

HANSARD

NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

COMMITTEE

ON

RESOURCES

Thursday, September 22, 2016

COMMITTEE ROOM

**Department of Natural Resources
Cape Breton Privateland Partnership**

Resources Committee

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft (Chairman)

Mr. Terry Farrell (Vice-Chairman)

Mr. Stephen Gough

Mr. Bill Horne

Mr. Derek Mombourquette

Hon. Pat Dunn

Mr. John Lohr

Hon. Sterling Belliveau

Ms. Lenore Zann

[Mr. Gordon Wilson replaced Mr. Terry Farrell]

[Hon. David Wilson replaced Hon. Sterling Belliveau]

In Attendance:

Ms. Darlene Henry
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb
Legislative Counsel

WITNESSES

Department of Natural Resources

Mr. Frank Dunn, Deputy Minister
Mr. Allan Eddy, Associate Deputy Minister



House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

HALIFAX, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2016

STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

9:00 A.M.

CHAIRMAN

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning, this is the Standing Committee on Resources. My name is Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, I am the Chair of the committee and the MLA for Lunenburg. We will be receiving a presentation from Mr. Frank Dunn, Deputy Minister of the Department of Natural Resources. There will be an agenda-setting session at the end and committee business, so we will end the meeting at 10:30 a.m. Are we in agreement? Okay, that's fine.

I will ask people to introduce themselves for the record.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would remind people to turn your phones to vibrate or turn them off. The only people who are allowed to take photos during the meeting are the media. Washrooms and coffee can be found to my left, out the door. If there is an emergency, hopefully not today as yesterday, you can exit through the Granville Street entrance and proceed to the Grand Parade by St. Paul's Church.

I remind witnesses and members to wait to be recognized so that your microphones can be turned on. I welcome our witnesses today and ask you to introduce yourselves.

[The committee witnesses introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, you may proceed with your presentation.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Thank you, Madam Chairman, Allan is with me today. Allan, as he mentioned, is the Associate Deputy Minister of Natural Resources. He is also responsible for the forestry file so we'll do a bit of a tag team when it comes to answering members' questions this morning.

Good morning and thank you, Madam Chairman. I'm pleased to be here today to present to the Committee on Resources to discuss the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership. This is an important initiative for the province and I think it's an excellent thing that the committee has called the department to speak about it. As this is National Forest Week, I have to say that the committee's timing for discussion on a forest topic is flawless.

There's no question that the forest sector is a significant economic driver in the province. In fact, the sector employs 11,500 Nova Scotians in direct and indirect jobs, and adds \$800 million to the province's gross domestic product.

First, I'd like to provide a description of what the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership is, how it works, and the role it plays in today's forestry sector. The goal of the private land outreach program is to improve economic, social and environmental contributions from non-industrial, family-owned woodlots in Cape Breton. It's an initiative that helps landowners and forest management contractors to share best forest management practices. In simple terms, the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership is a partnership of organizations that promotes and facilitates services for private, typically family-owned, woodlot owners in Cape Breton. The partnership is made up of three forest management groups: the Nova Scotia Landowners and Forest Fibre Producers Association, the Baddeck Valley Wood Producers, and the North Inverness Forest Management group.

The Cape Breton Privateland Partnership provides professional and independent advice for private woodlot owners. Essentially it provides a menu of services for woodlot owners who want to enhance their woodlots. Landowners who become members of the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership are offered reduced prices for a number of services, including drone imagery and woodlot monitoring. Members receive a forest management plan, access to enhanced funding for silviculture, and help and advice in selecting a contractor for work on their woodlot.

The Cape Breton Privateland Partnership performs treatment monitoring on member woodlots to ensure the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership standards are being met. By joining the partnership members are assured that their forests are managed to the highest possible standards.

The partnership is based in a small office in Port Hawkesbury. However, the majority of the work is achieved through a virtual network of forest extension workers around Cape Breton. The partnership makes services that already exist more available to woodlot owners and contractors. For this reason, the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership is made up of only an office administrator and a manager. The objective of the partnership

staff is to coordinate and facilitate the work of extension providers and contractors around the island.

You may wonder why Cape Breton has such a specialized service. This is a model that has been developed especially for Cape Breton, other entry points for private woodlots in different parts of Nova Scotia, including the Association for Sustainable Forestry, three Group Ventures in central Nova Scotia, and the Federation of Nova Scotia Woodland Owners. We are preparing similar models in other regions to cover all Nova Scotians in order to improve broad-based extension. In fact, the department will soon be ready to sign a second partnership.

The creation of the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership is directly linked to a number of specific action items in the natural resources strategy. Specifically, these action items include: No. 35, "Help private landowners understand and use an ecosystem approach to manage their woodlands." No. 42, "Provide support to owners of small private woodlots, particularly through their organizations." And No. 43, "Focus education and outreach programs on shared stewardship."

We're improving to manage our forests in Nova Scotia and, in fact, the past five years the department has transformed its approach to how it manages its forests. My department has made great progress on the natural resources strategy. This year marks the halfway point in a 10-year strategy that we call The Path We Share. The strategy looks not only at forests; this point is sometimes overlooked. However, it is important to remember that as a department we are dedicated towards working through all 23 goals and 91 actions set out in the natural resources strategy. With that, we'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We'll start with Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Thank you very much. I just quickly want to mention that back in the day in the Group Ventures, my mother was the actual secretary at the Group Ventures operation for Sissiboo Forest Management, and it was very much part of my life.

Also, I want to mention - and I think we would be remiss not to mention Kingsley Brown here today who is probably one of the most instrumental people in having this happen. I know he certainly talked to me an awful lot about it from early on, and I'm sure he's watching from abroad somewhere.

My question is, I guess trying to fully understand how this mirrors what used to be the Group Ventures. I know that the scope of it has changed, primarily with the engagement side of it. So instead of having multiple Group Ventures engaging smaller areas, we have a larger entity that engages a bigger area - or a smaller entity that engages a bigger area.

I'm more curious about the actual side of program delivery and assistance and support for management plans and silviculture operations and stuff like that. For me to

understand it more easily, can you explain possibly - and I know maybe it's not fair - the difference between the old Group Ventures and what they used to provide for assistance, and this new initiative and what they now provide?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can start, and I'm sure Mr. Eddy can answer your specific question. Just a lead-in: I think it's important for members to know, not only if we're talking about the old Group Ventures, but also if we're talking about the partnership today, why it's so important to ensure that private woodlot owners are engaged. Private landownership in Nova Scotia makes up 65 per cent of our landmass. Some numbers that folks may not know, because you hear the 65 per cent a lot: of the working forest in Nova Scotia, private land makes up 60 per cent, and when you come to the amount of fibre that's put into the system, a whopping 75 per cent to 80 per cent of all the fibre that is utilized in the forestry sector of Nova Scotia comes from private land. Ensuring that private landowners are engaged, whether it's through the old model of Group Ventures, or whether it's through a partnership, is extremely important to make sure that our forestry survives and thrives.

On the specific question on the difference, it's a little before my time, so I'm going to look to Allan, and perhaps he can add something.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Eddy.

MR. ALLAN EDDY: I guess, fundamentally there's not a huge difference in the substance. The approach is quite a bit different. A lot of it has to do with technology that's available to us. One of the biggest differences is, under the old Group Ventures system, in fact, the private land system that was in place from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s was based on a forest management plan. You had your lands cruised, and a detailed forest management plan was put in place, and that plan cost several thousand dollars to have done. The unfortunate part about that was there were a lot of folks who would say, well, I'm interested. They'd get a management plan, and some of them just wanted the plan to have for other reasons. Some of them thought they would be interested. The conversion rate from the amount of money that was spent on management plans to the amount of work that got done was relatively low, as you will recall.

The concept now - again, because of technology and being able to have data on the cloud and bring it down, the first approach is what's referred to as a rapid plan. Basically what that does is allow the forest extension worker to provide an overview of the woodlot to the landowner based on the data that exists - the forest inventory data, the photographs, a lot of those things - and pull together a summary. It's a day's worth of effort, it costs a few hundred dollars, and that's the entry point. It's a much more efficient way of getting people into the system to see whether they truly are interested in moving on to the next stage, which is to get a management plan, which is a more expensive exercise and more detailed work.

In the first year of the partnership, the conversion rate from rapid plans to full-fledged management plans wasn't as good as they would have liked to have seen. That rate of conversion is rising very rapidly. In fact, right now, I think they have a backlog of 70-some plans to be done. It's a really good way of doing it. Again, it's using the technology for a much more efficient delivery.

Probably the most fundamental difference with the partnership and any of the Group Ventures previously is that partnership also offers certification. If you'd like to have your woodlot certified, they will prepare the plan to reflect the requirements of certification and work with you as a landowner to maintain that certification.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Just to follow up on that interesting point on certification, do you know what percentage of them have opted for certification?

MR. EDDY: I can get you specifics on that, but what I do know is that the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership has the second-fastest rate of growth in certified properties in Canada, just behind a group in Quebec. I think something like 410 per cent is the rate of growth in certification. So I guess that would indicate that a significant number of landowners are opting to have a certified plan when they move from the rapid plan to the full management plan.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

HON. PAT DUNN: Just on a comment you made about going forward in preparing other partnerships in the province, could you expand on that with regard to perhaps where they might be and obstacles you might be facing and things that we have learned from the previous five years?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I guess one of the fundamental principles that we try to find or follow with the partnership is to utilize existing organizations, so we don't want to reinvent the wheel here when we create these partnerships. You'll notice that the organizations in the Cape Breton partnership are existing organizations. Our plan is to ensure that partnerships across the province utilize existing organizations.

Our plan is to cover Nova Scotia by region. We call these regions service areas. The work we're doing now is a service area for western Nova Scotia. Our plan is in the future to also have a service area in the central part of the province and a service area in the eastern part of the province. So if everything goes the way we would like, we would be looking at four service areas.

Our idea is to provide them with seed funding originally, much the same way as we've provided funding to the Cape Breton partnership, with the idea that over a period of time we would get to a point where approximately 50 per cent of the costs to operate a partnership in a service area are actually covered by the members. If you want, we can get into how that would happen. At least in the Cape Breton partnership there's a membership

fee of \$25 per member and then the services, some of which Mr. Eddy referred to, some of them are free and some of them are provided to members at a reduced rate.

The plan is to have four service areas, and I would suspect the next one you will see will be one in the western region of the province.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

HON. DAVID WILSON: Just to go back a little bit on the certification, I know in the information that was provided that members of the partnership can have their property certified under the Forest Stewardship Council - the FSC. But back in the Spring I know the government indicated that they were going to drop that certification in the Medway district because of duplication under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Is that just a one-off or is that something that's going to happen across the province? Maybe just a little more clarification on that situation and then what's happening in Cape Breton.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Sure. I can jump in there and then maybe Allan can add some points that I might miss. So yes, the department did drop the FSC certification in the western Crown lands - I guess it would have been sometime around this time last year, I think - because of a duplication of certification programs that were on those lands. Those were lands that we had acquired from Bowater.

There is another certification program, the SFI certification program which is well recognized across the country; in fact, it is the most utilized certification program across the country. It has board members with Ducks Unlimited, and the wildlife association are on that board, so it truly is a recognized program.

For us, although we dropped the FSC certification because of the bureaucratic red tape to go through two certifications, I think it's important to note that what's really important is what happens on the ground. When we dropped the certification we did commit, though, to continue to provide and do all the operations and processes on the ground that currently would have existed with the FSC.

The other thing to keep in mind is the western lands are currently operated by West For, which I believe is made up of 14 sawmills. There was no need for those sawmills to have an FSC certification from a market perspective. It's a little different in the eastern end of the province where Port Hawkesbury Paper does have an FSC certification. Many of these sawmills and the partnership itself would be providing fibre to Port Hawkesbury Paper in some manner or another.

MR. EDDY: So that's the situation on Crown, and just to translate it a little bit further to private land, there are, in fact, three different certifications in Nova Scotia currently. As the deputy indicated, you've got SFI, FSC, and there's also a CSA certification. A fairly familiar story in Nova Scotia, we each have to have our own story and we each have our own approach to things, so different groups have brought in those

various certifications. We're the champions for them and so there are private woodlots all across the province that would have one or the other of those certifications.

For the last three years we've been working with the various groups to sort of say, look folks, certification is a very good thing. I think everybody agrees with that, but I think everybody who knows anything about certification will tell you it's a very intensive process - a lot of overhead attached to it, paperwork and all of that, and maintaining the certification. As the deputy said, what really matters is what you do on the ground and that's very important, but in order to maintain that certification you have to have all the verification, the paperwork, and all of that.

If you have multiple systems and you're maintaining multiple overheads, it starts to really run up the costs for everybody. So one of the things we had been working on with private landowner groups was to say, look folks, you should get together and decide which one of these three certification systems works the best for the majority and find a way so that we could have one private land certificate for all of the province. That would cut down dramatically on the cost of that.

The groups have been working on that and they are focused on the FSC certification and again, because there are a lot of landowners that favour that particular certification, and as the deputy pointed out, there is, in fact, some market potential for it, at least in the eastern part of the province as an individual landowner selling to that one market.

MR. DAVID WILSON: That was part of my question: is there a disadvantage of having the three certifications? Is it the government's position to allow the industry to move in that direction or is there going to be anything imposed down the road? Is there a timeline that the government has indicated to the industry to make a decision by this date or government may - I don't know if it's introduce legislation or anything. Is there any indication that's the direction or is it up to the industry and the partners to do it?

MR. FRANK DUNN: It's up to the industry to decide. We're not going to impose what certification a private landowner should use.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: Thank you, a great discussion. I would like to go into how the local farmer or woodlot owner proceeds to get the help of the partnership, and what's the value of that? How many of the farmers or woodlot owners participate in this process, especially in Cape Breton? It sounds like it's quite a huge number of woodlot owners.

MR. FRANK DUNN: I guess we're on a bit of a recurring theme here. I can start and then Allan might want to add. Right now, as of 2015, there are 318 new members in the Cape Breton partnership. Of those new members there are about 418 woodlots, and about 26,000 hectares of land would encompass the 400-some-odd woodlots.

How do they join? I mentioned there's an office in Port Hawkesbury. There's also that extension piece that we had talked about. This is very much a partnership and whenever we can we promote the partnership and our partners do as well, so it's becoming known in Cape Breton.

As far as the types of services that a member of the partnership could expect to get, there is a series of them. I won't go into any detail on any particular one for the sake of time, but if any member wants either me or Allan to elaborate on what that service is, we'd be happy to.

There's the woodlot assessment report, which is free to members. There is a forest management plan, which Allan already talked about a little bit in relation to the partnership and how that's a little different than when the joint ventures were in existence. For members, it's \$500, but for a non-member, it's \$1,200. You don't necessarily have to be a member of this partnership, also, to get some of these services but obviously the advantage is to be a member.

We talked about FSC certification already; that's a service that's provided. A service around contractor supervision, so you could actually have that partnership provide a service to you to actually supervise a contractor to ensure that they're harvesting your woodlot the way that you had expected them to. Drone imagery - I think drones are the wave of the future, and you can actually have your woodlot mapped and a video of your woodlot basically.

Layout of your woodlot is more of a paper type of exercise. Silviculture funding is something we can get into if you'd like. The final piece is woodlot monitoring, so once a year the partnership would actually have someone go out to your woodlot, have a look at it, see how things are, and provide you with an update. Those are some of the services that are provided by the partnership.

MR. HORNE: The size of the woodlots - is it areas that are clear-cut or is it properly taking wood out for saw logs and so on. Do you have a number?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I'll offer my opinion, and I know Allan is closer to the scene down there. If you remember the rationale around why we want to engage private woodlot owners and in this particular case in Cape Breton, it's because they had become disengaged from the forestry process.

I think a lot of that has to do with demographics. Woodlot owners are getting older. Some are less interested in pursuing that forestry venture. Back in the mid- to late-2000s, we had the price of lumber collapse, and basically the industry collapsed. We had a lot of people move out of that area of business. What would the woodlots look like? I'm sure there would be a diverse array. However, many of them, I would suspect, haven't been harvested in a while simply because the private landowners have been disengaged from the process. I'm sure there are some that have been clear-cut over time, but equally I'm sure

there are some that have been cut through partial harvest methods and some that haven't been cut at all for years.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Eddy, did you have something to add to that?

MR. EDDY: I just want to pick up on it. The question was, how big are the woodlots? It depends on who you talk to whether they would describe their property as a woodlot or not. In general, there's a figure that has been around since the 1970s that says there are 30,000 woodlot owners in Nova Scotia. It all depends on where you set the boundaries, but that's based on a premise of 50 acres and above, or 20 hectares, in general. The partnership doesn't cut it off there. They will take smaller woodlots because part of it is to help those smaller properties be worked on at the same time as others to overcome the economy of scale challenges that they face. There are certainly different sizes, but in general, the smaller ones would be 20 hectares in size and go up to several hundred hectares in size.

I just want to pick up on the comment on harvesting because I think there's a sense that there's that bad clear-cutting, and then there's all the other good things. One of the things that the natural resources strategy speaks to is the fact that we are moving as a province to be consistent-based landscape level management. Really what that does is say, when we start looking at how we should harvest the land, we need to reflect the natural conditions of the land and the overall needs of the ecosystem.

It's important to understand that in nature there are a lot of things - there are two kinds of disturbances. There is frequent disturbance regime which means that something comes in on a fairly regular basis - spruce budworm, for instance, we're talking about Cape Breton, a 30 to 40 year cycle - and tends to come in and take the forest down, either disease, insect, fire.

In nature there are a lot of circumstances where what happens in a clear-cut is what nature would do. The difference in a clear-cut is that we make good use of the fibre to help drive the economy of the province as opposed to just simply allow it to be used in the natural cycle, which of course as we understand in nature there are all sorts of orders of magnitude of extra built into the system just to overcome various bits and pieces. So with good management, we can make sure that we capture that and use it to the best advantage of our society.

I think it's important to understand that clear-cutting has a place. The challenge has been that sometimes it's used where it shouldn't be. What this ecosystem-based landscape management will do is make sure that every harvest is based on an assessment of the soil conditions, the trees that are there, the exposure that's there, the interaction of that particular set of trees or piece of land in the larger landscape to understand it in terms of some of the wildlife concerns and pieces like that. It all has a place.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. JOHN LOHR: Thank you for your presentation. I'm just curious about the funding. I understand that the partnership received \$500,000 in 2014 and has received \$250,000 each year after that - or in 2015 and I'm not sure about this year. I'm just wondering, do you see that number declining? Do you see this going to full cost recovery or will this remain subsidized to that approximate level indefinitely?

MR. FRANK DUNN: The numbers I have for funding from a provincial funding perspective - in 2014-15, \$400,000. Currently this year for 2015-16, in the fiscal year, the funding is \$300,000. The plan is by year five that this funding would be reduced to \$200,000.

As I mentioned earlier, our long-term goal here is that these partnerships would be 50 per cent self-financing. So from a money perspective, that's our goal. Our goal would be if it roughly costs \$400,000 or so for public funding to go into this to operate, we'll eventually get down to \$200,000.

MR. LOHR: So if there were groups of woodlot owners presumably in other areas that wanted to have an association like this, that funding would be available to those groups also.

MR. FRANK DUNN: That's correct. The funding comes out of our extension division within the department. The primary goal is to engage and educate our private landowners for the very reason that I had mentioned earlier. They are critical to ensuring that we have a healthy forest industry.

To answer your question, these other service areas that I had mentioned previously - whether western region, central region or the eastern part of the province - they would also have funding from the department at their disposal.

MR. LOHR: I guess what I'm wondering, and maybe it was in your documents - I apologize that I didn't get it correct - I see your cost list of services, but what is the cost to become a member? I see you have a different price list for members and non-members. What is the fee to become a member?

MR. FRANK DUNN: It is \$25 per year per member.

MR. LOHR: That's a pretty low fee.

MR. FRANK DUNN: If I might, though, I think it's important for the committee members that this is not an exercise to generate a revenue source per se from membership fees. This is an initiative to re-engage a sector of the Nova Scotia populous which we find is critical for us to ensure that we have a viable forest sector.

Whether those membership fees will change over time, I think that will depend on the partnership and the organizations that run them.

MR. EDDY: Just to expand on that a little bit, I think again the concept here is when we talked about the Group Ventures earlier, one of the things I neglected to point out was when the Group Ventures were in place, government would have handed them a binder and said here's how the Group Venture is run, here are the rules and regulations, this is what you must do.

When we set up these service areas the first thing we say is, here are the bookends of what we're trying to accomplish, if that's of interest to you then we're interested in talking with you. But most important, you, as the folks who are driving this, first need to go get the social licence to do this, so you need to bring the membership together and the various other business interests so that we don't get a situation where people say we're competing against government money in this game. So as you see in the case of the Cape Breton partnership, as they formed, they had all the major silviculture contractors together, the three existing landowner groups all came together and did that.

What we said to them is, you must present us a business plan that we're going to stress-test to see whether or not it's reasonable to expect that you can meet this expectation that over the five years you can get down to 50 per cent, so that's what they did. In their particular case, they had low membership rates and they were looking at other ways of generating those funds.

I can tell you that halfway into the exercise we sat down with them and said it doesn't seem to be working so well, what do you think? They went back to their board and thought about it then came back. They have changed their structure now and we're expecting a report at the end of this month. I met with them a couple of weeks ago and the verbal update was that they were on track with their business plan so things are starting to come.

As we move around the province, and particularly if we were looking in a western service area, they may have a different business model. We're okay with that, but it has to be one that makes sense and is logical and will get them to it. So some folks may be depending on membership fees, others may figure they'll generate it through charging fees for generating management plans, and others may look at it as a checkoff on the wood.

That was one of the characteristics of Group Ventures, you agreed that when you were a member of a Group Venture that you would market your wood through them and that they would get \$1 or \$2 per ton of wood. So there are different methods that are possible. Our view of it is that rather than tell them this is what you must do, we ask, what works for you, and prove it to us with a viable business plan.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson, do you have a question? No, okay Mr. Mombourquette.

MR. DEREK MOMBOURQUETTE: Thank you gentlemen for your presentation. You answered a bit of it throughout the presentation in regard to the growth of the sector

and the project in Cape Breton. What I'm curious about is, what evaluations are built into the partnership from your department, just moving forward?

I know that you talked about a number of things during the presentation but just specifically, as it moves forward and as it grows and as you've indicated, people have joined, what evaluations from the department are put in place that continue to measure the success?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Mr. Eddy talked a little bit about evaluation. Our first report from the Cape Breton partnership is due to us September 30th of this year, with another report at the end of the next fiscal year.

Evaluation of any partnership or any pilot in my mind is very important and sometimes they are things that are often overlooked. The questions that were raised around funding - we want to ensure that we're doing our due diligence and that the funding that we're providing into this partnership, and potentially future partnerships, is money that is well spent and is actually accomplishing what we want it to do. So there is a series of criteria or evaluations that the Cape Breton partnership in particular will be providing to us and I can mention some of them here.

The number of members - how they have grown that membership since 2014-15. The percentage of total landowners, so the number of total landowners in the service area that the partnership services is that percentage that are members of the partnership growing.

Also the volume of harvest. I had mentioned that the current membership has somewhere around 26,000 hectares in the partnership so ultimately our plan is, it's great to have membership increase and the number of woodlots increase but if the harvest on the land that we're talking about doesn't increase, then the end game is really not being achieved. The end game here is to ensure that the fibre supply that goes into the market improves, so the volume of harvests over time, and that changes also.

The final one is the dollar amount around silviculture. Silviculture is a very important program for us. In fact, it's about a \$12 million industry across the province. Government puts about \$7 million every year into silviculture - almost half of that is for private land, a little less than half. Equally important is that if you have increases in harvestable volume, that we also see these private woodlot owners accessing silviculture and that's the final evaluation piece that we're looking at.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

MR. PAT DUNN: I'm just wondering - and I think you may have touched on it - if there are any new jobs created from the funding, either directly or indirectly with this partnership, any new jobs within the province?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can start and maybe answer the question anecdotally and Mr. Eddy might have some numbers, I'm not sure. Some of the players in the game, if you want to call it that, that we haven't talked about a whole lot yet are contractors - those who actually go onto a plot of land in Nova Scotia and actually harvest the fibre.

When the downturn occurred in the mid to late 2000s, we had a raft of contractors leave the industry and as a result - my associate deputy often says to me, the fibre is there, we just need to get it out of the woods. So at least anecdotally, partnerships like this are re-engaging contractors with private woodlot owners, with the hope that if private woodlot owners are looking to have more of their land harvested in a sustainable manner, that there will be more work and it will attract contractors into the business.

We're also looking at one of the key things for the partnership in Cape Breton, we want to ensure that you get the best value for your fibre that's cut. So whether it's pulpwood or whether it's saw logs, whether it's hardwood, that in and of itself should provide a supply and an ability to stimulate the market in some way.

Allan, I don't know if you have any specific numbers around employee growth or not.

MR. EDDY: I don't have specifics but what I can say is, certainly on the service side of it - I mentioned earlier they have 71 management plans in front of them to be written. That's an area where again, through the 1970s and early 1990s there were lots of people around the province - technicians and foresters - employed in creating those management plans. That system had pretty much withered and gone away. By renewing this, there needs to be people going in there. So whether it's a brand new job or it's a growth opportunity for existing consultants to help sustain their businesses, there's no question, the service side of it represents new activity.

As the deputy pointed out also, we did need a growth in our harvesting capacity. We have seen it and one of the key pieces that's required for those folks to attract the necessary financing is to be able to show that they have a wood supply - that if the bank lends them \$1 million to buy harvesting equipment, they are going to be able to access wood into the future.

In most of the rest of Canada, of course, where Crown land ownership is in the 85 to 95 per cent range, it's really not an issue for them because they know they're going to access Crown land and they can look at various contracts with major companies. Here in Nova Scotia, having access and demonstrating access to private land is very difficult, obviously, because it's a landowner-by-landowner piece. There are no long-term contracts with those folks.

So having these kinds of organizations in place where people can point and say, look, landowners are being aggregated there. One of the purposes of that organization is to

help provide an entry point to the market for them, help shore up the confidence of the people to provide the financing which allows the contracting industry to grow.

MR. PAT DUNN: Just to follow up with regard to harvesting the fibre, these particular private landowner lots, is there any biomass coming from them towards the mill? I also hear occasionally - again, I have no idea if it's accurate - that good sections of hardwood stands are sometimes used in this biomass.

MR. EDDY: An interesting question. We know that whole debate raged for the last two or three years and earlier this year the government changed the designation on the biomass plant that changed the must-run designations. Therefore, it now only operates when it's economically driven. From a dispatch perspective, what that has fundamentally meant is that the amount of primary biomass - primary biomass is where you go out to harvest the trees specifically to take it to the biomass plant - has dropped off to almost zero.

In fact, on a go-forward basis they're projecting that the plant needs about 300,000 tons of biomass to operate, and only about 40,000 tons, or 13 per cent, will be required as primary biomass. That's mostly in the wintertime and that's just kind of to balance the moisture content of the fuel.

So far this year about 14,000 tons were previously harvested in anticipation of the existing contract before the must-run change. Two thousand tons were used as a trial when they were jiggling the plant up a little bit trying to redo the boiler. Another 12,000 tons were purchased because it had been harvested and are in stockpile.

The Nova Scotia Power contract obviously changed. Port Hawkesbury Paper now has that contract to supply, and this year Nova Scotia Power was looking for 40,000 tons. Back to that 13 per cent I referenced earlier, that's already sitting in the stockpile so there is virtually no harvesting going on anywhere in the province of biomass for that facility.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: The other three service areas that we have - you mentioned the western area. So we have Cape Breton up and running. I'm just curious about, first, the status - and maybe if you could give a little bit more of a description of the geographic area and the people who might be involved with the western one. If you can - I know it's still not signed off on, but if there's anything you can share with that.

More importantly, I'm also interested in knowing - this is driven by the department to have the other three areas sign on to this idea, or is this coming from the grassroots up? Obviously from the grassroots up works far better, but we still need to maintain the goalposts on this, that kind of stuff. I'm just curious of the process for the other two areas and the status of the western region.

MR. FRANK DUNN: Is the department driving it? It's important to us. We're engaging with organizations in those areas. I guess a definition of a partnership is that everyone wants to be involved in coming to a solution. To Allan's point that he had mentioned earlier, these are organizations that want to be involved. In a lot of ways, the department is a facilitator in making sure that we can bring like-minded stakeholders to the table to provide that environment where we can have conversations to develop a partnership in a particular area. I don't have the details on the western area per se, but I think Allan does.

MR. EDDY: In the western area, there is Sissiboo, which you mentioned before - Sissiboo doesn't exist today, but people who were attached to that organization; La Foret Acadienne has been involved, which is one of the old Group Ventures; the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute has been involved with it; the Acadian Forest Keepers, I believe, is the name of the organization; Picea Forestry Consulting. Several of those groups have come together to bring this forward. Again, they have done the work, holding public meetings and bringing people in to understand what the interest is to take it forward.

Just to amplify, the deputy's perspective is, we believe this is the most efficient framework in which to deploy public funds for the best effect. We're not imposing it on anybody. We focused early in Cape Breton because in most change management, you work with the willing. In Cape Breton in the eastern part, as you know, there's a longstanding tradition of a little bit more formal co-operative approach to things, and so they had the platform in place and embraced it early. In fact, they were coming with various ideas that really helped us form this together.

The western end obviously is a place that we're interested in helping, largely, as mentioned earlier, because of the various constraints that the landowners face in getting their product to market because of the changes, particularly with the closure of the Bowater Mersey and the Oak Hill sawmill. It was obviously that if there was a part of the province that could benefit from it, it would be the western region if we could overcome some of those economies of scale that many of the smaller landowners face. That's why we were talking. Again, this is a partnership of the willing, so as people step up and say that they are interested, we would do it.

I think Mr. Dunn asked earlier about the cost of doing it and how that goes around the province. We don't have an unlimited pot. We have a specific budget, and so some of it is timing, how many of these groups we can entertain at a time. We need to get some of them established and contributing their 50 per cent so that we have that 50 per cent to take and invest in others. It will be a phased approach, and it has a lot to do with where the interest is and where the need is.

MR. GORDON WILSON: Just the geography of the western region, what's the boundary?

MR. EDDY: I've got to look at it, but I think in general . . .

MR. GORDON WILSON: Kings to Lunenburg?

MR. EDDY: Yes, it goes Digby, Yarmouth, Shelburne, and Queens County, I believe. I don't believe it comes up to Lunenburg yet. They may have a little piece into Lunenburg, but I think it's the other four counties that they're focused on at this point in time.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: Thank you; I appreciate the information. I'm just wondering about this number of 26,000 hectares in Cape Breton, Mr. Eddy. I'm wondering, how many potential hectares are there? How many more potential landowners or lots are there that could be part of that? What is captured statistically?

MR. EDDY: I don't have the absolute breakdown for Cape Breton for you, but to put it in perspective, we have about 5.5 million hectares of land in the province. Crown land is 1.8 million, and private land is about 3.4 million hectares of land. The forest area of that is about 2.6 million hectares - so if you looked at Cape Breton and said roughly 20 or 25 per cent of the land area; private land is relatively evenly distributed around the province, with some notable exceptions, but there is substantial room for growth.

Just put that in perspective, back to the number I said earlier of what has been quoted forever, the 30,000 woodlot owners, when you look at the five major sort of umbrella groups in the province, they probably collectively claim a membership of about 3,000, so 10 per cent. There are lots and lots of people managing their woodlots. Some of them have an interest in being attached to a formal organization; some don't. Certainly in Cape Breton we would like to see that number grow 10 times.

MR. LOHR: I'm just wondering, I know obviously there's a lot more landowners who could be part of it. One of the things we've heard is happening in Cape Breton, and it's happening first in Cape Breton, apparently, is Property Valuation Services Corporation is starting to change the designations on properties that are not being actively farmed or used as woodlots. There has been a tax break municipally if you had a woodlot but in order to qualify you need a forest management plan. I think you mentioned there was an increase recently in the number of members in this, have you heard of that? Would that be accounting for the increase in membership?

MR. FRANK DUNN: Through you, Madam Chairman, the issue of tax rates and forestry land woodlots is a big issue for municipalities. The UNSM has actually approached DNR, we've had some initial discussions around that to the point where we've agreed to have a working group look at it.

It's a complex and interesting topic. On one hand you want to entice people to be involved in the forestry sector in Nova Scotia, and one way you can do that for private

woodlot owners is to provide them with a discounted rate if their land is deemed to be forestry.

On the other hand, I don't think it's a secret that in some cases, although if you looked at the land in question you would think it was forestry, it may be attracting the forestry rate but there's little or no forestry activity happening on the land. That's a concern for the municipalities because obviously if the forestry activity is not there then the landowner should be paying the higher rate.

Are some people being enticed into the partnership potentially? I don't know how widely known the landowners in the area would know that, as a matter of due diligence, we're looking at tax rates when it comes to land. It would be an incentive to folks because one of the methods by which the Property Valuation association may be able to determine whether land is being used for forestry purposes is whether the land actually has a forest management plan. This organization provides that service to private landowners, so there is an incentive perhaps to do that and achieve the lower forestry rate.

MR. LOHR: So the increase in numbers would potentially - there should potentially be a lot more people once they realize this is an option. It serves a number of good purposes, I'm sure, to get people actively utilizing their forest resource. I guess it just seems a little non-coincidental. Was it coordinated? That's my question.

MR. FRANK DUNN: No, it was not coordinated. I think you can look at it from the other perspective as well, there is forestry land in Cape Breton that doesn't have active forestry activity on it now and perhaps is being charged the lower forestry rate. This review would result in the municipalities being able to charge a tax rate that is more application for the use of the land.

Was it targeted for that specific purpose? Absolutely not. I think the best way to describe it would be a by-product of people looking at what the advantages are and options of possibly joining the partnership.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Wilson.

MR. DAVID WILSON: There's a group of foresters travelling to Finland to study sustainable forest practice initiatives there. I have two questions. First, is the department aware of that? Second, are you participating? Are you helping fund this initiative that these foresters are going to take part in?

MR. FRANK DUNN: We are aware of the trip to Finland. There is an initiative that the department is a partner in. It's an initiative that we describe as the Forestry Lab. It is a group of stakeholders within the forestry sector, a very diverse stakeholder group. DNR is there, there are non-government entities there, there are sawmills there, there are pulp mills there, so basically everyone that is involved in the industry in some manner, not only

from an economic perspective but from an environmental perspective and forest management practices are at the table.

The Forestry Lab has met on at least two occasions. They have developed a series of seven projects that they want to pursue in the next year. The trip to Finland is one of those projects. It is budgeted I think in the vicinity of about \$8,000. The department has provided funding to the Forestry Lab itself of \$40,000.

So are we funding the trip directly? No. Indirectly, I would say we are. The trip to Finland is an example of what this group is really about and I have a list of the projects if you want to talk about them. It's thinking outside the box, thinking about some ideas in the forestry sector that maybe have not been thought about or have not been looked at in the last little while.

It so happens that the trip to a Scandinavian country to look at the forest practices there is something that the Forestry Lab wanted to do. If you want to have details around exactly how the forest works in Scandinavia, we could talk about that as well.

MR. DAVID WILSON: Maybe you just provide the committee, I think, with the projects and then if we have more questions maybe we can get in touch with the department. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, thank you. Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: I'd like you to explore a little bit of the silviculture. My understanding is that at one time it was quite popular, then it was stopped for many years, also the fact that maybe it's not the greatest use of your money for putting silviculture in. It seems to be quite a large portion of the partnership, this money spent - \$12 million I guess, \$6 million in private land. I just wanted to get your perspective of silviculture today and its value. It seems to be expensive.

MR. FRANK DUNN: I didn't want to misdirect the committee. The \$12 million that I had mentioned earlier was the silviculture for the province, so not specifically for the partnership.

In the department, we have two primary silviculture funds, if you want to call them that. We have a silviculture fund for Crown land, which is about \$4.2 million. We have a silviculture fund for private land, which is about \$3.1 million. That's the government share, I guess, if you want to call it that. That works out to be a little over \$7 million. But there are industry players as well that contribute to silviculture. With specifics around exactly what we're doing on the silviculture front, I think maybe Mr. Eddy would be the best one to answer that question for you.

MR. EDDY: Silviculture is probably the single most important thing we can do in the forest management cycle. Those who are involved in agriculture are very aware that

nature has a way of looking after itself by creating abundance. The processes are there to ensure reproduction and survival over time.

There are ways, when you begin to understand how that system works, as I referenced earlier, that you can use that process and get a more focused output of that. I think a classic example that most Nova Scotians can relate to is a garden and a carrot patch. You seed carrots, and you know they're very small seeds. They come in, they grow up, and they're very, very dense. If all you did was seed it and watch the green tops and go in the Fall, you would either have very small carrots or very few at all.

Forest stands are similar. There's a huge reproductive capacity there. They put tens of thousands of stems back on the site. If you just allow the natural process to go, those stems will stay small for a very long time. If you do the same as you would do with your carrots, which is go in and space them out, you can ensure that those trees, like the carrots, will grow to the size that you're looking to have in a much quicker time.

Pre-commercial thinning is probably the dominant silviculture treatment in the province that's used, and that's exactly what it does. When the stands are in those juvenile stages, you go in with spacing saws or power saws, and you space out the trees so that they have room to grow early and to take advantage of all that sunlight and soil nutrients. The other treatments that we do: of course, there's planting, there's commercial thinning, and there's partial harvesting. There's a whole series of silviculture treatments that are used, depending, again, on the forest condition that's encountered. But when it comes to ensuring the long-term health of our forest and in particular the commercial supply of fibre that can help drive our economy and support those individual landowners, as an investment, silviculture is probably the most important thing that we could do.

MR. HORNE: On a different note, the deputy minister has alluded to environmental issues with harvesting wood. I don't see that part of the partnership, talking about the environmental issues of going across streams or protecting streams and that sort of thing. I'm just wondering what kind of thoughts you have with that sort of value to the partnership and to the province.

MR. EDDY: I apologize, I guess we just kind of take that stuff for granted these days. It's not something special; it's the way we do business to ensure that the environmental balance is there. Certainly organizations like the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership are essential in taking that information out to the private landowners.

Again, that's one of the challenges that in organizations like DNR and some of the larger companies, we have lots of professional folks to do that work who understand it, and it's just reflex to them. Taking that information and providing best practices and best science to the private landowners is a vital piece of what we're doing with it. That's one of the rationales for why we say the funding is 50-50, because it's that kind of extension work and taking the extra time to help educate, which is not a normal function of the marketplace,

that's the role of the public purse in promoting these partnerships. So absolutely that's a key outcome.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

MR. PAT DUNN: I believe the Ivany report's fifth goal is to increase the value of Nova Scotia's exports by 50 per cent, I think maybe exceeding \$20 billion.

Looking at this partnership, in your opinion has the production and supply of forestry products increased? Is that the objective or the aim as you go forward in creating these other three regions and so on?

MR. FRANK DUNN: We don't have those numbers with us, but I can comment on the question in some areas. In fact it's a question I hoped would come up because it's an opportunity for us to talk about the sector in general and the challenges that the sector faces, particularly in Nova Scotia.

I had mentioned earlier that the industry employs 11,500 in either direct or indirect jobs. If you look at that and compare it to say tourism, tourism is somewhere around 10,000, I am told. If you look at it and compare it to the seafood sector, the seafood sector is a little bigger, we're looking more at 13,000 or 14,000, but it does give you some sort of comparison around how big the forestry sector in Nova Scotia really is.

As far as exports and markets go, we have a number of markets that companies are trying to access or have accessed, but we also have challenges with many of those markets. So with regard to finished lumber which most of our sawmills would be involved in, our primary market by far is the United States. For those who may not know, there is an agreement between Canada and the United States called the Softwood Lumber Agreement, which basically controls - I guess that's the best word to describe it - softwood lumber that is exported into the U.S. That agreement has currently expired and we're in a year of hiatus. That year of hiatus comes to an end on October 13th, the 12th or 13th - very close to actually when the House opens.

So the issue for us has been Nova Scotia has always been included in what is called the Maritime exclusion. Our stumpage rates are based on fair market value in Nova Scotia, so what we charge for wood on Crown land is tied to the fair market value of commercial transactions. The U.S. has said that since your stumpage rates are fair market value, tied to a competitive market, we don't see them as having any subsidies, you are provided an exclusion, i.e. there are no tariffs or quotas attached to what you can export into the U.S. It is a challenge for us because right now that agreement is open and we don't know where the Maritime exclusion will end at the end of the day. We're lobbying hard for them.

On the pulp side we have two mills; one mill that makes kraft paper in Pictou County and that pulp is exported to China to make things like tissue paper and Kleenex and that sort of thing. My understanding is that the pulp shipped out of Halifax Harbour

makes up about 20 per cent of the volume of product that is shipped out of Halifax, so it's a substantial amount.

We have the mill in Port Hawkesbury which makes thermal mechanical paper - the glossy-type paper that is used in high-end magazines and that sort of thing. I know the mill in Port Hawkesbury has been very proactive in looking at other markets that they may be able to get themselves into, but I think the committee is aware that the mill in Port Hawkesbury is also dealing with a duty that has been imposed on them by the U.S. of about 20 per cent.

The thing that has been helpful in that situation, as we kind of move and the mill moves through resolving that issue is that the exchange rate has been low enough that everything they sell is in American dollars. So the exchange rate has been low enough that to this point the countervail duty that has been put on them hasn't severely impacted their operations.

We have an organization out of Sheet Harbour - Great Northern Timber - that produces commercial pellets which they export to Turkey. We can get the numbers for you, absolutely, but I really wanted to make sure that the members realize there's a lot going on in the forestry sector, from an export perspective as well as internally. But with that comes lots of challenges as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gordon Wilson.

MR. GORDON WILSON: The membership for the Cape Breton partnership, I would like to know how they engage the woodlot owners. Do they have a marketing strategy? I'm sure it's a challenge to get the numbers to continually grow, you reach a peak, but does the department help with that? Is it all done internally? I would say that would probably be one of the key pieces of having this success.

MR. EDDY: Originally, so the fundamental critical mass to get the organization going came from the existing three organizations. It's important to understand that while they are part of the partnership, they remain separate entities. Baddeck Valley, for instance, one of the group venturers, not everybody in Baddeck Valley is automatically a member of the Cape Breton partnership, they have the opportunity to decide whether they want to be a member or not, or just stay as Cape Breton. So that's where the original impetus came from to move it.

Since then they had a targeted marketing strategy because one of the challenges of course is if you over promise and under deliver - if you have broad-scale advertising and you get way more people than you can deliver - then you get kind of a negative feedback going through the communities about the value of this particular exercise.

Also, to just be efficient, what they did was targeted mailings so instead of sending it they would pick a community where they knew there was a fair bit of private land and

forest activity, have a targeted mail-out to that community. One of the things of course is that created efficiencies so when they got the responses they were sort of focused in one area. That helped them grow through the first sort of year and a half to two years.

What they're finding right now is they are in that fortunate piece where they're starting to get the power of people-speaking-to-people thing, I like what I'm doing, and the word of mouth is working for them. So a lot of the growth that they've had right now is word of mouth.

Initially many of their early members were folks who just had sort of a sense of managing forests is the right thing to do, might not have been as interested in participating in the forest economy, if you will. What I'm told as of a meeting a couple of weeks ago is that this year they've seen a real uptake in the number of folks who are coming in because they want to manage their woodlots specifically for some form of harvest and they want to have that independent advice.

I think like a lot of these things, it takes a while to get going and you have to use different strategies at different times. So at this point in time they seem to be getting as much as they can handle through word of mouth at this point.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Lohr.

MR. LOHR: I'm just curious about your - I'm looking at your Services Offering page here, the \$500 fee for forest management plan, and in brackets it says, "(this cost can be recovered by the woodlot owner if wood is delivered to Port Hawkesbury Paper or Nova Scotia Power)". That repeats itself again a little further down in layout costs.

I'm just wondering what the mechanism of that cost recovery is with those two organizations. Does that cost money from those two organizations? Money from the provincial government? That's my question.

MR. EDDY: It's not money from the provincial government. That I can tell you. I'm not directly aware of the business arrangement that the partnership has with those two organizations other than that I know that in both cases, they deliver a significant amount of their silviculture programs for them. That's one of the ways that they can offer enhanced access to silviculture funding, because they have preferential arrangements to meet the silviculture obligations that Port Hawkesbury Paper had and Nova Scotia Power has in operating their biomass plant.

The concept there is more of a check-off scenario where I think in the case of Port Hawkesbury Paper, they're paying a small premium for wood from the partnership. Some of that is because they have a need for certified wood, and the partnership can deliver that. Really, it's an opportunity for the landowner, as opposed to having to take money out of their pocket, to be able to pay that back or pay that off at a time when there's free cash flow from the property.

MR. LOHR: So just to summarize what you said, that is something that the Cape Breton Privateland Partnership negotiated with those two organizations, and it doesn't involve your department. In some way, it's an incentive offered from those two organizations to businesses, Nova Scotia Power and Port Hawkesbury Paper, to acquire more wood presumably. Is that what you're saying?

MR. EDDY: I believe that's a fair summary of it. Again, the issue there is that one of the things that the service areas are very careful to do is not to be seen as an agent of any one particular organization. So one of the principles of private land management, most organizations recognize, is choice. It's very, very important to private woodlot owners.

In the case of the Cape Breton partnership, they would say to folks, we have market relationships with these organizations. If you want your wood to go to this organization, this is the price we can offer you. If it goes here, this is what we can offer you. These are incentives these people offer to get your business, so they really act as that middle-man honest broker of, here are what the various alternatives are. In that case, as you can see, there are obviously some incentives. Those two companies have stepped up to say, this is what we'll do to incent people to do business with us.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. HORNE: Just to carry on with what Mr. Lohr was talking about, if you could just expand a little bit more on the actual amount of money the province might pay to the partnership in direct and indirect ways. I don't know if that's clear enough. Do you have an idea of the funding that might go on from the province?

MR. FRANK DUNN: I can say that first of all in the departmental budget, the funding comes from our extension division, and our extension division does a number of things to educate and engage private woodlot owners. With regard to funding in 2014-15, it was \$400,000. For 2015-16, it was \$300,000 with the goal that within five years, we would get down to \$200,000. So that's 50 per cent self-sufficiency, with the balance being provided by the extension branch.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Any further questions? Okay, then I ask you to give closing remarks, Mr. Dunn.

MR. FRANK DUNN: I don't have any closing remarks per se, Madam Chairman, other than to thank the committee members for inviting Natural Resources to the Resources Committee. I know that Mr. Eddy and I, surprisingly, always enjoy coming to these committees because it's an opportunity for us to talk about all the great work that Natural Resources does. Today it happened to be forestry, but we'd be happy to come back to you to talk about anything that we do in the department.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I appreciate you coming and being a witness today.

We will take a short recess to set up for our business meeting.

[10:25 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:31 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: We're going to proceed with the business meeting. First under business is the meeting that is scheduled during the House session. Traditionally we do not meet. Are we in agreement to resume our regular schedule after the House sitting? I hear that everyone is in agreement so we will do so.

Also on our agenda is rescheduling the Mining Association of Nova Scotia tour. We were to have that on the 13th of October and now the House is sitting - at 11:00 a.m. we are expected to be in our seats in the Legislature - so I'm asking that we can have this delayed. It will probably have to take place in the Spring, would it? Or is it a winter type thing we can do? I'm not sure. Has anyone been on a gypsum mine tour? (Interruption) It's a more summer-type thing. (Laughter) Maybe we can schedule it for May or June, so I'll ask the clerk to reschedule it for May or June of next year. Are we all in agreement? We are all in agreement, okay.

We'll move to the agenda setting. You all have the topics before you. There are four by the Liberal caucus, two from the PC and one from the NDP. I think we're picking three, two, and one. Or is there a fourth? Three, two, one, okay. Is there one that the Liberals would like to delete? Mr. Mombourquette.

MR. MOMBOURQUETTE: I would recommend from our caucus the Forest Fire Prevention and Protection Strategy, the Maple Producers Association of Nova Scotia, and the parks and protected areas.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Okay, do the other members of the caucus agree? Okay, moving on to the PCs? Okay. The NDP? So everyone is in agreement with the agenda that's laid out.

Would all those in favour of the motion please say Aye. Contrary minded, Nay.

The motion is carried.

Okay, that will be our agenda for the next coming months. Our next meeting will have to be determined and that depends on when the House rises, so you will get notification from the clerk.

With that, I adjourn the meeting.

[The committee adjourned at 10:33 a.m.]