



**ENVIRONMENT AND PROTECTED AREAS  
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE MEETING**

**April 9, 2024**

**- Follow-up Responses -  
(Questions derived from Hansard)**

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<p><b>1. TIER – Funding Distribution</b></p>	<p>Ms Rich: Yeah. And if you want us to walk through the \$201 million, I could name who's got what and what it went to.</p> <p>Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. That's my next question. If you can provide a breakdown of who got what in terms of ministries and then what those ministries spent that money on. Like, I understand that we don't have a whole lot of time here, so if the department could return that information to the committee in writing, I would appreciate it.</p> <p>Ms Wilson: To confirm, if I may. The \$201.3 million: a listing of how that was dispersed.</p> <p>Mr. Schmidt: Yes, that's right. Like, from receiving the money to the TIER fund to the end recipient. If we could see which department got how much money and then where those departments spent that money, that would be appreciated.</p> <p>Ms Wilson: That's what we're asking for in writing.</p> <p>Mr. Schmidt: Yeah.</p> <p>Ms Wilson: We can come up with that, absolutely.</p>	<p>8</p>

**Response**

- In 2022-23, Alberta's government committed up to \$201 million from the TIER Fund (and the federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund) for programming to the following ministries:
  - Environment and Protected Areas: \$134 million
    - \$3 million to International CCS Knowledge Centre for CCUS knowledge sharing.
    - \$75 million to Emissions Reduction Alberta for technology funding competitions.
    - \$27 million from the federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund for Emissions Reduction Alberta programs.
    - \$5 million to Alberta Municipalities for the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre programming.
    - \$20 million in additional funding for the Industrial Energy Efficiency Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (IEE-CCUS) program.
    - \$1 million to the University of Alberta for the Adaptation Resilience Training program.
    - \$3 million for the Watershed Resiliency and Restoration Program.
  - Energy and Minerals: \$42 million for continued investment in Alberta's two commercial scale CCS projects: Quest and the Alberta Carbon Trunk Line.
  - Job, Economy and Trade: \$3 million for the Coal Workforce Transition Program.
  - Technology and Innovation: \$21 million for technology and innovation programming, including support for the Hydrogen Centre of Excellence.

\*Note: totals may not add up due to rounding.

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<p><b>2. TIER – Razor Energy</b></p>	<p>Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much. I want to drill down into one project in particular that has been funded through TIER. During the estimates process the minister of energy mentioned that money from the TIER fund was given to Razor Energy to undertake a carbon emissions reduction project. This was particularly interesting to me because Razor Energy went bankrupt in January, but this should come</p>	<p>8</p>

	<p>as no surprise to anybody who had been paying attention to what was going on with Razor Energy. That company had been in dire financial straits for a number of years with liabilities outstripping its revenue since at least 2018, yet between 2019 and 2023 – we’re not quite sure of when the money was distributed and how much – Alberta Innovates invested \$2 million into Razor Energy for a geothermal co-production project and ERA committed \$10 million to the project, although the information available on the ERA website doesn’t really make clear when that investment was made. How much was the total investment in Razor Energy with TIER funds?</p> <p>Ms Wilson: Unfortunately, we don’t have information specifically on that project here, but certainly we can take that away and follow up.</p>	
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FutEra Power in partnership with Razor Energy Corp received a total of \$12M in TIER funding support.</li> <li>• This includes:</li> <li>• -\$2M for the initial phase of the project from Alberta Innovates and</li> <li>• \$10 million from ERA’s Partnership Intake Program, with funds sourced from TIER fund and the federal Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund</li> <li>• The project was completed in early 2023 and continues to be operated by FutEra.</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>		

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<p><b>3. TIER – Unfulfilled grant agreements</b></p>	<p>Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Thank you.</p> <p>I’m also looking for a timeline of when each of these investments was made. Like I said, Alberta Innovates suggests that the investments were made between 2019 and 2023. ERA didn’t clarify when the investments were made. I would like to know when each investment was made in the company. This company was clearly under financial stress long before 2019 when the first investment from Alberta Innovates was made.</p> <p>Can the ministry clarify how it assesses the financial viability of companies before making investments from the TIER fund?</p> <p>Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. I realize we’re running short on time. Can the department commit to following up with the committee in writing with a number of projects that have failed in this sense, that you’ve decided to make an initial investment, you’ve reached some gateway where they’re not being able to deliver. I would appreciate some clarity on how many projects like investments in Razor Energy, where we’ve made investments that haven’t actually yielded any outcomes.</p> <p>Ms Wilson: I think that what I can endeavour to do is take that question away and determine what information we have that we can actually provide.</p>	<p>8</p>
<b>Response</b>		
<p><b>RE: Timing and source of funds:</b> See responses provided to question 2.</p>		

**RE: Assessing Financial viability:**

- Environment and Protected Areas works with its partners' organizations, Emissions Reduction Alberta (ERA) and Alberta Innovates (AI), as part of TIER investment programs.
- ERA and AI lead their own program design, program intakes and project selection processes. As part of their review and approvals, ERA and AI apply financial risk assessments.
- For projects funded by Environment and Protected Areas directly, the department's funding agreements with recipients include financial reporting and disclosure requirements during implementation, and third-party financial audit requirements, when deemed necessary.

**RE: How many projects like investments in Razor Energy where there were no outcomes:**

- The geothermal project involving FutEra Power and Razor Energy Corp. has been completed and continues to operate. Outcomes for the funding have been achieved and operation of the facility is not affected by Razor Energy Corp.'s filing under *Business Insolvency Act* on January 30, 2024.
- Emissions Reduction Alberta and Alberta Innovates have no examples where a project did not proceed due to bankruptcy, within the 2022-2023 fiscal year.
- Environment and Protected Area's grant agreements include terms and conditions for grant repayments if projects do not proceed as originally approved, do not spend funds on eligible costs, or if a recipient becomes insolvent or bankrupt, among others.

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4. AER – Kearl Lake Response	<p>Mr. Schmidt: I want to go to Kearl Lake which was reported on page 25 of the annual report. Last week at Public Accounts, the Deputy Minister of Energy and the CEO of the AER were here. They failed to take any responsibility for the disastrous response to the Kearl Lake tailings ponds leaks. In reviewing the mandates and roles document that was signed by the minister of Environment and representatives from the AER, it clearly lays out responsibilities for each party involved. It clearly states that the minister is to co-ordinate regular interactions with the chair and the CEO to discuss emerging issues. On what dates in 2022- 23 did the minister of Environment meet with the CEO and/or the chair of the AER to discuss a response to Kearl Lake? And what were the outcomes of those meetings?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: I don't have information to provide you on those specific dates with us today.</p> <p>Mr. Schmidt: Can you commit to getting back to us in writing with that?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: If we have the information to provide, we certainly will do that.</p>	15
<b>Response</b>		
This question is out of scope of the Public Accounts Committee. We are unable to provide the information in response to the question asked.		

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<p><b>5. AER – Review of Performance</b></p>	<p>Mr. Schmidt: Now, the minister is also responsible for evaluating the chair and the board’s work. When in 2022-23 did the minister meet with the chair and the board, either collectively or individually, to discuss their performance?  Ms. Wilson: No, I don’t have that information today either.  Mr. Schmidt: Don’t have that information.  Ms. Wilson: No.  Mr. Schmidt: Okay. Can you commit to returning to us . . .  Ms. Wilson: Again, I’ll endeavour to provide whatever information is appropriate to share.  Mr. Schmidt: Thank you very much.  Now, the board is responsible for evaluating the performance of the CEO, and the minister is responsible for making sure that the board does its job. What work did the minister do to ensure that the board adequately reviewed the performance of the CEO of the AER?  Ms. Wilson: I would say, with all respect, that it’s the same line of questioning in terms of the conversations that happened between the minister and the chair and the performance review of the board, and I would have to defer that question as well.  Mr. Schmidt: Okay.  I suspect I’ll get the same answer, but I want to put it on the record. It’s quite clear from the events that took place after March 31, 2023, that the CEO and the board of the AER were not up to the job of responding adequately to the Kearn Lake spill given that the government is now being sued for over a billion dollars by the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. What steps did the minister take in 2022-23 to better manage the performance of the board or the CEO in response to this incident in the hopes of preventing this from happening?  Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. What steps did the minister take in 2022-23 to better manage the performance of the board or the CEO of the AER to prevent this catastrophic response from Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation?  Ms. Wilson: I’m sorry. I heard the same question about how the minister was managing the board, or you’re asking the question about what was done to respond to the incident?  Mr. Schmidt: Yeah. What steps did the minister take to manage the performance of the board and the CEO and their response to Kearn Lake, in particular?  Ms. Wilson: Well, certainly, I think that we can say that the province, generally speaking, has clear processes in place to help prevent and respond to these, and we do expect that AER manages those in accordance with their mandate.  I can provide Environment and Protected Areas’ response to the Kearn incident and the monitoring that we undertook to ensure that . . .</p>	<p>15</p>
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Chair is evaluated on an annual basis through a performance survey among the board members, including a discussion of results. Both the Minister of Energy and Minerals and the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas have the opportunity to provide feedback.</li> </ul>		

- The Board is responsible for evaluating the performance of the CEO, and the minister is responsible for making sure that the board does its job.
- Any discussions about performance are confidential matters between an employer and employee. In this case, the AER CEO reports to the AER Board.
- Information related to the EPA response to the Kearl incident and monitoring can be found at this website: <https://www.alberta.ca/fort-chipewyan-working-group>.

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<p><b>6. Reclamation certificate process</b></p>	<p>Ms. Renaud: Sorry to interrupt. I'm running out of time. I'm wondering, because I don't recall this information in the annual report: would you be able to table information with these three pilots and what the anticipated outcomes would be as a result?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: I'll actually jump in on that. What ADM Makowecki is describing is some of the future work that we're doing. The items that he's talking about did not occur actually in 2022-23, so we can look forward to hearing the results of those pilots in later years.</p> <p>Ms. Renaud: Right, but my question is about managing risk, and that was talked about in this annual report, managing risk going forward. If there are implemented plans right now, we may not see the results, but can we get a description of what those three pilots are and what the anticipated outcomes might be?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: I think the minister recently announced those three pilots, so that . . .</p> <p>Ms. Renaud: Will you table that information with this committee in writing?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: We can share what's publicly available.</p>	<p>18</p>
<b>Response</b>		
<p>The following is information available on <a href="https://www.alberta.ca/reclamation-pilot-programs">https://www.alberta.ca/reclamation-pilot-programs</a>.</p> <p><b>Overview</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alberta Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) is working with the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) to implement two pilot Interim Directives that support the reclamation certification process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot for site reductions on well sites.</li> <li>• Pilot for reclaiming peatlands.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• These pilots seek to improve the process of issuing reclamation certificates to eligible industrial operators without compromising provincial regulatory standards for reclamation certificates.</li> </ul> <p><b>Pilot for site reductions on well sites</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This pilot enables the AER to issue a reclamation certificate to eligible operators, certifying that the portion of a well site on private land meets government reclamation standards.</li> <li>• Key dates: The AER will accept up to 100 applications and will last 18 months in total. See the interim directive for details about the pilot.</li> <li>• Requirements: Landowners do not need to participate if they do not wish to. Landowners must be notified in writing of the pilot, including a copy of the factsheet and the interim directive. There are two requirements if landowners decide to participate:</li> </ul>		

- Written proof of landowner’s acceptance must be acquired.
- Proof of landowner consent must be provided when an operator applies for a reclamation certificate.
- Well site reductions: The well site area may be reduced up to 60% of the original surface lease, if the area of the new well site is large enough to allow for:
  - A minimum 20-metre setback from any edge of the new lease boundary to the well head;
  - Well servicing, abandonment, and decommissioning activities to be completed within this reduced area with no additional temporary workspace required; and
  - Applicable safety requirements are met at all times. For example, Directive 071: Emergency Preparedness and Response; Occupational Health and Safety.
- The interim directive states that the pilot for site reductions on well sites does not change the AER’s minimum spacing or safety requirements. Operators that would like to apply for a site reduction must meet all the applicable safety requirements, including those related to well servicing, abandonment and decommissioning.

Key documents:

- Interim Directive: Pilot for Site Reductions on Well Sites
- Factsheet: Pilot for Site Reductions on Well Sites - Information for landowners about the pilot project
- Landowner Consent Form

Comments, or questions regarding the content of this document may be directed to: [epa.sitereductionpilot@gov.ab.ca](mailto:epa.sitereductionpilot@gov.ab.ca).

**Pilot for reclaiming peatlands**

- This pilot streamlines decision processes under the AER, while ensuring public lands continue to be managed with clear reclamation and restoration outcomes in mind. A decision framework and support tools are being piloted to support the AER in considering requests to change land use from peatlands to forest lands, for eligible well sites and access roads on public lands.
- Key dates: This pilot will run for 18 months total. See the interim directive for more details about the pilot.
- Key documents: Interim Directive: Pilot for Reclaiming Peatlands - Decision Framework and Support Tools for Reclaiming Well Sites and Access Roads on Public Lands.

Comments or questions regarding the content of this document may be directed to: [land.management@gov.ab.ca](mailto:land.management@gov.ab.ca).

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<p><b>7. Integrated planning spending</b></p>	<p>Ms. Renaud: The minister also states that they spent \$18.7 million more than the year before for integrated planning primarily due to legal settlement. Can the ministry provide a breakdown of the expense in integrated planning?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: Sorry. Could you repeat the question?</p> <p>Ms. Renaud: We need a breakdown of the expense in integrated planning. The ministry spent \$18.7 million more than the year before for integrated planning primarily due to a legal settlement. So I’m asking for a breakdown of that expense, the expense of integrated planning.</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: I don’t have that breakdown right now.</p>	<p>18</p>

	Ms. Renaud: Okay. If you could table that, that would be great. You will table that? Sorry, Deputy Minister. Ms. Wilson: I will table the details that can be provided.	
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated Planning Actuals were \$48.7 million in 2022-23.</li> <li>• The \$18.7 million increase from 2021-22 is related to a legal settlement. The department does not budget for legal settlements when negotiations are in progress as it would undermine the legal process and as such the <i>Supplementary Supply Act, 2023</i> (Bill 12) was approved March 28, 2023.</li> <li>• The breakdown of the Integrated Planning expense for 2022-23 includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$21.9 million in Salaries, Wages and Benefits,</li> <li>• \$18.7 million for Supplies and Services for a legal settlement (approved in the <i>Supplementary Supply Act, 2023</i> (Bill 12) March 28, 2023) related to regulatory program delivery.</li> <li>• \$5.8 million for Supplies and Services, that was spent on the Digital Regulatory Assurance System Development (DRAS), and</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integrated Planning supports the department's approvals and compliance assurance programs, as well as the delivery of the Alberta's integrated resource management system. This includes regional and sub-regional plans. Environment and Protected Areas implements the Land-use Framework and coordinates with the Land Use Secretariat to address the impacts of development on land, air, water and biodiversity at regional and sub-regional levels.</li> <li>• The Alberta Support and Emergency Response Team (ASERT) maintains a provincial program in environmental emergency management that includes preparing and responding to environmental emergencies across the province.</li> <li>• DRAS: the new system is making the review of applications more transparent and efficient – all while maintaining high environmental standards. The DRAS is replacing multiple systems to consolidate applications, approvals, long-term monitoring, and reporting.</li> <li>• DIZ: Initiated in 2022 and extending until 2024, the project aims to establish a Development Innovation Zone in Alberta's Industrial Heartland region, capitalizing on industrial and environmental advantages. It will test a streamlined regulatory process, offering coordinated approvals, shared infrastructure, and governance to minimize cumulative environmental impacts for participating facilities.</li> </ul>		

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<b>8. FTE Vacancies</b>	<p>Ms. Renaud: The annual report also highlights programs where expenses have decreased from the previous year. Now, that includes – we saw the clean air strategy, where there was a decrease of almost \$2 million, and then the land program expense has been reduced by \$4.4 million over last year. Now, we also read in the report that the ministry states that reductions were primarily as a result of a delay in filling vacancies and hiring. Could the ministry tell us: what were the total vacancies that were not filled in that fiscal year?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: I'm sorry. I don't have that information, but I can certainly look at that.</p> <p>Ms. Renaud: Okay. Maybe when you provide that information to the committee, is it possible – so we saw in the report the breakdown for the clean air strategy, the decrease. Then we saw the land program expense, the reduction. Is it possible to give us a list of where those FTEs belong? You know, the ministry is saying: there was a savings; we</p>	18

	<p>didn't spend this money; there was a delay in filling the jobs. Where were those jobs vacant?</p> <p>Ms. Wilson: Further to the other question, whatever we can provide, I'll follow up with.</p>	
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<b>Response</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ministry actively recruits to all vacant positions as they arise to minimize delays and to ensure priority work can continue on schedule. There were approximately 11 vacancies combined in Air and Land sections.</li> </ul>

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Narrative and Question Asked</b>	<b>Hansard Page #</b>
<b>9. Collaboration with Indigenous communities</b>	Ms. Renaud: Could the ministry provide an overview of its collaboration with Indigenous communities and stakeholders in developing and implementing environmental conservation initiatives and how these partnerships factor into its financial planning process?	20

<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) strives to develop sustained, trust-based relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations to help support the achievement of environmental, social, economic, and Indigenous outcomes of mutual interest in Alberta.</li> <li>• Alberta respects and supports the continued availability of Crown lands for the purpose of exercising First Nations' Treaty rights and traditional land uses, and Metis harvesting practices and traditional uses.</li> <li>• EPA recognizes Indigenous peoples of Alberta share a deep connection with this land. As such we have embarked on a number of collaborative initiatives with Indigenous communities and organizations.</li> <li>• EPA has entered into cooperative management initiatives with local Indigenous communities to help enrich and strengthen the planning, management and operation of a number of Alberta's provincial parks and as well as wildlife, while also implementing our commitment to reconciliation and our respect for Indigenous heritage and traditional knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Twenty-three Indigenous communities and organizations are exploring cooperative management of five northeast wildland provincial parks.</li> <li>• In the south, Piikani Nation has entered into a cooperative management arrangement for Castle Parks.</li> <li>• Seven Indigenous communities and organizations have entered into a cooperative management arrangement for the Ronald Lake Bison Herd in Northern Alberta.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• EPA has been working to understand what is important to Indigenous peoples within multiple Caribou Sub-Regional Planning areas by directly engaging with Indigenous communities and organizations. Many Indigenous communities have been active participants throughout the planning process through participation on Task Forces, Indigenous Working Groups, and through the consultation and engagement processes.</li> <li>• EPA established the Indigenous Wisdom Advisory Panel which advises the Chief Scientist and Government of Alberta regarding how to respectfully apply traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous wisdom to Alberta's Environmental Science Program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The application of traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous wisdom within a contemporary western science perspective is important to ensure a robust understanding of the ambient environment and its condition. The Alberta government is committed to working with Indigenous communities in Alberta by involving them in environmental monitoring, evaluation and reporting programs, and activities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• EPA supports the Indigenous Community-Based Monitoring Program, which is funded through the Oil Sands Monitoring Program, and was designed to encourage and support Indigenous led environmental monitoring projects within the oil sands regions of Alberta. This program provides support to Indigenous communities for: training, monitoring equipment, sample processing and technical advice by the participating communities.</li> </ul>		

- These monitoring programs and opportunities are used by Indigenous communities and organizations to help understand environmental effects, including cumulative and ecosystem level effects and impacts of industrial development on food security, confidence in traditional foods, and ability to participate in traditional land use practices (hunting, fishing, gathering, and other cultural activities).
- EPA supports the Government of Alberta Protocol and Relationships Agreements with First Nations. These agreements facilitate meaningful discussions, information sharing, and address areas of mutual concern through development of workplans.
  - Alberta Environment and Protected Areas participates and funds Environment and Lands Sub-tables under these agreements where projects of mutual interest are advanced and explored.

The above listed partnerships and initiatives factor into EPA’s financial planning process:

- In 2022/23, approximately \$8 million dollars was provided by the department to support Indigenous community and organizations participation in over 40 projects and initiatives pertaining to developing and implementing environmental conservation initiatives in Alberta. Examples include:
  - \$70,000 was provided to support the Ronald Lake Bison Heard Cooperative Management board
  - \$45,000 was provided to support Indigenous groups participating in Wood Bison Recovery Planning
  - \$4.7 million was provided to support community base monitoring programs in Northeast Alberta
  - \$1.78 million was provided to support Indigenous community and organization participation in Caribou sub-regional planning
  - Numerous other initiatives provided capacity funding to help support Indigenous communities participation in planning initiatives
  - \$100,000 to the Blackfoot Confederacy for their environmental sub-table.
- EPA’s program areas undertake financial planning processes throughout the year to ensure that appropriate capacity funding is secured to support Indigenous community participation in our projects and planning processes.
- When planning for Indigenous capacity funding, EPA’s program areas follow guidance such as the:
  - Government of Alberta Guidelines for Indigenous Protocol, Gifting and Expenses
  - AEP Indigenous Engagement Expenditure Guidelines, and
  - Internal Procedures for Crown-led consultation

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10. Air quality monitoring plan	Ms. Renaud: In the absence of detailed cost information for the implementation of the air quality monitoring plan, how does the ministry ensure efficient resource allocation and accountability in managing program expenditures?	20
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment and Protected Areas has a five-year provincial air quality and deposition monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan (<a href="https://open.alberta.ca/publications/five-year-provincial-air-quality-deposition-mer-plan-2021-2025">https://open.alberta.ca/publications/five-year-provincial-air-quality-deposition-mer-plan-2021-2025</a>) which supports the continued provincial long-term air quality monitoring operations, complimenting long-term monitoring with short term studies and identifying areas that could benefit from additional air quality monitoring.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the five-year plan does not include resource allocation, the ministry’s annual operational work plans are developed and resourced to implement the plan.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In addition, a capital plan is developed and updated annually to ensure the longevity of the air monitoring network and to add monitoring where gaps have been identified.</li> </ul>		

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<b>11. Air quality monitoring engagement</b>	Ms. Renaud: How does the ministry engage with community stakeholders to ensure their concerns and perspectives are integrated into the design and implementation of air quality monitoring initiatives, particularly in wildfire-prone areas?	21
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air quality monitoring in Alberta is delivered through a distributed model that relies on close collaboration with airshed organizations, industry and the provincial and federal government. The majority of the 130 stations in the provincial network are operated by airshed organizations.</li> <li>• Airshed organizations are community-based, not-for-profit, multistakeholder organizations that operate regional air quality monitoring networks, and provide education and outreach. The ministry is a member of these multistakeholder organizations.</li> <li>• In the case of wildfire or other emergency events, formal requests for monitoring are directed to the ministry through the Alberta Environment Support and Emergency Response Team (ASERT) or the Provincial Emergency Coordination Center (PECC). Requests may come from Alberta Health Services, emergency personnel or communities. In 2023, the ministry deployed eight Environmental Beta Attenuation Mass monitors (E-BAMs) in communities impacted by wildfire smoke.</li> <li>• The ministry also proactively deploys air quality sensors to monitor particulate matter and has deployed 50 sensors to inform on wildfire smoke impact on air quality. These sensors are located in communities expected to be impacted by wildfire smoke and as a result of direct request from communities. In deploying these sensors, the ministry coordinates with partners (airshed organizations, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Indigenous Services Canada).</li> </ul>		

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>12. Environmental monitoring and conservation</b>	Ms. Renaud: How does the ministry plan to measure the long-term impact of its environmental monitoring and conservation efforts on Albertans' well-being beyond short-term performance metrics?	21
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department has long-term environmental indicators for air, water, climate, fish and wildlife, plants, land, and wetlands. These monitoring activities help us to better understand current conditions and long-term changes over space and time.</li> <li>• In Alberta, our quality of life depends on having clean air and water for the environment, for our communities and for our economic well-being. Using environmental data collected, Environment and Protected Areas (EPA) reports on environmental management frameworks (EMF) for air quality and surface water quality under the South Saskatchewan and Lower Athabasca Regional Plans, surface water quantity under the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan, and surface water quality under the North Saskatchewan and Upper Athabasca Regional Plans. These frameworks are designed to maintain flexibility and proactively manage the cumulative effects of human activity on ambient air quality and surface water quality/quantity within their respective regions.</li> <li>• The frameworks facilitate sustainable resource management within the context of regional development and regulated regulatory processes. The frameworks do not replace existing regulatory processes. They contribute to managing growth pressures on air, land, and water over the coming decades, adding to and complementing existing policies, legislation, regulations, and management tools.</li> </ul>		

- EMFs identify the steps in a management response process that will be taken if monitoring data shows that an air or water trigger or limit has been exceeded. These steps include verifying the data, investigating potential causes of trigger or limit exceedances, and identifying management actions that can be taken to address the cause.
- EMFs for surface water quality are being developed for other regions of the province, such as the Peace and the Red Deer Regions.
- One of the outcomes of long-term, core monitoring oil sands monitoring programs is the ability to use analytical approaches to establish whether environmental change is occurring over time and drivers of those changes, including cumulative effects assessments. These analyses can take the form of scientific papers, technical reports as well as integrated State or Condition of Environment reporting. These State of Environment reports can be designed to include multiple knowledge systems and to address different stakeholder concerns (e.g., Indigenous communities, industry, and governments). Combined, these approaches and others, provide the foundation to assess monitoring and conservation efforts on Albertans' wellbeing currently, and into the future.

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>13. Program Reductions</b>	Ms. Renaud: The ministry's annual report highlights a decrease in expense for the clean air strategy and land program expenses. Could the ministry provide insights into how these reductions align with its long-term environmental conservation goals?	21
<b>Response</b>		
This question is out of scope of the Public Accounts Committee. We are unable to provide the information in response to the question asked.		

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>14. Budget Priorities</b>	Ms. Renaud: In the context of increasing expenses, particularly in areas like integrated planning and quasi-judicial expenses, does the ministry foresee any adjustments or reallocation in its budget priorities for the upcoming fiscal years?	21
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Integrated Planning section is responsible for supporting the department's approvals and compliance assurance programs among other activities. In 2022-23, expenses were \$18.7 million higher than 2021-22 due to a legal settlement that occurred on 2022-23. The increase from budget 2022-23 was \$15.1 million compared to 2022-23 actuals, also related to the \$18.7 million legal settlement. The department does not budget for legal settlements when negotiations are in progress as it would undermine the legal process and as such the <i>Supplementary Supply Act, 2023</i> (Bill 12) was approved March 28, 2023.</li> <li>• Quasi-judicial expenses increased in 2022-23 compared to budget and 2021-22 actuals by \$24.9 million and \$4.5 million, respectively. The increases are for compensation payments to landowners as per section 36 of the <i>Surface Rights Act</i>, which are not budgeted for.</li> <li>• The increase in surface rights compensation payments can be attributed to higher average payments to landowners and productivity, which has improved through IT advancements, ongoing process adjustments, and improved training and retention of employees and members.</li> </ul>		

- There is no budget for Surface Rights board payments as the amount is statutory and government does not have any discretion over whether to make a payment additionally, amounts are not required to be voted by the Legislative Assembly through the Appropriations process.

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>15. Resource Allocation</b>	Ms. Renaud: Could the ministry elaborate on its strategies for optimizing resource allocation to ensure efficient delivery of services and programs while maintaining fiscal responsibilities? Given the proximity of environmental challenges and the dynamic nature of the regulatory landscape, how does the ministry adapt its financial planning and resource allocation strategies to address emerging priorities and risks effectively?	21
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry has a comprehensive forecast and budgeting process which follows the direction of Treasury Board Committee and the Appropriation process. The budget and forecast process is on-going throughout the year so that the Ministry can adapt to emerging priorities. Internally the Ministry ensures budgetary controls through process such as the Contract Review and Grant Selection Committee and through monthly forecast updates.</li> </ul>		

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>16. Pesticide audit</b>	Mr. Rowswell: What is the status of the Auditor General's outstanding recommendations to the department as it relates to pesticide management and ensuring the public information on pesticide products and conditions for their use is current and accurate?	21
<b>Response</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The department has completed this recommendation.</li> <li>• The 2021 Registered Pesticide Product Listing was posted January 17, 2022, and the department continues to ensure that the materials on the pesticide website are up to date.</li> <li>• Any Albertan seeking more information on a particular product is encouraged to check the registered pesticide product listing available online.</li> </ul>		

Topic	Narrative and Question Asked	Hansard Page #
<b>17. Stocking of wild walleye and northern pike</b>	Mr. Rowswell: And I'll get one in there for the fish. Page 33 notes that a review by the independent Alberta science advisory panel on Alberta's science supporting the northern pike and walleye management frameworks showed strong support for the current approaches and outcomes. In 2022-23 the wild walleye stocking program continued to increase angling and harvest opportunities, with many of Alberta's southern reservoirs and some lakes stocked multiple times. Can the department elaborate on the broader strategy that has guided these decisions around the stocking of wild walleye and northern pike?	21
<b>Response</b>		

- Upon completion of significant public engagement, which included in-person sessions across Alberta, multiple virtual sessions and surveys available to Albertans, it was clear that Albertans supported the proposed walleye stocking expansion where it was ecologically responsible to do so.
- Alberta's walleye stocking program had been primarily focused on the restoration of walleye populations, such as Wabamun Lake and Lac La Biche Lake. To include recreational stocking opportunities, such as put-grow-take, has required expansion and annual delivery of a walleye stocking program.
- Alberta's broad strategy for stocking of wild walleye is to continue to evaluate opportunities for expansion of the program where ecologically feasible to do so and where wild walleye populations are currently naturally limited reproductively, and of course, with ongoing input from Albertans.
- Based on these factors, Alberta is continuing to support additional stocking of wild walleye populations through investment of infrastructure, staffing, and expansion of walleye egg collection sites.
- The department will continue to explore the feasibility of future wild northern pike transfers, noting the ecological risks of transfers, such as transfer of invasive species or diseases, are often much higher when transferring a species directly from one waterbody to another.
- Alberta has recently updated its criteria when considering the introductions, transfers, and stocking of aquatic species to address the current and growing risks associated with aquatic invasive species and potential disease expansion. Any introduction, transfer, or stocking in Alberta will be done responsibly and diligently.