

**HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**RESOURCES**

**Thursday, March 23, 2017**

**COMMITTEE ROOM**

**Department of Natural Resources  
Forest Fire Prevention and Protection**

**Printed and Published by Nova Scotia Hansard Reporting Services**

## **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. Ben Jessome replaced Mr. Terry Farrell]

[Ms. Joyce Treen replaced Mr. Derek Mombourquette]

[Hon. Christopher d'Entremont replaced Mr. John Lohr]

In Attendance:

Mrs. Darlene Henry  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Mr. Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

## **WITNESSES**

### **Department of Natural Resources**

Ms. Julie Towers, Deputy Minister

Mr. Walter Fanning, Executive Director, Regional Services

Mr. John Ross, Director, Fleet and Forest Protection



House of Assembly  
*Nova Scotia*

**HALIFAX, THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2017**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

**9:00 A.M.**

**CHAIRMAN**

Ms. Suzanne Lohnes-Croft

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Good morning. I'll call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Resources. I'm Suzanne Lohnes-Croft. I'm the MLA for Lunenburg and the Chair of the committee. The committee today will be receiving a presentation from Ms. Julie Towers, Deputy Minister of the Department of Natural Resources; Mr. Walter Fanning, executive director of Regional Services and Mr. John Ross, director of Fleet and Forest Protection.

I will now ask the committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Mr. Horne.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to remind people to put your phones on vibrate and that only members of the media are allowed to take photographs during this meeting. The washrooms and coffee can be found in the anteroom. In case of emergency we will exit through the Granville Street entrance and proceed up to the Grand Parade Square by St. Paul's Church. I would also like to remind witnesses and members to wait to be introduced so that the microphones can be turned on.

We will start, we will have Ms. Towers introduce her team and you may start your presentation following that.

MS. JULIE TOWERS: Hello everyone. I am lucky enough that I know most of you. I've been back at Natural Resources as the deputy since December but I was there three years ago for the previous four years, as the head of Forests, Parks and Wildlife, which included the fire prevention. Luckily for you, besides the knowledge I have, I am lucky enough to have with me two of the most experienced people in this province around fire and forest fire protection.

Walter is currently the executive director of Regional Services, but for many years he was the manager and director of Forest Protection and John is currently the director of Fleet and Forest Protection, which is tied in, all the trucks and the helicopters. There's a lot of knowledge here so we should be able to answer any questions you have, ideally. If we can't answer today, we'll certainly commit to getting the information and getting it to you.

I'm actually pleased to be here. This is one of the excellent programs at the Department of Natural Resources and Nova Scotia should be proud of all the years and the work it has done in wildfire management. The three aspects that we will be talking about as we go through are going to include prevention, detection, and suppression. The focus today is on prevention but they're interconnected.

You would have been provided in your packet a presentation which we will walk you through. It will be a little bit of the history, what we do, what resources we apply to the program and how we work with other jurisdictions, how we work with our neighbours.

Our direct mandate is the responsibility on wildfires. A lot of that is in forests, but it can also be the edges of wild lands and then we work in co-operation and there's defined boundaries in terms of how we interact with municipalities such as Halifax on that, to keep the roles clear on who does which aspect of firefighting.

The continual outcome is obviously ideally zero fires. That would be ideal for everyone - no jurisdiction can accomplish that but we work towards it. What we definitely have been doing and are doing is decreasing the number of fires and also the amount of area burned. It is a huge issue for Nova Scotia, as you know. We're very settled, there's no away, so we need to be and our whole program is very much designed around that quick response - get in early and stop things from spreading.

The other changes over time are very much the strength of the science behind it, wildfire science. It's not just about the way we react once there's a fire and suppress it, but what we can do in terms of predicting trends and avoiding them as much as possible but also controlling risks and controlling the chance of harm coming out of a fire. We can also speak about that.

Definitely fire prevention is a big aspect but also, as I say, when we do have to fight fires we need the resources in place. That includes the equipment as well as the people so it's great for Nova Scotia. We're actually just updating the helicopter fleet, which has been

in the works for a little while. If you have questions about the helicopters, I know John will be more than happy to talk about them; he's very pleased. There's four of the airbus units that are coming in as they are built.

The big advantage of the newer ones is they can cruise at much higher altitudes, the pilots and crew can see well, there is a lot more visibility in those units. They also were designed, because they're used - as you know because some of you would have been interacting in your own areas - they're called out for search and rescue. For example, the RCMP can call on us. There's a stretcher system in them now for medical evacuations, but importantly for fire they can carry three times as much water now. That's a huge difference for us.

Many people are very aware because of last year and the fires near Keji how critical it can be to be able to react and to mobilize all the resources. The fact that we work on the prevention and detection and suppression, we need the air support, but we also need the ground support and we need a lot of co-operation.

Ongoing every year as part of the detection is we use a series of aerial patrols. Many people will remember historically we had the fire towers in place. Actually, a lot of the fires were getting reported by mobile phones, not by the fire tower operators. There was only about 11 per cent coming through there.

Gradually it has been modernizing, shifting away from fire towers and using the aerial patrols that can go out and match against the signs to the highest risk areas and watch for fires that may be breaking out. The advantage to those is also they can locate very quickly exactly where the fire is, so it's not just smoke in an area - they can pinpoint things. That has been able to help us.

A very critical part that we have through the department is our provincial fire coordination centre in Shubenacadie. That's where all the resources are - and John and Walter can speak to that in any detail - where the people are, they're constantly monitoring things going on across the province and they can deploy and call on the resources that are distributed around the province. That includes the detection flights. That's also where we set the daily burning restrictions that we can talk about as well, and the fire weather index, which comes out of automated weather stations that send data in, and then they can assess risk as well.

On the people side of things, within the department itself, we have a lot of our permanent staff - foresters, technicians, biologists - who are trained to national standards to fight fires. They're there year-round, particularly available if we need them in the shoulder seasons for early or late fires. As well, there's a large crew that comes on in various chunks of time between April and October that are the seasonal firefighters; over 100 of those are brought on across the province.

Training is a big aspect we'll speak to as well. It's really important for those folks to be able to do their job.

Another major connection is with the volunteer fire departments as well as the municipal fire departments. For example, as many of you know, there are 325 volunteer fire departments. They're critical partners. Only a few municipalities have their own large fire departments, so we're interacting with those. Generally, they're first on the scene 60 per cent of the time so we need to be able to work really well together.

We have good working relationships with the volunteers, with the municipalities, but also with their neighbours - the northeast states, the other Canadian provinces and territories, and we can speak to that.

With those opening remarks, I'd like to turn to the presentation if you have it in front of you. I'm sure you've all read it and have a lot of questions for us. I would just like to highlight a few key points in there for you.

It's, again, the overview of what we do here in the province - the prevention, protection and the resources we have, and also speaking a little bit to what's done nationally and the approach on that.

If you're with me on the slide on wildfire management, many of you can recognize the traditional signs that are at department offices showing fire risk, but the key for us is - what is our mission? Our mission is to prevent harm as much as we can to property, certainly to forests, which is where the program got generated out of many decades ago, but certainly to infrastructure - to people's homes, et cetera.

Our role is to provide those resources. A very important part, as many of you could think of from other resources, is what do we do in prevention, what do we do in our policies? We need policies and procedures in place so that when a fire breaks out everybody knows exactly what they're supposed to do - who does what role, what do they bring to bear to fight the fire? That's a significant part of what the department also does.

The detection that we talked about, we'll talk about it in more detail. Training is a very big aspect of what we spend time on, and the equipment as well as the people.

Looking at the history of wildfires in Nova Scotia, you can see the orange on there is the amount of area burned. Nova Scotia tends to have a very low average fire size compared with most of the Canadian provinces and territories. That's a reflection that, again, we have to get in early and get in quick because there's no real away. There's no real remote. We have to be very quick on fires. Our average size is pretty small. It definitely has gone down over time.

The number of wildfires, and we'll talk a bit about that, again has been decreasing over time. But we're always working to continue that trend downwards. The peak was way

back in 1920, but you can see, in recent decades, what a shift there has been in that. It's quite substantial when we have a professional firefighting resource in the department, which has really ramped up in those decades.

If you look just at the last 10 years, this is the average over those 10 years: 231 wildfires. You can see that they range, in that middle column, in any case from 170 to almost 400. The average area burned there is total for the province, not per fire, remember. It's less than 1,000 hectares, which is actually very small considering we have 5.5 million hectares in the province.

The other really key point I want to highlight is that almost all of our wildfires are human caused. Looking at the specific causes, you can see the bar graph that's there. Some, of course, are unknown, we can't detect the cause. But over the years, we've been getting better and better at figuring it out, even though they're associated with humans, what it was specifically. Was it a truck? Was it blueberry burning? Was it an ATV? You can quickly see the largest one there. It's arson. That's our biggest issue. Grass fires, debris fires, and camp fires are certainly right up there, and slash and land clearing. When we talk about prevention, we can talk about what we do about that.

Our challenge is that 99 per cent of our fires are from humans, accidental or on purpose. It's a mix of that. It's exacerbated because, as we know, homes are spreading out more and more into woodlands, so the interaction is increasing because of that. We are seeing changes in climate: our winds, the dryness of conditions, the time of year that occurs. We have a lot of private ownership. That affects what happens on the ground, the fuels that are available - brush, debris, et cetera - fuels that might be somebody's firewood pile in their backyard.

Everything we do around wildfire, including prevention, requires a lot of players, and there's a lot of pieces to it. How do you get in there? Who's involved? What structures are you dealing with? What roads are there, your access - all those.

This is the prevention vision that the department has. It's very much about that shared responsibility because there's a lot of players involved, but getting at safety, getting at better partnerships, and very much community capacity, and this is where the MLAs have a major role. How do we help people understand, and how do we help them be ready to deal with fires? Under the prevention goals are coordination of activities, education and outreach - which we only keep needing to increase because we know that's going to knock things down. Analysis of trends so we can focus our prevention efforts is a big part, as well as exchanging information with a lot of people, and training. Tools, guidelines, and best management practices are all pieces.

Specifically here are some of the things that we're also doing for activities, and some of you may have interacted with these. Folks are out at fire stations talking to firefighters one-on-one about some of the things they can do to protect homes whether it's a metal roof versus an asphalt roof, where you store your firewood. There's all kinds of

things. There's an annual conference where people get to exchange information and learn the best they can. FireSmart is the title of a fire prevention program that's used in many, many jurisdictions. Particular areas are targeted, which you can see here, in some upcoming sessions that have happened. As well, we'll talk about ones that are coming up.

We know there are specific areas in the province, geographic areas, where there are consistent recurring issues. I think I live in the middle of one of them, in Shubenacadie. I call the fire shed, and they ask, Julie, why are you calling? Well, there's another grass fire in front of the house. They recognize my voice now, unfortunately. Certainly Cape Breton is one long-term area. River Hebert is another one.

One of the aspects, and you all play a role in it, is risk assessment. What are the risks in the communities? What are the plans we can put in place? We're doing some work, for example, in provincial parks or particular geographic areas around the province. These sessions are going on trying to target communities as a whole because as you know, you may have some people being very careful, but all it takes is a neighbour not being careful, and it affects everyone else. There's some going on in Pictou Landing. There's a home study module which is something that people can look at for themselves and learn from. It's available through our department. Campfire campaigns, all kinds of material is out there. In many cases, we can borrow from other jurisdictions and then reproduce for Nova Scotia. Sometimes we develop them. We try to get as much media information out there as we can.

For 2017, we're particularly focusing on first responders. There are some other communities we're going to be going to on the wildfire mitigation, the avoidance, as it were. We're always working with other jurisdictions and sharing resources because we need to do that, particularly education outreach but also obviously if we do have fires to deal with.

We have seen fire numbers going down. There has been a lot more emphasis on prevention in the department in recent years, and over the last five years, we've gone down by about 100 fires annually. That decreases the number of homes that get affected. We're getting better information on those trends so we can focus our efforts, as I said. It decreases our suppression costs, so that's a benefit to the province. If we can avoid the fires, we don't have to pay money to fight the fires. We're continuing to use our measures so we can see where we're being effective.

I would like to highlight Burn Smart. You see the coloured map there, which was brought in a few years ago. The idea of that is, the provincial centre helps people. The green is yes, you can burn. Yellow means maybe you can burn but only between certain hours. The red is you can't burn. It's very simple. It got us out of 12,000 permits that you had to go to the office to get, to everybody knowing. It's web-based, very simple, works well, and there's good feedback on it.



We talked about the detection flights and the fire weather index. That's all coordinated there in Shubie. Patrol routes, they set those up. They figure out where they need to be, particularly if it's in an area that may be more remote, and that's the best way of keeping an eye on things. If you have more specifics on that, Walter or John can certainly help with that.

Suppression: just so you know, if fires do break out, we have a lot of gear. It's the reality. We have our fire trucks, which are outfitted with the pumps and everything. We have those lovely Muskegs, which can go just about anywhere - also pumps, hose, fire line, and of course the personnel that we spoke about.

The incident command post that you see there does coordination in terms of who is in charge. We need them in any emergency, and it's particularly so in fires.

We talked about all the staff. They're not just technicians. There's all kinds of folks who work on that. We have 28 crews deployed across the province, which are a lot of those seasonal staff we mentioned. There's the support personnel that help them, of course, the coordination centre in Shubie, and then specialized personnel. There's specialized training that we can always get into as well.

We have very highly trained firefighters. Nova Scotian firefighters are well-recognized. Whenever they've gone to other provinces or territories, people are very impressed with how good our people are. It's a reflection of the training. They also get valuable experience because, luckily, we don't have as many fires or fires as big as other places.

The incident management teams are the coordination, very much so. Who plays what role if you are in there? We follow an international system on that which is common in most emergency management.

Mutual aid sharing is an important part to highlight. CIFFC, the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre - it's quite a mouthful - is in Winnipeg and helps make sure that across Canada if anybody needs help, we know where the gear is, we know where the people are, and we can do that coordination. We also have a compact with the northeastern area, our immediate neighbours. We can call on each other. There's a memorandum. There's details. There's mutual training. That allows people to be moved in and out as they are needed, and they get the experience from each other.

The volunteer fire departments that we mentioned are a critical part of this. The department takes command when they are on the scene, but the volunteer fire departments are key players in this as well. We move money and often equipment to help them keep that up. We have a formal MOU with HRM, which is a big area of the province and a lot of interaction, as you can imagine, but good working relationships there that are critical.

The helicopter fleet, we mentioned that - increased water capacity, more passengers, et cetera. They're fast, can carry more fuel and last for longer - we can go into any details that you want.

This is again the science. We have all kinds of computerized mapping, fuel loads, you name it - prediction. We're definitely in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century for how we handle fires - before, during and after.

The last point is that there is a wildland fire strategy. We work with all our other provinces and territories. It highlights areas and you'll see the Canadian FireSmart initiative - the fire prevention, and then the preparedness and response, public education and innovation. Nova Scotia is lined up very well on all of those.

I'll end there so we can open things up for questions.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Ms. Towers. I am very happy to see that Smokey is still employed. I have a soft spot for Smokey from my childhood and I'll pass it on to my granddaughter, I'm sure.

We will now take questions from members, and we'll start with Mr. Dunn.

HON. PAT DUNN: It may be a question for John. With regard to the replacement of the entire fleet of helicopters, the original budgeted amount was around \$11.9 million. I'm just curious as to how it happened with regard to the request for another \$5.2 million with the Canadian and American currency. If you could comment on that, please.

MR. WALTER FANNING: Primarily we suffered from the dollar exchange that you referred to originally. When we started the process for this and we submitted it, it was approximately two years ago. At that point, when we got the estimates for what these aircraft could approximately be - and that was both from what we anticipated would be the competitors and those bidding on the tender, they gave us those rough estimates, but when we did come out, the dollar exchange in time did hit us hard. It was about a 10-month period from the time it was prepared and ready until it actually went out for posting. That's primarily what the major cost was there for that.

It was very difficult for us. You could do those estimates and then you need a resource that's extremely difficult and hard to obtain, and at that point the dollar exchange hurt us bad.

MR. DUNN: Just a further question perhaps. With regard to the timelines, are we on track with obtaining these?

MR. FANNING: Yes, we are - excellent really. We have received one already. There is one that arrived in Shubenacadie - John, about four weeks ago? The second one is due very soon. (Interruption) Today. (Laughter) Well, the weather might be - it may not

land in Shubie. So that's there, but the next one is due to arrive, we think, in the Fall. The following one would be in the start of the next fiscal year. So the four will be in place and the other ones will be sent off as they arrive.

So we're not decreasing our helicopters right now. We'll keep each one as we get the new one in place.

MR. DUNN: With reference to the first one that arrived, are you pleased with it?

MR. FANNING: I went up to see it and I was curious because when I arrived, there was, I think - safely however - there were seven people in the aircraft with the pilot from Airbus looking at it. They don't fly that way, but they were very excited - all the pilots and the engineers - because this, as you can understand, is significant technology advances for us. When we look at our helicopters and what they bring for our safety for our pilots and our staff, they're extremely excited to do this and be trained in it.

MR. DUNN: Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

HON. STERLING BELLIVEAU: Thank you, it is certainly an interesting topic because as we all experienced last year we had extreme flooding in one end of our province and extreme drought in the other, so I find it an interesting time that we live in.

I'm interested in the permitting process. I know that you made reference to the map and that's a good tool, but I'm looking for some flexibility here and is there any discussion through the department when it comes to having controlled fires in the morning or certain parts of the day? I find that a little bit not in the best interests of everyone because everybody does not have the same schedule and sometimes it's easy to burn in the morning.

One of the things that really jumped out last year is that when you have a total ban across a region - in southwest Nova Scotia, for instance, you had a total ban on all fires, campfires. To me I think there needs to be some serious consideration. The example I'm going to show is that when you have campgrounds - in your presentation, Julie, you talked about "there's no away" but a lot of people try to get away and go to campgrounds. My question is that when you have a total ban for a certain region, that includes campgrounds. To me I think that when you have the effort that people go to building these facilities, is there any consideration to having some exemptions, in particular for campgrounds is what I'm trying to ask?

MS. TOWERS: Okay, I'll start. I just want to make sure I actually understand. There's almost a few questions in there. One is, can campgrounds have exemptions? You also reference something about the timing of when burning can occur or not occur - did I catch that right?

MR. BELLIVEAU: Yes.

MS. TOWERS: Was there another question in there? I just want to make sure we answer them.

MR. BELLIVEAU: Well I didn't want to confuse you but to me, my large question was the campgrounds, for instance, where there are many people there who enjoy that activity, is there any consideration to having those particular campgrounds, that they meet certain criteria exempt from that total ban?

MS. TOWERS: I'll start and the other two can add. The minister has authority basically under the legislation, in terms of looking at it as a staged. If there is going to be any kind of closure or restriction or ban, the department folks provide the information to weigh that. So are we talking about anything from just parks, within the forest itself, does there need to be a road closure? It's a staging. There's different information, depending on the extent of any requirement. I'll just preface it with that.

Certainly, all those things are taken into consideration. The department doesn't lightly enter any form of restrictions because we know how much it affects people. Unfortunately, the reality is that most people are out and about during the highest risk season but we do take those things into consideration. It would include things like, whether it is an enclosed way of burning, such as some have at campgrounds and some do not. Some are open pits, some are closed pits, et cetera.

Having said that, I'll turn it over to Walter to basically say here's what we can and can't do around making those decisions.

MR. FANNING: I think if we look at the bigger picture, there are examples where if we can make improvements of things I think we'd be open to discuss and do that. One of the things we try to describe to people is how we get to that. When we put in the safe burn map system to do that, to go to something anybody can access, we want to make sure people can access that freely, without cost, across the province.

When we did the initial runs and we did at least, I think, John, a 10-year period of fires, we found out that we thought that maybe there would be upwards of five to seven nights a summer that a place would not have the burn. Last year blew some of that out of the water for us, in the sense that when we go back to our fire signs people, it became that extreme. I think that's the important point I want to make here, that under those extreme conditions maybe there could be a campground under a - you know, if we look at that and say well maybe it could be open, but as we look at it as a provincial resource and a provincial response, we have to make sure we have resources.

That's what we're trying to make that balance on, we don't want to interfere with campers and tourism and stuff. We want them to come and enjoy our province, whether they're inside or out, but when we do that we get in a position like last year, where it was

so bad that it gets extreme very fast and we only have a certain amount of resources that we will get.

It's not just Nova Scotia, the fire centre will look at it as far as Canada is concerned. These resource agreements that we have, we can get access to air tankers. Now we don't want air tankers in Nova Scotia. We can't afford them; we can't justify them. We don't buy a \$38 million fixed air tanker - a wonderful machine but we would use it maybe several times or several days a year. Some years we'd never use it.

What we give as an example here is that the western fires last year, as some of the details showed, some people unfortunately are out there lighting fires. When we're looking at it from a provincial perspective, someone may look at a campground or they may look at a particular county, and say, I'm safe, we can burn.

The ones in the duty control are trying to look at what resources we have to protect across the entire province. I'll give you one example. Last year, we had the western fires, which were extremely bad. I want to make another point to credit the firefighters. Then all of a sudden, we had a fire up in Perch Lake, as MLA Dunn would remember that started last year, again. It was only by chance that we were able to get to that fire because the Quebec air tankers were coming into western Nova Scotia. The fire centre diverted them to Perch Lake. They put that fire out within I think 24 or 36 hours. It's predicted that that fire could have been over 10,000 hectares in size.

It's the same with the efforts going on in the western fires. We had some firefighters last year understandably frustrated because the fire was growing by 50 hectares a day. John's science people went through and said, had they not kept it at 400 hectares - it's a success they should be proud of - that fire would have grown in excess of 53,000 hectares. I think that's that balance we try to get, that yes, we know in some cases an individual campground or an area might be able to do it, but in the bigger perspective, we have to make sure that we have resources to fight what happens.

Unfortunately, as you've seen there, arson is still a big thing. When we have fires going at the most sensitive times, we have some people out there lighting them, and we have to be able to respond.

You did mention burning in the morning, if I maybe could address that as well. It would be impossible for me to sit here and say you couldn't burn safely some mornings. People are responsible. For the most part, we don't do things for the people who are law-abiding and do what we want. We do find that the safe burn regulations and stuff are there to say you could burn, but if people burn safely from 2:00 p.m. on, there's a far greater chance that it will be under control. That comes from some experiences where people have lit a fire in the morning, and come 2:00 p.m., when they do their assessment and say we're going to go into restrictive or extreme, we can't get that fire out. Again, that's that resource part of it. We want to have that optimal time for people to burn brush from 2:00 p.m. to midnight I think it is - I don't know the details. You can burn right through to 7:00 a.m. in

the morning, so we look at that as a pretty reasonable time to be able to burn your debris, and that includes the weekends. But we do find it problematic that sometimes in the morning some people burn under conditions that are not the best. For us, it's better not to burn in the morning.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross, did you have anything to contribute?

MR. JOHN ROSS: Maybe I'll just add to what Walter said there, and I want to repeat what he said about the campfires and the campgrounds. We looked at the statistics over the past 10 years. It would have worked out that it was very, very rare that we would impose those restrictions on campgrounds. Last summer was the exception to the rule because it was so dry, but normally, that would be something that would happen just a few times throughout the summer. It wouldn't happen a lot.

The other thing that goes with that, too, is that we were getting a number of inquiries at the fire centre there from people concerned about the fact that folks were allowed to have campfires in campgrounds, yet we had a burn restriction on for that particular county. They were concerned. If they can't burn outside the park, why were they allowed to burn inside the park? We did get a number of those complaints and those types of inquiries.

The last thing that I want to add to that, too, is that when we get into those extreme conditions, our staff are telling people not to burn. The slightest spark could start a fire. If we were to allow the campgrounds to have fires, then it's sort of contradicting what our staff are trying to tell people and the prevention measures that go with that. That's it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne.

MR. BILL HORNE: I'm glad you're here today, and I enjoyed being a volunteer fireman over the years. We fought a few small fires, but not in our range to do what you're doing.

I think it's very important. Prevention is probably the biggest issue as far as being prepared for fires. I just want you to walk through some of the prevention programs, from administrative work to science to response to a fire and how well you work with the volunteers, the fire departments, national and international. You have a pretty good reputation, I believe, in responding to other parts of Canada with trained people who have good knowledge of techniques used in firefighting. I just want you to kind of continue in that manner.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fanning.

MR. FANNING: I'll just make a couple of comments and leave the details to John, who would know that. As a volunteer, thank you, because they're invaluable to the department. They do, as our deputy indicated, 60 per cent of our fires. We do openly and

willingly have an agreement to pay them for their equipment and personnel. The training has been immense, and we couldn't do much of what we do without their assistance.

That part on Canada, I want to emphasize, it was mentioned that we are not many. But on a per capita basis I would venture to say that we've got one of the better wildfire prevention programs in Canada for that. We are small, but we are very knowledgeable. We are very well received.

We have been told that when there are crews coming in from other agencies, if there is a Nova Scotia crew, they will take them almost immediately because they work hard. They go out there dedicated, and they don't wait. We can provide many examples where the guys and ladies who have been part of this represent Nova Scotia very well in this area.

Like I said, we work very closely with the Fire Service Association of Nova Scotia for improvements and changes we want to make with them. There are always extra things that we can do, and we want to be there with them and to be part of that.

I think maybe for those specifics and that staff that we have, I'll turn that over to Mr. Ross.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross.

MR. ROSS: I think we're really talking about two different things here. One is the prevention side of it, which is the proactive part to it. I can speak to some of the things that we're doing there. But there is also the protection part of it and that's actually going out and putting the fire out or trying to put the fire out.

On the prevention side, we do have a provincial fire science officer who leads the prevention program in Nova Scotia. Some of the activities that she would be involved with would be education and outreach with school kids in the Grade 4 range, trying to get them at a younger age.

One of the other programs we referred to earlier, and that's the Fire Smart program. That's where property owners can do things to their property - like clearing brush, clearing gutters, that sort of thing - that will actually make the property less susceptible to fire if a fire were to come close. That has proven to work out in the western provinces. That's a big thing that we're trying to push right now, Fire Smart for landowners.

We have the Smokey the Bear program, which again goes along with the outreach to the schools and that sort of thing.

There are also prevention initiatives with volunteer fire departments, trying to get the messages out through those folks as well. We do try to do some media promotions and that type of thing. And of course there's our burn safe map, which is designed for prevention. When the risks are high, we put restrictions on burning as a preventive measure.

I don't know if you wanted me to speak to the protection side of things, and maybe that will come up later, but that is more the suppression part of the firefighting game. That's where we really do appreciate the help from the volunteer fire departments.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. d'Entremont.

HON. CHRISTOPHER D'ENTREMONT: Thank you very much for being here today. First, from a southwest Nova Scotia standpoint, it was a very interesting year. It was the first time I've seen total bans that extended for weeks on end, and quite honestly, we didn't have the disaster that I think we all expected to have one day. Everybody was walking on pins and needles, I think, just hoping nothing would happen. I don't know who we thank for that, but I'm going to thank you guys because I think you guys did a great job of snuffing out the things that did pop along.

I've had the opportunity to be a firefighter as well. I've had a chance to work in forest fires as well, which I'm sure has changed over the 30 years since I did it.

I wanted to ask a question around the arson issue because we are getting close to brush-burning season again. What we run into in our neck of the woods is they travel along the train trail and they light fires as they go along. What's our prosecution rate for arsonists when it comes to setting these kinds of fires? I'm sure the rate is very low, but what do we do to try to prosecute some of these idiots?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Was that parliamentary?

MR. D'ENTREMONT: I stopped myself before it happened.

MS. TOWERS: Two things - I don't know the numbers off the top of my head and I'll ask my colleagues if they do. If they don't, we can obtain that information.

The other thing I would like to say is this is where I would ask the members of the committee not only today but going forward - if you have any ideas that can help us in terms of how we interact with people and get to that cultural change, not only from the traditional "burn my grass in the Spring" because people think it's helpful, but also the arson aspect of why it's entertainment in some ways to do that, because it's a collective thing. We're trying to change behaviour and that means everybody needs to work on it. So the more ideas there are, we would really welcome that.

I'll just quickly ask Walter or John if they happen to know about convictions or charges.

MR. FANNING: It would be unfortunately very low. It's very difficult to get all the evidence in place to be able to charge them. I think what I'd like to focus on maybe is that in part of recognition of that, we have a program that started in Shubenacadie - it has been in there for a while but a few years ago John has been involved with pushing it. We've



teamed up with the Northeast Forest Fire Protection Commission, which is the seven New England States, the National Parks and it is Quebec East in the provinces.

What we've done now is that there are officers picked in the conservation officer group with Nova Scotia Environment and we assist with training them. We send them to the U.S. to take part in fire investigation training. We're trying to upgrade their skills to be able to do that, to be what we hope is more successful in court later. What we do is, we match those up with science people within our own department across the province, so we can team up and go to these fires and find that.

There are three different levels. We're not complete in that yet, being able to do it, but it was kind of recognized as a gap that we had to be able to go out and do that. We're kind of in the mid stages of that being effective. We hope that's going to start being something I think we can take some action on, improve that success.

The other part of it that they have too, if I could segue into that - we have incident management teams now that we have short teams that we have in DNR. We may very well be the only incident management team in the province, I believe, but we are working with Environment, EMO and others so that we all collaborate. Part of that is being ready, again, that science, in being able to distribute the work so that people can focus just on what's happening. Right now we may spend a little bit too much time putting resources on suppressing fires, as opposed to getting back and finding the evidence destroyed or something is not the way we want, so we do need some help.

I do want to emphasize the incident management team because we didn't have any prior to 2008 when we had the Porters Lake-Lake Echo fire which scared everybody. Now we have a fully certified incident management team within the department; we have two of them, actually. Last year was the first time we actually got to activate them in the province. We send these guys and ladies across Canada to do this role and we've never had that complex fire to use them, so there's a great amount of pride in the department and with the volunteers in EMO last year because we were in McGowan Lake, set up as a huge command base and our incident command team - we actually activated them here.

So there was a lot of pride to be able to say - there's some sense of comfort that I think the citizens of Nova Scotia can have that we are very well trained to do that. But we can't stop everything. When you get wildfires that are progressing at 18 to 24 metres a minute, we cannot stop it when it's heading towards your home. We can't come in and say, well we're going to make sure your house is safe.

The deputy has indicated we do need help from citizens to recognize that you have some dangers there that we can't come in and correct for you and we need your help.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross, did you have something?

MR. ROSS: I just want to add that the conviction rate is very low and we are trying to build up the expertise and the capacity to be better able to convict those folks and actually stand in front of a judge and defend our evidence and that sort of thing. We are trying to build that capacity.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: On a quick follow-up, when it comes to interaction with the volunteer fire departments - there are only 325 volunteer fire departments - how does that distribution of hoses and pumps and funding, how does that happen when it goes? We have a bunch of different levels of government that help fire departments. How does your role work in that?

MR. ROSS: What we typically do is we outfit the fire departments with Wajax pumps, which are the pumps that we use for firefighting, and a certain number of lengths of hose and some back tanks. They do get some resources from us to help with forest fires.

The other thing that we do is any time they're involved in helping us fight a forest fire, we actually pay them for that service. So if they bring a tanker, we pay them for the tanker and we pay for the men that show up as well, so we support them in that regard as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: I certainly find this interesting. Your opening remarks I actually noted the tone in your voice raise a bit when you mentioned the jewel of our province, Kejimikujik National Park, and the concern around there if there was a fire in close proximity. That's certainly of interest to a lot of Nova Scotians.

My question is - my assumption is that you're concerned about a wildfire being in close proximity to that provincial park. Just recently, this particular government allowed somewhere between 70 and 90 hectares of forestry to be clear-cut. So my question is, what is the difference between a clear-cut and a wildfire? I know that both will restore so can you explain that to me and to the public?

MS. TOWERS: I'll be restraining myself because as a wildlife biologist I could go into a lot of detail, but I won't. The important thing to recognize is any kind of disturbance in a forest is going to create changes, not only in the trees, but also all the other associated species, some of which are very similar, some of which are different.

We are big fire disturbances for sure - hurricanes are probably the next most common and forestry. It's the nature. If you take trees out, you are changing the habitat. The difference is, Nova Scotia has probably one of the fastest regeneration rates. We have a lot of trees and it greens up very quickly, so that helps reduce fire risk, because one of the issues as we know is that as forest ages, you do get a build-up of debris, and this is a huge issue out West. That can increase the fire risk.

The other one, I would say, which I would like to put on everyone's radar, is we do know that as you get various infestations, for example, the insects - like we know spruce budworm is coming to the province. We're going to have another outbreak, similar to what happened here in the 1970s. When you have that and you have a lot of trees that die quickly, you get a lot of dead branches, a very high fuel load, very high fire risk. Right now - and John can speak to the specifics - we're predicting now that that's going to come through. It's quite a bit in Quebec. It started in New Brunswick. It's probably going to come down the Cumberland Shore and go out towards Cape Breton. There are other areas it may hit.

We know now that we're going to have an increased fire risk in those areas and so a lot of the work that's going on is in tandem to handle both the insect issue, but also the fire issue. So anything we do on the landscape, any kind of activity - building subdivisions, cutting - it doesn't matter, they all have an influence and that's where the fire science and the fire behaviour predictions that they can do in Shubie all play into our ability to make sure that we're ready to prevent as much as possible, to reduce risk as much as possible, and to deal with things as they break out.

Maybe I can turn to John to speak a little bit about that fuel-loading issue and how that changes over time in forests.

MR. ROSS: Okay. I guess you're referring to the spruce budworm and the insect infestation. What happens there is, when the forest starts to essentially be killed off, when you get a lot of mortality, then you get a lot of dry fuels that are present and a lot of heavy fuel-loading. Those fuels actually have really good potential to ignite and to burn, and burn quite long, for long periods of time because there is that much fuel there. Whatever we can do to prevent that - if we have an area that's infested by insects, and we know that it's going to die, then it would make sense for us to try and salvage or do something, some harvesting of some nature, to try and reduce the fuel load and, therefore, the fire risk.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome.

MR. BEN JESSOME: I just wanted to talk locally about Hammonds Plains-Lucasville; I expect that you're somewhat familiar with the lay of the land. The area that I represent is composed of many subdivisions that are several kilometres from the main arteries, being the Lucasville and Hammonds Plains Roads, with two or sometimes even one access point from that main artery.

One of our subdivisions took it upon themselves to initiate a fire safety plan. I don't know if I'm using the right terminology for it. They had DNR come in and do an assessment of their subdivision. A significant portion of that subdivision was deemed to be extreme or high risk in terms of what the assessment indicated. I would expect that that could similarly be applied to many of the subdivisions adjacent and in close proximity. I would like you to speak a little bit about your ability to respond to wildfires in that context, please and thank you.

MS. TOWERS: There are two things. First, I'll preface it by saying, and you referenced it - the department does work with others on risk assessment and planning. So for communities that are already in place, what are the things we can do to lower risk?

The other part that everyone can do in their communities, which as we know are continuing to grow, the ideal would be to do some of that planning up front before there's construction. You see that in some other jurisdictions. It's built into bylaws, built into the planning. Just in the way you lay out a community or a subdivision, you can reduce risk. It can be access, which is a major one, but also where the homes are relative to the fuel load, which is generally trees but could be other things. One is up front.

Specifically on the responses, I would turn to Walter, if you want to start, about what specifically we would do to be able to respond in those subdivisions, or what we call the wildland-urban interface, which is a huge issue in Canada as we get that connection of homes and forests.

MR. FANNING: Again, sometimes it takes incidents to have it happen and improve. We always had a great working relationship with Halifax Regional Fire and Emergency on that over the years. It didn't take really long after the Porter Lake fire and the Spryfield fire for us to sit down and make even more plans. We have an MOU that exists between the two organizations now detailing those kinds of things.

I think for right now, that is significant because it's not just ourselves and the department. We look at what we have for resources province-wide, and we feel quite comfortable with what we have. Halifax Regional Municipality has a significant amount of resources and a significant interest in this as well. As you know, they are populated all through the communities with volunteers to do not only prevention but also be able to respond. We spend a lot of our activity in responding, but that prevention part is good. The fact that we had somebody out there, I credit John and them with starting that. We're only in the beginning because that awareness is a huge deal.

I remember back in 2000, Nova Scotia agreed to do the first Canadian meeting on - we call it the wildland-urban interface. We held a conference in downtown Halifax, and it was something like a month after that national or international conference that we had the Kingswood fire, where 160 hectares went up really fast. There were very high winds under those circumstances. Thankfully, no one lost their home, but we were very close in those circumstances. That was the beginning, in my mind, of Halifax Regional Fire and ourselves making those plans and saying yes, we have to be ready for it because it can happen everywhere.

That's the thing that doesn't seem to be cognizant in everyone's mind, that it can happen. Nova Scotia now, as we know, can have the same fires as anything we see in Slave Lake or any of these other places out there. Fire, in high winds and extreme conditions, travels and finds pockets to burn and move through a community, and it's scary. The vast majority of these fires that occur in the wildland-urban interface, some relatively minor

inexpensive work could be done in and around homes to protect you from most, and the more extreme ones, well that's just going to be very difficult.

I'm glad it's starting. No doubt John has some other examples there, but right now, that's that comfort we have, that the relationship between us and HRM fire is very good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Towers, you wanted to add something, and then we'll go to Mr. Ross.

MS. TOWERS: What I would like is for John to speak to a couple of things. One is how to help you find the resources on prevention, to help your communities - Fire Smart and other things - to direct you to those. I think the more of those that are distributed, the more it can help individuals and communities. The other is to describe a little bit about how the DNR resources, for example - as well as our partners' but certainly speaking to DNR - how our resources are distributed across the province, not just the people but also the equipment so that we are prepared for a response.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross.

MR. ROSS: In terms of what we have for resources out there, we have district offices pretty much distributed across the province. They are equipped with a fire truck, and they are equipped with pumps and hose. Each one of those offices has a fire crew that's available to respond to a call when it comes in, so we do have a good density of resources scattered throughout the province.

We also have the Provincial Fire Centre there in Shubenacadie. That's where the aircraft are located. We can redeploy those aircraft. We can station them in different parts of the province if the risk is higher in certain areas. That's where the helicopters are located. We also have a huge inventory of pumps and hose and other equipment that we can send out to the folks in the districts if they need help. That's essentially what happened this past summer. When the fires were occurring down in the western end of the province, we actually moved resources, including people, from Cape Breton and some of the eastern areas. We moved men and equipment down into the western end of the province to help out with the situation down there.

We also mentioned the MARS agreements that we have, the Mutual Aid Resources Sharing agreements. We can call on other provinces to help us out as well.

Again, I'll go back to the fires from this past summer. We actually brought in aircraft from Newfoundland, Quebec, and New Brunswick. There was one point in time when we had the entire fleet of New Brunswick aircraft here helping us out. We have access to a lot of resources.

Just to show you how successful we were in an extreme situation, if you go back to the slide presentation there, there was a map that showed an area, and on that, there was a

hatch mark that showed an area that's the actual size of the fire that occurred there. There's also an outline around that, which shows how big that fire would have gotten had we not put the resources on that. So that's the picture there.

It also shows where some of the structures and some of the values at risk were as well. So if you look at that, you can see that we were very successful at containing that fire in some of the driest conditions that we've ever experienced in this province. We really do have a lot of resources that we can call on when we need them.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Did you want to speak to the Fire Smart? I think that's what Ms. Towers . . .

MR. ROSS: Again, I mentioned we have a provincial fire prevention officer and she would be the point of contact to get the information and any of the resources that you may need to carry on that. I don't have her number here, but her name is Kara McCurdy and she would be on the government email list.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Jessome, a supplementary?

MR. JESSOME: Ms. McCurdy is actually coming out to Hammonds Plains, I believe, at the top of the month and was responsible for that Westwood Hills plan. Just to clarify, as I understand it, there's a distinction between the training that an individual undergoes to fight structural fires versus wildfires, is that correct?

MR. ROSS: That's correct, yes.

MR. JESSOME: In relying on that relationship with municipal partners - again, I'm applying this locally - what sort of access to or is it a mandated or available additional training for a local volunteer group of firefighters? How does access to that type of training shape up?

MR. ROSS: You're right, there is a huge difference between structural fires and actual forest fires. They're two different beasts altogether. We do have staff - we actually have a provincial training officer that coordinates the different training that occurs, but we do have folks that can go to the volunteer fire departments or any of the fire departments and provide some of the basic training and some of the courses that go with fighting forest fires and wildfires. If you were to contact our office, we could certainly set that up for you.

A lot of that training is delivered through the district offices. There are fire techs in the district offices that will go to the fire departments and do that training. We do try to make sure that all the volunteers have received training to deal with forest fires.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fanning, you wanted to add something?

MR. FANNING: A number of years ago we started a training program for the volunteers. At the time, there were approximately 9,000 volunteers, and that changes. There's a little less now and there are a lot of people coming in and out. We made an effort with even the basic fire suppression course, and over half the volunteers in the province were trained by DNR. That still exists and is still available, and we're more than willing to do that and we had a program in place also where we will train trainers. If individual volunteer departments and others want to train somebody for their department or for a group of volunteers, we're more than willing to provide that training so they can make sure that it can happen and increase.

It is significant. The difference between a structure fire and a wildland fire is massive. Sometimes you don't realize that until someone gets on the site and they find - like I mentioned earlier, this stuff moves at a kilometre an hour and more, and being able to strategically fight a structure fire that's not going to move and your protective resources - we respect that immensely. But once we step into that wildland environment and it changes, it's huge and significant.

I can remember even in 1991 down in Argyle when we had the fire down there. That changed direction three different times in two days. It just moves around. We almost lost firefighters in that because it did a 180 and it came back through because of what they call low-level jets. Being naive, I didn't know what airplanes had to do with fires, but it has to do with meteorology and how the jets come down and move.

We have people now who are sitting in John's group, and he is one of them - when John became the director - and I don't know if there's anybody I would trust more with the science because the advances in technology and stuff that happened are the result of John's work. That science that's there now, we can go in - and as the fire is going, he's got staff predicting where this is going, so where you put people and resources. When we find the direction that it's going, no one goes there. You do not stand in front of these things.

The training is significant. Wildland firefighters have upwards of 84 courses they could take alone, not associated with structures. We have done a lot, and we're doing more. We can also do more for volunteers, I think, if they want to get into it, the ones who do a lot of responses to wildland firefighters because they're invaluable to us and what we do.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

MR. DUNN: My question revolves around recognizing the importance of mental health support for first responders. Earlier this week, I had the opportunity to listen to a very gut-wrenching emotional speech/talk from a first responder who, over a number of years, was unable to get any support. It was one of those types of speeches you just cannot forget. This leads up to my question. What is the government doing to ensure that our volunteer firefighters are getting some mental health support? (Interruption) And our paid ones, of course, or anyone involved in the industry.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fanning, do you want to take it?

MR. FANNING: I'm not sure what supports are there for the volunteers through the municipalities and the supports that they have. I know it does exist in some ways because we find ourselves a little bit deficient in that. We were asking them about critical incident debriefing and stress for our own firefighters.

We did start some of that, and we've put something in place. This year during the Perch Lake fire, unfortunately, our earlier firefighters came across a deceased person, and we had to arrange it quickly. We actually went through the local group to ask where we can access these people to do it. I don't know where specifically it is. I do know it exists because we had them provide some advice to us on what we could do for our own department staff.

MR. DUNN: Just a follow-up in a different vein: you mentioned preventive medicine earlier, with regard to schools and education. You were talking about arson at the time. Could you comment a little bit further on what's actually happening in our schools with regard to that?

MS. TOWERS: I'll start, and the others can add to it. This is an ongoing thing. You heard John mention that there's particular focus on Grade 4. But there have been thousands of schoolchildren who have gone through various fire prevention programs in their schools.

The department itself regularly does it through events. We take advantage of Parks Day events, something going on in the provincial parks, et cetera. Smokey the Bear becomes the symbol of that, but there's a lot of that going on. There's a lot of dedicated time on that not only across the province.

You heard me mention that we know there are particular areas in the province where we're having more issues with fires being lit. Many people know Glace Bay is one area, up around that aspect of Cape Breton, up around River Hebert. I would suggest Shubenacadie is another one, living with them. So there have been targeted efforts to go to the schools. In some cases, it's our department folks - not only the folks coming out of Shubenacadie but also our distributed folks in the local offices doing it also working in co-operation. Glace Bay's fire department put on a targeted program and went out of their way to get to every schoolchild.

I'll ask the others to add other examples. This is something that has always been in place but has only been ramped up over recent years.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Does anyone else want to respond? Mr. Fanning.

MR. FANNING: I do have a quick comment before I send it to John because he would have more staff involved. There are examples like that out there where there is remarkable work.



The department doesn't really deal with grass fires unless at some point it affects the woods. We have a lot of sympathy for the volunteers who deal with that. The deputy referred to Glace Bay. Cape Breton County one year had over 2,000 fires in six weeks, mostly grass fires. They're not fires that we typically respond to, but the volunteers were having a desperate time, so we do go up to try to help them.

They had speakers who had been burned who would go into the classrooms and talk to the kids about fires. We even had a specific poster produced one year that showed somebody who was unfortunately burned, and it's about how grass fires can kill too. It is sad - I believe it might have been the Glace Bay area, I'm not sure. A 71-year-old firefighter was just walking his dog. It was only an acre and a half maybe in the community - he tried to put it out and unfortunately succumbed to the fumes and died. So it's around us, and it's a very difficult thing.

I know John has tentative plans in place so that if we get a community like that, we're very likely going to put an IMT in there for a few days and blast them to help the volunteers. Like I say, it's hard to even imagine what they're going through. That's just one area, but we have done a fair amount. John may have some specifics on the work.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross.

MR. ROSS: Well, I don't really have any specifics, but just to add to what Julie said, our prevention with schools and that sort of thing is targeted. So where we have the problem areas is where we do try to get into the school systems as a priority. We do have staff out in the district offices who have been trained to go and speak to schools and do extension work with them as well.

The other thing I will mention is the Natural Resources Education Centre in Middle Musquodoboit. They have a program there that speaks to fire prevention. That's aimed at school kids as well.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fanning.

MR. FANNING: Just one quick thing. I know John mentioned Kara, she's a great resource for that. If any of your constituents or others want to look up FireSmart, which is the Canadian program, they can. FireSmart Canada is an agency set up - those materials that are available are all available online. Our neighbouring country to the south, the U.S., has Fire Wise. Again a remarkable amount of resources are available through the Internet to give people some more information on what to do. Even the website for DNR has a number of those things as well, including the minor assessments that they can do on their homes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: I have just a few things that I observed in the last year, especially the latter part of 2016. We had a dry summer, again, in southwest Nova Scotia. One of the things I observed from a number of constituencies is that the water table was slow in returning to normal.

The other thing I observed was the early indication by the Department of Natural Resources of fire permits, whatever, earlier in March. That's just a personal observation. Is it just an observation of where we're at here in history?

When you have the budget that you were allowed last year for the fleet and force protection of \$6.9 million, is that budget reasonable? Does it cover everything? What I'm observing is that there's more attention being paid to fighting fires. Is that an adequate budget? Just give me a little insight on how that will unfold this year.

MS. TOWERS: I'll start, and then Walter can add. I would say, as I think we've highlighted, that Nova Scotia has an excellent wildfire management program. The budget has been pretty consistent over years, excluding helicopter purchases, which of course occur at intervals. It has been a practice for many years, as many of you would know, that we function on that operating budget which is consistent from year to year. If we have an exceptional fire season, and I mean that in a negative sense, like last year, where we do have a lot of extra costs - and this is typical of jurisdictions across Canada - that's when we return for an additional appropriation to cover the additional costs. As you know, when you have to fight the fires, you fight the fires. Then you sort out the invoicing later. So it has not been an issue for us to be resourced.

I would say, and the others can add, that it's the nature of wildfire management, particularly the suppression end of things, that you're going to go through a lot of equipment. That means you are constantly replacing equipment, constantly replacing hosing - and the trucks themselves. Hoses are probably the biggest ones, but the others can speak to that. That is contained within the tangible capital assets, the fleet. John is now responsible for both and can speak to that.

I would say it has been pretty stable. We've handled the appropriations when we need to. It's like anything else, the department could put more direct money into prevention, but I really don't think that's the most efficient way. Like we talked about, it's the cultural change, the behavioural change, the individuals and the community - and that's not what the department can do directly. We can certainly help and we can support. That's what we need to be thinking about - what can we do as Nova Scotians to help change that behaviour about not setting fires. Ironically, that will enable us to reduce the budget over time if we can reduce fires, if they're 99 per cent human caused.

MR. FANNING: I think on that point it is a culture change. It's a big deal. We can all go back to examples where people light fires because they want to see the nice green grass come up and they don't realize the impact they're doing to the ground, and it's not really doing what they believe.

As we require it, suppression has been something we can't ever forget about because when that happens we have to be able to respond. There has been a lot of time with John and the staff over the years to be ready to do that suppression. There has been an immense amount of time spent in training, to the point that we are very pleased where we are.

We, like the rest of Canada, have said prevention has to be our next focus - what's happening in this next decade. The deputy referred to the Canadian Wildland Fire Strategy. You will see a specific component in that where all the Canadian agencies say we have to start switching our efforts and our time because budget-wise we're not in bad shape. We have put a lot of money into training and now we feel that we're able to take that - I believe, John, that we can take it and put it into prevention to continue to stop the fires because every time we go out you're talking about several thousand dollars just to respond. Right now, I think we're at that place where we can do that and put that effort where we want.

We understand - we're very pleased with the purchase of the helicopters, but if it's like the other ones we won't be back for another 25 to 35 years to ask for it again. So we'll have that ability to go back in and spend time on prevention where we want to stop these, especially Nova Scotia. Fifty per cent of all fires in Canada are caused by natural occurrences, not people; 99 per cent of ours are caused by people so we have to focus on that.

Kids are one thing - they can cause our issues. I don't believe a lot of these kids are the ones starting these fires out there right now, so we have to find a way culturally to get at some of the adults. We can't stop them all, but every time we make significant changes and reduce it, it helps us cost-wise and people-wise. No one necessarily wants to be out in 35-degree weather in smoke doing this, but we're some glad that the men and women do it when they do.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen.

MS. JOYCE TREEN: Thank you for your presentation, it has been really interesting. Before I ask my question, I am going to make a comment about the campgrounds. For the campgrounds it probably hurts them a little bit, but as a camper that camps at a campground every weekend, I think it was a good call. We were disappointed that we couldn't roast our marshmallows or whatever, but we all know there is a lot of recreational consuming of alcohol that goes on at campgrounds during the fire time, in case you've never been there. Not me though. (Laughter)

So I think it was very wise. I'm sure you took a ton of heat for it and whatever, but it was the smart thing to do because that's what needed to be done, and sometimes you have to make the hard call.

My question is regarding the burn safety map that you guys have developed. Has it been positive? Do you have statistics on it that you can say it has increased the awareness

with people - like they do go and look for it? Except my neighbour across the street who works in Quebec during the week and comes home and burns, and I yell at him every weekend to put the fire out. Do you find that it's working?

MS. TOWERS: I can start and maybe John can add to it. Because I was in the department when we made this conversion over to this, I'd say two things. One, it has been very effective because it got us out of paper permits and all the staff and the individuals - the Nova Scotians who had to go to an office from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. to get their permit.

Ironically, we always knew that a lot of those folks were the ones who were very conscientious. If they were conscientious enough to come to the department, they weren't our highest risk. So I think it was very efficient because it took that out of the system and converted to an electronic system readily available to everyone, which is much better for the province.

In terms of what's happening, it's much easier to communicate. It's a very simple system, but very effective. It has been picked up by other jurisdictions and I'm sure we have the numbers on the number of web hits on that. I would say it has been a great conversion. I'll turn it over to John to add to that.

MR. ROSS: My sense is that there is more public awareness out there now. There are a couple of things that lead me to believe that. One is that we actually get calls in the fire centre from neighbours of people who are burning when the restriction is on. They're fully aware that their neighbour should not be burning.

The other thing is that according to our web folks, this is the most visited site on the department website so it gets a lot of hits. I can't tell you what the number is but it is significantly higher than any other. Just out in the public, too, I know that people are speaking to it more than they would have with the old permit system.

We did have a campaign going at Tim Hortons. They have the screen there with different ads and that sort of thing, so we did actually promote the FireSmart program on the screens there at Tim Hortons. I think we captured a fair number of folks through that as well. I think it has been a huge success it has made it a lot easier for the public.

Whether or not we're seeing fewer fires, it's tough to benchmark that but we're thinking we are achieving fewer fires because of it. We'll continue to monitor that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Treen, a supplementary?

MS. TREEN: It's more of an idea. You mentioned any ideas about helping to educate. I know our fire departments do a great job in Fire Prevention Week, bringing people out. They make a big, fun family event of it. I know the one in my area is super busy. What about a way that you could partner with them and have your own little corner

during that event, so you could talk about forest fire prevention as well, since the audience is already there and you're all about the same thing? I'm wondering if that might be an idea you can look into.

MS. TOWERS: I'll start and Walter can add and then John, if we forgot anything. Yes, the department has been participating in Fire Prevention Week in various ways. We do certain activities ourselves, as a department - media releases, information on our website, there's a lot more of the staff who take the opportunity that week to go out to do talks with community groups and schools. So yes, we do take advantage of that.

I don't know off the top of my head specifically if it's done in conjunction and that's where I'll turn to Walter to add and then John.

MR. FANNING: I know we do some of that now, whether we're in every community with it, not likely, but I know we do partner with them. Our issue, in a sense, is that Fire Prevention Week occurs in October, and 80 per cent to 90 per cent of our fires that we worry about are in May. So by the time we get to the green up in the first week of June, 80 per cent or 95 per cent of our fires are done and that's when our more serious time is. That's not that we can't get an extremely bad fire anytime in the rest of the year, we'd like to see something on the earlier part of it that maybe we could emphasize because that's when, even for the volunteers, I know they don't have time for prevention because they're responding to grass fires.

I don't know how we'd do it but it's a great thing we'd want to, I think, get involved with. We've made some attempts, I know, because the northeastern fire compact in the United States, they're huge on that. Every year they have something in the Spring that they do with an announcement. We've made some attempts but it seems to get lost in the hustle and bustle of the Spring and having that time to do it.

Anything like that that we can do, I know we'd be more than willing to participate with and promote it. We are involved with one - again, someone with the HRM said we've got that ability; if it's a serious issue, we'll produce a flyer and they said they will deliver it to every door in HRM if we need it. So I know the willingness is there, we just have to target what would be best and have something delivered. Sometimes the hands-on stuff is just as good as anything. It's kind of the wow factor when they come in.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross, did you have anything to contribute?

MR. ROSS: I'll just add to that too. Like Walter said, our busiest time of the year is in the Spring so we're trying to get the message out earlier. We are working on programs that would be like the Fire Prevention Week.

I might also add that we are involved in national initiatives and even some of the Northeastern Forest Fire Compact initiatives. There is a national group called Partners in Protection and our prevention officer is one of the members of that group, and we do benefit

from the initiatives that come out of that - such as the Fire Smart program, so that's one of the things.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Mr. d'Entremont.

MR. D'ENTREMONT: While we are throwing out ideas here, why don't we engage Engage Nova Scotia to help you out or at least take the funding from them to give to you to actually do something that's important, which is trying to keep fires from happening in our forests?

I don't need a comment on that, that's fine, but in my area, we've lost two fire towers. There was a time where Tusket had a crew and East Kempt had a crew, and now most things are over in McGowan Lake. Can you give me an idea of southwestern Nova Scotia, how our crewing actually works now? It's hard to figure out sometimes.

MR. FANNING: I'll speak to the towers maybe and then John speak to the crews with it. Our fire towers when they were created back in the 1950s and 1960s were remarkable. We have a huge, wonderful history on it, but what we found in time is that they weren't reporting the fires. It's just at the time with either sickness or difficulties they weren't in the towers when they were doing it. After a while, like our deputy indicated, they were reporting 30 per cent of our fires and then it became 14 per cent, and then it became 11 per cent.

What happened as an example of that - and this is again part of John's science when he started doing the analytical work - we found that the only time you needed a fire tower in the western Cape Breton area was 17 days a year. Other than that they weren't in, but we would put a person up there in a structure for all that time. In Cumberland County - MLA Farrell is not here - another example, one year we had 35 fires in Cumberland County and not one was reported first by the fire tower.

So what happened in time, we went to something that's an aerial detection system. Like the deputy said, they fly over and they give us pictures of the fire. Sometimes they've said, I got the licence plate of the truck that's speeding away from it or it's a truck fire, don't bother with it, the volunteers are there. Another time they said, okay, our crews couldn't get in there, so they flew over and they were giving them directions because some remote places in Nova Scotia, some of our younger crews are not maybe as adept at where the back roads are.

So there are a lot of examples with that, but we now provide a superior detection service for about a quarter of the cost. It was hard to go in to explain to the department and Nova Scotians why we would continue with something that wasn't necessarily working.

On the crews, I'll leave that to John.

MR. ROSS: With regard to the crews, because of the nature of things nowadays, we do have less firefighters than we did back a number of years ago, and so we try to station those firefighters where they can be the most efficient and respond. We also have a history of where fires are occurring so we can make sure that we've got people in the areas that we know are typically problem areas. That's how we've tried to station the crews. McGowan, as you mentioned - that's a good spot because it is fairly central to a lot of different areas.

Having said that, if we have an area of the province that's extreme and very dry, we can deploy resources to that area to deal with potential problems.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: The ocean is warming. I think the Bay of Fundy is warming faster than any body of water in the world - the evidence is last year's drought in southwestern Nova Scotia. Is there any expectation from your department whether we're going to have a normal year? Without the backdrop of today and the cold temperatures - 60 days from now could be totally different. Is there any recognition of what I'm trying to describe here as you project what could possibly happen next summer?

MR. ROSS: I can speak to that in the sense that it's very hard to predict what the summer is going to be like, but early in April or maybe it's late in April or early in May, we do get a seasonal forecast from the weather folks at Canadian Forest Service. They essentially try to forecast or predict what the weather is going to be like for the fire season. That's probably the best resource that we have to predict that sort of thing.

Just to let you know, last year, they were pretty close to what actually did happen. When Fort McMurray was happening, they did indicate that Alberta was going to be very dry up until a certain point, and then it was going to be very wet. They indicated that in the Atlantic Provinces, it would be a normal year until about midsummer, and then it would be very dry in some parts of Atlantic Canada, which we were part of. It was reasonably accurate, so we do try to take that information and apply it to our planning for the year.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Belliveau, are you satisfied?

MR. BELLIVEAU: Yes.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Gough.

MR. STEPHEN GOUGH: Thank you very much for your presentation. I've had a lot of experience with fires. In February 1970, we lost our home in a structural fire while my mother was in hospital giving birth to a newborn baby. It was a really tough time. Another time I was burning the fields, like you would do back in those days. Every year, you would burn the fields, burn the grass off. It got away from me, and the fire department had to be called. I had lots of fire people there with their water packs. It was very

embarrassing. (Laughter) Very embarrassing. I guess the thing is awareness and prevention and that.

One of the things that I've always wondered about is, a lot of times we hear of lightning strikes. Overnight, you have a lot of lightning strikes, and then you'll hear the next day about fires burning underground. Even in places where fires are burning, after the fire goes by, the firefighters have to go back and dig them up because there's underground fires. I spend a fair amount of time in the woods and things like that, and I often wonder, what is actually burning? Fire needs oxygen and fuel. I know sometimes tree roots are high above the ground, and animals hide under there and everything like that. What actually is burning underneath the roots and system to smoulder for days and weeks at times?

MR. ROSS: It is the roots and some of the dead trees, the larger organic matter that would be burning. The reason it's smouldering is because there isn't a lot of oxygen there, but there is enough to permit the woody debris to smoulder. What complicates that as well is, the dryer the soil is, the more that it's going to smoulder, and the longer it's going to smoulder.

This past summer in the western end of the province, that was a big issue for us. We were able to put the surface fires out, but it was the fires below the ground - and they were fairly deep - that we had to struggle with. It took a lot of time and effort to do that. In the western end, the roots on some of the trees were burnt so badly that the trees actually just fell over, and it was a bit of a hazard for the firefighters. We had to be careful of that. But that's what that is.

To go back to lightning strikes, we can get information from Environment Canada to give us an indication of the area of where the lightning strikes could be. Then what we would do is, through our aerial detection efforts, we would focus the aircraft in that area for probably the next three to five days. Usually, it's not the next day that those fires break out, it's two or three days later. So we would keep an eye on things there.

MR. GOUGH: There's one other question I just wanted to ask. Like the Chair, when I opened your presentation, I saw Smokey the Bear. It took me back a little bit. I've heard his name mentioned a number of times here this morning. I remember in the Spring of the year, Smokey the Bear would come to the school, possibly with a couple of firefighters and a big, shiny red fire truck. It was very exciting, in elementary school levels especially.

I've heard you mention the Smokey the Bear program. Does it still go along the same lines as it did back in the day? I know Smokey was on TV, in commercials. The awareness that it has gathered in the kids in those young years sticks with them. But I don't see him on TV anymore. I'm glad to see that there's even still a costume around that someone actually wears.



I'm just wondering, can you give me an idea about the Smokey the Bear program that is going on currently?

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ross.

MR. ROSS: I agree - I don't think the Smokey the Bear program has as high a profile as it did at one time. I think that's because there are fewer resources for us to be able to promote it the way that it was in the past. That's both in funding and manpower. It still is out there, and we do promote it, again, in the school system and at events where school-age children would be taking part in it.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Dunn.

MR. DUNN: I'm just sitting here thinking about the new fleet of helicopters arriving, the new technology in the helicopters, and the need for training for these new helicopters. Can you fit that within your current budget, or will you be asking for more funding for that? Just a comment on that.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Fanning.

MR. FANNING: It's actually going to be cheaper for us in a way because we had five aircraft, and there were five different aircraft. What we had to do was get certification every year and have three different companies come in to certify our staff.

What the pilots told me on that first day when we saw them all inside the aircraft was that it basically takes between three to five hours to certify on the aircraft. They said it's something like deciding between a Dodge and a Ford - they just need a little bit of time. The airbus pilot, the chief pilot, will train them and that's ongoing now. Chances are our pilots may be already trained.

For us it's a big deal because we spend a lot of money on training and recertification every year. It will be less than a third of that now, and it's the same time they apply. It's the same with the equipment replacement. Even rotor blades used to last 5,000 hours, and the new ones are 25,000-plus. So that kind of technology is amazing now, that we won't have to change a blade for years and years on it. There's significant savings that are coming in that which we hope to redirect in stuff like prevention and other things that we want to use.

MR. DUNN: What's the approximate capacity for the helicopter to be up in the air at any one given time?

MS. TOWERS: Just to clarify, are you asking about people or length of time or water or all of the above?

MR. DUNN: Well actually it's the length of time I guess that I was referring to.

MR. ROSS: With a fully fuelled aircraft, it's probably about three or three and a half hours of flying time. Just to put that in perspective, if an aircraft were to leave Shubenacadie and fly to the very end of the province, up to Meat Cove, say, it would take them an hour to get there. They would still have a good hour or hour and a half of firefighting capability before they had to go and refuel.

The other point I want to make there is that we have refuelling capability pretty much everywhere in the province. We have a cache of fuel drums located in different places. Plus we have some actual tanks set up in places like Baddeck, and we can always go to the Sydney airport and that sort of thing. So if they had to leave the fire and refuel, it would be a quick turnaround time, versus the old helicopters.

MR. DUNN: I just wanted to make a comment to thank you for your expertise on what has been happening over the past 10 to 20 years with regard to where we are in this country. We can be very proud of what has happened with regard to being prepared to tackle anything that is in front of us.

With regard to Smokey the Bear - you were mentioning him to Mr. Gough - I can recall being in a young elementary class a couple of years ago, and they were asking questions. One little tyke asked, how old is Smokey the Bear? (Laughter) Usually politicians can give answers - but anyway, I'll end there. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Is there anyone who wants to answer that question? Ms. Towers.

MS. TOWERS: I don't remember the exact year, and these two may know it, but Smokey the Bear celebrated a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary several years ago. I think it was in the 1930s - 1934 or so - when that program was started. That's how efficient it has been in the sense of how recognizable it is as a symbol. Some other jurisdictions have actually tried to phase out Smokey the Bear because nobody wants to be in the costume. (Laughter)

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Are there any more Smokey the Bear questions? Mr. Belliveau.

MR. BELLIVEAU: That's a great segue. I'll use my mother's answers for Smokey the Bear's age - 39.

My question is regarding the helicopter fleet. My observation is, in the last several years, there hasn't been a transition of this helicopter fleet. Can you quickly give us a snapshot? What I'm hearing today in this presentation is that the fleet is more updated. Are there fewer technicians or pilots? I don't have the technical names, but to me they would be pilots. Are those numbers basically the same as they were five years ago? Do we have less helicopters now with more capability?

MS. TOWERS: I'll start, and Walter can add, and John if needed. One thing just to remind people is that the helicopters are used for a series of work that we do at the department. Firefighting is the primary objective. They were brought into the province decades ago, as opposed to the fixed wing planes that tend to be used in other jurisdictions, to give us that maneuverability. So that's number one.

Search and rescue is another key part, but remember we also use them very much for key aspects of our project work in terms of getting out to sites - the forestry surveys and the wildlife surveys. That's how we monitor wildlife populations for some of those. So it's used for a range of things.

Over the years, the fleet evolved with different sizes and shapes because of those different uses. We had the bigger ones that could transport several people and then the Hughes 500, which would be the pilot and three people. So we had a range of that, but that brought in all those things that Walter touched on in terms of the amount of training you needed.

Remember, it's not just the pilots - it's our maintenance staff who have to be in there and take care of those machines. They all have to be trained. Every model was different. The products we ordered were different, as you said, that were needed to help keep them in shape.

The plan as it evolved over recent years to move to the consistency in the fleet was to get at a lot of those things - simplify the training, the requirements, the maintenance requirements - but still enable us to do all those things we need to do, with the primary objective being that wildland firefighting. So we started looking at what was out there and what other jurisdictions use, what could be available. We had to take all of those things into account.

I'll turn it over to Walter to talk about why they went the direction they did and how well it's working so far.

MR. FANNING: Staff-wise, there is no change. The same people are there doing some of the work, and they would be doing a little less maintenance work than they used to do in the past.

Every agency in Canada - and elsewhere too, but mostly in Canada - has a core fleet. Sometimes there's the question, why is it that they all contract stuff out and not just do it? Almost every agency with the exception of a few - maybe P.E.I. and maybe the Northwest Territories - all have a core fleet that they match to their resources.

That's why we chose rotary aircraft or helicopters. We can find water in lakes and ponds and places everywhere. We even use the odd swimming pool, to the chagrin of a local person. But if we stop the fire, it's still good.

That's what works best for us. New Brunswick went fixed wing because northern New Brunswick doesn't have places with a water supply, and they had old Budworm airstrips that they could use. Newfoundland and Labrador has immense areas, so they need the larger CL-415 air tankers. Every agency has a core, and then they contract out. We are actually closer now to that than maybe we ever were.

It was too difficult from a business perspective to justify a fifth helicopter. It just was not being used enough, and we went back on our stats. So we went with four that have a greater capacity. Water-wise, we can deliver more with four than we could with five. The small ones, although very adaptable, and they were workhorses, could only carry 90 gallons of water. These ones carry more, faster, and they're a little bit more adaptable.

That was good for us because now we have a contract with a local helicopter company for them to provide that extra bit. We can't justify the fifth, but we will be going out, and we have a contract with the lone helicopter company in Nova Scotia for them to be contracting and working on our fires at agreed-upon rates as backup.

Because we don't have the fifth, we will be using them more frequently, but that really matches more of what Canada goes to: decide on your core that you really need to have, and then you contract out, as best you can, the other work. That's where we are with it.

As far as the staff, as you mentioned, no, we have the same number. We have one less pilot right now because we have one less aircraft. But our intention is that by next year, when we have all our aircraft, we'll have another pilot in place to have a full complement.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I was hoping you would say "was on maternity leave."  
(Laughter)

Mr. Belliveau, did you have a supplementary?

MR. BELLIVEAU: No, I'm good.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Mr. Horne, the last question for this meeting.

MR. HORNE: In the last 10 minutes, you've probably answered most of the questions about the towers versus patrols and your new helicopters. You had mentioned at one point in your presentation that the new helicopters can take three times the volume. Are there any other significant stats that might be revealing that you may not have already mentioned?

MS. TOWERS: I think we touched on most of them. The length they can fly is significantly longer than the previous helicopters - the amount of water they can take.

We may not have touched on increased visibility. Just the way they're set up, you can see a lot better, which is much safer for everyone and more effective as you're doing that work.

I think we mentioned the fact that it can act for medevacs because you can actually fit a stretcher in there now. That is significant not only for our own staff or someone there. People may or may not be aware that, for example, if the RCMP calls us in for assistance, they pay. They reimburse the province. In some cases, that's what it is, to go in and help get somebody out. We can provide that service as part of that mutual aid across different emergency departments.

Did I miss anything else, guys?

MR. FANNING: I think the deputy has got it almost all covered. I think what this does for us that we really like is that adaptability. If there was another service that we could provide government, these machines give us those options. With the old ones, it was not possible. If things come up, there's a need for thermal infrared or something like that for finding lost people, these helicopters can adapt to it. We can make that happen, whereas before it was not possible.

There could be other services that we're not doing that government says maybe we should be doing that. These aircraft will allow us to do it.

MR. ROSS: I would also like to add that they do have more cargo capacity. They have better lift capability. We also purchased baskets that fit on the skids that can carry equipment and that sort of thing into a fire.

One last thing I just want to mention is, you talked about the fire towers. Maybe, Julie, I can get you to move to the next slide there. This actually shows a day in April last year. It shows the detection routes that we flew that day. You can see the red flames there. Those were actual fires that occurred. We matched the detection routes quite well with the actual fires that occurred that day. That does indicate that our detection system is working.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: Ms. Towers, would you like to give some closing remarks?

MS. TOWERS: Very briefly I would like to thank everyone for the time and questions today. I'm very proud of the department and its wildfire management program - always have been. It only continues to improve. It's amazing what everybody puts into it.

Yes, there are a lot more women there than there used to be, which is great. I've been training everyone on the fact that there's a lot of good people out there contributing throughout it, whether it's in the planning, the administrative support, or the actual suppression - but definitely on the prevention as we talked about today.

I'll just finish by saying I really look to everybody to help carry that message of prevention, to remind people how many are caused by humans. As Nova Scotians, it only makes sense to see that switch and decrease over time, and we all have a role to play in that. Anything we can do to help, in terms of sharing resources and giving information, we're more than happy to do that. I'll just finish there.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I would like to thank you for your presentation today. I think a lot of us learned some positive things that are going on in the department. I think we all feel a little more comfortable with how the services you are providing are top notch, so thank you once again.

We will take a brief three-minute recess. We need to come back for some committee business.

[10:51 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:54 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

MADAM CHAIRMAN: I call the meeting to order. Ms. Henry has a sheet that she is going to circulate for your signatures. Some members are not here, so if you're substituting for someone, please don't sign for them; we will have to have them sign themselves. We will pass it around. We'll start with Mr. Lohr. (Laughter) I'm sorry, Mr. Dunn. You're both tall. You're much younger-looking than Mr. Lohr.

As many of you know, the House is going back in. It's resuming on April 25<sup>th</sup>, so that will not interfere with our April meeting. We will still proceed with the April meeting of the Resources Committee meeting, which is April 20<sup>th</sup>.

What I would like to discuss with you is rescheduling the Maple Producers Association meeting. That was cancelled due to the recent House sitting. The Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture on the lobster industry - that was bumped due to the urgency of the dead sea creatures in southwestern Nova Scotia. We would like to reschedule those.

We also do not know the date of the House. (Interruptions) We do know now, but we don't know how long it will last so we can't really schedule for May. We would like to possibly put the Maple Producers on May 18<sup>th</sup> should the House end early, and the lobster industry for September - keeping in mind we're going to the gypsum mine on June 15<sup>th</sup> for our regular meeting.

Is everyone in agreement with the rescheduling?

It is agreed.

The next agenda-setting meeting will be in our September meeting. We've decided that we'll do that because over the summer issues may arise that would bring fresh topics

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and to hold things over that long and commit to them - I think people can come with a clean slate in September.

Are all in agreement with that?

I will entertain a motion for adjournment.

MR. DUNN: So moved.

MADAM CHAIRMAN: The meeting is adjourned.

[The committee adjourned at 10:58 a.m.]