

Legislative  
Assembly  
of Ontario



Assemblée  
législative  
de l'Ontario

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## Official Report of Debates (Hansard)

IN-33

## Journal des débats (Hansard)

IN-33

### Standing Committee on the Interior

#### Estimates

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

1<sup>st</sup> Session  
43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament

Monday 7 October 2024

### Comité permanent des affaires intérieures

#### Budget des dépenses

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection  
de la nature et des Parcs

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

Lundi 7 octobre 2024

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Chair: Aris Babikian  
Clerk: Thushitha Kobikrishna

Président : Aris Babikian  
Greffière : Thushitha Kobikrishna

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON THE INTERIOR**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT  
DES AFFAIRES INTÉRIEURES**

Monday 7 October 2024

Lundi 7 octobre 2024

*The committee met at 1402 in committee room 1.*

ESTIMATES

MINISTRY OF THE ENVIRONMENT,  
CONSERVATION AND PARKS

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Good afternoon. The Standing Committee on the Interior will now come to order. The committee is about to begin consideration of the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for a total of two hours.

In the past, members have asked questions about the delivery of similar programs in previous fiscal years, about the policy framework that supports a ministry approach to a problem or service delivery, or about the competence of a ministry to spend the money wisely and efficiently. However, it must be noted that the onus is on the members asking the questions to make the questions relevant to the estimates under consideration.

The ministry is required to monitor the proceedings for any questions or issues that the ministry undertakes to address. I trust that the deputy minister has made arrangements to have the hearings closely monitored with respect to questions raised so that the ministry can respond accordingly. If you wish, you may, at the end of your appearance, verify the questions and issued being tracked by the research officer.

Are there any questions from the members of the committee before we begin?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I do have a question. Is that a new direction? I haven't heard that before. Is that new direction?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** That's a new direction, yes.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Could we have a copy of that, or could I just read that?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Yes, sure. We will give you a copy.

I am now required to call vote 1101, which sets the review process in motion. We will begin with a statement of not more than 20 minutes from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Minister, the floor is yours.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the members of this committee for this opportunity to appear today before the Standing Committee on the Interior to present the expenditure esti-

mates for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for the fiscal year 2024-25.

Chair, I am here today in my capacity as alternate Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. For those of you who don't know, I have temporarily taken on ministerial duties while Minister Khanjin is on parental leave. I am proud to support my colleague Minister Khanjin while she takes this important time with her family.

I'm also pleased to point out that I am joined by my deputy minister, Jonathan Lebi, to my immediate left, as well as assistant deputy ministers from across the ministry. They will be able to assist in answering any in-depth questions that committee members may have. I would like to thank the entire team at environment, conservation and parks for their diligent efforts to bring me up to speed on all aspects of the ministry, and I look forward to all that we can accomplish together for the province of Ontario.

I would like to begin by providing a brief overview of the responsibilities and the mandate of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The ministry supports Ontario's plan to create jobs, build resilient communities, and foster a strong and stable economy, all while achieving our environmental goals of protecting the natural beauty of the province of Ontario. Our ministry is responsible for the protection and conservation of our air, land, water and species at risk and their habitat; reducing greenhouse gas emissions; climate adaptation planning; and managing Ontario's parks and conservation reserves.

To fully appreciate the scale of these tasks, we need to appreciate the size of our province. It is over one million square kilometres in area. That is an area larger than France and Spain combined. There are three ecozones in the province of Ontario: the Hudson Bay Lowlands, the Ontario Shield and the Mixedwood Plains. Our province is also home to four of the five Great Lakes and more than 250,000 freshwater lakes in total, which, combined, hold one fifth of the world's fresh surface water.

Ontario is a vast province with a wide variety of natural resources that require dedicated and nuanced oversight by our team at the ministry. I would like to now highlight some of the divisions that make up our ministry and share a few of the successes that we have accomplished over the past year.

The first division I would like to tell you about is the climate change and resiliency division. This division is responsible for taking meaningful actions to build Ontario's resiliency in the face of climate change. This includes

keeping us on track to meet our 2030 target of reducing our greenhouse gas emissions to 30% below our 2005 levels by the year 2030. Under our government's leadership, Ontario has already achieved greater reductions of greenhouse gas emissions than any other province or territory in Canada. Indeed, Ontario alone is responsible for 86% of Canada's total emissions reductions, and we are particularly proud that we have made this progress without imposing a costly or unnecessary carbon tax on the people of Ontario.

Our ministry is committed to working with industry, not against industry, to reduce emissions and protect our environment. The investments that we are making across government, from clean steel to electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, will create jobs and build a stronger economy for Ontario while still advancing our environmental goals.

Next, I would like to speak to our land and water division. This division protects the diversity of resources in Ontario. Land and water is responsible for the oversight and leadership of species at risk, provincial parks and conservation reserves, protection of Ontario's drinking water sources, and ecological health of our Great Lakes and inland waters.

One of the programs that is the responsibility of the land and water division, and one that I know Minister Khanjin in particular and indeed our entire caucus are particularly proud of, is the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program. Our government launched the Greenlands Conservation Partnership in 2020 with our partners the Ontario Land Trust Alliance and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. The program aims to secure land for conservation by leveraging public and private funding that helps us to preserve more areas of significant ecological importance.

One requirement of the program was that organizations we partner with must match every dollar of provincial funding with at least \$1.50 of private sector donation dollars. I am pleased to report that our partner organizations are not only meeting this requirement; they are even surpassing it. In fact, contributions have far exceeded the required ratio, with our partners matching every government dollar with approximately \$3.65 from their fundraising, so today the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program is the single-largest provincial fund to secure private land in Ontario for conservation.

In just four years, the program has collectively protected more than 430,000 acres of land across the province. Think of that: It is an area of more than two and a half times the footprint of the capital of the province, the city of Toronto. These lands are now permanently protected, and in most cases the public is allowed to access them, meaning residents are free to go out and enjoy Ontario's natural beauty for decades to come.

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The land and water division is also responsible for Ontario Parks, which protects, manages and operates more than 340 provincial parks and almost 300 conservation reserves across Ontario. In total, our system of protected areas covers about 29 million acres, or 10.9% of our

province, an area almost the size of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia combined. We take tremendous pride in the fact that Ontario Parks is the province's largest provider of outdoor recreation opportunities. This includes overnight stays on campgrounds and backcountry campsites, as well as roofed accommodations. Day-use opportunities include hiking trails, paddling routes, beaches, boat launches, picnic areas, park stores and visitor centres. Last year alone, Ontario Parks received almost 12 million visits and took more than 720,000 reservations, and that is just the start. While the previous government shut down provincial parks, we are investing in parks and building new ones. We are committed to growing our park system to protect and expand even more green spaces for future generations to enjoy.

In July 2024, we officially opened Ontario's newest provincial park, the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park. Located just 50 kilometres northeast of downtown Toronto, this new addition to Ontario's provincial parks system will provide more recreation opportunities for people living in or near the GTA. Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park is the result of extensive work among Ontario Parks and many partners, including the township of Uxbridge, the regional municipality of Durham, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, the Schad Foundation and the Green Durham Association.

Several existing trails of the park are open for public use while work is ongoing to develop a full park management plan. This plan will help determine the types of recreational opportunities and facilities that will be offered and what additional steps to be taken to protect nature in this new urban provincial park. The opening of this park is a testament to our government's commitment to protecting the natural environment, improving access to the outdoors and building resilient communities. As a ministry we will continue looking for new opportunities to conserve Ontario's green spaces and expand our protected lands.

Next, I will highlight the drinking water and environmental compliance division, as I take a sip of water. This division is responsible for protecting and supporting clean air, land and water, including safe drinking water. Drinking water and environmental compliance accomplishes this through provincial oversight and the delivery of risk-based compliance and enforcement programs in communities across Ontario. For example, our Spills Action Centre receives 84,000 calls annually, and in 2023-24, front-line officers and staff responded to more than 7,200 spills and 7,400 reports of pollution incidents. In the last year, we also undertook more than 4,700 planned inspections and audits that were direct touchpoints with regulated entities to monitor compliance.

When our officers found issues that were impacting the well-being of the environment and Ontario communities, they took progressive actions to change behaviour and mitigate the effects. These actions included issuing 2,791 violation notices and warnings, 94 tickets, 128 orders, 21

environmental penalties totalling almost \$1 million, 128 new investigations and 72 convictions resulting in over \$4 million in fines. Our ministry remains committed to upholding strong compliance standards, and we will take all necessary steps to ensure that bad actors are held accountable for the damage that they are causing to our environment and our communities.

Ontario's drinking water protection framework is designed to ensure the protection and provision of safe drinking water from source to tap. As a result of this framework, I am proud to say our drinking water is among the best protected in the world. Our comprehensive legislation, along with strong monitoring, reporting and enforcement, help to ensure our drinking water is held to Ontario's high safety standards.

In 2023-24, 99.9% of drinking water tests from municipal residential drinking water systems met the drinking water quality standards, while 99.6% of drinking water test results from non-municipal systems met the standards. Make no mistake about it, Chair: Ontarians deserve access to clean, safe drinking water, and our ministry is committed to protecting this vital resource.

Our next division is environmental assessments and permissions. Environmental assessments and permissions provides a single point of access for customer service and environmental permissions management in the ministry, as well as delivering on the province's environmental assessment program. Under previous governments, Ontario's environmental assessment program was not updated to meet modern environmental standards, building requirements and realities on the ground. The system was, quite frankly, ineffective and wasteful and created duplication, which resulted in unnecessary delays to the construction of critical infrastructure.

However, under our government, we have taken decisive actions to address these problems. We are leading the transformation of Ontario's environmental permissions program using a risk-based, client-centred electronic service delivery model. Our program is eliminating red tape and redundancies while speeding up the environmental assessment process as Ontario invests more than \$190 billion over the next 10 years in highways, transit, and housing-enabling and other infrastructure.

An additional six million people are coming to Ontario over the next two decades, and our infrastructure must keep up with this growth. Our revamped environmental permissions program will ensure that Ontario continues to grow in a way that protects our environment.

During the development of this program, we consulted extensively with municipalities, Indigenous communities and key stakeholders over the past few years, and thanks to that hard work, we are implementing a project list approach to environmental assessments. This will allow for a greater number of projects to follow a streamlined process, and it means the vital infrastructure projects such as new highways, railways and electricity transmission lines could see up to four years taken off their building timelines, bringing Ontarians the infrastructure our communities need more efficiently and more rapidly.

Chair, thank you for allowing me to give you a brief glimpse of the work that we've been doing in some of the many divisions of the ministry that I've just outlined. I know that I speak on behalf of Minister Khanjin and our entire government when I commend the members of this ministry for their incredible work to fulfill its mandate over the past year. With my remaining time, I would now like to give you a brief overview of our expenditure estimates for the upcoming fiscal year.

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The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks' 2024-25 expenditure estimates is \$860.4 million. This \$860.4-million budget for 2024-25 is an increase of \$77.8 million, or 9.9%, over the \$782.6 million for the expenditure estimates in the previous fiscal year. I will account, then, for our estimates as follows.

First, the Ontario Clean Water Agency is to receive \$295.8 million. The Ontario Clean Water Agency is a public agency of the province which serves as a provider of safe and reliable water, waste water and stormwater services for municipalities, First Nations communities, businesses, governments and institutions across the province.

Some \$135.5 million is allocated to the Ontario Parks special-purpose account, which, as I spoke about earlier, allows our government to be the largest provider of outdoor recreational activities in the province. The special-purpose account is funded by revenue from Ontario Parks operations, with restrictions that the funds can only be used for park-related purposes. These two items combined, then, are \$431.3 million, which is about half of our ministry's total allocation.

The remaining \$446.7 million allocated to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks mainly includes transfer payments for vital ministry programs, salaries and wages, and employee benefits.

I'm also happy to give you a brief explanation of some of the increases in allocations from last year. Chair, there is an increase of \$37.9 million this fiscal year to support the delivery of water and waste water services by the Ontario Clean Water Agency. This funding is being used to continue to provide training and operational support to municipalities, First Nations communities, institutions and private sector companies, while also expanding the scope of services provided to existing clients while attracting new clients.

Our 2024-25 estimates also enable continued planning to develop Bigwind Lake Provincial Park, the first new, full-service operating park in Ontario in almost 40 years—in fact, in over 40 years. It is located just east of Bracebridge in the Muskoka region. By proposing to turn it into an operating park, we will create four-season campsites, cabins, backcountry campsites, comfort stations, a visitor services hub, electric vehicle charging stations and more for Ontarians to enjoy all year round.

We have also allocated \$200,000 in 2024-25 as part of a \$3-million investment over three years to support environmental improvements in the Holland Marsh area. This funding is supporting farmers to implement efficient

and effective treatment of produce wash waters. This investment will improve water quality in Lake Simcoe and the surrounding area by reducing the amount of phosphorus discharges that flow into the Lake Simcoe watershed.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** We are confident that this program will also help identify new technologies and approaches for other produce-growing areas in the province, leading to more effective management of discharges throughout Ontario.

In closing, thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to address the committee and to share the work of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. We are committed that we will not and need not choose between community development and environmental stewardship. We can do both. We can grow the vital infrastructure, we can thrive, and we can protect the environment.

I'm very proud to say and to repeat that we are building the Ontario of tomorrow while being good environmental stewards. That is a responsibility that we all share, regardless of our place on this committee or in the House in which we serve the people.

Thank you, and I welcome any questions that the committee members may have, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister.

We will now begin questions and answers in rotations of 20 minutes for the official opposition members of the committee, 10 minutes for the independent members of the committee and 20 minutes for the government members of the committee for the remainder of the allotted time. As always, please wait to be recognized by myself before speaking. All questions and comments will need to go through the Chair.

For the deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers and staff: When you are called on to speak for the first time, please state your name and your title so that we accurately record in Hansard who we have.

Now we will start with the questioning with the official opposition. MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much, Chair.

Minister, welcome to your new role. It is a very, very important role, and with all due respect, it is a ministry that has suffered greatly in the eyes of the public, so you have a lot of work to do to bring back the regard for the environment ministry. Right now, the people of Ontario do not trust this government with the environment, and this ministry is at the forefront of that, so I hope that under your watch you will do what you can to make sure that people once again have trust with this government and with this ministry.

And I would say don't take it from me, or the public that is weighing in on their concern that the government has really had no real regard for the environment; we only need to look at the Auditor General reports and their most recent report. I know you'd agree that your role, the minister's role, is to protect our natural habitats and the environment, but it's shocking that the AG reported that in

Ontario there is no regular reporting on the state of the environment. As a result, the public, businesses, industry, stakeholders—all of these important decision-makers in the economy—still don't have a clear picture of the state of the environment and what the changes are over time. They don't understand about the connections between different areas of the environment such as water, air and natural resources.

And if you will indulge me a bit further, I would say it is quite distressing reading if you look at the Auditor General's report, which is a follow-up to the 2021 value-for-money audit. It says that as of October 23, 29% of the actions that they recommended have been completed—only 29%—and that for 57% of the recommended actions, it was made clear that the ministry had no intention of implementing those recommendations.

Really, most shockingly—again, I'm going to repeat—this ministry, your ministry, does not do or provide regular reporting on the overall state of the environment. So I am hoping that you can assure me that that's something that you will restore and that these books of estimates will show an investment in taxpayer dollars on making sure that you are transparent and accountable with what you have been charged to do, which is to protect the environment: our water, our air, our lakes and our species at risk.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member opposite—through you, Chair—for the congratulatory comment at the beginning of the long question. I do want to say that Ministers Khanjin and Piccini led this ministry well. I am here as the alternate minister, as I indicated in my opening remarks, and what I've been most impressed with is the commitment, dedication and professionalism of the entire ministry team and the great leadership of the deputy, as well, at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

I can also say that in terms of the overall state of the environment for the province of Ontario, we are leading Canada. The reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that has been achieved is 86% because of the measures we've implemented here in the province of Ontario. We are on track—more than on track—to meet the Paris accord target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 30% below 2005 levels by 2030. We are more than on track, so that is the state of the environment that I can tell you about.

But I can also tell you about our environmental plan. The Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan was first announced in 2018 as our government took office during the term of the 42nd Parliament, and I'm very proud to say that we continue to make progress on all the priorities set out in that plan. When I was a private citizen—through you, Chair, as I think the member knows, I was not elected until the 43rd Parliament of Ontario, so I joined this government in its second mandate—I was quite proud of this government's and the 42nd Parliament's mandate that this government had of the Ontario environment plan, because it was made in Ontario and it set out priorities that we are following.



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Our focus is on taking action, and we're proud to be the leader of Canada's progress on tackling climate change, as I've already indicated. In fact—and I do need to outline this in response to the member's question, because we're in a very transparent process here, and this is a report to members of this committee who, in turn, sit in the House and are responsible to the people and the citizens and the residents of our province—almost all of Canada's progress, as I indicated, towards its 2030 Paris Agreement target, about 86%, has been driven by Ontario and the actions Ontario has taken. We're ahead of every other province and territory in that regard.

Our government has fully implemented an Emissions Performance Standards Program as of January 1, 2022. Our government has announced support for two steel facilities to replace their use of coal; that's Dofasco and Algoma. They will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about three million tonnes a year each.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I have a follow-up question to that, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** That is per facility, by 2030—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair, I'd like to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** If I may finish—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One second, Minister.

MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** As you would know—

*Interjections.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Can you allow me to make a decision? The same way as the members of this committee are allowed to ask questions related to the estimates—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair, this is my time.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Just one second. We are preserving your time.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** But I kindly ask you to give the witnesses the courtesy to answer the question the way they see fit, the same way the members of the committee are allowed to ask the question.

Minister, continue your response, please.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you, Chair. I would like to continue.

We have also created the cleaner transportation fuels regulation, to increase requirements for renewable content in gasoline while maintaining requirements for diesel.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Point of order, Chair.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** We made it easier to approve advanced recycling—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Point of order.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** This is new. It is not my understanding—this is my time to use as I see fit. The minister is going on a long-winded answer that is not pertinent to my question, which is: Where in these estimates books are the monies that you are going to spend to restore comprehensive

reporting on the environment in the province? If he could answer that question, then we would be fine here.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw, it is not a point of order, but I will allow you this time to ask your question.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, and so I'll repeat my question again: Where in this book of estimates is the money and the resources and the plan dedicated to restoring comprehensive recording on the environment that your government has stopped doing? The public deserves accountability and transparency—words that you use. Where is the plan to restore that comprehensive public reporting on those elements that are important, like air, water, climate?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** That's a shorter question than the first question, but it's supplementary. So if I can just finish answering, and then I'll turn it over to my deputy with respect to that supplementary question.

We made it easier to approve advanced recycling sites that use thermal treatment to break down hard-to-recycle plastics and other waste into new products.

We've simplified the approvals process for energy-intensive facilities, such as cement manufacturers, to substitute the use of coal and petroleum coke with fuels derived from materials that would otherwise be disposed of in landfills.

We've issued \$16.2 billion—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I'm almost at the supplementary, but I was not allowed to finish. There's so much that we've done. I must finish, Chair, if I may.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair, he is not even coming close to answering the question.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I absolutely am, but she interrupted my answer to the first question with a supplementary. I want to answer both, and I will, Chair. I absolutely will. I look forward to it. I'm looking forward to fully informing the committee.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Please, let's keep decorum of the meeting. This is not a way to conduct a meeting, being disrespectful to each other. So please, I will urge you to keep decorum of the meeting. Let's conduct ourselves accordingly.

MPP Shaw, do you have any questions?

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Sure. I'm curious to know if the minister has any answers. Yes, I do. And I am not "she"—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I've been in the middle of my answer for quite some time, Mr. Chair.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I am not "she." I am MPP Shaw.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Please, Minister and MPP Shaw. Every time you ask a question, he's trying to answer it.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair, a point of privilege. I am not "she." I am MPP Shaw. I used the courtesy of addressing the minister by his title. I would expect the same courtesy. I don't want to be referred to in this committee as "she." It's disrespectful.

Now I will place my question, if you don't mind.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Go ahead.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much, Minister. My question to you now is related to flooding. We see extraordinary examples of flooding in this province, but as you know, your ministry has not done what is needed to mitigate risks associated with flooding in high-risk communities. So my question to you is, where in this briefing book do you make reference beyond one time to the threat of flooding to our high-risk communities? As you will know, a flooded basement can cost up to \$40,000 in damage, so what is your ministry doing to invest in targeting high-risk flood locations and mitigating and providing any kind of support to communities that are experiencing flooding under your watch?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair, to the member: This is the third question, and I'm still answering the first, but I will say flooding is a very serious concern for our ministry. I will be asking the deputy to comment on that specific question once I finish answering the first two, if I may, Chair.

In addition to the advanced recycling sites and simplifying the approvals process for energy-intensive facilities, we have issued \$16.2 billion in green bonds—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Seriously? Point of order, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, there's a point of order.

MPP Shaw, go ahead.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** The point of estimates is for opposition and government members to ask the questions to the minister, and the minister should endeavour to reply and answer in some vague way relevant to the question.

I asked the minister about the fact that this government does not do any overall reporting to the public on the state of the environment. I didn't get an answer to that. I've asked the government about what they are doing to mitigate and protect Ontarians from flooding. There are two questions. I did not ask about greenhouse gas emissions and I did not ask about green steel, so your answers have absolutely no bearing on my questions.

I understand that this may be a tactic of your government, to thwart the public's right to know and to thwart the public's right to know how you're spending their taxpayer dollars, but I would ask, Chair, that there has to be some connection between the questions and the answers for this committee to have any credibility in the public's eye.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw, the minister has stated that he is going to give the opportunity to his deputy minister to answer the question, but you interrupted him. So if you want to hear your answer, give them the time to respond properly.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** But, Chair, should the answer not be relevant to the question?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw, we need to continue. You are wasting your own time by these arguments.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I have a point of privilege, Chair.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. Go ahead.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It's now you, as well as the minister, who is thwarting my efforts as a duly elected MPP to conduct my duty.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** No, that's wrong. I am not trying to obstruct you toward any question you want to ask. But also, at the same time, when we have witnesses here to testify, we need to give them the opportunity to answer the questions as they see fit, not as you or the government side wants to hear the answer.

So, Minister, please answer her question about the flooding issue. You said that the deputy minister is going to respond to her questions. The floor is yours.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you, Chair. Through you, Chair, to the member: I believe, my government believes, my ministry believes and our Premier believes in responsible government, accountable government and the public's right to know. That is why I would appreciate her not interrupting me before I've answered fully and my deputy has answered fully all questions put to us, with further supplementary. She will have all of her answers, because we believe in full transparency and full accountability. The member will have answers—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Who is "she"?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, address her as an MPP—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I am here to answer questions of any member—including the member opposite, through you, Chair—but if I may, I would like to be able to give the full information that the public deserves and not be interrupted before a question is fully answered with other supplementaries. I've got them all. I'm just about finished number 1, 2 and 3 are coming, and my deputy is here to assist, because the public does have the right to know. But I would submit that the interruptions by the member are leading to the public's denial of the right to know, because I'm not being permitted to speak, so if I may continue.

We've issued \$16.2 billion in green bonds since 2018 to help finance public transit initiatives; extreme-weather-resistant infrastructure, which is relevant to flooding, the member's third question; and energy efficiency and conservation projects. And we've launched the Emissions Performance Program to use compliance payments collected through the emissions performance standards regulation to support greenhouse-gas-emissions-reduction projects at industrial facilities.

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So that's what we've done, and we can proudly report that the state of the environment is strong, that this government is both building the Ontario of tomorrow while being excellent environmental stewards, and I congratulate my ministry officials for that.

When it comes to the reporting question, before we get to the question on our great concern about flooding—and the people of Ontario absolutely can know and must know that our Ministry of the Environment and our government is doing all that it can to educate and ensure resiliency and prevent flooding—let me talk about the reporting requirements. To my excellent deputy minister, I defer on reporting requirements. So we're now at question two.

**Mr. Jonathan Lebi:** My name is Jonathan Lebi. I'm the Deputy Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Time check?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Five minutes.

**Mr. Jonathan Lebi:** Just to supplement what the minister said with respect to reporting: We do have a number of examples where we publicly report by sector and by media. For instance, the minister spoke to spills and our spills action reporting, where in this past year we've recorded over 7,000 reports on spills, over 7,000 reports on environmental impacts. We report annually on air emissions through our air report. We also do drinking water reporting, and the minister, I believe, mentioned the climate change reporting we do with respect to emissions performance in particular. So we do have reporting publicly published through our website, online and the like. And we regularly report, as incidents emerge in the environment with respect to spills—we quickly report out into the environment through our partners.

With respect to the question about flooding, if I may, through you, Chair: We work very closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources on the government-wide approach with respect to flooding, but this ministry in particular has identified and developed a few specific tools and supports to address flooding and urban flooding in particular.

So a few examples: We've developed a Provincial Climate Change Impact Assessment that helps others identify where they may be at risk with respect to flooding and how to prioritize.

We've developed draft guidance on innovative and resilient stormwater management approaches.

We launched in 2020 a five-year, \$30-million Wetlands Conservation Partner Program to help conservation organizations enhance and restore wetlands in the Great Lakes and watersheds and support municipalities with stormwater management.

We are also providing \$15 million to 18 municipalities in the Lake Ontario basin through the improving Lake Ontario waste water and stormwater discharges program.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has a broader complement of supports—to the member, through you, Chair—but we do have a series of areas where we do prioritize and try to address flooding, particularly in the urban environment.

Back to you, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you. So we have now completed all the answers to the—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, the floor is for MPP Shaw.

MPP Shaw, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I just want to be clear that we have completed the answers to all of the questions—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** The record will not show that.

My follow-up question to the deputy minister: How, then, do you respond to the Auditor General's value-for-money audit that is saying that you are not doing that? In fact, the very fact that some of the reporting that is

identified here that is not being released is the air-quality-in-Ontario reports, water quality in Ontario, and the minister's reports on toxics reduction—there are no progress reports that are made public on your 2018 Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan.

So my question to you is: How do you square with the fact that the Auditor General, who is an independent officer of the Legislature who provides incredibly valuable reports, including the report on the greenbelt, which has seen us now land with an RCMP investigation in the province—how do you square the fact that what you're saying does not in any way reflect the value-for-money audit from the Auditor General?

**Mr. Jonathan Lebi:** To the member, through you, Chair: Of course, the Auditor General—we respect her recommendations. We continue to try to implement and it's a continuous work in progress. With respect to her questions around reporting, we've been endeavouring more and more to be transparent and to continue to publish and be transparent.

All I can say is that the record online is that we have released our air monitoring reports, we have released our water quality and drinking water reports, and we continue to try to do so. The minister spoke to how we're tracking with respect to meeting our GHG emissions and our targets as well. I don't know why, in particular—and maybe that's a question better addressed to the Auditor General—that doesn't satisfy that. But from our perspective, it's imperative to be public and transparent in terms of our reporting. That would be my response to—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** To follow up to that comment—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** And we are on track—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I have the floor.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The floor is to MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** And so, Deputy Minister, we're talking about the reduction in greenhouse gas but in fact these emissions are actually increasing in the province of Ontario.

The other important thing that's very important to note is that with your government's increased reliance on natural gas or methane-generating sources of energy, we are going to undo all of the gains that we've made in the past few years from eliminating coal. So how can you say that the greenhouse gas emissions are going down, when in fact we are increasingly relying more and more on dirty energy sources in this province?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Chair, through you, we can say to the member opposite that we are proud that Ontario is leading Canada on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and the rest of the provinces and territories will no doubt take note to join us in that endeavour, as we—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

We move to the government side. MPP Dowie.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for being here today. I take to heart some of the comments, Minister, that you made in your opening state-

ment with respect to conservation and protected lands. I've seen first-hand that our government has proven that we have a deep appreciation for our responsibilities to protect and conserve natural spaces.

I know that continued investments to protect natural areas will play an important role in conserving Ontario's natural biodiversity for future generations. I was very pleased that the ministry recently approved the management plan for the new Cedar Creek Provincial Park down in Essex county. It's a place I enjoy canoeing very much. To see it under provincial protection means a great deal to me.

Can the minister please expand on what our government is doing to preserve more ecologically important natural areas and conserve our province's natural diversity?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair, I thank the member from Windsor–Tecumseh for that question. I've said it before and I'll say it here that my riding of Durham, and indeed Durham region, is a microcosm of the province of Ontario because, of course, we have both urban and rural, and we do have parks and conservation areas. We're very proud of that, not only in Durham region, but throughout the province of Ontario. So we're working with partners and conservation leaders to protect more natural areas and promote healthy natural spaces. We have a deep appreciation for our responsibilities to protect and conserve natural spaces and will continue in our efforts to expand protected areas in the entire province of Ontario.

Our government is fully committed to fulfilling our mandate to permanently protect a system of provincial parks and conservation reserves under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act. This is representative of Ontario's natural regions; maintains biodiversity, to specifically address one of the aspects of the member's question; and provides opportunities for ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation, something that is near and dear to all of our hearts, regardless of party.

As specific examples: Last year in 2023, the ministry established Monarch Point Conservation Reserve in Prince Edward county and Alfred Bog Provincial Park in southeastern Ontario.

Most recently, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks established the new Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park, which I referenced in my opening remarks today. This is located in the township of Uxbridge. The park was created using government-owned land, with potential to add more acquired lands to actually expand the park boundary in the future.

Beyond this, on March 11, 2024, the MECP and the ECCC announced a joint federal-provincial agreement to expand Ontario's protected area systems in three ways:

(1) Regulating lands as provincial parks and conservation reserves under the 2006 legislation, the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act that I previously mentioned; this includes lands previously Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy;

(2) Identifying and including more lands in the Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database; and

(3) Acquiring new lands for future protection.

The agreement, which provides Ontario nearly \$10 million in funding over three years, could result in the protection of up to 420,000 acres or 170,000 hectares, including additional protected areas accounting as well as potential acquisition of new lands for future protection. The agreement is anticipated to support biodiversity conservation and result in the protection of rare and vulnerable ecosystems, species at risk and their habitat, and connect more people to nature by making more green spaces available for sustainable outdoor recreation. This is where the federal and provincial governments, who serve the same residents and citizenry, have worked together in a productive way to do the right thing for the people they serve.

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Through this initiative, this summer the ministry consulted on a proposal to expand 27 provincial parks and conservation reserves for regulation under the relevant legislation I just mentioned. This totals 25,000 acres, or 10,300 hectares, and we intend to initiate consultation on additional sites in the near future. We'll continue to protect and conserve Ontario's natural spaces and consider new opportunities, Chair, to expand protected areas in the province.

The ministry is also dedicating resources to ongoing work to expand privately protected areas in southern Ontario through the Greenlands Conservation Partnership I referenced earlier. The Greenlands Conservation Partnership program is the single largest provincial fund to secure private land in Ontario to conserve ecologically important natural areas and protect wetlands, grasslands and forests. The funding is used by land trusts to secure new privately owned protected areas and their management and restoration. These land trusts have very strong track records in securing and managing privately protected areas and leveraging the provincial investment with private donations and funds from other non-provincial sources.

As I said, we're all in this together: the public sector, the private sector, our fellow citizens and residents. Regardless of party, we share the environment together. We must work together to maintain what we have and to expand what we have, and that is the good news that I report to this committee today.

Since this program was launched—that's specifically the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program that was launched in 2020—the investment I can confirm is that over \$38 million has been invested into the partnership, and this has protected approximately 430,000 acres of land across the province. Again, I want to emphasize, to put it in perspective, that that's an acreage of two and a half times the footprint of the province's capital city, the city of Toronto. And, of course, this has contributed to some of the most significant conservation efforts. For instance, the Hastings Wildlife Junction project near Bancroft, Ontario, which the government contributed an additional \$4 million to, is protecting nearly 25,000 acres.

That's 75 times the size of Canada's Wonderland—and this has within it significant forests and wetlands—making it the second-largest protected area in the region.

Building on the success of the program, we are investing an additional \$20 million over four years in the partnership to expand the protection of ecologically important natural areas and preserve the province's natural diversity. With this addition, the government's total investment in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program is \$58 million. And I can say that the funds will be distributed over the next four years. Specific details about individual projects, their locations and funding amounts will be announced as decisions are made.

Secondly, the continued investments to protect natural areas will play an important role in conserving Ontario's natural diversity for future generations. It's not just about the here and the now; it is about the future. Again, it's about building the Ontario of tomorrow while being strong environmental stewards, Chair. But I do thank the member for Windsor–Tecumseh for that question.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Gallagher Murphy?

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Chair, through you: Thank you, first off, Minister, for assuming this interim role.

Thank you very much, Deputy Minister, for being here today.

I'd like to talk a bit about Lake Simcoe. You brought up a point in your remarks earlier about helping to improve the water quality in Lake Simcoe. Given that that is just north of my riding, many of my constituents go to Lake Simcoe frequently, so I cannot understate the importance of Lake Simcoe and its watershed for both our natural ecosystem and the surrounding communities, including mine in Newmarket–Aurora.

I know our government has demonstrated our commitment to protect this unique body of water from day one. My question to you, Minister: Can you please tell us more about the recent government programs? I know you touched on one of them in your remarks, but if you could talk more about the programs and what we're doing to further this initiative.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair, I thank the member for Newmarket–Aurora for her dedication to Lake Simcoe. I know it is near and dear to her heart, and I can tell the member that, in fact, I have very fond memories over the years of visiting friends and family on Lake Simcoe. It is absolutely a top priority for our government in terms of protecting and enhancing that beautiful body of water.

Our government, Ontario's government, remains committed to protecting and restoring Lake Simcoe and its watershed, advancing the objectives of the Lake Simcoe Protection Act—yes, we have specific legislation in place. This requires co-operation among key partners, including Indigenous communities, municipalities, local conservation authorities, agriculture and commercial sectors, and residents.

Routine monitoring shows that some measures of lake water quality have improved, such as phosphorus and dissolved oxygen levels, but the lake is still changing due to the changing climate and invasive species, which we're learning much about. We will continue to build on our progress and adapt our approach over time to ensure that Lake Simcoe can be enjoyed for generations to come.

Since 2018, the beginning of our government's first mandate, Ontario has invested over \$13 million on programs that directly support the protection and restoration of Lake Simcoe and its watershed, including actions to implement the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, which includes investing in efforts to reduce road salt runoff into Lake Simcoe, as well as reducing phosphorus loadings to help protect Lake Simcoe from blue-green algae blooms.

As part of the 2024 Building a Better Ontario budget, Ontario reaffirmed its investment of \$24 million for a phosphorus reduction project in the Lake Simcoe watershed to treat drainage before it enters Lake Simcoe. As well, Ontario will be providing \$3 million for farmers to implement efficient and effective produce-washing technologies to help improve water quality in Lake Simcoe and the surrounding area.

Since 2020, the Wetlands Conservation Partner Program—this is a five-year program—has seen investments of over \$31 million to restore and enhance wetlands and priority areas across Ontario, and to support municipalities with stormwater management. A total of eight projects have been or are currently underway in the Lake Simcoe watershed. This is led by Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and the Couchiching Conservancy. The largest of these projects, at 176 hectares, is the Holland Marsh south restoration, which is by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

It has been estimated that in the first two years of the program, we have seen the avoidance of an estimated \$6 million in flood damage. I think that the member opposite would—again, this is a non-partisan type of approach that my ministry is taking, and I'm proud to be the acting minister as it does so. This has resulted in an avoidance of almost \$6 million in flood damage and the creation of over 170 green jobs in Ontario's rural and urban communities to undertake the funded wetland projects.

Lake Simcoe is important to the member for Newmarket–Aurora, but it's important to all of us, and these investments demonstrate that we can and must not choose between building the Ontario of tomorrow and being good environmental stewards. We must do both, and we're doing both, and I'm very proud of my ministry team for leading on that.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Gallagher Murphy.

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** A follow-up to that, Minister—thank you very much for that response. It is reassuring to know that our government is prioritizing our water resources. And I have to say, I do hear from many constituents of mine who talk about Lake Simcoe and the importance of reducing overall phosphorus loadings there.

So my question is: Could you talk a bit more about the specifics that you noted regarding the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan?

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**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for Newmarket–Aurora, through you, Chair.

In fact, I'm pleased to say there is more. That is how committed and dedicated my ministry officials and my team are. This is, of course, due to the leadership of both Minister Khanjin and Minister Piccini in this second mandate alone, and of course they, like me, have had the trust and confidence of the Premier in fulfilling the mandate of this ministry.

So with respect to more specifics about Lake Simcoe and the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, I can tell the member that we continue to work with our partners on implementing the plan by funding research and monitoring of environmental indicators. This helps us track change over time and it's influencing action on the ground—real, practical action on the ground—through partnerships and sharing information, because we are all in this together. We are all citizens who are here to be stewards of the environment together.

The Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, in conjunction with other provincial acts, such as the Aggregate Resources Act that governs gravel extraction and plans, underlines the province's leadership and direction about protecting the ecological health and environmental sustainability of the Lake Simcoe watershed, which are on track and are succeeding. Planning and developing decisions must conform to the designated policies and have regard for policies in the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and other provincial plans.

Now, in cases where requirements may conflict, the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan requires the act with the greatest protections to the ecological health of the Lake Simcoe watershed always prevail. That is our priority.

The ministry is taking additional actions to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering Lake Simcoe, including supporting watershed partners to do all four of the following:

- reducing phosphorus from rural sources by encouraging best management practices;
- reducing phosphorus from urban runoff by promoting green infrastructure;
- encouraging the use of innovative and effective phosphorus removal technology in the treatment of waste water; and
- finally, restoring vital components to the ecosystem that naturally help to regulate the entry of phosphorus into the watershed, such as wetlands and stream banks.

In 2021-22, under Minister Piccini's leadership, Ontario released the minister's annual report on Lake Simcoe, which describes recent actions taken by the province and multiple partners to protect and restore Lake Simcoe. The South Georgian Bay Lake Simcoe Region Source Protection Plan is in place and it includes the Lake Simcoe watershed. Policies in this plan help to prevent contamination of municipal drinking water and sources posed by

certain threat activities, such as faulty septic systems, leaking fuel tanks and the use of fertilizers, manure, pesticides and road salt.

I trust and believe that this detailed answer will give the member for Newmarket–Aurora, and her dedication to protecting and enhancing the environmental sustainability of Lake Simcoe, great comfort and great confidence.

**M<sup>me</sup> Dawn Gallagher Murphy:** Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Barnes?

**Ms. Patrice Barnes:** Thank you, Minister, for your presentation.

We understand that greenhouse gases are a big part of the influence on environment, and we've talked about transportation and the size of the province, and how transportation contributes to greenhouse gases. So, Minister, could you expand a little bit more on how we are addressing some of the greenhouse gases that are done through transportation emissions, knowing that we do need to transport goods across our province? The size of our province is sometimes way bigger than a lot of other countries, so what is your ministry doing in regard to reducing greenhouse gases as they pertain to transportation?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for Ajax for that question.

Of course, I mentioned the whole concept, the principle and purpose of being strong environmental stewards—that this government definitely has a team in place for that purpose—but it's important that we work with other ministries and the private sector.

For the transportation sector, we know that that sector accounted for 31.4% of Ontario's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2021. Transportation sector emissions, though, I'm pleased to report, have decreased by 17.6% since 2005.

We regulate the amount of renewable content in gasoline and diesel. In November 2020, we announced that the Ontario government is making the gasoline that drivers use every day cleaner by requiring fuel suppliers to increase the amount of renewable content. We know about one third of all greenhouse gas emissions in the province come from transportation, so we're working closely to make sure we achieve the goal by targeting our efforts toward one aspect of emissions that requires very close attention, and we're succeeding very well on that.

I trust that gives the member for Ajax the trust and confidence that she needs in response to her question.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

Now we move to the opposition side. MPP Shaw, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Through you, Chair: I'm sure everyone on this committee will agree that taxpayers deserve to know how you are spending their money, and they certainly deserve to know who's going to benefit from that expenditure. And so, that's why I'm here today: to ask those questions, to try to get answers and accountability for Ontario taxpayers. We only have a very short time to do it—20 minutes is not very long to get these important

answers—so I'm hoping that we can cut to the chase on some of these questions.

As an environment minister, you will know that this government exempted themselves from an environmental assessment at Ontario Place. And today, the public is horrified that during the cover of night, your government razed a waterfront forest. Right now, distressed birds and animals are looking for their homes. People are very concerned. My question: Do the estimates that we are looking at today reflect in any way the billions of dollars of taxpayer money going towards the destruction of hundreds of trees and natural habitat in what was a natural forest and parkland at Ontario Place?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair, to the member: I do want to say that another feature of our ministry that is most important is to deliver value for money to the taxpayers, and we do that by targeting both environmental stewardship, while balancing that with the need to grow the Ontario of tomorrow.

Now, I did point out in my remarks—and it's worth repeating—that in terms of value for money, we have seen an increase in the expenditure estimates by 9.9% this year over last. In real dollars, that's an increase of \$77.8 million. And I consider that the manner in which—first of all, there's an increase of 9.9%. That demonstrates the government's commitment to value for money with the appropriate increase in investments. But it's also that value for money that counts. It's got to be targeted, and I can tell the member opposite that, in fact, those targeted investments are achieving real results. The deputy may assist, if I'll be permitted to—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister. Minister, my question was very specifically—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw, one second.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** The deputy can assist further in answering the question more fully.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** No, it's okay. I'm good with that answer. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** She is satisfied with the answer.

MPP Shaw, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you. I would hardly say satisfied, but I appreciate your help there, Chair.

My question was—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** I'm doing my best.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Yes, I know, it's not easy.

The question was, do the estimates we're looking at reflect the billions of dollars of taxpayers' money that's going to the destruction of trees? These are natural habitats in a forest, and that's under your watch—

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Point of order—

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw, there is a point of order. You have to give us the—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I didn't hear it. Sorry.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay.

MPP Dowie, you raised a point of order. Go ahead.

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Yes, Chair. the Ontario Place redevelopment is not part of the ministry's estimates, and so I'm hoping that the question could revert back to something of relevance to the estimates.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Let's keep our focus on the estimates of the ministry and not other ministries.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** The important part is that this ministry exempted the government from an environmental assessment at Ontario Place, so there has to be a cost to that. My question is: In your estimate books, is there any cost that is reflective of your government's actions at Ontario Place? Because you didn't conduct an environmental assessment, you have absolutely no idea if there were species at risk, you have absolutely no idea of the impact of habitat destruction and the cost associated—

**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Point of order, MPP Shaw.

MPP Dowie.

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**Mr. Andrew Dowie:** Once again, Ontario Place is not part of the estimates of this ministry, and I would ask that the question revert back to what's in the estimates for the ministry.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I recognize what MPP Dowie is saying, but I'm asking the question. You don't know the answer. The minister is the one who will reply to me to say whether or not the actions at Ontario Place are reflected in this government's estimates.

This is the ministry that exempted Ontario Place from an environmental assessment. An environmental assessment is an important tool to mitigate damage and costs that will be borne by the taxpayers. So, again—

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Point of order.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Point of order, MPP Shaw.

MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I understand the motivations of MPP Shaw. We get that; this is the game that gets played. But this has nothing to do with the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment. This is not the place to litigate or discuss or debate policy—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Point of order.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** I'm making the point of order.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Well, make it succinct.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Chair, this is not the place to discuss policy—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Please, members of the committee, allow me to make a decision on the point of order. This cannot continue, the whole day like this. We are acting like children.

Standing order 14(d) states that a member raising a point of order or point of privilege, and any member permitted by the Chair to speak to it, must put the point tersely and speak only to the point raised.

Now, we heard the point of order. MPP Shaw, the Ontario Place issue is not part of this ministry's estimates,

so, please, let's focus on the ministry estimates and continue the questions in that regard.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** With that, I will move on. I find it hard to believe that the environment ministry has no purview over the destruction of parkland, trees and habitat, but that's the answer that I'm getting from this ministry.

So with that, I'm going to pass my time over to my colleague MPP Guy Bourgouin to ask a few important questions.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Bourgouin, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Good day, Minister. You mentioned in your opening statement about drinking water. You raised your glass and you drank tap water, and you said the source, the tap—Ontario's highest standards. You talked about Ontario's highest standards.

Minister, I'm not sure if you're aware—I'm sure you are aware—there are 19 First Nations that don't have clean drinking water; they're under boil-water advisories. And, Minister, do you know—I'm sure you do—that in some ridings, including mine, there are communities that have been under a boil-water advisory for close to 30 years? So we're talking about a young generation that never drank water from a tap. They don't trust tap water. They leave their community and they buy bottled water because they don't trust water from the tap. This is—comment est-ce que je te dirais ça? I'm trying to find the word in English, but it's shameful. We're in one of the richest provinces, in Ontario, and First Nations don't have clean drinking water like we take for granted.

A simple question, the first question: Do you believe First Nations are Ontarians, Minister?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Well, I thank the member for the question. First Nations are integral to the province of Ontario and Canada, and we are committed to supporting all First Nations communities in the quest to bring clean drinking water to everyone, in particular First Nations communities. Now, although the federal government—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Well, thank you, Minister. That answers my question—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Now, this has to be clear, Chair, because to interrupt me now would be unfair, sir.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The MPP is satisfied with your answer.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Yes, I think it's the right answer. Yes, they're integral. So, the answer—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I have the answer: Ontario supports—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Can I move on to my question, Mr. Chair, please?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, the floor is to MPP Bourgouin, please.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** But, Chair, I wasn't finished, in fairness—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** No, I'm satisfied with the answer, so please, Chair—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** —because it's unfair to me to be cut off, because we are committed to ensuring clean

drinking water comes to our First Nations communities in Ontario, but it is the federal government and Indigenous communities that are—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay, Minister.

The floor is yours, MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, and I hope you give me the minute or the couple of seconds he took.

But that being said, the ministry implemented the Indigenous Drinking Water Program with goals to work collaboratively with First Nations to support a resolution for long-term drinking-water-advisory support by long-term sustainability—each community's water infrastructure—and to assist First Nation communities to become self-sufficient in long-term sustainability through drinking water systems. I think that's where you were heading, Minister.

The ministry has cut the funding from Indigenous communities' drinking water program by \$500,000 this year, resulting in a total one-time investment of \$360,000 for programs. So we're reducing. On one side of the mountain, we say, "No, we want"—on dit, dans le français, qu'on parle des deux bords de la bouche. Mais d'un côté—I'll try not to go in French, because I know you don't understand French. But one side was saying that we were there to make sure the First Nations have clean drinking water. We have these programs and yet we're cutting the program.

There are 19 First Nations in Ontario with long-term drinking water advisories. Some communities have been under a boil-water advisory for close to 30 years—30 years. That's older than my son, and it's older than my daughter, who is 29.

Does the minister believe that a one-time \$360,000 limited transfer payment is enough to assist and secure, as outlined by the ministry, long-term sustainability for these communities?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** The member does not have his facts correct. First, the Ontario Clean Water Agency is to receive \$295.8 million in these estimates. The Ontario Clean Water Agency is a public agency of the province which serves as a provider of safe and reliable water, waste water and stormwater services for municipalities, First Nations communities, businesses, governments and institutions across Ontario.

Now, we know that although the federal government and First Nations share primary responsibility for providing safe drinking water for First Nations communities, our Ontario government is committed to working in co-operation and sharing technical expertise to help resolve the issue of water quality on First Nations reserves. The Ontario Clean Water Agency and the Walkerton Clean Water Centre provide First Nations communities with support in drinking water training and certification for operators.

So let's be clear on this, Chair: Even though this is a primary responsibility of the federal Liberal government and First Nations communities—and if there's any failure, it's the failure of the federal Liberal government—we are nevertheless in Ontario leading by providing support for



drinking water training and certification for operators, managers and—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. MPP Bourgouin?

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** He needs to follow the rules too. *Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, the floor is to MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Chair, there is a process; he needs to follow it just as much as we do. You mentioned many times that we're not children. It applies to the minister also. Thank you.

So if I can continue, Chair—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Your question, MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** We have a community like Attawapiskat. Since 1980, they're not drinking tap water. When they take a shower, they can't take it for more than 10 minutes, because if they do they have to have the window open, because they get rashes on their skin. They have to carry water from a distant system to be able to have potable water in their homes—not tap water, like you benefit, Minister, or I benefit, or anybody else in this province benefits. This is a reality.

And you cannot push it to the federal—I'm sorry, Minister. We have a responsibility at the province to make sure that they have clean drinking water like everybody else in this province. Do you think that's fair? I don't. I don't believe you do either.

And reading from your notes does not answer my questions, because you know that is wrong fundamentally. We all do. I can guarantee you we all do. But yet, nothing is being done—30 years in some communities; 19 communities still have boil-water advisories.

So tell me, Minister. Cutting two—there's two. In your own benefit, you're cutting two programs, reducing money that would help these communities fix that problem or go towards fixing that problem. And yet we have children that can't take long showers. They get rashes. Is that acceptable? I don't think so. Please answer that question, Minister.

1520

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Chair, the member sits as a member of a party that formed government in this province for most of the 1990s and propped up a Liberal government in the 2010s, but I can say that our ministry—and I agree that just because something is a federal responsibility doesn't mean we turn our backs. We're not turning our backs. We're offering the support.

Our Ontario ministry, our Ontario government, has made the investments—over \$250 million in this year's estimates. We've entered an agreement with the Walkerton Clean Water Centre, providing funding for a project to help identify and better understand the diverse drinking water needs of all First Nations communities. The project will identify areas for improvement and identify new, more effective approaches to providing First Nations communities across Ontario with the tools and the supports they need to support the resolution of long-term

drinking water advisories, build local capacity and promote sustainable water management.

We will continue working co-operatively with First Nations communities and the federal government to support the resolution of these long-term drinking water advisories and the long-term sustainability of water infrastructure, and my deputy has further details about the specifics of our investments in this important area. As we support First Nations communities, we are committed to doing that and we will continue to do—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. MPP Bourgouin, please direct your question through the Chair.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** I will. That's what I'm doing—talking to you.

So I'm hearing the minister, but explain why this was not a priority in your budget. It should have been a priority. We've seen chiefs come here, even being thrown out of the Legislature, speaking about these specific issues—specific issues that have been dragging forever.

And to say that it is federal? Because you opened your remarks by saying, “source to tap, Ontario's highest safety standard,” and then you drank from your glass of water. Yet these communities, which live in Ontario, don't have the same standards.

So I ask again: Why was it not a priority in this budget to have safe drinking water in the 19 First Nations communities? We all know who they are, because you heard us—you heard me—speak in the House. You heard my colleague Sol Mamakwa speak in the House. You heard this thing over and over and over again. Why is that not part of your priority in your budget? Because in your budget, it shows that you've been cutting the two programs. So I ask again why it's not a priority in your budget.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair: The member continues to grandstand and misstate the facts, or he's not listening.

First, the Ontario Clean Water Agency is to receive \$295.8 million. That's over a quarter of our overall budget, and the budget has been increased by 9.9%. And even though it is the primary responsibility of the federal government to First Nations to address clean water needs in First Nations communities, Ontario is doing everything it can as a provincial government to support the implementation of clean water processes and technology. That is what we're committed to, and we put our money where our mouth is. We are doing everything we can as a province, above and beyond our call of duty—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, Minister, but I'm not grandstanding.

Minister, have you been to these communities? I'm asking a simple question: Have you been into the communities that we're talking about, the 19? Have you been there? Have you been? Answer that question.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I, as Minister of the Environment, have not yet travelled outside of the capital—

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Okay. Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:**—but I plan to do so. But I also am well aware of our role as supportive—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, thank you. MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you for that answer, Minister. This is not grandstanding, Minister. You might think I am grandstanding, but I'm not, because I've been to these communities. I've seen it over and over. We take for granted—it's a human right to have drinkable water. It's a human rights issue. So I'm not grandstanding, and that's why I'm asking that this is fixed, that it needs to be fixed. We are passing the buck here.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** We're arguing that it's a federal issue, but yet it's provincial. We have a responsibility. They're Ontarians just like everybody else. If it would be a community or a municipality, I can tell you, it would have been fixed within a year. But because they're First Nations? Out of sight, out of mind. « Loin des yeux, loin du coeur », comme on dit—far from the eyes, far from the heart. That's what's happening in these communities. So I'm not grandstanding, because I've seen it over and over and over again, and this is wrong.

I'd like to move on to another question regarding winter roads—well, I'll probably hold off because—how many seconds left?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Twenty-six seconds.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Well, thank you, Minister. I hope you fix this, Minister. I'll give you the credit of fixing that. I hope you do, because it is a serious issue in Ontario, and they deserve the same respect as the rest of Ontarians. Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** We are committed to fixing it. We are doing everything and more that the province can do.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Okay. Thank you. MPP Cuzzetto.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Thank you, Minister. And I want to thank all the youth who are here today. Thank you for being here. It's very important.

I want to go back in history here, Minister, to March 26, 2001. The Minister of the Environment, Elizabeth Witmer, was the first to close down our coal plants in the province of Ontario to get us to a greener environment. Today, I was at Lakeview in my riding, where the coal plant that was closed down is now turning into 16,000 new homes in our community. This was all started through a Conservative MPP at the time.

But I want to touch today on the greenhouse gas emissions and what the government is doing to adopt clean fuels for cleaner transportation fuel regulations and long-term benefits for our communities in the north. Could you please explain how we're doing this?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for the question. Renewable content, Chair, is used to make cleaner biofuels, which are made with biological materials, including crops, forest residues and organic waste. Examples of renewable content—also known as bio-based

content—available in the marketplace include biofuels such as ethanol, biodiesel and renewable diesel. Ethanol is a renewable fuel produced mainly through the fermentation of corn in Ontario. Renewable fuels can also be made from other organic materials such as forestry residues or organic wastes.

This regulation that we've brought into place, the cleaner transportation fuels regulation, will have, I submit, long-term benefits to rural communities in particular. Most of the ethanol produced in Ontario is made from locally grown corn, but by increasing demand for biofuels like ethanol, the regulation will benefit local farmers, attract further investment in the industry and support Ontario's competitive advantage as a clean fuel province.

Ontario does have a robust biofuel industry that benefits our local farmers and exports internationally, and I believe this regulation will help that industry grow. Encouraging more production of biofuel is going to help keep even more consumer dollars in the province. It will also provide Ontarians with cleaner fuels and will reduce their carbon footprint from transportation.

I want to address that we do not expect this regulation to increase the retail price of gasoline, nor would we support any policy that would increase costs on consumers. As you know, our government is committed to reducing costs on consumers. That's why we've lowered gas taxes by 10 cents per litre, and we continue to call on the federal government to scrap their punitive carbon tax, which continues to drive up the cost of gasoline and everything else.

The ministry did consult key stakeholders and the public on the regulatory proposal through the environmental and regulatory registries that lasted for 45 days. The ministry then held two technical consultations dating back several years. Approximately 50 individuals attended the consultation sessions. We moved forward from May to August and held calls with key associations in the transportation fuel sector. We heard the views of the biofuel sector, and it, as I have indicated, is continuing to grow in Ontario.

The renewable content in gasoline must emit 45% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than fossil gasoline on a life-cycle basis before 2030—again, that all-important 2030 target date—to lower greenhouse gas emissions; 50% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than fossil gasoline on a life-cycle basis from 2030 onward; and then the regulation also requires fuel suppliers to continue to blend 4% renewable content in diesel. This renewable content must emit 70% fewer greenhouse gas emissions than fossil diesel on a life-cycle basis.

**1530**

Fuel suppliers must also report annually and make sure that blended fuels meet specific quality standards set out in the ministry guideline.

So Ontario gasoline is on track to be among the cleanest in the country. Ethanol is clean, renewable and already blended in most gasoline. Boosting ethanol content in gasoline is a practical and immediate climate solution to cut greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, im-

prove air quality and strengthen local economies as well, without adding burden or cost for drivers and consumers.

Our Ontario government then, I can say to the member, is making gasoline that drivers use every day cleaner, requiring fuel suppliers to increase the amount of renewable content in regular grade gasoline by up to 15%.

**Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto:** Thank you, Minister. I'll pass it on.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Who is going to ask the question? MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thanks, Minister, for coming. Minister, it's music to my ears; I had my undergrad in chemical engineering. Talking about renewable energy, it's an amazing thing that you're doing.

In talking about working with industrial partners—because I'm in the ministry of small business—it is very important to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and Ontario. So my question is about the Ontario Emissions Performance Standards Program, the EPS Program, which is an alternative to the costly output-based pricing system for industrial emissions mandated by the federal government. We all know that the EPS Program will save Ontario businesses over \$1 billion compared to the federal system, which is tailored to Ontario's environment and economy.

So my question to you is: What can you tell me about the Emission Performance Standards Program that is helping to incentivize emission reduction, while maintaining industrial competitiveness? As we all know, it's a balancing act. We want level 3. We want things to run our lives. At the same time, we have to be competitive, so that the industry can stay in Canada and Ontario. So what are we doing with that?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for the question, through you, Chair. The EPS Program that he referenced is the Ontario Emissions Performance Standards Program. It's our alternative to the costly output-based pricing system for industrial emissions mandated by the federal Liberal government.

The EPS Program, as the member suggested in his question, will save Ontario businesses over \$1 billion compared to the federal system, and it's tailored to Ontario's environment and Ontario's economy. If Ontario's program was not enforced, the federal government would reimpose their costly program on Ontario businesses, so our EPS will help us achieve emissions reductions from big polluters and also help us achieve our 2030 emissions reduction target without driving away businesses and without driving away our job creators.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** Thank you so much. Again, I'm glad to hear that, by working with industry to help them achieve greenhouse gas reduction targets, we are able to help the environment without increasing the costs to the end consumer.

Can the minister please elaborate further on why Ontario's EPS is better than the federal alternative? We talked about this, but why is it better compared to the federal?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Well, I can do so, through you, Chair, to the member, because of the reports that we have. The Emissions Performance Standards Program regulates greenhouse gas emissions from large industrial facilities. Emission performance standards are used annually to determine emissions limits for each covered facility. The limits become stricter each and every year, requiring emitters to take a number of actions.

First, to reduce their emissions and/or to pay for exceeding the limits, the goals of the Emissions Performance Standards Program are to encourage the industrial sector to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain competitiveness of our Ontario businesses and minimize carbon leakage. That's the risk of production leaving the province for other jurisdictions with less stringent climate policies.

Industrial facilities in Ontario have everything to gain by reducing their emissions through innovations. In other words, good environmental stewardship is good economics. The more they reduce their emissions, the less they have to pay for their pollution. In fact, they can get credits for any reductions that lower their emissions below their annual limits. They can then either sell these credits to other emitters in the program or save them to meet any future compliance obligations.

Further, Ontario has launched the Emissions Performance Program, the EPP, which is reinvesting the compliance payments collected through the EPS Program to help eligible industrial facilities implement initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This is what I mean by working with industry rather than against industry.

By giving industry the responsibility for leading and designing their own initiatives, we are supporting innovation and investment in green technologies while helping these facilities stay competitive and supporting economic growth. The Emissions Performance Standards Program is a key government action that will reduce costs for all and provide security to Ontario industry while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Stakeholders across most sectors have consistently indicated support for the current EPS Program over the federal Liberal program.

As we developed the proposal for the emissions performance standards, we considered the following guiding principles—and they're important, Chair:

(1) Providing continuity and predictability for Ontario businesses;

(2) Maintaining an incentive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on track and even ahead of schedule, which will help us meet Ontario's emissions target of 30% below 2005 levels by 2030;

(3) Minimizing the risk for carbon leakage, considering competitiveness impacts to Ontario's industries;

(4) Ensuring the program continues to be fair, cost-effective and flexible to the needs and circumstances of our province; and, of course

(5) Minimizing regulatory burden.

The present value of the cumulative cost savings to regulated industries is estimated to be approximately \$1.1

billion for the period beginning 2023 through to 2030. My deputy may have some more details in that regard.

**Mr. Jonathan Lebi:** No, I think you said it well, Minister. You covered all the bases.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** All right, so that's a complete answer to the question.

The member suggests the need for balance, and I think we've achieved that. That's what this is about: making sure that Ontario does its part in every way to help grow the economy, to help build the Ontario of tomorrow while being good environmental stewards and, at the same time, even when it's not in our jurisdiction, to do everything we can as a provincial government to support Indigenous communities in our province. That is what we're committed to.

Above and beyond the call of duty is where our Ontario government is for Indigenous communities and for all citizens and residents of this great province.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Anand.

**Mr. Deepak Anand:** I'd like to pass it on to MPP Yakabuski.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Yakabuski.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** How much time do we have left?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Seven minutes and 37 seconds.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Oh, I was hoping to have 38 seconds, but I'll make it work.

Well, thank you very much for being here today, Minister. I want to first commend you for taking on the additional challenge of this ministry in an alternative way while Minister Khanjin is taking some very special family time. We appreciate your dedication, and we appreciate you being here today.

You did mention in your initial address about the 430,000 additional acres that we've protected just in the last four years in Ontario and that we have protected lands that now have a greater area than the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia combined, which I think sometimes is kind of—they don't like that narrative over on the other side, because they like to paint us as not being great friends of the environment. We're the government that brought in the Ministry of the Environment, under former Premier Bill Davis, and my father was a member of the government at that time.

I do want to specifically ask you, Minister, about our additional protection of an urban park, which is now something that people—as the province increases in population and people are growing in other areas, they also want to have that protected land in the areas near them.

I happened to have the privilege of being the parliamentary assistant to the then Minister of the Environment when the groundwork was done and the process was begun to bring in the urban park in Uxbridge. So I just want to ask you some questions about that, because I know there's a lot to talk about with that.

**1540**

We know that our province's population is growing rapidly and that our government's dedication to expanding

parks and recreation opportunities has been clear from day one; we've shown that. Can you please tell us, Minister, how our government is continuing this dedication through the establishment of the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park, and what benefits this will bring for the township of Uxbridge and the surrounding communities?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** I thank the member for the question, through you, Chair. It is reminiscent of the fact of just how vast our province is and how much parkland and green space we are dedicated to protecting.

Of course, the member is right that the history of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks now goes back over half a century. This ministry was created by a Progressive Conservative government led by the Honourable Premier William Davis back in 1972, and it continues to be a key pillar of this government's dedication and responsibility for Ontario's parkland, Ontario's green space; for support for our Indigenous communities; for doing all that we can as a province to support initiatives and to ensure technology is available and possible, as well as education for our First Nations communities. This is essential as we move forward together as a society, and I think it's consistent with truth and reconciliation, as well.

When it comes to urban parks, what's important about Uxbridge in particular and the announcement in this regard—just 50 kilometres from Queen's Park—is that the idea of an urban park, as Uxbridge is, is now not just an idea; it's a reality. It's open and available for our fellow citizens who live near or within the GTA. It's so important that green space and parks are not at some distance, hours away, in terms of accessing them. They are integral to being part of our urban communities as well, and that was the motivation behind leading the implementation of an Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park for the province of Ontario.

Natural environments in our urban centres offer many benefits. That's why they should be an integral part of urban centres like the GTA, and that's why Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park is such a triumph. In recent years, demand and park usage have grown tremendously as more people seek out the benefits of being in nature. We established the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park to provide new opportunities for sustainable outdoor recreational activities in a rapidly urbanizing community such as the GTA.

Let's get to the figures. We're investing \$19 million over three years to support costs related to regulating park management planning, including consultation with Indigenous communities and the broader public, operationalizing, and the potential of adding land to expand the park for the future. The funding will also support administrative costs for any subsequent park additions, assessments and studies, planning and design work for park development, and procurement and construction costs of any new park facilities.

I submit—through you, Chair, to the member—that the park will accomplish four main objectives in the important urban centre of the GTA and the need for park accessibility and usage in an urban centre like the GTA:

(1) It will help ensure access to local, sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities;

(2) It will strengthen protection for vulnerable ecosystems;

(3) It will improve the ecological quality and natural habitat of the region; and

(4) It will promote biodiversity in southern Ontario's green spaces.

It is anticipated that this new urban provincial park would boost local tourism and regional economic growth. That's why I always say that good environmental stewardship is good economics.

With this new provincial park, the government is making progress on its commitments to ensuring access to regional opportunities for Ontario families to enjoy, boosting local tourism and strengthening the protection and health of local wildlife and the environment. The new Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park provides the township of Uxbridge—in fact, the entire GTA, and communities and individuals close to the GTA—with more opportunities to benefit from natural spaces close to home, such as clean water and air, and recreational activities for families to enjoy now and in the future. It promotes physical fitness, also an important attribute to ensure that we promote.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** This new park also helps protect vulnerable ecosystems and promote biodiversity in southern Ontario's green space. That cannot be emphasized enough, Chair.

But I do hope and believe that the member is satisfied and has confidence, given the answers I have provided on Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park.

**Mr. John Yakabuski:** Well, certainly, Minister, and, again, I appreciate the work that you're doing to manage this ministry at this important time. Thank you very much for your appearance today.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you. That concludes the government allotted time.

Now we move to the opposition. Before we move, I just want to remind you that we have 18 minutes left, the allotted time for the entire hearing, and please focus your questions on the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The floor is yours, MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you very much, Chair. I'd like to start by welcoming the Stop Sprawl university students that are here today joining us. The future of Ontario is very important to them, and they're deeply invested in that, and they're very concerned about some of the actions of this government that are threatening our high-quality farmland, our ecosystems, our habitats for endangered species.

I would say that your ministry used to prioritize these areas: wetlands, farmland, things that would mitigate flooding. And now, with bills like Bill 23, which undercuts conservation authorities' ability to protect wetlands, and Bill 185, which is making it very difficult to protect class 1 farmland, this group, these young students see very clearly that this sell-off of farmland and paving of wet-

lands and abandoning of oversight is not good for the future of Ontario. In fact, they have a petition that we're going to be tabling in the Legislature that very specifically asks the government to pay attention to these issues and to understand that their actions are having significant impact, particularly when it comes to farmland, which, you will know, is a form of green infrastructure.

I'm also happy to see that we're joined here by the MPP from Waterloo, Catherine Fife, who has been leading the charge in fighting the sell-off or the expropriation of 770 acres of class 1 farmland in the Wilmot area.

So my question: To these students who have taken the time today, who are very concerned with the actions of your government and the loss of farmland, the loss of wetlands—can you tell them where in the budget you identify a priority that you will do your duty to them to protect non-renewable farmland—once it's gone, it's gone—and protect this form of natural green infrastructure going forward in this province?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Thank you to the member, Chair, for the question. As I've indicated, my riding of Durham, within the region of Durham, is a microcosm of the province. I have farms and farmers within my riding—proudly so—in the northern area, and we have the urban areas to the south, so I'm well aware of the commitment to protecting and preserving farmland.

The Premier, the Honourable Doug Ford, was clear about this just last week when it comes to a province-wide approach. The Premier's expectation and our government's expectation is that any region, whether it be Durham region or Wilmot, treats farmers fairly, respectfully and co-operatively in assembling any land—period, full stop.

The whole issue, when the member references Wilmot, started when the region threatened expropriation at the onset of their land assembly process. Our government's goal is to help fund the region to assemble land in a fair and respectful manner with local farmers, without expropriation, as was the case in St. Thomas.

Over the long term, we believe in a balanced approach to ensure a thriving agri-food industry, while also supporting economic growth, new investments and well-paying jobs. So we have never approved expropriation, and were never consulted on expropriation. The Premier has been clear on this, and we just want the region to treat farmers fairly.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister. I'm going to pass to MPP Fife.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Fife.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, Minister, for being here. And thanks to the students who are also showing up today.

I listened carefully to your response to MPP Shaw with regard to the Wilmot lands, and I must tell that you that the region has very clearly said that the government insisted on the NDA, insisted on the lack of transparency, insisted that the forced expropriation must happen prior to even moving forward with the purchase of sale.

1550

You said in your comments to the government side that good environmental stewardship is good for the economy. The GDP and the value of the farmland in Wilmot surpasses the IT sector in Waterloo.

The government has set the rules of engagement to secure an undisclosed, large mega-industrial site on class 1 farmland. You have set the framework and the rules for the region to move forward. It has created a lot of conflict, I will tell you, and created great instability for those farmers, because they don't know if the government is just going to come in and take their land. So I have to say, you are funding the expropriation and the purchase of this class 1 farmland for industrial purposes. Will you not acknowledge that by doing so, you are a key player in these transactions?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Through you, Chair, to the member: I believe that the member and others within the member's party asked the ministry team at economic development, job creation and trade about this, including Minister Fedeli, and I would most certainly refer to their comments. But I believe that Minister Fedeli was quite clear that the NDA addresses the dollar value of our funding support for the purchase of the land, so that there is fairness for the taxpayer. If one is buying a home, one doesn't want the seller to know what the buying limit is. You don't negotiate—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But you can't buy a home—

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** You don't negotiate in public—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Minister, I'm sorry. I'm going to reclaim my time, Chair. You cannot buy a home without the money, and you are funding the project.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** As Minister Fedeli stated, the NDA is to protect taxpayers.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** But undermines democracy in doing so.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** We don't negotiate in public. As I speak, I can tell you that negotiations are ongoing—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Fife, let's give him a few more minutes to answer the question.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** —and I'm not in a position to speak to the NDA, which is there to protect taxpayers.

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** With all due respect, Chair, the minister did not answer the question. He did not acknowledge that the province is funding the expropriation. The expropriation of class 1 farmland in Wilmot would not be happening if the province was not funding it.

So I ask you again, Minister: Do you not see the value of preserving prime farmland in Ontario when we lose 319 acres every day, and your involvement and interference in progressive regional planning in Waterloo is undermining the economy and the local economy for farmers and is actually putting at risk our water recharge, because Waterloo region depends on source water protection?

Under vote item number 1116, under environmental compliance and operations, I see that the government has not kept pace with remediation and protection of source water protection. So this is a gamble that the government

seems willing to participate in. It seems willing to fund it and to drive it.

I genuinely feel that this is the wrong direction for Wilmot, and I would love to hear you, as the minister, state the importance of preserving class 1 farmland for the economy and for the environment.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Well, Chair, through you, I will repeat what I've said before—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** No.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Our government's goal is to ensure a balanced approach, to ensure a thriving agri-food industry, respect for farmers, working respectfully with farmers, while also supporting—

**Ms. Catherine Fife:** Thank you very much, Chair.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** —economic growth, new investments and well-paying jobs.

Now, we do have an answer as to source protection—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, the floor is MPP Shaw's.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you, Minister. We're going to move on to another issue with the limited time that we have. Thank you.

*Interjection.*

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Minister, the floor is to MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Your government, in 2021, initiated pay-to-slay legislation, which really, essentially lets people destroy or damage endangered species habitat in exchange for a simple pay amount in a so-called conservation fund. Somehow this fund would be used to create new habitat for the species in question sufficient to outweigh the damage that is caused by this development.

My question: How many permissions have been granted based on the pay-to-slay legislation? Can you tell us how much money has been collected and how much has then been used to restore habitat, particularly when it comes to species at risk?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Our government—through you, Chair, to the member—is committed, as we've demonstrated, to protecting and recovering species at risk and to implementing and fully abiding by the principles and spirit of the Endangered Species Act. We'll continue to protect species at risk and their habitats—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** The question was about the pay-to-slay legislation, Minister.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** —including working with stakeholders and Indigenous communities to improve the effectiveness of the program. Each year, Ontario invests in projects that help protect—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair, respectfully, I had a very specific question and he's not addressing it.

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** —and recover well-known and lesser-known plants and animals. We'll continue to do so.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** It's his privilege to answer the question any way he wants it.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** No, it is not. This is our time. I'm reclaiming my time, then.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** That's the witness's—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** It is not. It is the members' time, not the minister's time—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** No, I know.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** —and I asked very specifically about pay-to-slay.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** The witness is privileged to answer the question any way they want to see it fit.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Could you direct him, then, to answer my question, which is regarding the pay-to-slay legislation?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Ask your question, MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I asked, very specifically, how many permissions have been granted based on the pay-to-slay legislation, how much money you have collected and what has been spent to remediate these damaged habitats and species-at-risk habitats in the province. It's your government's policy. It's your legislation. How many?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** From our first year of our first mandate, this government has committed to protecting habitats and species at risk. Since its inception, the species-at-risk stewardship program—and I emphasize the word “stewardship” again, because that's what this is about—has supported more than 1,200 projects through hundreds of community recipients. Supported projects have contributed to the creation or the restoration of thousands of hectares of habitat, filled important scientific knowledge gaps, created thousands of jobs and raised awareness of Ontario species at risk.

This is the great leadership of Premier Ford's government. This is the balanced approach that I speak of—

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Chair?

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** Thank you. I'm going to pass my time now to—I mean, I would just like to say that you did not answer my question about pay-to-slay, and it would be hard to believe that anyone can trust this ministry when it comes to pay-to-slay.

You heard my questions two times. The third time would be how many and how much. If you want to submit answers to those questions to me in writing, I would be happy to receive them.

In the meantime, I'm going to pass my time over to MPP Bourgouin. Thank you.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Bourgouin.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Can I know how much time—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Seven minutes.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I'd like to talk about the environmental issues that we see up north. As you know, up north especially—when we talk about “up north,” we're talking mostly the James Bay coast, because for us, Kapuskasing is up north, but there is more up north when we're talking the province. We're seeing the effects of climate change a lot more, and we tend to forget that.

A couple of weeks ago, I went to Fort Albany, and we see a river, a huge river, that we see the bottom of the river. That First Nation has to be flown by helicopter to be able

to hunt or go fishing in their traditional territories. We've seen that Fort Albany has been evacuated and Kash was evacuated two years ago because of fire.

And then in wintertime, we're seeing now that the winters are not as cold as they used to be, which brings me to my question. When we talk about winter roads, for First Nations, winter roads are critical. That means their winter roads—that's when they bring a lot of their goods. They bring all of what they need for the year, to be honest with you, and not only the First Nations; for mining, also, because these roads are being utilized by many, many communities and also mining and other groups.

Last year, I can tell you—for the last two years, we've seen that the winter roads are sometimes not even safe during the peak time. We see now them opening up, Minister, even—it takes a longer time to open up, and they also close earlier. I'm thinking about Moosonee. We've usually seen the river—you know, they use the river to be able to cross to Moose Factory, and we're seeing that also jeopardized, because now the frost is not there; the cold weather is not there.

This brings me to my question, Minister, and I hope we can get an answer. We know that changes to temperature due to climate change are more dramatic in northern Ontario, and we have important infrastructure—our winter roads and ice crossings—that are extremely vulnerable to climate change. We're already seeing that the seasons of operating these critical roads are starting later and ending earlier, and changes to temperature are making them unsafe throughout the winter. We've seen them open and we've seen them close. These roads are not only essential lifelines to connect isolated communities to goods and services in the rest of the province, but they're also used for mining and other industries, like I said, in the north.

**1600**

My question would be: What investment is this ministry making to respond to environmental changes that threaten our critical infrastructure in the north and safeguard it for the future for the First Nations and the communities up north?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** Well, I want to answer the member's question—through you, Chair—first of all by indicating that my other ministry, the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement, gave me the honour of travelling to Pickle Lake to open a new ServiceOntario location, where I was warmly welcomed by MPP Mamakwa, one of the member's colleagues. So far in this ministry—I've only been here a short time, a few weeks—I have not done any travelling, but I look forward to it.

In terms of what we've done to ensure climate emergency measures are addressed and that we have resiliency—and I emphasize the word “resiliency”—I can talk about our government's investments. We know how important that is to Ontario, and in particular in Indigenous communities.

Our government is taking steps to help build Ontario's resiliency and protect all Ontario communities from the impacts of climate change. This includes making historic

investments in conservation through the Greenlands Conservation Partnership program I spoke about. But we've also supported the Wetlands Conservation Partner Program with \$31 million over five years, including \$11 million available for new projects that started just last fiscal year. These projects, I submit, will improve water quality, help prevent flooding and build climate change resiliency.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** Chair?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** In the first three years of the program, 335 wetland projects were initiated and completed—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Bourgouin, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Guy Bourgouin:** This sounds very like another response that he just answered, because you're reading right off the book and you've responded with that answer many times already.

So I'll pass it again to my colleague Sandy Shaw. She has another question.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** MPP Shaw.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** I just want to return to this issue of pay-to-slay. Again, I want to emphasize that this is your government's legislation that allows people—developers, generally—to destroy or damaged endangered species habitat in exchange for a simple pay of small amounts of money.

I did ask you how much money you have collected and how it is being spent, and I would like to know very specifically—under the pay-to-slay legislation, as we know, your government has destroyed the habitat at Ontario Place. You have destroyed wetland. You have destroyed the urban forest. You've impacted the habitat of these species. Because you did not conduct an environmental assessment, we don't know if these were species at risk.

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** One minute.

**Ms. Sandy Shaw:** So very specifically, I want to ask you: Was there any requirement from this development to offset, to pay money for the damage that has been inflicted on this much-beloved area, the Ontario park forest land? You have this pay-to-slay legislation. Quite clearly, the habitat has been irreparably changed and damaged—shoreline impacts. I asked you earlier if your government has committed any money to remediate the damage that you have created there, and now I'm asking you: Is your government going to be collecting any funds under the

pay-to-slay legislation to redress this unprecedented destruction of Ontario Place?

**Hon. Todd J. McCarthy:** The species-at-risk stewardship program, Chair, has resulted in—

**The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian):** Thank you, Minister. The time is up.

This concludes the committee's consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Standing order 69 requires that the Chair put, without further amendment or debate, every question necessary to dispose of the estimates. Are the members ready to vote?

Shall vote 1101, ministry administration program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, the vote carries.

Shall vote 1112, environmental policy, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1114, environmental sciences and standards, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1116, environmental compliance and operations, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1118, environmental assessment and permissions, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1119, climate change and resiliency, carry? All in favour? Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1120, land and water, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall vote 1121, Emissions Performance Standards Program, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

Shall the Chair report the 2024-25 estimates of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to the House? All in favour? Any opposition? Seeing none, carried.

That concludes the estimates for the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Seeing as there is no other committee business, the committee is now adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, October 8, 2024. Thank you very much.

*The committee adjourned at 1607.*









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

Ms. Catherine Fife (Waterloo ND)

### **Clerk / Greffière**

Ms. Thushitha Kobikrishna

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Ms. Amanda Boyce, research officer,  
Research Services