participated in a January 25th workshop "Can Hydrogen power the North?" organized by the Department of Infrastructure.

Hydrogen is a gas and it has been used in Canada for many years to produce fertilizer and other chemicals. Largely as a result of the climate emergency, there is international interest in hydrogen as an energy carrier. Fossil or carbon-based fuels are also an energy carrier but when burned, release carbon dioxide. For hydrogen, water is the usual byproduct which could help us better address greenhouse gas emissions.

The federal government released a hydrogen strategy in December 2020 showing the growing interest in this field. This was a virtual workshop with about 50 participants. There was a good cross-section of interests from GNWT, the federal government, community governments, Indigenous governments and corporations, NGOs, and business. The purpose of the workshop was to share information about what is known, and to initiate a dialogue around potential production and use of hydrogen in the NWT.

There are new technologies and products being developed by many manufacturers of equipment and vehicles that can use hydrogen, including heavy trucks. There are basically two ways to produce hydrogen - electrolysis of water and stripping of natural gas. Alberta has a growing hydrogen sector and economy, and the Edmonton to Calgary corridor will serve as a pilot project for trucks using hydrogen.

Bridge technologies that allow switching between hydrogen and carbon fuels would be helpful and could assist with some sectors.

More effective use of the retained carbon taxes and the large emitter trust accounts should be explored to promote pilot projects in the NWT. More work on the economics of alternatives is also needed.

The NWT experience with biomass is an example of how such a transition can take place. We need an energy transition plan with regional approaches to get us off fossil fuels. Infrastructure officials committed to publicly releasing the background document and a "what we heard" report from the workshop. Clearly, hydrogen will have to be part of a mix moving forward and should be in the next

energy action plan. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Infrastructure. Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member for Thebacha.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 927-19(2):
ECONOMY

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in line with my statement the other day about economic recovery, today I want to talk about the long-awaited and major NWT infrastructure - the Mackenzie Valley Highway.

Madam Speaker, for decades, it's been envisioned by both territorial and national leaders alike, that the Mackenzie Valley Highway extend from the southernmost tip of the 60th parallel up to the Dempster Highway in Inuvik. Among the first to envision this was Prime Minister John Diefenbaker with his northern vision of developing the northernmost regions of Canada to enable a road to resources, to help unlock the vast mineral-rich lands in the territories.

Building on that vision over the years, the Mackenzie Highway slowly grew and extended more and more. But it was not until 1972 that it extended between Fort Simpson and Wrigley, which was only completed in 1994.

Madam Speaker, since that time, there has been many engineering, environmental, and financial studies on the construction plans for the remainder of the proposed highway. In 2014, however, the Government of the Northwest Territories had changed its original plans from the highway by shortening its length by nearly 500 kilometres, only extending it from Wrigley to Norman Wells. Moreover, since 2015, this project has been under environmental review by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board. And to date, this review is still ongoing. Additionally, according to the Department of Infrastructure's website, since 2015, 40 of the 42 bridges have been built along with two access roads along the Mackenzie Highway's route.

Madam Speaker, even though I do not reside in, nor am I from any of the communities along this highway's route, as an NWT resident and leader, I consider this project a high priority for the NWT economy. In fact, as everyone in this House knows, this project is a priority for the 19th Assembly to pursue. Despite the fact that fact, however, I'm beginning to be slightly concerned by the lack of progress I've heard on this project's progression during the life of this Assembly. I don't believe I heard one update from our Infrastructure minister or Premier on the status of the Mackenzie Valley

Project. Madam Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I do not want this Assembly to forget about the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project or its importance to the future economy of the NWT. This highway has many benefits which includes improved intercommunity travel, a lower cost of living in the project's region, and creating new economic opportunities like increased tourism or greater access to mineral and petroleum resource development. This project will not only benefit the Sahtu or Deh Cho regions but the entire NWT. I will have questions for the Minister of Infrastructure at the appropriate time. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Members' statements. Member for Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 928-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on Feb 7th the CBC reported that Alberta psychiatrists are raising the alarm that the ongoing mental health crisis amongst children and youth has evolved into a full-blown mental health emergency. These experts are calling on the provincial government to provide a significant increase in funding for additional child and youth mental healthcare services, as COVID-19 mandates, including isolation requirements, have exacerbated an already precarious situation.

Alberta Children's Hospital has seen a 200 percent increase in mental health-related emergency room visits in the last ten years, with cases spiking since the pandemic. Mental health professionals in the North deal with the highest rate of suicide in the entire country yet feel there is no avenue to suggest check-ins for people suffering from mental health issues. Often patient advocacy leads to these professionals being labelled as troublemakers and feeling their concerns are dismissed.

Recently, there have been numerous reports of NWT youth attempting suicide, as well as talk of suicidal idealization. Some of these children are as young as 10 and 12 years old. Two have recently attempted suicide in Fort Smith and, tragically, a third, a young adult, was successful.

How can we continue to deny that we are in a mental health crisis when any young person sees suicide as their only option? Parents and youth advocates are at a loss.

A constituent reports that they had no idea that their child, who showed no outward signs of depression,

communicated to an adult that they were experiencing suicidal thoughts leading to the RCMP contacting the shocked family. Another parent reports that their child is prone to depression, including suicide attempts, and that the family has utilized every government resource available to them with no relief for three years. This compounds the situation by creating mental health issues for siblings and parents that love the child that is suffering.

With Ontario reporting that one in five kids have mental health problems and, in the North, the NWT and Nunavut have the highest suicide rates in Canada, when will the NWT admit to having our own mental health crisis? With incidents likely being much higher than reported, what is HSS doing to save our children?

We have no residential trauma program, no residential treatment program for youth, no child and adolescent unit at Stanton, and the solution seems to be to ship vulnerable people off to another part of the country causing further traumatization. If children are going to get better, they need wraparound support services in place where they are. We must walk this journey with them, not leave them to navigate it alone. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member for Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 929-19(2):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTH REPORT
IN THE TLICHO REGION

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I am going to be talking about NWT Health Status Chartbook published in the fall of 2019.

Madam Speaker, this report details the health of NWT residents and this report clearly shows that the need of the people in the Tlicho region have long been ignored. The region has the worst health indicators in almost every area that is measured. These poor health indicators are the results of lack of attention and action from the Government of the Northwest Territories over many years. For example, many people do not have access to clean running water right now. This is critical to everyday life.

Madam Speaker, we need to do better. We need to change how we support health among our residents because, clearly, what the Government of the Northwest Territories has been doing is not working. We need the government to be proactive, work with Indigenous people equally, and not to discredit.

When you look at this report, Tlicho make up 6 percent of the population and represents the worst socioeconomic outcomes across the NWT. Compared to the rest of the NWT, the report states Tlicho region has the lowest level of education, second highest rate of unemployment, lowest level of family income, highest proportion of homes in core need, highest rates of overcrowding, and the highest rate of overall crime in the NWT. When looking at other indicators, the NWT generally compares poorly to the rest of Canada. The Indigenous people are facing the biggest barriers to achieving good health.

For example, Indigenous people in the NWT represents the majority of smokers, heavy drinkers, diabetic, lower life expectancy, and lowest outcome in mental health and wellbeing. This is the result of many years of having lack of access to health and social services; care that does not respond to the needs of Tlicho and other Indigenous groups and racism in the system. Madam Speaker, now is the time to address these systems that are not working for our people. We need a new approach. We need to step back and re-evaluate how to create health in Tlicho region and other regions in the Northwest Territories. We need health solutions led by the people of the region. I will have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members' statement. Member for Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 930-19(2):
PAID SICK LEAVE

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. If you're sick, don't go to work. This is a message we need to send to our residents. However, currently, the Employment Standards Act in the NWT only entitles people to five unpaid sick days after 30 days of employment. After five days, you better get back to work. And you're not getting a paycheque while you were off, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I would like the NWT to introduce paid sick days so people stay home while sick. I would also like us to lead a cultural shift here. People should stay home while sick. Also, Madam Speaker, that definition of a "sick day" needs to include the reality that the odd mental health day is needed. If existential dread prevented you from sleeping, take the day off. If your anxiety kept you staring up at the ceiling all night wondering about the budget, don't go into work. Not only do you deserve a break, but it's a safety hazard for many workplaces to have insomniacs running around, Madam Speaker. Burnout costs employees and employers more in the long run.

There is an argument that paid sick leave puts undue hardship on small businesses; something our own Minister of Education, Culture, and Employment has pointed out when I asked this previously. However, ECE in introducing its own paid sick leave legislation found that many of those arguments were overblown and, in fact, businesses with paid sick leave experienced greater productivity, retention of trained staff, reduce the risk of injury, improved worker morale, increased labour force participation - something every employer needs and something we desperately need in the north, especially those employers who consistently lose staff to the GNWT who are very generous to speak to sick days, Madam Speaker. I'll have questions for the Minister of Education, Culture, and Employment.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member for Kam Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 931-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH WELLNESS

MS. CLEVELAND: Madam Speaker, mental health has become a buzz word during the pandemic but it isn't all for naught. Talking about mental health is half the battle. The other half is finding the right support. Since March 2020, more than a third of young adult Canadians accessed mental health supports, and half of Canadians indicated their mental health declined compared to before the pandemic. Of Canadians 15 or older who reported having a mental health care need in the last year, one third state their needs were simply just not met.

But I question if our system is set up to figure out what these needs are and how to connect Northerners to them. Mental health is a continuum that includes mental health supports, like treatment and counselling, which we heard about from my colleague from Nunakput and from Great Slave. The continuum also includes mental wellness options like cultural, physical, and creative outlets. Part of ensuring that mental health resources are available to those who need them is also about ensuring that the system can determine the strengths and resiliences of residents and meet them where they are at. In short, Madam Speaker, as a new mother suffering from postpartum depression, I needed mental health interventions, but today as I work to stay well during the pandemic with my colleagues, my mental wellness is reliant on connections with people.

The language of mental health matters. To start using the same language, we need to keep dismantling the stigma and talking about what mental health and mental wellness really means to our communities. The economic burden of mental illness in Canada is about \$51 billion a year. In any given week, at least 500,000 employed Canadians

are unable to work due to mental health problems. This means that every dollar we invest in and make accessible to northerners through NGOs, recreation, hunting and trapping, language and cultural programs, contribute to our mental wellness continuum. We need to solidify their place in community wellness through accessible, stable, multiyear funding.

The NWT needs a system capable of meeting a person where they are at in their wellness journey and not trying to figure out how to fit the person into a government system reliant on not enough professionals. We need a broad system of care that values the contributions of lived-experience as well as masters degrees and supports equitable clear access to this system.

Madam Speaker, we cannot let mental health conversations become a whisper as restrictions ease. Let's turn up the volume, peel away the stigma, and broaden the conversation. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Members' statements. Member for Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 932-19(2):
EULOGY FOR EVELYN KRUTKO

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this eulogy is to commemorate the life of the late Evelyn Krutko. Evelyn was born and raised in Fort McPherson to her parents, Mike and Effie Krutko, who had both passed on several years ago. Evelyn has four older sisters - Patsy, Shirley, Joan, Edna - and two living brothers - David and Bruce - one brother Gordie who passed away at a young age.

Evelyn attended Lethbridge College school of applied arts and science taking renewable resource management of which she graduated in 1979. She worked for the GNWT Department of Renewable Resources as a renewable resource officer up in Inuvik where she met her future husband Al Larocque.

Upon the opening of the Mackenzie Bison Sanctuary near Fort Providence, the department opened a wildlife office in the community, and Evelyn was hired as a renewable resource officer to run the office. Evelyn, along with her husband Al, and two really young children, Alaina and Mike, moved to Fort Providence in 1984. They were welcomed and embraced by the whole community.

Evelyn was a wildlife officer in a male-dominated profession at the time. ENR has confirmed that she was a trailblazer for women in this field. The hunters and trappers watched her every move to see if she would falter. Evelyn did her job with keen interest and was not afraid to tackle the coldest

temperatures in order to do her job. She was spending nights and days out on the land, including at Horne Plateau, on caribou hunts, and ventured out into the bison sanctuary. Evelyn gained the respect of the hunters and trappers for what she could do, and she bought many furs from them on behalf of the department. Evelyn retired from the department in 2011 after serving 32 years in ENR.

Evelyn also became a second mother to many of the young hockey players that she and her husband Al gathered up to start minor hockey in Fort Providence. It was fitting as their son Mike was at the age to play hockey. Kyle was very young and took up hockey when he was of age.

Evelyn organized fundraisers and tournaments with the help of the parents of the players. They proved to be very successful as a young team which later became a winning adult team as the Providence Bolts. Their family has bragging rights to fame in the name of Jordin Tootoo. Jordin was picked up at the peewee age to play with Fort Providence and lived with Al, Evelyn, and their family and played hockey in Fort Providence. Jordin was from Rankin Inlet in Nunavut. Eventually the team entered and played at the Alberta Native Provincial Championships in Edmonton about 1996-1997, and this was where Jordin was scouted and picked up by the Western Hockey League's Brandon Wheat Kings, and the rest was history in the making.

Evelyn was very much part of our community, having served several terms as a hamlet councillor, and was still a sitting councillor at the time of her passing. She also served on the local friendship centre board for numerous years and the native women's associations. She also volunteered her services to many functions and events, especially her service to the elders of our community.

Evelyn is deeply missed by our community, by the community of Fort McPherson, and many friends and family she leaves behind. To her husband Al, children - Alaina, Mike, Kyle, and her four grandchildren - Phoenix, Avery, Findley, Merrick - your wife, your mom, your grandmother has left for the Spirit World and has been accepted by the Creator. As the Dene elders will say, she is now on the happy hunting grounds and with our ancestors. We extend our sincerest heartfelt condolences to the family of Evelyn Krutko. Mahsi.

MADAM SPEAKER: Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Members' statements. Member for Nahendeh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 933-19(2):
EULOGY FOR RITA ROWE

HON SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I would like to thank the member for

the Deh Cho for the beautiful eulogy of Evelyn Krutko. She was an amazing woman.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Rita was born on a small farm in Lonesome Pine, Alberta, to Mary and Arthur Lockhart on the 27th of June, 1935. She was the youngest daughter of 14 siblings. Her mother passed away when she was 12 years old. After her mother passed away, she moved in with her sister, Eva Morbick in Edmonton. Rita went looking for work at the age of 16 which found her on a plane heading to Yellowknife to start her adventure. Her first job working as a waitress at the Busy Bee Cafe where she she became lifetime friends with Patricia Rowe. With Christmastime arriving and Rita having no plans, Patricia invited her to come to the Rowe's house. This is where she met Bill and they started another life adventure.

Bill and Rita were married on January 20th, 1953, in Peace River. Bill and Rita worked in the oil fields in Saskatchewan, residing with the Higginson family in Berwyn, and then headed north. They ran a garage and a restaurant in Enterprise until it burned down. Then they moved to Hay River where Bill started DJ Motors and Rita worked really hard raising their six children.

In 1963, she ended up with TB and her and her two sons, Jack and Owen, had to go to the Sans in Edmonton. It was a very difficult time for the family but like Rita would always say "que sera sera, what will be will be". This was her outlook in life.

Rita was known for her timeless work as a volunteer in Hay River, whether it was with the figure skating club, minor hockey, or the Royal Purple. She ensured the goals were met and the youth had fun. One example was Ms. Hazel Haight and Rita organizing figure skating auctions, collections, and setting them up to make sure they had ice time paid for and the coaches were in place.

In 1976, Bill and Rita moved south to take over the family farm. You would always see her working in the garden, her flowers, the cabin, and preparing for family visits. If she wasn't doing those things you could find her visiting neighbors. Rita loved being on the farm and her family. She instilled honesty integrity, and hard work in all her children.

Madam Speaker, I had the honor of knowing Ms. Rowe. She was an amazing individual. I know she will be sadly missed by her family and friends. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to budget address, day 2 of 7.

Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 914-19(2): HYDROGEN POWER

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. My questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure on hydrogen as a power source for the NWT. I participated in a useful workshop for officials recently staged regarding this topic. I'd like to know from the Minister what role hydrogen will play in a new energy strategy and action plan for the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. I'm pleased to inform the House that work to develop a new three-year energy strategy is already underway. We recently started our public and stakeholder engagement which will inform the development of a renewed plan. Hydrogen is certainly exciting new opportunity that we are watching closely with much interest. The department recently hosted a virtual workshop with stakeholders from across the Northwest Territories and neighboring jurisdictions to be able to look at the potential of using hydrogen technologies here in the Northwest Territories. And that I thank the Member for his attendance and participation at the workshop. We will continue to look at hydrogen and what role it might play here in the territories as we develop a new energy action plan and review our 2030 energy strategy. Quyanainni.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for her excitement over the workshop. We heard that a regional approach is needed for the required energy transition to get us off fossil fuels. For example, trucking and shipping is a big part of the economy for northern regions while surplus hydro is found in the south.

Can the Minister tell us how the new energy action plan will recognize and embrace our regional needs here in the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. Embracing regional needs is very important to everything we do for energy as every region and, indeed, every community has different needs and opportunities. The 2030 energy strategy is constructed in a way that we take regional needs into account in all of our decisions. This will be reflected in the three-year action plan. As we move forward, we continue to work to ensure that we meet regional and community needs as there's never always a

one-size-fits-all solution for energy across our unique communities. Quyanainni.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. We do have a few tools that we can use to encourage the energy transition, including the yet-to-be-tapped large emitter trust accounts and their ridiculously restrictive policy. No changes have been made to the policy to access these funds despite assurances from our Minister of Finance.

Can this Minister, though, tell us what incentives and regulatory changes will be made in the new energy action plan to ensure a transition away from fossil fuels? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. The large emitter grant account, again, is administered by Department of Finance, and the Member pointed that out, which is great. So any questions specifically for the details on that can go to the Minister.

I can tell you, however, Infrastructure is here to support industry with advice as well as support to access matching federal and GNWT funding for greenhouse gas emission projects to best leverage the larger emitter grants account. Thank you. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. Lots of issues here were raised at the recent hydrogen workshop, including the need to pose the right research questions, ensure stakeholder engagement, do life cycle analysis of options, and looking at bridging technologies.

Can the Minister commit to developing a Northwest Territories hydrogen strategy that will examine these issues and more? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. While hydrogen technologies have the potential for a promising path forward for us, it should not be looked at in isolation. For this reason, we feel it's best to include hydrogen as part of our overarching energy strategy to be sure we can balance our priorities of affordability, reliability, as well as sustainability. We look at all emerging and established technologies moving forward, including hydrogen. We need to ensure that we're making the best investments and doing the best actions that lead to the best outcome for cost of energy and greenhouse gas reductions. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

QUESTION 915-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH POST-PANDEMIC

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. These questions are for the Minister of Health. Madam Speaker, during this pandemic we have seen a rise in youth suicide in our communities, numerous drug overdoses, those amongst our youth, rise in family violence, increased substance abuse, shaming on both sides of the vaccine debate, and we actually placed people on waiting lists to get mental health supports.

Madam Speaker, will the Minister confirm if her department has tracked mental health issues experienced by residents arising out of this pandemic? Are there metrics that we can use to direct us to relevant treatment and supports? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the Member. There's no question that the pandemic has been a very stressful time. It's produced a lot of anxiety, a lot of depression, and people are reaching out for services. We have, since the beginning of the pandemic, been tracking social indicators and publishing them on our website. They are examined quarterly. And what we see is that the use of our programs has varied over time. It was lower at the start of the pandemic and greater now, and it depends on the particular service that we're talking about. But when it comes to the community counselling program, there is no waitlist. People can make same-day or even drop-in appointments, and they are in person, unlike earlier in the pandemic when they were virtual, which I understand is not as preferable. So we continue to monitor the data from the people who present for services to understand what their needs are and how to meet them. And you'll be interested to know that we are doing our semi-annual community counselling program questionnaire of clients this winter so that we can obtain up-to-date information about what they need and what we can provide to them. Thank you.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, will the Minister tell us if her department has an action plan going forward to address mental health issues attributed to this pandemic? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we do not at this point have a specific pandemic mental health action plan. But depending on the results of the community counselling questionnaire, that may be a good

direction for us to go in. In the meantime, we do offer a wide range of services. And I certainly hope that the Member is promoting those services in whatever way he can, community counselling, online services, out-of-territory services. We try to provide variety so that we can meet people where they're at. Thank you.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And in just a response to the Minister, I do promote those supports that are out there and as well, I get people coming in to my office and provide that type of support as well, even though I'm not qualified. But people just need someone to talk to sometimes.

So Madam Speaker, will the Minister confirm if our communities will see additional staff to assist in providing mental health supports to those in need and how it will unfold? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I commend the Member for providing a listening ear. He's right; often that is exactly what people need.

As I mentioned previously, there are services available. They've been available throughout the pandemic. We have counselling available on a same-day basis. We have the child and youth care counselling program to assist youth with their mental health issues. So at this point, I think our biggest challenge is staffing.

We do have a number of vacancies. Yesterday in response to a question from another Member, I mentioned that a shortage of housing was preventing filling positions in his community, so that is a limiting factor. But we continue to advertise for the staff and do fill the positions as quickly as possible knowing how important they are. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I've heard from parents who are concerned, you know, with the mental health of their children at school. So will the Minister confirm how her department will address mental health supports in our schools, and is she working with the Minister of Education to address it? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the question. The child and youth care counsellor initiative is a joint project between ECE and the Department of Health and Social Services. It is, if you like, school counselling 2.0. What we have is a four-year implementation plan of which we are now in year four where we've provided 42 positions to schools and seven clinical

supervisors in order to address the needs of children and youth, particularly with respect to mental health, but they could bring any needs forward. We are now at the point of beginning an evaluation of this program so that we can determine whether it is meeting the goals that we set for it. So the service is up and running. It's available in person. And the evaluation will be completed during the next fiscal year. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Nunakput.

QUESTION 916-19(2):
HOUSING

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had questions for the housing Minister but she's not in the House, but I'll redirect them to the Premier.

Madam Speaker, the people in my riding are wanting -- have been waiting way too long in regards to move to the public housing units. Can the Minister provide me with a waitlist per community in my riding in writing? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Housing Corporation.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't have the list of -- the waitlist for the numbers for Nunakput. I don't have them in front of me. I will follow up with the Member with those numbers. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Supplementary, Member for Nunakput.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister confirm whether the three retrofits in Paulatuk, two retrofits in Ulukhaktok, and a plan for 2022, have they been completed? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not have the numbers for the Member. I do have a list of our co-investment public housing delivery and also our CIRNAC delivery as well, too, for the Northwest Territories. I will provide those numbers to the Member and also with the repairs for his riding as well, too. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Supplementary, Member for Nunakput.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Minister for that. Madam Speaker, we have local businesses in the Beaufort Delta that are willing to build units and work together with our government and sort of "build it they'll come", so to say where it's not going to be a burden on our government for upfront costs to be building.

Is the government willing to work with local businesses in the Beaufort Delta to build units in the communities to get units there quicker so we're not having to get two units per year when we have a waiting list of 25 or 30 people, in one of my communities. Are they willing to work with us to get units into the communities this year? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Chair. Absolutely, I am willing to work with the Member as well. We do have the co-investment funding that is available for the Northwest Territories. We do have staff that provide further information on that program delivery. There has also been a number of Indigenous groups throughout the Northwest Territories that has accessed that funding, and the Housing Corporation works with them very closely in trying to support those applications going forward.

And I just wanted to go back to the Member's question that just for the numbers on the public housing waitlist. I do have 15 people on the housing waitlist in Paulatuk, three households with numbers of people in Sachs Harbour, and 17 for Paulatuk. I do not have the numbers for Ulukhaktok. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Nunakput.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I'm happy to hear the Minister's willing to commit to working with us in regards to Nunakput because we do have a housing strategy being done for a couple of elders facilities that these companies are willing to build and work together with getting a negotiated lease, I guess, that's what's going to be needed to happen. And if I could get commitment, again, for the record, that she's willing to work with us to get these units completed in my riding of Nunakput and the Beaufort Delta. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very encouraged to be working with all Indigenous groups throughout the Northwest Territories. And if they're coming up with wanting to pursue partnership or finding additional and unique housing solutions, I am committed to be working with that Member and with those Indigenous groups as well too. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Mahsi.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Thebacha.

QUESTION 917-19(2):
MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY

MS. MARTSELOS: Madam Speaker, can the Minister of Infrastructure provide us an update on

the status of the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. The Mackenzie Valley Highway Project is currently undergoing an environmental assessment by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Review Board. The next major milestone in the submission of our comprehensive developer's assessment report, we have been working hard to collect information that is needed for this report over the past several years and expect that report to be submitted to the Mackenzie Valley Review Board this fall. This project will then move forward with the environmental assessment review process for the report. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Supplementary, Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Madam Speaker, I think the Minister has answered some of my questions but I'm going to ask it again.

Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide a timeline for when we can expect the environmental review for the Mackenzie Valley Highway to be complete? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni ekati. Once our developer's assessment report is submitted, the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board will initiate their assessment process. The timeline in which is governed by the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. However, we anticipate that the environmental assessment process will be completed in 2024, which will be followed by a regulatory process to be able to obtain specific licences, permits going through the regional land and water boards. So we anticipate that to be completed in 2025. That's the timelines. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Supplementary, Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Madam Speaker, I'm wondering if the Minister can provide clarity on something. According to the Department of Infrastructure's website, 40 of 42 bridges and two access roads have already been built along the proposed Mackenzie Valley Highway route, yet construction of the highway has not officially begun. Can the Minister confirm if construction of the highway has begun or not? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. Construction on the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project has not started. The Canyon Creek access road, the 14

kilometre portion of the Mackenzie Valley Highway alignment from Norman Wells to south of Canyon Creek was completed in 2018. However, this work was advanced as a standalone project with appropriate regulatory approvals and community support as initiative to build capacity in the region as well as advance the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project. We also hope to advance the construction of the Prohibition Creek and Mount Gadet access road as well as the Great Bear River Bridge while the environmental assessment and regulatory process is underway. The bridge projects the Member's referencing were completed as part of the Department of Infrastructure's bridge replacement program for the Mackenzie Valley winter road, but we will continue to support the project as we all know this is a priority of this Assembly. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Final supplementary, Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide us any specific dates or timelines for when construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway will be starting? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyanainni. Once again, the environmental assessment process is completed. When it's completed, the regulatory authorizations received, the GNWT will need to make a final construction decision on the project. Construction of the project will require significant federal financial support to proceed. And I've identified this to my federal counterparts as well. Pending an appropriate level of federal funding to support and advance this project, we expect we could be in a position for commenced construction on 2026. Quyanainni.

MADAM SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Great Slave.

QUESTION 918-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services.

In the 2017 Child and Youth Mental Wellness Action Plan 2017-2022, HSS identifies numerous actions in several departments that were to have been implemented to improve the situation for young people. As it's now 2022, can the Minister please provide an update on the plan such as what has been completed, how have the outcomes been measured, and will there be a report and update coming? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Minister for Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm not familiar with this report so I'll have to come back with that information. Thank you.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That's concerning, but I'll move on. Besides telephone Help Lines, what specific supports are provided to families and guardians to help them recognize the signs or symptoms of a mental health emergency in their children long before it gets to the point of suicide? Where do parents go for help when they find themselves in this situation? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I appreciate the Member shining a light on this area. It's obviously every parent's worst nightmare is to fear that their child has suicidal thoughts or has attempted or completed a suicide. I appreciate her shining a light on that. I think that it's very important to do that.

We have, of course, the community counselling program that's available to individuals or people could attend in families. We also have a specific app, and of course that depends on having the right tools and the connectivity. But it's called the Strongest Family Institute, and it is specifically geared to helping parents with challenges that they face.

The Child and youth care counselling program, which I spoke about in response to another question, is one that is also available to families where they can attend together to talk about the issues that they face. So there are services that are in place and available immediately to families in need who are facing challenges. Thank you.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That's good to know that the families can also access the youth counsellors; it's not just for children.

My next question is does the Department of Health record statistics for children on overdose, suicide attempts, mental health assistance, medivacs, etcetera? If Ontario can provide us with the statistics that one in five children are having mental health problems, where are those statistics for the NWT? How many children are in our mental health system and how is their progress tracked and recorded? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I'll return with that information. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, will the Minister finally admit that we are in a mental health crisis here in the Northwest Territories after two years of this pandemic? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I recognize that the pandemic has been incredibly stressful for almost everyone. It has produced a lot of anxiety, depression, loneliness, especially for people who live on their own like elders. And we have provided services throughout. The demand for services is uneven. At this point, we are able to keep up with the demand for services, and so I feel confident that we're not facing anything that we can't deal with. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Deh Cho.

QUESTION 919-19(2):

INDIGENOUS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Finance Minister presented budget 2022-2023 in which she stated that making "flashy announcements" and hoping new money would solve long-standing problems, and it goes on to state that the goal is to influence the path for the next five to ten years. And that's where it's concerning and it actually got me off my seat. Because there's a real issue that we see that's not being addressed is what I don't see in bold in funding is towards the Indigenous recruitment and training and retention. This is important as the Minister stating that this path is already being set for five to ten years, and we're not really addressing this. This has been an ongoing problem. Can the Minister address this long-standing issue? Mahsi.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister responsible for Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am more than happy to address this. We've done, actually -- in some ways, actually, this is exactly the kind of thing I was speaking to. We do want to be influencing where we are in five to ten years, and that does mean we need to be taking action today for Indigenous recruitment and retention. That is why we've moved forward on the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework. That was released earlier -- or I guess a few months ago now, and we've had an opportunity to speak to committee about that and have public review of that alongside committee, and I was grateful for the feedback that we got at that opportunity.

We're also continuing to put forward a GNWT human resources plan so that this is, you know, really that -- the approach that we're taking to

Indigenous recruitment and retention is one that is built into that plan and built into everything we do in the Department of Finance and with our human resources. So, you know, we already are doing a lot in this space, and it is exactly my hope that that's the kind of thing where we have that work, we are doing that work. We need to get word out about that work. We need all the departments to be working together towards that goal, because in five to ten years, you know -- and frankly, even before that, it would be pretty amazing to be one of the top employers in Canada for inclusion and diversity. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Madam Speaker, and mahsi to the Minister for that. Since the start of the 19th Assembly, many of us on this side of the floor have made the issue of Indigenous hiring and a review for the Affirmative Action Policy. I think the policy's goal was 50 or 51 percent. We're at 30 something percent and I think it dropped down to 29. So we're not even meeting our targets, and this government's been here for -- this is the 19th Assembly. You know, we're not putting our mouth where, you know, we should be putting the action.

I'm not seeing it in any of the projects that, you know, this issue is highlighted and budgeted for, and that's a concern. You know, we've always spoken about the geography of the Northwest Territories as the makeup is predominantly Indigenous and Inuvialuit and Metis. And we're always fighting that losing battle. We're always battling, battling the governments here. The government is fighting back with our people forever. And that's a big concern to us as Indigenous people and Indigenous leaders.

I highlighted the fact that I was an employee and had been interested in a program to advance myself, the associate director program. I no longer see it anywhere in the government website. So it's been wiped out. That would have given me an initiative, a chance to work with an existing director job shadowing, you know, and the director was leaving. I never got nothing. I never got nowhere. My managers, you know, dismissed me. So I've experienced that. And that's the type of training we want to see back on the books is job shadowing on-the-job training. It gives us a chance at these positions. We don't need, you know, highly, you know, the high degrees to be able to figure out what's just common sense within the workplace. And we need this government to start listening to us as Indigenous people.

I'd like to hear the views of the Minister on that, and I won't have any further questions, Madam Speaker. Mahsi.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I can't speak to

the Member's personal or specific circumstances but there's a continual renewal of the kinds of programs and policies that are available. The Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework brings it under one umbrella and puts targets on departments and puts an onus on senior management as part of their performance plans that they have to deliver on this. So we're taking those things seriously because it doesn't need dollars; it needs people to buy in and to understand the importance. These people to actually at the leadership level and at this level, amongst Ministers and among deputies, to be in a position to say that this is something that we as a government value, that this is something that we are going to advance. And that's not about the dollars; that's about getting it done. Every department has staffing dollars. Every department already has compensation and benefits associated to it. When we spend those dollars on our compensation and benefits for public servants, we want every public servant to feel included, every public servant to be reflected, and to know that they have a future in the Government of the Northwest Territories. So while the programs might change their names, we do have still the Indigenous career gateway program. This is an opportunity to connect young people into the public service. We have the regional recruitment program similarly to identify openings that are recurring and to find folks in their communities who can fill those positions. And if they do, there's the building capacity within -- there's -- sorry, the Indigenous management and development training program to help folks who need a bit of a step up to make their career.

And one of the newer ones, Madam Speaker, that I think's really exciting, building capacity with Indigenous governments program. This is an opportunity to have secondments between Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, and the Government of the Northwest Territories so that we are truly all reflective of one another, that we better understand one another. So I'm glad that we keep raising the issue. I don't want to not have the chance to talk about this as I have been for the last couple of years because there is a lot happening, and we're at a really critical point. The framework is in place now. Those measurements are in place now. And we do need to be paying attention to seeing as they come to fruition. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 920-19(2):
PAID SICK LEAVE

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Earlier today I spoke about my desire to have paid

sick leave in the Northwest Territories. So my question for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment is in the life of this government, will we bring forward legislation to introduce paid sick leave in the NWT? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't know, maybe. The Member raises some very valid points, and sometimes I joke that he's just trying to chip away at the workweek with the more holidays and paid sick leave but the fact is this pandemic has shown us that when you're sick, we want you to stay home. But not everyone can afford that. So we are reviewing the Employment Standards Act in the upcoming fiscal year which starts not that long from now, and we are going to be going out and speaking with employers and asking them these questions, how they feel about it, and then speaking with the public as well. And the Member mentioned that in BC it's been shown to be a positive for employers. And so I want to say that nothing is stopping employers from implementing paid sick leave in their own businesses right now. So I want to thank the Member for raising that and maybe putting this on the minds of employers before we look at the legislation. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: Yes, thank you, and I thank the Minister for stating that. I've actually had a number of businesses reach out to me during the pandemic who have introduced paid sick leave. So I suspect the number of people who are actually left in the territory without paid sick days is steadily decreasing, and I would like to thank all businesses who have taken that step.

I'm actually wondering, though, if the department has any of those statistics of who in the NWT labour force or how many workers are presently without any form of paid sick leave? Thank you, Madam Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: No, we don't have those numbers. When employers implement things like this, they're not required to inform employment standards. However, under the Employment Standards Act, I believe there's around between 15,000 and 19,000 employees in the territory who fall under that act, and I would imagine for the most part they don't have paid sick leave. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 921-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH LEAVE

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Finance. I think it's important that

we use the data that we have and that we understand the data we have and that we can use it to make change.

My questions for the Minister of Finance today are in regards to how the COVID-19 is impacting public servants in the territory. Does the Minister know what percentage of GNWT employees are currently on stress leave? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there's not a category of leave that is specific to stress or mental health leave. We do, of course, track and are aware of general sick leave but the specific reasons that someone might be on sick leave is, for I suspect fairly reasonable privacy reasons, that's not something that we are tracking. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That kind of changes, I guess, some of my questions. And I understand that this is a privacy concern between employees and supervisors. But is there a mechanism for, then, the Department of Finance to be able to blindly sort that information from NWT service providers or through, because I'm assuming that this is getting logged under short-term disability instead or long-term disability, is there a mechanism from either insurance providers or healthcare providers where this can be blindly provided to the GNWT? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that's an interesting question that I'll have to take away. It may well be that the vital statistics is tracking some information or receiving information more broadly about the impacts of mental health on mental health pre- and post-pandemic. It may be of some assistance or of some interest that interestingly GNWT employees, as I said we are tracking the total numbers and we're actually using less sick days, less leave without pay days than in prior fiscal years. Pre-pandemic, we were at 9.1 days in the 2018-2019 but current fiscal right now, coming to the end of it, we're at only an average of six. And I can also say, perhaps I'll provide the Member directly, I do have a list of the number of accesses to some of the various mental health programs that the GNWT runs and the numbers there. So I will provide that separately, and that may well lead to some more discussion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And no, I thank the Minister for the willingness to have the offline conversation. And

I think it'll be interesting as well to see that in the year -- or, the fiscal year we're going into now, now that public servants are back to their workplaces and we're coming to the potential end of the public health emergency, it'll be interesting to see how that has an impact on sick days going forward, and really if people being able to have the opportunity to work remotely has an impact on sick days that are being logged.

I know that in other workplaces, public health and safety, in addition to occupational health and safety, is something that a lot more employers are talking about. And so I'm wondering if this is a conversation that's currently occurring within the Department of Finance within the responsibility of an employer to monitor, support the psychological health and safety, especially coming out of a pandemic, of their workers and public servants in the territory? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I'm conscious of time on this one, I have to admit. Yes, I'm struggling with where to start.

So we have quite a number of programs that we do provide to employees, some that were introduced to -- as additional items in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. I think really, though, Madam Speaker, this is a much bigger issue. I can say that I had inquired with the department and the conversation around morale which is related perhaps in part, though certainly doesn't encompass everything that I know is specific to mental health but about that wellness of employees, the wellness of public servants, the impact of being asked to do more through a pandemic when they were suffering themselves at home and working through conditions that were not normal.

So I know that the Department of Finance is right now taking on the effort to bring that into our human resources plan, looking at some initiatives around new training that can help to better identify that wellness, that psychological wellness in a workplace. There's literally work out right now to try and see what we can bring in in that regard. So short answer is yes, the conversations are occurring, and I am hopeful that I'll be able to report back to this House some more information about what that's going to look for the future of the public service. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can you put me back on the list for an additional Minister, thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 922-19(2):
FEDERAL GRANTS

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I got a question for the finance minister. I was just reviewing your 2022-2023 budget, and in the budget it talks about grants from Canada. And I'd like to ask the Minister if she's able to maybe talk about the grants from Canada and perhaps break it down further because I'd like to know how the money's coming in and how is it broken down. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there's different types of grants that we get from the Government of Canada. I mean, it's obviously a pretty excellent question here for budget session and being day 2 of having just received our -- the budget speech. So I'm trying desperately to find my summary of revenues, Madam Speaker. I have it in front of me now.

So the biggest grant we get from Canada, the territorial formula financing. That is really the backbone of what forms our budget. But there's others in there that I think perhaps don't always get the same attention and may be less well understood.

There is, of course, also the social health transfer. That involves a lot of the social programs over in ECE and health. And there's other health programs. The DIF transfer that also helps support a lot of what happens over at the Department of Health. But, Madam Speaker, then there's also all the infrastructure contributions. So when we get infrastructure contributions, that too comes into the revenues that we are seeing here in the operations budget, and that then goes to help pay some of the infrastructure projects we have on the go. And then there's no doubt many other smaller projects that come in that come in as grants and supports from the federal government.

So that's my two second breakdown, and I'll be happy to talk about that more. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister also explain as the grants contribution comes in and it's broken down, normally you would have to do a reporting on those grants or contributions back to the Government of Canada. When that happens and we go ahead and spend the monies here in the Northwest Territories,

we also put policies in place when we try and help our people in our communities. So if you could help me understand and explain how you report this back to Canada, and when you get this money from Canada is there policies attached to it when it comes to the Legislative Assembly? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And Madam Speaker, so individual departments, of course, will have the reporting obligations to their counterparts in the federal government. And as we go through the review department by department, starting I think later today, we'll have -- I would certainly encourage everyone in the House to engage exactly in that dialogue of, you know, what is that we have to report back to the federal government on, what is perhaps the nature of that reporting, and, you know, always open to having the conversation about whether we are providing enough information as is available publicly but also, you know, what is the kind of relationship we have with the federal government as will be reflected in the dollars that come in. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, thank you for that response. I was reviewing the budget for our riding, for the Tu Nedhe-Willideh riding, and this year -- our allocation for this year is about 3.4 million.

Madam Speaker, I guess I'm concerned about that number when we really need help in our communities, whether it be internet services, which is really slow in Lutselk'e, dust-free roads in the community of Lutselk'e. That's just to name a few. And then now, you know, I am hearing that we need to improve the winter road and barging season so we can provide essential services into the community of Lutselk'e. So I don't know how consultation's taking place with communities, and how did we arrive with these numbers? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, so the budget, of course, isn't drawn up on a per capita basis. It's not per 33 communities divided up by 33. There are occasions, for example with MACA's budget, where of course Members may want to ask about the specific dollars that go into a community. But for most departments, a lot of what happens is territory-wide. So, for example, education or health is delivering services that may be regional. They may be delivering services that are, you know, done in a headquarters. There are services that are done -- planning communications that are done that benefit all of the territory and can't quite be divided out. You know, even some of the large infrastructure that we put into place, Madam Speaker, there's projects that benefit, you know, multiple regions or, indeed again, when we're talking about significant roadways crossing different

ridings and indeed benefitting projects up in the Beaufort Delta help Yellowknife in that it grows the overall economy of the Northwest Territories. So the budget isn't drawn up riding by riding. But that level of detail, I'm very confident will come out over the next couple of weeks to understand what the individual benefits are to each and every community but hopefully to each and every member of the Northwest Territories as residents and as businesses. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I guess what I wanted to say is thank you for that response, and I'm probably going to spend the next few days probably to understand the budget that's been put before us here as well. But I want to look forward to work with the Minister of Finance as to how we could look at our budgets for the Tu Nedhe-Willideh riding, and I want to let her know that we have some big issues there. We want -- housing's a big issue. Affirmative action's a big issue. Hiring policies is something that's been talked about in our region. So it may be within the next day or two I would like to sit down with you, if we can, and just see what we can do to work together to resolve these issues. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Speaker, I don't know that there could be a better set of first questions, certainly not coming to me.

---Applause

That's a statement about consensus government. That's how we do government here. We're going to sit down, and that's where the consultations take place, is that we sit down, we talk, we learn from each other, and I am very happy to do that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Oral questions. Member for Monfwi.

QUESTION 923-19(2):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HEALTH STATUS
REPORT

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Okay, question for the Minister of Health and Social Services, that the department tracks the NWT health profile of its residents to understand public health issues that impact the whole population. The information gather is to provide decision-makers the information they need to take actions. With that in mind, can the Minister provide an update on action taken in Tlicho region to address the poor health outcome in my region? Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister for Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I appreciate the question from the Member for Monfwi.

The provision of Health and Social Services in the Tlicho region is delivered by the Tlicho Community Services agency. They create their own budget based on their own process, and they submit it to me for approval. I've recently received the budget for the next fiscal year. I haven't yet reviewed it. But I certainly will be doing so. What I suggest is that the Member speak to the board of the Tlicho Community Services agency about how to address the needs that she has in mind to improve the social determinants of health. Thank you.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you for the answer. She is the Minister of Health and Social Services, so that's why I was addressing.

Can the Minister report on any progress achieved to reverse the poor health trends in the Tlicho region since the report was tabled over two years ago?

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is an unusual occurrence, but I'm not sure which report the Member is referring to. But if she can tell me which report, then I can certainly come back to her with a response. Thank you.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yes, thank you. That is the GNWT Health Status Report that was published in fall of 2019 which I tabled two days ago, and that's their own report that I am addressing. So that's why I'm asking what are they doing to fix the problem. Do they have any action plan? Do they have any -- what do they have? What are they doing to fix things in our region? Or not just in my region but in other regions as well, and which we heard from other Members addressing their issues.

So Madam Speaker, if the GNWT was to allocate their budget based on need, we should be seeing improvements in health outcomes over time, but this does not appear to be the case for people in my regions and other groups as well, because the problem have been addressing -- Members have been addressing the problems here.

Can the Minister explain how a budget to address health outcomes are allocated? How is the department assessing the needs of community and responding with appropriate levels of funding to address those needs? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we have a pot of money

called the community initiatives fund. And what we ask communities to do is create their own wellness plan to identify the things they need in their community in order to be well and to be healthy. These wellness plans are on the Department of Health and Social Services website. They're funded annually. The funding can be carried over. The plans also are evergreen plans, meaning that they can change over time to meet the needs of the communities. And this year, we are going through an exercise where we are reaching out to each of the communities to have them assess their plan, whether it's working and if not, how it can be changed. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Monfwi.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Does the GNWT have a specific and unique plan to address housing, crime, education, mental health, and addictions in my regions, in Tlicho regions? Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm not aware of a whole-of-government approach which would take in all the subject areas the Member mentioned, and we don't have a specific Tlicho plan. As a territorial department, we provide programs and services for the whole territory. We have quite a number of funds that are available by application from communities and Indigenous groups such as the on-the-land healing fund, peer support, addictions and aftercare, suicide prevention, and so on. So there are a number of ways that communities can build up their own resources by making applications to these specific funds. And then in addition to that, of course, we spend the better part of our \$600 million budget on healthcare that is for everyone. So that would include the health centres in the Member's communities as well as Stanton Hospital, the counselling programs I referenced earlier, specialist services, all the different components of health. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 924-19(2):
ALBERTA TAR SANDS TAILINGS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources about the development of regulations for discharges from the Alberta tar sands.

I understand that Alberta has begun ecological and human health risk assessment work downstream of potential discharge points. Can the Minister tell us what involvement, if any, this government has had

in this risk assessment work and whether it includes impacts into the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister for Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is my understanding that human health and ecological risk assessments are one of the six knowledge gaps that the Alberta government is working on. My understanding, in reaching out to the Alberta government, is Alberta has retained an independent consultant to complete the work to fill this information gap. Once the report is completed, then it's going to be given to the GNWT and then the GNWT, the department and the ones who we -- the consultants we've retained, will be looking at it and assessing it as in looking at the findings.

Madam Speaker, I want to make sure that people understand the department has made it very clear to Alberta and the federal government that any plans to release treated oil sand water to surface water must ensure the ecological integrity of water in the NWT is maintained. And we've been very clear in my communications with both the federal minister and the Alberta Minister. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. I'm not sure he actually answered my question. So I'll try it a different way here.

So one of the most important pieces of work that's going to be done is considering any potential discharges and the impacts of the tar sands tailings, and that usually involves modeling of contaminants downstream. So can the Minister tell us if any of this modeling work has been done and whether it includes the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Government of Alberta is focusing on impacts immediately downstream from the oil sands region to the Old Fort. Their assessment and modeling does not extend into the NWT. Based on the outcome from the risk assessment on initial model, they will consider extending their model to the Peace-Athabasca delta. The GNWT will request further modeling if the results are of a concern for us. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. If I was worried before, now I'm even more worried that this modeling doesn't even go into the Northwest Territories. So if it doesn't cover the Northwest

Territories, I'd like to know more from the Minister what he's going to do about this? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I've said to the Member and the House here, we are -- the Alberta government is working on theirs; we then are going to reassess it, and if we have concerns we will go from there. We are working with the Alberta government. We are reaching out to them, telling them our concerns. We're working with Indigenous governments to identify these. So we are working on this. This is a file that may not be out in the public. It may not be splashed all over the papers as people would like. We are doing the work behind the scenes with the Indigenous governments, keeping them informed. And once we are able to be able to achieve things and -- or we have concerns, we will make sure we get the committee informed, because right now we don't have information beyond that we are working with the Alberta government. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that. I'm not asking him to splash it all across the newspapers, but the only information I've got from this Minister, from this government, is what I get in the House about this issue. That is totally unacceptable.

What I want from this Minister is to start sharing what they're doing behind closed doors with this side of the House. So as the "polluter pays principle" says, you know, the Northwest Territories should not have to spend our resources to understand what the impacts may be from the tar sands. Can the Minister tell us what he is doing to recover our costs from the Alberta and/or federal government? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we're working as best we can with the Member. We're trying to get that information. He may not want it -- he may want it -- details down to the ground. We don't have that information right now to share. We're willing to share that information.

In regards to his question, ENR is working on our bilateral water management agreement and its bilateral management committee to get regular updates, reports, and information, etcetera, from the Alberta government. Alberta has assured the NWT that it has retained a team of highly qualified independent experts to fill the gap, the knowledge gap, and they will share their reports and findings. ENR is and will continue to do its due diligence to ensure NWT waters and our residents are protected.

Madam Speaker, we are working for the residents. Once we have something concrete to share with committee, we will do that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Final supplementary, Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. I want to thank the Minister for that.

You know, I keep asking questions of this Minister, now two days in a row, because I'm not getting any other information. So will this Minister now commit to finally start to share some of what's going on behind closed doors with this side of the House on this issue? Mahsi, Madam Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we're going to share, when we have concrete information, with committee. We're more than willing to do that. The Member has reached out to us. We've had private individual meetings with him. We have meetings with committee. If committee wants to have a technical or an in-camera briefing on this, please send it to us. We're more than willing to work with them on that. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Members, time is up for oral questions. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Honourable Premier.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 567-19(2):
ANNUAL STATUS REPORT – 2019-2023
MANDATE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, FEBRUARY 2021 –
JANUARY 2022

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: The Annual Status Report on the Progress of the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2019-2023. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Tabling of documents. Minister for ECE.

TABLED DOCUMENT 568-19(2):
YELLOWKNIFE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS 2021-2022
CAPITAL PLAN (AMENDED)

TABLED DOCUMENT 569-19(2):
YELLOWKNIFE EDUCATION DISTRICT NO. 1
2021-2022 CAPITAL PLAN (AMENDED)

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Madam Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Yellowknife Catholic Schools 2021-2022 Capital Plan Amended. And the Yellowknife Education District No. 1 2021-2022 Capital Plan Amended. Thank you.

MADAM SPEAKER: Tabling of documents. Notice of motion. Motions. Notice of motion for first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole on bills and other matters. Bill 23 - An Act to Amend the Public Utilities Act; Bill 29 - Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act; Bill 38 - Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act 2021; Tabled Document 561-19(2) 2022-2023 Main Estimates, with Member for Deh Cho in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole on Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): We now call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Mahsi, Mr. Chair. Committee would like to consider Tabled Document 561-19(2) Main Estimates 2022-2023 and Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Mahsi, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Member. Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item. Mahsi.

---SHORT RECESS.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): I now call the committee back to order.

---Laughter

That was my gavel. That was my gavel there.

---Laughter

It's just like being in the communities. You know, the most important person in the community? Is the bingo caller.

---Laughter

Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 561-19(2), Main Estimates 2022-2023. Does the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources have any opening remarks.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): You may proceed with your opening remarks. Mahsi.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am pleased to present the 2022-2023 Main Estimates for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Overall, the department estimates propose an increase of \$849,000 over the 2021-2022 Main Estimates. These estimates support the mandate objectives for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources while continuing to meet the GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of these proposed estimates include:

- Increases for collective agreement of 1.42 -- or 35 million and for the Bathurst and Bluenose-East Caribou of \$1.03 million offsetted by reductions of 850 for the Barren-land caribou calving survey for a total of 180,000;
- New initiative funding of \$260,000 for the hunters and trappers disasters compensation program; forced growth of \$251,000 for increases in air tanker contract and insurance costs;
- Sunsets of 968,000 in funding for complete initiatives related to the agriculture strategy, Inuvik to Tuk Highway environmental assessment biologies requirements and obligations, a climate change information management position, and activities under the Nature Fund agreements with Environment and Climate Change Canada; and
- A reduction in funding for travel of \$495,000.

Through sound fiscal management and strategic investment, we continue to support this Assembly's mandate commitment by:

- Implementing the 2019-2023 Climate Change Action Plan, including estimating the NWT Climate Change Council and ensuring climate change factors are integrated into government decision-making;
- Supporting initiatives that promote economic diversification and jobs in the communities through territorial protected areas implementation, supporting a sustainable forestry industry, and expanding waste diversion programs;
- Supporting the GNWT's work to improve food security through country food, land-based programming, and effective management of harvest species and their habitat; and
- Contributing to GNWT-wide efforts to implement UNDRIP; and support regional decision-making through the established co-management system for water, wildlife,

forestry, and through ENR's work on sustainable livelihoods.

This concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Minister. Does the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources wish to bring witnesses into the house?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, I do, sir.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chambers. Mahsi.

Will the Minister please introduce the witnesses.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Will the Minister please introduce the witnesses.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On my far right is deputy minister Erin Kelly. And closest to me is director of finance Jessica St. Arnaud. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does the committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary beginning with corporate management starting on page 72 with information items on page 75. And we'll entertain questions from the Members. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On corporate management, this is where the policy, legislation and communications function of the department's located. And there was quite a bit of work done in the last Assembly on the Forest Act. So I'm just wondering if the Minister can tell us if it's the intention of the department to bring forward a Forest Act bill in this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. Yes, we are.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's good to hear. And we now have a legislative development protocol with the intergovernmental council, and there's provision for other Indigenous governments who didn't sign on to the devo agreement to be part of that process. So there's a

lot of work that has to be done and perhaps some new funding that's provided to the Indigenous governments. There's some public engagement that needs to be carried out, some policy work. Can the Minister tell me if there's any additional resources found in this year's budget to assist with that work? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For that detail, I'll go to the deputy minister. And with your permission, I'll ask her to provide a little more bit more detail as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Proceed, deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are prepared to do all of the pieces that were just mentioned, the public engagement with the work with the 99GC IGOs and all of the elements to get this piece of legislation completed with funding that we found from within the department. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I'm a bit worried about that. I know other departments went to the Financial Management Board to secure additional resources, and I guess the other pieces of legislation, the Waters Act, the Environmental Protection Act, that's not going to happen in this Assembly. So can I get an explanation from the Minister as to why no additional resources were secured from the Financial Management Board for the Forest Act work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So when we were looking at the Forest Act, we looked at our resources that were available, the work that was done in the 18th Assembly, and the work that we need to do to get this legislated proposal forwarded and passed in this Assembly, and we feel that the resources we have presently we will be able to meet that need. But for further detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister to see if there's anything else that would be helpful. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't have much to add other than that we've looked for the resources internally and have been able to identify them, and we feel that we have the resources that we need to complete the work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks for that. I'll be watching it very closely, and I am concerned about the level of resourcing, but.

I want to move on the Community Harvester Assistance Program. This program has been under review for at least two years. It was even raised in the last Assembly about how effective this was in building some food security and enabling people, particularly in smaller communities, to get out and get country foods. So it's been under review for at least two years. What is the timeline for finishing this review and securing some additional resources for the program? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: The timeline, I'll turn to the deputy minister for giving the detailed timeline realizing the time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have completed the engagement on the review of CHAP, and we released a "what we heard" report where we've asked to check in with Indigenous governments and harvesters to ensure that we got it right. That response is due back on February 10th of 2022. Even now, we're starting to work on some of the changes to the program, and we will be coming back hopefully in the summer with the final version of all the changes that will be made to that program.

I will just add here very briefly that there are a number of other programs, and when we did the engagement, we heard that CHAP is not the only program that is needed. There's skill development and other elements, and we've been working on those and have new programs related to those as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah, can someone tell me when the last time the Community Harvester Assistance Program amount was actually increased? Because it looks like it's just a constant for as long as the Main Estimates appear, or the years that are listed here. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I'm sorry, for that detail I'd go to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. While there haven't been increases to the CHAP funding, there

have been increases to funding that have been used for some of the training programs that I mentioned, trapper training, some of the resourcing to ensure that others are available to access these programs, not just the CHAP program itself. So there has been some additional resources but not specifically for CHAP. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm going to let the Minister in on a little secret. I expect that there's going to be a supplementary appropriation probably come forward maybe May/June for this set of main estimates, and I want to encourage him to bring forward an increase in funding for the community harvester assistance program. So I'll just put that out on the record.

I want to move on to the disaster compensation fund. That's a grant; it's on page 74 of the main estimates. And I see that the actual amount for 2020-2021 was \$400,000. And I think this was as a result of flooding of Taltson and damage that was done to people's cabins and so on. So it's good to see that the amount has been increased to \$275,000 in this year's main estimates. But it's still not even what was paid out last year, or a couple of years ago. So why is this not increased to a greater extent than just the \$275,000, and what would happen if there's more claims than that submitted? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly, Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, so when we increased it, it's based on applications, when harvesters submit their applications, and that's how we come up with our numbers. Right now it's based on that. But for further detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister to explain if we have over-expenditure and what happens moving forward on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We requested some additional funding to review this program. It's quite similar from a flooding aspect to one that we also have for forest fires, and we wanted to do a program review this year, which is ongoing, and we did request additional funds because of the flooding along the Taltson where we knew that we would require additional funds. So to date, there have been \$185,000 in claims related to the Taltson flooding. So the intent here is to review the program and make any adjustments that are needed and also to ensure that it's similar in nature to the fire

one, the fire compensation program that we have as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks for that information. So this review -- one of the questions I had was whether the criteria are going to change because I understand there's only some things that can get claimed. There's a maximum amount and that not everybody was necessarily happy with the amount that they received compared to the actual damages. So when is this review going to be finished and when will the criteria be changed? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll go to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're working on the review right now. There are a number of criteria that were reviewed, and there were some criteria that for a specific purpose for the Taltson flooding were adjusted.

One of the things that we have here is this is for harvesters, and one of the criteria pieces, that 25 percent of your income needs to come from that. But we recognize in this day and age that many people are harvesting, but 25 percent of their income, it's quite a large amount. So we're looking at all of the criteria when we're doing the review, and we'll most likely adjust some of that criteria through the review process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. That's all I have for this activity. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Thank you. Are there any further questions for -- Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I guess just further along about the disaster compensation program, do we anticipate that there's going to be a lot of claims this year coming from the flooding that happened around in the Deh Cho last year? Are we prepared for that, or are we going to see more issues? Are we going to be back looking for more money later? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So in the Deh Cho, we had flooding. We addressed those already. We've already dealt with it. But, again, I can't tell you what's going to happen, predicted, like if it's going to be there. So we feel right now with our budget we are close to being able to do it and move forward on it. But if we have a bad flood season as we did last year, then we may have to come back again. But right now, we feel that with the money we have allocated in the budget, we should be able to meet the needs moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also want to reiterate support for some of the grants or the contribution funding here. I'd also like to see increases over time with some of the on-the-land work and the Take a Kid Trapping, et cetera, et cetera. So more of a comment that I just would like to also see some increases there. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you very much. We will be looking at those things as we move forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Any further questions, Ms. Nokleby? No. Any questions on this section? Ms. Martselos.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like clarity on Furs Act because when the Wildlife Act was passed, I was Chief at the time and the public engagement was not -- we were not listened to. And there was some sections in the act that still have -- we still have a problem with in my community, especially the First Nation, the two First Nations. And so I'm wondering when those public engagements are going to start and hopefully they're face-to-face and not virtual. I think it's extremely -- I don't want it to happen and then there is no engagement, you know, because not everybody wants to go virtual, especially First Nation people. I know that from experience. So that is one of my concerns. So I'd like an answer to that, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Martselos. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank the Member for that. I can guarantee you we're going to do public consultation. We also have the process with IGCs that we are working with that through that process. But for the detail on exactly how we're going to do it, I will, with your permission, turn to the deputy

minister to answer the rest of the question. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're currently working with a technical working group to create a legislative framework, and that would translate to drafting the bill, and then the bill would be reviewed by the technical working group as well. And once we have the bill, we will consult with Indigenous governments on the bill, and we will also engage with the public. Depending on what the situation is at the time, we will offer to meet with folks, whether it's virtually or in person, and we understand that in person is better but we'll see where we're at with the COVID situation at that time. And our hope is that we will be doing some of that work this summer, but it will depend on how far we get with the technical working group because it's important that we get the bill right. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Martselos.

MS. MARTSELOS: Further to the Wildlife Act, you know, Salt River has to follow the Wildlife Act but there's no enforcement on reserve. You know, they expect -- the Government of the Northwest Territories expects all members on reserve to follow the act and but we don't have no enforcement when we have poachers or anyone else on the lands. And I just wonder, Mr. Chair, if that is going to be addressed eventually. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Thank you, Ms. Martselos. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you very much. We've been reaching out to the federal government, talking with the federal government. We've worked with -- had conversations with Salt River First Nations, and we're moving forward on that. But for the detail of where we are right now, I will turn to the deputy minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So my understanding is that we're still engaged in the conversations about the trilateral MOU and that we're committed to finding the right tool to address enforcement concerns on Salt River First Nation land.

The main issue that we have is that the GNWT cannot directly regulate or enforce specific territorial legislation on federal land. But we would like to work with Salt River First Nation in finding a solution, and perhaps that would be a federal regulatory tool. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Martselos.

MS. MARTSELOS: My final question, Mr. Chair, is about the harvesters support program. It has remained the same for years. And there's not a big increase or anything in this, like some of my colleagues have mentioned. And it's the one program that affects everybody within the First Nations, whether it be Metis or First Nation Dene in my community. And, you know, it's important that we look at that and increases should be done throughout the Northwest Territories on the harvesters support program. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Martselos. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. As the deputy minister said previously, we are working on a "what we heard" report. The deadline for response is February 10th. But also as the deputy minister has said, we have other programs out there that we've heard from the users of the program, which is our Indigenous governments and our harvesters and our people in the communities, on what they would like to see. So we are working on it, and I think if I remember correctly, we're supposed to have something prepared by midsummer to bring forward. And for further detail, I'll just ask the deputy minister to clarify if I missed anything. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're already working on some of the items that have been brought before us to improve the CHAP program, and there are a number of others, once we get the responses back on February 10th, where we checked in on the "what we heard" document with harvesters and Indigenous governments to make sure we had it right that we'll continue to work on, and we'll come back in the summertime with a plan on what we've accomplished and what we still have to accomplish to update the program. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. I guess we are getting some more information forthcoming. Any further questions on this section? Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. I see that you said there's an increase in the contribution for the harvesters support program. Because I've been hearing from families, especially young families in the small communities who rely heavily on country foods. So what they're saying is that because of -- well, lately they've been seeing an increase in groceries and gas. It's making it difficult

for them to -- it's difficult for them as it is, especially for those with low income -- from low income family. What they're saying is that now that with the caribou restriction in place, it is hard for us to go out because of the gas. The gas price has increased in the small communities. So there is lot of talks about that, harvesting country food.

So what I would like -- I just want to ask about that because this program, harvester support program, is really -- it really helps a lot of people. It helps a lot of families due to the increase in groceries and gas and all that. So I want to ask how do you guys allocate? How does this fund allocated to the regions or to the small communities?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon Armstrong. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that type of detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There's a formula which is one of the things that's being reviewed. But we provide funding to the Indigenous government, or the RRB, and they provide funding to the community members. That's one of the things that was brought forward as a concern is that sometimes people are unable to access the CHAP funding.

With respect to the other elements of the comment there, we have Take a Family on the Land program that's new, because we heard that that was something that was really important to people where we've allotted -- there was \$209,000 allotted in 2020 to that and \$166,000 to 17 groups this January. So that's a new program that is along the lines of CHAP in supporting some of the aspects of CHAP where there's funding, as well as a regional COVID harvesting subsidy and regional community training and knowledge exchange programs. So there is additional work in addition to CHAP. The funding formula is one that we're looking at right now, but it's up to the recipients of the funding at the Indigenous government level to distribute the funds within their area. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. So you said there's a formula in place. So the money that's there, it's one point something million -- 1.3 million here. So is it allocated based on needs or per capita?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's not -- it's allocated based on a funding formula, which I believe takes into account the number of potential recipients, and then the need is dealt with by the Indigenous government to provide it to those in need within their area. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Yes, because right now at -- you know, usually at this time, people from my region they harvest caribou, and in the past they used to go to our regions in the regions, Tlicho regions, but now they have to go long distance. And it's just a lot of them are saying that it's hard. It's difficult if you don't have the means, if you don't have a vehicle, if you don't have any of those -- the stuff that -- it's really hard for them to access country food, especially caribou because -- which is a main diet for the people in the regions. And so that's why I was asking about that for it, because harvesters support program really helps family, especially if you have to travel from the outlying communities all the way to Mackay Lake in the -- you know, like, it's a -- and now with the increase in gas, a lot of people are complaining that it's -- you know, it's -- it's hard. It's difficult for them. And now with the mobile zone that it's -- the mobile zone is huge. It's difficult for people to go hunting. And some people, they go there, they come back, you know, they have -- they cannot -- like, they come back empty, like, with no caribou, nothing because it's too far. And then the RWED are making it more difficult for my people, especially for my people, that -- to go to harvest caribou. It's -- they go long ways.

Like, for example, for a family from Gameti, there's an ice road, winter road now. Winter road is open so people are going out. And for them to travel from their community to barren-land and it's hard; it's difficult. So I just wanted to know if any time soon they're going to change or the mobile zone not to be huge right now because it's -- they're unable to go hunting. They can go hunting but it's, like, they have to go further. So that's why I'm saying that. So I just want to know if there's any plan in place to change the mobile zone to accommodate the people that want to go harvest caribou. It's not just for my region, but every year there's people from other regions that go hunting as well, like from across the lake. And we see them go there, and then even from Deh Cho, people go there too. So -- and last year, a few times there was some people from Sahtu region as well. So that's why is

there any plan in place that -- you know, like, just so that people can harvest caribou. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Okay, mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong. If we can be mindful of the time and the other speakers, keep our preamble short and to the point if you can. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. There is no looking at shrinking the mobile zone. The mobile zone is done with where the caribou are, where our collared caribou is. And it's also working with our Indigenous governments and the renewable resource board of -- Wek'eezhii Renewable Resource Board. So we work with Indigenous governments. We work with the councils, the leadership, and we explain it; we work with it. And it was developed in collaboration with our Indigenous government. It was with the Tlicho. They talked about it. If you look at the Bathurst right now, we're at about 6,200 caribou left. The Beverly is available. And in our conversations with our Indigenous governments, we've talked about working with them on setting up community hunts. We talked about doing that. We've also talked about working with the communities to identify where the Beverly is located so that we can work with them on this. But for further detail, I would like to ask the deputy minister to add anything I may have missed. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So to highlight from the Minister's comment, the mobile zone is work that we do with Tlicho government and with the Wek'eezhii Renewable Resources Board, So that's joint work, and it's to protect remaining Bathurst caribou. ENR is supportive of harvest of the Beverly herd which is a healthy herd, and we have provided additional funding this year because we recognize how challenging it is for Indigenous governments that access those caribou, and they have been unable to -- well, it's much more difficult. They haven't been unable to, but it's been much more difficult.

The reason that the mobile zone is so large is because the caribou are distributed across a large area, and it's challenging when there's mixing of the herds, which we've had this year and last year. So we recognize that there are those concerns, and we're working with the Tlicho government and other governments on ways that we can promote respectful harvest and help them to access caribou that are in numbers that are, you know, safe to harvest. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Yeah, well, that's good if they're -- I think -- this is -- I'm hearing it from people, you know. I'm not hearing it from the leaders. So it's good that maybe they -- but it's just that I'm hearing from other people as well. So that's why I am addressing their concerns because they rely heavily. And some of them said, I mean if it wasn't for the traditional food, you know, like, it would be more difficult for them with the increase in groceries and gas. It prohibits them, a lot of them, from doing further from doing more for themselves, you know, to be self-reliant. So that's why I am addressing the caribou, that mobile zone and that, you know, it would be nice to see this harvester support program working with the Indigenous government, and, you know -- working with Indigenous government based, you know, like allocate the funds based on what they say and, you know, like based on needs or per capita would be great. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong. I think I gave you an extra one but, Minister, if you care to respond, mahsi.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Okay, I agree we need to work on this. That's why we went out and did -- asked the Indigenous governments and the users of the program what they needed, what they think we need to do, and how do we improve. We have been working -- as the deputy minister has said, we've heard some things and we've started working on those things as the funding -- we are waiting for the information on February 10th. This is from Indigenous users, our hunters, our Indigenous governments. It's not the Government of the Northwest Territories coming up with this solution. It is the people of the Northwest Territories and our hunters that are helping us develop this. And again, like we said, we will be bringing it forward, hopefully this summer, the information from what we learned and how we're moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Minister. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm perplexed because we have artisans who are looking for hides with which to, you know, to, you know, make items for sale to tourists and that. And we talk about the harvesters support programs. So one of the issues, one of the problems is that they don't have access to moose hide and caribou hide, and that's because I don't think there's an incentive to bring that out of the bush, and it's left there. So I guess I'd ask the Minister is there any incentive to harvesters to bring their moose hide and caribou hide out and so it can be accessed by artisans? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I don't know what hunters the Member is talking about, but I know the hunters that I've talked to, I've heard from, they bring the hide in. They're bringing them in to their communities. They do -- a lot of time the families use it. And so it's very much the hides are brought in, whether it's the caribou or the moose, they bring it in. And I know in my riding, we have elders that work on this and they sell it, or they actually -- I had one lady -- two ladies that I know, do the hides and then they make -- use that to make their slippers and their gloves and that. So in regards to for incentive to sell it to others, I will ask the deputy minister if we do have certain things in this program area. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the NWT Art Strategy includes an action item to increase access and availability of Northwest Territories fur and hide for NWT artists, and it's an ITI-ENR co-shared action item. So we are working through programs such as CHAP and those mentorship programs that I mentioned, that are new, to indirectly assist by teaching people to harvest and prepare the hides, and our on-the-land funders collaborative has provided funding to hide camps to make sure that those skills are being passed on to others. We will also work with communities to consider options for support if they approach us about a specific larger scale initiative. So if someone wants to do this in the communities and they come to our on-the-land group, we can look at that as well.

With respect to ITI, they have a program that buys and provides funding for hides - moose, beaver, seal, fox, muskrat, et cetera. So there's two different departments that are doing work on this matter. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess, you know, I have a lot of people come to my office, a lot of artisans selling goods, and a lot of those goods are made with commercially tanned hides. And I ask them all the time, why don't you use traditional tanned hides? Because we can't access the hides. No, we're not -- some of the hunters, harvesters, aren't bringing them out of the bush. And maybe they do it in Fort Simpson but I get people from Providence, Simpson, all over, come to me to sell stuff, and it's an issue.

So what I'd like to see, I guess, is that as part of this is that we provide -- that we can provide an

incentive for harvesters to bring the hides out, if they're not, and make them available to artisans to tan. And whether we just -- my preference would be just give it to them. Like, you pay somebody \$250, \$500, I don't know what it would be, to bring it out of the bush and then turn it over to the artisan, and they can tan it. And that's kind of what I'd like to see, because there is a gap there. I know there's a gap there. You know, when you get tourists in, they -- when they pick something up, first thing they do is smell it. They want something that's traditionally tanned, so. And if access to the hide is an issue, then we should address it. And if we have to provide some incentive -- we provide incentive for everything else so, you know, there's no reason why we can't do that. So is that something your department can look at since you actually deal with the harvesters? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yeah, we can potentially look at this, but for clarity I think the deputy minister would be able to say if we can do this this fiscal year coming up and moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think that we'd be interested in having some conversations with folks that are interested in this through our on-the-land program. To my understanding, there's the getting it and bringing it out of the bush but the work begins when you're trying to actually tan the hide, and there are fewer and fewer people that are willing to do that work because it's very work intensive and very difficult, and that's why we've been supporting things like hide camps through the on-the-land funders collaborative, is to make sure that those skills are still available. So we are supporting the skill development, and we're happy to have a conversation through the on-the-land unit, in particular with folks that, you know, that are interested in that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'm pleased to hear that, that you're willing to work with it because what I will do is I will send the artisans over there because what I proposed to them was that if they get the hides, that ITI then pay them to actually tan the hide, because I know how much work goes in to tan a hide. Like, it's not just a week's worth of work. It's longer than that. It's two weeks. Could be three weeks. And it's fairly intensive. And it was to provide the artisan a little

extra money if they're tanning their own hides. So that's just a comment.

I'd just like to move on to personnel and active positions. With the vaccine policy, I'd like to ask how many staff in the -- I guess in corporate management I suppose at this point, were impacted by the policy? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For detail, I'm going to turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm aware of five people who chose not to get vaccinated in the department. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So can you tell me for them to keep their positions, was it mandatory for them to have the vaccine?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So that's very much a Finance-HR issue. I know where the Member's going with this, but. So if their schedule requirements, i.e., getting on planes, that they need to make sure they're vaccinated and that's a federal government. If they need to be in a company that requires it, they need to do it. And if they don't and if they're not -- don't have the vaccine, then we have set in the policy through the territorial government with the Department of Finance that they follow that process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I guess it's safe to say that, you know, if somebody's required to fly and a requirement -- the federal requirement is you have to be vaccinated, then it is mandatory to have the vaccination for that position if you want to keep it?

I just want to go on here, is how many Indigenous employees would have been impacted?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. I don't know if we have that detail but we'll turn to the deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. At this point, and I should highlight here that I'm talking about staff that are on strength right now, as well as with the five, I think there's one Indigenous person. But I would have to go back and check the records to be certain. I believe it's one. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would ask the Minister, will there be an opportunity for those that were impacted to be either reinstated in their positions, or at least have the opportunity to reapply and be rehired when that policy falls off the table? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. For that detail, you're going to have to ask the Finance Minister what the policy is, what the HR policy is. I'm not going to get into that. It was a decision made by us on how we're going to move forward on this and so we are following the chief public health officer's directions, and we are working with the federal government on how we deal with it. And for that detail of how that's being implemented, maybe save that question for the Finance Minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Minister. Are there any other questions for this section? Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you. This section I just want to make sure, are we -- I know we got the time limit in going through this. Is it -- or do we go through page by page and then we go through ten minutes of it? Or just can I get some clarification on that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. Yes, what we do here is we go section by section, and I'll read off the section that we're on and the page numbers that we're dealing with. So we're working through the department, but as we move along, right. So now we're on corporate management. And you'll see at the top of the page, it says "corporate management", "corporate management", and the next one would be "environmental protection", which is a different section. So we're just sticking on corporate management right now. So you can just gear all your questions within that section. So you got eight minutes left to go.

---Laughter

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. Well, just reviewing these couple of pages here, including the graphs and that in there, and then also on page 69, it talks about activities. And I guess for me what stands out as we go through this section here is that we talk about wildlife, fish -- I know it's a little further down -- but when I went through it, one thing I don't see is that maybe if the Minister could maybe help me out so I understand with your department in terms of downstream users for fish and from the water coming down from Alberta, they say water is life and if it's life then, you know, we all eat the fish. So I just want to know if there's any fish studies done by your department so that we -- is there a report out there? I just want to let that out to you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Yes, maybe if I can just clarify, Mr. Edjericon. We got wildlife and fish on page 94. So we can save that question for when we get to that section because we're just dealing with corporate management at this time. We're on page -- we're starting from 72, 73, 74, 75. Mahsi.

MR. EDJERICON: So 72 there, the other thing is that I know last year we'd -- there was in the news where there was wasted meat that was found. You know, in the Dene culture, you know, we don't like to waste meat. We harvest what we need and that kind of thing. So I guess maybe you could help explain what assurances can you give me to see how we could prevent this from happening again for -- when hunters go out there, sometimes they waste meat, et cetera. Like, what are we doing to put a stop to that? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So we do have enforcement. We have individuals that reach out to our departments, our regional offices, and we inspect it and that. But for that detail of how the process is, I'll ask the deputy minister, with your permission, to provide more information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So we have officers along the winter road that we're working with, but we're also working with harvesters. So before Christmas, we had a meeting with harvesters from the different Indigenous governments to come up with ways that we could work to improve, like, the respectfulness of harvest and to reduce waste. And then we had a leaders meeting where Minister Thompson met with his colleagues that went through what was brought forward by the harvesters at the December meeting

in January. So there's some communications materials that are being developed, and there's work that has been identified for ENR to do but also within communities for their to be discussions related to wastage and respectful harvesting because it's something that needs to be addressed by everyone. So there's quite a bit of work that's going on related to respectful harvesting and reducing wastage. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yeah, and I think -- thank you for your answer. And you also mentioned that you're also working with the local harvesters as well I'm assuming, and if you are, then you're also working closely with the Indigenous governments as well and to put an end to some of these activities.

I guess, Mr. Chairman, I don't -- I mean, I'm thinking here is that we got -- this section is a really interesting section but I just want to say that, you know, as a former Chief, I -- you know, when I used to go to assemblies and the Minister comes in and they do their speech and we try to ask questions and then the next thing you know, the time's up and they leave but then we don't get results. So I just want to say that, you know, it's actually an honour and privilege to sit here and question the Minister and get staff, and we can hear it firsthand. You know, so I have more questions in this document that I have for the Minister. I'll just leave it at that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): All right. Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. If there are no further questions, I'll allow the Minister to make a comment. Mahsi.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, thank you very much. I have only been the Minister for the last two years, but I can tell you right now we've had the opportunity to meet with Indigenous governments, Indigenous leadership, and we had conversation, frank conversations, good communications, a lot of questions and answers, and we're trying to work together collaboratively. It's the most important part of what and how I feel with the department of ENR. We try to work with our Indigenous governments and our partners. And just for a little bit further detail, I'll ask the deputy minister to just give a little bit more update. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Minister. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I forgot to mention our hunter education program that's in nine schools, which I think is something that would also be of interest. So we've worked with ECE and

converted our hunter education program that was developed with Indigenous governments, and it has been converted into a school-based program, and there's a pilot going on in nine of the schools. So I just wanted to highlight that as well. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi for that bit of news. That's good, good stuff. No further questions, please turn to page 73, operations expenditures summary, environment and natural resources, corporate management, operations expenditures summary, 2022-2023 Main Estimates, \$14,984,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Thank you. Environmental protection and waste management, beginning on page 76, with information items on page 78. And this one, for the new Members' information, yes, it ends on 78. Okay, I'll entertain questions on this section. Okay, Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. You'll want to reset the clock but I don't think I need the full ten minutes you might be relieved to know.

On this one, contaminated sites is listed as one of the program areas, and I note that in one of the very few successful environmental rights act requests for an investigation, there might have been two only successful in about 20 years. The last one, though, was about the Ptarmigan Mine, which is down the road here in Yellowknife. Quite frankly, it's a disgrace. People, tourists have to drive by that thing all the time, and it's just a total mess. But the Minister did conduct an investigation and said that work needed to be done at the site. I understand it's one of these sites under devolution. So can the Minister tell me what has been done at the site? Is there money in this budget to actually do further work at the site? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I'll just go to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Ptarmigan is one of the accepted waste sites in the devolution agreement. So there are still negotiations ongoing. There's been much progress that has been made lately with the federal government. We have, based on the outcomes of that investigation, committed to dust suppressant which we're working on right now to get in place. There was fencing -- some signage and fencing repair, and there's additional fencing repair that will be occurring in the spring, and we're

working on a land use permit at this time. I should mention the accepted waste sites negotiations are for more sites than just Ptarmigan, and they're all being considered in those discussions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So is there money in this budget to do work at Ptarmigan, and can we get reimbursed? And what is that amount? And can we get reimbursed for that money by the feds? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's part of the negotiations that we're having with the federal government at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair. To do the work I described. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, okay, thanks for that. Okay, for the tailings cover, the dust suppressant, stuff starts to dry out in May. Do we actually have the suppressant in stock, so to speak, and is it ready to be sprayed on or whatever in May? Because that's when the stuff starts to blow around, so. That's something we've seen from Giant Mine for years and the same out there so do we have the stuff ready to go? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: That's one of the few times I think I've actually got a 'yes' in this house, so very pleased to hear that, and I know a lot of other Yellowknife residents and others will be quite happy with that.

So in the description of the activities carried out under what the purpose of this section of ENR is, there's words around prevention. Is there any policy work that this section of ENR is going to do this year? The only thing in six years that I've seen here was about a 10- or 12-page document about some kind of vague GNWT policy around contaminated sites. Is there any other policy work, legislative changes, anything at all, that is going to help

prevent messes like Ptarmigan Mine from happening again and again and again? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there is an approach to contaminated sites document that we have, and we have an ADM working group because this is a multi-departmental initiative, which we've shared with committee. There's a GNWT contaminated sites management work plan that has a number of policy-based items that folks are working on at multiple departments, and we're on track with that work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I think I may have seen a document, but can the Minister commit to share it with standing committee and report regularly on progress on that initiative? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yes, we'll make a commitment to get the report to committee. And as for progress, we will have to discuss with committee what he means by "progress" and what timelines that the committee's looking for. Is it monthly? Is it quarterly? Is it annually? As we move forward. So before I make a commitment on that, I'd like to get some clarity from committee on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'm a very patient man. I've been waiting six years. So any kind of progress reporting would be really helpful. But I'll leave it at that. That's all my questions on this activity. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I just wanted to ask a bit of a question for more detail on the dust suppressant that the deputy minister mentioned. I'm just curious to know is this for the tailings that's adjacent to the roadway and which type of dust suppressant are they looking at? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'm going to the deputy minister. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is the tailings that are near the roadway, and I'm sorry, but even I do not have that level of technical detail in this binder right now. We can certainly get back to folks, if the Minister's okay with that, with the type of dust suppressant. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I'm a bit of a nerd from my time at Giant Mine which is why I'm curious to know what's being explored for Ptarmigan and do urge the department and the Minister to chat with the Giant Mine folks about their issues in spreading dust suppressant throughout the windy conditions of the Northwest Territories. And I see a nod. So I'll just take that as a comment.

I guess my question is around -- again, with Ptarmigan, and I appreciate my colleague raising it. With the land use permit work being done underway, is it -- and while we're still negotiating within the accepted waste sites under devolution, can we still continue to progress on with the remediation work there? And I guess it is a little bit the similar question to what Member O'Reilly was asking, but will the process delay remediation work as we go through the devo process, or can we continue to advance during that time? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. We'll get the dust suppressant information to her. In regards to that detail, I want to say yes, but I'm going to turn to the deputy minister to get clarity on what the process is moving forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's what's being negotiated right now. Clearly, we're doing the work on the land use permits, and we're hopeful that we can come to an agreement, and it's looking positive for us to continue with the work. But that is the crux of the negotiations that are occurring at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Without incriminating myself, I may have had a time or an opportunity; I've looked around the Ptarmigan Mine despite some "no trespassing" signs there. So I'm just curious to know if we're verging on to somewhat of an emergent situation at Ptarmigan? I know that there are issues with a head frame and probably likely stability and such of some of the buildings. I'm not sure if there's an open raise or shaft there. I see my colleague nodding his head yes. So what point would we get to where it becomes a hazard to the point where we have to do something ahead of that agreement being reached, and is there a process for us to do so? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So even though the negotiations are ongoing to determine who's ultimately responsible for those sites, the GNWT put up fencing quite some time ago. There's boulders, there's signs, getting people to not go on the site, which is an attempt to address some of the concerns that have been put forward. So until we know who is ultimately responsible, we're trying to keep people off of the site so that those things are not addressed.

Clearly, we need to determine who's responsible so that we can move forward, and that's what we're working hard on at this point. And I can honestly say that there have been conversations recently at the deputy level trying to move this, and I'm hopeful that we'll be able to make progress. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I would like to say that I was on the site long before all the signs went up and the fencing. It just looked really neat. So we wandered off the highway.

And I guess my final question on that, then, is, you know, are we on the hook, then, as the GNWT for that in the meantime? Is there -- and I know again I'm probably just reiterating Mr. O'Reilly, but I maybe was not always listening to the answer. So, you know, are we able to recoup that at some point? Thank you. I'll just ask again.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is the crux of the negotiations that we're having right now, is who is responsible for paying for the remediation of those sites. Not just Ptarmigan, the suite of accepted sites. And that's all I can really comment on at that time because the work is ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: I just want to say I appreciate the Minister and deputy minister's patience, as you can understand that from this side we definitely want you to be asking for that money to be paid for by the federal government regardless, you know, if we do end up doing the remediation work ourselves. Some of it seems like it's their stalling that has let the mine to get to that state for so long. So I feel like we should hold them accountable. And again, just a comment. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. No other questions from committee? Oh, we have got a couple. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just -- I think I'm in the right spot here hopefully. Environmental stewardship -- stewardship and climate change? Oh, sorry, I think it was the next one.

---Laughter

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Environmental protection and waste management. It goes up to page 78. You good? Okay, I'll move on to Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I just had a question for the Minister.

Since devolution, it's my understanding that the contaminant sites, does the GNWT take responsibility of the contaminated sites, or is it -- my understanding it's still the responsibility of the Government of Canada?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): All right. Mahsi. Maybe just to remind committee if we can indicate that you're done with your question by saying. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So those six sites are part of the negotiations. We didn't take them over from devolution. But for further detail, maybe I'm wrong, so maybe I'll look at the deputy minister. She just touched her brow so I think I

might have said the wrong thing. So to get the clarity, I'll have to go to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there are still federal sites that are on federal land. There's some that we're negotiating. There's some that the federal government is remediating, and then they're asking us to take back, and we need to do the work to figure out if we want to accept those are not. And there's some that are GNWT sites that were contaminated sites before devolution, and they remain ours. So there's multiple ways, but there's still federal contaminated sites that are the responsibility of the federal government. There's some that we're negotiating here that are called accepted waste sites. There's some that we agreed that they would remediate and give back to us, and then there's some that were ours to begin with. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you for your answer. Also, can you tell me exactly how many contaminated sites are there, we're looking at here? I'm assuming you guys did the study, that for the Northwest Territories. The question is to the Minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I will turn to the assistant -- or the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There were 1,319 sites that were transferred to the GNWT through devolution. An additional 99 sites will be transferred to the GNWT once the Government of Canada has completed the remediation work to the GNWT's satisfaction. A further 20 sites are being negotiated with the Government of Canada regarding responsibility. And I've already mentioned the different categories of the sites. So thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you for that. Now that you told me those numbers on that, has your department -- or to the Minister, has your department gone out to figure out the actual cost to remediate these mine sites in broad numbers so

we -- I don't see any numbers here but I'm asking that question to you. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon, since you're kind of new, I'll direct all your questions to the chair and then when you're done your question, maybe you can just indicate that you are done by saying "thank you" or recognizing the chair. Mahsi. We'll move along. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So before I put my foot in my mouth, as the Member was asking the question I thought we were just talking about the six sites and not the whole gamut. But for that detail, I'm going to turn to the deputy minister. She has the numbers, I believe. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So to be clear, these are not all mine sites. Some of these are just small sites on the landscape. And the GNWT uses a risk management approach, and we work with Finance and other departments on that. And there is a liabilities fund that can fund some of the remediation. But the decisions on what will be remediated are dependent on the level of risk. So we prioritize high priority sites to action with the funding that we do have. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for that clarification earlier because I was the chairman for the Impact Review Board, and I've been through that as well, so thank you.

Another question to Mr. Chairman is that now that -- I guess I want to know how's the department working with the remediation portion? Once they identify this and figure out the costs and that, how's that work going to be let out? Is it going to be done through contracts or can that be done through working with Indigenous governments and that kind of thing? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So depending on the projects, we were working with a variety of options. Again, it's very -- it depends on what project we're talking about and how we're doing with it. We do have -- or conversations with various organizations and governments moving forward on it. So again, until we have a specific site that you're talking about, we look at the whole gamut moving forward. There's a number of options available to us. But I really need to stress if we can work with Indigenous

governments as best we can, we do that there, so. But for further detail, I'll ask the deputy minister to add to this. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So we use GNWT procurement policies for the GNWT remediation work that is ongoing. So there's the BIP policy. I think we're doing a lot of work these days on the remediation economy with our fellow departments of Finance, ITI, and ECE, looking at opportunities for remediation economy for northern and northern Indigenous businesses. And there's been a bunch of work that's been done through Giant Mine that we're learning from as well related to Indigenous involvement in Indigenous businesses and also northern businesses in that remediation project which is very large. So there's a number of different things that are going on to work with Indigenous governments related to the remediation economy. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess during your investigation and trying to determine the type or magnitude of reclamation you guys are looking at, I guess I'm wondering once you guys determine, say at Ptarmigan Mine, if -- that used to be a gold mine, and I'm assuming that there's probably tailings et cetera and similar to the Giant Mine. I just want at what point do we say that this one here needs to go to an environmental assessment, because to me, when you start reclamation it is a big project, and I just want to put that out there. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Edjericon. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn it to deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: We would apply for -- thank you, Mr. Chair. We would apply for -- maybe I'll just take it back a step further.

So we would do work and we do a human health and environment risk assessment and a remedial action plan that would outline what we would do for the site to get it to the conditions that are agreed upon. And then we would get a land use permit. And during that land use permit, it would be screened. And if it was necessary, then an EA would be called. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Edjericon.

MR. EDJERICON: That concludes my questions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Any further questions from committee on this section? Whoops, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: I see here in the budget it says the actuals from 395, the main estimates was different and that it went down. So it really -- so for the main estimates for this upcoming fiscal year's lower. What happened, and why is that?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon-Armstrong. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll just turn to the deputy minister. Yeah, because there's a number of avenues and other lines there that -- yeah, I'll just turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It went up \$8,000 from the 2021-2022 revised main estimates to 2022-2023 Main Estimates, and that's due to collective bargaining. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Weyallon Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: With respect to this contaminated site, so how many communities are you guys working with at the moment?

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Weyallon Armstrong. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We're working with the communities that are located close to the contaminated sites that we're working on. I don't have the exact number in front of me at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Ms. Weyallon Armstrong.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: That's good. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): All right, committee, let's see where we're at in here. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Now that I know what section we're on. Contaminated sites, I'd just like to ask about strategic oil and gas and what's happening with that and where in the department is it -- if we're looking at remediation, if the Minister could respond to that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. That's very much a Lands question but I can give you that since I'm wearing my Lands hat there right now. It's still in receivership. It's still in the court system right now. So we're not doing anything with it right now. Do we have a plan in place at any point in time? We are working on our plan presently. So yeah, that's about all I can say right now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: That's all, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. There are no further questions on this section.

Please turn to page 77. Environment and Natural Resources, environmental protection and waste management, operations expenditures summary, 2022-2023 Main Estimates, \$4,333,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Thank you. Environmental stewardship and climate change, beginning on page 79, with information item on page 82. Questions? Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 81, just looking at adaption plan and climate change community adaption, and we're looking at roughly \$378,000 combined there. And I'm just wondering here, because I guess when I look at what we're talking about or what we're trying to achieve with this, you know, we look at -- you know, it takes into account sharing of information and investing in infrastructure, looking at that, setting building codes to ensure that, you know, buildings are not going to get damaged, addressing possible health effects, supporting regions that are vulnerable to climate change, maintaining our ecosystems, you know, in regions, and also the environment. And, you know, we went through years of forest fires. Now we're going through years of flooding, you know. And, you know, what's next? Will it be tornados? High winds? We don't know.

So, you know, we're only looking at, like, at that \$378,000. I'm just wondering if that's enough money, or should -- is the government looking at maybe putting some more money into it considering what's happened over the last few years with flooding and fires. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Simpson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you very much. Right now we feel this is the money that we need to move forward with -- my deputy minister put her hand up. So I should look at her, and I'd get her to clarify that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So it's important to note that for things like climate change adaptation, this is just for the coordination and planning element. But there's climate change adaptation work that's being done in all of these sections, right, for wildlife, for water, for all of these different things, and also at different departments. So MACA and Infrastructure are also doing adaptation work. The reason this looks a little funny here is because some of the projects that were planned for 2020-2021 were unable to be completed because of COVID, the project itself. Sometimes it's because the communities were not -- we were not able to do the work with the communities at that time. We're always looking for funding from the federal government, and they do provide it but not always in this line item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: No further questions. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Any further questions from committee? Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister of the department comment on how the climate workers, I guess for lack of a better word -- sorry, brain dead -- how their work interacts with the other departments and how they are working to help, like, inform; they've got the expertise in your department, and I know that needs to be interconnected to others, such as at Infrastructure where maybe they only have one of those types of employees. So yes, how can they -- can the Minister speak a little bit to that interaction and how they help and if they need more resources in order to help inform other departments? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. There's a climate worker's question. Mr. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Well, I'm going to go to the deputy minister on that one. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So there are interdepartmental coordinating committees at all levels. So there's a director of climate change, ADM, deputy and ministerial committee of Cabinet. We work very closely with other departments, many other departments. We just, a year ago, got additional positions to help other departments build their capacity, as well as our own, to do some of the climate change work. And then an added element where we work together is that decision items that are going through need to factor in climate change, and our folks at ENR support other departments to do that assessment that's included in that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And Mr. Chair, does the department anticipate that that maybe needs to change or evolve, or do they see that as working going forward? I guess sometimes I get a little bit concerned that there's a lot of -- whereas that we do want to breakdown the silos but there's a lot of times where, like, I hear, like, that ADMs or the deputy ministers are having all these committees and then it makes me wonder if they're just having a lot of committee meetings and, you know, like maybe they're being overwhelmed in that and maybe the right people aren't. So I guess I'm just curious to know if there's -- if there's a way that we could move this forward efficiently so we're not looking back later on trying to change it like we are so many other departments of the GNWT. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think our department has quite a lot of experience working on files that are cross-departmental, and so we're not just sitting -- like, it's not just at the ADM level; it's at the working level all the way through. So there is that ability for consistency and things to go up and come down within those groups, which is really great. I mean, I don't think you can find a file that is

more -- where there's more of a requirement for departments to work together than climate change. If affects all of the departments, and there needs to be that working together. And I think that we're doing that effectively at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Ms. Nokleby.

MS. NOKLEBY: I'm good. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Let me get this here. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So I just want to start by saying that although I ask a lot of tough questions of this department, I do appreciate the work that the staff do, and I know that they're always doing their best.

But I do have some questions around climate change and the conservation area planning and management over a longer period of time. The Nature Fund protected areas grants and contributions is going down, down on page 81. It's about, I don't know, almost \$300,000 less this year than last year. When I look at conservation planning and implementation program detail on page 80, it's about \$1.5 million less than what was spent last year. I guess -- so where are we going to find the money to maintain the long-term investment that's needed to fund these protected areas? And I support them, and they will create sustainable long-term jobs that have lots of other benefits, but where's the money going to come from? Because we're not spending it, and this is not a good trend in this budget. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. I'll start, and then turn to the deputy minister.

ENR has been exploring potential opportunities to find territorial -- or to fund territorial protected areas over the long term and at the same time support economic diversification in the NWT. One option is the project finance for permits or PFP. PFPs are a relatively new financial tools that bring together diverse partners, including governments, donors, into a single group with a common purpose. Currently, ENR is representing the GNWT in discussions on the feasibility of PFP for the NWT. But for further detail, I will turn to the deputy minister because we have started the conversations and that, but I'll turn to the deputy minister for further information. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. And if somebody could clarify what was "PFP" also at the same time. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the Nature Fund fluctuates based on the activities that were planned so that what you see in here is the amount of money that we said we would need for the years that we had it. And the reason that the costs -- or the funding decreased over time is we were shifting from negotiations, which are expensive because you need to meet and have those meetings, to some of the management and operations pieces, right. So that is part of this change.

With respect to long-term funding, we're alive to that issue and have been working and talking to funders and also to the federal government for many years, but the project financing for permanence option, PFP, is a recent thing that's come up that we're looking at with other departments in the GNWT to see if it could be something that could work for all of us. And we're working with Indigenous governments and others, the funders themselves on that to see if it could work. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, no, thanks for that. I guess -- I know I said this before, I understand a lot of work that has to go into the negotiation of setting these protected areas up, but that's when the real work actually begins. You have to create management plans. You know, you have to -- there should be money for guardianship programs, investing in tourism and infrastructure in the protected areas themselves. I actually disagree with what the deputy minister said in that I think you need even more money when it comes to actually implementing these and doing it in a consistent and supportive way. So that's what I'm most worried about, is where's the money going to come from to do that? And it does require a sustained investment from our government. So I'm just going to leave it at that on this topic, Mr. Chair, but I want to turn now to climate -- the climate crisis.

And I'm looking at a document -- this is from a different department, but it was part of this consolidated climate change reporting from GNWT. You know, this government -- and ENR has the lead, apparently, on the climate change, climate crisis. And so this is a document from the Department of Infrastructure that actually calculates what the greenhouse gas emission reductions have been and predicts what they're going to be by 2025. So that's seven years into the agreement that we signed onto, the Pan-Canadian Framework, to reduce our emissions by a certain amount. We will -- by 2025, we will have only reached 20 percent of the target and that leaves, you know, another five years to do the 80 percent. Like I said at the time, this was a -- not a good strategy. We back end loaded it. And my predictions are coming

completely true. We're going to fail to meet that target unless we change course now.

So I want to ask the Minister, as the lead on the climate crisis, what are we going to do to change to trajectory of this government, this Northwest Territories, to actually meet the Pan-Canadian Framework target? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So as the Member has said, this is very much infrastructure, and that's part of it. As the lead, we work with the departments. But for detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister to explain how we are working collaboratively together on this very topic. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the GNWT working together is aware of, in particular, the timelines associated with Taltson and whether it'll be on -- be able to be in effect before the target -- that target timeframe. And because of that, we're working with other departments, including Infrastructure, for mitigation pathways for the next Energy Action Plan. They're the lead on the Energy Action Plan, but ENR is part of those discussions as well as some of the other departments. So there is work being done to look at other ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. So can we get any details on what the plan B is? Is that something that the Minister can share with Standing Committee and maybe even the public? Because plan A from the last Assembly's not going to do it. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yeah, that there, I would ask the Member to ask questions on that with the Infrastructure Minister, what plan B is, because I don't have what plan B is in front of me. But maybe the deputy minister may have further clarity on how we move forward on this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't want to speak for another department but my understanding is that Infrastructure will do

engagement on their next plan. That would be part of the work and that there needs to be -- they're working on their next energy strategy action plan, and they would engage on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Just more of a comment I think at this point. This is systematic of what I've said about this government's approach to climate change, the climate crisis, all along. It's divided up amongst three ministries. No one seems to want to take responsibility for an overall coordinated approach. ENR is supposed to have the lead but doesn't really. And I don't detect any changes from what happened in the last Assembly, the last Cabinet's approach; it's failing. The stats show that. And we're not going to reach the Pan-Canadian Framework. So another plea to change course, please, to try to save the planet. Thank you, Mr. Chair, that's all I have on this activity.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister, do you have any comments on that?

Committee, any further -- whoops, just backlog there. There are no further questions, we can turn to page 80.

Environment and Natural Resources, environmental stewardship and climate change, operations expenditure summary, 2022-2023 Main Estimates, \$14,270,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Agreed? Thank you. We'll move on to forest management beginning on page 83, with information item on page 86. Any questions, forest management. No questions? Whoops, stop. Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I see there's about \$30 million for forest firefighting and for suppression here. I know the last couple years, largely due to COVID, we have taken a bit of a pre-emptive presuppression method which costs us a little more but one of the benefits is that we have less risk of, you know, intermingling crowds and requiring maybe southern firefighters should there be a bad season. Can I just have the Minister speak to whether we are doing a similar approach this year or whether -- what our approach to fire suppression is going into this year? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Johnson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So we are looking at this very topic right now. What we are seeing presently with the variants out there is that we may be doing the same approach moving forward but we need to look at that and confirm it. But for details, I'll turn to the deputy minister, if she has anything else to add. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There needs to be some internal discussions with the CPHO to get some advice, and we'll make decisions based on that information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know that method costs us quite a bit more, and I know that a bad forest fire season usually means a SUP and it costs us quite a bit more than \$30 million. I believe we -- due to COVID, we've kind of been -- and increased tanker costs, running well above the average for a couple years now, and I believe there's some sort of formula of when we readjust these numbers.

Can I just have the Minister speak to whether we anticipate having to, you know, budget more than \$30 million going forward to forest fires given the kind of five-year average of increased costs? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Johnson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So the actuals for the last couple years we were \$14.696 million and \$19.892 million. So they're not out of whack, that different than what we are on average.

One of the concerns with the approach that we have been using is that from an ecosystem perspective, it's important that we let fires burn in some so that we don't end up with a landscape that isn't a patchwork, where there's consistent fire cross because then we get fires that can move large distances, right. So there's a balance here that we need to achieve with making sure that we're adjusting for current conditions but also with making sure that there's an opportunity for us to have a natural fire regime on the landscape. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. Johnson.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I guess I'm wondering what work the department does to kind of look to whether we are spending too much on forest fires. I guess I want to start by saying I think some of -- these are some of the best jobs in the whole territory. I have no issue with the \$13 million in compensation and benefits here. A lot of good experience and good training comes out of forestry firefighting. But there is \$18 million in contract services here. I imagine the vast majority of that is our tanker contract and our helicopter contract. But in past years in a bad fire season, ENR has essentially not used that, or I think kind of scrambles to find ways to creatively use helicopters because we pay no matter what under the contract.

Can I just have the Minister speak to whether we have reviewed these contracts for possible cost savings. \$18 million every single year is a lot of money. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. Johnson. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yeah, so what I can tell you is that we look at it every year. We look at it at the beginning of the year. We look at it at the end of the year. And right now is where we see what's available. One of the things is that what Members need to understand is because of the fire season and that, if we don't have the helicopters in the communities or the tankers in the community or the staff in the communities and we don't have contracts, we pay more, and we pay big bucks in that. So right now, we feel good with what we are budgeting, but there is a process, and I will turn to the deputy minister for clarity on the process. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So I think if the forest management people were here today, they would say that they're doing this on a very small budget for the size of our territory and that we actually have to move our folks around when there's fires in different regions because we don't have -- we're not wasting; we don't have them in every single regional centre. I think it's important to recognize that a lot of these contracts are for the 802s and the Electras as well as for flights. And in the past couple years, we've had to increase those because there's been fewer flights so we have fewer eyes in the sky so we've needed to actually go out and look to see and do reconnaissance to see if there's fires burning more so than we have in the past, right.

The compensation and benefits, we work really closely with Indigenous businesses that provide Indigenous people to fight fires for us. And yeah, I think that we're doing this on the smallest budget that we possibly can.

One of the concerns that came up last year that's really important to understand is if you don't have them on contract and there's fires in the south, they'll be down south working the fires and we won't have them up here to fight our fires.

Now, when we don't have a big fire year, of course we look across the government to see if there's any people who need to use the helicopter time for GNWT work so that we can maximize the contracts that we do have in place. But often that is not -- that's not available because we're using them all the time for fires. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yes, I have a couple questions I'd like to pursue here. I see that wildfire risk management plans, that there was \$275,000 spent last year and only 75 budgeted for this year. So where did the extra money come from to do the plans last year and why are we not continuing that level of funding forward to help protect communities? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So this is application based. So the communities actually apply for it. When we have more applications, we try to find the money within. But for how we do the processing and how we do the budgeting, I will turn to the deputy minister to get her to explain the process to the Member. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We do, as the Minister said, on a regular basis. In this instance, it's because through the supplementary funding that we got related to fighting fires in a COVID situation, there was some extra money to do some FireSmarting work with communities, and that's why you can see this difference on that line item. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I think the risk of fires is only going to increase with the climate crisis. So if there's more applications for funding, the department will find the money to get

the work done; is that what I'm hearing the Minister say? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: So when we get the applications, we try to find and be able to work with the existing resources that we have presently, and we try to do that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks. Well, I guess if I hear that communities are not getting the money, I'll come back to the Minister to raise that.

But the other question I have is I had a constituent raise with me the issue of being able to cut wood along the Tlicho All-Season Road and apparently was not able to get a wood cutting permit. What is going on with wood cutting along the road and why wasn't that sorted out before the road was opened? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So the road project got done quicker. We have zero to 12 when we're working with the Tlicho government. We are trying to work with the Tlicho government to set up a plan. We're in a process of working with them, and so we are working with the Tlicho government. They've identified issues and concerns. And so right now, we have zero to 12 and that's what we're working with the Tlicho government. For the people to get the permits, they go through with that process.

The other part of the road, and I don't know the exact mileage of it, but it's from 13 to the end of the road, we are working with the Tlicho government. They have concerns. And we're going through a process with their community and our staff moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. And Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, okay, thanks. This is all coming as news to me. So just so I can get this clarified, so the first -- from the junction to kilometre 12, ENR is issuing wood cutting permits to anybody, any residents? And then beyond kilometre 12, that's still under negotiation with the Tlicho government? Is that what I hear the Minister say? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Just to get clarity, I'm going to turn to the deputy minister. But it's 0 to 12 is where the cutting permits existed prior to the road. That's where the people were able to do it. But to get clarity on it -- and it's not negotiations. I want to get it clear, we are working with the Tlicho government on their traditional territory and public lands. We are working with them. It's not negotiating. I need to stress we are working with them together collaboratively to come up with a process that's respectful of them in their Indigenous area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With your permission, I'll turn to the deputy minister to give clarity on the permits and stuff like that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Deputy minister.

MS. KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. So ENR has been meeting with the Tlicho government to discuss the concerns, as the Minister mentioned. And what we're trying to do is come up with an interim plan while we work with the Tlicho government on a forest management plan for the area.

What we're interested in, and working on right now, is what will happen for those -- for kilometre 0 to 5 and 8 to 12, which previously there were permits in that area. And my understanding is we're almost -- we're almost there with those discussions. So at this time, they're still ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Chair. So I guess I'll make a couple suggestions.

Can I get a commitment, then, out of the Minister to give us a briefing note on this? Because I've heard different ranges of kilometres. And if that briefing note could clarify land ownership and who's responsible for forest resources along the corridor of the road. The last thing I want to do is interfere with the Tlicho agreement in any way and their rights. But -- so can I get that commitment out of the Minister? And secondly, can he commit to actually communicate this with the public? Because it's been radio silence with the public in terms of what's going on. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi, Mr. O'Reilly. Minister.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: We can give a commitment to what the process is and how we're doing it. But for communications, before I make that commitment, I would like to get the deputy minister to explain what's going on. It hasn't been radio silence from my point of view. Maybe there is some -- been some challenges and maybe it's just

the information that I've been receiving, and maybe it's because I've been talking with the Tlicho government on this very topic. So with your permission, I'll go to the deputy minister. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. I think he asked for clarification also on the permitting process too. Deputy minister.

MS. ST. ARNAUD: Thank you, Mr. Chair. There is no harvesting along the road at this point, and we're working with the Tlicho government to come up with the plan. Once we have the plan, we will communicate it out. But that's what we're working on getting at this point.

There is a structure -- there's a cabin on -- between 5 and 8, and the reason the numbers were different, it is -- we are looking at 0 to 12 but there would be a buffer around that cabin, and that's what we're looking at. That's why I said 0 to 5 and 8 to 12. So this is still under discussion and we'll -- we will definitely communicate it out once the plan is in place and once we've finalized our discussions with the Tlicho government. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Nothing further.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): I'm not seeing any further questions for this section. Please turn to page 84. Environment and Natural Resources, forest management, operations expenditure summary, 2022-2023 Main Estimates, \$39,096,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Agreed. We're getting close to our hard stop at 6 o'clock. I'm not sure we want to entertain another section. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I move that the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Okay, the motion is in order. The motion is non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): I will now rise and report progress. Mahsi.

MADAM SPEAKER: May I have the report of Committee of the Whole. Member for Deh Cho.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. BONNETROUGE: Madam Speaker, your committee has been considering Bills 23, 29, and 38, Tabled Document 561-19(2), and would like to report progress. And Madam Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Mahsi.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do I have a seconder? Member for Boot Lake. All those in favour? Motion carried.

---Carried

MADAM SPEAKER: Third reading of bills. Orders of the day. Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, February 24th, 2022, 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to Budget Address,
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Return to Written Questions
11. Replies to Commissioner Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills

21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

- Bill 23 - An Act to Amend the Public Utilities Act
- Bill 29 - Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act
- Bill 38 – Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act, 2021
- Tabled Document 561 -19(2) - 2022-2023 Main Estimates

22. Report of Committee of the Whole

23. Third Reading of Bills

24. Orders of the Day

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, February 24th, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

