



**PROVINCE OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

First Session
Fifty-First General Assembly

**Proceedings of the Standing Committee on
Resources**

May 5, 2026 - Issue 2

Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Assembly
Honourable Paul Lane, MHA

RESOURCE COMMITTEE

Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands

Chair: Mark Butt, MHA

Members: Elvis Loveless, MHA
Riley Balsom, MHA
Fred Hutton, MHA
Keith Russell, MHA
Joseph Power, MHA
Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA

Clerk of the Committee: Evan Beazley (A)

Appearing:

Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands

Hon. Pleaman Forsey, Minister
Jamie Chippett, Deputy Minister
Dr. Blair Adams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Forestry and Wildlife
Steve Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture
Neil Croke, Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Services
Kellee Martin, Assistant Deputy Minister, Conception Bay North Response and Recovery
Denise Woodrow, Assistant Deputy Minister, Crown Lands
Brad Nofall, Departmental Controller
Linda Skinner, Director of Communications
Sara Rideout, Media Manager
Nicholas Hillier, Executive Assistant

Also Present

Pam Parsons, MHA
Jim Dinn, MHA
Angelica Hill, Official Opposition Caucus
Margot Pitcher, Official Opposition Caucus
Scott Fleming, Third Party Caucus

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, substitutes for Fred Hutton, MHA for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre, substitutes for Sheilagh O'Leary, MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The Committee met at 6:02 p.m. in the House of Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Butt): Order, please!

Before we start, I would like to announce some substitutions. The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island will be substituted by the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi is now substituted by the Member for St. John's Centre.

Just a few reminders. Each time you speak, wave to identify yourself and wait for the tally light to come on before you speak. Say your name and your position each time you speak for transcription purposes. Please do not make adjustments to chairs. Watercoolers are located in the four corners of the House for your needs.

Now I ask the Committee Members, substitutions and caucus employees to introduce themselves, starting with the front row closest to the Chair.

E. LOVELESS: Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

M. PITCHER: Margot Pitcher, Opposition Researcher.

P. PARSONS: Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

A. HILL: Angelica Hill, Director of Research, Official Opposition Office.

J. DINN: James Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

S. FLEMING: Scott Fleming, Policy Analyst, NDP Caucus Office.

R. BALSOM: Riley Balsom, MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

K. RUSSELL: Keith Russell, MHA for Lake Melville.

J. POWER: Joe Power, MHA for the fine District of Labrador West.

CHAIR: I now ask the department officials to introduce themselves, starting with the minister.

P. FORSEY: Pleaman Forsey, Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

J. CHIPPETT: Jamie Chippett, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands.

B. ADAMS: Blair Adams, Assistant Deputy Minister of Forestry, Wildlife and Enforcement.

S. BALSOM: Steve Balsom, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Food Security.

N. CROKE: Neil Croke, Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Services.

K. MARTIN: Kellee Martin, Assistant Deputy Minister, CBN Response and Recovery.

D. WOODROW: Denise Woodrow, Assistant Deputy Minister of Lands.

N. HILLIER: Nicholas Hillier, Executive Assistant to Minister Foresey.

L. SKINNER: Linda Skinner, Director of Communications.

S. RIDEOUT: Sara Rideout, Media Relations Manager.

B. NOFTALL: Brad Noftall, Departmental Controller.

CHAIR: Before we start the Estimates review process, the Committee will now consider the minutes of the previous meeting.

If there are no errors or omissions, I ask a mover for those minutes.

J. POWER: So moved.

CHAIR: The minutes are moved by the Member for Labrador West.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: We will now proceed to the Estimates review process. Once I ask the Clerk to call the first subheading group for this head of expenditure, I will proceed to recognize the minister, who will get 15 minutes for the opening remarks. Then I'll proceed to introduce the first questioner from the Committee, who will get 15 minutes for questions in the first round. After the first round, questions will proceed with a round of 10 minutes each, alternating between Members of the Committee.

I now ask the Clerk to read the first subhead.

CLERK (Beazley): For the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

I now recognize the minister for opening remarks.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

Welcome everyone, of course, to the Estimates of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands. It's my first Estimates as minister, so I appreciate everyone being here and appreciate the staff for coming in and doing their work on this budget. It is great to be here.

Just a few notes on the department, the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands is responsible for managing and conserving resources that mean so much to all of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, with regard to forestry, agriculture, lands and where we make a living and enjoy recreation.

Recently, we were joined with the Emergency Services Division; it's good to see all that brought under one roof. We know that only happened probably six weeks ago. We had two good Incident Management Teams from the Emergency Services and the Forestry, and they work gracefully and professionally along with each other at many events, storms, emergencies and different events. They have worked together and collaborated together, so joining those two divisions under one roof, I mean to say, it just fits together. It just makes sense. I'm pleased to have all that department under one roof and, I must say, working efficiently together.

Certainly, we all saw what happened with regard to emergencies in the past few years, especially with the storms. We've seen snowstorms; we've seen floods, water, winds and that kind of stuff, hurricanes and, of course, then we also saw the devastation that happened in Conception Bay North last year and how those teams worked together. We're getting ready and preparing for this season coming up so just having the two teams together is certainly a big benefit to us and, especially, to the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador. We appreciate having them together.

The department employs approximately 800 people working in five branches throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Our government certainly is investing in local agriculture so we can grow more of what we eat and eat more of what we grow. We just put more funding into agriculture. We work with the farmers; I've had meetings with farmers. I know when I started in November, we met with the Federation of Agriculture and we met with the egg farmers. I met with a lot of farmers in their initiatives as we move along into this season.

Last year, you saw what happened and you've heard some of the stories with regard to the farmers, how the drought, because of the hot temperatures and hot seasons, affected them. We stepped in with some AgriRecovery and the programs, AgriStability. We increased the AgriRecovery amounts to include feed and that kind of stuff for the farmers.

We've been helping the farmers already, so we'll continue to do that work as we move along into this year, and talk to the farmers and work with the farmers to have that work started for this year so we can get back to having our farms working relatively well and initiatives for the farmers. I mean to say, the programs are already there of course, the PAAP programs and the SCAP programs. Those programs are efficient and working for the farmers, but there are also other things we can do, equipment banks and whatnot.

We worked efficiently with the farmers. We want to put some initiatives in place, so we'll be working with the farmers, like I said, and we'll also get ready for this year's season and open up more land for the farmers and keeping with the programs and that. We have approximately 540 farms in our province with more than 800 primary sector workers. In 2025, farm cash receipts totalled \$165.7 million, an increase of nearly 3 per

cent compared to 2024. The volume of milk sold by Newfoundland and Labrador Dairy Farmers in 2025 remained on par with 2024, totalling nearly 49 kilolitres.

We've also met with the Dairy Farmers; we've met with the dairy people and the association. I am after having meetings with all those groups and individuals, and they have expressed what they need, what they feel we can do, and of course we'll be introducing our 10-year plan. Those are the people we will be talking to, the people who know how to grow it and the people who know how to do it, and that will be the farmers, of course, the dairy farmers, the root crop farmers, all types of farmers, egg farmers. How we get to those levels and how we do it, those are the people that we have to talk to. I think we all know that. We have to talk to our farmers and get that experience and knowledge that we grow more of what we eat and eat more of what we grow. That will be a part of our 10-year plan.

Our Agriculture staff provide advisory and support services for development of the farming industry, including funding and insurance programs, and I just mentioned some of those. The staff here have worked well with the farmers. I know they have. I mentioned the AgriStability and AgriRecovery; I know the staff here have been diligent with working with the farmers on that, getting their applications in and getting their approvals out as fast as they can. I'd like to thank them for that because it was a lot of work.

We'll be making more Crown land available for agriculture. We recently aligned the Lands-related divisions under a dedicated assistant deputy minister to focus on continuously improving Crown Lands processes. By putting one ADM for Crown Lands, that will speed up the Crown lands process. We're working to have initiatives in place for Crown Lands. We've all heard, certainly, the stories with Crown Lands, approvals and wait times and that kind of

stuff, so we've dedicated one ADM to Crown Lands for more efficiency of that program. That's the stuff in regard to Crown Lands.

Our Forestry, Wildlife and Resource Enforcement teams are working to manage, conserve and protect our forest and wildlife. The staff in Forestry, they're already doing a lot of work, like Forest Management plans and how we're going to deal with the forestry management. Of course forest fires is another big thing. We have our forest fire people on hand and that sort of stuff, that comes under Forestry, and our Resource people and our firefighters. We know we have to protect our forests, because of the forestry industry that we do have. We'll be working diligently with that.

The provincial government's Wildlife staff, Resource Enforcement officers and Regional Services teams are committed to serving and protecting wildlife resources. Their work to promote safe, knowledgeable and responsible hunting and safety practices is crucial. From licensing and wildlife surveys, research, education and habitat monitoring, our Wildlife staff manages the province's game species and work to conserve species at risk.

Their work supports sectors like outfitting, which employs 1,300 people, mainly in rural communities and generates more than \$50 million annually in revenue for our province. Their work is also key to nearly 10,000 citizens who have accounts in our wildlife management system and pursue hunting as a source of food and outdoor passion.

As global markets evolve, we are working with industry partners to help modernize and diversify the forestry sector and remain committed to strengthening the province's forest industry.

While provincial lumber production is projected to increase by 10 per cent in 2026, approximately 110 million board feet, North American lumber prices are facing a

nearly 12 per cent decrease in 2026. Our staff continues to work on forest ecomanagement systems, activities such as wood supply analysis, industry development and forest inventories. We manage and monitor more than 12,000 kilometres of resource roads and oversee harvesting and operations.

That's an interesting point because we do that 12,000 kilometres of resource roads and agriculture roads and I think the previous minister of Transportation said there's about 10,000 kilometres of roads and highways in the province on regular roads; and we do 12,000.

Our Wildlife services division and Emergency Services branch are fundamental to our government's commitment to safer communities. That's something that we're concentrating on is safer communities for all of us throughout our province.

We have ensured communities are better prepared to respond to increasing wildfire risk. We have committed more funding for wildland firefighters, volunteer firefighter training, equipment and fire prevention mitigation and planning. Of course, we just put funding into the Wildfire Prevention Mitigation Program. The first round, we received 133 applications, maybe a little over. I think it were 58 communities that we gave the program to help their – and everybody who was interested in it, I must say. They were eager to get some funding to help plan for and educate their communities on protecting their communities with regard to the Wildfire Prevention Mitigation Program.

With regard to safer communities, I've seen it so far this year, the awareness alone, I'll say that because even from the communities, you'll see communities, they'll post stuff. You'll hear them on the news. There are people talking and they're really talking about safer communities. Now they

can protect their own communities and do their part, as well as us.

With regard to Fire and Emergency Services, that's something that we just brought the two teams together and we just announced, in the budget alone, enhancements for Fire and Emergency Services, equipment for the volunteer firefighters, initiatives in the budget to enhance Emergency Services. We put more money in the emergency system for radios. We put \$4.16 million into tools and equipment. We also put funding into the programs for firefighters. We'll be hiring more firefighters for the upcoming seasons. We've done a lot of initiatives so far with regard to our department and we'll be putting more emphasis on working within our department to make our communities safer as we move along.

As we go through our Estimates, you'll see some of where we're going to be doing some of our initiatives and what we have in place and we've already done. We'll be engaging with everyone on what we have to do.

Of course, in *Budget 2026*, we're also investing \$25 million to – pending those final decisions, which we are anticipated to make over the coming months. We are doing what we can. That \$25 million was to rebuild Conception Bay North. A Cabinet Committee has been established and that's chaired by the Minister of Finance with memberships including the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Minister of Housing and myself, of course. That's who's on that Committee. Through work through the Committee, we will be also working with the communities of CBN.

Thanks to everyone in the department and I'll let the Estimates begin.

CHAIR: I now call on the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

To begin, I say to the minister, you certainly have good staff. You're in good hands. I know four, I worked with when I was there. I know some of the others in different roles or whatever, but you're in good hands. That's important to know, as a minister.

You talked about meeting with farmers and stuff, let me ask you a question: Did you dig any potatoes yet?

P. FORSEY: So far this year?

E. LOVELESS: Yeah. You visited a lot of farms but did you dig any potatoes yet?

P. FORSEY: Oh yes, I've dug potatoes.

E. LOVELESS: On those farms?

P. FORSEY: I've planted potatoes.

E. LOVELESS: I was going to say, I did.

P. FORSEY: I've planted potatoes, Sir, yes.

E. LOVELESS: Do you know what? Laughter is good medicine, but it is important, though, because we did go to a lot of farmers and see what they actually do. Because when you see what they do and appreciate that, then it makes it better going back to the office and making your decisions as to what can we do to make their work easier.

I don't need to tell you that in terms of farmers and getting out there and meeting them and seeing the challenges that they have, so we can help them. That's the bottom line. It's not a complex process. It's certainly a simple one, as far as I'm concerned, but we need to get out and show them that government appreciates what they're doing, but how can we help them to move forward because we know they are facing challenges.

Minister, in your opening remarks, I think you referenced a 10-year plan. Is that new?

P. FORSEY: That is new, yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay, has it been publicly introduced or announced?

P. FORSEY: We're putting work in place now to have that 10-year plan put in place, yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay, so for clarification, it's a 10-year plan but it hasn't been announced yet?

P. FORSEY: It hasn't been announced, no.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I'm going to start off, just for process, I'm going to go section by section. My colleague is going to do some sections as well around the Fire and Emergency piece.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

E. LOVELESS: I'll do some line by line and I'll have some general questions within the section, if that's good with you.

1.1.01, Minister's Office, you're pretty precise in terms of spending your dollars where last year was \$276,000, \$276,000 and \$276,000 in terms of Salaries.

Minister, in terms of the Minister's Office, how many staff do you have?

P. FORSEY: Staff in the Minister's Office, we have four. We have the minister, the liaison, the secretary and the EA, yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Under 1.1.01, the Transportation and Communications there saw an increase. It was budgeted at \$59,000 and revised to \$84,000. What was the increase of that \$25,000 for?

P. FORSEY: That was increased travel and support with regard to the two ministers'

offices during the transition into the new department structure.

E. LOVELESS: Moving down to 1.2.01, Executive Support, what was budgeted and what was revised from last year is – if I have my math correct – around the \$2-million mark, which is an increase. Can you explain that increase, please?

P. FORSEY: That was the additional salary costs due to filling the ADM positions.

E. LOVELESS: Can we get a breakdown of that \$2 million for the ADM positions?

J. CHIPPETT: That's when the merger of Emergency Services and FAL came together. The salaries would have been reprofiled from Justice into that number you're seeing there. That number, the \$1.7 million, includes the six ADMs in the department.

E. LOVELESS: So there were additional ADMs created, correct?

J. CHIPPETT: Not created but moved into the department from Justice. That would have been Emergency Services and the CBN recovery ADM.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Moving to 1.2.02, Policy, Planning and Administration, Salaries, what was budgeted and revised went down last year, and this year it has been estimated for more than what was budgeted in '25-'26. Can someone explain that?

J. CHIPPETT: The decrease in revised in '25-'26 was due to position vacancies, positions that would have been under recruitment and so on. At the time, the revised was calculated for Estimates. Then, with respect to '26-'27, some of what's making up that increase is salary adjustments. People might have been hired or moved to new steps in the pay scale, and there is one additional position there based

on the restructuring, the splitting of the policy and planning divisions into a Policy and Planning Division and position in FA and a Policy and Planning Branch and position in FAL.

E. LOVELESS: So all the positions have been filled?

J. CHIPPETT: Not all filled at this point in time, but recruitment under way.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Under that same section, we have Revenue - Provincial, what was budgeted was \$2,000 and the revised amount was \$500,000. Can someone just explain where that revenue came from and why it went from \$2,000 to \$500,000?

P. FORSEY: That was the interchange from the diversification programs from the forestry industry and the Canada interchange agreements.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you for that answer.

Moving down to 1.2.03, Administrative Support, under Supplies, if someone could explain, what was revised was a little higher but what has been estimated this year is nothing, it's blank, and there was nothing budgeted for Purchased Services and revised at over \$500,000.

Can someone explain why there is estimated to be nothing there?

J. CHIPPETT: The budget in '25-'26, this is the general capital account for capital works that are done in the department. The budget is allocated in Property, Furnishings and Equipment at the beginning of the year and then, as expenses are incurred, it's moved into those other lines.

As an example, you mentioned the \$2.7 million in the Purchased Services in budget 2025-26, and those amounts are above in revised: \$14,800 in Transportation and

Communications; \$390,000 in Supplies; and \$633,100 in Purchased Services; or elements of a capital project that was being carried out at Salmonier Nature Park.

That's the same approach in terms of the \$1.8 million in '26-'27. The last year of the capital infrastructure project at Salmonier Nature Park is contained in that \$1.8 million, as is the last year of funding under federal Fighting and Managing Wildfires agreement.

E. LOVELESS: Under the Revenue - Federal piece there you received over \$1 million last year, and that's cost-shared with the federal government, correct? Is that cost-shared or just outright revenue from the feds?

J. CHIPPETT: That would have been the third year of the Fighting and Managing Wildfire Agreement. That agreement was fifty-fifty, so that would be 50 per cent of the total allocation for last year.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I'm just going to change course a little bit in terms of just asking a couple of questions. I'm going to go outside of the first subhead – my time is four minutes – because 1.2.03, that's the whole section, correct? Am I right in that?

J. CHIPPETT: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

While I have a bit of time before we go to the others, what are the long-term plans for Corner Brook Pulp and Paper in terms of employment and the operations? Can you comment on how many paper machines – if I have the terminology correct – are operating currently? Can people of the Corner Brook and Western Region be confident that Corner Brook Pulp and Paper does have a plan for long term?

J. CHIPPETT: Corner Brook Pulp and Paper has developed a diversification plan,

which has been spoken about publicly. The government continues to hold regular discussions with Corner Brook Pulp and Paper on that diversification plan.

Of course, from an operational perspective, Corner Brook Pulp and Paper had shut down in the summer, I think it was, late fall –

OFFICIAL: Late summer, early fall.

J. CHIPPETT: Late summer, early fall, I mean, due to water levels in Grand Lake. It came back on stream in February with one paper machine operating at that point in time, but holding employment levels steady.

The government continues to talk to Corner Brook Pulp and Paper on its diversification plan.

E. LOVELESS: What are the employment levels right now?

J. CHIPPETT: Around 400 – I think 380 in the mill and 20 people at Deer Lake Power.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I'm going to park it at that for now; I do have other questions but I'll let others jump into the –

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I think you, Minister, mentioned that there were four people in the minister's office. How many overall are currently employed in the department and how many are vacant?

J. CHIPPETT: There are 801 positions in the department – this data is of April 1. Chair, 533 of those are filled; 132 of those are seasonal staff that, in fact, may have been recalled since April 1. You'd have firefighters and you'd have conservation officers at Wooddale in those numbers. There are 65 positions in the recruitment

phase and there are 71 positions that are vacant or people are on leave from those positions.

J. DINN: Of the 71 vacant or on leave, would you be able to give a breakdown of that?

J. CHIPPETT: I don't have the breakdown on those. I do have breakdowns I can provide on each division and what the vacancies are. We could get the vacant, on leave ones broken down as well.

J. DINN: Okay.

What is the breakdown of vacancies per division?

J. CHIPPETT: Executive Support, just do that section – there are 16 vacant in Executive Support. There are 52 vacant in Agriculture and Food Security. That's the entire branch. There are 107 vacant in Forestry and Wildlife. Some of those would obviously be seasonal positions, 75 seasonal. Then there are three vacant in Emergency Services.

J. DINN: Okay.

If I may, when you're looking at a complement, you're including the seasonal as well. So there are 107 that are vacant in Forestry and Wildlife, or is that a fact that maybe some seasonal haven't been hired there yet?

J. CHIPPETT: There are 75 in Forestry and Wildlife –

J. DINN: Oh, 75 that are –

J. CHIPPETT: – that are seasonal.

J. DINN: Roughly then about another 30 or so, I guess, are vacant.

J. CHIPPETT: I have 37 are in recruitment phase.

J. DINN: When did these recruitment phases start?

J. CHIPPETT: It varies by position. I don't have that level of detail with me.

J. DINN: How long have those positions been vacant?

J. CHIPPETT: I don't have that detail either. I know there are several competitions on the board now for conservation officers and for conservation officers in Resource Enforcement Division and for conservation officers associated with the forest fire program.

J. DINN: Would it be possible to get that, when the positions became vacant? I mean, there must be some, at some point, when someone said I'm retiring, I'm leaving, I got another job, fired or whatever else. The reason I'm asking is I'm trying to get a sense of just how well staffed the department is to do the work it needs to do.

It's one thing if you got vacancies that existed for a month versus vacancies that have been ongoing for several years, then there's a problem there and recruiting there, whether those positions are in remote areas, office, field work, whatever else. With regard to the Forestry and Wildlife – and I assume some of those are enforcement, seasonal jobs – correct?

J. CHIPPETT: That's correct.

J. DINN: What's the vacancy rate in the seasonal work and if there's a recruitment phase to it, what are the challenges – I guess do you fill the positions successfully each year? Some people come back, but I also know some people who say I'm not coming back, I'm retired now more or less or I didn't like the work, whatever.

J. CHIPPETT: So there are several answers, I think, to that question. We do find it harder to recruit in rural communities. You'll see in some parts of the Estimates to

come that some of our Transportation and Communications lines are elevated because, for example, when there's a significant forest fire, we have to move people around to put more people in a particular area and then we need to backfill those positions in other areas.

It is a little more challenging in rural areas, but as an example, we have recruitments on the board for, I want to say, is it 27 –

OFFICIAL: Yes.

J. CHIPPETT: – 27 resource enforcement officers right now and we've had some success is my understanding in a strong application pool for those.

J. DINN: If I'm understanding it correctly then, in rural areas, maybe it's the fact that people have to be moved around, makes it difficult to recruit as well. Would that be it or?

J. CHIPPETT: I probably wasn't clear; the movement occurs when we can't recruit.

J. DINN: Okay.

Here's my question – and I don't know if you've done exit interviews of people who didn't come back to find out why. In a rural area, do you have any understanding as to why it's so difficult to recruit in a rural area?

J. CHIPPETT: Do you want to take that one, Blair?

B. ADAMS: I mean, the challenge of recruiting in a rural area first off is just the available labour pool in rural areas is much smaller than larger centres, so there are just less people applying for the positions. Many of our positions require technical skill sets and training. Finding someone who has the appropriate training to be a wildland firefighter or silviculture worker in a rural area can be challenging, so the pool of people who apply are small.

The other piece is that they are generally CL1 positions that are often entry-level positions. Folks who do come in those positions are often looking to move up to higher level positions in the department so they move on fairly quickly. There's a natural turnover in those positions as well, just in terms of a large number of positions so you get a natural vacancy rate. All those things combine to create a fairly regular turnover. We work pretty hard to recruit and fill those positions.

J. DINN: Have there been other considerations of incentives to recruit people to these areas?

B. ADAMS: Yes, absolutely.

In particular, in Labrador, we've been working on some housing solutions, to provide housing to people in places like Port Hope Simpson so that we can recruit the wildland firefighters in those areas.

J. DINN: I would assume that the recruiting of wildland firefighters is one thing, but if you're recruiting an enforcement officer it might be very difficult in a small community, especially if you know everyone around there. You bring people into a position of conflict, I guess, in many ways with their family and friends and so on and so forth.

That's it for me for that section.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive, Executive and Support Services.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 to 1.2.03 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.03 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.4.02 inclusive, Forestry, Wildlife and Resource Enforcement.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.4.02 inclusive carry?

I now call on the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

Just a couple of questions before I get into 2.1.01. The minister mentioned forest roads, 12,000 kilometres of forest roads. I believe in the budget there was mention of forest roads and some increased funding for upgrading of forest roads. Was that in the budget?

P. FORSEY: Yes, you'll see that further down in the budget there where it's listed for the forest roads; you'll see the figure once we move down further in the Estimates for the forest roads.

E. LOVELESS: I mean, 12,000 kilometres of roads for forest roads, what prompted you to make the decision that you need to upgrade more of those roads? I'm assuming it's a challenge for staff to upgrade these roads or upkeep them. What evidence was put before you to make that decision that you need to invest more in upgrading those forest roads?

P. FORSEY: That's also for agricultural land, too, with regard to getting to the resource roads to agricultural lands and that sort of stuff. So we need to put money into roads. You'll see down as we move through

Estimates, the funding that's available there for those roads.

E. LOVELESS: Move on to 2.1.01, Administration and Program Planning, in the description there it says wood supply analysis. Could we get a breakdown of allocations, I guess, of logging for all zones in the province?

P. FORSEY: We can get you a breakdown of that.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I guess it's a good point for me to ask, in terms of the binders at the end, will we be provided with one?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

J. CHIPPETT: We have thumb drives.

E. LOVELESS: There you go, technology.

Moving down into some of the Estimate lines, under Purchased Services there, because most of the lines in terms of Salaries was pretty consistent, but if you don't mind me asking, the \$2.8 million represents, what salaried positions under that heading?

P. FORSEY: Did you say under Purchased Services?

E. LOVELESS: No, I'm asking 2.1.01 under Salaries, \$2.9 million was budgeted, \$2.8 million was spent, \$2.8 million is revised again this year. What positions fall under that salary category?

P. FORSEY: That was a variance due to salary adjustments.

E. LOVELESS: No, I'm not asking about the amount, I'm asking what positions fall under the \$2.8 million salary?

P. FORSEY: Oh the positions.

E. LOVELESS: What type of positions, titles and –

P. FORSEY: Okay.

B. ADAMS: There would be a variety of positions under that. We'd have our forest management planners who do the development of forest management plans. We'd have our inventory people who actually go out and record the data in the forests. We'd have our photo interpreters who take the aerial photography and interpret that and build the inventory. Then we'd have our foresters who do our computer modelling to develop the wood supply models and everything that goes along with that. We'd have some folks who do support for industry services and administrative staff to go along with that. It's sort of the strategic management of forestry for the branch.

E. LOVELESS: Just a question. In terms of the fires that we've had, it's destroying timber. Is that becoming a concern for you in terms of your analysis of timber availability for loggers? Is that becoming a concern?

B. ADAMS: Not at this time. This past year, we had just over 18,000 hectares of forests burn, whereas we're talking about millions of hectares of forested land in the province, so it's a pretty small percentage overall. It's not big enough, at this time, in terms of forest fires that affect the wood supply.

E. LOVELESS: Okay. But it's on the radar?

B. ADAMS: Yeah, we're certainly cognizant of it.

E. LOVELESS: Hopefully it won't become a concern.

B. ADAMS: When we do the wood supply analysis, we put in a small percentage of average loss to fires every year so we account for that in our modelling.

E. LOVELESS: Sure. Yes.

So under Purchased Services, what was budgeted and what was revised was an increase of approximately \$55,000. What was the increase for?

P. FORSEY: That was funding that was utilized for the Labrador satellite-based forestry inventory and cover.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I think it was the minister who referenced more money for radios. What type of radios and who are using those radios in your department?

P. FORSEY: That would be under the Emergency Services and that's the P25 radios.

E. LOVELESS: 2.1.02, can you give me a status update on – forgive me if I'm categorizing in the right words – the fire centre that was announced for Gander? Where's that in terms of planning?

P. FORSEY: Of course, the fire centre is still strategic with regard to the FPC. We train our firefighters out there. That's where most of the firefighters will be based. Some will be dispersed throughout the province, but they'll be based in Gander and all our equipment is based there. That's where we have our aerial, our water bombers and such for the aerial. All that's still there in Gander with regard to that.

E. LOVELESS: Are there any new plans for expansion in terms of real estate?

P. FORSEY: We'll always be looking at upgrading our FPC, our Fire Protection Centre. We're utilizing that as much as possible and upgrade it where we can.

E. LOVELESS: Moving on to 2.1.02, Operations and Implementation, the Salaries there last year what was budgeted and the revised amount was over half a

million dollars. Can someone explain the increase of that half a million dollars?

J. CHIPPETT: So a couple of things are going on there. Just for context, a similar answer to what we talked about before, that Blair gave on positions in the previous one. These are conservation officers in the 35 regional forestry offices across the province, the district offices.

There's always some overtime involved with those jobs anyway, in particular with respect to moose-vehicle collisions and callouts to deal with roadkill animals and so on. But the other piece here is some of these people would have worked to backfill people who had gone to work on forest fires, so there would be additional wages for overtime for those.

E. LOVELESS: How many of those district forestry offices are in the province?

J. CHIPPETT: Thirty-five – 30 on the Island and five in Labrador.

E. LOVELESS: Just for clarification, one would be Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir, right? What's the complement of staff in that office?

B. ADAMS: I believe there are three staff there now, but I can confirm for you.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I think there were more at one point in that office. Can you confirm how many was in that office?

B. ADAMS: I don't know the historical number there, but I'll get that for you as well.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Minister, do you feel that three is suffice in terms of that operation of that office in Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir?

P. FORSEY: How many do we have now?

B. ADAMS: Three.

P. FORSEY: Are we recruiting any more – are there any more applications out or anything down there, Blair?

B. ADAMS: I think three are sufficient there now. We have 35 offices spread around the province. We don't have, generally, large numbers of staff at any one location because we're covering a big region of the province, but what we do is we shift staff around to support people where it's needed. If we have some reason to need additional resources down in that area, then we'd bring them down from our Bishop Falls office or wherever we need it to support those staff.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I don't know the titles of them; I did know at one point, but I'm getting older now. Those three employees that are there, what are their responsibilities?

B. ADAMS: They would all be conservation officers. They'd have all the general roles and responsibilities that conservation officers would have under the Forestry Branch. They'd be involved in potential forest management and planning, issuing domestic cutting permits, doing any silviculture work that might need to be done. They'd also potentially be involved in fire response down on the region if that was required.

They would not be involved in enforcement because that's done by the Resource Enforcement.

CHAIR: The Member's time has expired.

E. LOVELESS: Really?

CHAIR: It is. Time goes by when you're having fun.

E. LOVELESS: I'll be back.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Carbonear -Trinity - Bay de Verde.

R. BALSOM: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I believe you said that you're spending money on 32 new positions in Wildfire Services with an additional \$3.1 million for the Community Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program, along with other wildfire initiatives. Could you tell the Committee what you are doing in relation to these positions, what's the funding for and what other initiatives you are spending money on that's going to create safer communities from a wildfire perspective?

P. FORSEY: Are you talking about the \$7 million that we announced in the budget, that part of it, all the funding there, or just the part on the emergency services?

R. BALSOM: The \$3.1 million for the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program.

P. FORSEY: Okay, the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Program, that was done through the programs for communities, for putting plans in place with regard to what they do in education throughout the communities. Through the FireSmart programs, educating them through that. They'll put the funding towards that and they'll get the plans in place, especially around vegetation, around the area, any foliage, cleaning up brush that's close to the communities, cleaning that up.

Having people in their communities putting away stuff that's in their backyards, taking it out of there, especially wood products, cleaning all that up and having a base there away from the wooded areas, forest fire areas. Fire areas can be grass as well; dry grass is considered fire fuel. So cleaning all that up and that program was put in, some funding, for the people to have that done, communities. Of course, we've also put in

funding for wildfire suits for firefighters and that stuff in the communities.

That's some of the initiatives that we've put in place. We've put a lot of funding into the fire protection in communities, especially our volunteer firefighters and the committees and working with the communities so that we can have those programs in place. We did one round, I think, it was probably, what, a month ago, two months ago now –

OFFICAL: April 7.

P. FORSEY: April 7, we did that one. I think there's another round that will go out in the near future, probably, in the next couple of months anyway.

Again, with the applications that we did receive, it was 133 applications that we did receive and we were able to give 58 communities \$2.26 million so they can go out and educate their communities on having their plans in place and protecting their communities.

It's great initiatives that are put in place for communities to stay safe, which is part of what we said we wanted to do was to make safer communities. Those programs go a long way and people are interested. The big thing I see is the interest in it for people to take part. Especially wildfire prevention this time around, they're really concerned about that.

One initiative was GlobalMedic – it wasn't us; it was GlobalMedic that gave us the tanks for the communities for forest fires for firetrucks – use their pickups for having their water tanks. I must say I would like to say thank you to GlobalMedic for that, for taking on that initiative themselves – \$4,000 each, I think, they were on a price value to four communities to have in their trucks.

I think in the first round they donated 32 and they were out in February and then, only a couple of weeks ago, they committed

another 32 to us, which is a great initiative just from GlobalMedic themselves. They see the eagerness to have safer communities here and they partner with our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to give us that initiative.

Initiatives like this throughout the communities and what we can put into our communities to keep our communities safe, we've all seen it. We don't need to talk about it a big lot. We do need to talk about it, of course, but we don't need to be told anymore of what we need to do because we need to know our communities have to be safe and we need to know that we have to put programs and initiatives in place, work with our volunteer firefighters, work with our communities and keep our communities safe.

By doing those programs with the communities, we'll certainly be able to provide some education. Education is the big thing – awareness and education, and I've seen that it's working because communities are getting involved and they're putting their own posts up and they're getting their own communities involved in doing things that they can do for their communities, which is great. We can provide the funding for them; they can do the education. We can also train their firefighters, go in and train some of them with wildland firefighting so that we can have those firefighters ready for this season.

Those are a lot of the initiatives that we've been doing with regard to those types of programs, and of course we'll continue to work with communities. Whatever awareness we can put out there, working with communities to ensure that we do have the safer communities and protected as best we can – especially our volunteer firefighters. They do professional and great jobs for what they do. The more we can help those people out to do their jobs as efficiently as they can and professionally as they can, that is what government can do. I

think we've done those initiatives, and we'll continue to do those initiatives.

With regard to emergency plans, we put in funding for emergency planning. There are five positions being hired for Emergency Services so we can get the planning done and in place for emergencies and those areas. That's another great initiative.

We saw, certainly, in the Auditor General's report about the emergency services and what needed to be done, so we're preparing to put funding into that. We will continue to work with the plans for communities putting emergency plans in place. We're working and doing their plans, our own provincial plans and our own departmental plans. We've already accepted all the recommendations of the Auditor General. We'll certainly be working to get those in place as soon as possible, because our emergency plans, our community safety and protecting our communities with what we can do to protect all our communities and keep all our residents safe has to be top priority.

We've been warned, and not only warned by what we've seen, we've been warned by Mother Nature herself with regard to the wildfires and with regard to storms, wind, hurricanes. We've been warned. I don't know how many more warnings we need, really. We know that we have to put initiatives and planning in place to keep our communities safe and, moving forward, that's what we'll be doing.

Thanks for that question. That was somebody to give us a chance to elaborate on some of the initiatives that we have been doing. We've been doing more with regard to Emergency Services and protection within the communities, but we did have some more budgetary things this year, of course, for exactly those initiatives that we just talked about, some of those protections, precautions and that kind of stuff that we can do. As we move along, we'll be putting

more funding into that and working with communities and keeping them safe.

That's what we're doing on that one.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

I, too, would like to thank the department. I remember, of course, it wasn't that long ago – just last summer – when we were faced with multiple wildfires, obviously in Conception Bay North, but in Holyrood and different parts of the province as well. It was all of you who were out there, and we'll never forget that.

As the minister said, wildfires are not just something that are happening in other provinces. Please, God, we don't see that to this degree, but thank you for everything that you've done last year. It was a summer like none other, unprecedented. So thank you for that.

Minister, I'm going to ask, with regard to the \$2.26 million, how were the communities chosen for the programs? How did the amounts get decided with regard to the distribution and allocations for that funding that was recently announced last month?

P. FORSEY: I'll start it, but I'll get my ADM to jump in there to elaborate more on that question.

That was done through an application process through our department. There was an application process there, basically, for education. If the application was due to educating their communities – not for equipment, that \$2.26 million in those applications didn't go in for equipment. That went in there for what they were going to do with regard to training, and there were firebreaks in there as well.

You might have seen some of the bigger funding that went out. I think, I'll say,

Lewisporte was somewhere around \$200,000 or somewhere in that area?

P. PARSONS: \$200,000, yes.

P. FORSEY: Blair can jump in here, but I think that was to do with some firebreaks that they already were going to put in place. They had the work done on the firebreaks and some planning in there.

Other communities just wanted to do some more planning, and others probably had some work in place that they could get some brush cut and that kind of stuff and, through that, that's how the communities were chosen. There was a committee formed and they chose them due to their planning and their budgeting of what they needed.

Blair, you can just touch in a little bit more if I'm missing something on that?

B. ADAMS: Maybe I'll give a little context. Over the last couple of years, Canada has been facing similar summers that we just saw last year all across the country. It's a growing issue nationally.

The Canadian Council of Forest Ministers, all the jurisdictions across Canada working together, developed a Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation strategy, and that formed a basis for these agreements that the federal government did with provinces across Canada. Those agreements take a whole-of-society approach; the whole idea is to really engage all of your community, work hard to educate communities and do a lot of planning, because that goes a long way in terms of preventing forest fires. That's one of the most effective tools we have.

In this particular case, what the agreement with Canada laid out for us was the establishment of a prevention and mitigation advisory committee under the agreement. That committee is made up of technical experts and some folks in municipalities, Indigenous governments and organizations.

That was the group that did the initial technical review and evaluation of the proposals, and then they made a recommendation to the minister. That was the process that we went through.

Just to give a breakdown of what we had in plans, there were 14 Community Wildland Fire Resiliency Plans, these are of the 58 that were successful in their application. There were 14 fuel mitigation projects, people call them firebreaks, but it's the removal of fuel or vegetation in and around communities, and the largest one being the Lewisporte one that the minister referenced. Then there were four educational programs.

We were really pleased with the uptake and interest from people, no surprise after the last season, and we're looking forward to rolling out the next phase. We think there is going to be an even better response.

P. PARSONS: Yes, I think it would be safe to say that each and every department across the entire province would have applied. I would think or I would assume.

The current fire commissioner, that's an interim provincial fire commissioner, is he also on that committee as well?

B. ADAMS: No, the fire commissioner is not.

P. PARSONS: The recommendations that were made, can they be tabled? Did the minister implement each recommendation or did they vary? Did he go with all the recommendations from the committee or was there any change or any difference for the distribution of resources?

B. ADAMS: There was no change, we just went with the recommendations of the committee.

P. PARSONS: So that's where they all went, because the allocations for the \$2.26 million – so those recommendations, you didn't vary from that is what I'm asking. So

you just took the direct recommendations from there?

P. FORSEY: Yes, whatever the recommendations were.

You mentioned all communities applied; I don't think all communities applied. We received 133 applications and out of that there were 58 that were chosen. So that left, obviously, what's 58 out of – that's 76 or something applications still not done. So they can reapply in the new one and still go through the same process through the Committee and as they come down, they'll just choose them through the Committee and that's how they're chosen. That's exactly how it's done.

Yes, go ahead Blair.

B. ADAMS: I will add to that, that going forward we have six new Prevention and Mitigation staff under this program, a couple of coordinators at headquarters and then four regional staff who are involved in prevention and mitigation.

The role of those people is twofold. One is to work with the communities who've received these grants and help them implement them and help them understand how to deliver the projects that they're working on; and two is to help potential applicants prepare their applications so they can be successful in the process and provide good advice for the communities on how they develop their proposals or their applications so they meet the seven FireSmart principals that are prescribed under the agreement and under the Canadian Wildland Fire Prevention and Mitigation Strategy.

We're hoping that's going to help a lot of communities be successful in the application process.

P. PARSONS: When can we expect this second round? So this would be for protective gear because this one was for

education and prevention measure that they recently announcements, say, last month. So the next round of funding coming out, is that for the protective gear, the bunker gear and whatnot as firefighters now are going into the wildfire season?

P. FORSEY: So you're talking about the next round now from the \$2.26 million, the ones we just did, the Fire Prevention Mitigation one?

P. PARSONS: The next round that would –

P. FORSEY: So the next round of this one would be, I think, somewhere close to or around July for the \$2.26 million, that's part of the federal initiatives. That'll still be through planning and education, basically, in the communities and fire breaks. That's the funding that we're talking about is that one there. That's where that \$2.26 million went this time and that's where more funding will be going in the next round – you did mention the next round.

There was no equipment in that \$2.26 million that went out for Fire Prevention and Mitigation and neither will there be in next round, I'm assuming. They'll be the same applications for that funding. That's the program through the wildfire prevention and mitigation. That's what we're talking about here.

P. PARSONS: But for the gear, when can we expect that to come out, with applications that are currently submitted now with regard to helmets, the protective gear for individuals?

P. FORSEY: Applications are under review, and I'll just refer that one over to our deputy minister, Neil Croke, for an update.

N. CROKE: The program closed the end of March, so now the fire commissioner along with the fire protection officers are reviewing all the applications. What they'll do then is they rank them in a score based on who is in most need, usually is what happens, and

how then to share a region, if there are mutual aid services across different fire departments.

So we're hoping to have that completed now within the next couple of weeks and then we'll let you know. We'll do, I guess, a second assessment then, I sit with them and kind of go through it and we're hoping to have it out, hopefully, by some time in the next six to eight weeks.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

In time for getting into the wildfire. As we know, we've been seeing fires happen now. I've had several in my district, but I'll conclude on this section.

Traditionally, when those letters have gone out of approval to the towns and municipalities and the departments, the local MHAs are also cc'd on that. Can you confirm that will continue to happen, that the local MHA will be notified should any department within their district be approved for funding or if they're not? Can you guarantee that the MHA will be cc'd?

P. FORSEY: I have no problem cc'ing you on that.

P. PARSONS: All 40 districts, obviously?

P. FORSEY: We can't tell you every application that's in place, but if there is fire equipment that goes your way, I'm sure Neil – they'll let you know that there's stuff gone your way, right?

P. PARSONS: Right, traditionally, that's been the case where MHAs have been cc'd, going to their particular districts, so I ask that you please continue that for communication and a courtesy for the local MHA as well.

That's it for me for now.

P. FORSEY: Okay.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under section 2.2.01, Insect Control, would it be possible to have an update on the status of the Japanese beetle in this province?

J. CHIPPETT: So 2.2.01 relates primarily to forest pests, so largely the spruce budworm, but our Agriculture division is actually responsible for measures with respect to the Japanese beetle. You recall there was some spraying last year and additional traps and kind of a public awareness and education for people to report if they saw a beetle and what to do if they did see one and who to advise.

The same group that worked on that last year within agriculture continues to work on it with City of St. John's and government in terms of some of the transportation and infrastructure properties that have fields and so on associated with them. Generally, there will be more notifications to the public throughout the spring and summer.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Are there other invasive species that we monitor that might prove to be a threat to our forests, especially where the climate is warming up and we're seeing probably a lot more species of insect animals that didn't exist here before really.

B. ADAMS: Yeah, with climate change, invasive species is an absolute threat to our forest resources. Interestingly, it's not necessarily brand new things turning up here from a forestry perspective, which I think is more the case from an agricultural perspective, but pests that have been here at low prevalence, or low densities for a long time that may have been held in check by cooler weather, becoming more abundant and more active on the

landscape, and that's an increased risk to our forests.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Any in particular that's more concerning –

B. ADAMS: Currently, right now, we're dealing with the spruce budworm outbreak in the province but there are other species like woolly adelgid, as an example, and there are several beetle species that have caused damage, particularly on the West Coast.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

Under 2.2.02, Fire Suppression and Communications, what will the satellite infrastructure of the AWC in Wabush consist of?

J. CHIPPETT: Air services are obviously the responsibility of Transportation and Infrastructure. I do know they are working on provisions for Labrador West that would enable a water bomber to be located there. At this stage, those will be a temporary solution with other options in terms of other locations that the water bomber could be at in Labrador. But more for Transportation to answer than us.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is it possible to have a quick overview and update on our current fire suppression capabilities? I know some that were sort of talked about, but the size of the fleet and the numbers of the staff available during fire season.

J. CHIPPETT: The biggest piece in terms of structure is, based on the restructuring that occurred earlier with the change of FAL and FA into separate departments, we have a Wildfire Management division for the first time in the department. So there's a director and a manager associated with that.

We have a number of communications and dispatch positions – 10 in total; six wildfire prevention positions – Blair talked about those with respect to the Prevention and Mitigation Program. There are 75 seasonal firefighter positions, with 18 vacant positions that will be filled this spring.

There are 83 year-round district staff. We talked about those earlier. They participate in fire response, so those would be the people that would be in those individual 35 offices. There are 19 people who are in other jobs but who we call upon. They have the training and so on, if needed, from a wildfire perspective. Then, obviously, there will be 50 new firefighters hired between this year and next year on top of those numbers.

J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to fire suppression capability, I would assume then the water bombers and that would be in Transportation and Infrastructure?

J. CHIPPETT: That is correct.

J. DINN: Do you have any conversation with them around that kind of equipment in fire suppression or is that strictly within?

J. CHIPPETT: Within the fire season, when there are actual fires, there are daily meetings between our staff and folks in Transportation and Infrastructure. Our folks are the experts with respect to fire weather indices. Our fire weather stations, which we've enhanced in the last few years, give us detailed forecasts in very specific locations and that data is very important in terms of calculating the fire weather index. That is often what determines, of course, where water bombers are located during the fire season.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I guess right now, when it comes to the water bombers, there are five water bombers?

J. CHIPPETT: That's correct.

P. FORSEY: Yes.

J. DINN: And they're what? Are they the brand name of the –

P. FORSEY: CL-415s.

J. DINN: Okay.

I guess you have spotters or trackers or anything like that – I know there was some talk about tracking planes or spotters or bird dogs.

J. CHIPPETT: There are the five CL-415s that the minister talked about. We also avail of resources through CIFFC, which is Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. That's pretty close to what the acronym is. We avail of bird dog aircraft through what we call resource orders and, obviously, this summer past, additional aircraft in the form of water bombers or helicopters and so on that we might avail of through other jurisdictions across the country.

J. DINN: I was speaking to a pilot who flies the Fire Boss. It's a version of the Air Tractor 802 Fire Boss, but it's float equipped. He's a firefighter in Greece, in Australia – he's a Newfoundlander but he was talking about the safety features of this versus large planes, the capacity.

I think you can buy probably four or five Fire Bosses for the same price of, let's say, one of the 802s, \$4 million to \$5 million each, but the capacity and the sheer number of them probably make it more effective.

I guess where I'm going is, are there any discussions with Transportation, within government even to look at how to expand the fleet, maybe using this technology, the Fire Boss program, to expand the firefighting capabilities, especially if we end up with, and we probably will, more summers like we had this year past, and

that's going to become the normal in many ways, sadly.

J. CHIPPETT: I'd say two things. Number one is the 415s, from capacity perspective and so on, right now they are kind of the cream of the crop with respect to suppression. There is a process under way. You've probably seen some of the federal government announcements around funding for air assets that would be purchased nationally. Through that process and actually through the Emergency Management minister's group, as well, there have been assessments done of the air assets across Canada.

That is the discussion across the country. Certainly, any new technology, we're quite interested in that. We are looking, for this fire season, at the potential use of drones in terms of some of the abilities that they might provide to us, provided we can do so safely, obviously.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: I got lots of questions.

The minister, I think, said that fire mitigation plans, the funding – you referenced Lewisporte and other districts and why Lewisporte got that amount of money. I think you said 58 of the 171 was given out to various municipalities.

P. FORSEY: One hundred and thirty-three applications, 58 approvals.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

For clarification, the ones that didn't get approved have to apply again?

P. FORSEY: Yes, because there might have been something in their application or they might have applied for equipment or did something wrong there that the

application didn't apply to what they needed to apply for with regard to the process of the programs.

J. CHIPPETT: I can –

P. FORSEY: Okay, go ahead.

J. CHIPPETT: Just to speak to the process in a little bit more detail that Blair talked about and he gave the breakdown. So there were communities that were advanced in their planning. The primary reason Lewisporte was able to move forward or that project was able to move forward was because they were ready to go with fire breaks. Our staff and the committee thought they were well planned and could be executed safely and so on and so forth.

There were some applications, as an example, where people wanted to do fire breaks but they had not really identified areas for fire breaks. They were not planned to a sufficient level of detail to allow those types of projects to proceed in this round.

The reason a lot more of the 58 were about plans is because the logical next step from the plan is if you need to do fuel management and so on. So that's kind of the iterative process that we hope communities will go through.

To the minister's point, our staff – and Blair mentioned our six staff – they will be actively working with communities that weren't approved. Ideally, the people who didn't have advanced plans, like the Lewisporte example, would come back with an application to do the proper planning and do the proper investigation of the areas in their community that could need a firebreak or could need fuel management or what have you.

So we look at it as a very iterative process, but we would expect communities to come in with changes to some of those applications.

E. LOVELESS: A positive point and a negative point. They're going to be frustrated through that application process, especially if I put the application process in and did everything, everything is good, but I've got to reapply again. It's not just on this application process. That's happened through many of processes where communities come back and say, gosh, we've got to apply again.

So I guess I'm going to have to have a chat with that red tape office to let them know that it's something that should be considered because municipalities – we all know the challenges they have in terms of applications and processes and stuff like that.

But on a good point, what I'm hearing from you, Deputy, and from the minister, is that the more far advanced they are in terms of a town, then that's going to entice them to apply for even more funding because I think over the experiences of the forests fires on Bay d'Espoir Highway, the towns really appreciate that we need to have our own fire plans, our response plans. So this is a good thing for sure.

My only concern is that you provide money for fire mitigation plans, the plans will get put in place, but then there's going to be a cost to rolling out the plans to the municipalities. I guess they're going to be coming to the department and the government for more money.

We know that's going to come, and that's not a bad thing. I certainly preached it in the last fire we had, in terms of you've got to move now. You can't just rely on provincial governments to have your plan for your towns and your regions. They're there for help but you have to have your own thinking hat on.

In terms of the forest fire, the last fire – and I know the minister can appreciate the Bay d'Espoir Highway, and I know the ADM can appreciate it because I was like, don't close

it down unless you have to because when you close it down, it becomes a bigger problem than the actual fire itself because what goes on in the community, where you've got to go.

I guess this is more, not of a question, more of a suggestion or asking for help, and that help is part of the plan in even delivering government's responsibility in terms of fires, is that if that happened this year then I, as MHA, I'm pleading – I'm not saying it won't happen – that there would be regular updates for me and the mayors in the towns so we can help assess, locally and regionally, for that.

I guess I'm asking the question: Minister, can you guarantee that will happen if a fire happens this year and the Bay d'Espoir Highway is closed down?

P. FORSEY: I appreciate the fact that the Bay d'Espoir Highway – I mean we're bordering districts.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, you're going to finish paving 360 this year. I appreciate that.

P. FORSEY: Of course, you'll appreciate the fact that it's safety first.

E. LOVELESS: Absolutely.

P. FORSEY: If it comes to closing the Bay d'Espoir Highway, of course, we'll close the Bay d'Espoir Highway, right.

With regard to relaying messages to communities – yes, I don't see any problem why we can't relay as quick messages as we can with regard to safety purpose, whether that's through yourself or through your mayors of communities. Not every individual, of course, because you know how complex and how disorganized, probably, sometimes that gets.

When you've got a contact person, I can't see why we can't work together in some sort of way like that with regard to proving

what's happening and when we're going to do it, if it's going to close or going to open or what's in play – communication.

Probably through the emergency process – maybe Neil can step in there and just add in some more.

N. CROKE: Our role as PEOC, whenever there is a larger fire to the point that we're closing communities or highways, we will work with the municipalities and towns in the area to ensure that they're informed before we have to – unless it gets out of hand too quickly, sometimes that does happen, but our goal is to always engage with communities, that we have an open dialogue back and forth so that way they can be well-informed and be prepared so that way we try and give them notice so they can plan their steps out. Yes, we can commit to continuing that process.

E. LOVELESS: Okay. Good.

In terms of the Fire Suppression and Communication subhead, do we still have the friendly agreement with other provinces in terms of using their assets? Okay.

How much did we pay out last year to acquire their assets to fight our fires?

B. ADAMS: Our CIFFC resource orders, as we call them, which is our request for out-of-province resources, was \$6.7 million last year.

E. LOVELESS: \$6.7 million?

B. ADAMS: Yeah.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Quickly, under 2.2.02, under Transportation and Communications, what was budgeted and what was revised? There was an increase of over \$11 million. Can someone tell me what the \$11-million increase was for?

P. FORSEY: That was due to moving people around with regard to the forest fire in CBN, all the officials and paying overtime. That was part of the transportation costs in regard to the CBN fires.

J. CHIPPETT: Just to add to that. So the resource orders that Blair just talked about in terms of paying for out-of-province aircraft, they would be in that \$13 million. That would be in Purchased Services actually, sorry.

Transportation and Communications, the heavy helicopters you recall, the large aircraft that we brought in, some from the United States and some from out West, they would be in the \$13 million.

The other thing is we pay for resource orders under Purchased Services; all the fuel is contained in Transportation and Communications for those outside aircraft.

E. LOVELESS: So just one quick question. In terms of our assets and sharing them with other provinces, did we do any of that in 2025?

B. ADAMS: Yes, we did. In September, we sent some resources to Nova Scotia to assist them with some of their fires.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

My time is up on that, but I do have more questions. I don't know how that works.

CHAIR: Since we're about halfway through this meeting, it's a good time to stop for our 10-minute break. We'll reconvene at 7:45.

Recess

CHAIR: We'll continue on.

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under subhead 2.2.02, I think the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune – yeah, I got that right, that's the main thing. He asked about the friendly agreement with the provinces for firefighting. I think the answer was \$6.7 million for the cost to the province. Then I think it was mentioned that we often provide our services as well, or our equipment. So what would that cost us or is that borne by the other provinces?

J. CHIPPETT: Yeah, the beauty of CIFFC is there's a Mutual Aid Resource Sharing agreement. So if we utilize their aircraft, we pay, but well below market rate for that kind of aircraft. Similarly, when we ship ours out, there's a rate that is dictated in that agreement that they would pay us.

J. DINN: Okay.

I guess there's no reconciliation of such that's due. There's just a straight in and out, you pay for service and they pay. So, in the end, do we take in more money than we pay out? I'm just trying to think of the balance. Like, do we draw on those resources more than they draw on ours?

J. CHIPPETT: I think yes. If you look at 2025 as an example, we certainly used resources from outside the province much more than our resources were used outside of the province, but generally speaking it really depends on the respective fire seasons across the country in terms of resource use.

If we have a forest fire season that starts late, with a forest fire season normally starting much earlier on the Mainland, then our resources are in higher demand. But when everybody is within the fire season, sometimes it can be difficult. It's not just a question of how much we want to utilize or they want to utilize; it's also a question of availability in terms of the fire risk in any individual province.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Do you track, over the years, track those sharing of services and the cost?

B. ADAMS: We do track those costs. It's highly variable from one year to the next, as Jamie suggested. In 2023, as an example, we took in \$2.4 million in revenue through the MARS agreement for sending staff and aircraft out of the province. That was quite a quiet year for this province, but it was a devastating year for Western Canada. We sent a number of resources out there.

One of the big non-financial benefits we get of sending staff out of province is the training and experience that staff get. When we have our incident command folks go out and participate in the incident command system in BC or Alberta on these massive fires and big events, they bring back a wealth of experience that we didn't have available to us here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's a huge benefit of that agreement beyond the financial piece.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I'm not challenging the program; that's not my purpose in asking the question, but would it be possible to have maybe that data for the last 10 or 15 years? My reason for asking is to see if, indeed, it's been increasing, the amount, the cost both ways and if that's related probably to climate change but, more importantly, I guess, whether we should be investing more ourselves as well.

I think the fact that we learn information from other provinces is fantastic. I will never be looking to cut the budget here on that one. That's not my purpose in asking it, but I wouldn't mind having, if I could, that information.

B. ADAMS: We can put that information together, Sir.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is it possible to provide us with an overview of where fire blocks have been constructed in the last year and how did that cost? Were there any planned for this year?

P. FORSEY: Jamie.

J. CHIPPETT: I mean, the fire breaks that people would have heard about in CBN were the primary ones last year. There is a fire break from the fire in Central Newfoundland in 2022, I think, and last year. I guess the point being that, last year, we were able to avail of the fire break from 2022 in Central Newfoundland. It just goes to the point of how useful these things can be over time.

There was some work done around Churchill Falls and Lab City in 2024. Otherwise, the majority of the breaks now that we're thinking about are contained in the proposals that we talked about earlier.

J. DINN: Thank you.

I seen the ones in Conception Bay North and Labrador, quite impressive in some ways.

So let me ask you this. I've talked to firefighters and people. Fires can burn underground for quite a while, too. In light of that, especially the seriousness of the fire last year, in your fire suppression and protection, do you go back and inspect to make sure that those fires are indeed not burning or out?

I think of the one in Gander many, many years ago that's basically how that burned such a large acreage.

B. ADAMS: The fire, I think, the Member is referencing there was the 1961 fire in Central Newfoundland and there were stories from those fires where during winter, when there was heavy snow on the ground, there were bogs where the fire was in the bog and actually melted the snow off the

bog. It was in that year round, so that's something that can absolutely happen.

We haven't seen any evidence of that from the 2025 season. We have infrared systems that we use to scan the fires. Before we declare a fire out, we do an extremely thorough scan of the fire and that will pick up hot spots that are even underground. We'll do that on a grid system block by block, every bit of the fire, until we're confident and then we declare it out.

J. DINN: Okay, that's impressive. Thank you.

2.3.01, Wildlife Operations: Moose and caribou population surveys were done last year. What information did you glean from that regarding population size and health?

B. ADAMS: We aim to do five to seven surveys of moose management areas every year. We did five this past year. Our moose population is in good condition. The five-year moose management plan gives a target of about 110,000 animals as the goal for here in the province. We're at about 108,000 animals now and we actually saw an increase in overall moose populations last year for the first time since the 1990s. We're fairly happy with where we are on moose management.

Caribou – the population has been holding steady at around 30,000 animals for the last decade or so. We survey one-third of the Island every year, so it's a three-year rotation for census. Then we also have what's called a classification where we look at the number of calves and males and females in the herd for the 23 herds on the Island.

Then in Labrador, we do a census of the George River caribou herd every second year, on even years, so we'll be doing another one this summer. The last census put that herd at 8,100 caribou. We also, generally, try and do classification and collaring in the Boreal caribou herds as well

in Southern Labrador. Those herds are listed as threatened under the *Endangered Species Act* so they're not in great shape and it varies depending on which part of Labrador you're in, on the current status of that herd.

So that's a quick overview, if that works for you.

J. DINN: Thank you.

The 30,000 caribou, does that include the 8,100 from the George River or that's a –?

B. ADAMS: So the 30,000 is just for the Island and 8,100 would be for George River in Labrador.

J. DINN: How long has that herd been at 8,100?

B. ADAMS: That was the number we had from the last census, which was two years ago. So we'll get an update now. The herd, historically, back in the '90s, peaked at 750,000 to 850,000 caribou and declined to a low in 2018 of 5,500 caribou. We've been seeing a slow recovery over the last number of years. We have been seeing a very good calf production in recent years, which makes us a little bit optimistic, but they still have a long way to go, obviously.

J. DINN: So would predation from, I guess, wolves and so on and so forth be a factor in that now in keeping them from rebounding?

B. ADAMS: It certainly plays a role. We know predation, certainly, takes a number of calves for the George River caribou herd. It's probably not the main driver. We are seeing good growth in the herd. It's just it's growing from such a small number compared to its historical high.

That's a bit of a natural process for caribou. Caribou herds cycle every 60 to 80 years. They grow to really large numbers. They tend to eat everything in sight, collapse and then rebuild again over time. The key for us,

as managers, is when they're in that low point to we make sure we take good care of them so they have a chance to recover.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Back to the fire mitigation plans. As I was listening to the conversation back and forth, I go back to the application where you have to reapply again. Are the municipalities aware that they have to reapply again?

B. ADAMS: They are aware that they'll have to apply again for the next round.

E. LOVELESS: They are. Okay.

So the amount of funding for that mitigation plan, I think, was over \$2 million. On what line is that accounted for within your Estimates? I'm assuming that would be under 2.2.02?

J. CHIPPETT: It's under the Grants and Subsidies line in 2.2.02, so there's \$3.2 million.

E. LOVELESS: Okay. So just seeking clarification, \$2.3 million was budgeted; \$2.3 million was spent last year. The revised is \$3.2 million, but that's not an increase of over \$2 million, from \$2.3 million to \$3.2 million. Where is the other million dollars?

J. CHIPPETT: So that is the amount that is allocated to us under the federal-provincial agreement. Blair talked to the context of the program being established. So there will be funding for three more years under that line, under a four-year federal-provincial agreement. The expenditure is \$3.2 million for this year, but that may not all go to prevention and mitigation programs.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Can I challenge – it may not go to – so they're second in rounds. The full amount of over \$2 million was committed for mitigation plans, correct? So is that full amount going to be committed to the fire and mitigation plans?

J. CHIPPETT: Yes, the \$2.3 million, the same amount as the previous budget for sure, and possibly more of that.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

As I was saying, from a regional perspective, it goes back to the planning of responding to fires, like the Bay d'Espoir Highway shutting down. In terms of those applications going out to municipalities, I'm not sure that if – making a suggestion – maybe there should be regional applications. For the South Coast, the Coast of Bays Region, if we had a regional application – I know we're going back to regional government processes, but I think it would be a good thing because that way it pulls them all together from a regional perspective, in terms of having their regional – because when it happens, they all pull together anyways. So the regional mitigation plan, I think, would be more beneficial than individual. It's a starting process

Even for contact purposes, if there was a regional application process then there's going to be people on that regional committee as such and they could be the ones to go to instead of having to go to all these mayors during the difficulty of those fires.

J. CHIPPETT: There's nothing that would preclude a regional application, as long as there's an incorporated body that is responsible for the application. I use the example from MHA Balsom's district, in terms of CBN. The unincorporated communities that are served by the Small Point - Adam's Cove fire department have all partnered on an application for that area.

There's absolutely nothing that precludes a regional approach. I think we'd look very favorably upon an application like that for the reasons that you suggest.

E. LOVELESS: That's something I'll take back, because I have a joint mayors committee, they all come together and I think that's probably something – and it can be more efficient in terms of response to firefighting.

Moving on, in terms of wildlife, that's 2.3.01, I think the Member for St. John's Centre District talked about moose management plans, and I know all the work that certainly goes into moose management plans. If I could ask in terms of, you do your analysis, numbers of moose. I guess the success of the program – because I know it's been successful for various areas of the province – are you seeing any different trends in animals? Are you concerned, I guess, for – because I know some areas have always been, numbers are down so you have to reassess what you're doing so you can get the numbers up. What's the overall picture of the moose management plan in the province, as we speak?

B. ADAMS: We certainly see regional trends. Actually, down on the South Coast area in the Member's district, we've seen a pretty strong uptick in moose, down along that area in recent years. We've also seen a little bit of growth on the Avalon Peninsula the last couple of years. Central Newfoundland has been generally stable there and that's driven in large part by the habitat and the age of the forest. The Northern Peninsula, while it was declining for a number of years, has started to show a little bit of growth again now as well.

That's sort of a general piece, but we're fairly happy with the majority of moose management areas. There are 15 on the Island and a dozen in Labrador, so there's always one or two that you're dealing with challenges in terms of where the population

is going. But, as a general rule, we're comfortable with where most of them are.

E. LOVELESS: Is the moose fencing helping with your management plans?

B. ADAMS: Yes, I mean our management plan is focused on the sustainable harvest of moose populations. We don't really do a lot with the fencing, other than provide data and advice to TI who handles the fencing side of things. One component of the moose management plan is managing the risk around moose-vehicle collisions and the number of moose on a landscape.

On the Avalon Peninsula, as an example, and for moose management areas adjacent to the highways, we manage for lower moose numbers than we do in remote areas. On the Avalon, we manage for half the numbers of moose that we do in your district, as an example, because we want to reduce the risk of moose-vehicle collisions.

E. LOVELESS: Right.

I think you may have talked about, when I walked out, in terms of the caribou concerns, I guess, in Labrador, illegal activity. Can you give me an overall picture of numbers, enforcement and what's being done to deal with those that are participating in that illegal activity?

B. ADAMS: Sure.

Illegal harvest of caribou is definitely a significant issue and it has an impact on those herds. There are two things going on there. One is a lot of potential harvest on these herds occurs in Quebec and that's handled by the Quebec government, although we do work closely with them and communicate with them.

Then, for ourselves, we take two approaches to dealing with illegal harvests. One is engaging with communities and stakeholders in Labrador and trying to educate people and help them understand

how important it is to conserve and protect caribou so we can have a harvest in the future. On the other side is the enforcement action.

We have operational plans in place in Labrador at all times and we conduct regular patrols. The challenge, of course, is that Labrador is a very big landscape and these caribou are in relatively small numbers over a large area. It's a difficult environment to do enforcement in, but we're active on that file.

E. LOVELESS: Under 2.3.02, Co-operative Wildlife Projects, it's including conservation organizations. Does the department provide any funding to conservation groups?

B. ADAMS: We do very little direct funding of groups. Really, the only significant one we do is the Stewardship Association of Municipalities. We give those folks \$30,000 a year as a grant to help them leverage other funding, and, of course, they work with municipalities around our province to establish municipal stewardship areas.

We've been very success with that over the years. I think we're in the low 50s in terms of total numbers of stewardship areas now.

E. LOVELESS: My time is up.

CHAIR: Time is up.

E. LOVELESS: I got more questions.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: One of the questions I had had to do with the fencing as well, but with regard to the moose management. I know the fence on the Avalon has been extended now. I'm trying to think of how far out it goes.

With regard to the population growth, I know a moose will move around and so on and so forth, but the fence is obviously providing an obstacle. Does that affect how the population grows and then the moose management? That's what I was looking at, because I'm assuming if they're not going back and forth over the highway or it's restricted – and I don't know how effective the moose fencing is at this point in time but, nevertheless, I know you give advice on that but have there been studies done to show what the effect has been, not on the incidences of car-moose accidents, but on the population in other areas where this has been done?

B. ADAMS: Certainly any time you break up the connectivity of a landscape, you affect wildlife. That affect really depends on the species.

With moose, moose are a little bit homebodies, actually. Certainly they move around and disperse, but once they sort of mature and establish themselves, they generally stay in that sort of eight-to-12-square-kilometre area, unless there's a reason they need to move out of it. We don't think that fencing will have any meaningful impact on the moose populations on the Avalon.

J. DINN: Okay.

B. ADAMS: It's a bigger factor on species like caribou that are migratory and need to be able to move across bigger parts of the landscape.

J. DINN: Right. Yes.

With that, I was just looking at the caribou herds. Okay, this is going to sound wild, but I'm thinking like in Lapland in Finland you have reindeer herding. In Alberta, you have bison farming as well. In terms of strategy – I don't know – has there been any discussions or even exchange of ideas with these jurisdictions that do this? It becomes a viable industry. I know caribou have these

cycles, but going from 700,000 down to 8,100 is a big drop.

B. ADAMS: That's something that's been looked at pretty extensively in caribou conservation circles. There's a couple of things there.

Caribou and reindeer, even though they look exactly the same and they can interbreed and everything, how happy they are in a domesticated setting is really different. Reindeer will do fairly well in a domesticated setting; caribou do quite poorly.

There has been some work done in Western Canada where they looked at breeding caribou in captivity and then releasing them onto the landscape. Those have been largely determined to be ineffective in terms of caribou conservation. We do a little bit of a version of that, because we have taken caribou and put them on islands around this province and established island populations. That's been quite successful; not only does that create more hunting and harvesting opportunities on those islands as we manage those populations, it also creates independent reservoirs of caribou such that, if we lose them in other areas, we have a source population to take from.

J. DINN: I think we had bison one time here on Brunette Island.

B. ADAMS: Brunette Island, yes.

J. DINN: I don't think there are any left.

With regard to the caribou and the brain worm, where is that now? I know up around Trepassey when I used to drive there, at one time you saw the herd, the caribou were everywhere, and then the population seemed to vanish and now they seem to be on the rebound.

B. ADAMS: The brain worm was actually brought here in domestic reindeer that

people brought to the province. It illustrates a risk around those things sometimes.

It was involved in the large crash of caribou in the 1990s. It is still present in our populations, but it has become sort of a low-prevalence endemic now. We still see it on occasion, but it doesn't appear to be driving the caribou population up.

J. DINN: Okay.

One last question under 2.4.02: How many poaching incidents have been recorded in the past year, and is that up or down from the past? I'm just wondering if there is any data around that in terms of if it's better reporting and the prosecution of those who have been found guilty or charged with poaching?

B. ADAMS: I'll give you maybe just a summary of our stats and then a little bit of context for what we've seen.

The Resource Enforcement Division staff patrolled 53,313 hours this year, which was actually down a bit from last year, but our interaction with the public was significantly higher. We had 29,843 interactions with the public. That's an increase of 2,113 from last year, and that's broken down in the following: We had 782 complaints, those are people who make a report or complaint around some enforcement issue; 27,178 inspections; and 183 investigations. That led to 1,171 violations or occurrences; of that we had 482 warnings, eight stop orders, 44 removal notices, 501 SOTs or summary offence tickets and 133 charges.

I would say the big thing we noted this year is that we had a pretty significant uptake in serious inland fish offences. I don't think that was driven by higher activity; I think we just had a really effective year in terms of catching salmon poachers, to be frank.

J. DINN: If I may then, how many convictions out of that?

B. ADAMS: I don't actually have the data on hand for the convictions.

J. DINN: Okay.

Regarding serious inland fish offences in salmon, I'm just wondering, was there any assessment as to the motivation behind that?

The reason I ask is, I know when we would discuss it, say in other conservation groups, it would come down sometimes – I hate to use the term “organized crime,” but there are other factors that are playing into it as well.

B. ADAMS: I think it was a combination of things. This year we had good complaints, which gave us good intelligence to work from.

That was probably driven in part by the fact that some of these activities were egregious in the eyes of regular anglers and fishermen. They were providing good information which allows us to take good action.

J. DINN: Yes.

Thank you. That's it.

J. CHIPPETT: I'd just like to add that those numbers would have been for all the legislation that the Resource Enforcement Division is responsible for. I know your question was in the context of poaching, but Blair referenced removal notices that would be in the case of illegal occupation of Crown lands, or it could be water resources. The Resource Enforcement Division is responsible for any number of pieces of legislation, 10 or 12 I think.

The *Forestry Act* violations with respect to wildfires, for example, would be in there as well, just to clarify that context.

J. DINN: Just one last thing in regard to the rivers and the river guardians, wardens and

so on and so forth. When it comes to the river guardians themselves, would that be your responsibility or DFO's?

B. ADAMS: The river guardians are a federal program. DFO has their federal fisheries officers and then they contract out the river guardians generally. That's an entirely federal process.

Now, we do, with our resource enforcement officers, assist with inland fish enforcement.

J. DINN: The river enforcement officers, are they seasonal?

B. ADAMS: No, our enforcement officers are full-time year-round. As Deputy Chippett referenced, they enforce 10 pieces of legislation beyond just the fishery work.

J. DINN: Okay.

I was just thinking in terms of when they come on, when they start and when they stop, and there has been some discussion around that and extending the employment to make sure that the rivers are better protected.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

Under 2.4.02, Enforcement, just a couple of questions under the Enforcement piece. Your fleet for the enforcement officers to do their jobs, what's an update on the number of vehicles you have and if there are any deficiencies in that you need more?

I can almost say the answer is that you need more, for sure, but could you give an update on that, please?

B. ADAMS: Right now we have 47 vehicles in the Resource Enforcement Division fleet. The average is 4.71 years old. We have

three vehicles out of service that we're hoping to bring back, and I believe we have three new vehicles on the way.

E. LOVELESS: The 47 vehicles is for the whole of the province, Newfoundland and Labrador, correct?

B. ADAMS: That's for the whole province, yes.

E. LOVELESS: The whole province, okay.

I don't know if you can answer this, but is 47 suffice or do you need more? If Santa Claus was here tonight and you had to ask him, can I please have this amount of vehicles, what would be that number be for your staff?

B. ADAMS: We don't want a truck for every staff member. We don't need that; that's unnecessary.

We have 94 officer positions in that division. There's always going to be a little vacancy factor. In an ideal world, we're running around mid-80s, in terms of our staffing, with your vacancy factor. We would like to be up in the ballpark of 60 vehicles or maybe in that range. That is probably enough to keep all of our staff going, or maybe a few more than that depending on operational needs and that sort of thing. You generally don't need every officer and all your trucks at the same time, right?

E. LOVELESS: Right. Yes, I understand.

I asked you before in terms of a conservation officer for the Milltown-Head of Bay d'Espoir office, would they attend to a roadkill?

B. ADAMS: Potentially, yes.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, because I know a couple of years ago there was only one person in the office. That's why I asked if there's more than one. I asked the minister in Committee stage did he believe that you

should need more than one. He said, absolutely, so I'm like, okay, I have a question for you.

I'm glad to hear that because the support needs to be there. No matter what office, no matter what field work you're at, there should never be one person attending to whatever their responsibilities are.

B. ADAMS: Yes, 100 per cent, safety is our number one priority when our officers – whether they're enforcement or conservation officers – respond to roadkill or go out and do anything. Generally, we like to have staff operating in pairs or groups. That's not always possible in the rural region, of course, but staff are trained to do a very careful risk assessment. If they don't feel it's safe to engage in any activity, they'll stop and request support.

E. LOVELESS: Safety is very important and those people driving those vehicles need to go over good roads. There are a few potholes on the Bay d'Espoir Highway that the minister is going to take care of, so I'll report back to them that there are going to be good roads, and they won't have to worry about bumps on Route 360.

That's it for me.

P. FORSEY: It depends on (inaudible).

E. LOVELESS: I know the exact point.

That's it for me under those subheadings.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: Not so much a question, as a statement. When you referred to the caribou herd in Labrador and the George River herd – please don't take me the wrong way, please – you said you had to educate Labradorians on the migration and all that. I really think you have to educate the hunters

from Quebec, not the hunters from Labrador.

Again, please don't take me the wrong way, but we've seen what the hunters from Quebec have done. We're not allowed to do what they do.

I just wanted to throw that out there.

Thank you.

B. ADAMS: It certainly wasn't meant to target Labradorians on that whatsoever.

J. POWER: No, no, and I didn't mean that either.

B. ADAMS: I was trying to be as general as I could, but I take your point.

J. POWER: I didn't mean that either, no.

B. ADAMS: Yes.

J. POWER: Like I said, I just wanted to throw it out there. I didn't mean anything offensive either, right?

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Seeing no further questions for this subhead, I ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.4.02 inclusive, Forestry, Wildlife and Resource Enforcement.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 to 2.4.02 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.4.02 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.3.01 inclusive, Agriculture and Food Security.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.3.01 carry?

I now call the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Thank you, Chair.

I guess starting with 3.1.01, just a couple of line items there. It was budgeted last year and revised. There was a difference of about half a million dollars under Salaries. Can you explain why?

P. FORSEY: Jamie, do you want to take that one on Salaries?

J. CHIPPETT: So those were vacancies that we had throughout the year and I note, in particular, recruitment challenges in Wooddale and that particular area in Central Newfoundland. Sometimes it is a challenge to recruit in that area so the difference in Salaries is related to vacancies in this part of the division.

E. LOVELESS: Well, I guess we won't have to worry because the minister is going to take care of that because you're estimating \$4.859 million. They'll be taken care of. I'll make note of that and I'll follow up on that for sure.

Supplies last year was budgeted at over one million dollars and \$705,000 was spent, which is less than \$250,000 and then you're estimating the same amount of a million. So if you spent less, why are you estimating another million? Can you just explain that difference of \$250,000?

P. FORSEY: Go ahead, Steve. I can't see it.

J. CHIPPETT: So we talked earlier about the general Capital Account for capital works in the department in the first section

that we went through. We transferred funding out of Supplies and into the Capital Account for necessary Capital purchases at Wooddale again. In terms of energy curtains, there are 38 greenhouses and 38 cold frames at Wooddale so, basically, some Capital purchases were required so we transferred funding out of that subhead to the Capital Account.

E. LOVELESS: I will say there are a lot in this province who don't even know Wooddale is in Central, which is a gem. So, Minister, that's your responsibility.

We talk about marketing for crab, for fish products, and I think this year was budgeted \$2.3 million for marketing of crab. Now I'm not sure if that's extended to other fish products as well, but is there any program within your department for marketing of agriculture products, for helping farmers to market their products outside of province?

J. CHIPPETT: So there's not a stand-alone marketing program. We do have a position who works on marketing, but not a lot of the provincially produced agrifoods products are exported. A really big number or percentage of those are utilized here in the province. The other thing is some of our federal-provincial programming would enable projects on marketing from individual farmers or groups.

Steve, I don't know if you want to add anything to that?

E. LOVELESS: We all know the pressures of gas prices, so there's not one select group in the province that's not affected by this. Farmers and meat producers are definitely being affected by this and it's only going to get worse if it goes above what going there right now.

So are you hearing from meat producers in terms of moving their products to market, and any other farmers of other products moving them to market? Do you have a plan

to assist them with those financial pressures?

J. CHIPPETT: We do hear from the agriculture community, regularly. As the minister said, he's had numerous meetings with different groups associated with the sector. Recently, some of the things we've heard include the need to look at fertilizer, given the fact that the conflict in the Middle East has driven up prices

Generally, inputs into farming have become more expensive. But the minister may wish to talk a little bit about the budget initiatives that address some of those issues, the PAAP.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, we could. In the budget, of course, we have the PAAP programs and the SCAP programs. Jamie just also mentioned some of the initiatives that farmers are looking for.

We've increased some of the programs, especially under the PAAP and SCAP, and I mentioned it previously in my preamble with regard to the AgriStability and the AgriRecovery which we've already put in place for agriculture.

We're looking at the buyback program for land for agriculture, farming. Agriculture lands buyback program is there for that, to get new farmers involved so we can grow more crops and opening up more agricultural land ourselves so that we can also get the young farmers involved in the agriculture program.

Again, like I said, we've been meeting with different stakeholders, as Jamie just mentioned, through the Island. Challenges, yes, they have challenges, no doubt about it; we're hearing it every day. We hear of the challenges that they do face and, no doubt, as they get ready to go into this season, fuels will be one of the things that will come up, but that will be in our 10-year strategy. As we move forward with our 10-year strategy to put in for farming and food

initiatives to increase our food self-sufficiency. That's what we'll be doing there and, of course, the programs themselves.

Whatever we can do to help farmers along the way, we will sit down and listen to farmers to see what we can do. We have to do it together. Of course, they know how to grow, so we have to grow with them. We have to have the programs in place so that we can get down and help them with the insurances, of course, again is another thing that we help them with. Some of the programs that are under the federal shared, the SCAP one, from the feds and the province, that's a 60-40 one, then we have our own provincial assistance programs.

Those are the two biggest programs that we have there for farmers right now. Again, like I say, we're looking at a way that we can help with their fertilizer this year. We know that through our conversations, they've already asked us about the feed and fertilizer, so we're looking at initiatives for them as well.

There are lots of ways that we can help the farmers, help them grow and help with our food self-sufficiency. Within our 10-year plan, those are the things that we will be doing, and looking at other products that we can do.

You mentioned Wooddale, of course, that's in my district. It's a great place, a lot of farming. The centralized area for farming is in Wooddale. We have a number of farms in there. We have the tree planting and the Wooddale nursery and that stuff in there. They are great initiatives.

The food programing, the seedlings and everything that we have for the farmers in regard to the crops that we're helping them grow in that area: rutabagas, turnips and different crops that they plant first. I think we sell them to farmers for – is it around \$2 a tray, for the ones that they get? That's a big help to farmers, especially in the growth of the start of the season to get them on their

way so that they can get them in their fields. That's all done through Wooddale, of course, and that goes right out through the province.

Those are some of the good initiatives that we've been doing. Farmers appreciate that. We've been talking to farmers; they like that. Of course there are other things we can do and, yes, they will have challenges, but we'll help them along the way face those challenges when we get there and see which way is the best way forward so that we can certainly increase our food self-sufficiency in other ways.

Dairy, of course, is another area that we've been talking to farmers and seeing what we can do on that end, and egg producers as well.

E. LOVELESS: I have more questions, because the minister went on way too long. I'm just saying.

CHAIR: Yes. The time has expired.

Any more questions?

The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

You just went through a litany of initiatives and ways which we help farmers. I'm just curious, because inexpensive food comes down to an economy of scale in many ways, of the measures that you listed and the initiatives to increase the amount of food or the initiatives to help farmers with increased costs, which ones seem to be the most effective? Is there any program that stands out that we can expand further? Are there any other new initiatives that you're exploring in either of those areas?

P. FORSEY: Well, the ones that help the farmers the most, I guess, are the SCAP and the provincial program. The SCAP more than any one, because that's a 60-40

program that you've get a higher volume for funding for what they need to do. That's the biggest program and we'll continue that program. It's there.

Again, last year, when they faced that drought, we instigated the AgriRecovery to get their hay and feed for their animals that they needed. Any losses to their farm, if they proved that they got losses to their farm because of drought, that went under AgriRecovery. So that program is there and that can be high volumes of money if you're talking dollar-wise with regard to a farmer and helping them out in income or revenue that can do that.

The biggest one right now, I guess, would be the SCAP programs and the PAAP programs but, again, some of the other initiatives that I just listed there and, as we move along, I guess, we will see other challenges probably. Drought last year was one of the challenges that I guess none of us have seen for a while, but we got through it. So we'll just have to work with them again on other initiatives, other ways and, of course, through the Wooddale programs that we have in there, that's helping farmers along the way.

Again, those initiatives – that's what we gave out. I will ask Steve if there's anything else that I missed or probably there's something else that he can elaborate on that we are doing for the farmers. I'll just ask Steve.

J. DINN: If there's anything that farmers are looking for that maybe we could be offering as well.

S. BALSOM: I think if we looked at all the programs across, they all play a role for farmers, right from just having extension services for advice on either livestock or crop specialists or pest management. Our funding programs under SCAP and the provincial agricultural assistance program, we provide funding for infrastructure. Marketing is in there; land development;

equipment. We have a Limestone Subsidy Program because our soils are acidic naturally and, in terms of helping with fuel, we help with the freight with the limestone, as well as paying a portion of the limestone.

The fertilizer program is something that farmers really say is important, especially with the cost. We have our four equipment banks across the province. We have very low lease rates to help new entrants access the farming equipment. In terms of the Transplant Program, we are producing four million transplants a year that go out to over 130 different farms. That's an incredible amount of food that gets a head start on production, and it helps with producing more per acre.

I think if you look across the board at all the programs, we do have a lot of supports for farmers.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

What's being done to protect farmland or agricultural land in and around the city? If you look in the Goulds, there's a lot of farmland that probably has been taken over or arable land that has been turned into housing developments more than anything else. I'm just wondering what's being done, not only to develop, but to protect the existing farmland?

J. CHIPPETT: Just a comment on land first. I mean, in a number of the sectors that the department is responsible for, the competition or competing land uses are a significant factor. It's no different in the forestry sector either.

There are agricultural development areas. I'm not sure I'm thinking about the right word but, with respect to St. John's and area, there's a land use authority associated with agricultural land. Similarly, Wooddale has a Land Development Advisory Authority as well. People who want to use some of the land for purposes other than agriculture need to make applications for those uses.

At the end of the day, there's an appeal board and so on for those decisions, and then those come to the minister.

Those are a couple of the specific initiatives for protection. I just wanted to highlight, in addition to what Steve said about the programs, development of agricultural land is a challenge. That's one of the reasons there is extra funding this year for the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program. There is a fair amount of land out there in agricultural leases and so on, but getting it developed sometimes is a challenge. So there is additional funding available for that.

J. DINN: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Given the drought across most of the province last year, I'm assuming there was an increase in the number of claims that were made; I'm looking at the cost of that and, I guess, your projections for the future in terms of AgrilInsurance and Livestock Insurance under 3.2.02.

J. CHIPPETT: Under AgriRecovery, just to speak to the program from earlier, we did approve applications for 18 farmers.

One of the challenges that exists with respect to any number of the programs you just referenced, and specifically AgrilInsurance and Livestock Insurance, is a low sign-up rate amongst farmers and food producers. For example, there are eight farmers registered under AgrilInsurance and there are two farmers registered for Livestock Insurance. We continue to talk to the Federation of Agriculture, we do a fair amount of promotion in terms of social media and so on, but we do not traditionally get high numbers of people signing up for these programs.

In the case of the SCAP program that the minister referenced, business risk management programs are always a part of that program. We budget a specific amount each year under SCAP for programs like AgriStability. Then, in years with the

AgriRecovery, if that's approved by the federal government due to drought or some other unforeseen circumstance, we will find the money to match our part of the claims process.

J. DINN: Thank you.

What reason is there for the low sign-up rate? They have their own insurance or other insurance or it's just –?

S. BALSOM: I guess that's a question that we're really going to try to dig into in our 10-year strategy. We do promote the business risk management suite of programs quite extensively at all the conferences and any AGMs that we participate in, but it's just traditionally Newfoundland and Labrador farmers have not been, I guess, at the scale.

Small, diversified farms losing one crop, they see, potentially, that the premiums to pay for a small part of their farm is not worth the application process. It is actually an agenda item for our Agriculture Minister's table, looking at small, diversified farms.

There are similar uptake issues in the Atlantic provinces and small, diversified farms in Quebec, so we're actually going to do a review of those programs to see what the underlying issues are with getting small, diversified farms on those programs, and, potentially, if those programs have to change to suit our smaller, regional, diverse-type farms. It's certainly an agenda item that we want to focus on.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Lake Melville.

K. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a quick commentary, guys, on the caribou situation. I always take every opportunity to impress upon anybody in any room I get into about just what the caribou

situation in Labrador meant to us. I think if we saw, let's just say, any group load aboard the Ski-Doos and all the komatiks and everything in Blanc-Sablon, came across to the Northern Peninsula and decimated the moose population, there would be a very visual, very aggressive response. I just hope, as a government and a department, we can be as forthright as we need to be and as creative as we can in order to address the situation with the caribou in Labrador.

I understand the logistics and that big line between Quebec and Labrador. We call it the Big Land for a reason. It's a lot to enforce; we get that makes it extremely difficult but not impossible. I think that we can all work together from all sides of the House and all corners of the province in order to do something about that.

I will quote something Mr. Loveless said to Joe and I while we were just having a conversation: If we can really work and strive to achieve that synergistic relationship interprovincially when we send assets in the event of a fire, I would suggest that the decimation of a population is as important. We should put as much effort into that sinking as well when things like the illegal hunt we saw in Labrador happened.

With that, I'll move on to something else that's really important to me. That was just my commentary. I've had wonderful dialogue, I will say, with the minister. He's very easily accessible and very open to talk about the realities of Labrador versus the Island. He wants to know what Labradorians think, and I really respect that, but I want to talk about farming just a little bit, if I may.

What we see in Labrador, and oddly enough Joe's Member's statement in the House today was bragging up his cross-country club in Lab West, and wonderful to see, but he truly mentioned something that's a reality to us in Labrador, the fact that we got really eight months worth of skiing. If you got eight

months worth of skiing, you have four worth of farming, really, right.

So in saying that, I'm just wondering, in general, we know the price of shipping is so crazy. Labrador's short growing season, costs are too high to do anything. What we see in Labrador is, we see a steady trail of all kinds of goods and services, everything from eggs, milk, fresh produce, nearly impossible to find or afford in Labrador, I'll say, we see that coming, I guess, to Quebec.

I'd love to see what's on the minister's mind and what the department is thinking in terms of the direction for helping food security in Labrador, in general, supporting our farmers and overall just taking off our reliance and upping that food security at home, to take our reliance off Quebec, in terms of what comes through, the goods and services in Labrador.

P. FORSEY: No, thanks for the question actually.

In regard to the first note, we've had our conversations on the other situation there and it's been good conversations. I know the two of you guys, right now, you're passionate about Labrador and you're looking for initiatives for Labrador, especially on that water bomber. You're looking to get her placed in Labrador and that will be done for Labrador.

That water bomber is destined for Labrador, once we figure out where it's going to be, I think it's either in Lab West or Wabush or Goose Bay. Of course, we want to get her up there for forest fire season, she might have to move back and forth, but I know you fellows are interested along with some of the agriculture needs.

Again, in our 10-year plan, we know that there are challenges, of course, the cost of just getting freight up to Labrador, even from here, to getting freights up to Labrador, we know what the cost is, we've heard it.

Lela Evans, of course, in the House of Assembly has brought it up many of times. You guys have talked about it many of times and we know that the cost is there for that.

We've had conversations with our own farmers here on the Island, dairy farmers as well, and they have challenges with putting fresh foods, even fresh milk and vegetables up in Labrador. A lot of it, of course, coming in through Quebec. We have to sort of meet those challenges and face those challenges. I've been talking to some farmers in Labrador already; we've met with some farmers.

Of course, what you just mentioned, the seasons are shorter and I think, probably, even the soil might be different in sorts of ways, right? That's some of the challenges that we have to meet and to address those challenges, especially in Labrador. But you are right, to increase food self-sufficiency, not only down in this part of the Island, but up in Labrador as well.

That will be part of our 10-year strategy. We'll be working towards putting some initiatives into Labrador as well. Maybe there are other ways we can grow it; maybe there are other ways we can get it there; maybe there is something else we can do.

I'll just ask Steve if there are other initiatives or conversations that you may have with the individuals, or some strategy or some initiatives that we're already doing.

I'll just ask Steve if there's anything available.

S. BALSOM: Just on the record, to let everyone know some numbers, we do have 12 farms operating in Labrador now that we work with through both our funding programs and our agriculture extension. They're mainly vegetable, fruit, honeybees and one beef and pork farm.

We've recently supported the construction of an abattoir up there. We are expecting

that should be operating this summer. We do deliver our vegetable transplants to Labrador. We put them in a cold container truck and bring them up there, which is helping with the short season. It helps with season extension.

There was a large project a number of years ago on a cold storage facility in hopes that as production grows, storage is obviously an important part. We have a research program on Labrador forage trials ongoing now to support the growth of the beef industry and to support that abattoir as well.

I had one other thing that we were working on. Oh, yes, recently there was a request for proposals that is closed for an egg quota in Labrador from the Egg Farmers of Newfoundland and Labrador. They're looking for a new entrant potential for Labrador, so that's another opportunity.

K. RUSSELL: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: No more?

The Chair recognizes the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: Just a couple of quick questions to clue up these subheadings.

So, Minister, your 10-year plan, has that been costed and forecasted?

P. FORSEY: Jamie.

J. CHIPPETT: So there is funding in the budget for development of the strategy. We will be hiring a director of food security and doing consultations in the early part of this year to inform a strategy that would be developed by, hopefully, the end of the fiscal year.

E. LOVELESS: So just for clarity, there's someone to fill a position to start that plan?

J. CHIPPETT: So the position that we would hire is a director of food security.

They wouldn't necessarily be the person who's developing the strategy. Work has started on preliminary aspects of the strategy, but this person would have an ongoing focus on food security, which, of course, is about a lot more than just agricultural food production.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I'll move on to just a quick question on 3.2.03 under Agriculture Initiatives. Under the description it says: Also beginning in 2026-27, delivery of the Limestone Program to subsidize the supply of agricultural limestone. If someone could just comment on that.

The other two things are under Operating Accounts: Supplies and Operating Accounts. You spent money last year but you're not estimating anything for this year. Why is that?

P. FORSEY: Okay. That's the limestone combined with the land development all combined into one program.

E. LOVELESS: Just seeking clarity—combined into one program, are you referencing what I read out to explain because I'm also interested in why there's nothing estimated under Operating Accounts and Supplies under that same subhead. It was budgeted over \$400,000 and you spent over \$300,000 and nothing has been estimated for this year.

J. CHIPPETT: So we moved the Limestone Program inside of the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program. It is application based. We do expect that we will spend some money on Supplies. So that Supplies line is actually the supply of limestone. That's a part of what we do. We purchase the limestone from the quarry, and then farmers pay us a subsidized rate for the limestone.

Given this is all in one program and will be application driven, all the funding is contained in Grants and Subsidies, the \$3.3

million, but, likely, we will have to transfer some to Supplies.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

There's nothing showing there right now, but it's a possibility, depending on the demand for that limestone, that it will be transferred back.

J. CHIPPETT: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Under 3.2.04, Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership, the federal revenue piece last year was budgeted at \$5.4 million and revised at \$4.5 million, a reduction of \$1 million, and \$1 million being forecasted or estimated for this year's. Can you just explain the difference there?

Hallelujah.

P. FORSEY: He figured he was supposed to go over there somewhere. He knew it.

Yes, that was a carry-over from last year, I think. There were less applications last year for that program.

E. LOVELESS: Well, you have to make sure there are more applications this year, right?

I'm going to move on to Animal Health, 3.3.01, in terms of the line by line. I just have a general question and a couple on the lines of the Estimates.

We have seen recently, and we see it too often, in terms of cruelty to animals. We saw the incidence of the dogs and, being an animal lover, I can hardly repeat what happened to them and whatever. In terms of cruelty to animals, Minister, and I know we did some legislative changes a few years ago, but there is still not enough strength in that to protect pets and pet owners. So where do you see that in terms of what you have in your department to help lessen

these instances in society? What are your plans moving forward to lessen this, and hopefully this will not happen again?

I know in terms of the enforcement piece, it's more outside of your department as well, but cruelty to animals comes under you as well. Where do you see moving your department and your policies or direction to help protect those that are affected by this?

P. FORSEY: Yes, I'm like yourself. I mean to say, cruelty to animals, it's unacceptable really.

You know, of course, that we have legislation there that protects the animals. Outside of that, I mean to say, if we see that type of activity happening and what's happening, right now it is to contact the RCMP or the RNC, the justice side of it, to have that looked at.

More awareness, I guess, b'y, is something that we can do, like probably put out some more awareness of such. Through education and awareness, hopefully that would cut back on that, because it's something we shouldn't be hearing. As of late we've heard it more than we should, I'll say that.

Other than the legislation that's there right now and what they can do, probably some awareness and education of it.

E. LOVELESS: Yes, the awareness is always good no matter what we're talking about in terms of cruelty, but I think those that have been affected recently and in the past would say to us, in previous government, and are going to say to you, as a government, we need to do more; we need to do better.

My brother-in-law is an RCMP officer, and if something happens in terms of cruelty to an animal, he's limited to what he or she can do. That's where we need to target. We need to do better. We need to have more strict enforcement around that. There's no

difference in what he was talking about in Labrador with the caribou and the numbers and prevention.

I guess that's a general statement that we need to do better. Hopefully we don't see any more of these media stories.

Line by line, just a couple questions. Your provincial revenue under Animal Health, \$1.3 million was budgeted, \$1.4 million you received and you're budgeting \$1.3 million. What's the provincial revenue involved under that Animal Health category?

J. CHIPPETT: There are two components primarily to that revenue. We act, in the department, as a pharmacy for farmers and so on. There's a dispensing fee that we would collect when we provide those drugs to farmers and so on. Then the second piece is, there is a fee schedule with respect to on-call work and so on that our veterinarians do. So depending on the hours and so on, there is a charge when we would have to visit farms.

Obviously, in terms of the discrepancy that you referenced, it's very difficult to predict the exact number of call-outs or the exact number of prescriptions that would be dispensed. That's where the \$1.4 million comes from.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Just one question, Chair, under Animal Health, 3.3.01. It's about avian flu; any concerns with regard to that, if it has infected or affected our poultry stocks across the province and monitoring and preventative measures and so on and so forth?

S. BALSOM: We do monitor for avian influenza. We do have a foreign animal

disease lab in St. John's that is capable of doing the testing.

B. ADAMS: Conservation officer.

S. BALSOM: Oh, yeah.

As the ADM for Wildlife has pointed out, the conservation officers are also involved in any call-outs when there's suspicion of a bird that has died in terms of potential avian influenza.

Back in 2022, it kind of reached its peak; we had 128 call-outs. It has declined to six call-outs in 2025. We had one case two years ago in the Gander Bay area, a small backyard flock tested positive and a quarantine zone was put in place and the protocols were taken, but since then, everything is quiet in terms of we haven't had any reported positive avian influenza since. A lot of these call-outs for dead birds are just precautionary and they're tested, but we haven't had any cases since.

J. DINN: Thank you very much.

That's it, Chair.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

Seeing no further questions, I now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.3.01, Agriculture and Food Security.

CHAIR: Shall 3.1.01 to 3.3.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, subheads 3.1.01 through 3.3.01 carried.

CLERK: Please be advised that our three hours for this head of expenditure will elapse at 9:13 p.m.

I now ask the Clerk to call the next subhead.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.2.02, Lands.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.02 carry?

I now call on the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

E. LOVELESS: If we have 10 minutes left, why wouldn't we just call right to the last heading so we can incorporate any questions we have and then we're done?

CLERK: We have to vote each one.

E. LOVELESS: Okay. All right, no problem.

Crown Land – the famous topic in this province. Minister, there's a new ADM created for Crown Lands, correct?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: We can all appreciate, I guess – and no disrespect to the ADM or whatever position you hold and whatever responsibility, an ADM can only do so much, what's beneath her or him, field people, really moves applications and stuff, that's where the supports are needed.

You have a new ADM for Crown Lands, are there any other additional staff to help her, I believe it is, right? I'm not sure which one it is for ADM for Crown Lands.

OFFICIAL: Her.

E. LOVELESS: There you go, okay.

Are there any other supports for her to do what she's going to attempt to do in terms of Crown lands? Is that position housed here in the city or is it in Corner Brook?

P. FORSEY: Yes, you're right. We did hire an ADM for Crown Lands, but most of the staff are in Corner Brook, most of the directors and office staff. We do have some offices here in St. John's as well. Land mapping and the applications, that's here in St. John's; that's here in town.

We have more staff in Corner Brook as well to deal with Crown lands. We've all heard the situations with the Crown lands, especially in regard to section 36 of the *Lands Act*, so we've hired the ADM to look at some of that, to address some of those issues for people to acquire the land with regard to the sale of their house or downsizing to move in somewhere.

I'll certainly let her speak; she's been with us for a little while so I'll just let her give us some initiatives that she has been doing with regard to Crown lands applications and activities.

Denise.

D. WOODROW: One thing that we've been working on is our vacancy rates; our vacancy rate over the past year has been up to 40 per cent. At the moment, it's down to about 22 per cent; not new positions per se but definitely new people to help smooth the process over.

We're also looking at other ways to give people more access to their own applications online so that they can see for themselves. Those kinds of things we're working with OCIO to see what we can do there, to work with our system so people can find this out.

We have our inquiries line as well that will respond to people's questions as they come up. We're also looking for ways to support people through the application process. Since the online portal has come up, it's actually been really successful. We do allow exceptions for online but they're really rare that people want them. They usually just have some questions about how to use it

and how to handle it, which they get through the inquiries line or from return calls from land management officers.

E. LOVELESS: Out of respect for others that may want a couple of questions, I'm going to try to clue up because I do have more on Crown Lands, but I have the opportunity to ask the minister in the House of Assembly.

In terms of Fire Services, I have one question in terms of the fifth water bomber. The fifth water bomber was forecasted and budgeted in 2025, correct?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

E. LOVELESS: Okay.

I just want to confirm, the RFP went out for repairs to it, when? If someone could clarify.

P. FORSEY: Blair.

B. ADAMS: I don't have that date, but TI would be the folks to ask about that because they were in charge of that process.

E. LOVELESS: I was just wondering when the plane was done, completed, in terms of her repairs, but I can get that.

P. FORSEY: TI (Inaudible).

E. LOVELESS: Yes.

Anyway, that's it for me and thank you all for (inaudible).

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: Minister, as a former fire chief and former president of the Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Fire Services, I just want to commend you and your team and the actions that you took in the budget to

create safer communities and give volunteer firefighters the support they need to do their work.

I served on the Labrador City Fire Department for 30 years and 15 of those was fire chief. I know the great work that Fire and Emergency do – I don't know what it's called now but the Department of Forestry back then – I know the great work that they did with us in Labrador when it came to forest fires.

What I did like in the budget was the hiring of wildland firefighters and the training for volunteer firefighters. Believe it or not, most volunteer firefighters are used to putting out structural fires or industrial fires, they're not used to being out fighting forest fires and it's a different beast, trust me, I've seen it. I think the training that was provided – I know there was a crowd in from the fire school in Manitoba that provided two-day training for volunteer firefighters and that will go right across the province, which is great. It is great. Five positions for FES for the planning department, again, I think that's a tremendous asset.

From my experience, there are a lot of communities out there that don't have fire plans done, actually a lot of them. A lot of them couldn't afford it before the program and before the funding that the government announced last week for fire planning and other initiatives, so I think that's great as well.

I'm sure my colleague will agree with me, it's great to hear that the water bomber is coming back to Labrador, too. We do thank you for that.

Minister, I was just wondering if you could elaborate a little bit on the increase for funding, the \$1.7 million for Supplies, \$3 million for Furnishings and Equipment and stuff like that?

P. FORSEY: Okay.

Of course, you went through a lot of it there then, yourself, but, yeah, we announced \$7 million in the budget this year for Forest Fire Protection, Emergency Services, that sort of stuff.

You say you had how many years in?

J. POWER: Thirty years.

P. FORSEY: Pardon?

J. POWER: Thirty years.

P. FORSEY: Thirty years as a fire chief. I would like to say thank you for your service, by the way, first of all.

(Applause.)

P. FORSEY: And to all the firefighters out there, and all the volunteer firefighters we do have.

Yes, \$7 million in the budget. A lot of that, of course, went to the \$4.16 million for Fire Protection Vehicles and Equipment in this budget. That was an increase this year of \$400,000 over last year. It was good to see that \$4.16 million. It was a good announcement that we did. It was a good announcement to see that we're putting in those initiatives for protecting our communities, so we can have safer communities. Part of that, of course, was our election platform, and I think we're doing it.

Again, you mentioned the wildland coveralls. There is \$1.7 million gone in for wildland coveralls.

Just to break it down a bit more: \$90,000 of that is gone in for wildfire training. I know the training started, probably, I don't know, about six or eight weeks ago. It started, and the training is still going on in regard to the volunteer firefighting training part of it. That's still happening. It's good to see that's on the go. There was \$90,000 put into that.

There is \$310,000 toward specialized sprinklers and trailers to protect critical infrastructure during wildfires. There were trailers made up with the specialized sprinklers and that on them and gone out to communities for wildfires so that they can protect some of the infrastructure, especially around the cabin areas and those areas. Probably in non-incorporated areas, as well, that can be used. That's a good thing to have.

There is \$120,000 to upgrade the two mobile command trailers. Those units are very good things to have during the emergency services, during forest fire season; especially on fires, so that they can have a mobile command there with radios working and people knowing where they are at each moment and that kind of stuff. It's good to put money into that.

There is \$770,000 for four regional station enclosed trailers stocked with equipment and personal protective equipment. We already mentioned that; that was some trailers and regional equipment.

There is \$300,000 annually to upgrade technology at the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre so that staff can be informed and stay connected during those emergencies. That's money we put into that and that's funding for some positions to increase the staff in there so that everybody is connected so we know where everybody is to, especially in the case of emergencies.

So \$400,000, again, over and above what was already slated for \$4.16 million, so there's \$400,000 extra on that. Chair, \$2.9 million, again, the radio has been brought up; \$2.9 million was for the P25 radios to allow for communication between all first responders, providing vital and secure communication links for all the groups responding to emergency situations, especially important in areas where cellphones are probably non-existent.

So those P25s come in handy when you're trying to reach each other in emergency services – and we all know what the cell service is like around Newfoundland and Labrador, of course. There are dead areas everywhere and pockets everywhere that you can't get out. So being connected and knowing what everyone is doing at one time is certainly a great contribution to have with regard to the P25 radios so everybody can stay connected.

That was part of our initiative for safer communities. I think that reaffirms our guarantee to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that we're committed to protecting our communities and having safer communities, and we'll continue to do that and we'll continue to work with our communities and we'll continue to work with our volunteer firefighters.

Not only that, again, just outside of that, we'll be hiring 50 more firefighters in our own program, so that's a big help for wildfire protection. That's a good area that we've had, so that allows us to protect our communities. It's good that we can have that done.

Another \$3.9 million for the Fire Services budget to operate the Fire Commissioner's Office and purchase workers and compensation premiums for all the volunteer firefighters. I believe I did mention that, that we were hiring more staff for those offices. That's a good thing to have.

With regard to firefighting, we saw the challenges. We know what can happen. We know what those beasts can do when they get going and the behaviour of them that they wipe out our communities. We don't want that happening. So we have to do whatever we can.

Again, aerial services, the fifth water bomber you mentioned, it's great to have that back in service. It was good to finish that over the line and have that brought in. We lobbied for it a long, long time, and to

finally have it up and running after eight years, it's great to see that back in the air so that we can have it for this year's fire season and a great asset to have. We're very pleased to see that and that is destined for Labrador where we can figure out the best point to place that, whether it's in Goose Bay or Lab West to get that. We want it there for the start of the forest fire season. That was one of the initiatives we want.

All those with regard to protect our communities and some of the emergency initiatives that we've put in, I think it's a good budget.

Thank you.

J. POWER: Minister, I would like to say just one more thing. I know I'm out of time. Minister, you've probably heard me say this before but volunteer firefighters are my heroes. I got paid to do something I love and they do it for free. I would like to thank every volunteer firefighter in this province for what they do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Since we're an hour and a half in, I think we should take another 10-minute break to stretch your legs. We will reconvene here at 9:29.

Recess

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: Thank you, Chair.

(Inaudible) online portal for Crown Lands.

P. FORSEY: The online portal for Crown Lands is running pretty well, I must say, with regard to applications. There are probably 2,950 applications on file. Other than that, the online portal is going pretty well. Anybody who can't do that certainly can call Crown Lands and we can set up an

appointment for them and have somebody talk to them that way.

I'll let Denise just give us another update on the portal if she finds –

D. WOODROW: So I have don't have the precise number but I was advised that it's only been about 10 examples of when someone has asked for an exception to use the online portal. So we have had about 2,900 applications and they have all gone through the online portal except for maybe 10.

P. PARSONS: So what we're hearing is it's not really that much uptake with the online portal, do you think, as opposed to the traditional calling in? Is that fair to say?

D. WOODROW: I have not heard of any issues with people not wanting to go through the online portal; maybe some assistance at some points in time but not a resistance to it. The applications have been all coming into Crown Lands that way since the portal has been up and running.

P. PARSONS: Thank you.

Minister, can you update or confirm if Crown Lands will be giving land to municipalities within their borders to do as they wish or as they plan?

P. FORSEY: The legislation is there now for communities to occupy their land, to acquire the land through the legislation that's already there, that's still available. So they can certainly work to have that done with regard to the ways they can get it. If it's an industrial sale, it costs a bit more. If it's land just for housing development, we can certainly do a small price on housing developments. That's the two ways they can acquire their lands.

We're also looking at initiatives that we could also do something better, but right now that's the two ways in the legislation for receiving their land.

I'll let Denise elaborate on that one, again, as well.

D. WOODROW: Yes, what the minister said is absolutely correct. There are free grants available for non-economic development for municipalities. We are looking at ways to look at the bigger picture to figure out how municipalities might be able to have some more control over land.

P. PARSONS: You use the word free grant, that sounds really enticing. That's a good thing. So it's a simple process for municipalities simply to contact Crown Lands. What would be the process? I guess what would be different than it was previous?

D. WOODROW: They still have to make an application, because the due diligence of finding out who's on the property, what the property has been used for, that kind of work still needs to be done by Crown Lands. I wish we had a simpler way to just click a button on the computer and see what's on the land but the reality is, we have to wait sometimes for things like snow to melt and go out and look and do surveys and make sure that there's no existing structures, that kind of thing.

We also do a referral process to other departments. That needs to happen in order to determine whether or not there's something like a flood risk or there are other kinds of environmental or resource issues that need to be addressed. So that work takes time to do. We do endeavour to do it as quickly as possible – kind of keep our fellow departments and others to timelines where we can.

P. PARSONS: Okay, I'll just conclude this section, because I won't have anything further on this, but as we know, Minister, you were an advocate to fix Crown Lands when you were in Opposition. I think we can all agree that Crown Lands certainly needs improving or changing to make it more user-friendly.

What's your hallmark that you want to put on this, that you want to actually do, to kind of overhaul or reformat or simply modernize Crown Lands? Because, as we know, it is a difficult department, not to the fault of any officials per se, but it is a challenge when working with Crown Lands, we all know that as MHAs.

P. FORSEY: Good question, and you're right, I lobbied for it, I really did. We've been six months in and that's one of the key issues that I want to do with Crown Lands is, like you say, fix Crown Lands. We just hired an ADM to help with that process. We'll figure out how we do it.

Section 36, of course, that's what brought up the situation in the beginning was section 36, adverse possession, for people to be able to get in their land. We want to see that process go through so that people can acquire their land.

Through the application process, of course, it's whether you own your land or you don't, that has to be proven. But section 36, somebody has been on that land, living on that land for 40 years, paid the taxes on it and that sort of stuff. We want to make it right for those people that they can acquire that land and have their house and sell their property so they can move in with their young people or seniors' homes or cottages, whatever they want to do. That's part of the reasons and then certainly the process of speeding up Crown Lands.

We've been there six months. We're moving ahead with some initiatives. So far we're doing good with it. We've already hired a good ADM, as far as I'm concerned, and we're moving along with some more initiatives. Her background certainly helps with some of the issues that come up, especially on adverse possession and those ones.

Yeah, six months in, I think we're doing good. We're moving in the right direction, and we'll go a bit further.

P. PARSONS: Well, that's good, and I certainly will applaud, you have a good, strong woman and a good leadership position in that position. That's great. I support that. Thank you for that.

One last thing. As we know, Crown Lands, the main office was located in St. John's; that's now on the West Coast. Of course, that was done by this previous administration. Any plans to make any changes to bring it back to the capital?

P. FORSEY: No.

P. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

That's it for me for this section.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under 4.1.01, Crown Land, how is the department doing with its goal of a 90-day reply time? What's the current average turnaround time for a routine application?

D. WOODROW: Currently, we have about a 39 per cent standard meeting the 90-day service standard. That includes applications that might be deferred out for things.

It's a hard number to kind of explain because there are a lot of things that go into the calculation of it. Some of the applications that might have to go through environmental assessment or through other referrals are included in that number as well.

So the number is kind of hard to really nail down and reflect what's actually happening.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 4.1.01, how many applications came into Crown Lands last year, especially with the Primary Residence Land Title Program?

Is that program as effective as you'd hoped?

D. WOODROW: The Primary Residence program has been successful. I just have to get the number for you. We have had, in 2025, 278 applications received and 217 of those were registered.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under that same section, do you have an estimate of the number of people affected by unsecure title to their properties who could avail of the Primary Residence Land Title Program?

D. WOODROW: I don't think that we have that number. That number could be made up of people who have had title registered in the Registry of Deeds, which is a public registry that wouldn't track that kind of information.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under the same section, are there any policies in the works to use more Crown land for residential development?

D. WOODROW: Crown Lands is always working with partners like Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and other departments who have initiatives for housing. We don't have any housing initiatives of our own, but we certainly work with anybody, any department who does, to facilitate access to Crown lands as efficiently and as quickly as possible, and help them identify areas where Crown land may be available for housing supports.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Under 4.2.01, Land Management, is it possible to have an update on how Crown lands application process is working since amendments were passed in the House back in the fall of 2024?

D. WOODROW: Sorry, could you repeat the question?

J. DINN: Sure, my apologies.

Would it be possible to have an update on how the Crown lands application process is working since amendments were passed in the House back in the fall of 2024?

D. WOODROW: I guess how I could put that is the Primary Residence Land Title Program wasn't a legislative amendment per se, but I think it came around that time. That's been working well for people to get access to their title, get their Crown title sorted out in a much more cost-effective manner than it would be if they had to go through the full grant process. So that's one way it's been measured.

J. DINN: Thank you.

It has to do with proving title to Crown land because of improper document management. So we've heard of lawyers and researchers having trouble proving title to Crown land because of improper document management. There are lots of grants on file at the Howley Building, but no one knows where they are because they haven't been marked on a map. These are some of the complaints we've heard.

Is the department looking at reforms to make it easier to find and track claims, or is this even a problem from your point of view?

D. WOODROW: Sorry, I can't really hear the question.

J. DINN: We've heard of lawyers and researchers having trouble proving title to Crown land because of improper document management. There are lots of grants on file at the Howley Building, but nobody knows where they are because they haven't been marked on a map.

So is the department looking at reforms to make it easier to find and track claims, or is

that a problem from your point of view, as well?

D. WOODROW: I think the reference to missing grants, as far as I know, had to do with some grants that were lost in fires. There's not a real good answer for that. We have all the Crown grants in our registry that we have available. They're located at the Howley Building. Apart from that, the work has to be done just by kind of putting together the history of the properties.

J. DINN: Is the department considering any proactive mechanisms to prevent squatting on Crown land?

D. WOODROW: Yes, the RED division of the department is able to help us with some enforcement. When we are aware that there is somebody that might be squatting on property, we do work with them and they work with us to put notices and to communicate with people about the status of their presence on the land.

J. DINN: What happens if they choose not to follow your notification or notices?

D. WOODROW: We do have enforcement tools under the act, like we can seize the property and take those kinds of measures. That hasn't been an issue since I have been in this position, not with any particular individual. Either that or we offer them the ability to get a grant or quick claim or primary residence. We try to assist people who may be squatting on the property.

J. DINN: Okay, thank you.

4.2.02, Land Development, Capital: Has there been an increase in the amount of land put to cultivation over the last year and, if so, by how much?

J. CHIPPETT: Repeat the question, please.

J. DINN: Sure.

Has there been much increase in the amount of land put to cultivation over the past year and, if so, by how much?

J. CHIPPETT: I'll refer that one to you, Steve.

S. BALSOM: I'll have to find that, Jamie. I've got it here somewhere.

D. WOODROW: We have agricultural titles. Currently, we have 2,862 in total, either leased or licensed, and the area covers close to 55,000 hectares.

J. DINN: Thank you.

D. WOODROW: In 2025, we had 26 new ones and 18 titles issued.

J. DINN: How many new ones were in 2025?

D. WOODROW: Twenty-six applications and 18 have been issued.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Again, under 4.2.02, Land Development, last year, it was said by the previous minister in Estimates with the 50-year agricultural leases, government doesn't allow commercial production on those. I was just seeking an explanation as to why that is and whether you think that making changes to that rule might yield more locally grown produce.

D. WOODROW: Sorry, I really can't hear your question.

J. DINN: You can't hear the question?

Last year, it was said by the previous minister in Estimates that with the 50-year agricultural leases, government doesn't allow commercial production on those. I was just looking for an explanation as to why that is and whether you think that making changes to that rule might yield more locally grown produce.

P. FORSEY: Yeah, I appreciate the question, MHA, but we'll have to research that one and we'll have to get back to you on some numbers on that one.

J. DINN: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

J. DINN: I do.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

The 2024-2025 annual report of the Farm Industry Review Board noted that, "Balancing the needs of existing producers with potential new entrants requires diplomacy and financial acumen."

What are the points of diversions between the two groups or where don't their interests align?

P. FORSEY: We're done agriculture.

CHAIR: Member, it should be realized that we're dealing with the Lands issue.

J. DINN: 4.2.02?

P. FORSEY: Yes.

J. DINN: We're asking: The annual report of the Farm Industry Review Board noted, "Balancing the needs of existing producers with potential new entrants requires diplomacy and financial acumen."

What are the points of diversion between the two groups, the existing producers with the potential new entrants, or where their interests don't align?

K. RUSSELL: Sir, I have to object to this ridiculously obtuse line of questioning.

J. DINN: Chair, if I may respond, I've had to listen to where the Member had to speak

about caribou when we were talking about Agriculture. So this is not a ridiculous obtuse any more than his was. So I will –

K. RUSSELL: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: I will be allowed to ask the question.

K. RUSSELL: (Inaudible.)

J. DINN: Excuse me. I would ask that the Chair rule that there is no need to comment on my questions; that's for you to do. I have not commented on the questions that the Member has asked. It's up to me to ask the questions here.

If the Members do not know or can't answer it, we'll provide it and they can do that later. The Member is entitled to ask his own questions, make his own comments, but otherwise keep the comments to himself, please, Chair.

K. RUSSELL: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: I ask the Member for Lake Melville to just respect other Members.

K. RUSSELL: Certainly, Chair.

CHAIR: Continue on, Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: That was the question. I'm just wondering if, indeed, there are any divergence that you're aware of between existing producers with potential new entrants?

P. FORSEY: We'll review that question and we'll get back to him.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for that section, Chair.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Are there any further questions?

Seeing no further questions on this subhead, I now as the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 4.1.01 to 4.2.02, Lands.

CHAIR: Shall 4.1.01 to 4.2.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

On motion, subheads 4.1.01 through 4.2.02 carried.

CHAIR: I now ask the Clerk to call the next subheading.

CLERK: 5.1.01 to 5.1.05, Emergency Services.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01 to 5.1.05 carry?

I now call the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

P. PARSONS: A question for the minister: For the wildland coveralls, will every department throughout the province receive these wildland coveralls?

N. CROKE: Yes, every department will receive pairs of coveralls.

P. PARSONS: They'll receive that for this wildfire season this summer?

N. CROKE: We've got to go out to an RFP, so it depends. It's gone to procurement now, just to be reviewed, so we're hoping to have it out within the next little while. I can't speak to how much can be delivered by fire season.

P. PARSONS: Okay, that's good news. Thank you.

Now I'll just quickly move on to section 5.1.03, Disaster Assistance. For the Allowances and Assistance, that's related to payments to residents and businesses for damages incurred during disasters. Can you advise why we didn't see the full budget last year, given that it was the wildfires, please?

J. CHIPPETT: The Allowances and Assistance lines would be based on claims from individuals from previously approved Disaster Financial Assistance Programs. We await word from the federal government on the approval of the CBN wildfire as an event that triggered Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements. We expect that to come, but we haven't received final word on that yet. So there wouldn't officially be claims related to the wildfire from last year yet.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

So in that hold up, ultimately, we're waiting. So they've been submitted to the federal government and we're just waiting on word back from the feds?

J. CHIPPETT: So what's been requested of the federal government is them to say that the wildfire events meet the federal threshold for Disaster Financial Assistance. So once we receive that, then the process with respect to claims and so on will begin.

P. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

Also, under the same subhead there for Disaster Assistance, Temporary Housing Assistance Program funding, will that be coming from this budget line in this area?

J. CHIPPETT: That is contained within the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing budget.

P. PARSONS: Okay, so we're working with Housing. Can we confirm that this assistance program terminated on March 31, or would that be for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing?

K. MARTIN: That program has been extended until September 30 of this year.

P. PARSONS: Of this fall?

K. MARTIN: Yes.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

How many individuals were still seeking assistance through that program?

K. MARTIN: There are 48 households currently in that program.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

What are their current living situations?

K. MARTIN: Those individuals are either living with friends and family or they are in rental accommodations.

P. PARSONS: Okay. Thank you.

Also, Minister, can you confirm how much money has been paid out to residents in Conception Bay North thus far to date?

K. MARTIN: A lot of the assistance that has been provided to households has been for their evacuation assistance. They've been receiving financial assistance through the Temporary Housing Program. There have been business stipends and employee evacuation supports, but those things were provided through the departments which those programs fall under.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

We're seeing, obviously, an increase in the federal revenue of over \$13 million. This would be assumed to be related to the funding from the provincial Disaster Financial Assistance Program, would that be right?

J. CHIPPETT: Yes, so that revenue would be anticipated revenue from claims from past events.

P. PARSONS: Also in the Budget Speech, there was a pledge of \$25 million to rebuild Conception Bay North. Would the \$14 million come from the federal government in this line to be included in that \$25 million?

J. CHIPPETT: The \$25 million for CBN is separate from this heading. The \$25 million for CBN is held centrally in the Department of Finance.

P. PARSONS: Okay, I'll just conclude on this particular section.

Residents in the Conception Bay North region were concerned about whether the unincorporated areas were going to be able to avail of the funding through the provincial Disaster Financial Assistance Program. Has any decision been made on that, to change that?

K. MARTIN: We work regularly with the unincorporated residents, as well as the residents of the town. Any requests for financial assistance would be for individuals. There would be no difference between the individuals, whether they live in the town or the unincorporated area.

P. PARSONS: That's good. Thank you.

Now I'll move to 5.1.05. This is regarding Newfoundland and Labrador 911.

How is the department addressing the disparities in the 911 access for rural and remote communities, particularly where cell coverage is limited?

N. CROKE: Cell coverage is a challenge for rural Newfoundland, just as it is a challenge for rural Canada. It is an issue. Where people have land line access, then they can call 911 and if they have cellphone access or if you have a VoIP phone or if you have Starlink set-up and stuff like this, you could use VoIP access. Most of the VoIP providers now actually connect right into 911, they'll transfer the call directly to us.

P. PARSONS: Okay.

A question on the cellphone coverage. As we know, there was an election promise to increase money for cellphone coverage. I don't know if that would be with Finance or maybe a different department, but is it something that the department or the minister can comment on, on an update, an increase for cellphone coverage?

N. CROKE: I believe that's with Industry, JGRD. They manage the cellphone (inaudible), we just provide some direction and assistance to them and that's it.

P. PARSONS: I guess maybe my question wasn't clear. It was an election promise for the province to invest more, I think a certain amount of millions, several million, to help increase cellphone access province-wide. I just wondered if there was an update on that, given that this department heavily deals with the reliance for cellphone coverage.

P. FORSEY: I'd have to get that information for you.

P. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

What performance metrics does the department track for 911 response times and call handling? Can those be made public?

N. CROKE: So 911 works with the two public safety answering points and we track all our calls. We track call volumes in and what they're called for, whether it's police, fire or ambulance. We track the duration of the call. We track where it goes. It's all recorded so we can make that information available.

P. PARSONS: Thank you.

Okay, that's it for me.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Under 5.1.03, Disaster Assistance, what outstanding disaster claims are included in this block of funding?

N. CROKE: You mean for the Allowances and Assistance, and Grants? Is that what –?

J. DINN: Anything at all, yes, please.

N. CROKE: They could be for any of the previous storms. They could be the Eastern blizzard, the West Coast flood, storm surge and the Thanksgiving rain storm. All those are still there. It takes up to five years to go through the process.

J. DINN: If I may then, it could be very well – I can't remember when Fiona was, so would it be –

N. CROKE: We're still dealing with Fiona.

J. DINN: Okay, and if I may, are we still dealing with that, then?

N. CROKE: With Fiona? Yes.

J. DINN: I thought so.

Thank you.

What action is government taking to address the inadequacies of the emergency preparedness as outlined in the Auditor General's report?

P. FORSEY: Yes, the AG report with regard to the emergency plans, we've already accepted the recommendations of the Auditor General. We've moved to planning. We've increased some emergency plans. We've approved some emergency plans. We've worked on our own departmental plans and we're working on the provincial planned strategy.

That's what we've done so far with regard to the Auditor General's report only a couple of weeks ago. Other than that, we've accepted all the recommendations and we're moving forward.

J. DINN: Thank you.

Is there any timeline on the recommendations, when the work you're doing will be completed, when you will have these recommendations completed? Is there a timeline for that?

P. FORSEY: My experience with the Auditor General, being the Chair of Public Accounts for the past couple of years, is that the Auditor General usually gives three years to have your recommendations report in, but we're hoping to have them a lot sooner than that.

J. DINN: Okay. Thank you.

5.1.04, Fire Protection Vehicles and Equipment: How many municipalities have applied for upgraded fire equipment in the past year and how many of them were able to receive new equipment?

J. CHIPPETT: So last year, for '25-'26, there were applications for 61 vehicles and 146 applications for equipment. There was approval for 14 vehicles and approval for 42 equipment applications.

J. DINN: Thank you.

You answered the second part already so I won't ask that.

Subhead 5.1.04: How much of the \$7 million for fire equipment, supplies, staffing and other areas as announced on April 24 is one-time funding?

P. FORSEY: Could you repeat that question again?

J. DINN: Sure, no problem.

How much of the \$7 million for fire equipment, supplies, staffing and other areas as announced on April 24 is one-time funding?

P. FORSEY: Out of that \$7 million, there was \$4.16 million put in for fire vehicles and the equipment budget. That's one-time funding.

J. DINN: Thank you.

That's it for that section.

Thank you, Chair.

P. FORSEY: Thank you.

CHAIR: Any further questions?

P. PARSONS: I just wanted to thank the officials, I mean, it's not lost on anybody what we went through, so a heartfelt thank you to the people on the ground, the work and the hours that you put in. As we know, many people have experienced devastation. Ultimately, we're all here to work together, to protect our communities and ultimately our residents. So thank you so much for everything that you do.

I look forward to having a good working relationship with the minister going forward.

J. DINN: I would also like to say thank you very much for that and for being here until 10 o'clock. It's a testament to your dedication. Thank you for your patience in answering questions.

CHAIR: I actually have one more question from the Member for Labrador West.

J. POWER: I should have asked this question probably in section 1 or section 2, but I'm going to ask it anyway.

With regard to wildland fires, I know back in 2014, we put a fire break in the back of Wabush. I'm going to say it was almost a kilometre that we put there. I noticed last

summer in Lab City, the fire break was much smaller. I'm going to say it was probably 400 feet.

Is there new science out proving that the smaller break is better than a larger one? I know in 2014, I saw fire jump a lake that was over a kilometre long. I'm just wondering is there new science saying that the breaks can be shorter?

B. ADAMS: There's a ton of research going into fire behaviour science right now, but certainly there hasn't been anything that suggests smaller fire breaks are more effective. Generally, when we're dealing with an active fire event and we're looking at building a fire break, there are a couple of factors we take into account. One is, we have our fire behaviour person look at the fire behaviour, the available fuels, the forecast and where the fire is likely to travel and all that sort of thing, then we look at the lay of the land, I'll call it, in terms of what natural barriers exist there. Can you join two bodies of water together? Can you run it up against a mine pit, as an example? Then look at what available tools you have to actually create the fire break and the time you have to create it.

So if you want to make it a kilometre wide, it's going to be shorter in the same amount of time. Usually in those cases, you're building it in a pretty tight window. So there are a lot of factors going into where you put it and what it looks like.

J. POWER: Minister, I just want to thank your department as well for everything that they do. I hope you're not so busy this year as you were last year.

CHAIR: Okay.

P. FORSEY: I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for attending the Estimates this evening. I certainly would like to thank my department on a job well done on answering most of the questions, or all of the questions, actually, because I can't say I

answered any, probably. Anyway, a job well done and I hope they were satisfactory to you. Any questions, we'll get back to you.

I know the concerns, of course, because of the wildfires and forest fires and emergency and all the relationships that I have and I know where all the questions were around, I can appreciate that and that's a good thing.

I think the Estimates are good. We talked about Santa Claus and we talked about reindeer so far in these Estimates, so we did a good set of Estimates.

With that, I'll just turn it back over to the Chair.

CHAIR: Seeing no further questions for the subhead, I'll now ask the Clerk to recall the subhead.

CLERK: 5.1.01 to 5.1.05, Emergency Services.

CHAIR: Shall 5.1.01 to 5.1.05 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, subheads 5.1.01 through 5.1.05 carried.

CLERK: The total.

CHAIR: Shall the total carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands, total heads, carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the Estimates of the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, Estimates of the Department of Forestry, Agriculture and Lands carried without amendment.

CHAIR: Thank you to the minister, department officials and the Committee for the attendance.

The date for the next meeting will take place on Wednesday, May 6, at 5:30, to consider the Estimates for the Department of Jobs, Growth and Rural Development.

I'll ask for a mover for adjournment.

Moved by the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

All those against, 'nay.'

Motion carried.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.