



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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Number 149

1<sup>st</sup> Session

35<sup>th</sup> Legislature

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## HANSARD

Monday, October 30, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

# YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

## 2023 Fall Sitting

**SPEAKER** — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun  
**DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE** — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin  
**DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE** — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

### CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

### OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

#### Yukon Party

Currie Dixon	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Yvonne Clarke	Porter Creek Centre	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Stacey Hassard	Pelly-Nisutlin

### THIRD PARTY

#### New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

### LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly**  
**Whitehorse, Yukon**  
**Monday, October 30, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.  
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

*Prayers*

## DAILY ROUTINE

**Speaker:** We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Introduction of visitors.

## INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I am asking my colleagues to help me in welcoming to the gallery today folks who are here for the 30 years of the Yukon First Nations Health Programs tribute, beginning with Al Lucier, the chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board of Directors. We also have Myra Iles, who is a member of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board of Directors. Within the First Nations Health Programs staff, we have Laura Salmon, director. We also have Krystal Olito, manager, and we also have Ann Swan, Nicole Dillman, Dawn Coles from Dawson City, Michele Thompson, Naomi McDougall, Adanchilla Pauls, and Darla-Jean Lindstrom.

*Applause*

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, for the tribute to the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heart of Riverdale, we have the honour of welcoming to the gallery Andrea Simpson-Fowler, who is the executive director, Michelle FisherMayr, Grace Simpson-Fowler, Oleksii Ogarov, and Violetta Umanes. Welcome.

*Applause*

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to please help me welcome a life-long friend, Grant Pauls, to the Legislature today. Grant is visiting from Vancouver but is a long-time Yukoner and a well-known artisan, jeweller, and a member of my nation, the Tahltan Nation. Welcome.

*Applause*

**MLA Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to ask the Assembly to help welcome a few members of my family. My dad, Jim Tredger, is here — he is no stranger to the Assembly — my mom, Carole Kroening, and it is a special treat to welcome my aunt, Judy Tredger Campbell, who is visiting from Alberta.

*Applause*

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in welcoming Joe Iles, who is here with his wife today.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Tributes.

## TRIBUTES

### In recognition of Yukon First Nations Health Programs

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Yukon First Nations Health Programs.

First, I would like to recognize and congratulate the First Nations Health Programs on 30 years of devoted service in the Yukon. Secondly, I would like to thank the organization and all those who have worked with the First Nations Health Programs during its valuable time.

This organization, run out of Whitehorse General Hospital, Dawson City Community Hospital, and Watson Lake Community Hospital, provides and supports compassionate care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the Yukon. Their empathetic care is based on First Nation culture and values and is shared with the people facing some of the most difficult times in their lives.

Within this House, many of us have either needed hospital care or visited loved ones in the hospital. We all know that it can be an extremely stressful time, especially when you don't know what to expect. The First Nations Health Programs give people some peace of mind. The program staff support and advocate for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who use hospital services. This helps clients know that their health needs are being met from the moment they arrive to the moment that they are back in the comfort of their own home.

The First Nations Health Programs staff offer emotional, spiritual, and social support. They help communicate between client, family, and hospital staff as well. They provide reassurance about hospital care, such as a client's diagnosis, treatment, and surgical procedures. If you come to the hospital with mental health concerns, a First Nation mental health advocate can support and encourage you to get the help that you need. They arrange for traditional Indigenous foods like moose, caribou, bison, and bannock. They also arrange for traditional Indigenous medicines in the hospitals and are part of the role of gathering medicine from the land. They also make hospital discharge plans for clients when it is time to return home.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, Yukon Hospital Corporation launched an Indigenous workforce initiative to increase the number of Yukon First Nations working in all areas of our hospitals. This inspiring workforce initiative is aimed to recruit and to retain more Indigenous team members and offer supports to improve Indigenous professional development opportunities.

We are very fortunate to have such caring and compassionate community individuals who have kept this work going for 30 years. I wish the First Nations Health Programs another successful 30 years.

*Applause*

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize both the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yukon Hospital Corporation running Whitehorse General Hospital and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Nations Health Programs.

This year marks a significant milestone for both. For the Yukon Hospital Corporation, we celebrate 30 years of providing hospital care by Yukoners for Yukoners as, in April 1993, management of the hospital was transferred to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. That resulted from the Yukon Hospital Corporation operations, which had begun in 1990 in preparation for the first phase transfer agreement for health services between the Yukon territorial government and the federal government. The devolution of health services from the federal government to the Yukon was a major step forward in the constitutional development of the Yukon as we gained local control over this important area, including the ability to better reflect the needs and culture of the Yukon.

This year, as I mentioned, also marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the First Nations Health Programs. In the last three decades, it has been offering quality patient-centred, culturally appropriate care for patients and their families. This program is in fact nationally recognized for its innovative approach and best practices in care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. It includes in-hospital patient support, assistance with personal care, discharge assistance and planning, traditional food and medicine components, language interpretation, and family support.

The traditional foods program includes wild game donated by local hunters, outfitters, and conservation officers, and, of course, the services it provides are available at all three of our hospitals in Whitehorse, Watson Lake, and Dawson City.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of the health professionals and staff of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the First Nations Health Programs for all that each of you do to take care of the needs of Yukoners and to support them in receiving the health care services that they need. I would also like to thank the members of the board of trustees, including those who have joined us today, as well as the staff who have joined us here today.

*Applause*

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the First Nations Health Programs' 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The First Nations Health Programs is based on the foundational work of so many of our matriarchs, including Ida Calmegane, Agnes Mills, Doris McLean, Betsy Jackson, Mary Battaja, and Marilyn Jensen, all of whom paved the way to ensure that Yukon First Nation culture and traditions are reflected in all parts of the work of the First Nations Health Programs and hospital settings.

I had the privilege of working with the First Nations Health Programs between 2010 and 2017. I came to truly understand the positive impacts that the First Nations Health Programs make in terms of patients' experiences. I saw the daily collaboration that occurs between the liaison workers, the physicians, nursing, and extended specialists who may be a part of the patient's journey. I witnessed the ability of the incredible staff of this program to break down barriers and address systemic racism while respectfully working in the best interests of all patients.

The staff work closely with family members and First Nation governments to ensure that hospitals are culturally safe spaces for all people. All cultural ceremonies are welcomed into the spaces of those who are palliative and nearing the end of life.

The First Nations Health Programs is nationally recognized for improving quality, efficiency, and effectiveness with its ability to organize patients' care and enhance the experiences and outcomes of all Indigenous folks accessing care at any of the Yukon hospitals. This incredible work is done daily by the 16 staff at Whitehorse General Hospital, two staff at Dawson City hospital, and one staff at the Watson Lake hospital.

The staff who work with the First Nations Health Programs show up daily with their heart on their sleeves and ready to support anyone who walks through the hospital doors. I commend all the incredible staff of the First Nations Health Programs who contribute to the well-being of our hospital systems and patients who access the care that they need.

I thank our past leaders and matriarchs for the hard work they have done to ensure that hospitals are a safe space for all Indigenous people, no matter where they are coming from. Mahsi' cho.

*Applause*

### **In recognition of the Heart of Riverdale**

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a place that embodies the very essence of creativity — the Heart of Riverdale.

For a decade, the Heart of Riverdale has offered a range of artistic programming for Yukon youth to discover, learn, and explore. As they state in their own words: "At the Heart we teach skilled artistic expression with an emphasis on creative development. Our goal is to nurture community-minded artists and to guide them to realize their limitless potential in art and in life." Whether that be through dance, music, theatre, or visual art, creativity and artistic expression are celebrated and encouraged.

Beyond artistic programming, the Heart of Riverdale plays an essential role in the community of Riverdale, providing drop-in space for youth, play space for children, and hosting community events that bring neighbours together.

Congratulations to Andrea Simpson-Fowler on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Heart of Riverdale. Andrea was born and raised in Riverdale. Her idea of repurposing the old Fraser's building in the Riverdale Plaza came from her seeing the need for a positive space for the young people in her community and her desire to build what she wished she had as a kid growing up in the Yukon. It was Andrea's dream to create a space where people of all ages could come together to participate in programming and to nurture children and youth to grow and develop in positive and healthy ways and to experience a sense of belonging by participating in activities that promote healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, a wonderful myriad of performing arts is available to discover through offerings at the Heart of Riverdale with an international, multi-cultural group of instructors and

staff. Each year, we look forward to many performances including *Art from the Heart* at the Yukon Arts Centre, *Polar Night*, the Cypherfest street art festival, and this past weekend's haunted house.

It is so important for kids to have opportunities and exposure to the creative and cultural industries. It teaches them how to express themselves and to work together to have discipline and develop a sense of pride and responsibility toward themselves and to others. It also encourages them to try new things and overcome challenges, fostering not only the next generation of arts creators and appreciators but also future leaders.

Mr. Speaker, because of the Heart of Riverdale, it is more than just a place of instruction; it is a true community. It is where friendships are formed, where support is given, and where dreams are shared. Here, artists aren't just taught; they are empowered to take their creativity to the next level, to realize their full potential not only in their art but also in life itself.

Thank you again to Andrea and to all the staff and instructors. May the Heart of Riverdale continue to inspire, nurture, and guide the limitless potential in all who pass through its doors.

*Applause*

**Mr. Kent:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the Heart of Riverdale community centre — or “the Heart” — as they celebrate their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Although music, dance, and visual arts are the core components of the all-ages programming at the Heart, they also offer a wide variety of other programs, including after-school care and full meals and snacks at the café available to students.

One project the Heart has undertaken that could use some help is the purchase of a vehicle to support their after-school program. They have a van picked out and Mister Jamie is ready to drive it. They need some funding from the community to make it happen. Please visit their GoFundMe page to help them make this purchase a reality.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Heart, the vision of Andrea Simpson-Fowler cannot be overlooked. Her advocacy efforts started well over a decade ago with former Riverdale MLAs Ted Staffen and Glenn Hart and have continued through to today. Without her dedication and passion, the Heart would not be the success that it is. Thank you, Andrea, for your years of work.

I would like to conclude by thanking all of those staff, volunteers, and students who have helped make the Heart the success that it is. Congratulations on your 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

*Applause*

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the little community space that could. The Heart of Riverdale sits quite literally in the heart of Riverdale and is so much more than what you can see from the outside. The building holds so much more than just a studio, play, and art space. It is an incubator of

creativity and has the wraparound supports to make dreams a reality.

Andrea Simpson-Fowler grew up in the Yukon and was nurtured to be the artist that she is by this community. In turn, she has supported, mentored, and taught generations of dancers and performers through her dance company, Leaping Feats. I met Andrea when I was a teenager. She was so cool then and she is still so cool now. Even way back when, she knew that not every kid would find purpose in traditional sporting activities and that some of us needed other environments in which to thrive. She has made it her life's work to build up community and help young people forge their paths.

After years of teaching, supporting, and tying together resources for the creative arts, Andrea knew that people of all ages needed an environment in which to grow and thrive. The Heart provides that outlet for people of all ages. I remember our first conversation about her dream for the Heart. She saw the opportunity for a thriving, full-service community centre where some of us saw a building where the old Chinese food restaurant used to be on the top floor. Despite all the setbacks, the community that was inspired by her vision never wavered. They knew that there were endless possibilities to nurture community-minded artists and guide them to realize their limitless potential in art and, most importantly, in life.

After what must have felt like a million conversations, grant proposals, endless meetings, and so many tours, it finally happened. You can now find a beautiful, open, and welcoming space for all ages right in the heart of Riverdale — a space that nurtures creativity, builds confidence, and gives wings to dreams. So, congratulations on 10 great years of “Heart”, and I look forward to many more.

*Applause*

**Speaker:** Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today two legislative returns that are in reference to Committee of the Whole Vote 3 on Education during our recent debate.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a legislative return relating to a question from the Member for Watson Lake.

**Speaker:** Are there any reports of committees?

## REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the *Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*.

**Speaker:** Are there any further reports of committees? Are there any petitions?

## PETITIONS

### Petition No. 21 — received

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 21 of the First Session of the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin on October 26, 2023.

The petition presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. However, eight pages of the petition are not in the correct form and will be returned to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

**Speaker:** Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 21 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its representation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 21 shall be provided on or before November 9, 2023.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates the newly elected Yukon Employees' Union executive: President Justin Lemphers; Vice-President Lisa Vollans-Leduc; and Vice-President, Communities Julie Anne Abel.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Yukon Brewing for their recent success at the Canada Beer Cup, winning silver for their rye IPA in the category of contemporary IPAs and silver for their lead dog olde English ale among all English-style olde ales, Scottish wee heavies, and Scottish ales.

**Ms. White:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House thanks the past president of the Yukon Employees' Union, Steve Geick, for his years of service.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates the Yukon Employees' Union for their successful convention and election of a new executive.

**Mr. Cathers:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Environment to respond to families who would like a playground at the Lake Laberge campground by determining an appropriate location for it and installing playground equipment.

**Speaker:** Is there a statement by a minister?  
This then brings us to Question Period.

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: Carbon tax

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister announced significant changes to the Liberals' signature carbon tax policy. What is clear, though, is that the announcement and the policy change are overwhelmingly targeted to benefit one region: Atlantic Canada.

The consensus is that it is for two reasons: The Liberals are down in the polls there, and Atlantic Canadian politicians have been speaking out about the impact that the carbon tax is having on the cost of living in that region.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals are down in the polls here too, but what we have lacked is a Premier who is willing to speak up and advocate on behalf of Yukoners. We have been urging the Premier over and over to tell the federal government about the impact of the federal carbon tax on the cost of living here in the Yukon. What has he done? Nothing.

Why has the Premier refused to stand up for Yukoners against federal policy that is hurting the north?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I will disagree with the member opposite as far as the Yukon Liberals doing nothing. Since the pan-Canadian framework forward, we have been arguing for regional-specific exemptions and reductions all along the way, within a certain parameter. We are very disappointed with the federal government's backtracking on policy initiatives intended to fight climate change.

We believe that last week's announcement from the federal government shows a profound lack of understanding of the realities of living in the north, and we expect better from the federal government.

We have been able to make significant progress toward addressing environmental concerns and reducing carbon emissions locally while also ensuring that every single dollar collected from a federal carbon-pricing mechanism gets returned to Yukon individuals, businesses, and governments.

We disagree with the members opposite about carbon pricing, obviously. I will remind folks as well that it was the Yukon Party that signed the Vancouver Declaration to get Yukon on board for a carbon-pricing mechanism. We keep hearing from the opposition what they don't want to see, but we have still yet to see their carbon-pricing plan.

Again, I am very disappointed with the federal government not looking at the whole country and also changing from a price-signal mechanism.

**Mr. Hassard:** So, earlier this year, all four Atlantic premiers jointly wrote to the Prime Minister to make him aware of the significant impact that the carbon tax was having on their region. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador even wrote a follow-up letter to specifically highlight his concerns.

Along with the Atlantic MPs, they have made the case that Atlantic Canada cannot afford the increasing impact of the carbon tax on their cost of living. However, despite the fact that the Yukon has been leading the country on cost of living and that the north has been more affected by the carbon tax than any other region in the country, we have heard nothing from this Liberal government.

Why has the Yukon Liberal government refused to stand up for Yukon interests and advocate for changes to federal policy that actually hurts the north?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear anything new in the second part of that question, but I will again disagree and say that we are also leading the country in unemployment. We are also leading the country in GDP growth. We are doing a lot of great things here in the Yukon, and we also have a lot of mechanisms and money that have been dedicated to inflation to make sure that Yukoners can live to their best potential.

We are also committed to returning all of the revenues returned from the federal government, and we are equally committed to reducing carbon emissions in the territory. Federal policies need to be predictable in this arena — stable as well — and broadly applied in order to succeed in the transition to a net-zero economy. We don't hear anything about a net-zero economy from the members opposite in the Yukon Party.

*Our Clean Future* strategy, for example, indicated that 21 percent of Yukon emissions are related to building heating. We have implemented numerous programs based upon setting a goal of increasing the share of homes heated by renewable energy from 26 percent to 50 percent by 2030. This ambitious goal will be challenged without a price on carbon.

We are also providing low-interest loans and grants to encourage the switch to renewable heating while, at the same time, investing in renewable energy, such as wind, solar, and battery storage, to meet the increasing demand as well.

**Mr. Hassard:** Mr. Speaker, we have been calling on the Premier to stand up and let the federal government know that Yukoners can't afford more Liberal tax increases for years now. We have asked questions in the Legislature and even passed a motion calling on the federal government to do almost exactly what they have just announced, but when it was proposed by us, this Liberal government in the Yukon said no. They voted against our motion and the Minister of Community Services even said that it was an assault on carbon pricing. The Minister of Finance said that day that cutting the carbon tax on home heating fuel would be the same as subsidizing fossil fuels.

I would like to give the Minister of Finance a chance to explain: Why did he vote against our motion last year to do exactly what the federal Liberals have just announced?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I think it comes down to a fundamental theory or philosophy, which is that I don't think taxpayers should be paying for climate change; I think that polluters should be paying for climate change.

I agree with Alberta's NDP leader, Rachel Notley, when she said — and I quote: "To apply a carbon price to only some regions and some fuels is totally unacceptable." But I also agree with the Canadian Climate Institute's concerns — and I quote: "It sends the signal to emitters — and investors — that policy can be weakened in the future..."

We need to be stalwart in our approach to fighting climate change. Carbon pricing is the most cost-effective manner in which we can do that as a nation and as a region. We need to keep moving forward, because I don't want to see taxpayers paying for forest fires and floods. I want to see polluter pay and I want to see federal programming and policy that mirrors that.

Again, when we see a regional-specific caving on a policy, I have concerns with that, for sure.

#### Question re: Carbon tax

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, for much of this year, the Yukon has led the country in cost-of-living increases, and despite this, the federal Liberal government has increased the carbon tax and is now heaping on a new clean fuel standard, which many are calling a second carbon tax. Yukoners cannot afford any more federal tax increases. The federal Liberals have now shown that carve-outs and exemptions on the carbon tax are possible but only if they are put under pressure. The three territories bear the brunt of the carbon tax more than any region in the country.

Will the Premier stand up to the federal government and insist on a northern carve-out to the carbon tax?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, rising inflation and an elevated cost of living continue to present challenges around the world and that is no different here in the Yukon — absolutely — and we know that this is a very challenging time for many people. That is why we have put lots of money in the budget to compete against inflationary times.

The members opposite forget all of the conversations that we have had, from the pan-Canadian framework forward. We fought at every turn for regional-specific exemptions and rebates that make sense in the context of what a carbon-pricing mechanism is, and we will continue to do that.

You have to consider carbon leakage, which means mining companies going to other countries where the environmental policies and the human rights policies are not there. You have to consider the cost of living in northern areas and we have considered that as well. You have to consider the unique situation of our placer industry as well, where there are not a lot of alternatives.

We always argued within the policy definition. When the five-year review came out, those considerations changed from the federal government and they doubled down on price signal. So, we argued within that — in the House here, in the Legislative Assembly, we all voted in favour of the new changes that would allow us to keep our Yukon carbon-pricing mechanism. I thank the members of the opposition for that, but to say that we have done nothing — that is just clearly inaccurate.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, I think that the Finance minister ignores the fact that the policy has changed and now the federal government is entertaining new exemptions. The Yukon Party has led the call for an exemption from the carbon tax for the north since the federal government announced it in 2016. We have consistently made the case that a carbon tax only serves to make life more expensive for northerners and that is what we have seen since the Liberals forced it on us.

It is not just us saying that, Mr. Speaker. We have seen other northern leaders — like outgoing Northwest Territories Premier Caroline Cochrane — say that; we have seen past premiers of both other territories say that, but the lone northern supporter has always been the territorial Liberals.

So, when the Premier attends the meeting of premiers next week in Halifax, will he change his stance, stand up for northerners, and make the case that the territories should be exempt from the carbon tax?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** The member opposite is only telling parts of the story as well. Every jurisdiction has a different option for carbon pricing. In the Northwest Territories, they said yes — and in Alberta — to not having their home fuel rebate, which is very problematic for them right now because the federal government went forward without considering their situation — they are in an election as well — so that is going to be very problematic.

The Yukon Party is also not telling people that in the Yukon, 100 percent of the money that is raised from the federal government on carbon pricing goes back into Yukoners' pockets, which is not necessarily the same thing in every other jurisdiction in Canada. We don't keep any of this money, even if there is a price on carbon.

Now, for the interest of people who are paying attention now, there are things that we do need to consider. Canada also announced a rural top-up for the climate action incentive, so that means that federal rebates in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador will permanently increase from 10 percent to 20 percent effective on April 1, 2024. I will add that this is something that the federal government borrowed from Yukon because we already offer that. If the general money back that you get as an individual is \$400, in a rural community, it is \$440 per person right now. So, we are looking to see and reviewing to see how this will impact the Yukon and we will make appropriate adjustments, if needed.

**Mr. Dixon:** Mr. Speaker, the simplest thing to do would be to get rid of the carbon tax altogether for the entire Canadian north. The carbon tax affects the price of pretty much everything in the north. It affects the price of food, housing, and transportation. Throughout this year, the Yukon has led the country in increases to our cost of living. Despite this, the Liberal government increased the carbon tax by 30 percent this year, but now the door has been opened to changes to the policy and hopefully an approach that reflects the needs of the Yukon. This is the perfect time to make the case for a northern exemption from the Liberal carbon tax, but the only way to convince the federal government, as we've seen in Atlantic Canada, is if the Premier speaks up. So, will the Premier call for a northern exemption to the carbon tax?

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Yes, over the last number of days, we have engaged with the federal government and certainly have tabled our displeasure to what we saw last week. What we are waiting to see now is: What will the changes be? The door does seem to be open for some flexibility. We think that there needs to be a level playing field, and we think that going regionally into Atlantic Canada with a reduction that we have seen is not the appropriate way forward.

I will ask the member opposite — maybe we will have an opportunity to table the Yukon Party's plan to deal with climate change, other than just an exemption. This is a real problem.

We know what we're dealing with when it comes to fires, we know what we're dealing with when it comes to floods, and we know that we have not seen, openly, another system tabled anywhere in this country and we certainly have not seen another system tabled by the leader of the opposition. The Yukon Party signed on to the Vancouver accord. The member opposite said that there would be a made-in-Yukon carbon-pricing system that he would table in the 2021 election. We have not heard the details of that now, but, again, we are not pleased with the change and we will continue to ensure that all the funds that come through this system go back to Yukoners.

#### **Question re: Public transit funding**

**MLA Tredger:** The Minister of Community Services has told Yukoners that there is no additional money for free transit despite the City of Whitehorse saying more money would be needed in coming years to make it happen. This is a real disappointment to Yukoners who have been waiting for free transit. It would help Yukoners reduce their carbon emissions by driving less.

Despite the minister claiming there isn't enough money to make it happen, he somehow found an extra million dollars in his department's budget to help pay for an ore dock. That money was cut from the Better Buildings program budget, a program meant to help Yukoners cut greenhouse gas emissions by funding home retrofits.

Why is the minister okay with moving money from climate initiatives to pay for private mining interests but not to fulfill his commitment for free public transit?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I will take exception to the assertions of the member opposite. We are committed to working with the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon NDP caucus to explore replacing fair generated revenue to make public transit free in Whitehorse. We have a transit working group made up of one Yukon NDP MLA and a representative from the City of Whitehorse. The working group is an important place for these conversations to happen.

Our government has allocated a total of \$1.5 million for free transit as per the confidence and supply agreement that we have entered into with the Yukon New Democratic Party. We want to make sure that the free transit initiative that was put forward by the Yukon NDP through the confidence and supply agreement sticks to the budget of \$1.5 million. We're going to do that.

**MLA Tredger:** Mr. Speaker, free transit is not just about climate action. It would also make transportation more affordable for Yukoners. Yukoners who already use public transit save a lot of money on monthly passes or bus tickets. Those who own a car could save a lot of money by choosing the bus instead. Our initiative is a win-win for everyone.

But instead of helping low-income Yukoners, this government is giving over a million dollars through their landlord subsidy to people who already own multiple homes. Adding a million dollars to the free-transit budget would be more than enough to make it happen.



Instead of helping Yukoners meet rising transportation costs, the Liberals chose to subsidize those who already have the most.

Why won't the minister take real action on affordability by fully funding free transit?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Once again, I will say that we are fully prepared to honour — and want to honour — the agreement we have with the Yukon New Democratic Party through the confidence and supply agreement to provide free transit for Whitehorse.

The budget for that initiative, agreed to with the Yukon New Democratic Party caucus at the time of the confidence and supply agreement, was \$1.5 million. We have that money, and we are prepared to spend it on free transit.

I am aware of the proposal that the Yukon NDP caucus has sent to us and to the City of Whitehorse. I have not heard back from the City of Whitehorse. I know the City of Whitehorse is currently in the midst of doing a study on free transit. That study will be done in January and February. That may inform the city and inform us on ways forward.

As I said, as a government, we are working very hard on many fronts to ensure that we are supporting Yukoners as much as possible while making responsible financial decisions on behalf of all Yukoners, and the working group is an important place for these conversations to happen. I look forward to the next meeting of that working group.

**MLA Tredger:** So, here we have it. This Liberal government found millions in leftover money that they couldn't spend on climate action, housing, and infrastructure projects. They are happy to give that money to private companies to build an ore dock in Skagway. They are happy to give money to landlords who already own multiple homes, but somehow there is no additional money for free transit. They are weaseling out of their commitment to Yukoners by pretending their hands are tied and they are killing a plan to deliver action on climate change and affordability.

Why doesn't the minister think that climate action and affordability are worthwhile investments?

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Mr. Speaker, I will be perfectly clear for the member opposite. We made a commitment through the confidence and supply agreement to put aside \$1.5 million for free transit. We still have \$1.5 million for free transit. We have a transit working group working with the City of Whitehorse to come to some sort of arrangement. The City of Whitehorse has acknowledged that \$1.5 million is a lot of money for the City of Whitehorse for a free transit initiative. It doesn't cover all the costs of transit. We have had these meetings inside that committee.

I would like to clarify that the CASA commitment that the member opposite has been referring to — the confidence and supply agreement states: "6.a. continue investing in renewable energy infrastructure through an additional targeted investment of \$5 million per year."

The Yukon NDP is proposing moving money away from renewable energy projects to pay for their transit proposal. Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker. They want to take money away from renewable energy for the transit initiative in Whitehorse.

We don't think that's a smart approach. I am surprised by this approach, to say the least.

The Yukon NDP is very keen to see us reach our goal of 45-percent emission reductions. Renewable energy projects are a key component on how we will reach these reductions. I am not saying that we are not willing to support free transit; I am saying that we are willing to do it within the budget.

#### **Question re: Midwifery in Yukon**

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, when talking about the lack of midwives in the Yukon in November 2021, the minister indicated that Yukoners could get a midwife in another province or territory. That doesn't make sense when we know it would be a lot cheaper to fund birthing options in Yukon communities. We saw this in Nunavut in 2022 when their government had to pay over \$30,000 for every birth outside of people's home communities.

Can the minister tell Yukoners how much it costs this government every time a Yukoner accesses midwifery services out of territory?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon is committed to providing Yukoners with an additional option for safe, accessible, and high-quality maternity care without having to pay out of pocket, so maternity services here in the territory are, in fact, free at the midwifery clinic. The Yukon midwifery program is experiencing the impacts of the local and global shortages of health care workers and has experienced significant staffing challenges. As a result of the staffing shortages, the Yukon midwifery program had to temporarily shut down services of birthing services and transfer clients to Solstice Maternity while the recruitment of additional midwives and other mitigation strategies are underway.

The new collective agreement for the government does have an impact on our attempts to recruit midwives. I look forward to more questions.

**Ms. Blake:** Midwives have been working in the NWT since 2005. Their program has at least 25 midwives. Nunavut's midwifery program has been running since 2011 and currently has 26 midwives. The other territories have made midwifery programs that work. This government has regulated midwifery in the Yukon for just two years. In that time, Yukoners have only had access to midwives for births for just six months. Now the program has collapsed again.

When will this government provide access to midwives for birthing in the Yukon?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that the collective agreement most recently signed between the Yukon Employee's Union and the Government of Yukon established a new classification of midwives here in the territory, which is expected to assist in better attracting midwives to work within the existing model of service delivery. An ongoing competition for midwives is currently running on yukon.ca and we have aligned our wages with the collective agreement.

The Yukon midwifery program, along with the entire maternity care community, is committed to ensuring the safety and the well-being of clients. They do provide some services for pregnant people during their pregnancy and additional

services for clients who come. With respect to pre-birth care and midwifery care here in the territory — is aligned with standards and best practices included for patient safety.

We have budgeted \$1.35 million for the Yukon midwifery program in this budget. I look forward to another question.

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, Nova Scotia's midwifery program was on the verge of collapse. The Nova Scotia government then conducted an external quality assurance assessment, which allowed them to understand what was wrong and how to make it better. Now their program is thriving.

We asked this minister to conduct an external quality assurance assessment last spring. Instead of taking our suggestion, the minister talked about ongoing internal assessments. Well, here we are with a failed midwifery program.

Why hasn't this government done an external quality assurance assessment to understand the root causes of the collapse of this program so that it can be fixed?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am concerned about the facts that are in this particular question. I can indicate that we are committed, as are the current staff of the midwifery program, to providing the best possible service to clients here in the territory. I can also indicate that ensuring the health and safety of our clients relies on a team of registered midwives who are able to provide the full scope of midwifery care. To provide 24/7 coverage, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon midwifery program offers, while complying with Yukon standards of practice for registered midwives — at non-hospital births, there always needs to be two staff from the midwifery team on call. We currently have two staff and are continuing to recruit more so that those midwives can operate and provide assistance in non-hospital births. To achieve the level of coverage that we need, the program needs to fill all four midwifery positions. We have been very close to doing that on separate occasions. What I am pleased to see is that the new classification and salaries should assist us in that goal.

### **Question re: Carbon tax and alternative heating subsidies**

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, last week's announcement about the changes to the federal carbon tax have provoked some questions about what it will mean for Yukoners. Currently, the rebates provided to Yukoners from the carbon tax flow through the territorial government and are distributed pursuant to the Yukon government's *Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act*.

Can the Yukon government tell us if changes to the act will be necessary to allow for what the federal government has described as a doubling of the rural rebate? Will these changes be in place for April 2024 when the federal government says the rural rebate will be increasing so that Yukoners can benefit from the federal Liberals' change in policy?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Mr. Speaker, I believe I already answered this question earlier, but I can just speak to it again for the member opposite.

We do know that they did announce the rural top-up for the climate action incentive payments. If you are on a federal

backstop — or in your federal rebate in places like Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, it will permanently increase from 10 percent to 20 percent, effective April 1, 2024. I stated that already today. I already said, as well, that we are reviewing how this will impact the Yukon and how we need to make appropriate adjustments internally as well. I already mentioned that they borrowed this idea from the Yukon carbon-rebate mechanism.

Right now, on average, from the last numbers that we got through Public Accounts, Yukoners, as individuals, will get about \$400 back, unless you live in rural Yukon — then you get an extra \$40 back, bringing your total for the year to \$440.

We will continue to monitor. We have questions in to the federal government on a whole bunch of things about this new policy change. But that one is something that we already implemented in Yukon and it's something that we are discussing right now — looking at the numbers, how they come back to the First Nation governments, the municipalities, the businesses, the individuals and to see how that will affect the overall percentages.

**Mr. Istchenko:** So, hundreds of Yukon homes are heated using propane. In fact, the government has been actively switching buildings — their government buildings — from oil to propane. However, it was noticeable in the federal government's announcement that propane would not be treated the same as other fossil fuels under the revised carbon tax.

Will the Yukon government push for propane to be exempt from the carbon tax like it is for home heating fuel?

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** I think I also addressed that as well in earlier questions from the Yukon Party. Again, I agree with what the Leader of the NDP in Alberta said — and I'll quote her again: "To apply a carbon price to some regions, and some fuels ... is totally unacceptable."

**Mr. Istchenko:** Mr. Speaker, let's hope that the Yukon government does push for propane to be exempt. The federal government has also announced that they were enhancing the support available for electric heat pumps but only in Atlantic Canada. The program that they announced offers an upfront payment of \$250 and increases to the total rebate for installing a heat pump. In the words of the Prime Minister's Office release, this program, it says — quote: "... would make the average heat pump free for lower income households..."

Can the Yukon government explain why Yukon was excluded from this new program and whether or not we will be pushing for a program that will actually work for Yukoners here in the Yukon?

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, the Energy branch runs our program around heat pumps. They are good for Yukoners' homes; they work up until about minus 30 degrees, and then after that, they are just like an electric heater. But they really are great in that range of minus 15 degrees, where we often are, and they are twice the efficiency of regular heaters. We provide rebates up to \$8,000 for heat pumps; the federal program here offers rebates up to \$10,000, but they are considering whether or not to advance that.

We have been in conversation with the federal government about trying to deliver their programs to help Yukoners reduce red tape and get through that system more quickly. I know that the Premier has been in conversations with the federal government; I know that the department was in a meeting today around heat pumps. Overall, what we are working to do is to try to reduce Yukoners' dependency on fossil fuels — period. That is the work that we are doing; that is the work that we think is very important from an energy perspective and a climate perspective.

**Speaker:** The time for Question Period has now elapsed. We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### GOVERNMENT BILLS

#### **Bill No. 32: Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023) — Second Reading**

**Clerk:** Second reading, Bill No. 32, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to bring forward Bill No. 32, *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, for second reading.

The Department of Justice continues to enhance support and protections for victims of crime. This is one more step in our work to do so. This bill introduces provisions to protect victim information from being uncovered through access-to-information requests submitted by anyone who presents a risk of harm for a victim.

The scope of the changes of this legislation are very narrow. It protects sensitive and personal information contained in victim records that are created in the provision of services for Victim Services' clients. We are trying to avoid attempts that we have seen to access information through the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and gain access to the personal information of a victim that is held in the files of Victim Services. Attempts have been made to do so, and these amendments apply only to access requests. All other provisions of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, of course, continue to apply with respect to this information. These protections exist in other Canadian jurisdictions, so we are, at this point, aligning with them for the protection of victims' rights.

The Department of Justice is very pleased to bring forward these legislative amendments to improve our services for victims of crime and ensure that victims have safe and confidential access to Victim Services.

**Mr. Cathers:** I am pleased to rise to speak to this as the Official Opposition Justice critic.

I would note that this is intended to enhance victim protection by ensuring that victim records and any information included in those records can't be disclosed to offenders or alleged offenders in a circumstance where that disclosure could result in harm to the victim.

We believe that this is a reasonable exception, as long as it is implemented appropriately. I don't have any questions regarding it at this point. We will look forward to this legislation being supported here by the Assembly.

**Ms. White:** In speaking to Bill No. 32, I have to say that, for me, the briefing was eye-opening. Really, what we are seeing coming forward in these amendments to the *Victims of Crime Act* are actually changes to support victims of crime, because it turns out that there are those who will use an access-to-information request to find out if they have been named as an aggressor or as an offender. In these cases of domestic violence, it's totally unacceptable to know that victims of crime could then be made vulnerable by even sharing an ATIPP document that is entirely redacted, but it would be enough of an indication to know that there was information there.

We look forward to debate and possibly the minister expanding more, but we really have very few questions on the amendments as they stand.

**Speaker:** If the member now speaks, she will close debate. Does any other member wish to be heard?

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** I am very pleased by the comments by the members opposite. I am happy to send our thanks to the officials at the Department of Justice who provided the briefing to the members opposite and answered some of their questions. I look forward to Committee of the Whole, and if there are others, we can speak about them together.

This is a very narrow piece of legislation. It is designed to protect victims of crime. I certainly look forward to the support of the members opposite as we move this small but important piece of legislation through the House.

**Speaker:** Are you prepared for the question? Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Division.

### Division

**Speaker:** Division has been called.

### Bells

**Speaker:** Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

**Hon. Mr. Pillai:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McPhee:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Agree.

**Hon. Ms. McLean:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Silver:** Agree.

**Hon. Mr. Mostyn:** Agree.

**Mr. Dixon:** Agree.

**Mr. Kent:** Agree.

**Ms. Clarke:** Agree.

**Mr. Cathers:** Agree.

**Ms. McLeod:** Agree.

**Ms. Van Bibber:** Agree.

**Mr. Hassard:** Agree.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Agree.

**Ms. White:** Agree.

**Ms. Blake:** Agree.

**MLA Tredger:** Agree.

**Clerk:** Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

**Speaker:** The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

*Motion for second reading of Bill No. 32 agreed to*

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House now resolve into Committee of the Whole.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker leaves the Chair*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**Chair (Ms. Blake):** Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Chair:** Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

*Recess*

**Chair:** Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

### Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

**Chair:** The matter now before Committee is general debate on Vote No. 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

#### Department of Environment

**Chair:** Is there any general debate?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Madam Chair, I would like to introduce to the House the persons I have in support today. To my left is Manon Moreau, who is the Deputy Minister of the Department of Environment, and to my left is Briar Young, who is one of the assistant deputy ministers at the Department of Environment.

I stand before this Assembly as the Minister of Environment to give an update on the Department of Environment's work to advance initiatives that are protecting the Yukon's environment and building more resilient, thriving Yukon communities. The supplementary estimates that I am presenting today highlight an increase of just over \$3.6 million to the Department of Environment's budget. These additional funds are due to an increase in the operation and maintenance budget, while the capital budget has not changed. Of this amount, over \$2.1 million is attributed to the collective agreement increases, and the remaining \$1.58 million is completely recoverable through our partnership with the Government of Canada. These additional funds are supporting several Department of Environment initiatives that will advance our conservation work, help us better prepare and respond to climate change, and increase our knowledge of the territory's wildlife.

Communities around the globe are experiencing the impacts of climate change, and here at home, we are seeing changes in temperature and precipitation, which in turn are driving changes in ecosystems, flooding, wildfires, and permafrost thaw. Over the past years, our territory has seen increased flooding and fires — a familiar story that can be heard in jurisdictions across the country and around the world.

As we work to reduce our emissions, we must also invest in building communities that are more resilient to increased severe weather. The time to do that work is now and the Department of Environment has been focusing on just that. In 2022, Government of Yukon released the *Assessing Climate Change Risk and Resilience in the Yukon* report. The report evaluated the climate change impacts that pose the highest risk to Yukoners and provides recommendations to address climate change impacts that pose a risk to Yukoners. These recommendations fell under seven priority areas, which include: transportation infrastructure; floods and fires; permafrost thaw; ecosystems and biodiversity; changing conditions on the land; health and well-being; and economy and livelihood.

Findings from the report also noted that much of the Yukon's current resilience to climate impacts stems from our community values, strong relationships, values of self-sufficiency, communities working together, ongoing connections to the land, and making the most of limited resources.

The supplementary estimates include \$382,000, which is fully funded by the Government of Canada, to continue our work of addressing the seven priority areas that emerged from this assessment. We will continue to build on our adaptation commitments like this and others in *Our Clean Future* while working with the federal government, stakeholders, experts, and knowledge-holders in order to advance climate resilience in the Yukon. We are pleased that our climate risk assessment aligns closely with Canada's national adaptation strategy, which was released in November 2022.

It is more important than ever that we plan ahead to prepare for and reduce the impacts of future climate events that could jeopardize our health, safety, and way of life in the Yukon. This

work will not only build communities that can better withstand the increasing impacts of climate change but would also help us reach our goals highlighted in *Our Clean Future*.

In addition to this funding, the increase to the 2023-24 supplementary estimates also includes \$890,000 in order to advance flood mapping projects across the territory. These maps will give the Yukon and Yukoners critical insights into how we can better coordinate and respond to flooding emergencies, understand climate change impacts, and assist with community and land infrastructure planning. As committed to in *Our Clean Future*, the Government of Yukon will produce flood maps for 14 flood-prone communities over the coming year. We know that many communities want to have a better understanding of the flooding risks and we have established a flood mapping advisory committee to help provide direction and input from local levels.

The flood mapping advisory committee includes representatives from various Yukon government departments, the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Assembly of First Nations Yukon, and the Association of Yukon Communities.

Due to the amount of work involved, we are taking a phased approach that prioritizes communities based upon multiple criteria, including risk and readiness.

As official flood maps are developed, we will continue to work with all levels of government and the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization to support flood preparation, mitigation, and response. The first flood maps are being developed for the Southern Lakes area, Carmacks, and Teslin. Engagement on draft flood maps will occur this fall and winter, and final maps are expected in 2024. The Southern Lakes communities covered by the maps are Carcross, Tagish, Marsh Lake, and Lake Laberge. The Government of Yukon will be seeking feedback on draft flood hazard maps by holding a series of community open houses as well as online public engagement in order to ensure that the maps are accurate and reflect both community and Indigenous knowledge.

The next communities for flood hazard mapping will be Old Crow, Ross River, and Dawson and the Klondike area. As official flood maps are developed, we will continue to work with all levels of government and the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization to support flood preparation, mitigation, and response.

As we work to build stronger, more resilient communities, the Department of Environment is also working to better understand our territory's complex natural environment and the wildlife that calls it home.

This supplementary estimate also includes \$163,000 to further support the implementation of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, which is guiding our work in conducting wildlife research projects, including Porcupine caribou research and monitoring.

The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring that the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* guides our shared work with Canada and the Inuvialuit with the purposes of conserving wildlife, their habitats, and traditional activities on the Yukon North Slope.

In order to further our work in monitoring the Porcupine caribou herd, we are investing an additional \$83,000 — all of which is recoverable through federal funding — to further our work with Polar Knowledge Canada to monitor moose and wolves in the Porcupine caribou range and the impact that they may have on this culturally important species.

The Government of Yukon will continue to work with our partners in Porcupine caribou management, which includes the governments of Canada, the Northwest Territories, the Inuvialuit, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun.

All the work that I have mentioned today is incredibly important to the success of our environment and communities across the territory. In order to conduct this important work that is protecting our environment and strengthening our communities, the Department of Environment has a diverse and talented workforce that is responsible for advancing environmental stewardship and initiatives while effectively managing the Yukon's natural resources.

The Government of Yukon values this work. The supplementary estimate includes over \$2.1 million in order to fulfill the commitments under the new collective agreement between the Yukon and the Yukon Employees' Union that was ratified this past June.

I want to highlight that a lot of the funding that I announced today, as mentioned, is fully recoverable through the Government of Canada. This additional funding that is being brought to our territory to advance these important initiatives is directly due to the hard work of Department of Environment staff who continue to advocate for support of these important initiatives that are helping us to advance our environmental goals in a cost-effective manner.

I am proud of this department's work over the past years to advance projects that are helping our territory meet its climate targets. These projects include our work to sign the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, releasing a policy for the stewardship of Yukon wetlands, implementing a single-use plastic and paper bag ban, passing the *Clean Energy Act*, and the *Animal Protection and Control Act*, releasing the Yukon climate risk assessment, signing bilateral water management agreements with the Government of Northwest Territories, upgrading camping infrastructure, adding campsites across the territory, and much more.

I look forward to continuing to see the work that comes out of this department, some of which I have highlighted today.

Again, thank you to all the hard-working Environment staff who are committed to ensure that our land, air, wildlife, habitats, water, and climate continue to thrive and support our way of life. This work is ensuring that future generations of Yukoners will have an opportunity to appreciate our territory's natural beauty, just as we are fortunate to do every single day.

I know that for many Yukoners, our territory's natural environment is rooted in their way of life, whether it be going out on the land to harvest their food, participating in one of the many recreational activities that our unique environment supports, or appreciating the natural beauty that surrounds us.

Our connection to nature is what often makes us proudly call ourselves “Yukoners”.

Before I end, I also wanted to take a moment to thank all Yukoners who are taking steps every day to reduce their impact on the environment and to strengthen their connection with nature.

Madam Chair, thank you for allowing me to have the time today to highlight some of the critical work that the Department of Environment is undertaking in order to protect our natural spaces and to ensure the success of our territory.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I look forward to answering questions from the members opposite.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I want to welcome the staff who are here today and the staff who are listening to the radio and are ready to text answers or more information, if required. I will get started right away. I want to thank the minister for his opening remarks also.

As you know, the mining industry is probably one of the biggest economic drivers in the Yukon. It creates a lot of jobs; it is part of our history. So, of course, when they heard about the minister signing a bilateral nature agreement, they were concerned because they will be affected by this agreement.

I do have a couple of questions here. I want to know how they have been consulted and who has been consulted with. Do they have a seat at the planning and implementation table, and who else has a seat at that table? I also believe that maybe there were to be more staff as part of this work — so, if the minister can answer those questions and also tell us if they have had to hire any new employees and if they are permanent or not.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Perhaps just to provide a little bit of background for the House — I’m sure that I’ve provided some of these comments before, but just to be clear about the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* — and then I will provide some high-level detail about the accord — and then I will also endeavour to answer the member opposite’s specific question.

The *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* is a three-year agreement that supports Indigenous leadership and conservation, increased protection of sensitive habitat, recovery actions for species at risk, and the protection and conservation of new lands and waters in the Yukon. I think I have said before that the Yukon has already conserved approximately 19.3 percent of territory and is working toward meeting Canada’s 25-percent target by 2025.

Additionally, this agreement will support how the Yukon can make meaningful contributions toward Canada’s 30-percent target by 2030. We will make these contributions by building on existing commitments — such as those established through First Nation final agreements, which include parks and habitat protection areas — and by supporting Indigenous governments and groups identifying additional conservation and protection areas. Any new area identified for protection and conservation will require the support of Indigenous governments and groups. The \$20.6 million in funding from the agreement will also support effective land use planning, which is our main mechanism to support additional protection of wildlife spaces and biodiversity.

The *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* and its objectives of increasing protected land while enabling Indigenous leadership and conservation are elevating discussions on Indigenous protected and conserved areas among some Yukon First Nations. We have a goal of creating certainty and clarity for Indigenous partners, for municipalities, and for industry by clearly identifying the areas we mean to protect and those with opportunities for resource development.

We are pleased to collaborate with the Government of Canada on planning for the future and ensuring the responsible management and sustainable use of our lands and resources for future generations.

Specifically to the Member for Kluane’s question, mining companies initially have not been specifically engaged on the agreement itself, but any newly identified protected areas will go through the land use planning or park planning engagement that will include opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement. The nature agreement has provided fully recoverable funding from the federal government for term positions — in this instance, 13.7 full-time equivalents for this year — and, as indicated, it is fully recoverable.

We are just in the process of identifying and hiring those positions but are certainly cognizant of the fact that the mining industry — and certainly the mining industry in the Klondike area has been involved in Dawson regional land use planning and will continue to be involved in that process. The purpose of the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* was to provide some more, I would say, horsepower for the department and for impacted First Nations in order to continue the process and to move the land use planning — certainly in the Dawson area — further along. But certainly, I hear the Member for Kluane loud and clear with respect to the fact that the mining industry wishes to be involved, which I would believe they have been with respect to land use planning so far.

Specifically with respect to the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, as far as what has already been implemented, the nature agreement supported several initiatives this past field season in order to increase our monitoring and surveys of fish, wildlife, and habitat. For example, the agreement supported work to increase our understanding of northern mountain caribou through the deployment of GPS collars on several Yukon herds and also to assess and monitor biodiversity and the distribution of rare plants and rare ecosystems. This monitoring and these surveys will provide data and information that will inform land use future planning processes.

As well, the Yukon government is starting work with interested Indigenous partners to support capacity toward an Indigenous lens on management approaches for species at risk in the Yukon. As well, in the coming months, a call for an expression of interest will be going out to Yukon First Nations and other transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to enable funding opportunities for projects that will support the agreement’s objective: to protect and conserve land and water in the Yukon. We anticipate that there will be workshops in order to support Indigenous leadership and conservation early in 2024.

The specific answer is 13.75 positions. Hiring is starting right now. I can hopefully provide the member opposite with some details as to how that hiring process is going, but some of the positions will be, for instance, a wildlife biologist, technicians, park planner, director, project coordinator, and policy analyst.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that answer.

One of the most sought-after, happy, awesome — there are a lot of words that you could use about it — that Yukoners love about the Yukon is their campgrounds. They really like their campgrounds. I know they were a little bit disappointed when the minister said that he wasn't going to build a big one with 150 stalls.

But anyway, can the minister provide a little bit more information about the planned upgrades that he is talking about — future infill in some of our current campgrounds — and how many sites were added this summer, where they were added, and what the cost of adding them was?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I can certainly agree wholeheartedly and endorse the comments from the Member for Kluane as to the fact that Yukoners and visitors to the Yukon certainly are very excited and love the Yukon camping experience. I had the honour to be able to travel around the territory this summer to various campsites, which I will get into, but, of course, the big announcement was about Congdon Creek where now there are an additional 41 sites. I understand, in speaking to Parks staff there and also in my travels with Parks staff, that it is becoming a very popular site. In fact, I believe that it is now actually — it's close between the Yukon River campsite in Dawson and Congdon, but it's neck and neck as to which is the largest campsite.

But, yes, the feedback that we receive from both Yukoners and from national and international visitors is very positive with respect to Yukon Parks. I will just provide some background which I think will answer a number of the questions that the Member for Kluane had.

Yukon Parks had a busy 2023 summer season and delivered another fantastic camping experience for Yukoners and visitors. Campgrounds opened on May 4, 2023, ready for Yukoners to enjoy spring camping and a third extended campground season. The Tombstone Interpretive Centre opened on May 13, with the Tombstone Territorial Park backcountry campgrounds opening on June 29.

It was a very exciting season for the Tombstone Territorial Park. This year, the park hosted their first cultural camp with great success, opened its new gallery and exhibition space, and held numerous fireside chats with local elders and community members. I had the opportunity to visit the Tombstone Interpretive Centre in August of this year, and I can confirm that it was all happening. In 2023, the Tombstone Interpretive Centre welcomed 21,435 visitors with 1,840 participating in programs. Tombstone backcountry online reservations for the 2024 season will open in March 2024.

As the 2023 camping season has now wrapped up, Parks staff are working hard to process all of the payments and information received, per the summary, to be shared with the public. In 2024, the Department of Environment will launch a

new online campground reservation system pilot project that will allow campers to book sites ahead of time at selected road-accessible campgrounds.

Parks has invested \$2.4 million in infrastructure upgrades this year to complete improvements to our campgrounds and recreational areas. Improvements to date include the new playgrounds at Marsh Lake, Wolf Creek, and Congdon Creek, and I certainly heard from the Member for Lake Laberge that there seems to be some desire for improvements or a better playground experience at Lake Laberge, which I will certainly direct my team to have a look at. I also know that the Parks staff did a fantastic job at Pine Lake last year and in Dawson as well.

As well, Yukoners will know that five campgrounds received new boat launches this summer and new docks were installed at another three campgrounds. They are those light-brown floating docks, but I saw pictures and they look absolutely fantastic, including at Pine Lake. In July of this year, we opened 41 additional campsites at Congdon Creek. In addition, four walk-in tenting sites at Wolf Creek have recently been installed, and additional sites for Ethel Lake and campground reconstruction there have been delayed but are planned for the spring of 2024, as there were issues of heritage mitigation.

We will continue to improve our park infrastructure, including more boat launch replacements and dock systems in the future. Yukon Parks remains committed to completing the boat launch program while working in partnership with Community Services to deliver on these programs. For the record, Madam Chair, new boat launches were installed at Twin Lakes, Otter Falls, Aishihik Lake, Frenchman Lake, and Ethel Lake. Nunatuk Lake is still underway and is expected to be completed by October 31, which would have to be tomorrow, but we will see. We will keep the House posted as to whether that occurs, but it says “subject to material delivery to the contractor”.

New docks were installed at Pine Lake, Squanga Lake, and the Twin Lakes campground. The Dezadeash Lake and Pine Lake boat launches were replaced in 2021, and the Tagish River boat launch was replaced in 2022. We don't have the stats for this camping season but certainly anticipate to receive those soon. I will look forward to being in a position to report on those stats for the 2024 Spring Sitting.

During the 2022 camping season, we hosted 79,620 visitors for 57,886 campsite nights at our road-accessible campgrounds. This is — not surprisingly, I suppose — a 55-percent increase from 2021 and is only eight percent below the 2019 season, which, of course, was before the COVID pandemic. It will be fascinating to see what our numbers are for 2023. I would say that I will have my fingers crossed that we are now at or even slightly above the 2019 season.

Some of the highlights include the boat launch replacement program. There were supply chain issues and other delivery issues. It got off to a bit of a slow start in 2021-22, but I can certainly commend staff and independent contractors because it was, in my view, quite a banner year for boat launch replacements this year. I know that Yukoners appreciate the work that was done there.

I have more, but for now, that's the high-level survey.

**Mr. Istchenko:** The minister talked about the 41 sites at the Congdon Creek campground. I think I was actually part of building some of those sites when I worked for the department a while ago. Can he confirm whether they were old sites that were just redone and reopened or if they were actually new sites? Can he also confirm if he consulted with the Kluane First Nation and local RV parks and business owners in the area about that? One of the reasons I do ask this is because, quite often, our campgrounds — that campground being one of the main ones — are often closed due to bear activity. I think I am a little concerned about that, so I just want to know what work was done with the local governments there and the business community and how the bear activity has affected closures this summer — and maybe at all the different campgrounds when it comes to bear activity.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I think I can be fairly brief on these answers. I am advised that they were old sites that were refurbished, but they had been closed for approximately 20 years — for some period of time.

Also, in my travels when I was there for the official opening of the new, refurbished sites, I was advised by some of the wildlife technicians that the male or the female — I think that perhaps all soapberries were removed from the area and those were deemed to be significant attractants.

Also, with respect to the question of the Kluane First Nation, the Department of Environment reached out to the Kluane First Nation, but they advised that they did not have the interest or capacity to engage but thanked the Department of Environment for contacting their government.

I am seeing a note here which is consistent with my experience when I attended at Congdon Creek. Regarding bears, the Department of Environment removed the soapberry plants near the campground. However, there were still requests for persons to continue to use hard-side trailers and otherwise to stay within the electric fence area.

In my tour of Congdon Creek as well, as I recall, the electric fence is largely powered by solar power and, from my recollection, it does not actually require that much power to be a deterrent. Of course, there would be a battery backup as well.

The other question that the Member for Kluane had — and I am not familiar with this business operation, but perhaps the Member for Kluane can provide some elaboration if he has some additional information. The Cottonwood campground, which I gather was a private business at one point, is not currently operational or is not open, so there was no opportunity to engage with them, but perhaps there is another business that is in the area.

So, the loop had been closed for 20 years. Most, if not all, soapberries were removed — female soapberries. It was one or the other, but it was the female soapberries that were removed.

There was outreach to the Kluane First Nation. Department staff also reached out to the White River First Nation and they did not receive a response.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that.

There's a new RV park being put in at the south end of Kluane Lake, and there is also an RV park in Destruction Bay.

Anyway, I'm going to move on to roads — the roads that access our campgrounds — such as the Kusawa Lake Road, Watson Lake campground, and many of the other roads.

It's the Department of Environment that advertises and promotes campgrounds and a great camping experience. What they don't tell people is that sometimes the roads aren't very good. It's the Department of Highways and Public Works that does the maintenance on those roads. Of course, the Department of Highways and Public Works — those roads are not priority roads for them. Their priority roads are the main infrastructure loops — and also, they are responsible for the airports, so that would be wintertime snow removal and things like that.

As we increasingly see more of the northern lights and more of a winter tourism season, we're starting to see more people wanting access to the campgrounds year-round.

When it comes to the maintenance of these roads, I'm curious to see what the budget is. I'll give you a really good example of the issues that we have. The busy times for our campgrounds are mainly long weekends. A lot of the times, then, the Highways and Public Works department will go out the day or two before. They will go blade and calcium the road because they want everybody to drive on a smooth road. Everybody drives through this calcium, and their motorhomes and everything are completely covered in dirt and they are unhappy.

Highways and Public Works is trying to get as much done as they can with the limited budget that they see. I'm curious to see if the department is looking at increasing the budget for this, getting on a more regular schedule, or just looking at other maintenance options such as the private sector.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** What I would say, at a high level, is that certainly we would anticipate being in a position to answer some of the specific budget questions when Highways and Public Works returns to Committee of the Whole, as the budget is within Highways and Public Works.

The Department of Environment does not have a dedicated budget for this. We work with the Department of Highways and Public Works to prioritize maintenance of the roads, where possible, and I am advised that we do use the private sector to maintain roads, specifically in the Watson Lake area and particularly when Highways and Public Works does not have capacity.

I was asked — even during this Sitting — about Kusawa Lake. I take the Member for Kluane's point that a lot of the secondary roads, like the Kusawa Lake Road, the Aishihik Lake access road, and Annie Lake Road — a lot of the fairly significant secondary roads in the Yukon — can sometimes be in absolutely wonderful condition, but with some precipitation and heavy use, the rutting and washboarding can happen, in my experience, fairly quickly. I did provide a response even during this Sitting from Highways and Public Works that Kusawa Lake Road, during the last few weeks, had just been bladed. Obviously, sometimes it is a matter of timing.

For the Department of Environment, the roads that have been deemed to be priority roads are Kusawa, Little Salmon, Watson Lake, and Ethel Lake. I know that the Kusawa access



and the Ethel Lake access are quite a number of kilometres, so they do represent a challenge.

What I would say, as far as having had discussions about using some of the Yukon campgrounds even past the shoulder seasons and into the winter, is that I know that Highways and Public Works works with the Department of Environment and some private contractors sometimes in Dawson at the Yukon River campground, and it has been plowed in the winter to allow for cross-country ski trails. That is a good cross-departmental use there.

I also heard — I was in Dawson a few times this summer — when I was at the Klondike River campground, they had a lot of challenges this late spring and early summer. They had, I think, two floods causing significant washouts and they also had a mini — it was pretty close to a tornado. Walking through there, some significant-sized trees had come down. That's sort of answering the question, but at that point, as I understand it, Highways and Public Works did jump into action quite quickly and on a multi-departmental level. We were able to keep the Klondike River campground open. I have also been on the Aishihik campground access road, and I know that some parts of that road were just built into a mountain and there isn't really the proper foundation for the road in places.

It's the Yukon. There are challenges and I know that the staff at the Department of Environment and the hard-working staff at the Department of Highways and Public Works certainly do their best, but as the Member for Kluane well knows, sometimes it really is just timing. It's rain events, and when the calcium chloride comes down and then there is a rain event — and then a certain volume and rutting.

I will certainly do my best to provide additional information, wearing my Highways and Public Works hat with respect to the prioritization, the budgeting, and a bit of a survey or summary as to how it went this past summer with respect to the camping access roads. Anyway, kudos to Highways and Public Works and to the Department of Environment in working together in some of those areas where there were significant challenges brought upon — in the Klondike, the flooding events. I think that there were two flooding events in that valley that had to be dealt with.

I take the Member for Kluane's point with respect to prioritizing and with respect to doing our best to have the roads in the best shape possible at most times in the summer.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Just to stay on that, I know that in my community, I have organized — with a bunch of friends — a pretty big snowmobile race out on Pine Lake for years. It is a short road, but it has always been kept open for the locals and it is quite busy, but now the department — we are happy to see — has actually hired a local private sector guy to keep that campground road open and then, when it is time for the big race day or some of the community events, the private sector will go in there and volunteer their time and equipment for free to do a bit of that work. Maybe that is something we could look at. When the minister mentioned capacity issues, maybe the private sector could help with this bit of an issue too. That is just a little bit more information for the minister.

I want to switch now to my favourite things: hunting and fishing and loving every day and hunting and trapping and everything that goes with it. The minister committed to new hunting opportunities at the Fish and Game Association banquet last year. Can he elaborate now a little bit on what some of the new opportunities were for this past hunting season and maybe what is coming for the next hunting season? Also, did the minister work with all of the boards — the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the local renewable resources councils, the Yukon Trappers Association, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Outfitters Association? There are a lot of good associations that all believe in those opportunities for hunting for conservation. Can the minister just elaborate a little bit on that?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** The Government of Yukon is committed to sustainable management of the Yukon's wildlife to ensure that populations remain healthy and resilient now and for future generations. We are committed to expanding hunting opportunities for Yukoners in areas and for species where conservation concerns do not exist. The Department of Environment is currently undertaking an internal review of all existing hunting restrictions both by species and area. The conservation status of these populations will be evaluated and compared against targeted surveys with a view to easing hunting restrictions where possible.

As a result of this review, we anticipate being able to offer additional hunting opportunities to Yukoners in the 2024-25 season. In the Sifton-Miners Range, survey results in the Sifton-Miners Range moose management unit show the number of moose in this area to be greater than expected. As a result, we were able to increase the number of permits available in that area from 12 to 24. As well, eight new permits for hunting elk in the Takhini valley were made available in 2022 and were once again offered in 2023. These adaptive *Wildlife Act* elk permits are restricted to the harvest of a bull elk with five-point antlers or fewer. These additional permits are part of a two-year pilot project to reduce conflict between elk and agricultural landowners in the Takhini valley.

I will provide a bit of background with respect to surveys. The Department of Environment is committed to collecting robust wildlife population data to evaluate harvest sustainability. We survey and monitor wildlife populations and consider information from licensed harvesters and First Nation, Inuvialuit, and community partners to make informed decisions about harvest opportunities for resident and non-resident hunters.

The Department of Environment does not survey and probably wouldn't be in a position to survey all wildlife populations every year and relies on reports from Yukoners and First Nation and Inuvialuit governments to evaluate harvest sustainability and guide decision-making until the next population survey.

The Department of Environment has dedicated significant resources to collecting and analyzing data to support evidence-based decisions about wildlife populations. We carry out population inventories, collect harvest data from hunters, and perform ecological assessments to gather up-to-date

information. We prioritize areas to survey based on a combination of factors, including harvest levels, access, community concerns, land use planning needs, and the date of the last survey and human activity. There is quite a list of surveys which are occurring.

In 2022, the Department of Environment allocated approximately \$448,000 for three moose-related surveys and \$865,000 for 12 caribou-related projects. I can get the 2023 numbers as well.

We have completed or are in the process of completing wildlife surveys for moose and caribou. The caribou surveys are substantially complete, and wildlife surveys for elk, bison, and deer are in the works.

Surveys for sheep, grizzly bear, black bear, fish, pikas, bats, and ground squirrels were completed this year. We are also researching elk and deer populations in the Takhini valley to better understand their ecology and behaviour. We also track ungulates and other species through the use of cameras deployed in the valley. The data gathered from cameras and collars will help us to manage populations and determine if there is an opportunity to expand Yukon's deer hunt.

I have certainly asked the department — to the member's question — to do a bit of a deep dive on that, because there are certainly anecdotal stories indicating that the now invasive deer population that's coming north appears to be healthy. But I'm certainly not a wildlife biologist and I am not specialist. What I can say for the Assembly today is that, yes, I've heard these anecdotal stories and questions about the possibility of opening up more opportunities for a deer hunt.

The Department of Environment conducts regular engagement with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Fish and Game Association. I have met fairly regularly with the fish and game and I believe I have a meeting scheduled in the near future with fish and game.

Over the course of the summer, I met with Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, Kluane First Nation, Selkirk First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. There may have been others, but certainly I met with leadership for all of those First Nations. Wildlife and hunting opportunities were not the only topic, but certainly they were topics that were raised.

Department of Environment keeps all partners informed by sharing survey results and keeping in touch through our regional biologists. In discussions with my officials, I have certainly asked for précis or summaries of the surveys to be made available sooner than they have historically been made available, because that provides credibility with respect to any assertions that I make with respect to either there being additional opportunities or abundance or there being conservation concerns, as I have certainly heard from the Member for Kluane over the course of the last two and a half years.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Let's stay on that, then — absolutely. The minister was talking about surveys that were done. I do have a copy of the surveys that they were doing because it was provided in his briefing binder from last year, but I want to talk a little bit more about the surveys and the areas that they survey.

Before I ask the minister the question, I will throw the deer population in. The deer population is increasing in game zone 7, 8, and all around Whitehorse and basically Watson Lake. Deer followed farming when the Alaska Highway was built and there are a lot more out there and a lot more opportunities. I will say that I remember maybe a previous minister — it might have been me — asked about that. They needed to come up with a population — so it sounds like you guys are doing that study and a survey, which is great. That would be a great hunting opportunity.

But when it comes to actually doing the surveys in the air, whether in a helicopter or a plane, my question is: Who does the department pick as the observers and spotters in these planes? The other question is: With this information that the department will gather as it comes in after the survey is done — I'm looking for timelines for when the Department of Environment gets the information and they can share it with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the renewable resources councils, Yukon Trappers Association, Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Outfitters Association, or the many other organizations. Because the process laid out under the *Umbrella Final Agreement* where you go through the regulation change proposal to do things like these increased hunting opportunities — that information needs to be provided in a timely manner to these organizations. What assurances can the minister give me that these people will get this information so that they can start working on these processes? Also, who are the observers and spotters when they're out doing the surveys?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Just to back up with respect to the deer permits — just for the record, the Government of Yukon currently offers 12 deer permits per year. Through the permit hunt authorization process in the 2022-23 hunting season, eight deer were harvested in the Yukon. The Yukon's first-ever deer project is currently underway — I guess, tracking project — utilizing both trail cameras and collaring.

The Department of Environment is in the process of accurately determining information on population size and distribution, but I think I provided the message loud and clear that this appears to be a potentially significant opportunity, and we would like to have an assessment available sooner rather than later.

The one response with respect to the time that I have asked the department to strive to work with is a turnaround time for the preliminary two-page summary of between three and six months, and I will certainly be pushing for that to be possible. I think that with more information available sooner, we are certainly in a position to provide that information to all interested parties, including the regional renewable resources councils, impacted First Nations, Yukon Fish and Game Association, and Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

While I am on my feet, I will just say that I attended the AGM of the renewable resources councils in Whitehorse. It's a blur as to the time, but it was this year and it was at the Sternwheeler. I certainly applaud the members of the various renewable resources councils for the work that they do.

This is a fairly technical answer here, but once surveys are completed, staff in the Fish and Wildlife branch compile and error-check the data, create the necessary spatial layers for the survey areas, analyze the data, review the results, and draft a report and accompanying summary documents. The report is then reviewed by management, and preliminary results are shared with affected First Nations and renewable resources councils prior to distribution to the public. But I am cognizant of the fact that the Yukon government — and by extension the Department of Environment — has dedicated pretty significant funds in the last two or maybe even three fiscal years for surveys. It's my view that it's important that this information — with the appropriate checks and balances, which I have here — be provided as soon as it can reasonably be provided. We have heard from our partners in wildlife management that public access to summary survey results is desired and we are working toward that.

With respect to the survey question, I am advised that First Nation governments and First Nation administrations are approached and opportunities are provided to First Nation citizens where possible. Sometimes that is not possible. I am advised that typically surveys are led by Yukon government biologists, and they include First Nation government staff or citizens. Participation in aerial surveys requires certain skillsets and experience in order to ensure that quality survey data is acquired. So, sometimes yes and sometimes no — but attempts are made to engage with First Nation citizens to participate in surveys.

I am advised that the regional resources council AGM was in April. That's when I went to the regional resources council AGM in Whitehorse and met with various council members there.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I have a question about the Kluane sheep hunt. It was cancelled last year because of conservation efforts and concerns from the First Nation. One of the good things about this hunt is the fact that the proceeds from the hunt go to conservation efforts and things that they can do in the community to help with conservation, like trapping incentives. There are many things that it can be put toward. In light of that, the resident hunter tag was cancelled, too.

Can the minister give me an update — if this will be happening again and the status of that?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Kluane First Nation Chief Bob Dickson wrote to the department, to me, in March sharing the Kluane First Nation's concerns and requesting that the Department of Environment take management action under the *Wildlife Act* to help protect sheep populations in the Kluane First Nation traditional territory. In consequence of that, as the member opposite has indicated, the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary sheep permit was not offered this hunting season. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board indicated their support for this cancellation in a letter sent to the director of Fish and Wildlife on April 6 of this year — 2023.

When the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary was surveyed for sheep in 2014 and 2018, our survey results in adjacent areas of Kluane Park and Brooks Arm also showed low sheep estimates.

We surveyed these areas again in July 2022 and found similar results to previous surveys.

In fact, we have observed the lowest number of sheep in Brooks Arm since we started monitoring in 1974.

Similarly, Parks Canada recently reported low adult sheep populations in the Tachäl Dhäl survey area — the lowest since their monitoring program began in 1977. Our Alaskan counterparts note similar patterns on the Alaska side of Kluane National Park, particularly in recent years.

In the summer of 2023, we conducted further aerial surveys of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary and the Brooks Arm, Ruby Range, Donjek, Nutzotin, and Flat Top sheep management units. We will continue our long-term monitoring of population estimates and recruitment rates across these areas to determine the need for further management actions.

However, specifically with respect to the question that the member opposite asked, due to stated conservation concerns and some of the data that we are in receipt of, the Kluane First Nation cancelled their auction of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary sheep permit for the 2023-24 season. In a spirit of co-management, the Yukon government also cancelled the 2023-24 lottery for single-permit hunt authorization. There is a request for this to be at least for a period of two seasons, which will include next season.

The Yukon government will work with affected First Nations in southwest Yukon, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and stakeholders to amend the wildlife regulations accordingly. We are committed to working with our Yukon First Nation partners and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board to develop a sheep management plan for the southwest Yukon in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of sheep in the area.

This summer, I had the opportunity to meet with Kluane First Nation Chief and Council in Burwash on this very topic and we certainly have committed to continue an active dialogue on this file. I know that surveys took place in the summer of 2023, as well, and I hope to be in a position to provide that data in the near future.

With respect to some of the areas, 2022 was the first time that there had been a survey in quite a number of years. So, in consequence of that, the department took the position that, in order to solidify the results, it would be a good idea to survey some of the impacted areas again in 2023.

The specific answer to the Member for Kluane's question on the wildlife sanctuary sheep permit is that there is a request from Kluane First Nation for that not to proceed again in the upcoming hunting season and there will be a request for the Yukon government to take the same action again for this season.

**Mr. Istchenko:** Madam Chair, I thank the minister for that answer.

The government stopped doing multi-year quotas for outfitters because of a legal opinion that they got that is contradictory to the *Wildlife Act*. Now, multi-year quotas are one of the most important things for outfitters because people often book hunts years in advance. The current situation creates

a lack of certainty. It's also very positive from a wildlife management standpoint.

Will the minister agree to table or show us the legal opinion and also propose an act change through the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board process to reinstate this multi-year quota for outfitters?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Madam Chair, we recognize that there continues to be a few outstanding issues of concern between the outfitters and the Department of Environment. We are committed to resolving them collaboratively with the outfitting industry. In order to improve support for the outfitting community, the Department of Environment hired an outfitter liaison officer in May of 2023. The outfitter liaison officer has been proactively working with Yukon outfitters and the Yukon Outfitters Association in order to answer questions, address specific issues of concern, and identify potential ways to resolve them.

We recognize the certainty that multi-year quotas provide to Yukon outfitters; however, as indicated, multi-year and over-harvest quotas do not comply with the *Wildlife Act*. I have reviewed the legal opinion, received advice, and asked for a follow-up briefing on this, and this is the conclusion reached based on statutory interpretation.

As the member opposite knows, the Department of Environment has implemented an interim solution to provide certainty, flexibility, and predictability to outfitters. The interim process states that, unless the legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place to establish quotas. I understand that in the discussions that have occurred between my officials and the Yukon Outfitters Association that, first of all, the so-called letter of comfort states that unless a legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place. Also, over the course of the last year and perhaps even longer, if there is an alternate legal opinion, our legal department would certainly review same, but we haven't been provided with an alternate legal opinion that indicates that the current provisions provide for multi-year quotas. This interim process also allows outfitters who had quota agreements prior to 2022 to access unused moose and caribou quotas from the previous four years, up to a maximum value.

We remain committed to working with the outfitting industry, renewable resources councils, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, licenced hunters, and Yukon First Nations in order to ensure a fair, transparent, and sustainable solution.

The Department of Environment's perspective is that there is flexibility and that it does provide certainty and that it is unlikely that quotas would be changed — or can be changed, really, even legally — unless certain preconditions are met.

We agree at a high level that the modernization of guidelines is necessary for a variety of reasons, including that they conform with the Yukon *Wildlife Act*, address Yukon's legal obligations to consult with First Nations, and to better

align them with how wildlife management is conducted in the Yukon.

The Member for Kluane did ask me a question about the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. If the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board does engage in this process, it will be a comprehensive consultation process that will take some time and, of course, Yukon outfitters will be significantly involved in that process. With respect to that consultation — any possible *Wildlife Act* change will, of course, involve policy work on many topics and it will take some time to reach recommendations.

**Mr. Istchenko:** The minister said that he received another legal opinion. I am wondering if it has been shared with the industry. I don't know if the minister understands how important having certainty in the outfitting industry is. Before this change, I think, over the past decades, there was one appeal. There are appeals everywhere now, which isn't good for the industry. There is no certainty for the industry. So, the question I asked — if the minister would just share that information, his legal opinion, and look at what needs to be changed in the act, let the outfitters do what the outfitters do, and go through the process set out in the *Umbrella Final Agreement* in chapter 16 where you go through the regulation change proposal — a simple proposal put forward by the minister would solve this problem.

I will move on. I asked this question in the House about the request from the Fish and Wildlife Management Board to the Premier requesting that the outfitter guidelines be reviewed. The minister said that the correspondence had been received. It's in the process of being reviewed and there will be due consideration as to the next steps moving forward.

I want to ask the question again like I did before. I want to ask him because the uncertainty in the industry right now is not good. We just talked about that. I just want to ask him if he has accepted the recommendations in the letter that he has received. If so, has that launch been reviewed, and what is the timeline for this review, and — I am hoping — will the industry be involved?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I will keep my response fairly brief here, but absolutely, the Department of Environment and I recognize the importance of certainty. The two parties may disagree as to the comfort letter providing certainty. It seems to be providing some level of certainty, but obviously, reasonable people can disagree on that.

With respect to the legal opinion, I'm advised that, in consultation with the Yukon outfitter liaison committee, the summary of the legal opinion has been provided multiple times to the industry, and the relevant sections and the relevant interpretation of those sections have been communicated to the outfitter liaison committee on numerous occasions. There is no mystery as to what the concern is.

Madam Chair, I can also advise, for the record, that the Department of Environment has met with the outfitter liaison committee on numerous occasions — just for the record: October 26, 2021; February 16, 2022; May 3, 2022; December 13, 2022; March 17, 2023; May 11, 2023; and a planned meeting in early December 2023.

Certainly, the Department of Environment is in regular contact. I will just repeat myself, but for the record, we agree that modernization of the guidelines is necessary for a variety of reasons, including to ensure that they conform with the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and address the Yukon's legal obligation to consult First Nations to better align with how wildlife management is conducted in the Yukon.

The Government of Yukon has responded to the board inviting them to initiate the review — the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. As far as the clarity, like I said, I think people can disagree, but with respect to multi-year quotas, the interim process states that unless there is a legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor that necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place to establish quotas. It also allows outfitters who had quota agreements prior to 2022 to access unused moose and caribou quotas from the previous four years, up to a maximum value. That has been the status quo for the last two and a half years.

The legal advice is that the *Wildlife Act* was being misinterpreted and had been misinterpreted for many, many, many years. So, yes — does it require some work? It absolutely does. If there is this consultation process with respect to proposed amendments to the *Wildlife Act*, it will in all likelihood be a multi-year process. Yukon outfitters will absolutely be involved, as will be a number of other parties.

My advice is that officials from the Department of Environment have met with the Yukon outfitters liaison committee on numerous occasions, and the summary of the legal opinion has been communicated.

If the Yukon Outfitters Association, as I indicated previously, were in a position to receive a different legal opinion that disagreed and said that it's evident from the current *Wildlife Act* that multi-year quotas can be implemented on the licence at the beginning of each YG fiscal year, each April 1 — I know we're not in the assuming game in this business, but I would think that — I won't assume — that opinion would have been forthcoming in the last two and a half years. I think that there generally has been a status quo and there is certainly a commitment to work with outfitters and many groups with respect to the modernization of the *Wildlife Act*. But as indicated, it's anticipated that the consultations will be multi-year with many interested parties and it will take some time, but there is certainly a commitment to have outfitters absolutely involved in the process.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I asked a question last year about the trapping cabin land application in the Yukon. The Yukon government lands department is treating the application like a house with a \$300,000 price tag, and actually, a line cabin is just a basic small little cabin, and this is causing hardship for the people who would like to build one — the time lines. For the trapper, it's about safety. It's about when it's cold and having a place to go. You get stuck and sometimes you get wet, hypothermia, or frostbite and the other dangers that come with trapping. Those cabins are very good. You have a breakdown and you need a place to stay. I would ask the minister to take immediate action to expedite the permitting process for these

trapping cabin land applications, especially for the line cabins. What work has the minister done since then so I can let the trappers know?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I had a brief conversation with my officials on this matter. I believe that this is an Energy, Mines and Resources issue. It's a fairly specific topic, but my recollection is that we have written to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources on this matter relatively recently. I am advised that there may have been a recent response as well, so I can certainly get back to the member opposite with respect to his specific question and his advocacy for this one trapper.

Just for the record, trapping is one of the Yukon's oldest industries and it plays an important role in the territory. Traditionally, it was practised by First Nations to provide food, clothing, and material for trade. The trapping industry in Yukon and elsewhere is undergoing change due to the industry's economic markets and social acceptance. We continue to support the Yukon Trappers Association, which provides a collective voice for trappers. The Conservation Officer Services branch offers a mandatory multi-day trapping workshop for those who would like to get a trapper or assistant trapper licence. This course covers several topics including harvest ethics, First Nation perspectives, safety and survival, and humane trapping methods. Trapper education helps to ensure compliance with trapping regulations and that trapping is done sustainably and respectfully.

The member opposite's question is specifically with respect to a trapper's cabin. I gather that the applicant wishes to have matters perhaps streamlined in a certain manner. I am just checking to see if there are any other notes with respect to this.

Recognizing that the safety of trappers is an important aspect of the trapping industry, trappers are offered the ability to apply for land for cabins through the trapping cabin land application policy. Applications under this policy can take time, as they are subject to regulatory review that includes consultation with affected First Nations — in this case, I am advised that it is the Carcross/Tagish First Nation — to examine impacts of a cabin location on wildlife and engage with stakeholders in the application area.

Occasionally, these types of applications trigger the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, but as indicated, I will endeavour to get back to the member opposite with respect to his specific question this afternoon.

**Mr. Istchenko:** I thank the minister for that. This will probably be my last question before we take a break, and so I do want to thank all the staff who are in here today, because after the break, we will turn it over to the Third Party.

I have a question about the Tagish River habitat protection plan. The minister had a big celebration last summer, but the implementation committee had not really completed their work yet, so I am wondering if the work has been done and if the landowners were given the opportunity to be heard. The big question for the landowners — and the uncertainty for those along the river who would like to either improve their existing docks or add new docks — is: Is that actually going to be a possibility?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** In November 2022, the Government of Yukon and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Government of Canada signed the final management plan for the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area. The management plan will help conserve fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, including migratory waterfowl, while recognizing the relationship and connection to this important area by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and community members.

The completion of the plan also marks a milestone in the implementation of the *Carcross/Tagish First Nation Final Agreement*. There was a community ceremony to celebrate this achievement, which took place this spring on April 1 in Tagish. I don't believe I was able to make that. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was able to attend.

The steering community engaged extensively with stakeholders and the public to develop the recommended plan. The main issues raised by community members during the engagement was related, as the member opposite indicated, to a recommendation to reduce shoreline development and use and issues around docks.

An implementation committee has recently been formed consisting of members of the three parties and representatives from the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council and the Tagish Local Advisory Council. The implementation committee will develop a specific shoreline implementation plan with input from local residents to identify timely, creative, and workable ways to address concerns with shoreline development as these residents look to rebuild and repair following, among other things, recent flooding events.

I'm advised that the implementation committee has been formed, which includes the Tagish Local Advisory Council. The group has met several times, making good progress on a shoreline development guidance.

Through the implementation of the management plan, the Tagish River will continue to have a healthy ecosystem and wildlife populations, while providing clarity and certainty to land and water users in the area.

The implementation committee, formed by all three parties, will oversee and collaborate on the implementation of the management plan recommendations. Implementing the plan is a priority and it will take focused effort by all parties to work on a shoreline implementation plan and other important tasks as laid out in the management plan.

So, just to loop back, the implementation committee has been formed and the group has met several times, making good progress on shoreline development guidance.

**Chair:** Do members wish to take a brief recess?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Chair:** Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

*Recess*

**Chair:** Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

**MLA Tredger:** I am delighted to be discussing the Department of Environment today. Thank you so much to the officials who are in the room for joining us. Thank you to the folks listening in as well. I am very much looking forward to the discussion.

I want to start by asking about something that the minister said on Thursday about the *Species at Risk Act*. This was in Question Period, and he was referring to the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. He said — quote: “This new funding will also support engagement with First Nations and Inuvialuit to build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk moving forward, including if we should go ahead with legislation for species at risk...”

So, I was quite surprised to hear the “if” — “... if we should go ahead with ... species at risk...” I am wondering if the minister can confirm: Are we going ahead with species at risk legislation, or is that decision yet to be made?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I will answer the question and then provide a bit of background. Yes, I think that we have had this exchange over the course of the last two years with respect to species at risk, but the bottom line is, yes, our intention is to proceed with the species at risk legislation, but we need to work with First Nations and many other partners, and we cannot assume the results of consultation.

I will just provide a bit of background.

As Yukoners, we have a unique connection to the territory's wildlife. We have a duty to monitor and protect species at risk, including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, insects, and plants. The Yukon has 48 species currently listed as being at risk under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, while another 10 species are under review. There are specific legislative tools in place to list and conserve species at risk in other parts of Canada and this is a priority for the Government of Yukon as well.

In December 2022, we signed the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. This commits us to increased surveying and monitoring of species at risk and engaging with First Nations and the Inuvialuit on approaches to managing species at risk. As a result, Yukon's capacity and resources for collaborative work with other parties on species at risk matters are significantly increased over the next three years. This work will include, among other things: long-term monitoring of little brown bats in southern Yukon, including the installation and maintenance of bat houses to shelter and protect maternity colonies at risk in the boreal forest; the annual monitoring of collared pika at several hundred sites in Tombstone and Kusawa territorial parks; the investigation of the potential impacts of winter recreation like snowmobiling, dog mushing, and cross-country skiing on woodland caribou in southern Yukon; the monitoring of the Aishihik wood bison herd in the southwest Yukon and the transboundary Nordquist herd in the southeast Yukon; the remote camera trap monitoring of grizzly bears on the Klondike Plateau and in the South Beringia Priority Place; the monitoring of wolverine population trends using non-invasive camera traps in multiple areas of the Yukon;

and new and expanded monitoring of at-risk vascular plants and alpine meadow and dune ecosystems. This new funding will also support engagement with First Nations and Inuvialuit to build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk, including if we should go ahead with legislation for species at risk in the Yukon.

That is the nub of the matter, Madam Chair. With this funding from the Canada-Yukon bilateral nature accord, we will build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk moving forward, including if we should, in fact, go ahead with legislation for species at risk in the Yukon. But certainly, the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* increases Yukon's capacity and resources to work collaboratively with other parties on a variety of species at risk matters over the next three years.

So, yes, intent to proceed — yes. These resources that we have will certainly assist and provide metaphorical additional horsepower in order to move this file forward, but certainly there will be a great deal of consultation and collaboration required.

**MLA Tredger:** I really appreciate the beginning and end of the minister's reply, because they were very direct to the question, and I am hoping we can have a pretty fast back-and-forth where we really stick to the questions. The rest of the information is very interesting, but I do have a lot that I am hoping to ask today.

I am happy to hear that it is this government's intent to proceed with species at risk legislation, assuming the agreement of their partners. That makes sense to me.

In annex 4 of the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, it lays out some of the specific commitments. Under "Develop species at risk legislation", it says that Cabinet approval — and this, I believe, is to formally begin legislative development — is to be sought in the fiscal year 2023-24. So, we have about six months of this fiscal year left.

Has that Cabinet approval already been sought, or is it on track to be decided by the end of the fiscal year?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I am advised that before the end of the fiscal year, the Department of Environment hopes to have funding agreements in place to support the work that was asked about and will then be seeking a Cabinet mandate on the management approach.

Calls for expressions of interest will be going out to Yukon First Nations and other transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to enable funding opportunities for projects that will support the agreement's objective to protect and conserve land and water in the Yukon. We anticipate that there will be workshops to support Indigenous leadership and conservation early in 2024.

To answer the specific question, it appears that we are generally on target with respect to the scheduled work plan.

**MLA Tredger:** That's great to hear. Congratulations to the minister and all his staff for pulling that off, because it's not an easy thing to stay on time, so I appreciate that.

I understand that the Dempster fibre line project experienced some significant deviations from what was

submitted to the YESAB — that instead of drilling underneath streams, large parts of vegetation along the rivers and creeks were mowed back, and this was on fish-bearing streams, which, of course, has the potential to impact wildlife, including fish. I'm wondering if the minister can tell me what the government has done to address this and what the steps will be going forward.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I'll try to keep it fairly brief and undertake to provide an answer to the specific question — from the Department of Environment.

But just briefly, for everyone — for Yukoners perhaps listening — with respect to the Dempster fibre, this year, installation work exceeded the targets set in the spring of 2023, and 780 kilometres of fibre have been installed as of the end of October 2023. The remaining work includes aerial attachments to existing power poles in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, splicing of the fibre, and testing and commissioning of the 800-kilometre line. Work is seasonal and most of the crews have demobilized for the winter now.

With respect to environmental protection, input from Yukon University scientists as well as First Nation traditional knowledge-keepers was incorporated to inform various environmental components during the design of the project. Environmental protection is a key value of this project. Stantec and Tetra Tech are subcontracted to mitigate the impacts of this project on the environment, particularly on permafrost. The contractor follows an environmental plan with specific directions that were approved through the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board process to protect values such as flora and fauna, wetlands and water bodies, and other sensitive environments.

A second round of environmental monitor training was provided to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and Gwich'in Tribal Council citizens. There were 16 participants who successfully completed the training and are eligible to work on the Dempster fibre project as environmental monitors.

Just briefly — because I know that there were questions about aerial installations, and this won't take long — the preferred installation method, of course, is putting cable into the ground. This method offers the greatest protection to the cable and helps to preserve the landscape and environmental values such as wetlands and habitats. Specialized equipment is used to exert minimal ground pressure to create a shallow trench where the conduit is laid and immediately buried.

In areas where this equipment cannot be used, including river and roadway crossings, we use horizontal directional drilling. A small hole measuring approximately 75 millimetres is drilled below the surface where the fibre conduit is placed. This was used to assist in crossing under the Arctic Red, Peel, and Mackenzie rivers without disturbing the flow of the waters. This can only be done in suitable soil and not through rocky areas.

The last option — and the one that drew some attention — is the installation of new poles for an aerial installation, which is only used when we encounter hard rock or unstable, clay-like soil. Aerial installations are our last and least preferred option

and are used in rare instances only when all other installation methods will not be effective. I am also advised that it is the most cost-ineffective method. So, certainly from a contractual perspective, the GROL — the overall contractor — would not be interested in it.

I did have numbers with respect to the number of kilometres that had aerial installation, and they still remain at a low percentage of the 800 kilometres.

Stantec and Tetra Tech are subcontracted on the Environment file. I can likely provide some additional details to the Member for Whitehorse Centre should they wish to receive that, but the project is going well. We hope that it is — well, politicians making promises — operational by late 2024 or early 2025.

**MLA Tredger:** I really do appreciate the back-and-forth that we have going here.

Is the minister aware of any investigations into the environmental practices or environmental concerns related to the Dempster project by his government or any other levels of government?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Could the Member for Whitehorse Centre please repeat the question?

**MLA Tredger:** Is the minister aware of any investigations into environmental violations or concerns related to the project, either by his level of government or any other levels of government? I would be curious to know either about closed investigations or ongoing investigations.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I believe that if there is information available, it is likely more in the control or knowledge of the Department of Highways and Public Works. As I am the Minister of Highways and Public Works, I can commit to a legislative return answering that specific question.

**MLA Tredger:** Thank you to the minister. I would appreciate that. That would be great.

I would like to talk a little bit now about *Our Clean Future*. As per the latest report of the *Our Clean Future* committee, the next annual *Our Clean Future* report is expected in the fall of 2023. Looking outside, I would say that we are into winter now and I have not seen that report yet. It usually comes out in August, so we are getting quite late here. Does the minister have an updated timeline for that report?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Since the release of *Our Clean Future* in 2020, 43 actions have been completed, 87 are in progress, and six are yet to begin, but we have made significant progress on many of our commitments. There is still a lot of work required to meet our 45-percent greenhouse gas emission target reduction by 2030. We are working with industry to establish, as you know, a mining emission intensity target for quartz and placer mining operations. We will continue to build on *Our Clean Future* as we learn more and implement new actions. This will be reflected in future annual reports.

We will continue to work with experts, stakeholders, and partner governments across the territory and beyond to identify opportunities to accelerate and intensify our efforts to reach our ambitious targets.

As the member opposite will know, we established the Yukon Climate Leadership Council to provide advice and

perspective to support us in meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets. We are working to integrate the work of the council directly into *Our Clean Future* and to continue to implement existing actions that align with their recommendations.

Also, with the end of the second Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change in 2022, we are exploring how to continue mentorship opportunities on climate change for the important voice of youth.

The release is somewhat later than last year. My notes indicate — I believe that the cover said August, but the actual release date was September 12, 2022. Obviously, this release will be later. Our commitment is to release by the end of the year. Some of the additional complexities involve integrating the findings of the Yukon Climate Leadership Council and some of the recommendations from the second Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change — so, yes, soon and, in any event, a commitment to release before the end of the year.

**MLA Tredger:** Lots of follow-up questions there — the minister said that there are 43 actions in progress and six that are yet to begin. Is that as reported in the 2022 report on the 2021 year, or is that the information that will be in the upcoming report?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** I do not have the most recent annual report. I am advised that the annual report that will be released by the end of this year includes the status of actions from 2022, and these numbers, I believe, will be substantially what will be released, but I haven't seen the report card. As indicated, it will be released shortly.

**MLA Tredger:** It is a shame, because it is going to be spring 2024 before we can debate in this Legislature what happened in 2022 on these actions. That doesn't feel urgent, that doesn't feel like an emergency, and that doesn't feel like the intensity with which we need to be moving toward these actions. I do look forward to that report and I look forward to debating it in the spring or discussing it in the spring. I hope that it comes as quickly as possible.

The minister has mentioned that it will have responses to the Yukon Climate Leadership Council's report. I mean, that is good. They have been waiting for over a year on a reply. They have been waiting over a year for a response, as that happened last September. September 2022 was when the report came out. It looks like they will be waiting another month or two. I just can't really imagine pouring myself into that kind of work — they felt so passionate about it and called to — and putting my everything into producing this report and then to sit in silence for over a year.

I've said this many times in the Legislature, and I'm sure I will say it again — I hope I won't say it again, and I hope that we will have the report soon — but I just can't imagine that people who experienced that are going to want to come back and do work with this government again. I can't imagine that the people doing that are going to believe that their work matters. It does; it matters so much that we find ways forward and find ways to reach our goals as a territory and as a world, because it feels like, with every season, the climate anxiety and



climate dread mounts. The toll that climate change is taking on our world is mounting.

I want to pick up on another thing that the minister said, which is the intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target. That's I9 in *Our Clean Future*. It reads: "Establish an intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target for the Yukon mining industry and additional actions needed to reach the target by 2022" — so, 10 months ago. It lists Environment and EMR as the leads. I am hoping the minister can give me an update on that.

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** With respect to the Climate Leadership Council, first of all, their work is certainly very much appreciated. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I met with them on a number of occasions, but importantly, we also met with them on a few occasions after their report had been tabled and there were a number of debrief sessions. A lot of their work has been reviewed and analyzed and has been given scrutiny — and reported back to at least the chairs — as to the ability to implement some of their suggestions or their initiatives and which areas would meaningfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions and which ones would independent analyses reveal might be double-counting or maybe less effective in reducing greenhouse gases.

I don't disagree that it has taken a bit of time to integrate the Climate Leadership Council's work, but after their work was completed, as I indicated, there were one or two — perhaps the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources met even more times — with the Climate Leadership Council. There was feedback provided and scrutiny and analysis of their work, which was communicated to them. We were absolutely respectful of the time and energy that was spent on the valuable work that they accomplished.

With respect to the mining intensity targets, I will certainly urge the Member for Whitehorse Centre to direct follow-up questions in Committee of the Whole for Energy, Mines and Resources with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Back to the Climate Leadership Council: The Climate Leadership Council recommendations were reviewed by Navius Research where they undertook a third-party verification of potential emissions reductions. From there, recommendations were reviewed using the eight decision-making criteria that were developed alongside municipal and Indigenous partners. That was an element of the scrutiny and analysis of the valuable work that the Climate Leadership Council did.

With respect to mining intensity targets, briefly, at a very high level, the Government of Yukon is working toward establishing an intensity-based target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions per unit of production in the mining sector. The Government of Yukon recognizes that our approach is unique and ambitious and we are taking the time needed to get it right. We are working with a consultant and the mining industry to set baselines and find solutions that enable industry to achieve the targets.

In any event, an intensity-based approach accounts for progress made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, encourages mine operators to innovate and adopt low carbon practices, and

accounts for the growth of substantial year-to-year fluctuations that occur in the Yukon's mining sector. The mining-intensity approach recognizes the difference between the types of activities undertaken by different quartz and placer operations throughout their mining lifecycles. Mining emissions are included in the economy-wide net-zero 2050 target legislated in the *Clean Energy Act*.

Briefly, back to the Climate Leadership Council, it's important to properly analyze and capture the recommendations from the Yukon Climate Leadership Council. This is the first year we have incorporated recommendations into new actions and we are committed to reflect their important work into the latest annual report.

We have worked closely with other departments to incorporate new actions into *Our Clean Future*. This work is critical to get right. I certainly understand the urgency of the matter. But the report will be released in due course and, in any event, before the end of the year.

**MLA Tredger:** In the 2021 annual report for *Our Clean Future*, which is the most recent publicly available report, it lists EMR and Environment as the leads on intensity-based greenhouse gas reductions action I9. Is Environment no longer lead on that action?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Madam Chair, to answer the question from the Member for Whitehorse Centre, yes, EMR is currently the lead on action I9, which is: "Establish an intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target for Yukon's mining industry and additional actions needed to reach the target by 2022." EMR is closely connected with stakeholders that will be impacted by I9, and therefore, it makes more sense for EMR to lead this action.

The Climate Change Secretariat provides support for some of the more technical actions due to its significant network of professionals across Canada. Yes, so EMR does have the lead; Environment is in the background providing technical expertise and liaising with expertise from across the country.

**MLA Tredger:** That answer worries me, because I think the Department of Environment has a focus on protecting the environment. I think that, because that perspective is no longer a lead on this action, it is a concern. Does the minister think that having his department removed as the lead on this action is consistent with his action of serving the goal of protecting the environment?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** Madam Chair, just to confirm, EMR has always been the lead on this file; they are the regulator of the industry, and Environment is here to support. That has been the situation from the get-go with respect to *Our Clean Future* and this action item. Many actions in *Our Clean Future* are collaborative; we play a role in implementing this action, given our role and coordination in reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We continue to be committed to reaching our OCF goals regardless of which department is leading the actions. *Our Clean Future* is an all-of-government strategy and requires all of government to work together for climate change.

Energy, Mines and Resources has always been the department that has been negotiating the intensity-based targets with the industry. That is the situation; understand that.

**MLA Tredger:** I am going to try to squeeze in one more question here in a complete shift of topic to animal protection. Currently, as far as I know, all small animal care happens through humane societies in the Yukon or similar rescues. Now that there have been changes, is the government planning to run any of its own programs for small animals?

**Hon. Mr. Clarke:** The new *Animal Protection and Control Act* modernizes the Yukon's animal protection and control framework to better protect Yukoners and animals in the territory. The new act strengthens enforcement of animal care and control, improves animal welfare standards, and regulates animal-related businesses.

While the act received assent in the 2022 Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly, the act will not come into force until the regulations are developed. We expect the regulations to be complete and the act to come into effect by the spring of 2024.

The act provides a broad framework for animal care and control, and regulations will provide the specific detail required to implement this new law. It's important that these regulations reflect Yukoners' values, our relationships with animals, and our way of life.

We have engaged broadly on the development of the *Animal Protection and Control Act* control regulations with industry associations, municipalities, First Nations, the public, and interest groups. The engagement focused on standards of care for domestic animals, exotic animals, control standards for livestock, and prohibited cosmetic surgeries. A report of what we heard during engagement will be released later this fall.

We are considering all feedback from the engagement process as we develop the regulations for the new *Animal Protection and Control Act*. Once the regulations are developed, we will consider how best to support communities and governments that are interested in taking on animal protection and control enforcement roles.

The answer to the member opposite's question is: At this juncture, the Department of Environment in the Yukon government is not interested in occupying the field, but certainly, as I indicated in my final comments, once the regulations are developed, we will consider how best to support communities, governments, and organizations that are interested in taking on animal protection and control enforcement roles.

That is, for now, the state of play. As I have indicated previously, discussions with the Humane Society Yukon are ongoing. They continue in this year.

However, Madam Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale North that the Chair report progress.

*Motion agreed to*

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Madam Chair, I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

**Chair:** It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

*Motion agreed to*

*Speaker resumes the Chair*

**Speaker:** I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole?

### **Chair's report**

**Ms. Blake:** Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

**Speaker:** You have heard the report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

**Some Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** I declare the report carried.

**Hon. Mr. Streicker:** Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

*Motion agreed to*

**Speaker:** This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

*The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.*

### **The following sessional paper was tabled October 30, 2023:**

35-1-121

*Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees* (October 30, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

### **The following legislative returns were tabled October 30, 2023:**

35-1-105

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — CSFY Dawson Program (McLean)

35-1-106

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — allocation for experiential learning spaces (McLean)

35-1-107

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. McLeod related to general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — landfills receiving compactors (Mostyn)