

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



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**Official Report  
of Debates  
(Hansard)**

E-21

**Journal  
des débats  
(Hansard)**

E-21

**Standing Committee on  
Estimates**

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Natural Resources  
and Forestry

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament

Tuesday 3 November 2020

**Comité permanent des  
budgets des dépenses**

Ministère de l'Éducation

Ministère des Richesses  
naturelles et des Forêts

1<sup>re</sup> session  
42<sup>e</sup> législature

Mardi 3 novembre 2020

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Chair: Peter Tabuns  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Peter Tabuns  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES

## COMITÉ PERMANENT DES BUDGETS DES DÉPENSES

Tuesday 3 November 2020

Mardi 3 novembre 2020

*The committee met at 0900 in room 151 and by video conference.*

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Good morning, everyone. We're going to resume consideration of vote 1001 of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. There are now a total of 15 minutes remaining for the review of these estimates. To ensure the remaining time is apportioned equally, it will be split as such: seven and a half minutes to the official opposition, seven and a half minutes to the government.

With that, I will start with the official opposition. MPP Stiles.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Good morning, everybody. At the last meeting that we had last week, I asked the minister for an updated total on Ontario's school repair backlog. I was told it remains unchanged at \$16.3 billion. Is that correct? Yes, that's correct—I see some nodding, just for the record. And that is after we had a pretty significant commitment to renewal funding. I wanted to try to understand that. I was a little confused, because the amount that's being given by the government to reduce the backlog, I think, is still not going to actually—well, it doesn't seem to have made a bit of a dent over the last few years.

So what I wanted to ask was, did the ministry conduct a school condition assessment this year? Just yes or no is fine.

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** I'm Nancy Naylor. I'm the deputy minister.

I would have to check with our ADM whether this was a year for assessment.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I was just looking into this and got talking to some school boards, frankly, and I received some information from the chair of the TDSB finance budget and enrolment committee, who had notes from the October meeting of that committee of the TDSB. Coming from that report by Steve Shaw, who I know you'll know, who is executive officer of facilities and planning for the Toronto District School Board—he actually just retired as of last week. In his report on this—because the Toronto District School Board trustees had a similar question about the numbers not really changing in the last year—this is what he said: “In recent years”—and I've since confirmed that he means since 2018—“when the consultants have been assessing school buildings and components, they

have been moving backlog requirements into future years, where they find building components still have capacity to perform as intended. The impact of this change has been a reduction in the backlog for the current year, but an increase to the backlog in future years. This is due to the movement of components for the current year into the four years following the current year. By way of example, for a ... priority repair such as the replacement of interior doors, the replacement date for this repair is pushed out by another five years, and not part of the current window of deferred maintenance backlog.”

Just to be clear, what that means is, the way that we measure some of these repair backlogs is changing. I just wanted to confirm that that's your understanding, as well—and if not, if I could get a commitment to report back on that, please.

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** We can take that away. That's a level of detail I'm not familiar with; I'm sorry.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Are there any other staff here who could speak to that?

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** I think if this relates to a report to the TDSB board, I'm not sure that we're prepared to speak to that, but we can take that away.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** My understanding is, it's not just affecting the TDSB, that it affects—the way that they're measuring the capital repair backlog has changed under this government. So I'm curious as to why that would have changed other than to—and this was the conclusion of everybody who attended this meeting, apparently; that it changed so that the backlog doesn't appear to be growing at the same rate that it had grown previously. Is that correct? Basically, the way they're measuring things has changed, not the actual backlog.

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** It's not a measurement or an assessment change that I'm familiar with—not directed by the ministry. We're happy to look into it and take it away.

Perhaps we could just add a little bit of context. We do have a \$55-billion real estate portfolio. We do invest \$1.4 billion a year in renewal, which is what the Auditor General recommended to us. That's 2.5% of the portfolio value. In addition, we are just fortunate that the minister was in a position to make an additional investment and announcement this week.

Minister, perhaps you'd like to touch on that.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Yes. The Auditor General has recommended ministries to allocate 2.5% of their budget for the purpose of renewal or maintenance funding. We do

that, it's within our fiscal plan to continue to do that, and more importantly, on the capital side, we've allocated money on an annual basis.

Last week, we had \$1 billion dedicated from the federal-provincial joint Green Fund, and, in that, \$700 million was allocated for education; there was an additional \$100 million for long-term care and funding for municipalities. All together, it's \$1 billion of new funding that must be spent by December 31, 2021.

While it is a one-time investment and infusion of funding, that will help incrementally reduce the backlog that was inherited when we came to power.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** What I'm trying to understand is an allocation of \$1.4 billion apparently was allocated last year, but the repair backlog didn't go down, and, in fact, we don't really know—now we're questioning whether or not it's being measured in the same way as previous years.

Why has the same amount of renewal funding been allocated for this year if we know that it didn't even really put a dent in the capital repair backlog?

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** As the minister just noted, school boards will actually have more money this year to work on renewal—

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

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** It's also relevant to know how far that money goes. In the last 18 months, over 70% of our schools, or 3,400 schools, have received renewal investment. School boards do develop annual plans. They focus a lot of that on the summer months, obviously, because schools are unoccupied. That amount of investment every year allows them to plan, group up projects, such as windows and roofs or ventilation systems, and spend their summer months in that intensive renewal—

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Thank you very much. I just want to ask one other question, changing tack for a minute. Can you tell me how much the ministry spent on advertising between March and November of this year, 2020?

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** March to November. If you give me a minute, I'll look for that in my notes.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** While you're looking for that, can we get a breakdown of that spending by platform, date and subject matter?

**Ms. Nancy Naylor:** We might have to take that level of detail—

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Can you re-confirm that for the record, that you will provide that report, including breakdown of spending by platform, date and subject matter, to this committee?

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** As I understand, for the fiscal year 2020-21, there is \$5.04 million allocated for advertisement. This would have included expenditures related to, for example, details on the safe reopening plan and included elements promoting the money set aside for parents so that they knew they could be eligible for the payments—the support for parents and support for students, both of which were critical.

Just for context, if you look at the 2017-18 school year—

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Minister, is it possible to get that broken down by the amount—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I apologize to all, but time has run out. We go to the government—

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Mr. Chair, can I just—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Your time has run out. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I know, but can I just ask a question to you—a point of order? I just want to confirm that it's in the record that we have asked the deputy minister to provide the breakdown by platform—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I can ask the Clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna):** All outstanding questions will be provided by research to members here, as well as the ministry staff, and they would be able to provide your answers, if it's on the record.

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** I mean, we did get a commitment. I know it's important to get that on the record. Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** We go to the government now. Mr. Oosterhoff, I gather that you have the floor.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thank you, Minister and your team, for appearing before the estimates committee. I know I speak on behalf of all the members when we say we are grateful for the work that you do each and every day. We appreciate your responses over the hours of conversation and more in-depth analysis of the estimates.

Minister, I know this is something that you care about a great deal, and your team as well, but I think one of the defining shifts in the Ministry of Education over the last couple of years has been this real emphasis on workable skills—on real-life, tangible skills that can be used in a meaningful way, whether that is coding, whether that is financial literacy, whether that's focusing on improving math skills or psycho-social skills.

I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about why that's so important, why that has been such an emphasis for you, and how that has been tangibly brought to the fore by the Ministry of Education, both in curriculum and through the investments and dollars that have been put towards student success.

0910

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Thank you for the question and obviously for the interest in this. I think we noted when we were elected that, according to EQAO, some of our younger learners were not able to meet the provincial math standard in this province, which is most troubling. That's why we announced a four-year math strategy that allocates about \$200 million on that basis—\$55 million this year alone—to support enhancing that skill set for our students. Much of it is predicated on teaching the teacher, if you will—helping to incent them by subsidizing paying for additional qualifications. There's \$4 million for these purposes, to encourage educators to continue to take progressive courses in math. We've also introduced a requirement for new educators in the province to complete a grade 9 math standard, which we think is important for all educators.

Obviously in the context of the curriculum itself, we relaunched a new math curriculum in this province between grades 1 to 8, which has been updated and in place this September, which, as you noted, includes coding for the first time as early as in grade 1. Financial literacy is a critical element as well that we think needs to be strengthened; we did take action in the grade 10 careers course but expanded it dramatically in the elementary math curriculum between grades 1 and 8. It starts as young as grade 1, learning basic money skills and the early foundations to strengthen personal responsibility and the financial acumen of our citizens. We're very well aware of the challenges and debts that young people may face.

In addition, we have strengthened the Summer Learning Program, with a focus on math and STEM. As you know, we've undertaken an effort to update the grade 9 math curriculum, destreamed, with emphasis on some of those competencies that job creators want and that our job seekers need in order to help align that mismatch. We feel that it's going to help. Step 1 is going to be the grade 9 curriculum, and there's much more work to do thereafter, but that will be introduced for September 2021.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thank you, Minister. One other area—and I know we're getting close to time, but it's an area that matters to all of us as legislators and of course as individuals. I'm wondering if you could speak a bit about the importance of mental health investments in the Ministry of Education and what your ministry has been doing to ensure that there are mental health supports for students, educators and, frankly, the system as a whole.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** I appreciate that this continues to be a challenge for many students in the province, dealing with COVID, and many of them would have challenges that precede COVID. We've allocated \$20 million in new dedicated mental health funding in the 2020-21 school year to deal with this unprecedented challenge and an additional \$12.5 million in one-time federal funding also for this purpose, utilizing supports to strengthen both mental health and spec ed services for students within our schools, recognizing that there is a serious impact of COVID on those learners with the greatest levels of stress and angst. So we've made that allocation.

We've worked with School Mental Health Ontario in the context of expanding training. As part of our professional development days, we've made mental health specifically a stand-alone area of focus in addition to the broader health and safety training for COVID for all educators, supply teachers and OTs in the province of Ontario. I think that just underscores the necessity for us to focus on the wellness of children and to make sure that they know that our singular priority is ensuring that these students and our staff can retain the confidence to keep going through this adversity, and obviously, it's the basis for why we put that investment in place in June, why we expanded it in the summer and continue to do so.

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

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Our colleague Minister Tibollo announced an additional \$15 million in community-based supports targeting young people—youth, children and, of

course, students—all of which is going to help in the community in accessing those supports, as well as knowing that the government has taken action within the system of education, within our school boards and within our schools to have more psychologists and psychotherapists, more social workers on site to reduce the backlog of wait times associated with accessing care.

**Mr. Sam Oosterhoff:** Thank you very much, Minister. I have no further questions, but I want to thank you for the very obvious and very dedicated work that you have put into also ensuring that you're working with your other ministerial colleagues in making sure that education is at the forefront of equipping our students for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and ensuring that they have all they need to succeed here in Ontario. Thank you very much for appearing, together with all your officials today.

**Hon. Stephen Lecce:** Thank you. I do appreciate the attention of the committee and the opportunity to present. I want to thank the member opposite for joining and thank the committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** All right. You're done? Okay.

Before we proceed, MPP Kanapathi, I understand that you are there—

**Mr. Logan Kanapathi:** I'm in Markham, Ontario, Mr. Chair. Good morning.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Thank you very much. We will be going to the vote.

That concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Education. Standing order 69(b) requires the Chair, myself, to put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. I will ask once if members are ready to vote, and then I will go item by item.

Are the members ready to vote? We are.

Shall vote 1001, ministry administration program, carry? Please, a show of hands so the Clerk can count.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I don't think so.

All those in favour, please raise your hand so that the Clerk can count—in favour of vote 1001, ministry administration program. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It carries—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** My apologies for the confusion. I am going to re-call that vote for clarity. I will ask people who are in favour of vote 1001, ministry administration program, to raise your hand. All those in favour on the Zoom call, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Okay. It is carried.

We shall now go to vote 1002, elementary and secondary education program. All those in favour of that vote, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It is carried.

We shall go to vote 1003, community services and information technology cluster. All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Vote 1004, child care and early years programs: All those in favour of that vote, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. It's carried.

Shall the 2020-21 estimates of the Ministry of Education carry? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2020-21 estimates of the Ministry of Education to the House? All those in favour, please raise your hand. All those opposed, please raise your hand. Carried.

We will now recess until 9:30 a.m. Thank you all.  
*The committee recessed from 0920 to 0939.*

## MINISTRY OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Good morning, everyone. The committee is about to begin consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for a total of seven and a half hours.

Before I go further, I want to note that, present in the room is MPP Harris, and I understand, MPP Khanjin, you're joining us on Zoom. Are you present? I don't see you, MPP Khanjin. Well, when she reappears, I will have her confirm her name and her location.

I'm now required to call vote 2101, which sets the review process in motion. We'll begin with a statement of not more than 30 minutes from the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, followed by a statement of up to 30 minutes by the official opposition. Then the minister will have a further 30 minutes for a reply. The remaining time will be apportioned equally among the two parties, with 15 minutes allotted to the independent member of the committee.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** By way of introduction—I'm John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, for the purpose of these hearings.

Good morning. I'm pleased to address the Standing Committee on Estimates. The estimates committee serves an important role in the legislative process, holding ministers to account and providing transparency to the taxpayers of Ontario. Believe it or not, it has been 15 years since the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has appeared before the committee. I must say, it is an honour to appear before you as minister. The ministry has done some remarkable work since our government took office, and I'm looking forward to discussing it with you today and to answering your questions with full candour.

I'd like to introduce my ministry officials who are here with me today. My deputy minister, Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark, is here in person. Online: Craig Brown, assistant deputy minister of policy division; Amanda Holmes, chief administrative officer and assistant deputy minister of corporate management and information division—these are the folks who set up the budget for the ministry and develop and implement our multi-year plan; Sean Maguire, assistant deputy minister of forest industry

division; Tracey Mill, assistant deputy minister of provincial services division—this includes branches that oversee our services related to enforcement, forest firefighting, science and research, and fish and wildlife services—and Jennifer Barton, assistant deputy minister of regional operations division. This is where the 25 district offices and three regional offices reside, providing front-line services to clients on a variety of issues, including permitting and authorizations and crown land management. I'm very grateful to my senior officials for joining me here today. Together, we will be able to answer questions that the committee may have for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

I will speak about the ministry's ongoing efforts to uphold fiscal accountability to the taxpayers of Ontario and a number of signature ministry initiatives undertaken over the last two years—initiatives aimed at strengthening industry and protecting people, property and Ontario's vast natural resources. I'll speak about our forest sector strategy, how my ministry supports broader government initiatives such as Open for Business, and our efforts to promote economic recovery from the COVID-19 outbreaks.

I want to begin by describing the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's role within government and the services we provide to the people of Ontario. As a ministry, we are responsible for the protection and stewardship of Ontario's natural resources, including crown lands, water, forests, fish, wildlife, aggregate and minerals like stone, sand and gravel, and promoting sustainable resource development in a number of sectors, most notably within the forest industry, hence the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Our mandate includes protecting people and property from natural hazards such as flooding and wildland fires, and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation for the economic and social benefit of Ontarians. This includes recreational hunting and fishing, which serve both as a favourite pastime and significant sources of employment.

Customer service aspects: Our role in overseeing outdoor recreation in Ontario means we have a strong focus on customer service—

*Interruption.*

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** That's probably somebody calling about their hunting licence this morning, for deer season—MNRF excels at this aspect of our operations, and I am very proud of the high standard of customer care that we deliver to Ontarians. We provide exceptional customer service to two million anglers and hunters in the issuance of licences and big game draw services. We are the public face of government for many individuals, particularly in the north—various operations for anglers and hunters to make purchases and access important information; accessible online services, in addition to contact centres that provide phone and email support for anglers and hunters; social media channels which have a large and loyal following of thousands of people; partnerships with a network of private licence issuers across the province; and contact with ServiceOntario, so

Ontarians who want to make purchases in person may still do so. Our ministry's customer service gives us a high degree of visibility among Ontarians, and it is something that I'm very proud of.

My ministry is committed to achieving our government's priorities—delivering on our mandate to support Ontario's economic prosperity through sustainability and responsibly managing the province's natural resources; promoting economic development and job creation; and providing excellent customer service and fiscally responsible service delivery.

A summary and highlights of estimates: It's worthwhile to look at MNRF spending in the context of the spending of the government as a whole.

Let me begin by describing the ministry's staffing and organizational structure. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is a highly decentralized operational ministry. We require a strong regional presence. We have offices—get this—in more than 70 communities right across Ontario. The ministry employs more than 2,800 permanent staff, and more than 90% of our employees work outside of the greater Toronto area. We're a major employer in rural and northern regions of Ontario, and our operations benefit greatly from this province-wide perspective. Our employees provide a diverse range of highly visible, front-line services all across the province. This includes wildland firefighters, who protect communities from fire and other natural resource emergencies—and what a season they had this year; I'm sure we'll get more into that later on. It includes conservation officers, who protect our natural resources and promote safe hunting, fishing and outdoor activities. It includes biologists and resource technicians, who interact daily with members of the public and with ministry stakeholders as we deliver on our core businesses. It includes researchers and scientists, who monitor and conduct applied research to answer critical public policy questions and help us to plan and be prepared for the future.

My ministry's number one priority is the safety of the public and the protection of our communities. Thanks to the dedication and bravery of our front-line staff, we're able to deliver on this priority, even in difficult times like the ones we're currently facing.

Since 2002, the overall operating costs of the Ontario public service have risen far more quickly than my ministry's. My ministry's percentage of the provincial budget has continued to decrease. Our annual allocation makes up just one half of 1% of the provincial budget—a surprisingly small figure considering our contribution to the quality of life Ontarians enjoy. I want you to digest that for a moment. It's hard to not see a part of life that this ministry has involvement in for the people of Ontario, yet we do it on about one half of 1% of the provincial budget.

**0950**

Although MNRF may represent a very small part of Ontario's total budget, my ministry takes seriously the government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and reducing the size of the deficit. In support of that commitment, my ministry developed a strategy for modernizing

and reorienting our operations towards fiscal sustainability. The process has required difficult decisions to ensure our key services remain sustainable:

- modernizing our transfer payment process and capital infrastructure plan to achieve savings, while protecting what matters most;

- living within our allocation without compromising our service delivery, while managing internal pressures and external risks;

- finding efficiencies, making use of all available tools for achieving savings. And while achieving these savings, we have been able to deliver on a number of government-wide policy initiatives;

- developing a two-year burden reduction plan aimed at reducing red tape for businesses, to reduce costs for them and allow them to expand and create the jobs that a growing population in Ontario requires;

- reviewing the Far North Act, to help open up the resources in the Far North and create economic prosperity in that region;

- hosting engagement opportunities with Far North First Nations, tribal councils—the Nishnawbe Aski Nation—directly to seek input on proposed amendments. My colleague Minister Rickford and I met with Nishnawbe Aski Nation Grand Chief Fiddler most recently in early October and had a very positive and productive discussion about this initiative;

- developing an aggregate reform proposal and engaging with the aggregate industry to improve the way it's managed;

- continuing to implement and enhance an electronic fish and wildlife licensing system, to make it easier to purchase hunting and fishing licensing products. I know, MPP Gates, you're anxious to hear that particular sentence right there. MPP Gates and I were having a little discussion about fishing licensing before the meeting;

- developing a forest sector strategy, which is one of the things I'm proudest of as a minister.

Forest sector strategy: Forestry is a vitally important part of the province's economy and our culture. I have a personal connection. I was born and raised in the Ottawa Valley, and I'm well aware of the importance of the forestry industry. In my riding, it's a big part of our economy, a big part of our lives. Years ago, my father, Paul Yakabuski, incidentally, served as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Natural Resources for a number of years, but prior to that, as a businessman in our little village of Barry's Bay, he sold crosscut saws. He and his father bought them by the gross, 144 at a time, as logging and lumbering became such a big part of the economy in my part of the province. And to the best of my knowledge, he was the first person to sell chainsaws in eastern Ontario. So, having grown up in the region, I know there would be really no Ottawa Valley without logging, and I'm sure I will get to expand on that at some point, too.

It's difficult to gauge what the region would have looked like today had J.R. Booth not settled in the Ottawa Valley in the 1850s. We can talk about J.R. Booth later, as well. J.R. Booth was one of the great pioneers to open up

the Ottawa Valley, and it couldn't have been done without the forest industry. Some people may not know, but at one time J.R. Booth was actually the richest man in Canada—one of the original lumber barons, the largest lumber producer in the world. He was referred to not just as a lumber baron, but as the lumber king. So forestry really had its genesis, almost, in my part of the province, in the Ottawa Valley.

I know that on a larger scale, Ontario's forest sector plays a critical role in the success of our economy. The industry generates more than \$18 billion in revenue annually and supports 147,000 direct and indirect jobs—a much-needed source of employment in rural and northern parts of the province, in communities with few other industries. It keeps families and communities strong by offering opportunities for young people to stay closer to home. Good jobs in this renewable sector help families pay their bills and put food on the table. These jobs are a lifeline for many of those communities in Ontario.

Our government recognized early on that the forest sector has not been able to reach its full potential. We recognize that it is capable of so much more. In the 2018 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review, our government committed to developing a strategy for the forest sector that would encourage economic growth and position the sector as open for business. An extensive consultation process, which spanned from November to May 2020, was kicked off. We held round-table sessions across the province to gather insight from the forest industry, from municipal and Indigenous leaders, and from members of the public. We solicited feedback online and created a draft forest sector strategy, which we posted for public comment. We then held engagement sessions with Indigenous communities and municipalities. We hosted a total of 29 engagement sessions and collected thousands of comments from the Environmental Registry. We held extensive consultations due to the importance of hearing directly from the many stakeholders and partners who are impacted by the forest industry here in Ontario. We wanted to hear about what's working, what's not working, and what we can do as a government to promote economic development and job creation in the industry—insight used to develop a document called Sustainable Growth: Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy, which I had the honour of releasing in North Bay back in August, a strategy with a 10-year horizon, to strengthen Ontario's forest industry. The title of the strategy is something I'd like to draw your attention to. I have a copy of it here with me, and you can have a look at it, as well—under four pillars. Sustainable Growth—that's the title of it. It's intended to promote economic growth and development, but it's also aimed at protecting our forests to make sure they'll be there for future generations. We know that for the Ontario forest sector to remain strong and vibrant in the long term, we need to ensure that our crown forests remain healthy, diverse and productive.

#### 1000

In fact, sustainable forest management is so important for the industry's success that the central pillar of our

strategy is promoting stewardship and sustainability, because if we do nothing to help this industry or the people of the province of Ontario who depend on it, if we can't ensure that, generations from now, it will be as strong—no, not as strong; stronger than it is today, by employing sound sustainable forest management practices.

Forest sector strategy pillar 1: Ontario is a global leader in sustainable forestry. Our forest products are celebrated around the world. We have the strictest standards of forest management anywhere. Our strategy draws heavily on Ontario's sustainable forest policy framework. That framework draws on the best available science and involves extensive planning and monitoring.

Forest companies are subject to a number of oversight mechanisms that ensure that their practices are sustainable. Our forests are managed sustainably according to forest management plans developed by a planning team led by a registered professional forester and approved by my ministry. The ministry prescribes the steps that forest companies need to undertake in the stringent process of developing a plan. Developing a forest management plan is a rigorous and scientific process that includes Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and is not done haphazardly. It can take up to three years just to complete the forest management plan.

Planning teams must carry out their work in consultation with stakeholders, Indigenous communities and members of the public. Their work needs to be informed by the latest science and applied research. Most importantly of all, forest management plans must be sustainable. Plans don't receive approval from my ministry unless they include concrete measures for regenerating forestry sites.

Ontario's forest sector plants around 73 million trees each year and airdrops an additional 365 million seeds on harvested crown lands to help regenerate our forests. It's measures like these that have given Ontario's forest sector an international reputation as a leader in sustainability. More than three quarters of crown forests are accredited by third-party forest certification systems—more than three quarters.

The forest industry will play an important role in meeting a growing consumer preference for renewable and more environmentally conscious products. Forest products can help mitigate climate change by reducing our reliance on non-renewable products like single-use plastics.

Demand for forest products is set to increase significantly over the next 10 years. You may not know—you may know, but you may not—that the United Nations predicts that by 2030, demand for forest products will rise by more than 30%—almost a third. Our strategy is aimed at capitalizing on this demand to drive economic growth and create well-paying jobs throughout the province.

Pillar 2, putting more wood to work: Ontario has 71 million hectares of forest, and 27.7 million hectares of that total is managed crown forest. You remember this figure from our budget: Less than one half of 1% of that managed crown forest is harvested each year. Less than one half of 1% is harvested each year.

The current volume of timber harvested each year is less than 60% of what it was just 20 years ago. This is less than half the volume already identified as sustainable harvest each year, significantly less than the annual forest growth. We're growing much more wood each and every year than even our sustainable harvest levels are, and way more than what we're actually harvesting.

We're increasing the amount of wood harvested. We're investing in new technologies that will continue to improve our understanding of the growth and management of our forests. This will enable forest companies to increase the harvests closer to the approved sustainable level—sustainable. I want to emphasize that word.

A key tool in this work is the forest resources inventory, the FRI. It gathers information about tree species, composition, range, age and distribution. It covers forests and ecological and land use conditions in order to depict Ontario's land base, and it allows us to support resource management and land use decisions, as well as help sustain healthy natural environments.

We are investing \$84.5 million to enhance our ability to carry out forest inventories. A large portion of this money will be put toward an advanced technology called lidar. It uses remote sensing capabilities to get a precise picture of forest volume. Lidar—light detection and ranging—is an exciting tool for forest managers, using a technique that uses laser light to sample the surface of the earth, producing highly accurate measurements. The scanner that contributes to MNR's inventory is capable of transmitting and receiving as many as six million pulses of laser light per second, resulting in data that can be used to map the reflecting object in high, three-dimensional detail.

Technology will greatly improve the way we estimate Ontario's total wood volume. Increased accuracy will improve our forest management planning practices and decision-making abilities. The more detailed information will also help us to increase the wood supply, because we'll have a better idea of what's out there, the condition of it and how ready it is to be harvested.

It will help the ministry determine the most effective techniques for increasing forest growth rates and which specific areas to target for these efforts. The maximum sustainable amount of harvest our forests can support is 30 million cubic metres per year. This is the limit for us to meet our strict sustainability objectives and ensure the long-term health of our forests. Forest companies currently harvest less than half this amount, and that unharvested wood represents huge potential for growing the industry.

To increase the harvest volume, we will need a clear picture of where this underutilized wood is, along with the species and how much it will cost to access this wood supply. We're partnering with the Centre for Research and Innovation in the Bio-Economy to develop an economic fibre supply model. This gives potential investors the information required in considering an expansion of their operations in Ontario's forest industry and attract new investors who may be eyeing Ontario as a place to establish a foothold. We've seen evidence in mills that have retooled and modernized to ensure that nothing goes to waste—

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

**Hon. John Yakabuski:**—from what is brought into their operations. This gives potential investors the information required in considering an expansion—there you go, an expansion—of their operations in Ontario's forest industry and attract new investors who may be eyeing Ontario as a place to establish a foothold.

**1010**

Forest sector strategy pillar 3, improving cost competitiveness: There are a number of things that we can do, and we'll have a chance to talk about it later. With one minute left—I'll have a chance to come back here; I think we have seven and a half hours, Chair, if I'm not mistaken. There are so many exciting things going on, and we look forward to talking about them further. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Thank you very much, Minister.

I now turn to the opposition. MPP Monteith-Farrell, you have up to 30 minutes, but as you're probably aware, we've only got about five minutes now before we recess for the afternoon session. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Good morning, everyone. Good morning, Minister, and my greetings to all the members of the committee, the ministerial officials and the guests that are here today. I'd like to thank the minister for his presentation this morning, and I look forward to hearing more. I'm going to make some comments during my allotted 30 minutes and may proceed to questions in that time as well.

Now, to begin, I would like to take this opportunity to say, as a lifelong resident of Thunder Bay and as a northerner, the MNRF has played a key role in my community and communities across the north for generations. I am looking forward to, in the next few days, exploring the finances of the ministry. I do hope that this week we will have a conversation about why and how the ministry is spending money. I'm sure many people throughout Ontario would like to know more.

This is a ministry that is a steward to so many critical areas of provincial policy and large areas of its landmass, and holds a repository of expertise and knowledge about our shared natural resources. MNRF plays a critical role in ensuring that scientific knowledge is developed and that best practices are followed. Many habitats and ecosystems depend on the ministry for their survival and longevity. It guards our public safety and protects us from many natural hazards. Indeed, the staff of MNRF have helped make Ontario a much safer province. It is also a ministry that has long been part of economic development of our natural resources in large areas throughout this province—for example, Ontario's Forest Sector Strategy released last year.

As a member of the official opposition, I am a member of a caucus that is proud of the forestry industry in this province. I believe that it is of critical importance that we grow and sustain this industry, and there is always more to do.

I saw the focus the forest sector strategy placed on increasing Indigenous economic development and participation, and I was excited by that. As the report noted: “Ontario acknowledges that Indigenous communities have an important relationship with the land, and exercise Aboriginal and treaty rights in forests. Ontario is committed to continuing to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships with Indigenous communities across the province. Indigenous communities are seeking greater involvement in the management of forests and the use of traditional ecological knowledge in forest management, direct economic benefits and opportunities to create more Indigenous businesses in the forest sector.” That’s from page 11.

I would be interested to see how the MNRF is working in partnership with Indigenous communities to ensure economic development. Economic development in Indigenous communities and all communities across Ontario is something my caucus strongly supports.

A major part of our thinking is that development that is sustainable—there’s that word again—is the best kind of development. For many decades, my caucus has stood for sustainable economic development. Indeed, the Crown Forest Sustainability Act was passed many decades ago by previous members of this caucus and one of our current members. The purpose of this act is to manage crown forests to meet the social, economic and environmental needs of present and future generations. Our approach—my approach—is to view it in a balanced manner and to ensure we keep a reasonably fair set of policies that balance different priorities, and there will always be competing priorities.

That is why I’m so pleased that MNRF was brought before this committee. It’s a real opportunity for the ministry to explain and help expand the public’s knowledge of its activities across Ontario—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Ms. Monteith-Farrell, I’m sorry, we’re out of time. We have to recess. We will now recess until 3:30 p.m.

*The committee recessed from 1015 to 1530.*

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Good afternoon. We’re going to resume consideration of vote 2101 of the estimates of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. There’s now a total of six hours and 56 minutes remaining to the review of these estimates. When the committee recessed this morning, the official opposition had 25 minutes and 58 seconds remaining.

Before we go to the opposition, I see we have a number of members who have joined us by Zoom, and they are going to have to confirm who they are and where they are.

MPP Skelly, you have moved online. Please identify yourself and your location.

**Ms. Donna Skelly:** Hi, it’s MPP Skelly. I am at Queen’s Park.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** MPP Cuzzetto.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Hi, it’s MPP Rudy Cuzzetto, and I’m here in Toronto.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I had a note that MPP Khanjin—ah, MPP Khanjin, there you are. If you would identify yourself and confirm you’re in Ontario.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** MPP Khanjin, in Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** With that, we go to MPP Monteith-Farrell. You have 25 minutes and 58 seconds left.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am so pleased that MNRF was brought before this committee. It’s a real opportunity for the people of Ontario to expand their knowledge about the important work of MNRF. Many will be quite curious to hear the answers provided this week, and I know they will be given in the spirit of honest and open communication, so I thank you all for that in advance.

But before I continue, I’d like to discuss another matter related to MNRF but that speaks to the broader environment of governance in our provincial government. Since the new government was elected in 2018, there have been significant changes to the policy areas and legislation that MNRF oversees. Substantial areas of policy and legislation that were long part of MNRF are now part of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks: for example, provincial parks, conservation reserves and species at risk. Still other areas now exist in a hybrid format, with some areas delegated to MECP and others to MNRF, where there is overlap in program areas. For example, flood hazard funding to conservation authorities remains with MNRF, but, overall, conservation authorities are now overseen by MECP. MNRF continues to oversee fish and wildlife conservation, while species at risk have been sent to MECP.

I’m hoping that later today we can clear up many of the questions circulating about how the ministry is managing these changes. Some examples of the questions I’ve heard from stakeholders were about clearing up what is now in the domain of MECP versus MNRF. Others asked how the ministries are co-operating to ensure that the job gets done. Still others asked if Ontario received good value for money from this decision to transfer certain responsibilities to MECP from MNRF. Many worry about what all of these changes will mean for our natural environment, for biodiversity and for all the many species in Ontario.

In addition, as the critic of natural resources and forestry, I would be remiss if I did not comment on the oversight picture in Ontario in the last two years. As we sit here today, there is no longer an environmental commissioner’s office. While I understand the Auditor General now looks after the reporting of environmental issues under the Environmental Protection Act, I think the loss of the commissioner’s office was a loss to the people of Ontario.

A broad public set of institutional knowledge and expertise in many areas MNRF operates in has disappeared. That’s a shame, and I believe that it hinders our ability as a committee and for the public at large to know exactly what is going on in relation to the environment they live in, how and where money is being spent and what that holds in our future, because the activities and plans of MNRF are very important to our province’s future.

Indeed, what our shared future may look like is very much in question. Something that lies behind almost everything we will be talking about this week is the issue of climate change and how it will affect our shared future. As a grandmother of two little ones in Thunder Bay, I worry about their future and what it will look like and the impact of climate change, yet I only found the words “climate change” three times in the 103 pages of the ministry’s 2020-21 estimates briefing book.

I do wonder about how the ministry, and more broadly, this government, is managing what amounts to a significant threat to our collective future. We must deal with environmental issues related to climate change, because there are very real dangers facing us. How climate change is being confronted across the programs of the ministry is something I hope that senior ministry staff and the minister will be able to provide answers for and information about.

I hope this week’s discussion will tease out some of the ways that the ministry is dealing with climate change and how program spending is or is not being directed towards climate and initiatives. I will note that the greenhouse gas reduction initiative budget is now listed at zero. Like it or not, climate change will affect both the ministry and every person living in Ontario.

Something of particular interest to many people in the public was the government’s decision to cancel its funding from MNRF to the 50 Million Tree Program. This afforestation program was in the midst of its multi-year plan to plant millions of trees, mainly across southern Ontario, in specific areas where no forests currently exist. Afforestation is not reforestation. In 2019, after the cuts were made, members of the government continually equated the tens of millions of trees the forest industry replants each year as part of reforestation with afforestation.

As I said before, I am very proud of the forest industry in my riding and across Ontario; they do great work. Thousands of people across my riding are employed in the sector and their families depend on the continued health of the forest industry.

But afforestation and reforestation are different. Around the world, science is recognizing the value of planting trees to fight climate change, to reduce flooding and to help increase and protect biodiversity and habitats. Afforestation is a critical part of this process, but to do afforestation right, it takes planning and resources, and in the end it delivers good value for money. I will be looking at what precisely the government and the ministry’s plans are for afforestation in the future.

Speaking of policy areas of the ministry that are and will be radically affected by climate change, I want to turn to forest firefighting. First, I want to say thank you to all the forest fire rangers and firefighters of Ontario. Your work is vital to this province. I cannot say enough thanks about the work that the firefighters in Ontario did this summer—and every summer—and their service especially in this difficult time. I want to extend my warmest thanks to all of the public service, the staff who support firefighters behind the scenes in offices, in aircraft

maintenance facilities and throughout the province. Ontario has faced some significant forest fires in recent years, and I want to thank all those who protect us with their work—what you’ve done to keep us safe.

I also want to highlight that many First Nations communities have had their lives uprooted because of these forest fires. Many members of these communities have come to Thunder Bay for safety from fires. That’s going to keep on happening—and more and more—because of climate change.

We have not had, I think, a major forest fire season in Ontario for several years. Luckily, this year was better than normal, but, unfortunately, it’s only a matter of time until we have a bad fire season again. The magnitude and longevity of the next major fire season, due to climate change, may be far worse than anything we’ve seen before. I think we got a taste of the future when the smoke from the great forests of BC and the US Pacific Northwest reached Toronto skies in September. This is something we have to be prepared for, and we can ensure that, to a reasonable degree, our province is in a state of readiness. How MNRF is preparing for and is acting to ensure we are in a state of readiness for the next major forest season is of great interest to me.

Forest fires, of course, are not the only hazards that the people of Ontario encounter. Flooding has been a significant issue across Ontario, and that includes my riding and the riding of the minister. This is a major issue that cuts across communities throughout the province. In 2019, there was major flooding across eastern Ontario. I applaud all those members of the public who reached out to help those in need, and many local municipalities and regions that swung into action to assist homeowners and residents.

I will note that previous to that, in its budgetary process, the current government decided to cut in half MNRF’s funding to conservation authorities for flood-related hazards. Funding was cut from an already small \$7.4-million program to a \$3.9-million program that helps conservation authorities manage flooding right before a major flood.

#### 1540

This funding envelope was already too low and had barely budgeted in years. I do not think that was a wise move on the part of the government. Giving credit where credit is due, though, the current government, through MNRF, did create a provincial special adviser on flooding. A report was made with a series of recommendations to MNRF, and I hope we will be able to discuss and shed some light on the ministry’s progress with those recommendations over the next few days. I think there will be many anxious homeowners and residents who are nervously awaiting arrival of the next costly flood who would appreciate our conversation.

As I said before, science tells us we can link increased flooding to climate change. We can very reasonably expect flooding to continue and to worsen. Just like forest fires, as with flooding, how and if Ontario is in a state of readiness is of critical importance for our future. How we

will manage and mitigate the effects of climate change is top of mind for me and many Ontarians, and I think ties back into almost every program MNRF has.

Something that my office heard about quite consistently and recently is the creation of the double-breasted cormorant hunt. How MNRF met its obligations under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act in the creation of this hunt is of great interest to many stakeholders across the province. During the discussion of the creation of the double-breasted cormorant hunt, many stakeholders raised their concerns about this change. The government's final announcement on the creation of a limited seasonal hunt and with requirements to collect the birds that are hunted was different than the original proposal. For example, as a northerner, I know how important hunting and fishing are in this province, but no one needs cormorants.

Across northern and rural Ontario, hunting and fishing is a way of life. I know that hunters and anglers are connected with the land, and they are most invested in ensuring thriving habitats for many species across this province. They understand the importance of regulation and safety requirements. They understand the importance of sustainability of species, ecosystems and habitats, and they know that the balance between humans and nature is delicate, that indeed human beings are part of nature.

As I said last year, I do not believe the change to create a cormorant hunt, especially as it was originally proposed—it was not based on a scientifically based wildlife management program.

I would like to share part of a submission made by the Canadian Environmental Law Association when this change was being considered. They talked in depth about the MNRF's obligation under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act. "The MNRF's proposal is contrary to the conservation and sustainability purposes of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.... In 1997, when the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act "was first introduced to the Ontario Legislative Assembly for debate, then-Minister of Natural Resources John Snobelen stated the following about the act's purposes:

"The proposed Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act will help ensure conservation and management of the province's abundant fish and wildlife resources. It will contribute to the sustainability of the environment, social and economic benefits associated with those resources, and it will give Ontario tougher fish and wildlife enforcement provisions."

"This statement by the minister provides direct evidence of the legislative purpose of the FWCA. The current proposal, however, is void of any consideration demonstrating how sustainability and the conservation of wildlife resources were taken into account. Neither does the proposal reference any science-based justifications for its approach. Rather the proposal references 'concerns expressed by ... commercial fishing industry, property owners.'"

As Justice Abella, speaking at the Court of Appeal, stated, "The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act received royal assent on December 18, 1997, and was proclaimed

on January 1, 1999. It was enacted to provide a scheme of wildlife conservation and management including the establishment of ethical, humane and responsible hunting practices. The act assigns to the government the responsibility for balancing the interests of people against the welfare of animals to determine what constitutes humane treatment or unnecessary suffering of animals.

"Concerns regarding animal welfare, including humane and ethical hunting practices, fall squarely with the policy and objectives of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act."

How exactly this decision to create the hunt is made is of great interest to me, as well as the ministry's interpretations of its obligation under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act; indeed, how the ministry is spending money and resources to ensure Ontario is protecting fish and wildlife is of great interest across the province. I am interested to see how this decision helped ensure conservation and management of the province's abundant fish and wildlife resources, how it contributed to the sustainability of the environment, the social and economic benefits associated with those resources, and how it gave Ontario tougher fish and wildlife enforcement provisions.

As the MNRF is also responsible for the provincial administration of the Migratory Birds Convention Act, it will be of great interest to me to see how the ministry continues to fund science related to this act, and how science informs the ministry's decision-making. I also hope we can discuss if MNRF has any future plans to expand new hunting seasons to other birds or species and how the ministry is making those decisions.

I believe all this traces back to a vitally important topic: scientific research performed and funded by the MNRF. Ontario needs to know that their government is ensuring that scientific research is being done and that it informs the best available decision-making processes. This is something that we pride ourselves on in this province.

I hope that we will have a productive and fruitful hearing about the MNRF during our time together. In conclusion, I would like to thank the minister for being here today. I would also like to thank all our guests who are appearing before the committee today. Also, I am so glad that we will be able to have a conversation.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Thank you, MPP. You know you have about nine and a half minutes left if you wanted to use it.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Yes, I think I will start with a question. It's fairly substantial so I think that will take up the time.

The minister talked about the number of people who are employed by the MNRF. It's a very significant employer across rural Ontario and northern Ontario. What is the current number of full-time-equivalent positions—which I'll refer to as FTEs going forward—both authorized and actual, employed by the MNRF currently?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell, and thank you, Chair. I did reference that in my opening remarks, but I will turn it over to the deputy for something more precise. I think I used the number of around 2,800, but I can let the deputy speak to that.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Deputy Minister Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark. If you'd like the current number accurately, I'll ask our CAO, Amanda Holmes, to provide that. She's on Zoom.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Okay. Ms. Holmes, if you would introduce yourself for Hansard. Please proceed.

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** Yes, my name is Amanda Holmes. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the corporate management and information division. Good afternoon.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Good afternoon.

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** Our full-time-equivalent number as of July 31, 2020, was 2,709 FTEs. We also have a number of seasonal employees. You mentioned those staff earlier; a number of them are fire crews. As of July 31, we had 1,037 seasonal employees, and our FTE cap, which we are allowed to have—the minister did reference in his speech—is 2,800.

1550

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** How does that compare to the number now, compared to before you transferred, I would assume, responsibilities over to MECP?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I would have to refer that to Amanda as well, to the deputy.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Amanda, do you have that number accessible right now or will we need to take that away and bring that back?

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** I'm just looking for that number now. I may have to take a minute to get my hands on that rather than hold us up, but I can get that during this call.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Okay, thank you.

The next question is, how many full-time equivalents and what dollar amount was transferred to MECP for that? This might be something that would be included in that amount, like in that area for you to look into?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'm sure we'll have to get back to you on those, on that kind of financial number.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Okay. And could you provide a breakdown of the current FTEs by ministry program area?

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** Yes.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We'll have to bring that back to the committee.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** All right. And then again on staffing, how many FTEs, both authorized and actual, related to scientific research does the ministry currently have?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We're taking notes, and we'll get—

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Okay. Is that going to be brought back to the committee?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We'll have to bring that back to the committee, for sure, yes.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** All right. How is the ministry investing in science staff in preparation for development of the Ring of Fire?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We work with the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, but the Ring of Fire is primarily under that ministry, under Minister Rickford. Much of the development of the Ring of Fire and

surrounding the deposits there come under the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines, so much of that information would have to be sourced from them.

We're obviously involved. We work with the permitting to allow the clearing of corridors in order to facilitate the development, but as far as ministry people involved in the actual establishment of the Ring of Fire, most of that does come under the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines. It's not our ministry.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** I think I was looking to see how or if the Ministry of Natural Resources, as the sort of, as you said, person who would permit for that—is there any scientific analysis going on about the impact to those unique ecosystems in that area?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Of course wherever there are impacts on natural resources, we have our people involved assessing those impacts and doing analysis, but unless you were more specific, it would be difficult for me to answer.

I don't know, Deputy, if you can enlighten us on that, but that's a pretty broad question.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Certainly with any activities across the province, our ministry would be involved in permitting and approvals of certain activities. If there are certain details that you're interested in, we'd be happy to take that back.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Okay. Then something else that we're interested in, as we're looking at value for money: What were the MNR's costs to transfer programs to MECP as per order in council 1149/2018?

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

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** All right.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** You did ask that question when it came to FTEs and how much money was transferred over, so I'm sure that ADM Holmes will be looking for that specific figure.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** And we will get the program-by-program breakdown?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We'll provide what we can.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Are there any other projected costs for this year?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Projected costs regarding—

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** The transfer.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Again, I'd have to turn that over to the deputy.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** At this time, I'm not aware of any additional costs. Amanda, can you confirm that, please?

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** I can confirm that at this time, we are not anticipating any further costs or transfers between the ministries. We did have a couple of pieces that did take place over the last two fiscal years, but we do not anticipate for 2021-22.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** All right, thank you.

On vote 2104, public protection, on page 85 of the estimates, base funding for public protection was increased by \$30 million. Can you please explain why this decision was made to increase base funding?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'll pass that to the deputy.

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

We go to the government. MPP Harris—oh, my apologies. It goes back to you, Minister, for 30 minutes.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Okay. I'm going to continue with where we left off this morning. We did run out of time.

*Interruption.*

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Somebody's beeper is going. Oh, I guess that's the timer.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Stopwatch—I'll turn it over to the Clerk. I apologize.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We're going to continue with pillar 3 of our forest sector strategy, and I'm so pleased to have my critic MPP Monteith-Farrell in what I would suggest is very much supporting our forest sector strategy based on her comments so far. We may find out differently as we go through this process. But we believe it's something that is tremendously important for Ontario and the north. It, in itself, will address some of those questions that she raised with regard to climate change and others specific to reforestation etc.

The third pillar of our forest sector strategy: improving our cost competitiveness. That's something that is so important in the world we live in today, to be competitive, consistent with our government-wide commitment to be open for business, reducing burdens for businesses, making strategic investments in forestry infrastructure and promoting a business climate in Ontario that attracts investment.

One way we reduce burden is by streamlining our forest management manuals, which, as I explained, prescribe the steps that planning teams must follow in developing a forest management plan. This streaming will result in \$9 million in savings over the next decade for industry.

We've provided a fast and secure online service known as the natural resources information portal, better supporting the forest industry during forest management planning, consultation and approvals with the ministry and lowering taxes for industry operators. We will be allowing them to write off capital investments for assets acquired after November 2018.

Pillar 4—this is a really important one: fostering innovation, markets and talent, engaging with Ontario's young people so they will see forestry as a path to a good-paying career. We want to encourage young adults to pursue careers in the forest sector and to highlight the vast array of career opportunities within that sector.

One of the things that has been holding forestry back in Ontario is a labour shortage. Introducing students to the forest industry through programs like the Specialist High Skills Major, supporting employment and skills training programs that focus on forestry through Employment Ontario—there is a growing Indigenous youth population that could participate in the future labour force and provide leadership in developing new forest entrepreneurial businesses.

**1600**

The committee may not be aware that every September, we celebrate National Forest Week. In fact, this year was

the 100th anniversary of that celebration. Last year, as part of National Forest Week, I visited Lakehead University in Thunder Bay to talk to students in their forestry program. I would have loved to have gone back this year, but as you know, that wasn't possible, with COVID-19. It's a great thing for young people and their communities. Good jobs in forestry allow kids in northern and rural communities to stay in their hometowns and help build prosperity right there.

The fourth pillar of our strategy is also about fostering innovation, working to promote innovative uses for Ontario's wood resources so that forest companies can tap into growing international markets for these products. Until recently, wood has not been widely used to build larger commercial and institutional buildings. Mass timber is an incredible material for building large-scale buildings. Built well, mass timber buildings will last many decades, even in Canada's harsh climate. Mass timber is increasingly being seen as an environmentally friendly alternative to traditional construction materials like glass and steel, which bring with them a much larger carbon footprint.

Several mass timber buildings are scheduled to be constructed in Toronto, including a 12-storey building for George Brown College and a 14-storey academic tower for the University of Toronto. We fully expect that these coming additions to the Toronto cityscape are just the leading edge of a widespread trend towards sustainable, eco-friendly mass timber construction.

We're also taking action to increase the use of sustainable and renewable biofuels in Ontario. They're produced from forest industry by-products and can be used for heat and power in Ontario. It's an innovative use for forest products, and it represents a tremendous opportunity to diversify the sector even further.

Thanks to cutting-edge engineering, modern bioheat systems are as efficient as fossil fuel- and electricity-based heating systems. This provides another heating option for rural, northern and Indigenous communities that are currently dependent on fossil fuels for heat. Our Ontario Bioheat Initiative and the soon-to-be-released forest biomass action plan also support the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan.

Another action we've taken under this pillar is we're redesigning our business support program, which was called the Forestry Growth Fund. The redesigned program is now the Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program. The redesign was focused on streamlining the application process, making it more transparent and user-friendly for applicants. The Forest Sector Investment and Innovation Program is designed to boost productivity, create jobs and promote economic development in communities that depend on the forest sector.

In September, I had the honour of announcing the first company to receive funding through the redesigned business support program. We are investing \$2 million in Oxford Pallet, a major employer in Norwich. Oxford Pallet provides good jobs to more than 60 people, and the company has built a truly impressive nationwide distribution network over the last 20 years.

Our investment will go towards new robotic and visionary technology. It will allow Oxford Pallet to double its production capacity and create up to 20 more new jobs. With these cutting-edge improvements, the company will be better able to meet the growing demand for its products, which include crates, mulch and material-handling bins. The Oxford expansion is expected to result in a more than 30% increase in lumber purchases from regional sawmills and lumber wholesalers, so this funding will have a ripple effect benefiting not just Oxford Pallet but the entire regional industry as well.

I look forward to announcing more investments in the coming months and years. It gave me great pride to deliver the forest sector strategy. I know that our government's commitment to making Ontario open for business and with the actions in our forest sector strategy, this industry has a very bright future.

**Forestry and COVID-19:** Our ministry has always recognized how important forestry is to Ontario's economy, but the COVID-19 outbreak has revealed just how important it is to Ontarians. We declared forestry an essential industry. This allowed it to continue operating during the first wave of the COVID-19 outbreak. In fact, Ontario was one of the first jurisdictions anywhere to include forest product producers on its list of essential workplaces. Raw materials were required to manufacture and deliver much-needed products for hygiene, food and medical supplies, including personal protective equipment.

I'm incredibly proud of the many Ontario forest companies that stepped up to the plate during a time of crisis in our province. It's times like these that reveal the true worth of an industry.

To offset the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the forest industry, my ministry implemented several measures intended to provide immediate support for the sector. We expedited the implementation of this year's Provincial Forest Access Roads Funding Program to allow for infrastructure expenses to be reimbursed months sooner than normal. This helped forest companies cope with cash flow concerns. We announced a six-month deferral of crown stumpage fees for the very same reason. We made \$3.5 million available in funding to forest companies to help them put protective measures in place for tree-planting workers to keep them safe from COVID-19 and to ensure that tree planting for this sustainable, renewable resource could continue to be carried out this spring with appropriate safety measures.

The forest industry will be needed more than ever to support economic recovery from this crisis and the actions in the forest sector strategy will help the industry grow and reach its full potential. I'm grateful for the opportunity to bring this to the attention of the standing committee.

I thank MPP Monteith-Farrell for her comments as she has raised a lot of issues. I'm sure that some of them will come back in the form of questions later on in the deliberations. She raised a number of issues, and I'm anxious to have the opportunity to address them later in the proceedings. Hopefully, she will re-raise them in the

form of questions as we move along, and we will address them at the appropriate time.

I have spoken at length about the work my ministry is doing with regard to the forest industry in Ontario. I'd like to now spend some time talking about the other work we do to sustainably and responsibly manage the province's natural resources.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry is involved in the protection of many of Ontario's most precious resources, including our fish and wildlife and our aggregates, and we play an important role in protecting people and property from natural hazards. Some of those I know are going to come back again in questions from MPP Monteith-Farrell. I'd like to tell you about some of the work my ministry has been doing in these areas. Maybe we'll be answering the questions for you right here. Who knows?

**Wildland fire program:** A significant threat to our forests and, of course, to our communities is wildland fires, and a very important role my ministry plays is protecting Ontario's forests and communities from this hazard. Nothing is more important than protecting the safety of the people and the communities across the province, including protecting our staff.

Our firefighting personnel and support staff carry out their duties with exceptional courage, dedication and professionalism. These are qualities that have given Ontario a reputation as an international leader in wildland fire management. Our wildland fire program is led by the aviation, forest fire and emergency services branch within the ministry. Their efforts are coordinated throughout the province through the ministry's emergency operations centre headquartered in Sault Ste. Marie.

The ministry's wildland fire program is responsible for the protection of some 90 million hectares of crown land throughout the province. This protection zone includes our crown forests. Protection on this scale is no small undertaking. It's a vast and complex logistical challenge, and the ministry has significant resources and personnel to predict, detect and fight fires. This includes 32 fire management facilities, eight aviation bases and an extensive inventory of fire suppression equipment, along with a fleet of specialized aircraft.

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The ministry employs hundreds of personnel to fight fires, including professional fire rangers, pilots, maintenance engineers and support staff. We work with municipalities around the province to extinguish and control wildland fires within their boundaries and to coordinate training, compliance and suppression activities. We also work with unincorporated townships and Indigenous communities to offer training, community wildfire protection planning and wildland fire hazard risk assessments.

Ontario is party to several mutual aid agreements with provinces and territories across Canada and countries around the world. These agreements ensure that if the wildland fire demands exceed Ontario's resources, we have partners that can come to our aid. In return, Ontario can support them in their time of need. This includes the United States, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand.

Since 1982, our province has been a partner and an active member of the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, or CIFFC. CIFFC is a not-for-profit corporation that was created to manage wildland fire resources and coordinate support across Canada and with our international partners. It shares resources and best practices, and it creates a form and a framework for critical decision-making and priority-setting during escalated fire seasons across Canada.

I've mentioned our partnerships with other provinces and countries. Here in Ontario, we have other critical partners in the fight against wildland fires. Many northern Ontario municipalities, unincorporated townships and First Nations work with us to keep communities and industries safe, and, of course, individual property owners and outdoor recreation users are one of our first lines of defence. By taking steps to understand and prevent wildland fires, they play a critical role in helping us to keep people safe and protect our forests. These partnerships allow us to share resources, which helps minimize the burden on any single jurisdiction during exceptional fire seasons.

Committee members may remember the wildland fires that captured headlines in the summer of 2018. That fire season was one of the worst on record for Ontario, and it tested my ministry's capacity to its limits. Less than two months after our government took office, we committed an additional \$100 million to fight forest fires across the province. That money was used to pay for continued fire response efforts, including supplies and equipment used to suppress the fires, and the work of support personnel and fire rangers. It also funded assistance from our out-of-province and international partners, including the United States and Mexico.

Just as we've benefited from support from our partners in times of need, as I mentioned, we also offer our help when our friends need it. Late in 2019 and early in 2020, my ministry deployed 30 fire personnel to Australia to help with an unprecedented bushfire season that made headlines around the world. We were also proud to send 120 fire rangers and four support staff to Quebec this past June to help combat the massive Lac Saint-Jean fire. In September, we sent 19 specialized staff to help manage fire operations on the ground in Oregon, as the west coast of the United States suffered catastrophic wildland fires across a large swath of land.

This year, our fire rangers and support staff had to deal with a fire season like no other—a fire season with the compounded risk of the COVID-19 pandemic. We took additional steps to protect people and property during the fire season. For this fiscal year, the ministry had a \$30-million increase—you asked about that, MPP Monteith-Farrell—in base funding for emergency forest firefighting. This allowed us to strengthen our preparedness for any emergencies and to ensure safety measures were in place to protect our fire rangers from COVID-19. Staff in my ministry adapted to the evolving threat of COVID-19 with remarkable agility, merging the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of Health into their practices. They

trained using physical distancing and housed their fire crews differently, all while carrying out their extensive preparations for the upcoming fire season.

My staff recognized that the pandemic could aggravate any emergency fire situation, adding a new dimension of risk for firefighters and communities threatened by fire. To stave off this compounded risk, my staff placed an even stronger focus on early detection and combatting detected fires with full force in order to keep them small. Thankfully, it has been a below-average season in terms of the number of fires on the landscape and the overall area burned.

But we have had to deal with two community evacuations due to wildland fire, one in the town of Red Lake and one in Eabametoong First Nation. Conducting these evacuations amid the COVID-19 pandemic amounted to an emergency within an emergency. In addition to the significant logistical challenge of moving people to safety on short notice, these evacuations had to be conducted observing strict public health protocols and ensuring there was adequate personal protective equipment and other precautions in place. Thanks to the tireless efforts of all involved, both fires have been extinguished and residents have been able to return to their communities.

As minister, I'm immensely proud of my ministry staff for coping with this difficult situation with their usual high standards of professionalism, dedication and care—standards that have given our province a tremendous reputation on the international stage.

Another key responsibility for the ministry is to protect people and property from flooding. Ontario is fortunate to have an abundance of lakes and rivers, but with that comes a risk to those who build and live near the water. Our role in managing flooding focuses on reducing risks, mitigation and early warning activities. We work in partnership with local conservation authorities to provide support for municipalities in dealing with flooding emergencies.

There are 36 conservation authorities in Ontario, set up according to watershed boundaries. They do important work in protecting people and property from flooding and natural hazards.

As part of our efforts to cut red tape and reduce burden, my ministry has proposed reducing the regulatory red tape for conservation authority development permits by making the approval process faster, more predictable and less costly. This action will also help us deliver on the commitments in our flooding strategy.

My ministry operates the Surface Water Monitoring Centre, which gathers and analyzes weather data and forecasts water levels. This is part of an early warning system that makes sure communities have the information they need to protect themselves from flooding. The Surface Water Monitoring Centre also provides resources to the public to better inform them of flooding risks. These include detailed maps that provide frequently updated information on Ontario's watersheds.

I don't think any of us will forget—certainly I know MPP Monteith-Farrell won't; she brought it up—the

devastating flooding in the spring of 2019. It caused catastrophic damage and displaced thousands of people. But while 2019 brought together an exceptional set of circumstances, floods happen every year in Ontario. It's a fact of life in a province like ours. Flooding affects communities, often with devastating impacts on homeowners and business. We can't prevent flooding, but we can become more resilient to it.

In March of this year, shortly before the COVID-19 shutdowns, I had the honour of announcing our province's flooding strategy. It was another highlight for me as minister. In response to the 2019 spring floods, our government recognized that we needed to have a plan in place to deal with these frequent and naturally occurring events, especially as our province experiences more extreme weather events.

We began the process by launching a series of consultations across the province and by appointing Doug McNeil as Ontario's special adviser on flooding. Mr. McNeil brought to the role a wealth of experience in flood mitigation, having served as a deputy minister of infrastructure and transportation with the government of Manitoba.

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We commissioned a report from Mr. McNeil on what we could do as a province to better prepare for flooding and how we can help our communities recover more quickly when it happens. The special adviser's report contained far-reaching recommendations for improving flood management in Ontario. Recommendations included education and outreach initiatives that were intended to raise public awareness. They included proposed amendments to regulations and policy. And they included suggestions for how we can improve our response and recovery measures.

These recommendations fed into the development of the flooding strategy, our long-term plan to make Ontario better prepared for flooding, better equipped to respond to floods and more capable of mounting a rapid recovery. The strategy introduced a series of new and enhanced actions designed to improve our collective understanding of flood risks and help us make appropriate land use planning decisions. The measures in the strategy are grouped into five priorities.

The first priority is to understand flood risks. That means gathering the best science and information available and making sure that the public and the governments and agencies that represent them are aware of the risks related to flooding. It also involves increasing public awareness and education. To that end, we have updated the ontario.ca website to better communicate what homeowners can do to be better prepared for flooding and to know who to contact during and after a flood. This is another example of the customer service focus of my ministry. We are constantly improving the information we provide online to be more accessible and user-friendly for Ontarians.

The second priority of the strategy is to strengthen the governance around flood risks. Flood management is

complex. It involves all levels of government and other partners. The strategy helps to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each group involved in flood management in the province. This clarification makes sure that we're all working together to implement sound policies that keep people out of harm's way. An example of this priority is making sure local development is directed away from areas where flooding and erosion present unacceptable risks.

The third priority in the strategy is enhancing flood preparedness. Flooding, as I have said, is a fact of life in Ontario, but by knowing when and where floods are more likely to occur, we will be better equipped to address them when they happen. We're enhancing our preparedness by using state-of-the-art science and technology. An example of this is a \$4.7-million investment in the stream gauge network, which measures water flow and levels. This technology helps municipalities better prepare for flood events.

The fourth priority is enhancing flood response and recovery. This means putting measures in place to improve how we receive and respond to requests for assistance, by making our programs more coordinated and more effective.

Finally, the fifth priority is to invest in flood risk reduction. This priority aims to promote strategic financial investments and work with the federal government to increase investment in critical areas like mapping and infrastructure. As the special adviser on flooding pointed out in his report, there is nothing we can do to prevent flooding, we can only become more resilient to it. Increasing resiliency is a shared responsibility, requiring the participation of all levels of government, agencies and property owners. We all have an important role to play in preparing for flooding and extreme weather events.

I am very proud of our flooding strategy and of the tremendous work done by scientists and officials in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to protect people and property from these inevitable events.

Our government has taken a number of other actions to offset the impact of flooding in Ontario. We have provided over \$7 million in disaster recovery funding assistance to households, small businesses and non-profits that were impacted by the 2019 spring flooding. We launched a \$1-million pilot project in 2019 under the Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance Program to help municipalities rebuild damaged infrastructure and make it more resilient to weather. And we're supporting smaller municipalities, which have received approximately \$200 million in federal and provincial funding to invest in critical water projects through the green stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. My ministry committed to investing \$4.7 million each year in the flood forecasting and warning network, which helps municipalities better prepare for flood events.

As I said, flood management in Ontario is complex and requires the participation of multiple ministries, municipalities, conservation authorities and governments from our neighbours to the south.

Did you say we were just about out of time, Chair?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates):** Close. Not yet, though. About a minute and 20.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Okay. Another key ministry responsibility I'd like to talk about is our role in wildlife management. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry plays an important role in sustainable wildlife management. This means managing wildlife species to sustain their populations and habitat while considering the needs of the human population over time as well. Wildlife management includes policy and regulation, along with research and monitoring done by scientists who are experts in their field. Wildlife management also includes habitat management and conservation, along with allocation and harvest planning. This is the important work that supports our decisions on which species can be harvested recreationally and commercially. It's always done with a keen eye on sustainability for the long term.

An example is the work we do to determine moose populations. Ontario's recreational moose hunt attracts hunters from within the province, from the rest of Canada, the United States and beyond. The ministry invests significant resources in monitoring moose populations to ensure that this popular hunt is sustainable. One way my ministry scientists do that is by conducting moose aerial inventories in selected wildlife management units each year. I had the opportunity to join staff—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates):** Minister, I'm sorry; your time is up.

We've got a couple of things to do before we go to the official opposition again. We have had another MPP join us. Guy Bourgouin, can you identify yourself and tell us where you are?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Guy Bourgouin. I am at Queen's Park in my office.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates):** Thank you very much.

We'll go to the official opposition for 20 minutes. Go ahead, Judith.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** I think the minister had addressed the budgetary increase to emergency services or public protection. The only question that I would like to get clarification on in that area is, we know that this year there was not a significant increase in firefighting—would the ministry have prepared for a big fire season? After that answer, I'm going to hand it over to my colleague Guy Bourgouin.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, MPP Monteith-Farrell, for the question. Yes, we did indicate—this fire season was like none other we've ever had. I guess every fire season is something like none other we've ever had, because every one is similar but different. You'll note that 2018 was one of the worst fire seasons we had on record.

In the budget, if you go back any number of years, the amount that has been set aside for wildland fire suppression and protection, the program, has always been fairly similar. Then in years like 2018, where there was an exceptional season for the number of fires that took place

across the province and obviously in the north, the vast majority of them, and the type of fires—how close they were to built-up areas and people and property—it certainly added to the costs of fighting those fires. But at no time was there any possibility that the resources would not be there to combat those fires. Even if the budget of that year was not the amount of money that turned out to be the firefighting costs for the year, it's clearly understood that we will fight the fires as long as they need to be fought. That's what happened through the summer of 2018—that regardless of what was in the budget that was tabled in the spring of 2018, our government did whatever was necessary to combat those fires through the summer of 2018. I recall having questions in the spring of 2019, given that we had to spend so much money for fires in 2018, about why we didn't have a larger number in the budget of 2019, and the answer was the same—that we will fight fires until they're out or controlled or put in a condition that is satisfactory to our management team, which does such a tremendous job throughout the entire fire season throughout the entire province, and obviously, particularly in the north, where we're responsible for it.

1630

In 2020, the most recent budget—we added \$30 million to that budget partially because of the COVID-19 measures that we knew were going to be necessary. But, regardless, if there was another \$100 million needed to fight fires this year, it would have been provided. The contingency plans are there to ensure—we're not going to stop fighting fires because we've used up the budget. That would be like having the fire department stop at your house because they were told they had no more money in the city's budget to fight fires. They're not going to stop until those fires are out and people and property are protected. That was why we put in the extra \$30 million. As you know—and you would know it better than me, because you live up in the north, and you know how important fire protection and fire suppression is for our resources up there. It's not about what we put into the budget—it's an absolute guarantee that if there are fires, our trained professionals, dedicated people, the best in the world, will be up there fighting them until the job is done.

I hope that answers your question.

**Ms. Judith Monteith-Farrell:** Thank you. MPP Bourgouin?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Minister, I've spoken to you on this subject a couple of times. The Calstock power plant, the small biomass facility operated by Atlantic Power and Constance Lake First Nation is about to close—two months till closure. The community is concerned, of course, and also First Nations. This little power plant purchases 3.5 million—locally sourced wood waste, and it consumes 200,000 green metric tonnes. I think it's a great plant, and it creates good jobs. If this little plant closes, that means there will be a loss of 25 direct, well-paying jobs in the biomass facility and over 500 full-time positions in the wood waste mills that feed the generator. I understand that the Minister of Energy, Northern Development and Mines is aware of the situation and has had discussions among the parties.

My question to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry is this: I know the minister thinks that one lost job in the forestry sector in Ontario is one too many. Given that we are talking about hundreds of jobs that may be lost in the forestry sector, will you intervene to save the good jobs at Calstock and the local mills?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** MPP Bourgouin, thank you very much for the question. You and I have had many discussions on this and many other issues as well. I appreciate your advocacy for your area. I've been up to Hearst. I don't know if you live in Hearst or not, but I've certainly been there. I know it's a big riding up there, so you don't necessarily—mine is a big riding too, not as big as yours. But mine is the riding where forestry really began, Guy, if I may call you—can we call people by names in here?

*Interjection.*

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** That makes it easier.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Guy works for me, anyway.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Wayne Gates):** Are you asking the Chair to make a ruling?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** It makes it a little easier.

I come from an area where forestry was its very lifeblood. I think, based on the discussions that you and I have had and also—I am absolutely certain that you've had a chance to read over our forest sector strategy to maintain and bring prosperity to that industry, which will mean jobs in your communities and other jobs for at least the next 10 years. We've got it as a blueprint for 10 years, but I think it can serve as a foundational plank for much longer than that, and we can build upon that going forward as well.

That forest sector strategy talks about more uses for wood, innovation, so finding more ways that we can make use of that wood because cost competitiveness, as you know, is a key component in the success of that industry. By ensuring that we're using every possible molecule, so to speak, of the wood harvested to its best use ensures the cost competitiveness of that sector.

We've been working very closely with Atlantic Power and Calstock and all of the parts of the material supply chain to that facility in the north and the impacts that it would not only have on Calstock but on them as well, because that is a place where—they're the feedstock for that facility, as you know. We've had many, many discussions with them, and I think that I may have even involved you in some of those discussions as part of our laying down the beginnings of the forest sector strategy and the impact that that has on that industry. We're continuing to have those discussions.

You know that we were able to work with Minister Rickford in energy, northern development and mines earlier this year, and I think I called you the very day that we got that approval from Minister Rickford. We got an extension. We worked with the communities, and I know you and I spoke about it, about how important it was, and got an extension to that contract. We're continuing to work very diligently on ensuring that we can do everything we possibly can to maintain, protect and build upon those jobs in the north, because the whole system is like the hub of a wheel, and everybody else feeds to it. You've got to make

sure that—if that hub isn't there, those spokes can't feed to anything in the middle.

We've been very active and have had some really good discussions. I have a very good feeling about where we're going to end up with regard to that facility. I don't have an answer, but you know my feelings and you know the commitment that I've shown in the past, and I think you can be comfortable that that commitment remains.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, Minister. I think you're right by saying the forest industry with this co-gen plant is very integrated together. The reason we're concerned in the region is because we know that the government has shut down a similar plant/energy facility in northern Ontario. It happened in 2018 with the OPG biomass facility in Thunder Bay. And I know your position on this, because I had the discussion with you—because this little power plant takes a lot of debris that stays in the bush that can be processed, and there's value to this. There's value because that little plant made the other sawmills in the area very competitive to others that didn't have that, which is also a plus, and so it's an integrated industry.

**1640**

So if you could explain, is there any other positive—or can you give us any more details on these negotiations that would help us hope or help us see that this will not be another closure like we've seen in 2018? Because communities are concerned, the First Nations are concerned. Don't forget, there's also—I know, back in my former job, there was a lot of biomass being done in Thunder Bay. But in the east, more in my area, there's very little, so there's a huge potential workforce, of work to be done, and there's a lot of work that could be developed to do more. So if you could expand on this and on negotiations, I think it would be greatly appreciated, for the people of the north.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Well, Guy, I'd love to; I'd love to give you a copy of Thursday's budget too, but I don't have it. So I can only provide you with what I can provide you. You and I, like I say, are on the same page when it comes to—you live up there. You know it. I've grown up with it. I understand it. I'm not from the north, but, I think, in the time that I've been Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, I've spent, with the exception, of course, of 2020 and COVID—but prior to that, I think it's safe to say I've spent as much time in the north as any Minister of Natural Resources who didn't actually live in the north for decades. Actually, one small part of my riding is in northern Ontario, so I might pull that card too.

You know that I've been up there and I've met with your people up there. I've discussed the importance of this industry to their communities, to their families, to their livelihoods and the jobs—not just the direct jobs but the indirect jobs—that this industry provides. When you go to the north, if it's not forestry, it's mining or it's recreation-related, and if it's not one of those three, it has a tough time. So we have to do whatever we can to ensure that those three key bread providers—they're the bread providers for the people of the north—we do what we can as a government to support them.

From the very first day that we took office, we made a commitment to improving the situation for forestry operators in the province of Ontario. I know you were elected in 2018, but I know you've been involved in this business for a long time, and you know it. And you know that the amount of crown land, timber land, that was being harvested in the north had been reduced substantially over the previous 15 years, which had a major impact on the prosperity of the people in the north. So when we were elected, we said we were going to ensure that we could bring the industry back to where it once was in an environmentally sustainable, conscious way. That's why we embarked on the forest sector strategy. So for us to embark on this strategy and then not support the components of that strategy could be said to be self-defeating, would it not?

So when I sit here today, it's very easy for me to say that if it is something that supports forestry jobs in the north, it dovetails exactly, it dovetails perfectly with the forest sector strategy that we introduced earlier this year. So there's not even a scintilla of a question about what my position is on supporting these installations. Until we have an alternative, until we have some other use, we're going to continue to support that, because my mantra is, we need to have a complete, holistic approach to the use of that product that we're harvesting from the forest, otherwise, we can't be competitive.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay, and on that, Minister, because roundwood is going to Quebec, or wood from our forests is going to Quebec. Now, we've seen in 2016, there were over 616,000 cubic metres, and of course it went up in 2017 to 622,000, then down in 2017-18, to 457,000. Now it's back up to 520,000 cubic metres. In the time of COVID, creating employment and utilizing all this wood, this roundwood, shouldn't it be used in Ontario processing? Because developing "la troisième transformation," the third transformation, second transformation and opportunities to create employment so that—

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

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** So I would ask that you comment on this. How can we create more employment with this volume that is going to Quebec and then being processed? As you know, truckers can't go to Quebec to deliver it. They have to stop at the border and dump it. So my question to you is this: How do we address the volume going to Quebec when it should be processed in Ontario?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Yes, that's a fair question, Guy. I would have to, quite frankly, examine all of the agreements that are in place. Off the top of my head, I can see where the question is coming from and what the genesis of the question would be, but I think I will have to ask the deputy minister to perhaps talk to our forest industry division to see what agreements there are in place and what we might be doing to address the opportunities for that wood to be processed here in Ontario.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** And with that, I'm sorry to say, you are out of time.

We go to the government now. Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, thank you very much for being here today. Of course,

thank you, as well, to the deputy and ADMs and staff that we have joining us via Zoom and, of course, all of our colleagues as well.

I was listening intently to your opening comments, and just talking a little bit about J.R. Booth and what he brought to the area in eastern Ontario. It kind of reminded me of a really great junior A hockey rivalry between some of the teams over the years in North Bay and, of course, the Pembroke Lumber Kings, which you made reference to earlier, which I'm sure that name, now that you mention it, comes directly from J.R. Booth and him being in the area. I was doing a little research on him earlier, and it turns out he was born in a town called Waterloo. However, that is Waterloo, Quebec, not Waterloo where I'm living, so a different place. I got excited for a minute.

But I think that I want to just kind of dive into this. I actually, before we came back here to committee this afternoon, got off the phone with a First Nations community that is looking at taking over an old mill up in north-eastern Ontario. They were quite excited to hear about some of the things that the new forest sector strategy has done for communities in northern Ontario.

I'm from North Bay originally, lived there a good portion of my life and have seen first-hand what it means to have a thriving forest industry here in the province. We've all seen, especially members that are here from northern Ontario, when there are big layoffs at some of the plants, it has a big ripple effect. When you're laying off 50, 100, 200 people in small communities, that's a very, very large portion of the GDP.

**1650**

I want to ask you a few questions about the forest strategy and get some of your feedback as to what that ongoing plan is going to look like. The forest industry in Ontario generates roughly \$18 billion annually and supports almost 150,000 direct and indirect jobs, which I'm sure you're well aware of. The vast majority of those are in rural and northern communities.

I was hoping you might be able to tell us a little bit about how—and I know you've spoken a bit about it already, but maybe go into a little bit more in-depth detail about this important industry, how you're planning to support it through your ministry. And maybe, if you've got a chance, touch a little bit on how some of the things that we're seeing with the forest sector strategy will pertain to COVID-19 and help such a vital industry to this province get out of a tough spot.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, Mike. There's no question about the stature of J.R. Booth. I don't know exactly what his physical stature was, but his stature on the world stage was something that was remarkable. At one time, he was Canada's richest person. Do you know that he never actually opened a mill? He moved all the timber and logs to mills that were operated by others.

But when you look at the Ottawa Valley, his fingerprints are all over it. He built railways and then sold them. In places like Madawaska, in my riding, there are still the remnants of a roundhouse sitting there for maintenance and repair of trains. Very few people live in Madawaska

anymore, but at one point, it was such a hub because of forestry. Because of the forest industry, there was a roundhouse where they would pull the engines in to do the maintenance on them in a little place like Madawaska. Madawaska is basically halfway between Barry's Bay and the east gate of Algonquin Park. That's the kind of places that were built. The other part that affected Madawaska was the building of the Bark Lake dam, and then it flooded some of what was the old town site. That was back in the 1930s.

But today, we still have generational businesses that did respond by J.R. Booth's foray into the lumbering business. We have Shaw Lumber in Pembroke which could possibly be the oldest family-run business in the province. It might have hit 170 years now in the Shaw family as a forestry business. If you just put that into perspective: 170 years, older than Canada. The Shaw Lumber business is older than Canada. We have McCrae's, which is fourth generation, and Murray Brothers. We're talking about old companies that have existed—Murray Brothers, 1902. I'm not 100% sure of the dates of McCrae's. But these are businesses that have sustained people in the Ottawa Valley—

*Interruption.*

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** If there's a vote, do we have to suspend?

**Mr. Mike Harris:** No, it's quorum.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Oh, okay.

They have sustained families in the Ottawa Valley for generations. This is the kind of business that it is, and it's allowed people to stay so that they haven't had to leave the area. They've been able to stay in the area and grow their families. When we talk about our forest sector strategy, the title of our forest sector strategy is Sustainable Growth.

Now who would be more motivated to ensure that their businesses were sustainable and would be there for generations to come than those people who are absolutely dependent upon those businesses? That's what our forest sector strategy is built on: stewardship and sustainability. Who's going to be the best steward? The people who need the sustainability.

This sector, which I know sometimes is absolutely inaccurately and wrongly maligned, because for some it's politically expedient to do so, or it accomplishes the message that they're trying to portray—quite frankly, it is the most sustainable, environmentally conscious business out there. I've often referred to forestry as very slow farming. You plant, you nurture—nature does much of the nurturing—and you harvest. So you plant and you grow and you harvest. That's why we believe that this is so sustainable—because we're talking about a harvest level in Ontario that is sustainable at about 30 million cubic metres per year. The growth rate of Ontario's crown forests is about 37 million to 38 million cubic metres per year. So we're actually growing more forests every year than we're even coming close to harvesting.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Maybe we can jump into that a little bit and talk a bit more about the sustainability piece. I know that a lot of people around the province, obviously,

have concerns about what climate change means and some of the different things that surround that—and when we look at other jurisdictions around the world and see some of the mass deforestation in areas like Brazil and the rainforest, for example, or parts of China and Russia.

Could you explain a little bit about how the forest sector strategy—like you said, one of those pillars is sustainability—what that means in terms of the actual harvest of timber here in the province?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** That's a great question, Mike.

As I touched upon in my initial address, we're currently harvesting somewhere in the neighbourhood of about 15 million cubic metres. We have a sustainable level of 30 million cubic metres in the province of Ontario, and at that level we're still growing more forests each and every year. So the forest of Ontario, excepting what we could lose because of disease and fire, is actually growing at a much faster rate than we're harvesting it. One of the ways that you ensure sustainability is ensuring the health of that forest. That's why it's important that we are using the technologies such as lidar to identify the wear, the composition, the age etc.—the harvestability of all of this timber that exists—to make sure that it should be harvested at the right time, as well. If it's harvested optimally, it's less likely that it's going to reach the point where it's more susceptible to infestation or dying because of—trees will die, and if they're dry, they're more susceptible to forest fires. That's one of the ways that forests do regenerate, but if we're harvesting it, we're avoiding some of that, as well.

So our forest sector strategy is all built on that sustainability and ensuring that we can harvest those trees at the optimal time.

Our wood is desired all around the world for its quality. There are places that wood grows a lot faster, but it's not as good. Our wood from the north has a shorter growing season—it takes longer to grow—but the quality of it is desired worldwide. We can continue to maintain a much higher level of harvest of the best wood in the world by harvesting responsibly, and that's exactly what our forest sector strategy is built on.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Minister, you'll know that the area I represent, Waterloo region and Kitchener–Conestoga, is home to some of the best and brightest minds that are coming out of the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University. We're the technology hub of Canada and really only play second fiddle to Silicon Valley in North America, when we break it down.

**1700**

You touched on innovation, talking about lidar and looking at ways that that can help us optimize the forest industry. What kind of investments is the ministry making into helping businesses do that?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'm going to turn that over to the deputy. Maybe Sean Maguire may have some better insights into what we're doing with lidar and stuff like that.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Not lidar specifically, but just when we talk about innovation and spurring on the forest industry to take risks and do new things—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I may get them to talk a little bit about lidar anyhow, but I will talk about our FSIIIP program, which we had—the one before that.

For example, we made a huge commitment to a cross-laminated timber manufacturing centre down in St. Thomas last year. I talked about in Toronto there's a 12-storey building going up at George Brown College, I think it is, and a 14-storey at University of Toronto. And all around the world, there is huge interest in mass timber construction that will have a much smaller carbon footprint on the environment.

But also, the durability of these buildings is quite amazing, actually. We went away from using wood, and it looks like we're starting to get back to using wood again. I find it very interesting, when I come across a bridge, for example—and there is a bridge between Bancroft and Peterborough that's being replaced, but the old bridge was completely framed underneath in wood. The whole framing underneath.

I'm sure that you've driven on Highway 60. From Huntsville to Ottawa, you've got to go through Barry's Bay, you've got to go across by Deacon. The bridge at Deacon, if you go underneath it, that bridge is completely framed and supported by wood—on a King's highway. So we're talking about something that—there's no weight limits on that highway, going over that bridge. It doesn't rust, it doesn't corrode.

There's another one south of Combermere, and I've actually walked underneath that bridge to look at the timbers. It has been there since the 1950s. I was talking to a guy not that long ago. His uncle actually designed that bridge, a fellow by the name of Frank Zamzar. This is just, the way they used to say—I guess it doesn't count anymore—“It's as solid as Sears.” I guess that doesn't work anymore. But that bridge is supported by beams. I'd say they're almost 30 inches in height, about 14 inches in width, and the full width is about 50 feet long. It's just as solid as can be. That was construction out of wood.

So when we look at the opportunities to use wood, the United Nations, as I said, are talking about an increase in the demand for wood products of 30%. Then you look at that through COVID; we were one of the first jurisdictions to declare forestry as an essential industry. When you think about the products—people don't even think about it—the PPE products that come from wood. What about the personal hygiene products that come from wood? You remember in the pandemic when there was first the lockdown and, whether it was Walmart or Canadian Tire or Costco or anywhere, you couldn't go anywhere and buy toilet paper because people were afraid they were going to run out of it, and you couldn't buy it anywhere. And, of course, how did that get resupplied? It got resupplied by the forest industry. Having declared it as an essential industry allowed it, quite frankly, to actually do that.

I know sometimes I lose track of the exact question you asked. I get wandering, because I get so excited about the contribution of this industry, not unknown but unnoticed by so many people. They just take it for granted, and the only thing they hear about is a story about somebody who

doesn't believe that forestry's a good thing—talking about some story about a rainforest being decimated in Brazil or something, but it is not even connected remotely to how we practise this business here in Canada.

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

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** You have a minute and a half.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** Listen, it's good to hear that, and I'm glad that the ministry is taking this very seriously. Like I mentioned before, we've seen a lot of troubles over the years with the forest industry and the lack of investment that has been made into it.

Just one last thing to touch on quickly before we move on here: We've seen such a huge labour shortage when we talk about the trades and supporting industries. How is the forest sector strategy that you've brought forward going to help alleviate some of that for the forest industry?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Well, we're working with the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development very closely. Also, we've helped sponsor some job fairs. But we are doing all of the things we can, working with the industry also to show innovation. Last year, we celebrated forest week up at Lakehead University to try to convince young people that there are some exciting careers in a new industry. I've got two mills in my riding that have gone through extensive renovations in the last couple of years, Ben Hokum forest products and Heideman's. The productivity of these mills versus what existed there before and what they get out of a sawlog is just unbelievable.

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

We go to the opposition. Before we ask questions, I note Madame Gélinas has joined us. If she would identify herself and note whether she's in Ontario or not.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Hi, Chair. I'm France Gélinas, the MPP for Nickel Belt. I'm in my office at Queen's Park. Is there space in your room for me to go join you there?

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I think there is room, if you would like to come down. We have Guy Bourgouin, MPP, also physically present.

And I gather you're about to ask a question.

**Mme France Gélinas:** Yes, I am.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** I will turn the floor over—

**Mme France Gélinas:** Thank you.

Thank you, Minister. I want to ask you about the selling of crown land. I have two specific questions that I would like you to answer. The first one has to do with—I have a lot of people who own their land, but they will have a little corner of it that is on a land use permit. So I don't know; there are 15 feet of where their garage is that's not on their lot. It's on crown land. They have a land use permit, and they would like to purchase this. How do they go about purchasing this?

And the second question has to do with—you were in my riding to celebrate IAMGOLD, the opening of a gold mine across the street from Gogama. In Gogama and in many of the communities of Nickel Belt, some of the homes in hard times were abandoned. They went back to

the crown, and we have tried anybody—your ministry, the Ministry of Finance, the Premier—to say, “There are now over 1,000 workers coming to the gold mine who would like a place to stay. We have all of those abandoned homes in Gogama that we would like to sell, and we don’t know how to go about it. We’re hoping you can help.” So two questions.

1710

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Thank you very much, France. I’m told that here I can actually call you by name; it’s not like the Legislature. So thank you, France, for those questions.

I’m not sure that this is necessarily the venue, but I’m going to—we do have crown land policies, and I would certainly like to talk to you more about these particular circumstances offline. But on the policy side of it, I’m going to turn that over to the deputy at this time. I’m sure that subsequently you and I can chat about some of those specific issues.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Thank you for the question.

The minister is absolutely correct; we have some policies in terms of how we can dispose of crown land. In the situation you have described—we have similar situations like that that we do look at, and we would be happy to look at those specific situations for you and speak to them in detail with you, if you’d like to follow up with us.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** So what you’re telling me is that right now in Ontario it is feasible to buy crown land.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** Yes, depending on the situation. We obviously have a process that we have to go through, and we can certainly go through that in detail if you’d like to hear about it now, or we can speak to you, individually, about how we do crown land disposition at another time.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** I wouldn’t mind if you could tell me what the process is, because we’ve put in a ton of work to try to find out—communicated with our local office—and never got anywhere. So if you know what the process is for somebody to buy crown land, please read it into the record. I will share it widely.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** I’ll hand this over to Craig Brown, who is our ADM of policy division.

Craig, would you have that material with you right now, or would you like us to come back with that in detail, in terms of what the process is?

**Mr. Craig Brown:** Good afternoon. I’m Craig Brown, the assistant deputy minister of policy at the ministry.

It would be easier for me to respond if I understood the specifics of the parcels that you’re referencing, so that I could provide an accurate response. Typically, if you’re looking at a disposition of crown land, the best place to start is a conversation with the local district.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** So the local office of MNRF in my district?

**Mr. Craig Brown:** That would be the first place to start, yes.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Well, I’ve had conversations with both the office in Sudbury and the office in Timmins, and the conversations are really short. They do not have the resources to sell crown land. The conversation ends right there.

**Mr. Craig Brown:** I think we’d be happy to follow up with you on the particular parcel that you’re talking about.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** There are many, many parcels. I’m interested in finding out what the process is for people to purchase crown land. If there is a process and if it works someplace else, I want to know. In my riding, at both MNRF offices, I get the same—I deal mainly with Sudbury, but for the north of my riding I deal with Timmins. I went to many levels, and the answer was, they don’t have the resources to sell crown land.

What you’re telling me is that there’s a process, so I want to know the process.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Minister?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** France, I can have Adam, my director of policy in my office, contact you directly.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** What is Adam’s last name?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Bloskie. I’m sure he has spoken to you before.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Yes, I know who he is. He would be able to help me as to what is the process for people—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Well, I think we’ll be able to help you cipher out the issue that you’re dealing with, get some more details, and we’ll see what we can do to assist.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Thank you, Minister.

My second question is about Gogama. Gogama has a local services board. When all the forestry collapsed and all this, many people had to just move away, and they left their homes there. The taxes are not paid. We’re told that it goes back to the government. Who in the government owns this? People want to buy those houses and pieces of property now, and we don’t know who to connect with.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Again, I don’t have the answer to that either. I’m not sure if the deputy would have that answer either. It’s not one we’d expect at estimates. We’ll have to get back to you on that, France.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Well, one more estimate kind of a question: How much money did your ministry bring in selling crown land last year or the year before or whatever last year you have numbers for?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I’ll have to turn that to the deputy, and she’ll probably turn it to—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** To Craig?

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** I’ll just see if our chief administrative officer, Amanda Holmes, would have that on hand. If not, we’ll have to—we will have it; we’ll just have to dig it up and get back to you.

Amanda, would you have that right now to share, or is it something we can bring back?

**Ms. Amanda Holmes:** The question was for any crown land last year, all crown land together. I don’t have that number, but we can take that back and get back to you on that.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Just to flag it with the Clerk to make sure that when this answer comes in, it’s shared with all the members, including me.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Thank you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Am I allowed to ask other questions?

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** You may, but MPP Bourgouin also wanted to ask some questions. Why don't we turn the floor to him? Then he may turn it back to you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. Go ahead, Guy.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Minister, when the industry went through the downturn, going back 12 or 13 years ago, we saw huge mill closures and job losses. Back then, I used to represent workers and I've seen the downturn.

When I asked you the numbers, when I talked about the wood going to Quebec, it was one of the issues I raised with the former minister back then—it was Minister Ramsay. In the answer he gave me, he said, "What do you want me to do, shut down more mills?" And I said, "No. You should help mills process this wood and create more employment in Ontario." That was my answer to him.

With this volume going and with this industry, we are past these hard times. We need to do more than just two-by-fours and two-by-sixes. What we need to look at is second and third transformations. This is being done elsewhere. I've seen it in the province of Quebec. They've built bridges made of wood. And we are in some places, so we need to see more of that. Why not create employment, utilize the fibre more? There are all kinds of buildings that are being created, as you know, and we can make higher buildings now.

I'd like to hear more from you. Where do you see us going from here to create more employment and generate more revenues for the province? If we ever face another downturn—it makes a huge difference. That's why I came back to Calstock. When we went through that crisis, the Calstock plant helped these sawmills to be a little bit more competitive, an edge over others that didn't have that, which makes a huge difference in closing or surviving.

I'd like to hear more from you on these particular issues. I'm talking about transformation and how do we keep these small plants operating, because they're all integrated and it makes a huge difference when it comes to downturns.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Thanks for that, Guy. I'm sure that you have seen and read our forest sector strategy, and I dare say that you would quite likely very much support it. We've taken those steps. We saw what happened in the past, and we don't want to see that happen again. We want to give the forest industry that strength of a base that allows them to weather storms, because this business is one that has always had—it's kind of the nature of the business; it's a commodity-based business. Depending on how economies all around the world are functioning, it has a huge impact on the sector. That's why we want to put more wood to work.

1720

Stewardship and sustainability is the number one pillar, and that's because if you don't take care of your business, you're going to lose it, right? If you treat that resource as something that is infinite, you'll find that before too long, it's gone. That's why stewardship and sustainability are

our number one pillar: because we're going to make sure that long after you and I are gone—decades, maybe centuries from now—we still have a forest industry, because there's always going to be a need for wood.

The second part of our strategy, like I said—I know you weren't here for my speech; it really was good—is putting more wood to work. We saw what wasn't happening here in the province of Ontario. On cross-laminated timber, Quebec is way ahead of us, so when we became government in 2018, that was one of the things we said: We're going to establish a cross-laminated timber operation here in Ontario. That's what's happening in St. Thomas. They're going to be building bridges and they're going to be building higher, bigger buildings—not just 12 and 14 storeys at George Brown College and the University of Toronto; they're going to be putting that kind of construction to use all across not just Ontario, but all across the world, with Ontario wood. And then, when you—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Minister, on that, I'd like to hear also—I wanted to say it, but I forgot to mention it—the trucking industry and the forest industry, which is a major component. Owner-operators are a major component. As you know, most of these are mom-and-pop operations, and now they're being gouged by insurance companies. They can't even hire their son who has been driving trucks for years, and now they're being asked by the insurance companies to pay from \$5,000 to \$15,000, the difference, or even more in some cases.

The industry, as you know, is very integrated with the trucking industry, especially logging, because logging trucks are mostly owner-operators throughout northern Ontario, from the east to the west. I would like to hear from you regarding the trucking industry, because of the impact, because we are seeing more and more job losses, owner-operators losing their jobs or quitting and not having their son take up the mom-and-pop operation because of the insurance.

I'd like to hear from you: Working with other ministries, what is your ministry doing so that we can stop this gouging of insurance to these mom-and-pop operations? Because I can tell you, in my riding I'm getting calls and calls from owner-operators—and also from the south, for that matter—saying, "Insurance is gouging us. We can't survive anymore. My son doesn't want to take up my business." Some of them were three or four trucks; they're going down to one truck so he can operate it, because he can pay the \$5,000 but he can't afford the rest. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** It's not just the forest industry, but anybody who uses trucks is facing those issues. Forestry more than others, because of the nature of the roads that they travel and the kind of travel that they do—they don't just travel on the 401 and King's highways; they're in some rough terrain. We're continuing to work with the Ministry of Finance, which is the ministry that is directly connected to the insurance industry, whether it's trucks or cars, homes or businesses. It's the Ministry of Finance that is the ministry responsible for the insurance industry.

But you're not talking about something that is specific to your riding; it's everywhere. I hear the same things, Guy. I'm telling you, I hear the same things from people who—you know, you've got the mill operator and then you've got the jobber. The mill operator owns some trucks that truck the finished product, the lumber or whatever it is, but the jobber is the guy in there with the skidders and the log trucks in the bush, having a tough time to insure those vehicles.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** And if these trucks don't deliver, guess what happens to your pillar?

**Hon. John Yakubuski:** That's right, and we get that. They're one of those spokes of that wheel that I was talking about earlier. Like you say, it's completely integrated.

I think that's one of the keys of this industry, is making people who never spent any time learning about the forest sector or having an interest—because, quite frankly, there are some people who just are opposed to it. They don't believe in it. They think it's bad. They think anybody who harvests a tree is committing some form of a criminal act. That's how some people feel, so they don't take the time to understand the impact that this industry has on those families. It isn't just what you see coming down the road. As you say, it's not about that nice, square beautifully piled flatbed of lumber; there are a lot of people that that has impacted, getting to that point. By the time it's in some nice bedroom furniture or a dining room table, there are a lot of people who have been impacted.

But the insurance is one that concerns us deeply because it has an impact on this industry. It's not one that we have direct control over. It's not one that we sit down with the insurance business and say, "It's time for the forest industry to control the insurance business." But it is something that the Minister of Finance and I have met on a number of occasions to talk about the impacts, and it is not lost on him.

This is not something that has happened in the last two years. It's something that has been a problem that has been ongoing for some time and is continuing to be exacerbated by circumstances. I'm sure COVID has had an impact on it as well. But it's not lost on—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** But it's not only the truckers. It's also—

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

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** It's not only the truckers who are complaining. It's the industry who are starting to say—because the industry made a transition to owner-ops. They used to own these fleets and they said, "No, we're trying to minimize our costs, so we went to these owner-operators." And now seeing that these owner-operators are falling, trucking is a dying industry in forestry and we're having a hard time finding truckers to haul the raw timber, it's going to create a problem for the pillar you're talking about.

That's why I'm so adamant in saying that you, as the ministry, need to get involved. I'm hearing you say you are, but to say that the government can't do—we can legislate to make sure that we protect truckers regarding insurance company gouging.

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

We go to the government: Mr. Harris.

**Mr. Mike Harris:** I believe MPP Khanjin has some questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** MPP Khanjin, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Andrea Khanjin:** Thank you, Minister, for your opening remarks and everything that you're doing currently at the Ministry of Natural Resources. I know you complement the Ministry of the Environment quite well, especially when it comes to the flooding strategy and the plan that you had rolled out with your team. I recall the Premier visiting some of the terrible flooding that had happened back in 2019 in the springtime, and you saw the turmoil that created.

I had also spoken to you quite at length about what happened in Innisfil. As you recall, you actually proactively reached out to me and said, "How are your residents doing? Are you getting a lot of calls?" because we had a flood in Belle Ewart, which is very common every few years.

So I wanted to ask you, in terms of the report and the guide you worked on, what else can you talk about in terms of ways you're helping Ontarians protect their property and ensuring that they have the right information from the government and from yourself?

1730

**Hon. John Yakubuski:** Thank you very much, Andrea. I appreciate that question and I appreciate your advocacy for your constituents, not only on this issue but on a wide array of issues.

It was not lost on me as the Minister of Natural Resources, only recently appointed when the flood of 2019 hit squarely into my lap, as they say, in the Ottawa Valley, that my area of the province was as hard hit, if not harder hit, than anywhere in Ontario. I saw it first-hand. I don't live on the water, and that would be one of those times that I was awful glad that I don't live on the water, but I saw the suffering of families and people who do live on the water, and businesses that were near the water, and how businesses were affected because of the flooding.

I was out on the Ottawa River more than a few times during that spring. The Bonnechere, the Ottawa and the Madawaska: Those are three rivers that all go through my riding, and the Ottawa is one of Canada's most majestic rivers. We saw water levels on the Ottawa that were never experienced before—perhaps, maybe, in 1961. I don't remember the flood of 1961; I was around, but I don't remember the flood of 1961. But it was just devastating to see that much water.

In fact, when we had one of our meetings—I hope I get this right; I'm trying to recall from memory—it was described to me that more than 40 times the normal volume of water in that period of time—in the spring of 2019, 40 times the volume flowed through. You can just imagine what that would do to the people surrounding it.

That was one of the things—I was in a boat around people's houses where the doorway was not even visible.

The second floor was visible, but the doorway to the ground floor wasn't even visible. I was in people's yards where the roof of the truck could be seen, but that was about it. So you can just imagine the damage that was incurred as a result of that.

We had had a flood, not quite as severe but still severe, in 2017. So in two out of three years, we had what some people describe as a 100-year flood. Some people think it means it can only happen once every 100 years, but what a 100-year flood actually means is that there's a 1% chance that it could happen any year. A 1% chance is really what a 100-year flood means.

So we got two major floods on those three rivers on my riding in two years. It didn't hit the Ottawa area as bad in 2017. In 2019, you might recall when the Premier and I were in the Ottawa area, in Constance Bay there, the flooded areas in the city of Ottawa, and it stretched all the way down. All through the entire system was massive flooding.

What we determined was that we needed a third party. I had several flooding meetings in my riding, as I know other members would have had across the province where there were other flood-stricken areas, and what we determined was that the people weren't going to accept the answers of operators or me; they needed a third party to actually examine what happened. That was why we took the, I would say, almost unprecedented step—I don't know that Ontario had ever had a flood adviser in the past. The deputy may have records or something, I don't know, but I don't believe that we had ever hired someone from out of province. I made sure that we hired someone who I had never met before. I had never even spoken to Doug McNeil until we asked if he would take on this task, because I wanted it to be somebody that I had no previous contact with at all.

So we hired Doug McNeil to actually examine what happened in Ontario, what happened here with the floods of 2019. What could we do to be better prepared for it? Was there a way that we could actually do something to prevent it? And how do we deal with people once a flood hits? You've got forecasting and then you've got dealing with the flood, and then you've got the aftermath.

Many of you, I am sure, have seen his report. It's a very, very good and extensive report. The clear conclusion of the report was that people, including the utilities, including the operators, did what they could, but the amount of water that came that year made it impossible to control. His conclusion was that we can't prevent flooding; we can only become more resilient to it. His report gave, then, a series of recommendations. I don't know if you have it there, Deputy.

I think there are about 90 recommendations or so about what we could do to be more resilient to flooding, including ensuring that building did not continue in areas that were highly susceptible to flooding. At one time, there was very little control as to where people would build: "Hey, we've got a property on the river," well, up goes the place. They want to be as close to the water as possible and the next thing you know they're in the situation where,

repeatedly, that area is being flooded, and then you've got a continuing problem. So one of his recommendations was about where you should or should not build.

But the big picture was that we needed to be better at forecasting, which, as I said in my address, we've invested millions of dollars in being able to—what do we call the sensors there, Deputy? I'm trying to think of the name. You know what I mean, where we've got them positioned all throughout the water bodies of the province to monitor, to be able to forecast, to see what's happening with the water levels. We're much more advanced as to when we might see this coming, so we'll be in a much better position, for example, to say—that's one of the things that people lamented and complained about. They felt that they didn't get enough warning that a flood was either possible or imminent.

Even in this year, even in COVID, we were much better prepared to be able to say, "It looks like there could be some water issues within the next X number of days." We're much better at monitoring the weather patterns and how much water is already in the system so that we could give people that warning.

He also made it clear that people do need to be prepared because flooding can happen any year. That's a message that people who live near water need: to be prepared for that possibility.

The one thing that we've done here in our ministry is that there are steps that people can take to mitigate the damage that flooding can inflict on their property. So one of the things that we did was we very much, with the help of my deputy, expedited the permitting process for people to make improvements to their property to make that property more resilient to flooding, because the best way to ensure that you're going to minimize the effect of flooding is to have your property in such a way that it gives you some form of protection. Some people did significant things. Some people literally raised their homes and built them up so that the water levels that threatened them or caused damage in the past would be much more manageable in the future.

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The one thing I always say about flooding is—not to minimize any disaster, because I was also the MPP when a tornado hit Combermere in 2006. To be there the following morning and see the devastation was breathtaking. But when a tornado comes through, it comes through in a matter of minutes, maybe even seconds, and the damage is done. When you're hit with a flood of the kind of proportion that we had in 2019, that damage just goes on and on and on for days, even weeks, before those waters subside. The impact of that flood is continuing.

If there are things that we can do to be better prepared for that, things that we can do to better forecast and then things that we can do in the aftermath—which is also what we did with municipalities, quite frankly. We gave municipalities the opportunity to build back better, so that if there was a piece of infrastructure that was damaged by flooding, we provided some funding so that that piece of infrastructure—rather than just build it back the same way,

build it back in a more resilient way, so that if we had the same thing happen, that piece of infrastructure would actually withstand the flooding that could come on that subsequent event.

There were a lot of things that we did as a result of Mr. McNeil's report. Then just before COVID hit—in fact, I think it was the last time I did a public event, and I did it up in Minden with MPP Laurie Scott, the Minister of Infrastructure—we actually released Ontario's flooding strategy, which specifically touches on those key points: being prepared, reacting, and then helping after the event. There are some people who say to me, "Well, that's not good enough. You've got to make sure that the floods don't happen." That is not something that I, any minister before me or any minister after me is going to be able to do. If they say they can do it, they're not being frank with anyone. If flooding was preventable, then we wouldn't see it. The prevention would have already been done.

We're quite fortunate in Canada, relative to the United States, when it comes to flooding. You see it every year: massive parts of the United States—it might be the Mississippi one year, it might be another river in other years, but they deal with massive amounts of flooding every year.

If it was something that we could simply prevent, we'd have already done it. But it is something we need to be better prepared for, which is part of what our flooding strategy accomplishes. We need to be able to better react to it, and that is the partnership between all levels of government: federal, municipal and our government at the provincial level. That's part of the flooding strategy: ensuring that we're all working together—conservation authorities working together with all levels of government and individuals. Property owners, those people who have experienced the flood, have suffered greatly, but they've also learned a lot when they've experienced it, and particularly if they've looked at all of the aspects of that flood and have seen what they can or cannot do. I've seen it—not personally; I'm thankful for that. But I've seen it in so many people's lives. I was out there sandbagging, filling bags on people's properties, meeting them and listening to their stories, not just in 2019 but in 2017 and in other years before. We've had other years where we've had flooding—not to the same extent. Those were the two biggest floods that I've ever experienced, and if I never experience another one like that, I'll be more than happy. I do completely understand that in any year it's possible. Until it happens sometimes, you don't have an assurance that you'll be properly prepared. But every time you go through it, you learn more.

Even the strategy of the operations of the Ottawa River—which is run by three governments, actually. With the Ottawa River, you've got the province of Quebec, the province of Ontario and the country of Canada—it's a national river that forms the border of two provinces—and the coordination of those three bodies.

Then you've got the flooding that took place throughout the Great Lakes and we're still dealing with high water levels on the Great Lakes. That's not just three levels of

government here within Canada; that's an international boundary, so you're dealing with the International Joint Commission. We have a seat on that; I think we have one—we have a seat on that commission, do we not?

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** We don't have a seat; we're on one of the subcommittees.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Oh, we're on one of the subcommittees.

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

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We're part of a subcommittee on the International Joint Commission. That's a body that deals with the Great Lakes. We're so fortunate, here in North America, to have that amount of fresh water in one contiguous form in the form of the Great Lakes. But when they misbehave, they can cause us a great deal of trouble. The management of that requires the ongoing work between two countries, not just the provinces. We're on a subcommittee, so we have ability to have input, but we're not part of the commission. You can't not be aware of the issues that can come up when the Great Lakes rise above their peaks.

Then we've had situations where we've been wondering where the water went. It's not that many years ago—France, you were probably here already when the word around Lake Huron and Georgian Bay was, "Stop the Drop," because the lake level was so low, people were concerned. The St. Lawrence Seaway was concerned about ships running aground. Those are the extremes that water can actually present from time to time.

When we came up with a flooding strategy, it's not that we've ever said that we could prevent flooding, but we'll be better prepared next year than we were this year—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** You're out of time, Minister.

With that, we go to the official opposition. Madame Gélinas.

**Mme France Gélinas:** My question has to do with the dramatic increase in the price of wood. A two-by-four in my riding is three times the price of a two-by-four before. I was wondering if any of this has hit the radar of your ministry and if you are involved—I'm told it has to do with COVID, and my next series of questions will have to do with COVID's impact on your ministry.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** It's a commodity—and it's not just your riding. I hear about it in my riding all the time. I've seen it first-hand when I have to go buy some lumber at my local Home Hardware in Barry's Bay. And not that long ago, I was talking to Kevin Bray, the manager. We had a Home Hardware store years ago, and I sold a little bit of building supplies. But I can remember selling—some people would call it chipboard; some people call it Aspenite. But I can remember selling Aspenite, a four-by-eight sheet, a three-eighths stick, or seven sixteenths, for about \$4.50 a sheet.

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**Mme France Gélinas:** So what you're telling me is that supply and demand is why we've seen those big

fluctuations? It has nothing to do with mills having to shut down or anything like this during COVID?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** That is part of supply and demand. The supply has not kept up with the demand. You see, in some of the mills early on, while we here in Ontario, one of the first jurisdictions anywhere to declare forestry an essential resource—and I can tell you that when we did that, the sighs of relief. You would have heard of it from mill operators in your area. You would have heard it, Guy, in your area—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** But, Minister, do you know how many of those mills ended up having to shut down?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'm going to explain that to you.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Oh, okay. Sorry; go ahead.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We live in a world market. We gave them almost that heartbeat to continue. But some mills were concerned about what COVID was going to mean. There were some projections that everything was going to stop; the bottom was going to fall out; there would be no demand for their products. So if you're a business person making decisions, you react, and some of those mills did react, on the concern that everything was going to go to hell in a handbasket, as they say. That did serve to exacerbate some of the supply problem.

But the ministry has done everything to try to make sure that those mills continue to operate and at the levels that can sustain them. Part of our forest sector strategy, France, as you know, is to give those mills more access to be able to produce more of that product—that high-quality product from northern Ontario forests. So at some point, the supply-demand gap is certainly one that will eventually narrow, but for this summer, particularly—and the other thing: The demand situation was, quite frankly, affected by COVID from the point of view that there were so many people that—

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Who were at home and decided to—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** They were at home or they decided that, “We're not going on a vacation this year. We're not going to go to Disney World. We're not going to go to Europe or wherever. You know what we're going to do? We're going to build a new deck, and we're going to put our money into that.”

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. I have another question, Minister, that has to do—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Well, I don't know if I answered your question or not.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Yes, yes—that has to do with COVID. Did you see an increase in the demand for fishing and hunting licences and the demand for moose tags this fall, during COVID? Are you able to tell?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'd have to get the numbers on that from the deputy.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:** I think the quick answer is yes, we did see a little bit of a blip. I'm going to hand it over to Tracey Mill. Tracey, will you have those numbers on hand, or will we have to come back? Do you know approximately how much we saw—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I bought my tag today.

**Ms. Monique Rolf von den Baumen-Clark:**—as an increase for fishing licences?

**Ms. Tracey Mill:** Thank you very much, Deputy and Minister. Tracey Mill. I'm the assistant deputy minister for the provincial services division in the ministry. Fish and wildlife licensing services are part of my division.

I don't have those specific numbers right now. But you are correct: We did see a slight increase in our Ontario resident fishing licences. Of course, as a result of the border closures, we saw a downturn in terms of angling and hunting from individuals from the United States. But I will have some specific numbers for you momentarily that we can provide.

**M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas:** Okay. And I'm curious about the moose tags also, and if there was a higher demand for any one of the hunts: the bears, the moose. Did more people go hunting during COVID? If you can give us those numbers.

But Guy has a question, and he has been very patient, so we'll go to him.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** We'll get all of those numbers. I'm not sure what we've got for time, but if not, it will be tomorrow.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** How much time?

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Mr. Bourgouin, you have about four minutes.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Minister, when the industry went through a collapse, towns like Opasatika lost their sawmill. Wood used to be tied to communities, or there was some volume tied to sawmills, but that changed with the former minister—the former government, I should say.

My question to you would be: Should this situation happen again, let's say for the sawmill in Hearst—there are numerous sawmills; there's more than one sawmill in Hearst, but one sawmill would close—would you give the opportunity to the community to find a buyer and secure that volume, so that they could find a buyer for that sawmill, instead of the company closing it down, keeping the volume and bringing it to Kapuskasing instead of processing it in Hearst? Would you give that municipality the opportunity to find a buyer, to save these jobs in that community, to create employment and to take that volume, to say to the company, “Yes, you have volume, but that volume should stay at that sawmill”?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** I'd have to look at the circumstances that would be actually presented to us. It's not that simple a circumstance, Guy. I mean, you have to be sure that it's going to be sustainable, and companies have to be willing to make investments to make situations work. If you just blanket say that you're assigning that to a community, well, then the community is the one that controls the rights to the timber, as opposed to the crown, and we have—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Maybe I should explain it better, my question, then. No, the crown has the forest. The crown still holds it, but my question is, would you give that volume—if there's a purchaser, if there's a buyer who's interested in buying that sawmill—it could be independents, it could be anything, saying, “We can make this sawmill work.” Whoever is the company, X company,

says, “We don’t want out, but we want to keep the volume to process it, because we want to make more investment in Kapuskasing,” or “We want to make more investment in Thunder Bay.” The list could go on.

But would you give it to any municipality to say, “No, the wood belongs—we’ll give you the opportunity,” if the municipality says, “We have a buyer interested. We have purchasers for that sawmill”—because we had purchasers for some of these sawmills that were shutting down, by the way, and the government decided, “No, we are not doing this.”

My question to you is: Would you at least give this opportunity, so that if there’s a buyer, to explore that, so these jobs stay in that community—and forest tied and wood tied to this or that, so that they can have a business plan to be made?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Again, I’ve got to look at the circumstances. First of all, if somebody owns that sawmill, it isn’t the crown’s sawmill to sell. It might be worth millions and millions of dollars. I can’t say, “I’m taking your sawmill, and now I’m going to sell it.” I just—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** I understand that. The sawmill belongs to the individual or the corporation—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Yes, so somebody. So whoever—you know, if I owned a retail business and I decide—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** But, Minister, the volume, though: The crown has the volume. The volume is the ticket.

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** But the volume would already be allocated at that time—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** I understand that, because they’re processing this forest in the sawmill—

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** Yes, it would have to be part of the new forest management plan at some time. It’s too complicated a question to be giving a simple answer to.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** It’s not that complicated. All I’m asking you is, would you give that municipality or that town an opportunity to save these jobs in that town?

**Hon. John Yakabuski:** You know how much—

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Tabuns):** Gentlemen, that’s all the time we have available today.

The committee is now adjourned until November 4, 2020, at 3:30 p.m., following routine proceedings of the House.

*The committee adjourned at 1800.*

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### **Also taking part / Autres participants et participantes**

Mr. Guy Bourgouin (Mushkegowuk–James Bay / Mushkegowuk–Baie James ND)  
M<sup>me</sup> France Gélinas (Nickel Belt ND)

### **Clerk / Greffière**

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