

EVENING SITTING  
COMMITTEE OF FINANCE

General Revenue Fund  
Environment  
Vote 26

Subvote (ER01)

**The Chair:** — Order. Why is the member from Regina Elphinstone on his feet?

**Mr. McCall:** — With leave of the committee, to introduce guests, Mr. Speaker.

Leave granted.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

**Mr. McCall:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I'd like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the committee and the members of this Assembly two guests seated in your gallery, Mr. Chairman. One, Charlie Penson. If you could please stand, Charlie. And his son, Darren.

Charlie is the Alliance MP (Member of Parliament) for Peace River out in Alberta and the Canadian Alliance Finance critic, Mr. Speaker. So if all members could give them a warm welcome, it's a warm evening, so that would be entirely in keeping, so please give them a welcome.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

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**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, and a special welcome to our guests, to Charlie and his son, Darren.

Mr. Minister, before we adjourned or recessed for the supper hour, we were talking about tanks and how we were addressing it. You mentioned that the city of Moose Jaw came to the department with a proposal whereby if . . . and I need to get this clarified.

Were they asking the department to come out and determine what it might take, the cost to clean up a site, whereby the city of Moose Jaw then if they would take over the site, they would clean it up, and the department would give a clean bill of health and then get on with life? Or exactly what were you implying when you mentioned about the proposal Moose Jaw had, and would this type of arrangement work in other communities in regards to cleaning up some of these waste sites and turning them into a place of economic activity again whereby the community or the city is not just having a liability on its hands as a result of taxes that just continue to go in arrears?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Just to point out that . . . I just wanted to clarify that we didn't give the city of Moose Jaw any money.

And what's the most amazing thing about the partnership approach that we talk to people in Saskatchewan about is that people genuinely get excited about the opportunity to do their part. And we want to capitalize of course as a government on some of the excitement and that not . . . the only player in the province is not the provincial government, but many other stewards, natural stewards. And cities and municipalities in general, large and small, play a very important role.

And in this instance, what happened was the city came up to . . . you know, with the concept that if they assumed ownership of an abandoned service station in Moose Jaw . . . The service station was sitting there. There was no activity on the site; it was within the city. It was a valuable area that they could possibly have a land sale on.

But what they were worried about that in the event that they assumed ownership of the property through tax arrears, then once they assumed the ownership of the property and claimed it through tax arrears, then they done a bunch of digging up that they'd find there would be huge liability there which they could not afford. And what they did not want to do at the end of the day is to be owners of property that was too expensive to reclaim and thus putting the municipality itself at a financial risk.

So what we've done is we negotiated in good faith an arrangement where it would not force them to clean it up if the damage was extensive to a point where it was just simply unaffordable for the city. And in this instance it worked out where the properties in question — I believe there was three of them — when they did finally assume, after we assured them we wouldn't hold them personally liable, assumed ownership of the properties through tax arrears and tax enforcement action that they found out that the contamination wasn't as great as they originally thought. And so as a result of their cleanup effort they were able to resell the properties and continue cleaning up areas throughout Moose Jaw from the sale of the particular properties that I made reference to.

Following that, SERM (Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management) then did a change to our Environmental Management and Protection Act that would take into account the Moose Jaw example when we met with other cities, where we'd allow the city to assume ownership of a property and determine the extent of contamination, and then we work on our resolution from there and not hold them personally liable.

So what you have is a very good relationship between Moose Jaw and SERM, and in a sense that we are making sure that they do their part and they're making sure that we don't hold them liable. And at the end of the day three sites in Moose Jaw were cleaned up and sold for a tidy little profit.

And they cleaned up other areas and we used the example to make rules and changes in EMPA (The Environmental Management and Protection Act, 2002) to ensure that we have the similar benefit with other communities. So it was a

win-win-win situation.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, so what you're saying, Mr. Minister, then is this is something that you would give consideration with other communities.

And just to indicate, I wasn't asking for funds. The people I've talked to, they haven't talked about funds. They've just talked about the fact if it became a major cleanup that they couldn't afford, then they're stuck with it if they assumed it, were to assume ownership and try to clean it up.

I guess the question I would have, Mr. Minister, — and I've got a couple here — is number one, is there a simple process of determining what type of cleanup costs might be involved if a site may be fairly contaminated that might be fairly costly? Or you could determine no, this site it wouldn't take it very much to clean it up but it would appear that say, it's a minimal amount.

You could say to the town, we've done some tests; this is what our tests are showing. And then the town would say, okay, well based on those tests then, we'll certainly . . . maybe proceed; we'd be willing to proceed with an arrangement to clean up the property.

And so I guess one question I have, have you come up with some kind of a test that would . . . rather than starting to dig and then just closing it in because oh, it's going to be more than you, more than you'd like to bargain for?

Secondly, you mentioned I think 110 communities have used centenary money and maybe you could give me an idea of exactly what communities have done. Have they made an application, and roughly how much money have they received towards this type of environmental cleanup?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I just want to just clarify first of all, one of the premises that we undertake when we look at the whole notion of helping some of these communities address some of the service stations that may be in tax arrears, may be closed down, may have been abandoned, is fairly simple. We have the . . . we operate under the principle of polluter pays.

So if a municipality were to own a site and the . . . or a private business were to own a site then we would help try and track down that private business to hold them accountable for some of the pollution on that particular land. And so when a community, it takes over a property we'll work very closely with them to do a couple of things, is look under the scenario of polluter pays and make sure we can't track down the original owner.

And secondly we'll also assist them with identifying what we would call phase 1 or phase 2 testing of the actual site. And some of the costs run in the range of 3,000 to 5,000 to 8,000. Or we'll do an assessment of the site and we can certainly work very closely with them on that to determine the extent of the contamination.

What we are doing in the event that we can't track down the original owner for odd reasons, the owner has passed away or

some other good reason, then what we would consider that site to be is a abandoned site.

And this is where again we'll work with the community to identify the site. You know, as I mentioned previously, we sat down with SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) and SARM (Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities) and we worked through the process of identifying some of these sites.

So when you made reference to the 110 communities, I want to clarify. It wasn't 110 communities; it was 110 abandoned service stations that we cleaned up. And these service stations dot the entire province of Saskatchewan.

So again to clarify, if a community wants to take part in the program they can certainly assume the ownership; they can — through tax arrears. They can do a phase 1 or phase 2 assessment.

We can help track down the original owner and if that original owner is still available then we try and hold him accountable. If he's not available then we use the abandoned service station funding to help them clean this up.

Some of the initial testing costs run from 3 to 5 to 8 million . . . Sorry, thousand. And I would also point out that we spent something like \$3.6 million over four years to help clean up some of these 110 sites.

So we're certainly doing our part and we'll continue working very closely with the community. And if you have any communities that want to bring forward some of the concerns, then we would urge them to contact our department, and we'll work very, very closely with them trying to solve this problem for them.

(19:15)

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, the idea of contacting or looking at the, trying to find the original owner, some of these sites have been . . . Some of the owners are gone. But the fact that you are going back, you know, things have changed even since 50 years ago, and I find it appalling. It's easy to sit in offices in Regina and start . . . or Ottawa for that matter.

We look at it at the whole agricultural scene right now. We've got a federal minister who hasn't got a clue when it comes to agriculture and the needs of Western Canadians. And we've got a deputy minister who is totally out of his league, and I have no idea why he's up there. The concern I have, and Mr. Minister, I was there in '89 when we had a minister who started the process and then left. And I think part of it, he got a lot of heat in his own caucus, and that was Mr. Hodgins who was minister at that time. And he started discussing some of these issues because there didn't seem to be any common sense as to how we arrive at solutions here.

And what I am saying, Mr. Minister, is it's time we used some common sense. It's time we started to work with communities. You've indicated that there's an avenue to follow so that we can start addressing some of these sites where people are willing and would like to, say, purchase a site where that site could be a

productive issue such as you've got in the Moose Jaw area.

And so rather than pursuing it tonight, I realize and talked to the Deputy House Leader and we kind of agreed to a time tonight, but we will not vote if off tonight because we may have to get into debate later on. I would like to move on to another issue.

Mr. Minister, and first of all maybe I could ask you a question. Is there . . . and you can give this . . . is there a specific contact in the Department of Environment that a community group or a business or a couple of businesses . . . say a business wants to buy out a property that's been sitting vacant. Is there a contact in the department that could be contacted to sit down and address this issue?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well thank you very much for the question. And certainly I think what I want to also stress from our perspective is that obviously common sense is needed in whole regard. And the most amazing thing that we have found out is that industry is now is starting to come forward and saying look, listen; we sold the products 20, 30 years ago, and we feel like we want to be part of the solution. So CPI, which is the Canadian Petroleum Institute, and I believe Federated Co-op are some of the leaders that have come out of the woodwork in saying, look, listen, we all created this particular problem. It's our products that . . . you know, may not be in some instances but they want to be leaders in this regard.

And a lot of communities are also saying, look, we want these sites cleaned up because they could threaten our water supply. And certainly you look at other of the environmental groups that are coming forward and saying, look what happened 20, 30 years ago; we've got to clean that up. And certainly from our perspective, we realize that.

So I believe we're taking a common sense approach. This is not us hunting down people that may have passed away 10, 15 years ago or hunting down somebody that was responsible in their activity. What we want to do is try and find as many players as we can to resolve the mistakes and issues in the non-knowledge, I guess I can say, the lack of knowledge around some of the dangers that these abandoned service stations could really actually do to the environment.

So the common sense approach that we're taking is that we're looking at following the leadership of people that are involved with the industry, the communities, the environmental groups saying, look, we need to address this. We're going to continue moving forward in this direction. We're doing our part as well, and we're all doing it under the premise of co-operation. So we are taking a practical, common sense approach, a prudent approach, to try and resolve the matter.

And we look at all the 400-plus sites we've had through the province, cleaned up 110, and I can tell you now there's 110 service stations that were abandoned that were making some dramatic problems for the area. Well they are now cleaned up. And you see some of the knowledge that we've gained from that and some of the current practices. History can teach us a lot of lessons. So I guess from our perspective, we have taken a common sense approach. We'll continue moving down that path.

And for any community group or mayor or reeve or people that might want to get active with a particular file and have a concern, they can call the environmental protection branch. The number there is 787-6178.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I guess that's what we're asking is basically the common sense and working together with. And I'll pass this information on, and hopefully it's an . . . as a result of part of our discussion tonight, we might be able to arrive at a resolve on that particular case. And no doubt there'll be other cases too. And I think, Mr. Minister, if we do take a common sense approach and work together with, we can accomplish a lot more and address these sites.

I'd like to move on to another area, Mr. Minister, and it's regarding grazing. And in this case it's Moose Mountain Provincial Park as it's an area, it's . . . Well it's not in my constituency any more, but certainly a number of producers in the area have grazed their livestock in the park for a number of years. And over the years, in the last few years there's been some concerns that there's going to be a major cutback.

But one of the issues that was raised this year, and I know I've talked with officials before, officials in the past, and with department . . . with Environment ministers, and we have a grazing association down around the park that, where the members have worked very diligently to come up with some common sense grazing programs and ideas whereby they utilize and use the park properly and make sure that it's not overgrazed in one area and not in another area. And the other thing is they police themselves as well. Because they realize if one individual is not obeying the rules, then it all comes back to haunt them.

And the concern right now, Mr. Minister, is there seems to be a sense of a lack of understanding with . . . I don't know if we have a new official down at the park. But my understanding was that the grazing association had suggested when cattle come in that they be brought in at different locations so that they're dispersed through the park. So that you get just a nice equal access to the park and grazing all over and there's a bit of grazing rather than overgrazing.

And the impression that I was left with is that the new director wants all the livestock to come in one area. And I'm not that familiar; I wasn't able to get all the . . . as much information as I'd like.

But I'm wondering if park policy has changed or if we're just not making sure we're communicating and that when directors change they have a sound understanding of what a grazing policy is in a particular park. It may vary from one park to the other.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. Most of the questions that we've answered on these occasions, whether it's grazing or certainly issues on the abandoned mine, or abandoned service station cleanup and some of the rules, we've certainly gone through some of these questions and answers through various estimates, but we'll continue moving forward some of the answers. It may sound like a broken record here but I'll continue moving forward.

In reference to the grazing issue at the Moose Mountain park, you'll be pleased to know that we've sent one of our officers in there, by the name of Greg Johnson. And Mr. Johnson met with the executive membership of the Moose Mountain grazers association. I believe the executive there that was Bob Brickley, and they certainly were talking about the access point for grazing.

There's a misunderstanding on the three locations that was to be considered. We can now tell you that there's going to be a second meeting within the next several weeks to resolve the matter. There's a few issues of the access point for grazing. There's also the issue about the monitoring of how many animals are in a given area because that's also very important as part of our vegetation management techniques.

But I'm very confident that Mr. Johnson and Mr. Brickley and the association can come up with a successful resolution to the problem that they had, and we'll certainly encourage them to seek that happy medium so that the problem would go away.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, I thank you for that and I know that the association down there has worked very, very diligently with managers through the years.

But, Mr. Minister, to suggest that because you've answered somebody else's grazing question this one isn't important is not really forthcoming, because we've talked about grazing, because we've talked about oil sites . . . one of my other colleagues has.

Some of your officials were here back a number of years ago and they sat for hours, not just a few minutes at a time, in estimates. Now some of the new . . . the deputy minister hasn't been here in estimates, wasn't back in the late '80s, I know that. So we can get into some significant debate if you'd like to get into an extended debate on the issue.

But at the same time, Mr. Minister, what we've attempted to do, and I appreciate the fact that back then and even through the past number of years we've had officials have begun to really recognize the importance of working together with groups and associations. It's better to build bonds that work rather than confrontational modes.

And unfortunately, you and your department sometimes don't always have control over who you put out in the field. Different people have different mentalities when it comes to dealing with the public. So it takes . . . And I guess that's why the questions come to me and then I'm talking to you and we're trying to resolve that, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Minister, I'd like to address a couple of questions — I know a colleague is just itching to get in on some debate as well — but regarding the SARRC (Saskatchewan Association for Resource Recovery Corporation) program, how much money is collected through the environmental tax on bottles and cans and what have you? And how much money is actually put in to the recycle . . . back into the SARCAN program? And have we begun to include other than voluntarily bringing our milk containers forward, are we . . . have we a program that addresses that to encourage more people to bring their milk, recycle their milk containers?

(19:30)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I would point out that the environmental handling charge, the revenue collected 2002-2003, \$12,291,505.26; contractual payment to SARCAN, \$9,259,230. It's an overall beverage container recovery rate is 88.79 per cent which is a very impressive rate. And again this is in reference to the environmental handling charge. And certainly I want to commend SARCAN for doing a tremendous job in this regard.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials tonight. I do have quite a few questions to ask but I'd like to start with questioning and it circles around critical habitat wildlife land.

And my line of questioning starts with some years ago back in 1995. The Hon. Lorne Scott, who was the minister of Environment at that time, or SERM at that time, I guess, brought in an Act that deemed certain lands critical habitat wildlife land.

That land was supposed to be in perpetuity for the preservation of wildlife and environment, and whatever have you. And the Wildlife Federation was also in favour of that and many people, active hunters, whatever, were also very favourable in fact that you did that.

Now, Mr. Minister, how much land to date is still deemed critical habitat wildlife land?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I think some of the wildlife habitat lands that you make reference to is that certainly some of the leadership efforts of Minister Scott are still being felt today within SERM. There's no question that he's moved the yardsticks on many fronts . . . (inaudible) . . . or in this instance the habitat lands, so we certainly want to publicly recognize him for his contribution and point out that his contribution during his tenure as minister we felt positively for many, many years.

When Minister Scott began that process, we were at 3.4 million acres of land. We'll continue remaining roughly in that same area. We are always constantly adjusting our volume of land that we've set aside. There's also exchanges, there's also identification of new lands.

So I can report that after a number of years after some of his work, that the amount that we're at is roughly the same, and to point out that it is not legislatively required to do so; we're doing this under a spirit and the intent to try and protect lands. So we were very cognizant of some of his earlier work. And you want to stay around that 3.5, 3.4 to 3.5 range to make sure that we follow through with some of his commitments.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answer. To date, has there been any land deemed critical habitat wildlife land that has been sold?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well I can certainly advise the member that over the last . . . Again he made reference to 1995, and I believe since 1995 some of the earlier work of Minister Scott, roughly 97,000 acres have been withdrawn from The Wildlife

Habitat Protection Act. And the 97,000 acres of land was bought for TLE (treaty land entitlement) purposes in which some of the negotiators for the TLE folks . . . There's capital improvements made on this wildlife habitat protection land and there's some capital dollars spent by the lessees. So in the transfer from the lessees to TLE lands there was costs associated with that.

So we took care of the lessees and then of course the land became TLE land and the TLE land had management agreements which many of the Indian bands want to continue to retain the wildlife habitat lands in their natural state. So it's really a good transition from a lessee to a TLE band in the sense that the wildlife habitat protection land is recognized by both those groups and the transition has been minimal.

We continue looking at ways to keep the 3.4, \$3.5 million range. We'll access more land, and we'll identify more land, and we'll add it on again. Legislatively it's the spirit and the intent behind the wildlife habitat protection land that we want to push forward on that front. So overall it's a good balance, it's a good fit, and so far there's been very few complaints.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to your answer, there has been land that's been turned over through the TLE process, which was deemed critical habitat wildlife land.

I believe under the jurisdiction of the Act that the Hon. Lorne Scott had brought out that land was not supposed to be sold or transferred. It was supposed to be in perpetuity, stay as and deemed critical habitat wildlife land. Nobody could own it or buy that land. With your answer you have gone that the fact that some of the land has been turned over through the TLE process, which raises many, many concerns.

In the area of the RM (rural municipality) of Meeting Lake there is a section of land which houses . . . (inaudible) . . . elk and that elk was brought in there through a lot of the Withekan Wildlife Federation who at that time paid for all the transportation of this elk into that area to establish an area for elk where there could be at some time a hunting season.

Now back in the early '90s there was some hunting seasons on that land. Has that land which is in the Meeting Lake RM, which is Crown land deemed critical habitat wildlife land, has that been turned over to the Mosquito Band?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — I don't have the particulars of that area that you spoke of and we'll certainly take it under advisement and get an answer directly to you.

What we have done, as you probably are aware — and I could be corrected on these figures but I'm fairly confident in them — is that we're trying to undertake, under a best efforts clause under the TLE Agreement, to try and achieve a treaty land entitlement settlement from 1 per cent of the land mass in Saskatchewan to 2 per cent. It's from 1 to 2 per cent of the land mass under the TLE and we had to undertake as a province every reasonable effort and every best effort to try and achieve that 1 per cent jump.

So I want to point out some of the things that we have indeed sat down with many of the Indian bands on, is to identify lands

that they wish they could select as TLE. There are time frames associated with the TLE process and certainly at the request of many Indian bands, they've identified lands that may be under the critical Wildlife Habitat Protection Act. And what I would point out is that TLE sale would be allowed in that instance as part of our best efforts to achieve the TLE Agreement that we sign as a province.

And so I would point out that one of the other things we do when an Indian band selects an area that has some wildlife protection Act issues on it is we would ensure that they've met with some of the stakeholders, pasture operators, landowners, to make sure that they are able to co-operate and coordinate in that area.

Once it's selected as a First Nations land, then our influence there dramatically decreases. But a lot of these issues, we talk to the First Nations band about access and management in the continued . . . trying to retain this area in its natural state as much as possible. And many Indian bands certainly say yes, that is our intent. And we feel that as a partner with the First Nations on some of the protection of land and resources and wildlife and so on and so forth, it's something that we want to continue building upon.

So I think the people of Saskatchewan could be well served and assured that through these agreements that the management of lands and the resources and the protection of critical wildlife lands, whether they're under TLE or whether they're under a lessee or whether they're under Ag and Food or whether they're under SERM or some other program, that all the players and partners involved have an understanding and a genuine concern of the importance to protect wildlife habitat. And that kind of respect and that kind of relationship certainly goes a long ways in making sure as many partners are engaged as possible and that will pay off dividends for us in the future.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. And I really would appreciate an answer within the next days regarding the ownership of that said land in the Meeting Lake RM. And the reason I wanted to know that, Mr. Speaker, or Mr. Chair, is because this land that is under the pretence that Mosquito owns it. Now if they don't own the land, then they can't get an outfitting licence.

Well last year there was an outfitting licence supposedly purchased by this band to outfit off that land. Is this land in question, does it have an outfitting licence? And did that outfitting licence come from the provincial government or would it come from the federal government?

**The Chair:** — Order. I just wanted to remind hon. members, and one in particular, that computers are to be operated silently.

(19:45)

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. What I'll point out that on agricultural leased lands it's a layered approach because the land is basically administered by the Department of Agriculture. They would in essence be the one that would issue the elk herding permit on that particular area, and we would issue the tag because we would be concerned about the sustainability of the deer population or the

elk population, and of course they would have jurisdiction on this leased land.

In the event that it is transferred over to the TLE then it would become a federally administered process, and certainly the bands, because it's under the TLE they would have a lot of influence as well.

So I would point out that clearly that there's some good collaboration. We monitor what's going on there. And it is without question that the whole notion of getting active and involved, the First Nations have often maintained that when it comes to issues like elk trading or management of wildlife or benefits from resources that they want to be part of the benefits and we certainly want to be able to do that. And that's one of the reason why a land base through TLE and protection of the environment are things that we always negotiate upon. And so far the system has worked quite well.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So in answer to that then, the land has not been turned over to the Mosquito Band?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again, on this particular instance I don't have the details of the Mosquito Band and the land in question, so I won't be able to tell you about whether the land has been transferred to the band or not. And what happens on TLE when they identify areas that they would like to purchase to fulfill that 1 per cent to 2 per cent of the land mass of Saskatchewan, well then they can identify that. And there's other third party stakeholders on a particular piece of land. For example if there was an outfitter that was there outfitting, then they would negotiate the sale of the outfitting business as well as, of course, the area of land for TLE purposes.

There's always the buyer willing, seller willing scenario under the TLE, just to be fair to everybody, and these are all negotiated in a timely fashion and moved forward. As I mentioned we have a 10-year time frame in which we have to move as quickly as we can, and so far the progress has been good. And I would further point out that the details on the Mosquito Band allocation you've asked for, I don't have them in front of me, but I can certainly get them to you as to where the process is at and how many acres that they're after and so on and so forth.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. With that then, I take it that at . . . to the point right now they do not own the land. And if that's the case then how can they obtain an outfitting licence to operate off that land if they don't own it?

Just to give you a background of the story of this land, this land was leased by a neighbour out at the farm. His personal land or his private land was sold, and with this lease that he held — which was in critical habitat wildlife land — he could never, ever own it; he could never, ever purchase it because it was deemed critical habitat wildlife land.

Now the fact comes if he could not purchase that land — because it had to stay critical habitat wildlife land — how in the world does a government allow another group of people to own that land? And then if they own the land through TLE agreements, how can they outfit off that land?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well as the member knows, again, I don't have all the details of the Mosquito land acquisition under TLE and we'll get that information to you as soon as we can.

But what I would point out is, the first thing is you don't have to own the land to run an outfitter business. Land ownership is not necessary to be an outfitter.

What you're after in that area of course is the allocation of animals in a sense of being permitted to hunt six deer or seven elk. We would determine from a sustainable argument how many animals that person would be able to . . . would be legally allowed to harvest. And certainly again, emphasize that point is that you don't have to own the land to run an outfitter business.

And the second thing is, under TLE we have to make our best efforts to achieve the 1 to 2 per cent scenario. So as a result of that, critical wildlife habitat lands in which we are going to make sure we maintain that balance is eligible for TLE purposes. Many of the Indian bands have identified some of those lands.

And as I mentioned, 97,000 acres have been vetted through the TLE process. And to point out that we are now identifying other areas to maintain that 4.4, 4.5 . . . sorry, 2.4 to 3.5 million acres of land that's deemed critical wildlife habitat. So that balance has always been met.

And again while the TLE settlements are moving forward, the interests and the size of the wildlife habitat lands are being maintained. So you can see the good balance that's occurring. And again, and I don't have particular details about the Mosquito Band but I can tell you that it is our effort as a government to try and ensure that we settle the TLE agreement that we're signatories to.

And this has been a long-awaited process and there's still a long, long ways to go. So we are making every effort to try and achieve that. And this is at the insistence of the First Nations. They're really pushing for it which is . . . They should be commended and certainly be recognized for that.

So we will certainly undertake, as we are legally allowed to do so now, some of the wildlife protection lands be settled under TLE designation and that process, of course, takes time. And there's always the issue of buyer willing, seller willing scenario, and those discussions and negotiations are always paramount to any settlement of TLE lands.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister, for the answer. Does that land, that land in question that the Mosquito Band supposedly or not supposedly have as their land through the TLE agreement, was there an outfitting licence given to that land through the Mosquito Reserve?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — The obvious answer, I still don't have the particulars of the Mosquito land settlement so I don't know that question. But typically when land is being transferred TLE purposes, we sit down with the Indian band in question and we ask them for the management of certain lands. We can sign agreements with them. Many of them have come forward and have signed agreements with us, and we certainly take them at their intent and their word.

As I mentioned before, some of the influence we have over that land, once it's TLE land, is dramatically diminished once the settlement is done. But certainly I think the partnership approach we've had with many Indian bands is that they want to see some of the wildlife habitat protected, sustainability of the animals in the wildlife, and the resources is there. So they clearly advise us that's what they want to do and we certainly take their word for it because it's important to all of us.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Well, Mr. Minister, I've asked the question as who owns that land, whether it is in a TLE process through Mosquito Reserve, and you haven't given me an answer. I've asked the question regarding an outfitting licence on that said land through Mosquito Reserve and I still haven't got an answer.

Mr. Minister, that land is not very far from my brother's land where we hunt. And we were on that land last year hunting, Mr. Minister, and we were chased off there because the Mosquito Band owns that land and they have an outfitting licence. But you, Mr. Minister, do not know that there is an outfitting licence on there. So if your department doesn't know there's an outfitting licence on that land, who does and who is giving us the right information as who owns the outfitting licence on there if there is an outfitting licence? Are they on there illegally outfitting, or do they have a licence?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — First of all, again, I want to point out that when you ask the questions I've said three or four times we don't have the details of this particular land that was settled as you've said in terms of the TLE purposes. We simply don't have the information here. But what I would point out is in the . . . suppose this process of TLE allocation is complete or on its way to being complete, and that the Mosquito Indian Band has identified this area as an area that they would like to have and that the process approved the TLE selection and settlement.

And they settled . . . the lessee, they settled with . . . if there was an outfitter on the land before, they settled with that individual. And they certainly met with us to talk about the management of the land after it becomes First Nations territory. If it becomes First Nations territory — if it becomes TLE lands — then the Indian bands themselves will issue the outfitting licence through their federal connection, in terms of them having the jurisdiction on that First Nations land.

So again, I don't have the details of the Mosquito Band transfer, but if they have identified lands through TLE and the process of dealing with the lessee is complete, the process of being . . . of dealing with any third party interest on that land is complete, and the process is seen that the land is being transferred to the Mosquito Indian Band, then technically you are correct in the sense of saying the Mosquito Indian Band owns the land, then they will determine through their own band bylaw who their local outfitter would be.

And there's about 40 bands in the province right now that have put in place Indian band bylaws in reference to the whole notion of outfitting. And clearly these are First Nations land, so we can't impose to them who can be an outfitter in that area. They reserve and retain the right to determine who their band-based outfitter is.

So in the case of the Mosquito, I don't have the details of that particular file. But if you're asking a question, if it is under TLE lands and it's approved, who has the outfitting licence and who has the right to issue the outfitting licence, the answer is the First Nations on First Nations land have the right to issue an outfitter licence, and certainly not SERM.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to your answer you just give me — and I understand where you're coming from — if it is under the TLE process, the outfitting licence has to come from the federal government. In regards to last year, and the current year last year, did your department issue an outfitting licence to Mosquito Band?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Again as I mentioned, we wouldn't have jurisdiction to issue an outfitting licence on this agriculturally leased land; and Agriculture would be the ones that would issue the licence. Where we would have influence is on the sustainability argument in reference to how many animals that particular outfitter could harvest.

The licence, it's a layered approach. The licence would be issued by Ag and Food, and we would determine the amount of harvest that that outfitter could take from the sustainability argument. And clearly again these are questions you can ask more specifically of the Minister of Ag and Food in reference to the ag lease lands in which he has jurisdiction on issuing outfitting licences.

(20:00)

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. With that, Mr. Minister, I take it that Sask Ag is the one that's responsible for giving out outfitting licences?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — On agriculturally leased land, yes they do.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister; I learned something tonight. And I definitely will be asking the Minister of Ag in regards to outfitting licences if they have an outfitting licence on there.

Mr. Minister, a while back when I said that the Witchekan Wildlife Federation was responsible for putting a lot of elk into that area, was to build up for hunt which would be obtained by Saskatchewan hunters. Last year there was a licence in zone 47, and there was 50 licences for elk to be issued out, which were. And shortly before the season was to begin, somebody somewhere somehow determined that there was going to be no licences for hunting issued in that area. Was that true? And what happened to that area, zone 47, where the elk licences were taken away from the hunting people?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Certainly from that question, we don't have no knowledge of anybody not issuing 50 elk licence for that area. We'll take your question under advisement. The officials that we have here aren't aware of that particular decision. And certainly if you'll give us the details, we'll get an answer to you very quickly.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. That's ironic that you don't know what is going on in your department

regarding the seasons because in fact Monday morning of that season, when the day was first open for hunting season, the officials from SERM, from Spiritwood, were down there checking for holders of said licences and they were there for two days without knowing that there was no season.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Yes, one of the things I think is very important here is that, as the member may know, is we have a tremendous job within Saskatchewan Environment to balance the many interests and demands on the resources and the land base of Saskatchewan. And we have many partnerships and certainly many processes that we have to go through to ensure that as many stakeholders are advised of some of the sustainability arguments that we use in terms of conservation and taking it easy on the wildlife, and so on and so forth.

And that's why the question that you presented today is confusing. Because what happens when we set seasons, our season setting system has us going through committees. And the committees, you know, they'll set up some of these dates several months beforehand to determine some of the dates in question.

And I'd also point out that if we are aware of a TLE land settlement within a specific area we incorporate that into the process.

So these things are managed or they're integrated. There's certainly there's many stakeholders that we consult with.

And while we're very proud of our system, we're just not going to say that mistakes and overlaps do occur. But, you know, in terms of this particular instance, we're perplexed as to how this thing would be able to work its way through despite the process we have in place.

But we'll undertake to get detailed information as to where that particular information that you presented, where that may have come from and we'll advise you accordingly.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. I find it ironic that your department doesn't know anything about this. I find that really ironic.

In regards to the 50 hunters that had licences there, they were only notified just days before the season that they were not allowed to hunt because the season was dropped. The season was dropped, Mr. Minister, for the simple reason that there was an outfitting band, outfitting off that said land that controlled a huge number of those said elk.

And it's ironic that through the efforts of the Wildlife Federation, especially Witchekan Wildlife Federation of Spiritwood, that put so much money to get elk in there to draw a season, and then all of a sudden bingo, some group comes in and they have the power over the government to take away the hunting right of individuals that paid for licences to hunt elk in that area and yet your department doesn't know anything about it. I find this ironic and the people in that area find this ironic; and probably the people of Saskatchewan find this ironic.

So my questions today that I have asked of you, I find this ironic that I haven't got an answer. It's just unbelievable.

The land in question was first of all given up through a landowner that wanted to sell his land and this band wanted that said land. And it was deemed critical habitat wildlife land. And the Hon. Mr. Lorne Scott went to efforts to put in there that this land would never be transferred, would never be sold. And yet it's turned around.

Why is your department doing that to critical habitat wildlife land to settle TLE agreements? There's lots of land around that that could be given out. Why is critical habitat wildlife land brought into this situation to be allowed to be sold or transferred?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well the simple answer is that we're going to undertake our best effort to settle TLE claims. We made that commitment as a government. We're going to continue moving forward in that regard.

And we've mentioned time and time again here, the fact of the matter is is we are going from 1 per cent of the land mass of Saskatchewan to 2 per cent of the land mass of Saskatchewan — from 1 per cent to 2 per cent — in which we have an obligation as a province and as a government to settle TLE land purposes for TLE land purposes.

We'll continue undertaking that very important task, and that is not to say we're putting other Saskatchewan people's interest second. Absolutely not. We've confirmed and we have affirmed today once again that the spirit and intent behind Mr. Scott's work to protect wildlife habitat lands to the tune of 3.4 million acres throughout this province . . . and between 3.5 million acres of land. We'll continue moving forward on that front.

So we're not compromising Saskatchewan people of . . . (inaudible) . . . and we'll continue moving forward with the flag that the TLE settlement that we have undertaken as a province and as a government will be achieved. We'll undertake our best practices to make sure that happens.

And I think it's important that we become abundantly clear in this Assembly that we believe, including you, sir, that you believe that TLE purposes and TLE land issues and the shores of that land should be settled.

And I think when you can be abundantly clear that you believe as I believe that the First Nations people in this province have a right to participate in the economy associated with lands and resources, and I believe as you should believe that the First Nations will take care of the land and the resources on that land as adequately and as professionally and certainly as committed as much as they can, as the rest of the people of Saskatchewan.

That's the purpose that we've allowed wildlife habitat protection lands to be part of the TLE process. And once they're under TLE purposes, once they're under a band-owned scenario, then we have every confidence that that band will do the right thing to manage the resources and to manage the wildlife.

Now what I'd like you to do if you can is to stand up and say, as a party and as a member of this Assembly, you support the TLE settlement that we've been working towards. You support the notion that the First Nations people should be a part of the



economy associated with land and resources. That you support the notion that the First Nations are responsible citizens of Saskatchewan when it comes to management of that land and respect for the environment and certainly maintaining a healthy, a healthy animal count and making sure that the wildlife are taken of. On this side of the Assembly, we believe that.

And the responsible, prudent thing to do is to settle a long-standing TLE issue and going from 1 per cent the land mass to 2 per cent.

And then we have settlement of wildlife habitat protection lands. And we say we'll exchange that land for other land. So the spirit and intent that you're talking about is not compromised. And that doesn't seem to be good enough for you, sir.

And that's why I say to you today, shame on you for that position that you're taking because that's not responsible to the people of Saskatchewan. And that we make every effort on this side of the House to find a compromise for all of our residents. And what you're trying to find is the problem. And that's the difference between this side and that side. This side we find solutions; that side you find compromises that hurt people.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank, Mr. Minister, for your rant. It was very good. I would like to inform you . . .

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Allchurch:** — . . . that the real person sitting in the chair that you're occupying now, the Premier, when he decides to call an election and you become members on this side, you will have all the ample time you want to ask questions of us as government.

In regards to critical habitat wildlife land, Mr. Minister, you said that through the TLE process, that's the way you want to go — to give First Nations the chance to purchase TLE land . . . or, pardon me, not TLE land, critical habitat wildlife land.

The question I want to ask you now, Mr. Minister: can the member from Rosthern or the member from Indian Head or myself purchase critical habitat wildlife land?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I would point out again that it's very, very important for us to stress that one of the reasons that we're working towards settling the TLE lands is to give it our best efforts as a province to achieve that 1 per cent to 2 per cent, and the very clear answer here is we're going from 1 per cent to 2 per cent.

And much of the land that we're talking about is occupied land; people that have settled this great province for many, many years; families that have owned land through this province for many, many, many years, many generations. Much of that land is occupied.

And the First Nations need to find the TLE lands, the entitlement that they're allowed, and we as a government have got to be able to try and accommodate that and work with the First Nations to assert that they have a right to some of the benefits associated with lands and resources in this province.

And we believe that wholeheartedly, as the majority of Saskatchewan people believe that.

So where do we go as a province? We go to areas that aren't occupied or areas that are leased or areas that don't have any encumbrances on that land, and many times that's difficult to find but we still have to make the effort to try and find that. And this is why the provision that we made . . . the provision we made on wildlife habitat protection land would be available for TLE purposes to accommodate that 1 per cent to 2 per cent.

And when I was going to school, getting 98 per cent on a spelling test was pretty impressive. Ninety-eight per cent of land right now in Saskatchewan is non-First Nations owned.

So I would say today, I would say today that I think it's incumbent upon us to not find problems, but find solutions in which we could settle First Nations TLE claims. I think it's incumbent upon us to try and find that. A responsible government would do that without compromising the rest of the province, and trying to find that happy medium. And that's why, that is the specific reason why Wildlife Habitat Protection Act lands are available for TLE purposes is to get to that 2 per cent.

(20:15)

Two per cent. Two per cent. That's what we're trying to achieve. And I'll tell you, when we talk about fairness and sharing, there is the genuine need on this side to recognize that, and the urgency of First Nations talking about fairness and sharing. And we're going from 1 per cent to 2 per cent and you've got a major problem with that. There is no question, there is no question that on this side of the House we will undertake every effort to try and achieve a deal in which we're signatories to in reference to TLE.

This is not about divide and conquer. This is about not diminishing other people's needs. This is about recognizing and asserting First Nations TLE claims. And we will do everything we can to achieve that objective, all the while balancing all of Saskatchewan people's interests. To me I believe that's leadership. And I would suggest to you, sir, that leadership is necessary on this particular file.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. In regards to your answer, it amazes me . . . is every time you stand and speak regarding issues dealing with First Nations you have the assumption that we are against TLE agreements. And we on this side of the House are not. But all we want in the process is that there's equal and . . . fairness on all possibilities regarding TLE land. And I have no problem going from 1 per cent to 2 per cent as far as TLE.

But in regards to the question I asked previously: if First Nations band members are allowed to own TLE or critical habitat wildlife land, can the members and my colleagues on this side and myself own critical habitat wildlife land?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well if you guys believe in the TLE purposes as you say you are, why don't you get up and say one of these days, well my dear friends, understand this, is that we're going from 1 per cent to 2 per cent on TLE.

And the other question you can ask, you can tell the folks that are questioning you about this TLE processes, instead of not defending it, not trying to explain it, if you're part of the solution, why don't you stand up and explain what we've been explaining for years, is that TLE entitlement is something that's a long-standing issue with Saskatchewan.

We are trying to find some solutions to this. And if you say you support it, then don't say you support it in here and do as your leader does — say something in front of the First Nations leadership and come here and do the exact opposite.

You do that outside there as well. Do it out in some of the travels, in some of the public meetings, in some of the correspondence that you write. Explain that treaties are a fact of life. Treaty land entitlement is something that we signed many, many years to share in the benefits and resources of Saskatchewan.

If you believe it, explain to the people that you're sitting with that this is part of Saskatchewan. If you believe it, then don't criticize the deals, don't criticize the TLE settlements we have. Embrace the First Nations' right to share in some of those resources. Accept the First Nations' role in management of the wildlife and the resources on that land. And if you can't lead, at least follow and not be critical of the process. That is my lesson.

And when people say to me, well we support this, we support this, and I say to you that talk is cheap and action really accounts for some of the things that is necessary. So I would challenge you today, if you say you support this and your colleagues support this, let us not try and find trouble, let us find solution. And if you can't find that solution, then get out of the way because we're going to lead this file, and we're going to make it happen because it's only the right and the fair thing to do.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Mr. Minister, thank you. You used the words it's the right thing to do. Is it the right thing to do to be fair with everybody in this province or is it the right thing to do to be fair with just a certain group? My question was to you, can anybody else own critical habitat wildlife land? And you've alluded to the question.

What makes me say from that answer, Mr. Minister, is that no, we cannot own critical habitat wildlife land. And why shouldn't we? Why shouldn't we? If you want fairness and equality in this province, which we on this side of the House stand behind that and agree with you, then let's have an even playing field. As the member from Prince Albert's saying level, well let's have a level and even playing field. But let's have an even playing field.

So my question to you again, Mr. Minister: can we own critical habitat wildlife land?

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Well what I think is very, very clear here is that as you look to the history of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan embraced many folks from many parts of the world to come to Saskatchewan and certainly settle in this great province and add to the great mosaic of people that we have in the province.

And guess what? At the end of the day 98 per cent of the land, as I mentioned to you, in Saskatchewan is owned by non-First Nations interests — 98 per cent, 98 per cent. And now you come along and you say, can me and the member from Rosthern be part of the 2 per cent that's left over. Like what kind of logic is that?

The bottom line here is very clear. Ninety-eight per cent of the land mass in Saskatchewan is owned by non-First Nations — non-First Nations. We're trying to get 2 per cent for the First Nations — 2 per cent. And you get up in your seat and you say, well can I have part of that 2 per cent? That doesn't make any sense at all. That doesn't make any sense at all.

And the only allocation of land that we have available right now is the wildlife habitat protection land and we're making that land available to the First Nations for TLE purposes and you say, well no I want some of that land too. Now how does that look for Saskatchewan people?

That's not an issue of fairness. That's not even close to fairness. The whole notion here is you got 2 per cent of the land mass you're trying to achieve. We're using wildlife habitat protection lands to try and accomplish that and you don't like it. The answer I ask is why? Why don't you like it?

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, like I told you before, you have all the ample time after the election to sit on this side as opposition and ask all the questions you want. In regards to the critical habitat wildlife land that I'm asking questions about, it also pertains to the Crown land leases, which the member from Cypress Hills and myself and many other members on this side have asked the minister from Ag, and also to the minister if you've been regarding Crown land leases and where you're going with TLE agreements with that said land.

And I take it from this that the answer is that it's going to be turned over to satisfy TLE process. And all I'm saying to you, Mr. Minister of SERM, is that the fair way of doing things? Is there fairness in the process that you're doing? I have no problem with the TLE agreements going forward. We said that; my leader has also said that.

The process though that you as a government are following is the fact that we should go overboard to do that. And all we're asking is fairness in all respects that everybody has equal opportunity to this land.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Obviously we're going to have to sit here all night and talk about some of the problems that that member has with TLE, but I'll let the folks out there judge from their perspective.

I would say this is that it is our effort within SERM to bring the many stakeholders to talk about very important items, whether it is resource management, wildlife management, exchange of land, grazing purposes, TLE settlement.

We will engage as many stakeholders as we can in trying to make sure that we share the benefits and the decision making in the management of all the lands of Saskatchewan. And we have had some great success, Mr. Chairman, great success in

engaging what we call to a power through partnership. And this power through partnership really goes on a premise of each stakeholder has an important role to play in the management, the resources, and lands throughout Saskatchewan. We will continue going down that path and making sure that we hear all the stakeholders and we're fair and we're open and we're accountable. And we're going to do all we can to settle some of the challenges we have, whether it's TLE or resource management and so on and so forth, by engaging stakeholders and being respectful to all the parties involved.

**Mr. Allchurch:** — Well thank you, Mr. Minister. My other members have a few questions. We're only allowed one apparently, so I want to turn it over to my . . . the member from Rosthern.

But I would appreciate the information and questions that I've asked earlier regarding the land in question, regarding Mosquito Band and the process that has taken place in regards to ownership of that land and if they do have an outfitting licence on there, regarding that said land.

I want to thank you for the answers, Mr. Minister, and I will turn it over to the member from Rosthern.

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, a question relating to some of the cabins at Dore Lake. It's a question that came to me, I think, about three days ago. There's a group of cabins there — a couple of dozen — that have been using water from Dore Lake, basically not as potable water, but basically as water for their toilets and this sort of thing. And SERM apparently has told them that they can't use that system any more, which means they'll have to haul water in and you won't have changed anything. And I'm wondering why that decision was made to cut off that water supply from those cabin owners.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. One of the things that's very important that we undertake and that member's aware that the . . . some of the challenges we have with water throughout the province. And we have undertaken what we believe is a very aggressive water strategy and to ensure that we have not only accountability from some of the systems that operate throughout the province, but to make sure everybody's aware of some of the dangers of drinking untreated water.

And in the instance of Dore Lake, I'm not familiar with the system the member makes reference of, but I would say this, is that SERM doesn't arbitrarily make decisions just to aggravate people. There's always reasons and logic and certainly public safety is paramount in some of our operations, that in the event that there is a problem with any campground and if there is the system in question, Dore Lake, if there's any problems with that system, if it's there then we obviously will advise people not to use it.

There's a number of reasons why we would advise people not to use certain water, whether it's potable water, whether it's for other purposes like washing up or washing dishes. There's always reasons why we would tell people not to use water. And we'll undertake to find the particulars of the Dore Lake situation for that member, and again to reiterate that we don't

do certain things for no reasons. If the system there is operating, if it's not operating well, then we'll find those answers and forward the answers to that member.

**Mr. Heppner:** — Thank you. The people there are not using this as potable water and they're aware that you could not use Dore Lake as potable water because that would be unsafe. And as I said, they're just using it for the washing and the flushing aspects, and they're quite prepared to go ahead and sign off any liabilities if that's what SERM's going to require.

If you don't allow them that, you do as an environmental group or a government that's supposed to take care of that, you're taking these people then and forcing them to haul water from all over, creating a lot more environmental damage than using the water that's there, using it for those particular purposes, not for potable purposes.

So I appreciate the minister's commitment to look into that. And when he gets down to someone that has the answer, I would appreciate that they look at that again because the people there are quite prepared to work with SERM and see if they can work out a system whereby they can do that. They're not looking for potable water; they just want to use that water as they have done for years.

At this time I'll turn it over to the member from Swift Current that also has some questions. Thank you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you. I don't want to interrupt the minister if he wants to comment on what the member for Rosthern was saying. But I'll just quickly ask this question regarding the Saskatchewan Landing Park.

There will be a number of constituents from Swift Current who have written to the minister, all with similar concerns about access to the park, access to the landing. The minister will know and the officials will know that it's really come a long way in terms of development of late and there's more and more interest in utilizing the park, not just for campers and golfers and those who are interested in the marina, but also for the outdoorsmen and people who are interested in that end of things.

So most of . . . All of these letters do revolve around access at the landing park and making sure it's as accessible as possible. And the minister has written back to these people and copied us on the letters, which we appreciate, and indicated the reasons for decisions that have been taken by SERM.

But I wonder if he could undertake to . . . And maybe this has already happened. I'll ask that first. Have the department officials, in addition to the letters that have come back from the minister, are they looking at this, at the issue generally of access to the Saskatchewan Landing?

(20:30)

And would it be possible, if they have been or if they're interested in doing that, to have a meeting, to set up a meeting with officials — not just the parks officials at the landing itself, but officials even in Regina — to discuss this issue? Because I think the users are reasonable, they're good stewards, they want to maintain the landing park as it is and improve it if possible.

And I'd ask that, for the minister to comment on that if he would.

**Hon. Mr. Belanger:** — Thank you very much for the question. I would point out that, first a response to the question about liability, we have to be very careful when we advise people. You can give us a waiver and a claim that you won't sue the government, but that . . . it still makes us ultimately liable if we advise people to do something that could be a threat to them. So that's always an issue that we have to address.

The second question, to the member from Swift Current, absolutely. If you have a group of folks that want to meet with us we're more than willing to meet. We'll sit down and we'll discuss the issues and the solutions we can find. Obviously the directive that we give our officials is that you find those solutions. And certainly if they're good stewards and we are able to accommodate their request, we most certainly will.

So I'd like to ask the . . . to thank my officials for coming out, and simply reporting progress.

**Hon. Mr. Lautermilch:** — Mr. Deputy Chairman, I move that we report progress on the Department of Environment and Resource Management — quite a bit of progress as a matter of fact — and move to Department of Highways.

**General Revenue Fund  
Highways and Transportation  
Vote 16**

**Subvote (HI01)**

**The Deputy Chair:** — I recognize the minister and ask the minister to introduce his officials.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to introduce Harvey Brooks, who is on my left, deputy minister of the Department of Highways and Transportation. On my right is Barry Martin, associate deputy minister, policy and programs with the department. Immediately behind me is Don Wincherauk, assistant deputy minister of corporate services. Fred Antunes director of operations, planning and business support is to my left and behind . . . or to my right and behind me.

Let's see. Stu Armstrong, assistant deputy minister, next to Don Wincherauk, responsible for operations. And Mike Makowsky. Mike is manager of transportation, trade and logistics and he is over on my far left there. And Terry Blomme, executive director for the southern region is directly behind Don Wincherauk. The staff that are with us this evening.

**Mr. Toth:** — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister, and welcome to your officials. A few questions regarding highways in the southeast area and some of the major concerns that have been brought to my attention.

Firstly, and we discussed last year the southeast transportation authority, some of the recommendations. No. 48 Highway from the Manitoba border through to Kipling, I think, is one of the priorities.

Now if I'm not mistaken, Mr. Minister, I believe there's supposed to be a top put on Highway 48 from the Manitoba border right through to No. 8. And it was my understanding from our debate last year that you would also maintain some . . . or begin some grading from No. 8 west towards Wawota. And I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if you could give us an update as to where we are and exactly what will be happening on Highway 48 in that location.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — From border to Highway 8 is going to be paved this year. The contractor is ready to move in there. That's going to be just over \$2 million for that work. From No. 8 west is on schedule for next year. And overall in your constituency this year, about 13.5 million will be spent.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Minister, when you're saying, when you're talking of \$13.5 million, can you give me an idea of where . . . I'm anticipating then part of that will be the additional twinning that's taking place on No. 1 between Wolseley and Grenfell. There's also, as I understand, some construction supposed to be taking place on 47 North to complete the grade up to Highway 48.

One of the issues that was just brought to my attention at an auction sale this weekend, however, was on the grade just north of Corning, that was graded last year, is a real lack of gravel on the top of that grade. And I just drove that way. Of course that area has been getting some moisture and has been making it get very difficult for vehicles to travel down the road with the lack of gravel on the top of the grade, especially with the moisture we've had in the area.

And, Mr. Minister, in regards to 47, will that be a dust-free surface? Is there the intention to complete that as a dust-free surface in the near future?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — To the member, the piece of road north of Corning where you identified a lack of gravel, we've also . . . we're aware of that and have been making arrangements with a contractor this week. As soon as the contractor can get in there, more gravel will be placed.

With regards to the corridor 47, we're looking at finishing the grading there and then assessing the whole piece and see what we do from that point. But really getting it, getting it built up structurally sound is our primary emphasis at this point.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, Mr. Minister. Mr. Minister, I think that is certainly important. If the grade isn't there, you're not going to maintain a dust-free surface. But I think as well we need to really certainly give consideration to a dust-free surface because of the fact that that artery there, north-south for that part of the traffic, there's a lot of traffic would flow up there.

I just have a letter here received just from a young gentleman who went a couple weekends ago. He said:

My girlfriend and I took a weekend to explore some of the province we live in and traveled from Weyburn to the south central part of the province. We really both enjoyed the weekend get away, everything about it but the roads. (And) Everywhere we traveled the roads were absolutely pitiful.

And he mentions:

The next time I think ... (about) travelling ... Saskatchewan ... (I think we're just going to) stay home and watch a movie. It's more affordable, less stressful and less damaging to the vehicle.

And he again mentions 47. They happen to live at Grenfell and of course, Mr. Minister, if you look at the Melville ... that Melville-Yorkton-Melville corridor, depending which way you want to head south, to hit a good highway you actually have to go 30 miles east to pick up No. 9 or a considerable distance west to pick up a good highway.

So I think, Mr. Minister, we need to be very cognizant if we're talking about tourism and building this province and encouraging not only our Saskatchewan residents ... and as this letter indicates the disappointment in the highways. And I recognize because of the deterioration of the highways over a number of years it's going to take us a while to catch up on that aspect. So I think it's important that we keep that in mind as to how we sell our province. And I know your government has been really into a key mode of trying to sell the province at this time.

Another question regarding 47, Mr. Minister, and it comes via the RM of Wolseley and I know there's been some debate between the RM of Wolseley, the RM of Chester and the RM of Elcapo, and that's that section north from 48 to No. 1. And I think we need to make a very legitimate effort to address that highway.

And while the financing may not be there at this time to get heavily involved in completing grade as well, I noticed the discussion has been or entered into with RMs and a lot of the traffic is moving on a road that's called the Brownhill Road. It's about three miles further east of where 47 is today.

One of the problems there however, Mr. Minister ... And I've been on that road a fair bit. And there are times especially in the day and early evening where as a result of the heavier traffic moving on that road because no one wants ... and then a lot of the light traffic because of the condition of 47 as it is today, where the dust just sits on there and it becomes very difficult to drive.

I'm wondering, Mr. Minister, if it might be possible to at least put 47 as it is until the grade can be completed or we can work out a corridor or we got a dust-free surface, into a situation where light traffic could move on a dust-free, fairly usable surface, and so it takes them off of that, where the heavy haul is moving, and just makes it a lot safer, especially for tourist traffic in the area.

(20:45)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — To the member, in terms of that particular piece of road and actually we're dealing with two pieces there, 347 and a corresponding road about 3 miles to the east. And about four years ago there was opportunity, at that point in fact negotiations went on to try and designate the second road as a heavy-haul route and at least have one designated, and then therefore at that point be able to maintain a

dust-free surface on 47.

There was no consensus that allowed that to happen and we've now got a necessary heavy haul on the east road, with feedlot and other business in there, and we also have heavy haul that continues up 47. And we can't seem to ... Working with the RMs, there doesn't seem to be any kind of consensus at this point.

So what we're working for is to try and get agreement there to just finish the grade to decide which of these will be the main corridors to No. 1, to get the grade completed, and then as I mentioned earlier, once we've got the corridor finished then we can assess the possibilities of making sure that we've got some dust free.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chair, thank you. Mr. Minister, I appreciate those comments because I've been having the same success trying to get an understanding with the three RMs. And certainly there is somewhat of a difference, differing opinion. And I know even the southeast transportation authority has been trying to come up with a clearly defined objective in regards to that north-south corridor.

And I guess what we would like to see — and what I'd like to see as the MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) as well, and I'm hoping to be able to sit down with the RMs and even hopefully the southeast transportation authority — and see if we can come up to that consensus. Because I know the travelling public are getting frustrated with the condition of the road. And of course the finger usually gets pointed at the department and then of course at their representative. And so we raise the question, then your department tries to respond.

Mr. Minister, having said that, what would be ... Does the department have sort of a long-term goal in addressing the issue of 47 and Highway 48? In view of the fact that ... I realize today with the federal government, government coming forward with some money to help with the additional twinning — and quite frankly I think it's a pittance when it really comes down to it, to the amount of tax dollars that leave the province as far as fuel tax dollars — it's certainly welcome because as you're aware, we talked about in our last election campaign of twinning No. 1. And we're also acknowledging the fact that we could speed that process up if the federal government came through with the appropriate dollars. And most recently they've announced some funding which has given you the opportunity to move forward a little more aggressively because there's dollars there.

But when twinning is completed, I think, Mr. Minister, with the types of roads we have through the province — and we've got such a vast artery of a transportation network in the province — what is your department doing, what's the Department of Highways doing as we look at the long-term approach as to how we continue to work to upgrade and improve highways that have deteriorated significantly as well as maintaining, so that we don't in the future get ourselves in such a bind again with the fact that we've got so many roads have deteriorated almost at the same time and we just don't have the resources to complete the rebuilding in one day?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I appreciate the question that the

member asks and also the dilemma that is faced by the people of Saskatchewan.

We look at the history of our relationship with the federal government in transportation and we see that they have had a tremendous impact. And unfortunately much of that has been negative; that unilateral decisions made by the federal government have cost our economy in the neighbourhood of \$300 million a year with the withdrawal of the Crow rate.

That's only the beginning of the costs because as all rural members will well know that it also meant a shift from rail to road. We saw amalgamation of grain elevators to terminals. And everyone of those moves caused by the federal government's decisions have cost us hundreds of millions of dollars. And the damage to our infrastructure has been extreme because of those decisions as well.

So if you start from that base and you recognize that the federal government has been largely responsible for the dilemma that we face as a province, as a people, and as a people who are trying to get our transportation system to be up to the best standard that we can possibly have in this province, you know that the amounts . . . And we're not just talking about the amount that came in through CSIP (Canada-Saskatchewan Infrastructure Program) for twinning which is important, but we're also talking about the other amounts that the federal government has put into the works.

The Prairie Grain Roads Program, for example which we are using to the fullest extent that we possibly can, is still relatively a pittance — 106 million over five years — which when you look at the hundreds of millions of infrastructure damage and how that's accelerated because, you know, your highways break down a little bit, you can't get to it, they break down severely, and those costs just continue to increase. Therefore the amount that they're putting back in is . . . no way corresponds to the damage that has been caused by their decisions.

So what we're going to be working at, what we are working at in terms of negotiation is trying to get the federal government to acknowledge the costs that were involved in this and to extend the Prairie Grain Roads Program so that we can continue to build and upgrade. And the member will know that we are already moving kilometres, the number of kilometres, every year from TMS (thin membrane surface) to paved standard.

And so the more that we can get the federal government to acknowledge their accountability for this, to take on some of the responsibility, the more we can accelerate our programs.

The CSIP funding for twinning is helpful, but you will also probably know that's all on a 50 cent-dollar basis which demands then that we focus for this time frame, now until 2007, a lot of the provincial monies on making sure that twinning program is completed. Okay, that's not so bad because the twinning is a benefit to the whole of the province, both on 16 and on No. 1. We hope that it will have benefits for the items that you were noting earlier — tourism, as well as for building our economy.

But I think primarily when we're looking at this, we're looking at continuing to press the government for federal funding for a

national highway system, the Western ministers, the council of Western ministers has been pressing for that. All of the ministers basically across the nation have been doing that, and I'm happy to say that when I went and made our presentation to the Standing Committee on Transportation that I was informed by their Chair, MP Joe Comuzzi, that the committee is unanimous in terms of their support for federal funding for a national highway system.

So we have some hope that there will be a ongoing commitment to helping us build our highways infrastructure, but what's important is that the dollars come into place and that the dollars do not always be set up on a match basis that pushes our focus to where the federal government wants it and doesn't allow us to meet the needs and build the infrastructure as we see needs to happen in the province.

**Mr. Toth:** — Mr. Chairman, Mr. Minister, just one other final comment before another one of my colleagues enters the debate. And certainly I think even if we look at . . . We've got this debate in agriculture right now and just a government, as I mentioned with Environment, just seems a total lack of knowledge of the industry out here.

And we've had the argument about the split and possibly even a 60/40 split on highways, if we could guarantee that every year, it might be something we haven't had in the past, we'd almost take it for lack of what we've had to deal with. And I'm not just talking twinning. You talked about the transportation aspect and some of those had that heavy haul. If we had some of that share as a result of the shift to the heavy traffic, it certainly would help us address a lot of our secondary roads as well. So hopefully down the road, we can . . . the federal government will begin to recognize some of those problems and will realize that it's not just a matter of a main artery through the province, but there are other aspects that need to be dealt with as well.

One further question before other members get in. In regards to the twinning of No. 1, some of the communities have raised the issue of allowing No. 1 to be slowed and moved through, for example the community of Moosomin, just use the same artery that's through there. And I know we argue the safety issue.

Just recently we were to Calgary, and we're quite well aware of the fact that while Swift Current, the speed limits are fairly, pretty well all highway speed through that main artery that goes through. But as soon as you hit Medicine Hat, you're down to 80; you're down to 50; you're down to 40. And then you're back up to 80 and then down to 50. And even with Strathmore. So there are locations where No. 1 has continued to go through communities. And in the case of a community like Moosomin, you've got basically one kilometre you would be slowing that traffic down.

And I know the argument has been the safety factor. But has the department entered in any discussions with communities like Moosomin and Whitewood in regards to where the proposed highway would be going and looked at avenues that could be explored as to how we address the disruption it may have for businesses along those routes?

(21:00)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I think very clear from discussions that we have just had here, but also from past experience, that the department really does spend a lot of time meeting with people in communities, talking with them about what their needs are. Now of course safety is really of highest priority to us, but also high on the priority list is the life of the community, is the economic development that's possible there, and all of that is what goes on in the discussion.

We also try and take into account the experience of other communities and that would . . . I mean I would look at Indian Head as an example where they have reflected on the decisions that were made there and think that what was done was good for them as a community.

When we look at many of these communities that have the experience of the traffic flowing through them, it's good for the first couple of years when you've got that highway just put in there, but then comes the time when it's maybe not quite as desirable and then the discussion starts about the 10 million, 20 million, \$50 million bypass that you have to construct because there's just too much rolling through the community, the roads are damaged by these heavy vehicles moving in, stopping, moving on again.

So there's a variety of different things that come into play in terms of the discussion, but I can assure you that the department does its utmost to listen to and to respond to the needs of the communities and to try and make sure that these . . . that our highways that we're investing heavily in are built safely and are built with all of those other factors in mind.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, and to the minister. A couple of questions, if I may, on some projects in the Swift Current constituency. The first one has to do with the Skyline Road north of Swift Current. We've asked about this on a couple of occasions.

That road just north of Swift Current I think is becoming busier and busier. It's an east-west road that feeds onto No. 4 and I believe it would be in the responsibility of the RM. But because of how busy that turnoff is getting . . . If you're familiar with Highway 4 north of Swift Current you'll know that except for the recent capital construction immediately north of Swift Current, it really does narrow significantly. So there are really no shoulders. And that is a . . . That road, the Skyline Road, is becoming increasingly busy. And when traffic is turning on to that Skyline Road it can cause . . . it causes some pretty tense moments on the highway and can cause some significant backups.

Now I think in previous estimates the minister has indicated, with the help of officials, that the department has that as an item. And they've been prioritizing that item for the system that they use. The specific request is for the shoulder there to be widened. It's not a huge request. It's just a bit of a build out that would accommodate on that west lane, at least, the ability to turn on to Skyline Road.

So I'm wondering if the minister could please update members of the committee as to the department's intention with that important improvement.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — For this year, Member, the intersection areas and widening program is not on schedule. It will be reviewed annually and put into the works as a possible. If we have resurfacing going on there it would certainly be higher on the potential, not only for the possibility of doing the shoulders but actually for doing a broader intersection treatment.

And along with that will be monitoring of the traffic counts in the area to see what kind of a build would be warranted there. I'm told also that in terms of the construction widening . . . or paving shoulders, is widening the shoulders a little bit is not necessarily a cheap fix. That can be relatively costly. But certainly that would be looked at if there was resurfacing happening right in the area because it would make it a little more economical having a contractor in there at the time.

So the short answer is, nothing on tap for this year but it will be continued to be reviewed.

**Mr. Wall:** — Mr. Minister, what is the cost of that turning lane project?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I'm sorry we don't have the details, but I will get those details for you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. But the costing for the project has been done by the officials?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I'm just saying, Member, that we don't have the details with us here tonight but I will get those to you.

**Mr. Wall:** — Well, thank you. I'd appreciate that, Mr. Minister, and I have another question. And just before I go onto it I would say that you know, just as an observer and someone who travels the highway a lot, that turning lane is increasingly becoming important and the request comes not only from residents on there but a very active Hutterite colony, the Swift Current colony, as well that utilizes that road significantly.

And I guess I'd be very interested to find out what the costing for that particular project is. And we can revisit it again after that.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Deputy Chairman, I also have a question for the minister and the officials about another issue we've raised several times before and it has to do with the highway just south of the Saskatchewan Landing bridge that goes up what is a very dangerous hill in spring and the fall and frankly all year long with large trucks. But particularly in the spring and the fall when farm equipment is using that particular road, it can be . . . the traffic slows down there significantly as you can imagine because of the grade and because of a very sharp curve.

And so the RMs and those who live at Saskatchewan Landing on a permanent basis now at the Sandy Ridge Cottage Development and the town of Stewart Valley and others in the constituency have written to me and to the ministers, yourself I believe, or at least previous ministers, asking about the government's intention with respect to that particular highway, what the options might be, some sort of an emergency provision if that's possible there in terms of vehicles being able to pass, or perhaps use an emergency lane if they're having troubles on the

grade, or any provisions at all that could help with the safety of motorists, truckers, farmers who often have to use that very steeply graded and sharp curved piece of No. 4 Highway.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I know that there has been significant correspondence with the member from Swift Current and some other members around this particular issue. And it has been examined by the department to determine whether some treatment there is warranted. And at this point given the demands of the road, the costs of doing the work, it would not be warranted.

And secondly, the other thing . . . The member has referred to doing a kind of possibly emergency or short fix. And I believe last year when the question was raised it was explained that this is also on the riverbanks. It's very difficult to build and very expensive because a lot of that area is slide prone when you're constructing there.

And so in terms of hope for where we might go in the future on that, I would just reaffirm — as I said to the Leader of the Opposition I think last week — that when we go in to resurface there, when you've got crews in place, then we'll look at the warrant with the change in cost because the crews are in place. And we will determine at that point whether or not it can go ahead.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chair of Committees, and good evening to your officials, Mr. Minister. Maybe some of the comments that I heard earlier will partially answer a couple of questions that I had for things in my constituency, primarily Highway No. 16. You've talked quite a lot about the construction program for Highways No. 1 and No. 16, particularly with a lot of federal money coming in and a new interest in trying to accelerate that program.

A couple of questions. How does the traffic count on the Lloydminster-North Battleford section of Highway 16 compare to other areas of the province, particularly No. 1, and also with regards to heavy haul? I don't know if you do a count of the kinds of traffic, because that's quite important there and I think that's important.

The other one, the other question is: I haven't seen any activity there and I'm not sure if there's been a contract awarded yet on any portion of that Highway No. 16 between . . . west of Battleford and Maidstone.

(21:15)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Well I'll start first, to the member from Lloydminster, with the traffic counts. And that is that between Maidstone and Lloydminster we find the heaviest count on 16 and that's why that section was done first.

The remaining section between Maidstone and Battleford is very, very close to what the west side and the east side of No. 1 are in terms of traffic count. But when we get into commercial truck, you see some significant difference there. When you get up between Maidstone and Lloydminster, you're looking at an average daily traffic count of fifty-two sixty with about a little less than 21 per cent commercial truck.

But when you look down at No. 1, you're looking at average annual daily traffic of forty-one eighty, but your commercial truck is up to 32.5. And on the east side you're looking at average annual daily of 3,070 but your commercial truck is up to about 42.5. So you can see the commercial trucking is heavier on those No. 1 routes.

Now the second part of the question you were asking is what about the work between Battleford and Maidstone? And right now the environmental work is being done. We're preparing for the contracts, but that work has to be done and then the contracts will be tendered.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. So that will . . . the work will be . . . Contracts will be awarded I assume this year and work will begin. I don't know if it's been decided whether it would begin at the east end of that area or the west. And if it starts at the west, have you had any . . . is there a decision by your department as to whether the highway will go through Maidstone, around Maidstone? I heard your comments regarding that same question from the member from Moosomin.

But my office has been flooded with a lot of calls from those constituents; I think your office and your officials' office as well. And I'm wondering if there has been a decision as to what to do there. And if that's the case, is that where the highway . . . the first contracting will be done?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — With regard to — I'll start with Maidstone — with regard to the community there were extensive discussions with the community and within the community and a variety of viewpoints. But we now have written approval to go around the community that comes both from the community itself, the officials in the community, and from the RM. So that is the plan there.

And the work that we're anticipating for this season would be 12 kilometres between Maidstone and east of Delmas, and just over 12 kilometres from the end of the four-lane west of The Battlefords to about 5 kilometres east of Delmas.

**Mr. Wakefield:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. It will be a very exciting day to try and get that four-lane highway. There's been considerable angst in that stretch considering the danger. But the road surfacing that was done in the last I believe two years, resurfacing of the existing lane, has considerably improved the safety because of the rutting in that road. So that I should acknowledge as much appreciated.

My final question is with regards to the entrance of Highway 16 into the city of Lloydminster itself. You've received I'm sure several pieces of correspondence from the city about the section from the city limits to the border. Also questions about the bypass that may be anticipated around, I think around the south side of Lloydminster.

So the question would be: what is planned, if there is anything planned, from the east side of the city limits, through the city itself to the border to match up with the Alberta section of the highway?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — The Department of Highways for Saskatchewan, Alberta Transport, the community, and I believe



the RMs south have all agreed on the proposed south bypass, but that's long term. We're looking somewhere 20 years down the road. But basically the concept has been approved and in the meantime we will continue to use No. 16 through the community. And as far as any change to the entrance into the community, not at this point.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, to you and your officials, thank you for this opportunity to talk about Highways and Transportation related issues. I know it's not common for members of the opposition to start their period of questioning with a compliment, but I would like to make an exception to that rule tonight.

I had the pleasure of driving the newly constructed road from the community of Gull Lake south on No. 37 to the river hill, and I would have to say without question, having driven many miles of road in this province over the last number of years, that's the finest stretch of road in the entire province. And I'd like to offer you that compliment and thank you. And my constituents are grateful too, but they think I've done a wonderful job of representing their needs so I'll take a little bit of credit, if I can, on that one.

But having driven that road so frequently and knowing that it is, you know, a fine piece of work, I was wondering if the minister would detail for us what it is that the department specified for that particular piece of road and why the surface seems so much better in terms of quality than some of the other more recent paving projects that we've seen around the province. Could you give us some indication of what the specifications for that road are?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Well, first of all, Mr. Chair, I would like to say now after that compliment by the member from Cypress Hills that now I remember why I liked you as critic for Department of Highways and Transportation.

I appreciate the compliment. I know that the department and contractors also appreciate when they get support for the work that's done. But I think it's important to note that this was built to the same standards, same specs that we use when we're building AC (asphalt concrete) pavements, and we're very pleased that it is a good surface and that people in the area will have a nice highway to drive on.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Thank you, Mr. Minister. Through the Chair to the minister, the driveability of that particular stretch of road though seems so much better than other highways that I've been on recently. And I'm wondering if it might have something to do with specifications of the pavement, if there's any possible change in the actual pavement specifications or the way it was laid or anything of that nature. And you can address that a little later on if you wish.

But there is a quality to that particular piece of road that I haven't noticed elsewhere. And I would like some explanation for that. I think that there must be something unique about that particular stretch of road.

Let's move further south on Highway 37 if we may, Mr. Minister. I know that the department is currently undertaking some work south of Shaunavon on that particular road. And I

was wondering if you might detail for us, Mr. Minister, the schedule, the construction schedule, for No. 37 from Shaunavon to Climax, what you plan to do in what stages, and the timetable for that particular construction project.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Just to the member, Chair, I'd like to reaffirm that though we are continually looking for better ways to build our highways, the standards used on that particular piece were the same standards and specs that we're using on our other AC pavement. So it could come down to, there's no place like home.

The other question that you were asking was regarding Shaunavon south on 37. And Shaunavon to the Frenchman Valley will be completed and surfacing will be done this season. Grading through the valley and the start of the new bridge will be tendered soon and worked on this season. And paving for that area will be scheduled for next year and the rest in future planning.

**Mr. Elhard:** — There's several questions that arise out of your answer on that particular issue, Mr. Minister. And maybe we can pursue it in just a little more detail.

The paving that will be done on the new section from Shaunavon to the Frenchman River hill will that be the same quality and standard as the pavement we saw put in place between Gull Lake and the Swift Current Creek?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — No. The volumes and the traffic there would not warrant an AC pavement. That will be a granular standard.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Is there also a difference in the load-bearing capacity of the two sections of road? I understand that the new pavement from Gull Lake south is built to a primary weight. Will the capacity of the new constructed piece south of Shaunavon also be built to a primary weight?

(21:30)

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Thank you. There are actually differences in the weight that will be handled. The piece down to Shaunavon from No. 1 is designed to handle primary weights and does. That's the kind of traffic that's been running there.

The piece south of Shaunavon is built to granular standard and we know that that is able to handle primary weights, but given the traffic patterns there, designed for the next 15 years, or expectations for approximately the next 15 years would be that that would just handle secondary weights. But the design of the road is capable of handling primary and a policy decision could be made at some time in the future to extend those weights to primary.

**Mr. Elhard:** — If that's the case, Mr. Minister, will people be allowed to access that section of road at a primary weight by permit?

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — This piece of highway will be treated as other secondary weight highways throughout the province where truckers or companies that are engaged in a trucking partnership program will be allowed to haul primary weights,

will be permitted to. But for others, no, secondary weights will be the order of the day.

And I think it's also important to note that when we're talking about the weight regimes and the trucking partnership programs, that we are also in consultation with stakeholders as we're reviewing that whole program and looking at what we're doing around weights, trying to make the best decisions in terms of the need.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Minister, I appreciate your concerns with the cost of building roads to a primary weight. And I assume that there must be substantial cost differentials, otherwise there would be no reason to build to a secondary weight when a primary weight wouldn't be that much more money. So I can understand that.

But I guess I'm concerned about the application of that restriction in that area for the simple reason that a primary weight road built in that stretch right now would allow unrestricted growth opportunities in that particular area.

And we've got a seed processor and a cleaning plant and number of other enterprises that are developing south of Shaunavon and the Climax-Frontier area that are limited in their growth potential by the restriction to secondary weights. And if the primary weight capability is there anyway, why wouldn't we allow full access to those roads at primary weight by those industries to allow them the opportunity to grow — not penalize them for where they're at?

I guess the other thing, Mr. Minister, is that No. 37 appears to me — and this is maybe a policy area — but it appears to me to be a prime candidate for a second, important access route for Saskatchewan products into the American market. And if we are thinking of expanding our opportunities in the South and the Southwest of the USA (United States of America), there wouldn't be any better way to get there, I don't believe, than Highway 37.

It serves a very local purpose. It serves a certainly a long-term potential, and we would want to encourage traffic to go down there by building it to a primary weight at this point. So I guess I'm wondering about the wisdom of restricting it to secondary weights when there is growth potential at primary.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — I think the member raises some very good points because we certainly are looking at trying to encourage economic development and growth throughout the province. And we know that throughout the province we're hearing from a variety of different sources that a move to primary weights might facilitate the growth in particular areas.

But I think it's also important to note that in the Southwest we probably have the highest sensitivity around moving to primary weights. And there are a number of factors involved in that and part . . . So what we have been doing, recognizing those sensitivities, is that even for the trucking partnerships, those go through the area transportation planning committee because they're trying to get the best management of transportation for the Southwest that they can.

The other thing that we have to be very sensitive about there is

that we have a short-line rail and we don't want to . . . we don't want to compromise the viability of that short-line rail by just simply opening up the possibility of primary weights which could divert traffic from the short-line rail, reducing its potential viability.

So all of these things . . . all these decisions are vetted through the area transportation planning committee. We're trying to be sensitive to the feedback that we're getting from the people in the area as well. And so we'll continue to engage in those discussions, to work with our area transportation planning committee, and to try and support all of the industry that's there.

And I think the member will acknowledge that the short-line certainly is trying to make major contributions to the development of the southwest Saskatchewan as well.

**Mr. Elhard:** — Mr. Minister, I appreciate the complexity of the issue and I'm fully supportive of the south . . . of the short-line railway in the area, but I can't justify penalizing another group of industries and businesses for the sake of the short-line rail. The short-line will succeed or fail on its own merits, and I think it's up to them to make sure that they're competitive. They've provided very good service. I don't see any reason why they wouldn't be competitive. They've already proven themselves to be up to that task.

But the requirement for a primary weight road in that area south of Shaunavon is there for the sake of the potential growing oil industry. There is a fair oil field in the area just north of Frontier. There is probably a potential for quite a bit more development in that area.

There is certainly, I believe, a potential for more truck traffic heading south into the American market. We already have a border crossing there that is restricted for hours of service, but it is a border crossing that was built with the anticipation of more traffic in that region since the Americans and Canadians went together and built a joint facility there. It's one of the most modern facilities in all of Western Canada. It's jointly operated and I think it's an indication that the Americans would welcome more traffic in that area.

So, you know, there's a potential for increasing economic development in the area, certainly increased movement of goods, and maybe for the export market having a primary weight road in that stretch would make considerable amount, a considerable amount of sense, Mr. Minister.

I mean this is a debate you and I can have for a long time and I won't ask for your response again. But I guess I would just urge the government and the department to look seriously at upgrading that entire route, No. 37, as a primary access for Saskatchewan goods into the American market and for goods from the southwest part of the province to come back up into the central and more northerly reaches of the province.

Mr. Minister, I need to go to another issue if I may, and that is the Gull Lake maintenance facility. The facility as you know was the subject of quite a bit of correspondence between the council of the town of Gull Lake and the department, and your office, and through my office. And at one point in our

discussions you mentioned that the ongoing viability of that particular maintenance facility was up for review. I'm wondering if you could tell us where you are at in that review process.

**Hon. Mr. Wartman:** — Well first of all I'll respond to the question around Gull Lake, but I do want to also go back to our previous discussion because there are, I think, maybe some things that need to be clarified there.

But with regard to the maintenance facility at Gull Lake, it is still under review. We are . . . we have committed to meeting with the community, there have been meetings with the union, there will be further meetings. And so we're engaged in the review and hopefully we'll find a solution that will be satisfactory to everyone. And we'll look forward to arriving at that.

Now to go back to the issue of Highway 37, I just, I want to point out that . . . And I may have not made it clear but the design and the build of the highway means that it is capable of handling primary weights. That's not so much the issue.

(21:45)

And the issue of viability on the short-line rail is not so much that we're trying to make one business viable and another not, but recognizing that if you've got a viable short-line rail, that takes a significant amount of traffic — heavy traffic — off of the roads in that area where there is a great sensitivity to that.

And so we're continuing to try and make sure that all of the traffic in that area is managed, and doing that in coordination with the area transportation planning committee and also in discussion with the industries in the area.

And I think also you point to something which we'll look at and have continued to look at and that is the ongoing north-south relationships and how to enhance some of the ability to move goods, services, and people back and forth across the borders. And we monitor the traffic flows and also try and anticipate the potential as we're building. So I think we'll keep that in mind.

That said, I'm told we're to the end of our time and so I would like to thank the member for his questions and the other members who have participated this evening. And I would like to thank my officials for their work and participation, and I'd like to thank the Chair for wonderful work.

**Hon. Mr. Lautermilch:** — Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you for your wonderful work as well and I'd like to move that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The committee reported progress.

The Assembly adjourned at 21:49.



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