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HANSARD

Monday, April 11, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2022 Spring 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 — Emily Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

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

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
Emily Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

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**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, April 11, 2022 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement

Speaker: The Chair will make a statement regarding a trend that the Chair has observed regarding the use of the rubric “Tabling Returns and Documents”. During Tabling Returns and Documents on Thursday, April 7, 2022, the Minister of Health and Social Services tabled a legislative return that was nominally in response to an oral question asked by the Leader of the Third Party the preceding day. In fact, the legislative return was intended to repudiate the preamble to the oral question that had been delivered by the Leader of the Third Party. The attachment to the legislative return was composed entirely of quotes by the minister as excerpted from Hansard.

The same day during “Tabling Returns and Documents”, the Leader of the Third Party tabled pages from Hansard from a range of dates to draw attention to quotes by the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Other members have also stood under the rubric “Tabling Returns and Documents” to table Hansard excerpts this Sitting. Hansard is already within the public record of the Assembly and, as such, it is not necessary to table Hansard excerpts or pages of Hansard. The Clerks do not hold documents that are photocopies or excerpts of Hansard in the records of the Assembly as the complete Hansard already exists.

With respect to the use by the Minister of Health and Social Services of the legislative return that provided Hansard quotes by way of a response, this is an inappropriate use of a legislative return. This document will not be entered into the Assembly’s working papers, and I am returning it to the member. Legislative returns should be used to answer questions by members, not to correct another member’s record as perceived by a minister.

As well, on March 31, 2022, the Chair delivered a statement regarding the description that can be provided when tabling a document under the rubric “Tabling Returns and Documents”. As mentioned in that statement: “The rubric of tabling returns and documents in the Daily Routine is not an opportunity for debate or for members to make statements. Members should restrict their description of documents to be tabled to the item’s date, title of the document or article, or a brief description if the document does not have a title.

“Descriptions should not constitute commentary or comparisons. If members wish to make members’ statements, then members should change the Standing Orders accordingly.”

However, in the sitting days following this statement, the Chair has observed that the Minister of Community Services tabled documents that meet the letter but not the spirit of the Speaker’s statement. This includes the minister tabling on

April 5 and April 7 newly created materials with titles designed specifically to form a narrative. This practice ignores the spirit of the Speaker’s statement and should stop. These documents are not going to form part of the working papers of the Assembly.

As I have advised members previously, and will use this opportunity to strongly advise members again, if members would like to deliver members’ statements, provisions for which exist in most other Canadian legislative assemblies, then members should add a provision for this rubric to the rules.

Thank you for your attention.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the tribute to National Wildlife Week, we have a number of guests in the gallery. From the Department of Environment, we have Christine Cleghorn, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Environmental Sustainability, and Kevin Johnstone, the manager of field operations for the south region.

As well, from CPAWS we have Candace Dow, who is the community outreach coordinator, and Maegan Elliott, who is the conservation coordinator — if we could welcome those individuals to the gallery.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to help welcome a number of special guests who are attending for the ministerial statement later on the Order Paper.

I apologize if I have missed anyone. I know there were lots of folks coming in at the last moment. These students are from the Wood Street school:

Lahela Reid, Jesse Amos, Teagan Ewing, Heidi Vallier, Bria Hindson, Amelie Guilbeault, Em Baker, Keiran Cowie, and Menna Zanger. Welcome. I’m happy that you are here today.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Wildlife Week

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise today to pay tribute to National Wildlife Week. National Wildlife Week is an annual celebration of the natural world and the plants and animals that live in it. It is an occasion to raise awareness of the need for environmental conservation and actions that we can take as stewards of this land. Together as Yukoners, it is important to recognize and appreciate the environment where we are fortunate to live.

Each year, National Wildlife Week gives us an opportunity to celebrate the Yukon environment and the wildlife with which we share this land. Yukon is home to 74 mammal species, 36 fish species, 239 bird species, four amphibians, more than

1,700 types of plants, 551 lichen species, 440 fungi species, and over 6,500 invertebrate species — insects, spiders, and the like.

We are fortunate to derive many foods, services, and recreational and cultural practices from the biodiversity around us. With spring comes bears, waking from hibernation. Although we must remain bear-aware year-round, spring is one of the most common times that bears are looking for food and a good time to check your property for attractants. Put away your bird feeder, clean up and contain any recycling or garbage, and turn on your electric fencing around your livestock.

Foxes are another wildlife common to Yukoners, and kits are often seen in the spring. We must remember not to feed foxes or any wildlife. Foxes are opportunists and they will take food if it is offered, but they are perfectly capable of finding their own food and do not need our help. There is a cost to feeding wildlife — a cost to the animal, a cost to the ecosystem, and, if you are caught by a conservation officer, a cost to you as well.

In April, we are lucky enough to see thousands of swans, ducks, and geese rest and feed on M'Clintock Bay, a stopover on their long migration to northern nesting grounds. The Celebration of Swans month-long spring celebration is our kickoff to a full year of wildlife viewing programs that aim to provide free, informative, and interesting events. This includes our wildlife discovery series in the summer and winter and our BioBlitz event that will be held in Beaver Creek this year. These programs offer the chance to get up close as stewards of the land and the wildlife that we protect. By doing this, we foster recognition and support for sustainable conservation practices so that future generations can enjoy these experiences.

I would like to recognize the many people and organizations involved in making these initiatives possible — events that continually support, protect, and bring awareness about Yukon's biodiversity. Conserving and protecting wildlife and their habitat not only saves animals and beautiful natural spaces for us to enjoy, it also saves our future.

I encourage everyone to take some time to get outside and take advantage of the great wildlife viewing in our territory. Let's use National Wildlife Week as a reminder to do what we can to conserve and protect the wildlife that makes Yukon so special.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize April 10 to 16 as National Wildlife Week here in Canada. This week was created in 1974 by the National Wildlife Federation with the goal of raising awareness about the importance of wildlife and wildlife conservation across the country.

The Yukon is home to a thriving and diverse population of wildlife. Our wildlife is a large part of the appeal of the Yukon, part of what makes our home unique, natural, and beautiful. Animals are a living part of our mountain ranges, valleys, lakes, and streams. They play a major role in maintaining a balanced ecosystem and also as an important source of food for many of us throughout the territory. However, the future of our wildlife relies heavily on human management and on the work of those

committed to actively protect and enhance or balance their populations. We live in their backyard and continue to work to ensure that human-animal conflict is kept to a minimum. There are a number of Yukon organizations dedicated to conservation efforts here in the Yukon and to advocating public awareness around ethical and responsible harvesting practices.

Their efforts help to ensure that our native Yukon species continue to thrive. So, our thanks to Yukon First Nations, the Department of Environment, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, our renewable resources councils, and our hunters and trappers who are front-line stewards on the land. We would also like to recognize organizations like the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, Yukon Trappers Association, Yukon Outfitters Association, Yukon Wildlife Preserve, the Yukon Conservation Society, CPAWS, Ducks Unlimited, and our local bird clubs — they are awesome — and many others for the pivotal roles that they play in wildlife conservation in the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, as legislators in this House, we need to ensure that wildlife policy and management practices are implemented based on the best science available and demonstrate the constructive roles that all of the organizations I was discussing play in the management of wildlife.

Applause

Ms. Tredger: I rise to pay tribute to the incredible wildlife of the Yukon. Sixty years ago, Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, a book that catalyzed a movement demanding action to protect birds. When I first read it more than 40 years after it was first written, I was struck by how familiar it felt. Even though its specific concern, DDT use, had been addressed, the impending disaster of wildlife lost felt just as relevant.

We're now at the 60-year anniversary of this book and still not much has changed. While there have been many individual victories in wildlife conservation, we are still facing disaster. We are still struggling with a broken relationship with wildlife and our mutual home.

There are many ways of thinking about wildlife: as a resource, as critical components of healthy ecosystems, and as our relations. How we frame our relationship with wildlife impacts the way in which we approach our decisions around wildlife. It's our responsibility to make sure that we make room at the table for many ways of thinking and knowing. It is also our responsibility to make sure that our relationship with wildlife continues on for future generations.

Wildlife populations in the Yukon are under threat from everything from habitat degradation to change in climate. Protecting them will require swift action on many fronts. It will require legislation such as laws protecting species at risk and important habitats like wetlands. It will require changes to policy for everything from hunting regulations to climate action. It will require systemic changes to prioritize a sustainable relationship with wildlife and the world that is home to us all. All of this will require bold leadership.

There are many people in the Yukon doing that work to build a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship with wildlife. My colleagues have named many of them. I won't go through them again, but thank you so much to all of them. Your work is so appreciated.

If anyone is looking for a fun and safe way to engage more with wildlife, I would recommend the McIntyre Creek wildlife camera. You can see its footage on CPAWS' social media and join in the guessing games and wildlife trivia. I truly believe that a healthy relationship with wildlife starts with curiosity and respect, and the wildlife cam fosters both.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling a *CBC News* article dated January 24, 2014 entitled "Yukon cancels \$13M affordable housing program".

Ms. White: I have for tabling *The Globe and Mail* article entitled "On mental-health care for the working class, Canada is failing — and Canadians are being failed".

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Mr. Cathers: I rise today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to table information about the government's plan for opening a walk-in clinic, including the following:

- (1) estimated costs of operating the clinic;
- (2) details showing the extent to which this facility will result in increased services to patients by local doctors; and
- (3) estimates indicating the expected reduction in physician services at family practices and the emergency room resulting from a reallocation of existing resources.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Education to appoint a chair of the Education Appeal Tribunal and ensure that a contract is issued promptly for a secretary/registrar of the Education Appeal Tribunal.

Ms. Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to inform this House when species at risk legislation will be introduced.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to call witnesses to appear before the Legislative Assembly outside of sitting days and in coordination with opposition parties.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wood Street Centre dress code

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today to acknowledge the students who brought forward their concerns about the dress code for the music, art and drama program at Wood Street school. I was able to meet directly with these students a few weeks ago, and I want to hold them up today for their courage.

These students found their voices and used them to speak their truth, not only for themselves, but on behalf of their peers. They used their voices to come together to express their concerns, raising an important issue to our attention.

Today, I'm pleased to say that the school now has a new co-created dress code. The students, principal, and superintendent worked together to ensure that this new dress code reflects the program goals and upholds the dignity of students and staff. The new dress code shows that Wood Street school administration is listening to student voices and including their perspectives in an updated inclusive dress code.

I'm also happy to share that the new dress code uses gender-neutral language. Gender-neutral language matters. It helps people feel safe expressing who they are and promotes a larger social change that will better our communities and promote gender inclusivity and equality.

Thank you to these students who have set an example for others across the territory. It is important that we continue to show up, stand up, and speak up. It is young leaders today who are pushing governments and leaders around the world to challenge societal norms. This action is making our community stronger, more inclusive, and accepting and safe for everyone, regardless of their gender, sexuality, race, religion, or the way they look or dress. Leaders today have a responsibility to hold up the perspectives of youth and ensure that they have a seat at the table, because the decisions we make today will impact these generations the most.

I'm bringing this issue to all of our attention today because I want to ensure that we are building up students across the territory. As citizens of democracy, we need to hear one another. We have heard these students and we have worked with them to make the changes needed to ensure that their voices are reflected in the school dress code. It is imperative that we continue to promote school environments where our students feel safe, comfortable, heard, and respected.

Thank you again to the Wood Street school students for raising this issue and working collaboratively with the school administration to solve it.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the students of the Wood Street school for bringing this important issue forward. They certainly participated in the democratic process by voicing their concern to the decision-

makers. They also held a very public rally that got the attention of a lot of people, including the decision-makers. I am pleased to see that those decision-makers listened. As we just heard from the minister, the department worked with students to come up with a solution. That solution is an updated and inclusive dress code.

However, as we know, the department is in charge of many other schools across the territory that are facing the same issue. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us if the dress code policy at other schools across the territory will be updated because, while this may have been brought to our recent attention by the students of the Wood Street school, it has certainly started a conversation across the territory. We thank those students for starting this conversation. This is what democracy is all about and the core of the work that we do as MLAs: listening to your constituents about issues important to them and taking action to find a potential solution.

Ms. White: The first time I learned of the Wood Street dress code and the effect that it was having on students was on March 2 when I read the following statement from students to their teachers — and I quote: “We believe that MAD should be a place where we can be ourselves, be comfortable expressing ourselves, be safe, and kick-ass in a non-hurtful and non-judgemental environment.

“We believe that the dress code is humiliating and shaming us. We also feel that this dress code is sexualizing us and reinforcing the gender binary and is a form of sexualized and gendered harassment.

“Things we would like to address: the existence of the oppressive and sexist dress code; the humiliation of students through the subjective and inconsistent enforcement of the oppressive and sexist dress code; the shaming of our development of biological sex characteristics that are beyond our individual control that is a result of the dress code being enforced; we do not feel safe in the classroom/school because of the dress code and the way that you choose to enforce it in this space; the enforcement of the dress code outside of school hours.

“We respectfully request the following: That our teachers cease and desist in enforcing the dress code, and that they issue an apology to us for shaming, humiliating, and sexualizing us in our place of learning; That as our teachers, you seek training respecting gender, sex, healthy body image, body dysmorphia and shame, consent, sexual harassment, and sexualized violence — and the impact of these on holistic health; An immediate revocation of the dress codes — formal and informal at MAD.

“We urge you to consider that your daily practice of enforcing the dress code enforces unhealthy relationships with our bodies — in addition to the pressure of social and other media.

“Enforcement of the dress code that is based on sexism and heteronormative gender stereotypes impacts our safety and in turn our learning in this space and others. We cannot learn when we are not safe...”

The question I ask, Mr. Speaker, is: How did we get here? I thought that we were long past policing each other's bodies, but I guess I was wrong. While I'm sure that school dress codes aren't written with the intention of humiliating, degrading, or sexualizing students, that's what can happen.

What followed was a flurry of activity from the students and their support team, a letter to the minister, a protest, and a petition. The protest outside this building on March 7 saw students holding signs that read things like: “Stop sexualizing teenagers' bodies” or “My education is more important than what I wear” or “I can dress myself”.

The minister did respond to the letter that she received, thanking the caregivers for outlining their serious concerns — and I quote: “All students and staff have a right to be safe, feel welcome and respected at school, and to learn in an environment that is free from any form of discrimination or sexism. Students have clearly outlined that the current dress code is not upholding these values.”

But the students had asked for more than just addressing the dress code. Can the minister tell us what supports and training have been supplied by the Department of Education to the staff and the administration at the Wood Street school respecting gender identity, sexual harassment, sexualized violence, and the others as requested by the students?

When students initially brought forward their complaints, they felt bullied and intimidated. What steps were taken to ensure that students were able to provide feedback, safe from retaliation? What steps are being taken by the Department of Education to repair this relationship?

It has almost been a month since the March break, so I went in search of the new dress code that the minister references. It wasn't anywhere on the Wood Street school website. Where are students supposed to find these new guidelines that respect them, their bodies, and their autonomy? Could she please table a copy of that dress code and let the community know where they will be able to find it online? Does the Department of Education or the Women and Gender Equity Directorate review school policies, including dress codes, to ensure that they use gender-neutral language and uphold the dignity of students? If not, why not? When can we expect a review of these policies across the territory?

I note that I went in search in dress codes from Yukon schools, and many schools don't have them posted publicly, which disempowers students and evades fair criticism. Clearly communicating expectations with students and their caregivers is important. We agree that gender-neutral language and the upholding of the dignity of students is critical.

So, our final question of the minister is: How does the Department of Education ensure that students aren't being shamed, humiliated, or sexualized —

Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I thank my colleagues from the two opposition parties for providing comments and feedback. I think that it's a really important part of what we're doing here today to help our students see themselves in their House — this is your House. That is what I definitely expressed to them when

I went and met with them a few weeks ago. Good questions — thank you very much for posing those.

In terms of conversations, conversations are definitely ongoing around training for staff. A lot of work will land within the inclusive and special education review and the work that's happening there right now. There are a number of working groups that are working to identify new definitions and new policies. I can confirm, of course, that the Women and Gender Equity Directorate worked on this dress code with the department and with the administration, and there's definitely room for a lot more conversations. I expect the Women and Gender Equity Directorate to be involved, particularly in definitions as we go forward.

In terms of other schools, I certainly have had discussions with other schools previously and know that this work is underway. It is important that we address all of our dress codes and policies in our schools to ensure that they are absolutely taking into consideration inclusivity and helping students to feel safe.

Good discussions started with the staff to address these concerns and how the dress code issues were raised and are being raised with students. The new dress code was completed just on April 1, so we'll work toward getting a copy of that for the members here. It is important that Yukon is an inclusive, welcoming, and accepting place. Our schools must absolutely ensure that students feel respected and safe. This is our number one priority at all times.

I am so impressed and grateful to the students of the music, art and drama program at Wood Street and fellow community members for bringing this issue forward. We know from other jurisdictions that outdated dress codes can be problematic and cause harm. We know that outdated dress codes have the potential to target certain students.

I understand that the school administration and teachers really took the students' concerns very seriously, and the Department of Education takes them seriously too.

I was moved by my conversation when I met with the students at Wood Street school. Listening to the group was profound, and it helped inform some of the final content in the new dress code. At that meeting, I was able to talk to them about my own experiences with dress codes. We had a good conversation about that, so I always welcome those opportunities to speak to our young Yukoners and to help prepare them for leadership roles. They showed leadership by coming forward in the way that they did.

The new dress code not only adopts gender-neutral language — which is key to supporting our larger efforts here in the Yukon — it indicates a gender and diversity lens on all decision-making.

Again, I thank the students for coming here today and for exercising their voices.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whistle Bend school

Mr. Kent: On November 21, 2019, the former Minister of Highways and Public Works stated in the Legislative Assembly that the budget for the new Whistle Bend school was \$32 million. In July 2021, the school had gone significantly overbudget and was now estimated to cost \$43 million. So, in less than two years, the budget of this project had skyrocketed.

However, the Official Opposition has now obtained the confidential briefing note that indicates the school has gone overbudget once again. The briefing note states — and I quote: “The total capital requirement for the project is \$52.8 million.”

Can the minister tell us why the project is now almost \$21-million overbudget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am glad to speak today about the leading-edge school in the dynamic and very quickly growing neighbourhood of Whistle Bend, where this Yukon Liberal Party government is building the first elementary school in the Yukon in 25 years. This school will be state of the art. It will have lots of environmental attributes that will make it incredibly energy efficient. We will reduce greenhouse gases by having the students who currently reside in the dynamic and growing neighbourhood of Whistle Bend being able to, hopefully, largely walk to school, bike to school, kicksled to school, or however they wish to get to school not involving a motor vehicle. So, this is a great news story, and we look forward to this project proceeding in a timely fashion.

Mr. Kent: While we appreciate that overview from the minister, the question was about the budget for the school. There was absolutely no answer to the question that I asked, so I will ask again.

As we have indicated, the government stated on November 21, 2019 that the budget for the Whistle Bend school was \$32 million. However, a confidential briefing note dated November 22, 2021 — almost exactly two years later — indicates that the project has gone overbudget by \$21 million. That is 65-percent overbudget in two years due to Liberal mismanagement.

Can the minister tell us how much of these cost overruns are due to the First Nation procurement policy?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The member opposite will know that, pursuant to ATIPP decisions that have been made in the course of the last year or two, the briefing binders that are provided for the members of the Liberal government to be prepared for Question Period and other debate are not, in fact, confidential.

In any event — I am going to answer the question.

The design/build contract was awarded to Ketza Construction Corporation for \$42.8 million. This cost reflects increased costs for building materials like lumber and steel as a consequence of the unjust, unlawful, and barbaric invasion by Russia into Ukraine.

The design/build contract was a value-driven procurement. Value-driven procurements look beyond the price to make sure that the project brings as much value as possible to the community and the territory. In this case, the winning bidder earned points for their schedule, training plans, subcontracting plans, northern experience, and First Nation participation.

To the best of my knowledge, as of today, this project is on that budget and on time.

Mr. Kent: We find it interesting that the minister is blaming the war in Ukraine for this project going overbudget, because the confidential briefing note that we have obtained indicating the \$21-million cost overruns is actually dated November 22, 2021, three months before the war started.

So, according to this newly obtained briefing note, the Whistle Bend school is a whopping \$21-million overbudget — \$21 million in just two years. That was even before the supply chain interruptions caused by the war.

So, it's clear the Liberals have mismanaged this project's budget and are taking taxpayers for a ride. Back in August 2019, the school was supposed to have completed construction in June 2023; however, this note says that it will only be completed sometime during the 2023-24 school year.

So, \$21-million overbudget and late — can the minister tell us why the project is so late and why it has gone \$21-million overbudget?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As I stated probably two weeks ago, I'm not going to take lessons from the former Yukon Party government on how to build schools, when to build schools, or how to build schools on time. I would take lessons from the members opposite on how to build small schools or small schools that are too small to replace the F.H. Collins structure.

We know that the member opposite — the hard-working Member for Copperbelt South — was integral in the planning and ultimately the implementation of the plan — the delayed plan — to build the middle school that is now the new F.H. Collins that will require serious consideration for expansion in the near future as, when it was built, it was at maximum capacity instantly.

So, interesting concerns from members opposite — but, as I said, I'm not taking lessons from the prior Yukon Party government on how and when to build schools.

Question re: Highways projects

Mr. Hassard: The list of broken Liberal promises is long and storied. The very first one that they broke was around procurement. In 2016, the Liberal platform promised to tender projects for seasonally dependent Yukon Government-funded construction projects no later than March each year. Of course, we know that they have now completely failed to meet this commitment for six construction seasons in a row. For this year's construction season, we know that there are lots of projects yet to be tendered. For example, the Freegold Road phase 2 project agreement that was assigned last fall was supposed to replace three bridges on that road, yet they are not tendered.

So, can the minister tell us when they will go to tender?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will attempt to answer the first part of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin's question and perhaps return to Freegold in a subsequent response.

The Yukon government plans and issues tenders as early as possible to help vendors prepare for upcoming work. This includes forecasting and tendering projects earlier so that businesses can take full advantage of Yukon's short, intense

building season. It also includes staggering closing dates to make it easier for contractors to bid on a number of tenders and to encourage price stability.

Public procurements are vital to local businesses, and the Yukon government remains committed to the continuous improvement of our procurement processes. When planning and tendering projects, we are giving contractors the best opportunities to perform the work at the right time. So far in the 2022-23 construction season, we have tendered 28 projects worth more than \$52 million, and an additional \$232 million worth of projects are forecasted to be tendered for this upcoming construction season. Of those, we expect \$184 million worth of projects to be tendered in the near future.

Mr. Hassard: I will remind the minister that today is April 11, so "early" has come and gone. As I said in my first question, in 2016, the Liberals promised to tender all seasonally dependent construction projects no later than March of each year. As I said earlier as well, this marks the sixth year of the Liberals breaking that promise. The Nahanni Range Road phase 1 project includes two bridge replacements. Construction of these bridges is scheduled to take place in 2022; however, once again, there are no tenders out for these seasonally dependent construction contracts.

Can the minister tell us how late the Liberals are going to be on getting these tenders out?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Government gives businesses advance notice of upcoming projects by posting our planned procurement to the Yukon Bids and Tenders website and by sharing information through our five-year capital plan.

When planning the timing of our tenders, we recognize that not all projects are seasonally dependent. We take into account factors such as project type and location, market availability, and the ability of industry to meet government demand within the planned project schedules. We intentionally stagger closing dates of public tenders to make it easier for contractors to bid on more than one tender and to encourage prices to remain stable.

For this summer and for the fiscal year 2022-23, this Yukon Liberal government has planned to get over \$530 million in capital projects out the door. I grant you that it is an ambitious project — much more ambitious than the prior Yukon Party government was ever able to get out the door. There is exciting work to be done on the north Klondike Highway as part of the national trade corridors fund, which includes bridge replacement and road reconstruction at Crooked Creek. There is exciting work at the beginning of a really significant airport renovation at the Whitehorse airport.

Mr. Hassard: Again, I will remind the minister that I am talking about seasonally dependent contracts, and there is again no answer on the Freegold Road or Nahanni Range Road projects. So, we know that the Liberals are quite dubious when it comes to promises and procurement. We are now on year six of them failing to get these contracts out on time, so here is another one.

For the Robert Campbell Highway between Ross River and Faro, the government scheduled construction work to begin on that this summer, yet, Mr. Speaker, there is no tender out —

so, once again, just false hope and false promises from the Liberals. So, can the minister tell us: When will the Robert Campbell Highway reconstruction between Faro and Ross River go out to tender?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite.

In April 2020, the project agreement for this component of the Robert Campbell Highway was signed with the Ross River Dena Council. The road rehabilitation project runs from kilometre 354.9 to kilometre 414.4 and has an estimated capital construction cost of \$55 million. Right-of-way clearing contracts have been awarded for this component of the Robert Campbell Highway. This was a direct-award contract to a Ross River Dena Council citizen-owned company.

The Yukon government will continue to work with the Ross River Dena Council to implement the project agreement. Members opposite will know that there has been a change in leadership in Ross River, and I do look forward, in the near future, to speaking to Chief Loblaw and trying to push this matter forward, but, of course, these projects have to occur in a manner that is satisfactory and beneficial to our partners with the Ross River Dena Council.

Question re: Support services for Hidden Valley Elementary School victims of abuse

Ms. White: It has been more than nine months since the abuses at Hidden Valley became public, and the government is still leaving children, families, and staff behind. Last week, a Hidden Valley parent reached out to me. One of their many concerns is that families are being offered one-size-fits-all solutions for support. The government is telling them that this is what they have for them, and if they are not happy, they are out of luck. For the families that don't fit in the government's box, they are stuck paying out of pocket and waiting for up to nine months for counselling services that they or their children desperately need.

What is this government doing to identify the unique needs of Hidden Valley staff and students, and what is being done to ensure that they are able to access the supports that they need?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question. I am happy to stand and speak about Yukoners and especially our youngest Yukoners — our children — who are in our schools. There is nothing more important than the well-being, safety, and protection of our students, and support for families. I believe I did have some opportunity in Committee of the Whole to speak about this — and specifically the question that has been raised here today.

In terms of supports for families, we remain absolutely committed to providing what is needed for families. Supports have and continue to be available to families and staff, including on-demand support coordinated via the school community consultant. This is what I focused on in Committee of the Whole — really encouraging students to speak to the school community consultant and to let us know what information they have so that we can better address the issues that they have in terms of private counselling.

Ms. White: Last week, the minister continued to repeat the name and the phone number of the community school consultant in the debate, but she never did tell us what power this position is given to fix the situation. So, the government is persisting in failing these children. Counselling is a long and difficult process, especially in the case of child abuse. The child needs to be comfortable with the counselling process, and that looks different for everyone. For some, it will be play therapy; for others, it may be group therapy; and some children won't be comfortable with a specific counsellor for various reasons. No one can say what the right form of therapy could be because it is entirely dependent on the affected person. A one-size approach is not what is needed here.

Will the government allow families and staff at Hidden Valley to choose the type of counselling services that they need and cover the cost?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The reason that I'm talking about the school community consultant is that this is a very key individual in terms of communicating with the department to let us know the information we need to help to make decisions and help to meet the needs of our families.

Other supports — and I'll just go through this quickly — that have been provided at Hidden Valley have included, but are not limited to — and here are some examples. Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services facilitated a six-session parent-support evening session with a clinical counsellor and outreach worker. This was held off-site to best accommodate the request and privacy of families. The child, youth and family treatment team has been attending the school to monitor the needs of staff, students and families, providing services to parents and families, and has delivered sessions on resilience and on social-emotional skills for grade 5, 6 and 7 students. Referrals to other supports and services are being facilitated as needed, such as through Family and Children's Services, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, and Victim Services. So, there is a lot of work happening with families. I encourage the member to bring forward the information specifically to the department.

Ms. White: Despite the minister's assurances, this isn't what's being seen on the ground. We're receiving messages saying — and I quote: "... there are no wraparound supports or services as described in the multiple letters and empty promises that were sent by the Department of Education."

Again, these are victims of a crime committed by an employee of the Department of Education. One would think that the least the government could do is ensure that no one is left paying out of pocket, and that's even if they can afford to.

So, I'm going to ask the question again: Will the government allow families and staff at Hidden Valley to choose the type of counselling services that they need, and will government commit to covering all costs to counselling services for the Hidden Valley families and staff in whatever forms it may take?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I believe that, in Committee of the Whole, I was very clear that our goal is to support children and families. If we have all of the information that I am hearing that the members opposite have — I heard it from the Leader of the

Yukon Party, and I'm hearing it today from the Leader of the New Democratic Party — please provide that information to us so that we can properly support families.

Again, folks can make their own choices. We do have a number of supports, as I've gone through some of those today, that are available. There's also child and family rapid-access counselling. I take note that families have a choice to seek out private counselling. We need to have the information in order to assist families to ensure that they have the resources to cover the costs of those services. So, please, I encourage the members opposite to provide the Department of Education with the information so that we can support our families and children. My commitment is to not leave any child or family unsupported.

Question re: Mental health services

Ms. White: Yukon journalist Lori Fox recently wrote a damning article about this territory's failures in mental health care — and I quote: "... the wait to see a psychiatrist if you don't pay for a private clinic... was laughable; a friend who also suffers from complex mental-health issues once referred to getting an appointment with one as 'winning the crazy person lottery.'"

People are left to wait for months until they reach a crisis point — and I quote again: "I was on wait-list after wait-list. I got worse and worse. Which is how I would up in the emergency room..."

So, will the minister fix this never-ending wait-list and hire a psychiatrist and registered psychiatric nurses to work at the soon-to-be-opened public walk-in clinic?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The community-based mental health services are a priority for our government. With the creation of the mental wellness hubs, there is now a network of mental wellness support workers, counsellors, and mental health nurses providing services and care for Yukoners, particularly in Yukon communities where there has been a record of absolutely no services. Staffing across the mental wellness hubs is an ongoing process, and we are meeting operational needs and delivering important and necessary services to Yukoners.

We are, of course, attempting to expand those services to Yukoners. We have money in this year's budget to hire nurse practitioners who will be an important piece of front-line medical services for Yukoners.

Ms. White: Despite the long list of words, what I didn't get was an answer. Is the minister planning on hiring a psychiatrist and psychiatric nurses for the soon-to-opened walk-in clinic?

As it seems to be the norm nowadays in the Yukon, people who need care are being referred to private care, and if they can't pay for it, then they have no choice but to wait. After years of piecing together what few services were available to them, Lori reached a crisis point because, believe it or not, having one or two short counselling appointments through a non-profit is often not enough.

People who need help are being failed by the government, and if they are not lucky enough to have benefits, they're even worse off.

When will the minister invest in wraparound, free mental health services, including psychiatry, to be offered to every Yukoner who needs it?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. The question leads me to thinking about *Putting People First*, which, of course, is focused on wraparound services for Yukoners. *Putting People First* is the report — the road map ahead for Yukon in providing wraparound services, as noted in the question, to Yukoners.

To ensure a bright future for the territory, we must continue to invest in sustainable, people-centred health and social services and a system that improves outcomes for all Yukoners. As our government continues to implement the recommendations of *Putting People First*, the Yukon's health care system is being transformed into a national leader. It does focus — and I'm sure that members opposite have read the report — on a format and a process of polyclinics that will, in future, provide wraparound services.

Of course, we're in the process of transitioning. We must provide improved services to Yukoners. Until we get to that — I'm certainly not suggesting that it will happen overnight. It is a road map, but we are working along this path to improve services for Yukoners at every turn.

Ms. White: I'm highlighting issues that are happening right now.

So, continuing the story — Lori had to wait for hours at the ER, only to be sent home with no follow-up care multiple times. It got worse and worse with no one to check up on them. Not once was Lori admitted to get the help that they needed despite trying. Eventually, Lori reached a breaking point. They suffered from a dissociative episode and were treated with police brutality instead of health care. The RCMP showed up in their backyard, and because Lori had a stick in their hand, the police shot them with a rubber bullet. After being failed at every single level of the medical system, Lori was criminalized for needing help. Government failures like this are killing people. It nearly killed Lori.

So, when will this government allow mental health workers to respond to mental health crises instead of sending the RCMP to arrest and charge people?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly am not going to respond to an individual person's experience, although I certainly appreciate it and receive it with compassion and the concern with which it was reported. No individual should have this service or the experiences that have been noted in that story, but the focus for our government is to provide mental health services across the Yukon medical system. We have improved services in Yukon communities.

Is it to the level at which we hope it will be? No, we have not yet implemented all of the journey of *Putting People First*. It will be a journey. There is no end to this road.

We will continue to work to improve and utilize mental health nurses in the most effective and efficient ways possible. We can indicate that there are extensive funds in the budget this

year to increase the services of the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services. We have continued to focus on providing the service that Yukoners need.

Question re: Cannabis retail sales

Mr. Dixon: It has now been three and a half years since recreational cannabis was legalized for adult use in Canada. Across the country, this new industry has thrived and has quickly grown to become a major source of employment and economic activity. Despite the success seen in just about every other part of the country, businesses in the Yukon's cannabis sector have struggled. Several operators in this sector have recently highlighted the challenges that they have faced in local media. They say that unnecessary government regulation and red tape are holding the industry back.

The Yukon Party has been pointing out concerns with the Liberals' approach to growing government and competing with this industry since the start, and now we are seeing the results.

Will the Liberal government reconsider their approach to cannabis and start getting out of the way of business in this sector?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First of all, it is important to touch on the fact that this is the perspective of the member opposite in his preamble. What we have seen here are growing sales by the private sector. The commitments made by my colleague in the beginning of this process included that we would listen to Yukoners. That's the first thing that we did. Yukoners defined what government structure they wanted to see. They wanted to see a level of government responsibility within that. They wanted to see a responsible approach to this program. That is what we did. We then opened the first store and, within a year, we made a commitment that this store would be put in the hands of the private sector. That was done, to the day, as committed to.

Our overall retail sales in the Yukon now are continuing to see growth. This is, again, from the private sector. Sales growth is an indication that we are displacing the illicit market, which people wanted to see. Remember that, three and a half years ago, 100 percent of this was black market.

Again, we are not going to change it, because we have a successful model. Retailers' sales continue to grow in 2021. Cannabis sales through the corporation to licensees increased by more than \$2.5 million in 2019-20. Explain to me how that is — that's not lining up with the preamble from the member opposite.

I will wait for question two.

Mr. Dixon: I would direct the minister to the comments from industry representatives over the past number of weeks. We have heard from the largest cannabis retailer who says that they are struggling. We have heard from a cannabis retailer in a community that has shut down because of government regulation.

So, it is not just me raising this; it is the industry itself that is raising these very serious concerns. Around the country, the cannabis industry is growing and thriving, creating jobs and economic activity; however, here in the Yukon, we are hearing

directly from businesses in this sector that are being stifled by a perfect storm of burdensome regulation, red tape, and inefficient government pricing structures.

Despite the concerns raised by the Yukon Party when cannabis legislation was first introduced, the Liberals have chosen a model that puts the government right in the middle of the private sector. No one should be surprised that this hasn't worked well for the private sector.

Will the Liberal government get out of the way of business and give the private sector the tools that they need to compete with and displace the black market and let this emerging private sector of our economy start to grow and thrive?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that the first thing we should do is take a quick walk down memory lane and remember that when we stood in this House to legalize cannabis, everybody who is sitting in that party voted against it. Let's remember that. It's a big move to vote against actually having this industry in place and now being cheerleaders and champions of it. It's good to hear the change. We're used to the 180. It's good to see it.

But beyond that, I think the other key thing is — I listened to the radio this morning, and I am glad we did. The rural retailer talked about the fact that there is still a stigma attached to going into these stores. That's what, I think, they talked about — the store in Carmacks. Yes, there was more — I think we should share what's going on — to that story.

The second is that the member opposite said "the largest cannabis retailer". I don't provide information publicly about who is the biggest cannabis retailer. I guess there is information that the member opposite has — the biggest in the sense of square footage and staff or the biggest on retail? We don't provide that, so I would like to know how that information has gotten into the hands of the member opposite.

I will continue on. We have early indication that the 2021 fiscal year continued to see sales growth at an increase of approximately 17 percent. Again, they talk about getting out of the way. We just reduced the wholesale price. We just lowered the price for the private sector. So, again, we are selling more. There's growth every year. We did what we said, and it is not consistent with the way those questions are being tabled today. I look forward to question three.

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, it's clear that what we're hearing from businesses — they are struggling with this model, and it is the model that was brought forward by this Liberal government and that this party voted against and did not support. We wanted to see more freedom, not less.

Despite the great opportunity that the legalization of cannabis presented for the private sector, the industry is being bogged down by a complex regulatory environment — red tape, rules that don't make sense — and there is also the inefficient product markup and burdensome tax policies.

Not only does this hinder the ability of these businesses to grow and thrive, but Liberal policies have been helping to keep the black market alive and well. The solution is simple: The government needs to get out of the way and fully privatize cannabis.

Will the Liberal government reconsider their inefficient, big-government model and start cutting red tape, lowering fees and taxes, and give this industry, which has so much potential, the tools it needs to create jobs, contribute to our economy, and displace the black market?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'll just go through that one more time. We've seen growth every year in the private sector in this industry. We've seen multiple stores open. I've listened to the private sector, and I appreciate the fact that the member opposite is echoing what was heard from some of the private sector. I hear that. I know that there has been some frustration in the time it has moved to get e-commerce in place. But again, we committed in the fall to have it in May. I stand by that commitment.

Again, when we look at our online sales — for the corporation, those were only 0.2 percent — 0.2 percent of total cannabis sales when it was being run online. Now, do I think that the private sector could do better? Absolutely, I do. Do I think that they will market better? Absolutely, I do. But at the same time, we're seeing growth, we're sticking to what we did, and we're getting out of the way. We're seeing an industry grow and we're removing black market revenue. That's what we said we were going to do, and that's what we're doing.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House 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

Deputy Chair (Ms. Tredger): I will now call Committee of the Whole to order.

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 204: *First Appropriation Act 2022-23* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Department of Environment

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am proud to stand before you as the Minister of the Department of Environment. I would like to welcome to the Assembly Deputy Minister Manon Moreau, who is to my immediate right, and to her right is Jeston Innes, the director of Finance. I have some preliminary comments and then look forward to the debate in Committee of the Whole for the Department of Environment.

The work done in this department is essential to a healthy, sustainable, and prosperous future through environmental stewardship and effective management of our natural resources. The support we provide is not just for future generations of Yukoners, but for the fish of our waters, the wildlife and their habitat, the air, and the climate. We support, maintain, and monitor so much of the world around us all year-round.

Right now, our staff at the Water Resources branch have ramped up their flood monitoring as the snow melts. Our parks crews are clearing campgrounds for the upcoming camping season. Our biologists are gearing up for another field season. Our compliance and inspections staff are available to help ensure that our home heating fuel tank hasn't buckled under the weight of the snow. Our conservation officers are keeping a close eye on bears coming out of winter hibernation. We are a department of people doing the work to keep you safe, healthy, and happy. Let me tell you about how much all of it costs.

The 2022-23 main estimates for the Department of Environment capital and operation and maintenance budget is approximately \$51.9 million. It is 1.2 percent more than the previous estimate. The operation and maintenance budget is approximately \$47.9 million, which is an increase of approximately \$93,000 over the 2021-22 estimate. The capital estimate is approximately \$4 million, an increase of about one-half million dollars from the 2021-22 estimate. We expect to collect approximately \$4.9 million in revenues. This includes about \$3.7 million of recoveries from the Government of Canada.

Unlike last year, we have capital recoveries to the tune of \$1.2 million. Let me dig into how that money is spent and what that means for Yukoners and our environment.

The importance of *Our Clean Future* is obvious in this budget. It is one of the main drivers of change, year over year, with another \$548,000 in operation and maintenance allocated to new initiatives. We are in year 2 of implementation and we continue to build on our work.

Why are we doing this? Because we know that these actions must occur now. Yukon's climate is changing faster than many other places. Wildlife and plant species are popping up where they never have before. Water levels are low in some places and flooding elsewhere. Climate emergencies have been

declared across the territory and the country. It's late, but it's not too late.

Together, we can adapt to the impacts of climate change, reduce our emissions, and establish what the future of Yukon might look like. That's why we are putting money into initiatives like extended producer responsibility that is budgeted at \$131,000 for fiscal 2022-23. It is a mouthful, but it has the ability to transform the way we think about who is responsible for waste. It shifts that responsibility from municipalities, governments, and taxpayers to producers and consumers of products and packaging. We are targeting packaging, printed paper, household hazardous waste, and automotive waste such as oil and antifreeze.

As part of *Our Clean Future*, we are committed to implementing extended producer responsibility by 2025. This will help increase waste diversion to 40 percent by 2030. We look forward to bringing this framework to Yukoners later this year for public engagement.

We are also looking forward to reaching the public online even more with an *Our Clean Future* commitment that we are funding this year: an upgraded *Our Clean Future* website. The cost for this project is approximately \$100,000. You can already find our OCF commitments online at yukon.ca/our-clean-future. This new version aims to have content feeding it all the time from an internal database. It will help share more knowledge about climate risks and impact, build community resilience, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Work is already underway with software development happening this spring.

There was also a smart-growth review. This \$30,000 commitment is to develop detailed guidelines by 2025 that can be used by the Government of Yukon and partners to develop walkable, bike-friendly, and transit-oriented communities.

Work on *Our Clean Future* and climate change doesn't stop with the Government of Yukon. There is \$150,000 in the budget to dig further into climate change research and modeling. We are partnering with the Yukon University to undertake and develop further research for us. We are also contracting Navius Research to undertake modeling and projections related to the 45-percent emission reduction target. The most recent model has just been completed. We are working with them and the Yukon Climate Leadership Council to provide analysis on specific policy actions to get us to our goals.

Between the Yukon Climate Leadership Council and the Youth Panel on Climate Change, we are getting more information and innovative solutions. While there is no new money in the budget for these leadership groups, we do continue to support them. The Youth Panel on Climate Change has completed its first year, providing government with a comprehensive set of recommendations. The second-year group of young climate leaders has now been selected and we look forward to learning from and with them soon.

We need to harness the passion and ideas of our young people to ensure we can mitigate and adapt to the changes that are already happening. This will continue to happen and will continue to happen if we don't take swift action now.

As mentioned, climate change has impacted nearly every stage of the water cycle. In just the last few years, we have seen waterways change course due to low levels and we have seen record flooding. Climate change alters precipitation, evaporation, surface water, snowpack, groundwater, recharge, and demand.

The work we are doing to monitor water in the Yukon is essential to understanding what changes we are undergoing, but also to figure out how to adapt. As part of *Our Clean Future*, our Water Resources branch is leading work related to climate change as part this \$224,000 increase in the budget. We are adapting existing surface and groundwater monitoring networks to track water quality and quantity trends for climate change.

We are developing flood maps for flood-prone communities. This will help plan for development but also emergency response by improving the understanding of potential impacts from floods. Flood mapping can incorporate climate change projections as the risk and likelihood of floods shifts with changing temperatures, precipitation, and extreme weather. We will also expand monitoring networks and improve our monitoring tools. This should help generate reliable flood forecasts in order to communicate and respond to high-water events. It includes stream flow and ice break-up models.

We will also analyze flood risk along critical transportation corridors. Many Yukon communities have only one reasonable transportation corridor. If that link is cut off, it cuts Yukoners off from food, goods, safety, and security.

We will continue to work with the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources to plan and maintain our roads for climate change effectively. Through the federal government's climate change preparedness in the north program, we are using \$296,000 to take on projects that help the Government of Yukon adapt to the impacts of climate change. Some of these projects include: undertaking climate change risk assessments, mapping permafrost along the Dempster Highway and around Whitehorse, identifying best practices for food security in a changing climate, understanding how climate change threatens human health, and tracking the impacts of a warming climate on wildlife and their habitats.

This is a diverse department which has a lot of different areas of responsibility and I certainly have longer opening comments here, but perhaps for now I will leave it at that, and I will invite questions from the member opposite.

Mr. Istchenko: I welcome the staff who are here today — thank you for coming — and those in the offices and on the phones who are providing information as needed for the minister.

I don't have any opening remarks. I just want to get directly into some of the questions. We do have a lot of questions and I am sure that the Third Party does also. I want to start with a few outfitting questions here.

The minister announced in Question Period that the department is reviewing the policy for the establishment of outfitter quotas. According to the minister, this was based on a

legal review that the department has done on the policy. Did the minister direct that a legal review of the policy be done, or was this something that the department generated on its own?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Outfitting, of course, is a valued industry in the Yukon that benefits communities through employment opportunities, purchase of goods and services, and in many cases, the donated supply of fresh meat. As I indicated previously in the spring session, the Department of Environment intends to review and modernize the 25-year-old guidelines to establish outfitter quotas currently used to establish moose, caribou, and sheep quotas. The intent of modernizing the quota is to align the industry with the wildlife values of Yukoners, bring the process into conformity with the Yukon *Wildlife Act*, and provide a consistent, transparent approach to quota allocation for big game outfitters.

Once we initiate this review process, we intend to seek input — and have been seeking input — from First Nations and Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, renewable resources councils, the outfitting industry, and the public. The outfitters will continue to operate during this review and we welcome an open dialogue as we move forward.

During the state of intention to review the outfitting quotas and modernize the quota process with the various stakeholders, legal advice was sought by the department, largely prior to my mandate as the Minister of Environment, but subsequent to that, I have been briefed by both my department and the justice council that's engaged in this review and have been provided the opinion primarily with respect to whether multi-year quotas were allowable.

Mr. Istchenko: Who conducted the legal review that found that this policy is inconsistent with the *Wildlife Act*?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: That review has taken place through the Yukon Department of Justice natural resources group.

Mr. Istchenko: Can we see that legal opinion? Will the minister table it in the House and share it with us and with the public?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The member opposite will know that it is not necessarily common practice, during the course of receiving advice from the Department of Justice, to release legal opinions. I can go away and seek advice as to if parts of the legal opinion are releasable, but for now, that's my answer. It's not common for those legal opinions to be released, but I'm certain that there was a canvas of relevant law from across Canada and a cross-jurisdictional scan. If there are elements of that cross-jurisdictional scan which are releasable, I will take that under advisement and get back to the member.

Mr. Istchenko: I am still having a hard time here. Can the minister explain this legal opinion? I am asking on behalf of the outfitters and lots of other Yukoners. He went out there and got a legal opinion, and we want to just understand what it says in that legal opinion that effected this change.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: During these last two years of COVID, I am advised that in the first year of the last two years, most of the communication was in the nature of Zoom or in writing with the outfitter liaison committee. Most recently, within the last year, those meetings have been in person, and during the course of those meetings, the nature and substance

of the legal opinion has been communicated at those various meetings. So, that communication has been taking place with the outfitter liaison committee.

Mr. Istchenko: So, which provision in the act is this consistent with?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: At present, the assignment of multi-year quotas and over-quotas is deemed to not be consistent with section 54(5) of the *Wildlife Act*, which states that operating certificates are to be issued annually.

Mr. Istchenko: So, what is the plan now, for the meantime, while this policy is then going to be reviewed?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Since November 1, 2021 — the department will implement an interim process to establish outfitter quotas. Outfitters who have never had a moose or caribou quota — this is dated information, because this has now occurred — will be assigned one for the 2022-23 season — after quota meetings — as per the outfitter quota meeting procedures.

Outfitters who had a quota previously will see their previous quota extended one year at a time with similar conditions unless there is a conservation issue. Multi-year and over-the-harvest quotas will not be offered as they do not conform to the *Wildlife Act*. The grizzly bear allocation process will remain the same for the 2022-23 season. Goat, sheep, and bison quotas, where applicable, will also remain the same.

Although the department, based on not being consistent with section 54(5) of the *Wildlife Act* — notwithstanding, the department is exploring how we can continue to provide certainty from year to year with the outfitting industry and still be in alignment with the *Wildlife Act*. The department is optimistic that we will find a solution. In the interim, the industry has been told by the department that, unless there is a conservation concern, their quotas will remain stable.

Mr. Istchenko: When will the outfitter be notified of their annual quota?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The quotas have been assigned as of April 1 and are available for pickup at Burns Road. I am advised by my officials that some of the notifications have been picked up and some have not yet been picked up.

Mr. Istchenko: The outfitting industry is a business. They need to know what product they have to sell. The minister just discussed April 1. People book many years in advance, so I want to go back to this again. I am having a hard time understanding the minister. He said April 1, but I wonder when they would know their annual quota for the following year. Has every outfitter been notified for this year? How will it work in the following years? When will they be notified about next year's quota?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will repeat my previous response and add a little bit. The Department of Environment will make best efforts to continue to provide certainty from year to year with the outfitting industry while still striving to be in alignment with the relevant section of the *Wildlife Act*. The Department of Environment is optimistic that they will find a solution and, in the interim, the industry has been told by the department that, unless there is a conservation concern, their quotas will remain stable. The answer to the Member for

Kluane's direct question is that the assignment will technically occur on April 1, 2023, but meetings will occur between now and April 1, 2023. If this policy being that, all things being equal, the quotas will be stable, my officials would alert any of the 22 concessions if there were conservation concerns between April 1, 2022 and April 1, 2023 in order that they be alerted.

I certainly am cognizant of the fact that these are businesses where the outfitting business is one where plans are made over the course of multiple years. These are significant experiences for the guests and hunters that these outfitters host in their concessions. I completely understand that.

I can also advise — and the member opposite will be aware of this — that during the incredibly challenging global pandemic, both the Department of Environment and the Department of Economic Development and other Yukon government departments engaged in fairly significant actions in order to support outfitters, including providing for alternate isolation availability. I'm not disputing today on the floor that the first year — and certainly the first season — wasn't a challenge for outfitters. The Yukon government listened to outfitters and they were eligible for economic supports. They were eligible for alternate isolation plans for their guests.

With respect to the four concessions of the 22 that had not had outfitter quotas, they were advised that they would be receiving quotas this year, but those quotas could have been imposed at this same time in 2021. Out of recognition of the hardships that had been borne by not just outfitters, but by many Yukon businesses, that decision was deferred. But the Department of Environment was clear that, as of April 1, 2022, all of the 22 concessions were going to have a quota.

Mr. Istchenko: If there's a concern with certain species, like the minister said, when will you alert the outfitter and let him know that things are going to change?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: These concerns are most likely to arise at regional resources council meetings or Fish and Wildlife Management Board meetings during the course of the year.

If the department is alerted to the possibilities that there are conservation pressures in a certain concession, the outfitter will be notified right away.

Mr. Istchenko: So, will this apply to all species?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes. The response is yes — for any species that are currently on a quota.

Mr. Istchenko: So, the minister mentioned earlier a policy that is being reviewed. What sort of consultation is planned for this policy review with the outfitters?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Establishing outfitter quotas is a complex process that requires balancing the rights, interests, and concerns of Yukon First Nations, renewable resources councils, and outfitters. The concerns expressed by those involved in the outfitter quota process point to the growing need for a consistent approach to wildlife harvest allocation to guide the sustainable harvest of Yukon's wildlife and to provide certainty to all those involved. Although multi-year and over harvest quotas will not be offered during the interim period, we are working on determining if and how this could conform with the *Wildlife Act*.

Department officials met with the outfitter liaison committee and several outfitters on October 26, 2021 and on February 16, 2022 to discuss a range of topics including the review of the quota allocation process and the development of new harvest allocation guidance more broadly.

To answer specifically to the member opposite's question about the timeline and process for developing a new approach to the wildlife harvest allocation, I can advise that we are currently in the early planning stages and therefore do not have specifics at this time to share. However, we can confirm that the intention is to work with First Nation governments, renewable resources councils, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, outfitters — those represented by the Yukon Outfitters Association and those who are not — and the public once we initiate a process for developing the new approach.

So, that is occurring. As indicated, these are in the early stages but, once again, just to somewhat repeat myself, generally speaking, the allocation in the 22 concessions has remained reasonably consistent over the course of the last number of years. There is certainly challenging and complex work to do, but we also recognize that it is important for business planning that the Department of Environment will provide as much certainty as we possibly can going forward during the course of these multi-party discussions.

Mr. Istchenko: So, when it comes to the outfitting industry, like many other industries — say, the Yukon Contractors Association. Not every contractor is a member of the Contractors Association or our local chamber of commerce, and not all businesses are members of that organization, and not every tourism operator is a member of TIAY, and that also goes with the Yukon Outfitters Association. I would just hope that all outfitting concessions would be consulted on this. They all have different areas and different issues.

I want to move on a little bit to the new *Lands Act*. I just want to know how the outfitters are being considered in the development of this new *Lands Act*.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. I have been advised, with respect to amendments to the *Lands Act*, that Energy, Mines and Resources is the lead on that. That engagement is commencing, and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources anticipates that there will be a "what we heard" document in the relatively near future and certainly is open to engaging and consulting broadly. So, I would certainly ask the member opposite, or perhaps one of his colleagues, to ask the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to provide some additional details as to where that consultation is at.

Mr. Istchenko: My colleague will discuss that with the minister in charge.

I want to switch a little bit over to wildlife management now. Over the past few weeks, we have asked a number of questions about decisions that the minister has made about restricting hunting in a number of areas. One of the general concerns that the hunting community has — I listened to it all weekend, actually, hanging out with some friends — is that, when the minister introduces new restrictions on licensed

hunting, they are essentially becoming permanent. They are essentially becoming permanent; as soon as they put these — they become permanent forever.

So, how does the department review previous decisions in light of new information or data, and does it ever consider undoing previously imposed restrictions?

I will give a good example. For instance, there are some areas where the department has recommended moving from PHA to open or from a limited number of PHAs to a higher number. The question is: Does the department ever consider undoing previously imposed restrictions?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We share this territory with an incredible array of wildlife species. Yukoners understand that a healthy environment with resilient wildlife populations is directly connected to healthy communities.

The Department of Environment strives to make sure our stewardship of these species and our interactions with them are responsible, sustainable, and informed by scientific, local, and traditional knowledge. Biologists and technicians study wildlife, monitor trends, and investigate habitat requirements and patterns of use. This work informs decisions on harvest management, land use planning, development assessment processes, and various permitting and licensing needs.

Some studies focus on how human activities influence wildlife so that we can develop strategies to lessen our impact on nature. Other studies seek to determine the size of a population, which helps us better understand how many animals may be available for sustainable harvest, while still leaving enough mature animals to replenish populations.

Together, we can make sure the Yukon's wildlife remains healthy and resilient now and for future generations.

The Department of Environment biologists and technicians are dedicated to development programs that monitor many Yukon species, particularly species of conservation concern and those that are harvested. We monitor species like bison, caribou, and moose through harvest data and population information. In some instances, such as for bears, we collect hair samples for DNA analysis, from which the results are used, along with harvest information, to estimate population size. We determine habitat use for species like wolf, elk, bison, and caribou by examining the location data sent from deployed GPS radio collars. We also use remote camera data to determine what types of habitat a species occupies.

Many of these projects are collaborative efforts with financial, field, and logistical support. This support is provided by our management partners, including Yukon First Nation governments, the Inuvialuit, neighbouring governments, industry boards and councils, and renewable resources councils, as well as the hunters, trappers, outfitters, and citizens who are out on the land. The Department of Environment collects and analyzes this data to help identify management goals, set priorities for future research efforts, and ultimately support evidence-based decision-making.

We collaborate with university researchers to employ cutting-edge techniques to analyze biological samples and data. For example, we have partnered with Dalhousie University to develop a new technique to census Arctic grayling using

genetics. We also developed new and innovative survey techniques to improve the accuracy of our population estimates. For example, we have developed moose survey techniques that quantitatively use local and traditional knowledge to sample low-density populations optimally.

We have joined with the universities of Alberta, Toronto, Trent, Colorado, Queen's, and McGill to investigate the effect of climate change on the ecology of Yukon's fish and wildlife, and we are developing a new Yukon deer program to learn more about Yukon deer populations and to consider future management options.

This summer pilot study will use remote cameras to learn about deer population movements in the Takhini Valley and Hot Springs Road agricultural areas. Future work may involve collaring deer to estimate abundance in the area and to work with hunters and our animal health unit to learn more about deer health across the entire territory.

With respect to the Member for Kluane's specific question as to whether certain management and conservation decisions are always permanent or whether the Department of Environment or other interested stakeholders do reviews — I have received three examples of reviews.

For example, in January, August, and December of 2020, the Department of Environment opened limited harvests on the Fortymile caribou after 25 years of collaborative recovery efforts with our partners in the Yukon and Alaska. We also reviewed and revised the sheep management regime this year, based on feedback. As well, the Department of Environment resurveyed Faro this year in order to determine the impact of the threshold hunt. I am certainly sympathetic to a concern that, once conservation measures are put in place, it is a point of no return, but I can certainly come back to the member opposite and hopefully be in a position to provide more examples of where data-driven decisions are made so that opportunities can be provided in various geographic areas in the Yukon, based on — we hope — the success of conservation measures.

Mr. Istchenko: I guess, for the minister, that is great information. It is information that I totally know and I totally understand. I worked with it in my previous role as a minister. But also sitting on the resources council and growing up in the Yukon, it just seems that nothing ever gets opened back up once it is closed. When it comes to the Fortymile caribou, that was a decision made jointly with both Alaska and the Yukon. It's good that it opened up, but that's because there was actually a management plan, and part of that is so that we can hunt our traditional foods that we enjoy.

When the department eliminates or restricts licensed hunting on a particular population — and I have been through this process many times — in a particular region, does it develop a recovery plan? If so, what consultation goes into the development of such a plan?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Deputy Chair: Order, please. One moment, please.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have no issue with the member opposite asking a follow-up question.

Mr. Istchenko: With the recovery plan and the consultation that goes into the development of such a plan, does

the department have specific population objectives they need to meet in order for them to consider whether to restrict or open up hunting? If so, is there data? Like, where can a guy find the published data when the regulation change passes, and it is what level that animal needs to come to where we can open hunting back up communicated publicly?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Department of Environment employs adaptive measures to manage wildlife more responsively. Adaptive management is a system that uses on-the-land monitoring and harvest information to inform and adjust our actions and impacts on wildlife as needed. It provides the flexibility to promptly alter the harvest regime in response to changing hunting pressures on wildlife population numbers.

Our shared priorities for the next steps include increased public education and the launch of at least one more community-driven wolf harvest program.

But the answer to the members opposite's question — firstly, with respect to population decline and the review of that, it varies, obviously, by species in location. If that number is in decline, the department will work with partners using science and database guidelines. I am also advised that fairly specific information is shared with regional resources councils and co-management bodies and stakeholders. Those numbers are generally available when those discussions on conservation versus abundance are discussed in arriving at some agreed-upon numbers.

Mr. Istchenko: So, let's move to a specific example. This might make it a bit easier here.

When the government announced the changes to the hunting opportunities for the Finlayson herd, the minister of the day announced that there would be what the minister called a "collective management plan". Let's start there.

Can the minister tell us what the collective management plan was intended to look like? What work has been done on it?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: So, it is certainly the intention on the Department of Environment to have a management plan with respect to the Finlayson caribou herd, and the member opposite is correct in indicating that this involves reaching out to both the Ross River Dena Council and the Liard First Nation. Those discussions have started, but candidly, we are still in the early days of discussion with respect to that. So, notwithstanding that the prior Minister of Environment indicated that it was her goal to have a herd management plan in place, I can reinforce that it is still our goal for that to occur, but it does require the discussions with the Ross River Dena Council and the Liard First Nation to bear fruit so that we can work on a combined plan of data collection and wildlife surveys. The member opposite will, of course, know that the Ross River Dena Council has fairly publicly expressed concerns about the caribou populations in their traditional territory, or their asserted territory, and the potential overharvest.

So, yes, we are committed to having a herd management plan for the Finlayson caribou herd. We do want to support — we have been supporting — both the Liard First Nation and the Ross River Dena Council in providing capacity.

I certainly will endeavour to do whatever I can to move these discussions forward, recognizing that this is a file of importance.

Mr. Istchenko: It doesn't look like there's a plan yet or a plan in place, but they are working on it. It's good to see that they are working with First Nations on it.

What are some of the measures that the government is discussing with the First Nations that they can put in place to help recover the herd?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Specifically with respect to the Finlayson herd, as the member opposite indicated, there have been no licensed hunting opportunities that have been available for the Finlayson herd since 2018. That, of course, would be one measure where at least the prospect of that would provide the opportunity for the herd to rebound.

As well, it's important for the department to have fruitful discussions with the new leadership at the Ross River Dena Council — Chief Loblaw and his new council. We look forward to those discussions occurring in the late spring and in the summer so that we can have an idea, hopefully, with respect to the subsistence harvest trends in the area.

On a more practical level, I'm advised that there was a survey conducted in the area toward the end of February and that those results should be available within the next 60 to 90 days.

So, certainly, I will stay on top of this file. I look forward to visiting the community of Ross River this summer to discuss both this matter and other environment-related matters as I will also with the Liard First Nation in the Watson Lake area as well.

The Member for Kluane will know — no licensed hunting opportunities since 2018 and now a survey that has been conducted quite recently. I'll stay on top of it and keep the member apprised as to the developments.

Mr. Istchenko: What I had asked was — the minister's meeting with the First Nations to discuss this issue for the Finlayson herd — when the department and the minister meet with the First Nations, they must have some idea of how they can help the herd recover. What are some of those ideas that they're bringing to the First Nations and their discussions?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As I said in my previous response, I think it is incredibly important for the comprehensive management planning process to engage. We would have an idea of what the First Nation governments' perspectives were in the Ross River area or in the Watson Lake area, but obviously, we are talking about Ross River with respect to the Finlayson caribou herd.

The member opposite also asked me a question a while ago about measures that might be adopted to increase herd size. I will certainly get back to him with any other responses from the wildlife biologists at the Department of Environment, but one of the discussions that we had, probably two weeks ago, was about a similar question that was asked. My response, as I recall, was whether there may be — I don't think there is. It's not our policy with respect to having predator control, but of course, from a policy perspective, one could consider liberalizing bag limits for wolves or any other animals that were

considered to be predators that could impact on the size of the herd.

One note I have here is about maternal penning, which of course, I would seek guidance as to what maternal penning is. I can imagine what maternal penning is, but the prohibition by licensed hunters is now four years old, so I will be interested to see what the numbers are once we receive those in the next 30 or 60 days and whether there will be some opportunities. Maybe there will; maybe there won't, but we will be guided by the data that we receive shortly.

We can also make better efforts, Deputy Chair, to support trappers in the area. Like I said, I guess we will have some data shortly, and we will know, generally speaking, what the health of the Finlayson caribou herd is and whether there is support for the proposition that some sort of limited permit or threshold hunt be authorized in that area within the next few years.

Mr. Istchenko: So, another example of what we have been talking about here is the South Canol area, where the government recently imposed new hunting restrictions for moose. I would like the minister to explain why the recommendations from the Fish and Wildlife Management Board were not accepted.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This response is similar to the response I provided a few weeks ago with respect to the South Canol. This is deemed to be another area where the sustainability of moose is in crisis. The Ross River Dena Council has asked for licensed harvest restrictions in this area for many years, and we received a letter from the Chief of the Teslin Tlingit Council indicating that establishing permit areas for licensed hunters would help address their concerns in the area.

We note, of course, that the proposal was not recommended to proceed, as proposed by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board; however, the decision to vary the board's recommendation to go forward with this regulation change was approved as our evidence was decided upon, because the evidence we had showed that the immediate regulation of harvest was necessary to ensure a sustainable moose population in the area.

A survey that was conducted in 2013 indicated that to have a sustainable harvest, a total of 15 bulls for both licensed and First Nation hunters could be harvested in any one season. From 2017 to 2021, licensed harvest alone averaged 15 bulls, not including First Nations' harvest. While licensed harvest had been relatively consistent for many years, the estimated total harvest numbers indicate that it is at a level that is far above that which is sustainable for this moose population, and licensed hunters are taking a disproportionate amount of the sustainable harvest.

I can also advise the member opposite that, with respect to wildlife surveys, the — so, in my view, that provided support for the proposition that limits or conservation measures ought to be imposed on the South Canol, and I would certainly err on the side of conservation when those concerns are raised.

For greater certainty, as well as to receive additional data — which we will share once we receive it — under the planned wildlife surveys for 2022-23, three areas have been designated

for moose surveys. One is the Nisutlin River-Quiet Lake, and the second is the Nordenskiöld River area, and the third is the South Canol.

Those survey numbers will provide support for the proposition as to the — that we've engaged in these conservation measures, or it may provide data for support for the proposition that there could be enhanced opportunities provided in the South Canol.

So, we had a prior survey's indication that too many bulls were being taken, and it was the view of the department and the Ross River Dena Council that conservation measures were required for this year. But, as I indicated, this government has committed to additional surveys in this fiscal year, so we will have data going forward quite shortly.

Mr. Istchenko: It's not lost on many that the decision was made on data from 2013. Restrictions were imposed, and now they're out surveying to see how things are. What happened to science and data?

So, the board also told the minister that taking this action would simply push the pressure into other areas. How does the minister respond to that point raised by the board?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: It's kind of a two-pronged question. The first, I suppose, is that if I receive the information based on the fact that the department has the benefit of something like 70 moose surveys that have been conducted in recent decades — and then there are discussions with First Nation governments and with regional resources councils, hunters, and trappers — then at some point, you make a decision based on the data. I take the member's point that you will never have all the surveys that you need that are as up to date as you want them to be, but the anecdotal observations — no, they weren't anecdotal; they knew in the South Canol how many bulls were taken.

The bottom line is that, of course, the population of the Yukon is increasing. A lot of our relatively recent arrivals to the territory have adopted a hunting lifestyle. They want to partake of the abundance of not just moose, but caribou, bear, and sheep, if they are skilled. Over the course of now 30 or 40 years, it was fairly predictable that areas that were relatively easily accessible by Yukon roads would be under pressure from a conservation perspective. That is borne out by the maps that I have seen. In totality, there likely is an abundance of moose in the territory, but it is not surprising, when you look at the predicted heat maps of moose abundance in the territory, that they are not as abundant as they were in areas that are relatively easily accessible from the Robert Campbell Highway, the South Canol, and the Klondike Highway.

To the member opposite's question, based on science and the best information available, you have to adopt conservation measures in the areas where you receive guidance. So, you can't sort of say: "Well, I'm not going to..." — based on a preceding aerial survey or prior surveys or the cumulative 1970s surveys that have been conducted with respect to moose management — then say: "Because I have concerns that if conservative measures exist in South Canol or Sifton-Miners or in the Mayo moose management unit, I am not going to do that because that is going to put pressure on other areas." That is not consistent really with science. It is not consistent with what has

been happening in the Yukon over the course of the last 25 or 30 years.

The Department of Environment employs adaptive measures to manage wildlife more responsibly. Adaptive management is a system that uses on-the-land monitoring and harvest information to inform and adjust our actions and impacts on wildlife as needed. It provides the flexibility to promptly alter the harvest regime in response to changing hunting pressures on wildlife population numbers. We also collaborate with the association on public education and community outreach activities like family fishing events.

It is a modern approach that enables sustainable wildlife uses over the long term. It is responsive to the needs of Yukoners and the needs of wildlife. It helps us to be nimble and flexible in a changing environment to ensure sustainable hunting opportunities now and in the future. One effective and collaborative adaptive management process is harvest- or herd-specific management planning. Once a plan is in place, our adaptive management regulations allow the changes to be enacted as necessary.

In 2019, we released the final conservation plan for grizzly bears in the Yukon and are now working to implement that plan. We have also done an implementation review of the 2012 *Yukon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan*. The implementation review included input gathered during 27 meetings with First Nation governments, boards, councils, and stakeholders. The review highlighted the continued respect and appreciation for wolves and Yukon's ecology.

Our shared priorities for the next step include increasing public education and launching at least one more community-driven wolf harvest program by 2023 and increased awareness of the First Nation liaison position within the Conservation Officer Services branch.

We are working with our partners on the Yukon bison technical team to review and update the 2012 bison management plan for the Aishihik herd. The Aishihik bison herd is a popular source of wild meat for many Yukoners. We continue to manage this herd with our partners while contributing to the national recovery efforts of this iconic species.

The harvest management approach for bison in the Yukon has relied upon adaptive management to adjust harvests as needed and to meet the needs of Yukoners, all while ensuring the sustainability of the herd. This adaptive management approach includes adjusting where, when, and how many bison are harvested each year. We conducted a bison hunter effort survey in the fall of 2021, and results were released in January 2022.

We are also working with our international partners in Alaska to review the management plan for the Chisana caribou herd. We are working with several governments, including six Southern Lakes First Nations, to create a management plan for the Southern Lakes caribou herd. All this work requires the collaboration of governments, engaging communities and the public, and thorough research to ensure the best plans for our future.

So, in summary, we're guided by adaptive management, and we have certainly been fortunate to have a lot of pre-existing data. This government has committed to a fairly aggressive and quite well-funded aerial survey program in order to buttress our decisions. But, just to loop back, if support for the proposition and a strong argument has been made that there are conservation concerns, then conservation concerns have to be addressed in the areas of concern. As far as providing opportunities in other areas, certainly there are challenges, but that's part of the adaptive process.

Mr. Istchenko: Can the minister explain the new regulations in relation to the limitation of hunting of roadside bears, and are there any plans to expand that at all?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As the member opposite has indicated, the roadside hunting of grizzly bears is now prohibited south of Whitehorse on select roadways. This change was proposed by the Taku River Tlingit First Nation and the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council and supported by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and also with input from impacted Yukon citizens. This prohibition is in effect 100 metres from either side of the centre line on select roadways. Maps detailing this ban are available on yukon.ca. As per the conservation plan for grizzly bears in the Yukon, a local community may request the minister to prohibit roadside hunting of grizzly bears on other roadways in the Yukon, but the specific answer to your final question is that there are no immediate plans to have any further roadside hunting prohibitions of grizzly bears anywhere else in the near future.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that.

So, elk — I'm sure everyone is well-read and well-learned on this from listening to landowners and hunters and everything else. The elk-agriculture conflict — it's still an issue for many landowners north of Whitehorse, and the fencing and wildlife compensation — that was just intended to be an interim measure to this issue.

So, what work is being done with the agriculture and hunting communities to deal with this issue?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Once again, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources may have something to add to this conversation in debate when his department is discussed at a later date, but I will provide what I have, as far as the updated information from my department's perspective.

The Government of Yukon continues to mitigate the concerns raised by some members of the agricultural community about the Takhini Valley elk population and its impact on crops and farm infrastructure. We are completing a two-year pilot project to manage elk conflict through increased funding for fencing, getting more hunters on the land in key areas, and reducing the herd through harvesting. We are evaluating the results of this pilot project, and we will be discussing outcomes and next steps with affected landowners, farmers, interest groups, and First Nations. Measures, such as the elk-agriculture conflict hunt, aim to condition elk to stay away from conflict areas.

The 2016 elk management plan prioritized addressing conflicts between elk and agriculture. Addressing these conflicts remains our priority. The Department of Environment

conducted a minimum count survey of the herd in December 2021 and actually observed more elk than in March 2021. Although useful as a snapshot, the survey technique does not provide accurate population estimates on trends.

In the coming year, radio collars will be placed on some of the elk to help us understand the extent of their range and how they use it throughout the year. A new deputy ministers working group — made up of government, the agriculture sector, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, and First Nation representatives — will review existing data and identify options to mitigate concerns with the elk-agriculture conflict. This work will review the existing zones in the permit hunt area.

So, yes, our department, in concert with Energy, Mines and Resources, believes that the radio collar process will provide a more accurate number of elk. Also, I can receive guidance then as to what the actual range of the Takhini Valley elk population is — for instance, how far out of the so-called “Takhini buffer zone” they are ranging.

The technical working group, with representatives from Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources, was formed in September 2021. The group is currently completing an assessment of the two-year elk pilot project and will develop elk management options based on their findings. The development of options will also be informed by a planned public survey. Targeted engagement is to be conducted during the summer and fall of 2022. Work from this group will inform decisions at the select committee level.

There are obviously conflicting objectives that are a challenge to reconcile, but in broad brush strokes, Yukoners have been clear on the desire to ensure the Takhini and Braeburn elk herds remain healthy and self-sustaining, but the presence of elk on the landscape provides many Yukoners with opportunities to view and learn how elk behave in their natural environment and to harvest elk. That’s a contradistinction with the goals and aspirations of the Yukon Agricultural Association.

With respect to a statistical analysis, our Conservation Officer Services branch received the following complaints by fiscal year. In 2019-20, there were three complaints related to elk conflict. In 2020-21, there were four complaints related to elk conflict. In 2021-22, there was one complaint related to elk conflict — recognizing that this may not be entirely consistent with the level of concern that may actually exist, but those are the numbers that we have received from Conservation Officer Services branch.

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

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Deputy 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. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Mr. Istchenko: We had left off with elk. I just have another couple of questions. I just want to know if the department has the most recent population count for both the Takhini and Braeburn herds. How did they count them and what was the cost for this count?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: First, with respect to the budget for fiscal 2021-22, \$38,630 was budgeted for the Takhini Valley and Braeburn area. For this upcoming year, \$40,000 is budgeted for the Takhini Valley and Braeburn area as well, but also includes support for the working group and the collaring project. The most recent numbers that started the process of considering whether one should do the collaring to come up with more accurate numbers are: 134 animals in March 2021; 247 in December 2021; and then, curiously, 152 animals in 2022 — so, quite recently.

Although useful as a discrete snapshot of the number of elk in a precise area at a specific time, the minimum count survey technique does not provide accurate estimates of overall population size and cannot be used to identify population trends, as indicated by the fluctuation that occurred from March 2021 to December 2021 and then to the spring of 2022.

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

I want to switch gears to the most favourite part of summer for many Yukoners: campgrounds.

There is work to be done at our campgrounds this year. When I went to the budget briefing, we talked a little bit about it. Many need maintenance, and there are a number of upgrades that should be taking place.

Can the minister answer which campgrounds are getting upgrades to the sites, and will there be infill happening or additional sites added to existing campgrounds? Are there tender opportunities for local businesses, and for which campgrounds?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The capital estimate for parks and campground infrastructure is \$1,089,000 and it consists of \$40,000 in personnel for general repairs to campground infrastructure by Parks. The \$597,000, as the member opposite has indicated, is for construction contracts for campground infrastructure and infill, and subject to any late-breaking information that I might be receiving, which I will provide to the member opposite — I will also endeavour to get him some more information for the breakdown of the \$597,000. I can provide greater detail in a return to the member, but the budget is \$292,000 for the category of Parks expanding existing infrastructure total, including campground infills — \$67,500. Tombstone backcountry trail development is \$50,000. Developing recreation destination — capital expenses to plan and establish a new frontcountry trail at Tombstone Park and green park operations — when I did a tour of some of the campsites last August and September, I believe that there is a push to have what is called “ground tube” garbage cans, which are more efficient and basically greener infrastructure. The

ongoing planning for the campgrounds within two hours of Whitehorse is budgeted at \$51,511.

For this year, it's design work, YESAB applications, and there's also a \$300,000 matter — a budget item for park playground safety — and a matter that has been delayed somewhat by virtue of — probably likely — COVID, but we have boat launch and dock replacement. The capital estimate for replacement of boat launches and docks is \$1.551 million for the cost of upgrades or replacements at 11 locations, including Aishihik Lake, Ethel Lake, Frenchman Lake, Lake Laberge, Nunatuk, Otter Falls, Quiet Lake south, Quiet Lake north, Tagish bridge, Teslin 10-mile, and Twin Lakes. That will be a great initiative for our boating enthusiasts.

That's an ambitious schedule, but hopefully it goes to enhance the camping experience for Yukoners, for other Canadians, and for our international travellers. What I have just broken down may not have a sufficient degree of specificity, but I can certainly provide that at a future date. So, Deputy Chair, that's substantially the information I have with respect to the upgrades.

In relation to the question the Member for Kluane asked about the tendering of contracts, we will just wait to see whether we have any up-to-date information on the tendering of the contracts.

With respect to boat launch procurement, two tenders have been awarded for this year, and those include sites at Tagish, Otter Falls, Aishihik, Ethel Lake, Nunatuk Lake, Frenchman Lake, and Twin Lakes.

Those are my responses that I have so far.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. I just have one more question, and then I'll turn the floor over.

My last question is about the newly proposed 150 campgrounds — or campground — so, within two hours of Whitehorse. It seems to be, in the minister's response, taking a little bit of a different direction when I asked him at Question Period. I understand that there is no final decision being made, but the minister did just mention that they were doing YESA stuff, so they must have some locations.

I'm just curious; are we still looking at one large 150-stall campground? Are we looking at multiple campgrounds to make up the 150? Have they actually picked locations?

I'm just wondering who will run these campgrounds. Will it still be run with the Department of Environment? Maybe it will be a private sector campground or maybe First Nations running that. Thank you, and I want to thank the staff who are here today supporting the minister. I'll leave it at that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for that question from the member opposite and for his questions this afternoon in Committee of the Whole for the Department of Environment. I have a bit of background here, and then I think I can provide an answer to the question.

Just briefly, six Yukon First Nations, whose traditional territories are within two hours' drive of Whitehorse, were invited to discuss possible campground locations and partnership opportunities with the Yukon Parks branch. We are working with First Nations to identify a location that would

meet the requirement for the new campground laid out in the *Yukon Parks Strategy*.

Yukoners will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the new campground after a final location has been selected in consultation with impacted First Nations. To get to the construction phase, the Department of Environment will also have to complete the necessary planning and design work. The new campground will provide economic opportunities for First Nations and the private sector. There will be opportunities to bid on tenders for campground design, construction, and ongoing operations.

As I indicated previously in the Assembly, the location has not been identified. Ideally, it would be a single 150 camping sites location that would be identified; however, in the consultations so far, there has been a growing realization that this could have a fairly significantly large impact, and it could be quite a large project. As I had indicated previously, there is at least the beginning of a discussion to consider smaller pieces of this project, but that has not yet been confirmed either.

The final question was who would run these new campsites. It could depend on discussions with the impacted First Nations. There is at least a possibility of a large site, or if there were a few discrete sites, there could be either First Nation management or co-management, in the spirit of reconciliation and economic opportunity.

It's exciting, but it is a challenging file. I would certainly send a shout-out to the great staff at Parks in the Department of Environment, as they work through this file. I would also give a shout-out to the Parks staff, as they get ready for the spring-summer-fall 2022 camping season. I know that Yukoners love this time of year where they are counting down the days to around April 30, May 1, April 29 and that the diligent Parks staff are probably putting some of their snowblowers on overdrive to open the early sites, given the snow load this year.

Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

Deputy Chair: At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole, as the Chair would like to take part in the debate on the Department of Environment.

Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises

Acting Chair (Ms. White): Order, please.

Is there any further general debate on the Department of Environment?

Ms. Tredger: I would like to start by thanking the officials for coming today and thank you for the briefing that we had. It was very helpful. I may re-ask some of the same questions to have them on the record. I am just looking forward to the conversation today.

I wanted to start with the minister's mandate letter. The mandate letter says, "Begin the process of creating McIntyre Creek Park, working with the City of Whitehorse, affected First Nations, Yukon University and local stakeholders." I would like to ask for a progress update on that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. We have initiated discussions with the City

of Whitehorse, and we will be following up with the affected Yukon First Nations, Yukon University, and local stakeholders toward the creation of McIntyre Creek park. The McIntyre Creek area supports a diversity of habitats important to wildlife, including wetlands. It is also known to be an important cultural area for both the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Yukon University recognizes the importance of the area to support field-based learning and research.

We acknowledge and respect this scenario with several concurrent planning processes already underway. This includes the development of the City of Whitehorse's new official community plan, Whitehorse 2040, the development of Yukon University's campus master plan, and the Lu Zil Män Fish Lake local area plan.

We will continue to work with affected parties to discuss the park's development and ways to ensure the environmental protection of McIntyre Creek moving forward.

I can advise that I have had, and I continue to have, quite regular meetings with the Mayor of Whitehorse and she confirms that the path forward with respect to McIntyre Creek, as far as the City of Whitehorse is concerned, is in fact the confirmation of the OCP, the official community plan. I will not speak for mayor and council, but my sense is that mayor and council are supportive of moving forward in a general sense, but they are not in a position to commit to a defined path forward, pending the review of the OCP. I understand that the first reading of the OCP is likely to be in May this year.

Certainly, we will continue the meetings, and we will also begin or re-engage with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün. The member opposite will know this, but the land set aside in the City of Whitehorse for a potentially more protected McIntyre Creek Park set aside, I suppose — 80 percent, or maybe more, of McIntyre Creek Park is west of the top of Copper Ridge. So, the top of Copper Ridge and it is further west — so, 80 percent is up in that area. The area, of course, of the greatest degree of complexity is between Porter Creek and so-called "Porter Creek D", the now-university and out to the Alaska Highway, the Kopper King, and into the connector to Whitehorse. That is on the map that I have in my office. It is a pretty small portion, but I think that there is the recognition that we will likely be speaking of the entire so-called "land mass", but the breakdown is probably 20 percent in that area of complexity. I am not saying that the other area is not going to become complex, but the maximum complexity is in that 20-percent area. It is certainly exciting, and I speak with my officials on it at every meeting that we have, and it is brought up with the City of Whitehorse at every meeting that I have there as well. So, I'm cautiously optimistic, but I know that there are something like 16, 17, or 18 stakeholders and interested groups. There will be a lot of input and opinions that will have to be considered.

From my perspective — I recognize that it's in my mandate letter and I do want to push on this — it aligns with the government's objectives to set more land aside but also to support so-called "urban national parks". The federal government just confirmed the first urban national park in

Canada. It's in the Rouge Valley in Scarborough, so in the east end of Toronto.

The north isn't specifically part of that policy or Minister Guilbeault's mandate, but we're pretty confident that the federal government will still be interested in finding some way to support First Nation municipal discussions, territorial government discussions, and other stakeholders because I think Minister Guilbeault's mandate letter directs him to seek other opportunities for urban parks.

Like I said, I think parks in Yellowknife, Whitehorse, and Iqaluit probably do not classify, but that doesn't mean that there wouldn't be support for the proposition.

Ms. Tredger: So, I understand that the conversations with the city are underway. Is there a timeline for the conversations with the affected First Nations and other stakeholders? I'll leave it there.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I would say that there are active discussions occurring between the Department of Environment officials and the City of Whitehorse already. Also, at the officials levels, the beginning of discussions have occurred with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Once the first reading of the OCP occurs in May, I have committed the Department of Environment to bring the parties together and begin in earnest the possibility of forging forward on the development of a management plan. Realistically, it would be in the early to mid summer.

Ms. Tredger: I entirely appreciate that answer, and I am looking forward to hearing how that goes. That is exciting news.

I would like to turn to the Youth Panel on Climate Change, which the minister mentioned in his opening remarks. I believe the quote was that he looks forward to learning from them. That is very exciting. I am also looking forward to that. However, the mandate for the current panel has been changed such that they are no longer able to make recommendations. I am wondering if the minister can speak to why that change was made and what and how he is hoping to learn from them.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We are excited to welcome the second cohort of the Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change. We launched the call for applications in December 2021. After receiving a total of 26 applications, 10 panelists were selected. The panelists include youth between the ages of 13 and 25 who are representative of the cultural, gender, and regional diversity of the Yukon. Seven are from Whitehorse and there is one each from Haines Junction, Pelly Crossing, and Watson Lake.

Within the last week or so, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I had the honour and pleasure of meeting most of the panel by Zoom. We were there for some of their first organizational meeting. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources might have been there for the balance of the meeting as well. The focus of this year's cohort will be on activities that build leadership, advocacy, policy-making skills, and engaging with other Yukon youth.

With respect to the member opposite's question, we welcomed the second cohort of panelists earlier this year, just now, and they are now continuing to build on the work of the first cohort. The focus we made for the second cohort was

leadership, advocacy, policy-making skills, and engaging with other Yukon youth.

I'm sure I can find out when — I think they're returning in the fall with their — I'll get that information, but they will be working in the spring and in the summer, returning, I believe, with their recommendations in the fall of this year.

Ms. Tredger: With regard to the last set of recommendations, is the government planning to create some sort of report card or accountability system so that the youth can see which of these recommendations have been implemented and where they are at with the implementation?

I do have the letter that the Premier along with the current Minister of Environment and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources were copied on — so, the letter that the Premier wrote to the last youth panel. I would like to go through it in quite a bit of detail, actually, but before we start that, I was wondering: Is there going to be a broader, more public accountability mechanism for those recommendations, such as a report card?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As the member opposite will know, this is a — well, it would be all of government, but certainly a three-department response, and the letter itself, authored by the Premier — I am advised by my department that sort of three-department approach will continue with respect to dealing with the recommendations. I appreciate that the member opposite may wish to ask some specific questions in relation to this response letter, which has seven main recommendations. I have reviewed this letter at various times over the course of the last month, but in fairness, a number of the recommendations fall squarely within either ECO — the Executive Council Office — or with EMR, but I can certainly try to address some of the questions that the member opposite may have and then the mining and extractive industry, which is recommendation 7.

So, there is a commitment to work through these recommendations and to respond, but some of these recommendations are not within the purview of the Department of Environment.

Ms. Tredger: So, the question I asked was about whether there will be a process for reporting on these recommendations put forward by the last Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change. In the letter from the Premier, it says — and I quote: “We will continue this work and will provide updates on our progress through our annual reporting.”

So, I am wondering where that progress is going to happen, and while I appreciate that there are recommendations that apply to many different departments, to me, it seems like the most natural place to keep track of all those recommendations and make sure that they are happening as a whole would be the department with the Climate Change Secretariat, which we are debating at the moment.

I am wondering if the minister can provide more detail on what that reporting back is going to look like — that update on progress.

Part of the reason I want to do that is that this letter says — and I quote: “We have appended to this letter a summary of initiatives already underway which address most of your recommendations.”

That was not my reading of either the recommendations or this letter — that most of them were already underway. I would like to dive into that a little bit, because maybe there are pieces I am missing. I looked at these recommendations, which were bold, brave, innovative recommendations, and I was somewhat stunned to hear that they are already being done, because that is not what I see; so, I hope I can learn something different now.

I would like to start with section 1, which is the recommendations on education. I understand that Education is not the department we are debating. Again, this is about climate change, and that is the department we are debating.

Two of the recommendations were to create full scholarships for Yukon students pursuing out-of-territory post-secondary education and programs related to green energy transition with the condition of a return-to-work period and to make Yukon University tuition free for all northern youth.

I don't see that addressed in this section except by a comment that says, “Some of the recommendations ... are best actioned by ... the Yukon University. We encourage you to continue engaging with them as well.”

Does that mean that this department is not going to take any actions on these recommendations and leave it up to the Yukon University, or does the department see a role for themselves in advocating to respond to these recommendations by working with the Yukon University, as well as the Department of Education, on out-of-territory scholarships?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I guess my preliminary comments — and I recognize that the first cohort of the Youth Panel on Climate Change — this work finished a few months ago, but recognizing that the response that was sent to the panelists was penned and dated on March 8, 2022, so that, yes, absolutely, there is work to be done on an all-of-government approach. Some of the departments, including the Department of Education, are likely just receiving these recommendations and they will respond. The Climate Change Secretariat will be the clearing house, or they will receive the responses from the various departments. As far as the accountability piece, we will report progress in the *Our Clean Future* annual report.

I heard the first cohort of the Youth Panel on Climate Change. Most of the recommendations — but in any event, I found the education piece to be compelling, because I believe one of the person's names was Bruce — I think Bruce presented. It seemed that there was a significant gap, certainly in the public education system with respect to environmental education. That seemed like a good place to start as far as educating the next generation.

But the bottom line is that this letter is March 8. Work is to be done. If the question is: Will the Climate Change Secretariat receive the various responses from the various departments? The answer is yes. With respect to accountability, we have an annual report for *Our Clean Future*, and that report is published for this year around August — so relatively soon, and you will have the beginnings, or the embryonic start, of the responses to the recommendations on an all-of-government basis.

Ms. Tredger: I am actually very relieved to hear that there is a further response to this letter coming. As I have made quite clear, I have found this response extremely inadequate,

and I am very heartened to hear that there is more coming. I understand from that answer that it is coming in the *Our Clean Future* report, and I assume that there will be a section added on to respond to these recommendations so that these specific recommendations are responded to, and I look forward to that.

In the response letter regarding the second recommendation, it discusses indigenous guardians. It says — and I quote: “We are working with Indigenous Guardians through our work on parks and protected areas and with the federal government to support community-based adaptation projects.” That is in regard to, I believe, a recommendation about invasive species and increasing capacity.

Could the minister tell us what work is happening, which First Nations are involved, what projects are underway, and what the goals of the programs that are underway are?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As pertains to land guardians and First Nation participation in that regard, I will just provide a bit of background here. The Conservation Officer Services branch is a law enforcement agency dedicated to promoting safe communities. We deliver a suite of comprehensive programs and services in support of the well-being of all Yukoners in 10 districts, including Whitehorse and nine Yukon communities. Conservation officers investigate and enforce the Yukon’s environmental laws. Our goal is to conserve and protect Yukon’s fish and wildlife populations and their habitats by ensuring that everyone understands and complies with the laws meant to safeguard our natural resources. As one of the main enforcement agencies on the land, conservation officers collaborate with other law enforcement agencies — including Alaska, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia — to assist in enforcing some federal environmental laws as well as British Columbia’s *Wildlife Act*.

Yukon conservation officers have a lot of ground to cover. They work together with many partners on the land to do so efficiently, including the public, other wildlife agencies, and First Nations. Managing human-wildlife conflict is a significant responsibility and challenge for conservation officers, whether that’s responding to nuisance or dangerous wildlife complaints, investigating livestock predation, crop damage complaints, or providing public notice of bear or wolf activity in a community.

Officers protect our fish, wildlife, and their habitat through inspections and field monitoring for compliance with trapping, hunting, and angling regulations.

While monitoring and compliance promotion helps to ensure that conservation measures are respected, public education, support, and trust are key components for making sure that Yukoners will be able to enjoy outdoor recreation experiences now and into the future.

Officers model ethical conduct for harvesting in the Yukon and educate the public in ethics through courses and workshops that they provide in collaboration with our stakeholders, interest groups, and local advisory bodies.

Officers are law enforcement professionals and undergo highly specialized training in a number of disciplines. Yukon conservation officers have the knowledge and skills to assist

RCMP when required, including on search and rescue missions, and have done so on a number of occasions.

Specific to the engagement with First Nation governments, there have been agreements reached with the Liard First Nation and the Kaska First Nation. In that respect, Kaska guardians have assisted with Parks with winter monitoring, and there are various transfer agreements in place. There have also been discussions with the Teslin Tlingit Council and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. I’m also advised that, with respect to the aerial surveys — which you have heard me speak about both in the last fiscal year and in the upcoming fiscal year — there has been First Nation involvement in those surveys.

As well, both staff in Parks and in Fish and Wildlife in the Department of Environment are actively engaged in conversations with First Nation governments and First Nation persons on the land. I can certainly provide greater detail going forward in a return.

Just to provide a level of detail for the discussions this afternoon, with respect to the Kaska guardians, \$30,000 was budgeted for last year, and \$30,000 has been budgeted for this fall. I am also advised that, in the discussions on administration of justice agreement negotiations, there can be a land guardian component of those, and the one example that has been brought to my attention would be the Teslin Tlingit Council.

Ms. Tredger: I have to admit that my frustration is rising a little bit, because we just listened to a long description of what conservation officers did, but I was relieved that there was some work going on with indigenous guardians. I am very excited to hear about that work; that is very good news.

So, in the interest of speeding this up a little, I would like to go through some of the other recommendations. So, recommendation 4 talks about indigenous sovereignty. I think that a notable omission in this response letter is that the recommendations from the youth panel are very clear — they are talking about both settlement and non-settlement nations — whereas in the response letter it exclusively talks about land claim and self-government agreements. I am just going to point that out.

In the next section, in local transportation, there are a number of recommendations that are not addressed such as implementing a bicycle rental program in each community, developing a winter food market — actually, to be fair, that is addressed, but in the response letter, it does say that the funding is provided for farmers markets, but the concept of a winter food market is not addressed at all.

A recommendation that really surprised me under recommendation 7 was a recommendation from the youth — this is number 2 under recommendation 7: “Prohibit corporate donations to political parties in the Yukon to ensure there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest surrounding environmental legislation for industry.” In the response letter, it says, “Respecting your recommendation on prohibiting corporate donations to political parties, the Yukon Legislative Assembly’s Special Committee on Electoral Reform is examining electoral reform options, which may include contribution limits for individuals and organizations/corporations.”

I was very surprised, because my understanding of that committee is that it is exclusively looking at electoral systems. I guess my question is: Does the minister have information that they are changing that mandate or that the mandate is different? If not, why were the youth told that's who would address this recommendation?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have no information today to provide to the Committee of the Whole Environment debate with respect to whether the Yukon Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Electoral Reform's mandate has been expanded in some way, but I am sure that information is available.

Ms. Tredger: I think that I have made my point. I just want to emphasize that I cried when I read that letter. I could not believe that the youth had poured their passion into this and they got this letter that said, "Yeah, we're kind of sort of doing these things. We are going to ignore the ones that don't apply to us. We are not going to give you a timeline for further recommendations and sort of shoehorn what we're doing into your recommendations, rather than having an honest conversation about them." I was so demoralized, and I cannot imagine how much more demoralizing it would have been for those youth. I am glad that the minister is looking forward to learning from this next cohort, and I very much hope that the approach will change. I am very heartened to hear that there are further responses coming; I will be looking for that.

I do want to move on, because we are running out of time and there is so much to cover. I would like to briefly talk about wetlands. The final wetland policy, I believe, is due in May, which is coming up quickly. One of the biggest concerns I heard about the draft wetland policy is the onus for protecting a wetland falling on either a conservation group or a First Nation to identify that it is of such significance that is worth protecting.

I was surprised by that emphasis, because there is a lot of evidence that wetlands are incredibly important for a whole host of reasons, not least of which is the amount of captured carbon they can contain. Given the importance of wetlands culturally, environmentally, and in terms of climate, why was the decision made that the burden of proof should fall on First Nations and environmental groups to prove that these wetlands are important, which is something we already know? Is there a plan to change that in the final document?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We are committed to completing a Yukon wetlands stewardship policy in 2022, as the member opposite indicated. The policy will help the Government of Yukon make decisions that respect the importance of wetlands and the benefits they provide and support a diverse, growing economy. Together, we can build a solid and consistent approach to wetlands stewardship that reflects the values and interests of Yukoners. This policy was drafted based on input from First Nations, transboundary indigenous groups, federal and municipal governments, industry, and other key organizations through roundtable-facilitated discussions.

We heard from Yukoners through a public survey in the fall of 2021. A report on "what we heard" has been published

online. Our next step is to conclude consultation with our First Nation and indigenous partners.

Of course, wetlands are important in the Yukon, because they are essential to maintaining water flows, flood protection, purifying water, recharging and discharging groundwater, storing carbon, and providing habitat for fish and wildlife. In addition, certain wetlands support traditional subsistence and cultural activities, such as harvesting and recreation. The wetlands stewardship policies are intended to align with and complement existing regional land use planning efforts and work by assessors and regulators, like the Yukon Water Board and the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board.

The wetlands stewardship policy is just one way to address wetland stewardship. In addition to this policy, we are managing placer mining impacts on wetlands within the Indian River area using sector-specific policy guidance. We are evaluating the wetlands management guidance within the Dawson regional land use plan. Also, we are currently evaluating various tools to assess the health of wetlands. We have completed detailed mapping for the Indian River and Beaver River watersheds, and a similar mapping project focused on the Mayo and McQuesten watersheds is underway. This detailed mapping will assist future planning, assessment, and regulatory processes in these areas. We are also completing a regional wetland mapping exercise for the Peel watershed planning region.

The Yukon wetlands policy began under a roundtable partnership approach with collaborative development among many partners and shared responsibility to develop solutions and decisions related to the policy content. Five roundtable meetings were held with the policy development partners, including Yukon First Nations, transboundary indigenous groups, municipal and federal governments, boards and councils, environmental non-governmental organizations, and industry.

During the public engagement period, the Government of Yukon received 207 responses from Yukoners in the form of e-mails, detailed responses on the policy, and survey responses.

A document summarizing all feedback is currently being prepared and will be posted on the government's website. I canvassed my officials and their best estimate is that the synthesis of the "what we heard" document — in fairness to the member opposite — does have diverse opinions, but those opinions and that response is in the process of being synthesized for release in the summer of this year.

The member opposite may also recall that there was a request by the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in for the consultation period to be extended by 30 days, and that request was granted. At the end of last year, it was extended from October 4 to December 3. That is where we are at with respect to receiving all of this information. Of course, there is exciting work that is being done on the Dawson regional land use plan, and that dovetails with the wetlands policy as well.

In addition, there is still the requirement of the Yukon government to consult with First Nations on a government-to-

government basis, so that will be occurring in the next months as well.

Ms. Tredger: I have two follow-up questions. The first is: It sounds like if the “what we heard” document is coming out over this summer, which I would assume means by the end of August, that we won’t be getting the final policy in May, and I wonder if there is an update on when we can expect that final policy.

My second question is: Is there work being done on a system to manage the carbon release from wetlands in terms of how much we are going to allow? Is there thought being given to a system of capping the amount of carbon that can be released from developing wetlands or a system of making sure that we have some sort of sense of how much we are releasing and that we can make decisions about what levels are acceptable to us?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am not sure whether I or my officials necessarily captured that final question. I am certainly prepared to answer it, perhaps in writing, going forward.

I think that it was about carbon capture and if, with this wetlands policy, there may actually be a sort of capped number of wetlands that could be at least potentially set aside because they have a certain carbon-capture potential.

I am not going to put words into the mouth of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, but I certainly look forward to that question, and we will endeavour to answer it in a timely fashion.

So, I would just say finally that the “what we heard” document with respect to the wetlands policy is out, so the next step is to develop policy after the consultation with First Nations.

I know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is on this file as well and would likely have some comments in the upcoming days when he is in Committee of the Whole.

The final comment that I would say — sort of a very high-level response from one of the executive summaries — is that the Yukon government is working to understand the role of wetlands and carbon storage so that we can have a better idea of how to account for them in our greenhouse gas emission calculations and targets.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

Acting 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 Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair’s report

Ms. White: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: 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 5:30 p.m.