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Chair

The Honourable MaryAnn Mihychuk

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.)): I'd like to welcome everyone to the committee.

First of all, I would like to recognize that we're on the unceded territory of the Algonquin people. We're in the process of truth and reconciliation, so it's important for us to remember our history and start on a journey of reconciliation.

We have two departments with us. There's a coming out of a new department, Indigenous Services, although I understand we're sort of second fiddle to the Senate. Welcome. We have Public Safety here as well. We're so pleased that you could make it.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are conducting a study on the 2017 wildfires in first nations communities. We're looking at emergency measures out of communities and in their areas, traditional territories, as well as fire services in the communities. There are two components to the study.

You'll have an opportunity to speak for up to 10 minutes, and then we will go into rounds of questions. I'm sure you know how it works.

Who's going to start?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin (Director General, Sector Operations Branch, Regional Operations Sector, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Madam Chair, we can start.

The Chair: Indigenous Services, welcome.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable members. Thank you for inviting us here today.

[Translation]

I am accompanied today by Lyse Langevin, Director General of the Community Infrastructure Branch of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

I am here today to provide information on this year's wildfires affecting first nations communities, emergency management on reserve, and on-reserve fire protection. I will also talk on our department's work on partnering with first nations and supporting their efforts to advance community resiliency.

[English]

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Government of Canada is committed to partnering with indigenous people in building resilient

communities. It is really through this partnership that we action our shared priority of ensuring the health and safety of first nation residents. A critical component in ensuring the achievement of our shared priorities is departmental support of indigenous communities to effectively respond to and recover from emergency events, such as the wildfires that occurred this year.

As with any community in Canada, the responsibility for emergency management on reserve starts with the first nation communities themselves as the first level of response. When an emergency event exceeds the capacity or capabilities of the communities, they seek assistance from the provincial or territorial government, and if necessary, from the federal government.

Currently, the department supports first nation communities during emergency events through the emergency assistance program. This is a program that supports the four pillars of emergency management: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery.

For response to emergencies, the emergency management assistance program reimburses first nations, municipalities, provinces, and territories, as well as third party emergency management service providers, up to 100% of eligible response and recovery costs, including costs of evacuations. Eligibility is determined according to the program's terms and conditions.

In recent years, events such as wildfires and floods are increasing in frequency, severity, and magnitude. This is a global trend, but this trend is also true in Canada. These events can result and have resulted in severe social, environmental, and economic consequences for both indigenous and non-indigenous communities alike. However, due to their relative remoteness and isolation in fire-prone areas, many first nation communities are more vulnerable to emergency events and the vulnerability can be exacerbated by remoteness or access to services during emergency events.

Thus, despite making up less than 1% of Canada's total population, one-third of wildfire evacuations over the last three decades in Canada have involved on-reserve indigenous communities. This year, 2017, has seen highly significant wildfires in four provinces affecting indigenous communities, including Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. During this period, first nations experienced the largest ever number of wildfire emergencies, 49 in total, resulting in their second largest ever number of evacuees. We're looking at over 12,800 people evacuated from first nations.

Alberta saw almost 500 evacuees as a result of wildfires in the southern part of the province. Statistically, this year, British Columbia experienced the largest ever provincial state of emergency. They experienced a record-breaking burnt land mass and approximately 3,200 first nation community residents were evacuated. In Manitoba this year, close to 7,000 remote indigenous community residents were evacuated and in the case of Wasagamack First Nation, community members resorted to using locally owned boats due to the immediacy of the wildfire threat. I'd like to emphasize that this was an extremely high-risk evacuation for the residents and demonstrates how quickly an emergency event can evolve and impact communities. Finally, in northern Saskatchewan, close to 2,300 indigenous community residents were evacuated from Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Overall for 2017, the estimated departmental response costs to support first nations communities in emergency events have been identified at just over \$34 million.

During the immediate response phase of an emergency event, communities leverage existing service delivery capabilities within first nations, municipalities, provinces, territories and third party emergency management service providers such as the Canadian Red Cross.

Access to the services beyond the first nations capacity is secured through comprehensive emergency management service agreements between the department and the provinces or territories. Five such agreements are currently in place, and where an agreement is not yet in place, historical arrangements are in place, or other mechanisms to ensure a comparable level of service to those offered elsewhere in the province or territory.

[English]

However, the service agreements formally ensure that first nation communities have access to comparable emergency assistance services to those provided to neighbouring communities and non-indigenous communities.

In the spirit of partnership, the new agreements are being negotiated with the full participation of regional indigenous organizations. In the recovery phase of an emergency event, the department supports the repair or restoration of critical infrastructure on reserve to a pre-disaster condition to allow evacuees to return home. With the increase in wild land fire activity and increasingly strained fire suppression efforts, ensuring sustainable community recovery is becoming more and more critical.

In recognition of this, the department is also focusing efforts on the mitigation and preparedness pillars of emergency management. For preparedness and mitigation efforts, the department, in partnership with first nations, invested approximately \$12.5 million in non-structural emergency mitigation and preparedness projects. These first nations community-led projects enhance capacity, placing emphasis on indigenous knowledge and practices. For example, since 2015 the department has funded regional partners to a total of \$6.9 million to support FireSmart projects in indigenous communities.

To support the protection of first nation communities from the threat of wildfires, the department provides \$16.5 million to provinces and territories annually under the emergency management assistance program for wildfire management agreements. Services provided in these agreements range from prevention to pre-suppression to suppression costs.

[Translation]

In addition to wildfires, community fire protection is an essential service that can make the difference between life and death for community residents.

First nations manage fire protection services on reserve. Community officials make the decisions regarding fire protection services under the annual core capital funding they receive from the department. To this end, first nations may establish their own fire departments or contract fire protection services from nearby communities.

Since 2008-2009, the department has provided almost 27 million dollars per year for capital investments, operating and maintenance costs, as well as firefighting training.

[English]

The department also funds the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada to support them in coordinating a number of fire prevention awareness and training activities, and advising on implementation of our joint first nations fire protection strategy. This strategy promotes initiatives that focus on fire prevention in order to support indigenous communities in reducing the risk of fire-related deaths and injuries, as well as losses to critical infrastructure.

The department is also committed to the creation of an indigenous fire marshal office. This would provide support to indigenous communities in their efforts to improve life safety and protection of residents, property, and environment. It would also support the development of appropriate indigenous fire services and relevant programs and services. We will continue to work in full co-operation with the Aboriginal Firefighters Association and other key partners on these and other critical elements that we know are needed to enhance fire safety for first nation communities across Canada.

The Government of Canada recognizes that a greater focus on fire prevention is absolutely critical to keeping people and communities safe from fire. This is not just about raising awareness of the importance of smoke alarms and fire safety, but also increased investments in first nation housing to help make homes on reserve meet applicable building codes and regulations.

I'll conclude by emphasizing that the department remains absolutely committed to partnering with indigenous organizations and communities in ensuring the health, safety, and resilience of their communities.

Finally, we will continue to work with them and other partners to ensure that indigenous communities receive comparable services to those of non-indigenous communities in Canada.

Thank you for your time. *Merci.*

• (1110)

The Chair: That was very timely, 10 seconds under.

We'll go to Public Safety.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy (Assistant Deputy Minister, Government Operations Centre, Emergency Management and Programs Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable members. I'm really pleased to be here.

As you are aware, the Department of Indigenous Services has a lead role in working with the provinces and territories regarding emergency management to ensure first nations communities receive necessary response and recovery services.

[*Translation*]

Following events like the series of forest fires this summer in British Columbia, we conduct a review of the measures taken to fight forest fires in 2017. Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada does this exercise in partnership with other departments such as Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The main observations become lessons learned, and are applied to future incidents.

[*English*]

During the 2017 wildfire response within the federal government, we were able to build a common understanding of the situation, which allowed for effective coordination of federal efforts.

[*Translation*]

Each year, in consultation with partners such as Natural Resources Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada, the GOC conducts comprehensive planning processes to increase federal preparedness to support the provinces, territories and first nations for potential wildfire events in Canada.

The Government Operations Centre is an interdepartmental organization that supports the minister in his leadership and coordination role in emergency measures. The purpose of its interventions is to direct and support the coordination of the federal response to events affecting the national interest.

[*English*]

As we do after each fire season, a review of the response to the 2017 wildfires will be conducted to improve the emergency management regime and identify preventive measures that can be undertaken ahead of future fires.

While there was excellent federal and provincial collaboration and efficient information sharing at all levels, including the Canadian Red Cross, there were gaps with the level of support to and inclusion

of first nations communities in the coordination of firefighting operations. This is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Public Safety Canada will continue to support a collaborative approach to strengthening indigenous emergency management and is pleased to be part of any discussions with first nations indigenous services and the province, given the many linkages to on- and off-reserve emergency and hazard management.

[*Translation*]

Ensuring that indigenous communities are resilient communities is a key aspect of our work. As such, in the context of the development of an emergency management strategy for Canada, we are working to develop and establish an inventory of emergency management plans and capabilities in indigenous communities.

[*English*]

Since May 2016, Public Safety Canada has led a collaborative approach with federal, provincial, territorial, and indigenous partners to strengthen indigenous emergency management. This approach, based on increased engagement, has been undertaken with the key principles of co-developing solutions to indigenous emergency management that are sustainable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive.

• (1115)

Most recently, on May 25, 2017, FPT ministers responsible for emergency management met with representatives from national indigenous organizations to discuss next steps in support of indigenous emergency management. More specifically, FPT ministers and NIO, national indigenous organization, representatives committed to developing an inventory of risks facing indigenous communities and to identifying emergency plans and capacities to address these risks.

To deliver on this commitment, Public Safety Canada has established an FPT indigenous emergency management working group comprised of representatives from provinces, territories, and NIOs. Under this working group the following progress is under way.

The Assembly of First Nations, along with the Government of Ontario as provincial co-chair of the FPT indigenous emergency management working group, are working with Public Safety to co-develop a culturally respectful methodology to collect data on emergency management plans and capabilities across indigenous communities.

Indigenous Services has confirmed support for this initiative and will work with us to gather existing data, for instance first nations emergency management plans, through Indigenous Services regional offices.

Engagement activities are under way with NIOs, such as participation at the AFN's second annual emergency management forum to enable engagement on key initiatives.

Finally, efforts are under way to host northern workshops in partnership with ITK, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and territories to address the unique challenges in northern and remote communities.

[Translation]

In addition, national indigenous organizations have been invited to meet with federal, provincial and territorial senior officials responsible for emergency management on a regular basis to provide insight and perspective on the challenges and solutions. The next meeting of FPT senior officials responsible for emergency management is scheduled for November 15 in Regina. This meeting will be an opportunity to finalize the project charter and reach agreement on timelines for the inventory, and also on capacity.

[English]

Public Safety Canada in partnership with Indigenous Services is collaborating with NIOs to also establish a series of workshops to seek specific views on emergency management initiatives and to involve them in the development of an emergency management strategy for Canada.

[Translation]

Public Safety Canada is pursuing its cooperation on all fronts to meet strategic objectives and develop an approach based on principles and elaborate a strategy jointly with indigenous groups.

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move into the question period.

We're going to start with MP Mike Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you both for being here today. We appreciate the presentations that you've made. Where do we start?

This has, as you've mentioned, been a record year as far as forest fires and the impacts that they're having are concerned, and there's the fact that this is going to be an ongoing occurrence. I think we recognize the impacts of climate change are going to bring about more and more of these types of events.

What are the lessons that you've learned? With 49 communities resulting in 12,846 evacuations, that's huge. Moving forward, where do you see us needing to get to? Once again, what lessons have been learned?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Thank you for the question.

There is a formal process that is under way in terms of gathering lessons learned because it's still fairly recent. If I speak about B.C., there's a formal process under way. There have been workshops. Just next week, there are going to be two meetings with first nation communities in British Columbia to gather comments. The idea is really to gather lessons learned from what worked well during the fire season and what didn't work so well and putting those issues that didn't work well on the track to resolution.

As to the lessons learned, I'll refer to what I think is one of the main lessons learned. We have this emergency management agreement with the Province of B.C. It's a 10-year agreement that

was signed in April 2017. The ink was barely dry on that when the provincial government went into election. A new government came in. We went into flooding season and then right after on the heels of that into fire season.

The plan with respect to this agreement is to have a high staffing component, up to 26 people, and a large hiring of first nation individuals so that we're working with communities up front of emergencies to do some emergency management planning. This is each community identifying risk to their community and having plans with respect to those risks and having plans to plug and play into the provincial system.

One of the lessons learned is we didn't fully get to implement that; it's a work in progress, but we need to do that hand in hand with first nations leadership. Out in B.C., there's the First Nations Leadership Council. We need to create governance around this emergency management agreement so that the lessons learned out of the formal process, which is starting now and will go into January, and the recommendations stemming from those lessons learned, go to a governance council comprised of first nations leadership, the provincial government and federal government departments.

Everyone there can take away what is their responsibility to put on the track to resolution. Sometimes it will be a shared responsibility, but we need to have a real plan for addressing those things that come up from on the ground.

• (1120)

Mr. Mike Bossio: We see that they represent 1% of the population but a third of the evacuations that occur as a result of these types of events.

Are you putting the types of resources forward that are going to actually address this? It's great you're doing the work you are in B.C., but we saw what happened in Manitoba and other communities.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Yes.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Are we progressing across the country to meet with communities and provinces to try to get measures in place so that we can avoid these types of circumstances in the future?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We are very concerned about the number of evacuees. That's why we mentioned it as well and we track it very closely. We take a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction approach working with the provincial government, in some cases having emergency service agreements with them. In other cases, such as Manitoba, which you mentioned, we don't have an agreement with the provincial government but we've put in place a mechanism through the Canadian Red Cross where they're working with first nations on the preparedness aspects that I mentioned, the planning, the training. Then if evacuations do need to occur, the Canadian Red Cross is there to support those evacuations.

Mr. Mike Bossio: We saw what happened in Manitoba and the uncoordinated approach that occurred as a result of working with an organization like the Red Cross when you don't have a provincial buy-in like you do in B.C.

How do we ensure, moving forward, that we establish that partnership with the provinces so that we don't see the fiasco that we saw in Manitoba?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We continue to discuss with the provincial governments.

Mr. Mike Bossio: How long has that agreement been in place with the Red Cross?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We've had agreements with the Red Cross for the last two years, but just recently, in April of this year, we signed a five-year agreement with the Canadian Red Cross to make sure that we have services that are longer term, not just year by year.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Is that just for the province of Manitoba or across the country?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: This is for the province of Manitoba because, again, we take a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction approach. We want first nation communities to have access to comparable services within the jurisdiction so that one community gets the same kind of services that other communities get.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Trying to drill down a little further, what kinds of investments are made? I was a municipal politician at one time, and I know that we developed our emergency preparedness program and platform and coordinated that with the next tier of government and the next tier of government so that we were able to have something feasible in place.

Is that type of approach being taken with indigenous communities across the country? What kinds of investments are there? Do all indigenous communities now have emergency preparedness programs?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We're working jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

If we take the case of Alberta, yes, they all do, and yes, they are completely embedded in the provincial construct, meaning that, when the community's capacity is exceeded, they can call on the provincial government. This has been a long-standing thing with Alberta. They have always said, "An Albertan is an Albertan" and they are there for response, but not only for response. They train side by side. The preparedness aspect is embedded into the provincial system, so that works rather seamlessly.

We're trying to transport that throughout the country by negotiating service agreements. More recently what we've been doing is having first nation leadership at the table for those negotiations to create governance where you have the province, the federal government, and the first nation leadership being able to address the issues that are surfacing, because we want it to be seamless.

The Chair: Questioning now goes to MP Cathy McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you.

From someone who was really at the coal face of this fire season, I am particularly interested in the conversation we're going to be having over the next number of meetings. Like the process you're going to embark on in terms of what went well and what went wrong, I think it is in that spirit we've entered into this as parliamentarians so that we understand, because certainly it was a very difficult summer.

For my first question, maybe we'll need to get National Defence here, but Public Safety might be able to answer it. One of the things I've heard regularly from both the indigenous and non-indigenous communities is that, obviously, they're very thankful for the military response, and certainly it's very clear what the air support was doing. Does the military have any capacity? All they seemed to be able to do was assist the RCMP. They didn't seem to be able to deal with the domestic response.

I don't know if you can speak to that or if we need to speak more directly with National Defence.

• (1125)

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Thank you for the questions. I can answer some aspects of your questions.

The first thing is that, in the process in terms of emergency management in the context of B.C. wildfires, our minister received a request for assistance from the B.C. government, and in turn, given the leadership role and the coordination role of our minister, it was then working with his colleague and working with the Canadian Armed Forces.

In that case, the request for assistance was targeted at providing some assets to be able to evacuate the impacted population. Our Canadian Armed Forces were adjusting and delivering amazing support in accordance with what was requested. In that case, it was great to be able to work together with the province very seamlessly in order, for instance, to pre-position assets to be able to anticipate where there were risks and where we could see we would need to evacuate impacted populations, including indigenous communities.

I don't know if that helps.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: That does help a little bit.

Had the province said, "My goodness, we need someone on the front line because this town is going to go down," would the military response have been capable of helping with that particular issue, or would you have had to say, "Sorry, that's not something that we're trained in and able to do"?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Do you mean in terms of firefighting operations?

Well, in that case, the local authorities in municipalities as well as the province are the ones on the ground in firefighting operations, so

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I recognize that, but there were times when whole towns were being—

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Of course, if the request for assistance had been targeting that kind of support, we would have had to work with Canadian Forces. We've seen in the past that there have been some cases where Canadian Forces were providing assistance of that nature.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

I'll go to our new department.

I think it would be really good to get some clarity. Certainly, I witnessed what I thought was actually a reasonably well-coordinated response and a pretty welcoming evacuation centre. I do have to give a big shout-out to Kamloops, which opened up their powwow grounds and welcomed indigenous and non-indigenous people alike, and they fed them.

My sense was that the department struggled to deal with a community that worked well together. For Kamloops, the response was, “Well, we can reimburse you for this part that you gave to indigenous people, but the others are not our responsibility.” There were some real challenges for communities that actually worked well together and opened up their hearts and their opportunities to deal with the red tape of, “We only pay for this,” or “We only pay for that.”

Can you make any comments?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The comment I'll make is that the department does reimburse emergencies related to first nations on reserve, and that's up to 100% of reimbursement through our terms and conditions. It is extremely good that first nations communities are hosting other first nations, and that's one of the lessons learned—

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: This is not first nations, and that was the challenge. They recognized an emergency. They had hundreds of people who were brought in, and it didn't matter who they were. They fed them and provided them with showers and washrooms, but unless those they were helping were first nations, the response was, “Thank you. You did a great job, but you're out of pocket.”

• (1130)

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: On that, I was just explaining that if it had been first nations, then it would 100% reimbursed. If not, these are the types of services that would be eligible under the disaster financial assistance arrangements from Public Safety as a reimbursable cost. That is something that is eligible because they're hosting a community that is eligible. It just works through a different system for non-indigenous people.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: I guess we'll get an opportunity to find out if they managed to weave through that system to get to where they needed to be, then.

I was in Manitoba, and again my observations were that it was sort of reasonably welcoming, as difficult as the situation was. It looked like it was a very difficult situation at the evacuation centre in terms of the support that was being provided. I'm now hearing something I didn't understand before, which is that some places have these agreements with the provinces and territories.

You had a paragraph in which you mentioned that some do and some don't. Which ones do and which ones don't? Red Cross had a really important role to play where we were. They had the only role to play in Manitoba. Can you talk about that sort of feature of the response?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Absolutely. I would say that we have about three buckets of situations. We have five formal agreements. We have them with Yukon, P.E.I., Northwest Territories, British Columbia, and Alberta.

We have another bucket where provinces step up and support first nations regardless of whether there's a formal agreement in place.

For instance, in Ontario, we're negotiating a formal agreement, but on the ground, it works. They will do what it takes through their operations centre to respond.

In other places, the third bucket is where there's not that kind of agreement with the province. An example is Manitoba. We've put in another mechanism through the Red Cross to provide those types of evacuation services, emergency preparedness, and other types of services.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we'll have to move on to the next questioner, MP Anandasangaree.

I'm sorry, please forgive me. It is MP Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): That's okay.

Good morning, and thank you. *Masi cho.*

I come from the province of Saskatchewan and represent Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation on the east side of the northern portion.

Can I ask questions related to Saskatchewan? If so, what does the provincial agreement look like with the Province of Saskatchewan?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Saskatchewan is one province where we do not yet have a formal agreement in place. We're in the process of having discussions with first nation leadership as well as the province to put something in place.

That being said, the Province of Saskatchewan does support the response and recovery related to events that occur on reserve. Although there's not a formal agreement in place, they try to imbed or work with first nations to make it as seamless as possible. There are improvements to be made there over time, and that's what we're seeking to do with the formal agreement that we want to put in place.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: There is a national working group that you spoke about in terms of addressing what went well and what didn't go well. Is there a similar process in place for the province of Saskatchewan with Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, the Prince Albert Grand Council, the Province of Saskatchewan, and other stakeholders?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: That one I could look into specifically. Typically, an emergency measures organization within a jurisdiction like a province would do an after action or a lessons learned event, but I can check specifically for Saskatchewan and get back to the committee on the process itself, if you wish.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That would be very helpful.

My next question is regarding the Canadian Red Cross. My experience is in evacuating people at the local municipal level as well as assisting the chiefs and councils. In terms of indigenous knowledge and the indigenous way of living, are you familiar with the Canadian Red Cross and what kind of services they provide from the indigenous aspect?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: When we looked at the options of a service provider to work with, one of the reasons we took the Red Cross was cultural sensitivity. They do this internationally and go into situations and have that cultural sensitivity and awareness, and where they don't have it, they build it. The Canadian Red Cross put in place a director responsible for indigenous emergency management to move that forward a little bit.

That being said, it may vary across the country as they implement new teams, train up their volunteers and whatnot, but we're finding that they do provide those services. In particular, in Manitoba they have built up a big team there, but as in any organization, there may be a bit of variability across the country on that.

• (1135)

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: The next question will be related to the local fire management services. As they do in the provinces regarding regulations and legislation to assist the local fire departments, are there any similar regulations and rules set in place to assist the local band with their fire departments?

Ms. Lyse Langevin (Director General, Community Infrastructure Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): I'll take that question. Thank you very much.

First nations manage fire protection services on reserve. They're responsible for making their specific decisions and their funding decisions under the annual core funding that INAC provides to them. Having said that, we work closely with the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada who put a report out a few years ago identifying key measures that could be done to improve fire protection on reserves. One of them is the implementation of an indigenous fire marshal. We are working toward doing that to help improve the situation of fire protection on reserves.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Still related to the key measures, what do you mean by the key measures? As well, you say INAC provides part of the core funding. Do we have an idea what amount we are talking about? I know it's hard across Canada, but per province, do we have an idea per local level?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: I have a general level that I can share with you today, and we could come back and give you the information per province.

INAC provides, as part of its A-base, approximately \$26 million a year for fire protection across the country. In budget 2016, \$250 million was provided for other infrastructure across the country. That includes roads, bridges, electrification, fire protection and connectivity. Of that, \$20 million was used in 2016-17 for fire protection. It's in addition to what we provide yearly from our A-base funding. I don't have the number for 2017-18 as the year is not finished.

For the A-base funding, we do have a provincial number that I can provide to you.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: That would be very helpful.

Still on the local fire department, it sounds as if the onus is on the chief and council and the local leadership to provide effective services. I'm looking for improvements. Does INAC still assist with ways to improve the services at the local level?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: You are correct that the onus is at the local level. You're absolutely correct.

The study that the aboriginal firefighters did identified four major initiatives that should be followed. We've endorsed their recommendations. There should be the creation of an indigenous fire marshal service and the development of a national incident reporting system. If you don't have the data for what is causing the fire, it's hard to go and do the proper fire prevention. It's a little bit of a catch-22, and we are moving on that, implementing fire life safety and public education programs and defining and supporting national fire service training standards.

We are funding the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada to work on that across the country with the first nations. They are very actively doing that. They have programs such as FireSmart, training of firefighters, and now moving forward on the creation of the indigenous fire marshal office.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we're going to MP Gary Anandasangaree.

• (1140)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, panel, for joining us. I have two basic questions.

First, with respect to evacuation, what kind of challenges did you face during evacuation this summer? Were there any specific concerns that you think need to be addressed?

Second, were there consultations with indigenous communities before the evacuation took place? What kind of communication? Did people have a choice to leave? Did they have any input into leaving their communities? Did they have any choice as to where they were going?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: With respect to the actual on-the-ground stuff, the lessons learned event will tell us more.

When I was mentioning earlier the formal undertaking for lessons learned, there will be, and there is at the moment, someone from the provincial government, with funding from the department, meeting with all affected communities to get their experience on the ground. What we've heard is that sometimes communities were being asked to leave and they had not necessarily declared a state of local emergency, those kinds of anecdotal things. We really need to get to the bottom of it and find out what is a systemic issue and then put it on a track to resolution, so that we all have clarity that, in the community, the chief is responsible for declaring, or not, the local state of emergency and also for assuming risk related to that declaration.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: I can add one aspect. In terms of consultations, what we heard, especially during a joint meeting that federal ministers had with their B.C. counterparts after the event—and some regional leaders were invited to that meeting as well—is that there was a lack of consultation on that front. That is something that, in terms of lessons learned, we need to focus on because the leaders were very vocal about the fact that they were not integrated sufficiently, not consulted on that.

I think that, when you see the emergency management process that involves local, provincial, and federal authorities, and you see that Indigenous Services is working with communities, in some cases provinces, there is a bit of a gap. I think this is where we need to have more consultations beforehand. The lessons learned event is going to help us see what the principles are that could help us.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Is there a specific emergency management plan with respect to indigenous communities? If so, was that developed in consultation with the communities?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The plan occurs at the community level. It should be a community level emergency management plan, and each community should have one of those. That should indicate how they fit into the larger construct, to seek assistance, if needed.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Right now as a government we don't have an emergency management plan.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: There's an emergency management—

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: There's one, absolutely.

A voice: A few.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: It took some time to provide the answer. Indeed we have one, absolutely.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Is that specific to any indigenous communities?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: No, not to my knowledge. I would refer to what my colleague has explained in terms of the existing agreements that are helping and supporting indigenous communities to have one.

Looking forward, Public Safety Canada wants to partner and work closely with Indigenous Services. We're doing the work right now. Before we can have emergency plans for all indigenous communities, we need to know what they have, what the risks are, and what they need. Then we can sit down with them and co-develop that kind of emergency management plan.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I'll add that there is a national emergency management plan for first nations. It is on our departmental website, but it quickly drills down into regional plans that are jurisdiction by jurisdiction, as I described, so yes.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: That's what I was getting at. Regarding uniformity, you're saying that at this point you don't have a uniform plan based on a broad agreement with indigenous communities.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: That's by design. We are looking to have the communities having services comparable with those of other communities within a jurisdiction. That is part of the design of the plan: not to create an emergency management system just for first nations. We want them to receive comparable services. That's why it's deliberately done jurisdiction by jurisdiction.

•(1145)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: With respect to emergency management planning within each of the indigenous communities, what type of support is being provided in devising that plan?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I'm sorry but I didn't hear the question.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: What types of supports are departments offering indigenous communities in developing emergency management planning for the local communities?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: It depends on the jurisdiction. In Alberta, they work with the provincial government. They receive training from the provincial government and work on emergency plans that plug into those of the provincial government. In other places, like Manitoba, as I mentioned, the Canadian Red Cross works closely with the communities. Some of them already have robust plans. Others need to brush them up. There's also the whole training aspect. Again, it's a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction approach.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: As a service, you're not involved in assisting in developing these plans, right?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Actually, in some cases the department is involved very closely. Again, it's jurisdiction by jurisdiction. In Quebec, because it's not something the provincial government does, our regional office has a very strong capacity. Our people work one-on-one with the communities at the departmental level to work on their emergency management plans, which by and large are very robust.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Why can't we have that across the country? Is it because some provinces are providing the service?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Yes, but the advantage of the province providing it is that it will automatically be compatible with provincial standards.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: We have an obligation with respect to each of the communities to have a similar type of service available to everyone, right?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The buck stops with Indigenous Services. We are there to make sure they have access to those services, and we do. It's just that it looks different from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Thank you.

The Chair: Questioning now moves to MP Viersen.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and my thanks to our guests for being here today.

I have a few questions. First of all, I think the FireSmart program is heavily Alberta-centric. You mentioned it as well.

Patrick, is this something that's being used across the country, or is it fairly heavy in the west?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: You are right. To my knowledge, this is mostly in the west. FireSmart is a program that's in the context of an emergency management strategy for Canada. This is a program that works, and it's something we're considering expanding. My colleague can correct me, but we have around 200 indigenous communities that are really exposed and have a high risk of wildfires. FireSmart could be really helpful on that front. That is something we're looking into.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We recognize it as a very good program. Just this year we've invested \$6.9 million in various components of the Fire Smart program—education, training, getting rid of dry vegetation around communities, and interoperability between the community, the provincial government, and firefighters. To us it's a really good investment. It protects communities, reduces the risk of communities having to be evacuated, and all of the elements that entails, the economic costs and social costs and whatnot.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: You mentioned four areas where you look at prevention and these kinds of things. The measure of success in those four areas, to me, would mean no loss of life. If we look at some of the most recent events, such as the Fort McMurray fire or even those in B.C., we've been very successful in those things, so congratulations to everybody who's worked hard on it.

The breakdowns have been more at the individual level. I had an opportunity to tour the evacuation facilities in Prince George. One of the issues there was misinformation and the whole Twitter-sphere of social media. Is that going to be part of your analysis going forward?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: That's a great question, and I really am glad you're asking it.

I would say two things. The first is that awareness is a problem. While we identify and are working on these areas—and I'm not just talking about indigenous populations; I'm talking about non-indigenous populations as well—there is awareness that these are some things we need to focus on.

The second point is that we've been really investing a lot in recovery and rebuilding. Now we're turning our attention to building back better, for instance, and making sure we're investing in awareness. For example, FireSmart has a component teaching people to be aware that they should not put their wood close to their house. It's simple things like that.

Knowing about those risks is helping people to adapt and adopt behaviours to reduce potential risks down the road, but it's also helping to mitigate the costs of recovery. That's why, working on the emergency management strategy with all the provinces and territories, we're really focused on.... You mentioned the four pillars. We're focusing on the prevention and mitigation pillars. That's where we're going to get return on the investment, I believe.

• (1150)

Mr. Arnold Viersen: To the other folks, is the social media component going to be looked at in your review of how things were managed—in the B.C. situation, anyway? Is it going to be part of the plan going forward as well? I guess it's a marketing thing at the end of the day. In my opinion, the success was that there was no loss of life, yet there was some discontent in places and that was driven through social media.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We'll see if social media comes up in terms of the one-on-one meetings with each of the communities, etc. It sounds like it would be worthwhile to raise and address it, but I'm not absolutely sure that this will be a theme that emerges.

The Chair: We will move to MP Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our panel.

My first question is on the division of power between different levels of government. The division of legislative authority in some regions over emergency management could foreseeably create barriers that impede the efficiency of emergency responders. Do firefighters and emergency response units that deal primarily with indigenous reserves especially have any barriers to proper staffing, adequate resources, or appropriate first response mechanisms?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Are you asking in terms of barriers to working together, or interoperability, whether there are legislative barriers?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes. Because of the division of authority, especially working within the indigenous communities, are you seeing any barriers?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: That would vary from region to region, but I don't see that there are any legal or policy barriers to that occurring, especially in areas where we have service agreements in place. The idea is to have those communities be interoperable with non-indigenous communities.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Would you like to add to that?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Yes, please. One aspect you may want to consider is that provinces and territories have created this Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre, which is pulling resources together and working together. With the B.C. wildfires, for instance, they were able to redirect some assets and firefighters to actually go to B. C. When you mention obstacles, this is something you should consider. The federal government is part of CIFFC, but having indigenous representatives also as part of CIFFC might help to overcome some of the barriers and ensure you have greater mobility on that.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: INAC has negotiated agreements with the provinces and territories as part of the framework to appropriately allocate emergency services. As of January 2017 there were still some provinces and one territory without standing agreements. You mentioned that Manitoba doesn't have an agreement in place. What have been the barriers to establishing an agreement in a province like Manitoba? With the informal alternative agreements that are in place instead, how effective have they been?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I think federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for emergency management made a statement years ago that it was desirable to have these service agreements in place to clarify roles and responsibilities, so I think there's a recognition across the country that we need to have them. They're at various levels of negotiation. We're talking through what those services look like, how we put them around governance. I think things are progressing well. Some jurisdictions, for instance Ontario, have an emerging agreement. The principles in this agreement are extremely solid. We're speaking to the leadership in Ontario, the Chiefs of Ontario, for instance, who are appointing five chiefs to work with us to put around governance so we're identifying the right priorities and we have support in implementing the agreements.

There's change, and it takes a certain amount of time to get there. We use best practices. We learn from one jurisdiction to another, but there's a flavour within a jurisdiction. Some first nations organizations want to bring something to the table that may be different from elsewhere, and we try to take that into account. I think we'll get there eventually and have agreements in place in all areas. It may take a bit of time.

• (1155)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Do you have any idea about how far we are with agreements, for example with Ontario and Manitoba?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: If you like, I could go jurisdiction by jurisdiction and tell you where we are.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Maybe you could provide some supporting information for us.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I would be more than pleased to do so.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Okay.

Do I have any time?

The Chair: You have about 30 seconds.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I'll let it go.

The Chair: All right.

We now move to MP Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): Thank you for being here.

This can get pretty political at times, if you don't mind my saying. You have the federal government, provincial governments, different bands, and then the Red Cross. The more you evacuate people, or if they don't want to evacuate because there are situations where the chief is under election or whatever.... How do we bring all these groups together, and then settle it?

In my city of Saskatoon and in Prince Albert, we'll start there, this happens every year. We're bringing in bands. We're bringing in people. It's two weeks. It's three weeks. Then it's six weeks. Tensions get high. The cities are involved. I have to admit, resources are being stretched. How do we deal with all of this in a simple manner? I've seen families split. The mom and the kids are in Saskatoon and the dad's in Prince Albert, or vice versa. I see it every year in our newspaper. Unfortunately, it's the second week in or it's the fourth week in and tempers start to flare. How do we deal with this?

We don't talk about politics, but indigenous situations can get very political when there are evacuations. We've seen it everywhere in this country when somebody is standing on a soapbox making this a political issue.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Yes, and I greatly sympathize with those who are being evacuated because that's difficult. I recognize first responders as well trying to help people get out of harm's way and there are occasions when people get split up. That's a tragedy in itself at the personal and family level for sure. Definitely we need to get better at resolving those issues. Again, it depends on where you are. In Ontario, Kapuskasing is a host community for evacuees on a regular basis. They have a system in place that's pretty well oiled to receive families and provide services, etc. But we need to get better at having that type of a resource accessible across the country.

Also, MP McLeod mentioned earlier there are proposals for an emergency reception centre in B.C. First nations are hosting first nation communities. There's better cultural awareness, more traditional food, in a way a better understanding of the people who are being hosted. That should be looked at in the context of the lessons learned event, but also in terms of continuous improvements from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

I see my colleague Patrick is itching to get in.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: No, no, I think he had great points. I just want to add that this is asking us.... We've been talking a lot about lessons learned, but we need to have evacuation plans in place, because otherwise there is a bit of chaos that happens. If you are moving some elders to different communities, maybe if you had a plan in the first place you would know where other communities could be welcoming evacuated communities, indigenous or not. I think that's where we need to turn our attention to, the planning aspect of it.

At Public Safety Canada, I think we are doing a good job when it comes to non-indigenous, but we need to work more closely with Indigenous Services. I was referring to this very bureaucratic jargon about creating an inventory and all that stuff. Actually, this is going to empower us to co-develop those evacuation plans with indigenous communities. What is the stuff they have to fight any fires or to evacuate?

Under the oceans protection plan, there are great initiatives that are being done to empower indigenous communities to have access to material and hardware that would actually help them, and to have plans and monitoring. I think we need to use those examples.

• (1200)

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I have a little time here now.

What are the standards? You say that first nations manage their own fire protection services. I'm just looking here, under "On-reserve fire protection". Are there standards in this country for individual bands? If they are managing them, do we have a Canadian-made standard that we are following? Do we have a standard for each reserve in this country, or is it up to the band whether they spend the money and what they spend it on? We have to have some standards on reserves in this country, I would think. Is there a standard?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: There is no standard at this moment.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: There is no standard.

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Thank you for the answer.

That is why the institution of the fire marshal is really key, because it will drive the standard. It will have legislation to go with it that would permit the bands and the first nations to adopt the building codes and so on. That is why it is so key.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: It's long overdue.

The Chair: Thank you.

That, technically, concludes our hour. I'm going to ask the committee to allow a bit of discretion for the chair to ask some questions. I understand that this has been done in other committees. Given that Manitoba faced one of the worst fire evacuations in recent history, I would ask your indulgence to ask a couple of questions.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you. I'll try to make it quick. I'll be done within 60 minutes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: From what I hear, the situation in Manitoba was dramatically different from the situation in British Columbia, which was wholesome. Yes, there were glitches, but overall there was co-operation and respect for culture, and people were through that emergency in relatively good shape. Unfortunately, the situation in Manitoba was not the same. It was dire. It was extremely stressful. People were lost. Six thousand people were evacuated, most airlifted. There were delays. Some would argue that life was in jeopardy. There was massive confusion from the chiefs not knowing whom to approach.

The situation was so dramatically different that I would like some.... Is that because, in this circumstance, Manitoba didn't have an emergency plan? I'm sure you are aware that the chiefs were marching on the legislature, calling for the province to declare a state of emergency, when actually they should have been contacting Indigenous Services.

Can you put it in some context? Why was there such disarray this year for the fire evacuees?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I can't speak to why there was disarray, besides the fact that it was an oncoming emergency situation that occurred fairly quickly. Folks were put in the face of having to evacuate very quickly, exercising their emergency management plans. The Canadian Red Cross, which was in charge of the evacuations, is definitely doing a lessons learned event and trying to ensure that it builds on what occurred and how to resolve it.

That being said, some first nations actually recognize the Red Cross for what it did very well. Poplar River, just last week, gave the Canadian Red Cross an award for helping them get out of harm's way.

It's never perfect, but we need continuous improvement. We need to build on the successes. We need to look at what happened in Poplar River and make sure that's learned. Why did that go well, and why didn't it go well in another community? When we have

organizations like the Canadian Red Cross, which want to step up and provide better services, we are in a better spot.

● (1205)

The Chair: Poplar River was the first fire, so there was actually capacity in hotel rooms, or at least rooms were opened for evacuees, while apparently at other times rooms were not opened for evacuees. Was there agreement to sign the five-year deal with the Red Cross from the Island Lake band?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The agreement was not sought by the individual first nations.

The Chair: In the agreement with the Red Cross, what was the consultation process with indigenous people in Manitoba?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: That one was an extension of an existing agreement. The consultation, per se, occurred at a high level between officials from the regional offices to leadership of Manitoba first nation representative organizations. It wasn't a first nation by first nation approach.

The Chair: Was that organization AFN?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I can get you the names.

The Chair: Please.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: There is the Manitoba Interlake Tribal Council, for instance. I can give you the specifics.

The Chair: Firefighters remained at St. Theresa Point and other communities to fight the fire locally, apparently saving buildings that are estimated at a value of over \$30 million, but those individuals didn't have equipment. The chief indicated that they are concerned that they will not be compensated, because these are not identified as official firefighters. Will Indigenous Services look at equivalency of those people who stayed behind and saved those communities?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: If these are costs related to fighting fires in indigenous communities and they were incurred during the actual emergency event, they would be eligible under the emergency management assistance program of the department.

The Chair: Good.

How many of the communities this year were airlifted?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I don't have that number, but we can certainly provide it to the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

We look forward to expanding on what was positive, what was negative, how it needs to be improved, and how it could be more culturally sensitive. Some of the participants indicated that actually DND had been involved in the past and was actually more effective. Everyone has an opinion, but this year was particularly hard on those Manitoba communities.

I appreciate your indulgence in letting me ask you some questions. If the committee is engaged in this, I do have Cathy wishing to ask a question, and I see Mike wanting to. Then T.J. wanted to—

Do we wish to extend the meeting?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Chair, I thought we actually had it booked for two hours.

Mr. Mike Bossio: We did.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: That's the confusion.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Chair, in light of your intervention, what we would propose is to skip our round this time and maybe go to Cathy. Then we'll continue.

The Chair: The clerk and I were of the impression that it was a one-hour meeting.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: No.

Mr. Mike Bossio: It was two hours. It was Cathy who actually raised that as a concern.

The Chair: Okay. Let's continue.

Mr. Mike Bossio: There was something both Kevin and I had asked that we didn't get an answer to. I was hoping that maybe Indigenous Services could provide it. What is the number of communities that have an emergency plan in place today in indigenous communities—

The Chair: You're going to provide—

Mr. Mike Bossio: —versus those that don't?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I think that will come out in the inventory that's being done in collaboration with Public Safety. I must say that a couple of years ago we had inventoried this, and it was 100%, and the department had funded them.

I'll add one thing. It's important that the emergency plan be drafted by the community, so that they are identifying risk. It's not just the document that's important, but it's the whole process around identifying the risk in the community, having a plan in place, and having people understand and exercise the plan, so that when something happens you know what to do.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Sorry about that, Cathy.

The Chair: I actually have MP Harvey on the official list next.

Mr. Mike Bossio: We were going to skip ours.

The Chair: Okay.

We're going to start over. It's now going to MP Cathy McLeod.

• (1210)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't perceive that we'll go the whole two hours, but at least another round, because there are still some unasked questions.

From what I hear, having someone from the first nation community in the emergency operations centre was enormously beneficial. I'd like to get a sense of how common that is, in your understanding.

Also, it was unique when they were in some of the traditional territory of one of our communities, and with the chief, they did some cultural activities with the firefighters from Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Is that a common thing?

Third, you're talking about a review process. I'd really like to understand what that review process is going to be and how coordinated it will be in terms of the federal government. Is it incident by incident? Can you describe how you're going to review the positives and negatives from the issues throughout the country?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: On your first two questions, that is not a level of detail that I have at my disposal. I trust that if I went to our

regional offices, we could gather that information in terms of how often it is that we have first nations embedded in the operation centres, and when there are cultural exchanges, how often that occurs. We can get back to the committee with that information.

Regarding the review process, again, it is jurisdiction by jurisdiction. If you'd like, I could speak to the B.C. approach.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Sure.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: There are three things happening in particular. One is regional meetings with the leadership of affected communities to gather lessons learned, what worked and what did not. Second, B.C. has hired someone, with INAC support, to meet with each of the communities individually to get that input and go in-depth so that we don't lose anything of what has worked well and what did not from the community's perspective. Third, in January, the provincial government is bringing together all players in terms of first nations, affected or not, to have a discussion around that. The idea is to have recommendations to a governance committee made up of provincial officials, senior provincial officials, senior federal officials, as well as first nations leadership so that they have recommendations coming out of the lessons learned.

To me, that is the way a good lessons learned process should be done, where you systematically build it up and come up with something you can do about what has occurred. Then we have decisions to make regarding what we do about the recommendations.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: In British Columbia in particular, we had the pine beetle. There was an enormous amount of fuel on the ground. I know that our first nation communities were talking about the need for community protection, barricades, and mitigation efforts.

In what you've presented here, for the department this year, it looks like \$34 million, but with \$12.5 million spent on mitigation, it doesn't seem as though we're in good balance there. We respond to crises, but we're spending very meagre amounts in terms of what actually might have made a difference.

Was that \$12.5 million a year versus the \$34 million? Could we talk a little about that piece?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: These are recent investments. In the last few years, we've been investing significantly in terms of mitigation and preparedness per se.

That came out of an Auditor General report. They noted that we had spent \$4 million over four years on mitigation, whereas the cost of our response and recovery was, at the time, on average, \$30 million. This year, we're up to \$100 million in response and recovery cost alone; last year, \$80 million; and the year before that, \$80 million. That response and recovery cost is significant, so we have been investing more. We've spent \$30 million over three years, in terms of mitigation, just on the non-structural and preparedness type of measures, not including what we're doing with the provinces, which is an additional \$19 million for emergency management service agreements, so that's something.

There are also investments being made through budget 2016 on structural mitigation in communities. There was \$40 million in the previous budget; 2014, \$40 million over five years; and in budget 2016, an additional \$25 million over two years.

That said, we can always invest more in mitigation. The important thing is to identify the risk and seek to mitigate it, to try to reduce the risk of disasters occurring. In the old adage, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

• (1215)

The Chair: Four and a half minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Only four and a half.

The Chair: It depends. Are we doing a five-minute round now, or are we going back to the seven-minute rounds?

Mr. Mike Bossio: She wants to—

The Chair: I'll keep going.

Mr. Mike Bossio: That's fine. The questions she's asking are good ones.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: And if they weren't?

Mr. Mike Bossio: They're always good.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Considering fire safety in communities, we continue to hear about many tragedies in our first nations communities.

Has there been an assessment and/or a comparison done in terms of rural remote communities with similar kinds of populations or similar kinds of rural remoteness in terms of the responsibilities that these communities have? Is there any kind of work out there done around that?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: In terms of assessment of comparability of responsibilities, I don't know that there has work done that way, except for the fact that the non-indigenous communities off reserve are under the chapeau of the provincial authority in terms of building codes and firefighting, whereas on reserve is outside of the provincial authority, and there is no coverage that way. The first nations are pretty much on their own with the funding that Indigenous Services provides.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Certainly, I know that representing a community that has many rural remote areas is an ongoing issue in terms of decisions that are being made. There are many off-reserve communities without any fire protection at all, and there are some less than adequate.

Is there any work that's been done? How many have their own services versus purchasing agreements with nearby communities? Is there any information out there on that?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: I'm sure we have that information.

I don't have it on hand, but I can provide that. Is it how many have their own fire protection services?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Fire protection services versus—

Ms. Lyse Langevin: For example, an agreement with the neighbouring municipality type of thing?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Yes.

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Okay. I can look into that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: You were talking about a national fire marshal. Where are you at in the process of making that a reality?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: It's an indigenous-led initiative, and the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada is now funded to focus on that. The fellows who are going to work on it started as of November 1 for the interim part of setting it up.

The first piece is they have to engage with the first nations, the chiefs and the bands, to see how far they want the legislation to go. You can go as far as condemning a building or just implementing building codes. It has to be an agreement across the indigenous population and community as to how far they want that legislation to go and how they want to see themselves regionally. There is a lot of capacity at the regional level, and they have to engage for the next year. After that, they would be full-fledged.

The Chair: Okay.

I'm going to suggest that we allow the other five who are on my list now to speak.

MP Boutin-Sweet, welcome.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for being here.

My questions are in the same vein as the previous questions.

First, I would like to obtain a clarification about what Mr. Beaudoin was saying earlier. I believe it was about reports that are required from provinces. The 2018 wildfire season will surely be as devastating as the others. Unfortunately, climate change causes a lot of problems.

What types of questions are asked? According to what I understood, you consult local groups, councils and local villages, but how does this work, exactly? Does the province put its own questions to local groups? Does the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development suggest questions to the provinces? I would like to know more about the process.

• (1220)

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: I simply want to make sure I understood your question.

What do you mean when you talk about the questions put to the communities?

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: I am talking about the reports concerning what happened in 2017 that aim to improve the evacuation program for the 2018 season, and to strengthen prevention.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Once again this varies from one province or territory to another.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Yes, I expect it would.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The principle remains the same. The majority of operations centres follow the same procedure. When an event occurs, we examine it to see what lessons can be drawn from it. In addition, we usually invite affected partners to the table, or we consult them in another way in order to be able to take lessons learned into account.

Before each season, we and our colleagues from Public Safety Canada begin to prepare. There are cycles. For instance, regarding flood season, in January we assess the situation to see whether the grounds are waterlogged and if there is going to be a thaw, and so on. We begin to prepare at that point. This exercise is also conducted to prepare for fire season. A risk assessment is done. The national assessment is done by Public Safety Canada, and we then apply it to a given region in order to determine which communities could be affected.

Last year, for instance, we detected a flood threat as early as February for Manitoba communities. This was done by radar. We met with Red Cross groups and the communities that were most at risk because of nearby rivers. We invested a large amount in prevention. I don't have the figures to hand, but I think it was \$5.6 million. For preventive purposes, we removed snow close to homes, installed dykes, and cleaned trenches in order to ensure that water would be able to drain freely, and so on. All of this meant that there were very few evacuations during flood season, even though the risk was high. Those investments were very useful.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: And what about evacuations due to fire?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: In this area, lessons were learned. That said, every province or territory uses the method, the principle being to determine what was learned and to integrate it into the next cycle in order to see what can be done to solve the problem.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Does some of what you learn from those experiences come from the information provided by groups in the field, in the indigenous villages and reserves?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: It is essential to establish a link with the affected community. Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada has a robust system, in that we have regional offices. People work with the province and with the first nations in order to make improvements. We have not reached perfection, far from it, but the purpose of that process is to improve.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: My next question is about prevention. My colleague Ms. Jolibois told me that \$26 million is available for prevention, for all of Canada. That is not a huge sum.

I would like to know whether Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada has put in place processes to develop partnerships. The last questions I heard were about partnerships between communities.

I would also like to know what your department's responsibilities are for remote communities with whom partnerships cannot be established.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Mr. Tanguy talked about funds to mitigate risks. Such sums are also available from Infrastructure Canada in Budget 2017. They total \$2 billion, a considerable amount. We work with these people to determine what can be done for indigenous

communities and how we can access more substantive amounts than the funding available from the department.

In the context of our service agreements, we must ensure that when the province establishes measures to mitigate risk, this does not increase risk to indigenous communities. It could happen, for instance that when installing a water diversion structure, the water is routed toward reserves, or vice versa. When we invest in structural risk mitigation, we share information, the idea being that communities know what the others are doing. If we know there is to be an investment project, the best thing is that we talk to each other, and possibly improve the project by cooperating.

At the very least, our service agreements require that we go and talk to each other. We ensure that neighbouring communities inform each other about investments. When it is possible, because often the risks are comparable, we cooperate.

• (1225)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Take a location like Pelican Narrows, in northern Saskatchewan. There aren't many communities nearby, and there certainly aren't any fire trucks.

Even though there are agreements, there is no infrastructure, and this makes things more difficult. There may be fire trucks in villages that are an hour away from Pelican Narrows, but everything can burn to the ground before they get there.

What can Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada do in such situations?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: At a minimum, the communities must have good emergency plans. The community is in the best position to identify the risks it is exposed to.

The community of Pelican Narrows you mentioned is exposed to fire risks, and no neighbouring communities can help. The community has to determine what resources it needs on the ground in order to be as autonomous as possible before asking for help. It can ask another community to provide assistance, but that community may not be close by.

We have to proceed one community at a time, establish emergency plans, identify the risks and take whatever measures are necessary to face those risks.

[English]

The Chair: That ends your time.

We'll go to MP Harvey.

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Good afternoon. Thank you for being here with us.

I want to talk a little bit about the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada. We met this summer when there was a competition in one of the indigenous communities in my riding, so we had a chance to talk. When I was there I felt the overwhelming sense of pride from that group and camaraderie within their group.

How do you feel we can best leverage with INAC? How can we leverage that relationship the federal government has with the Aboriginal Firefighters Association and, in turn, take advantage of the relationship they would have within their communities to implement strategies that are going to help mitigate risk and help build the type of system we need to see in these indigenous communities, especially in ones that are rural and remote? How can we leverage that opportunity, recognizing that chances are that a lot of the solutions we need to look for lie within that group already?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Thank you for that question. You are correct that it is a very tight community.

Over the past few years working alongside that community, because they do have a national reach through what they have been doing through the funding that INAC has provided to them, what we've been doing with them is a national poster campaign, a "be fire safe" fire prevention campaign, the firefighters competition, and they do work in as many communities as they can to work on prevention. Once the prevention is looked after, the second step is investment in capacity development. The third step is investment in actual equipment. If you haven't done your prevention and you buy a fire truck that you can't use.... The AFAC is very active in that at this point. It's all about prevention, help, and training.

Moving forward, that group who suggested the fire marshal is the one that's developing that concept, as I have said, and they are working across the province. The first three involved are, one from B.C., one from Quebec, and one from Saskatchewan. They are going province by province to see what the expertise is. That's what the engagement is for next year, to make sure they build something that all indigenous firefighters see themselves in that equation.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Within the four pillars you mentioned earlier, indigenous fire marshal service, data, fire, life, and then the structural training to ensure that they're all equally trained at an equal level, it seems to me from the outside looking in like a perfect segue to go through the Aboriginal Firefighters Association with these initiatives. They could use them as an opportunity to build that critical mass within their organization, and recognize that the strategies that they're going to come up with might not be exactly the same as we might see in another sector, whether it's private firefighting or in the public sector, but that those solutions would come from within and would reflect the intentions they have.

Do you think that's an area where the Government of Canada should be putting an increased focus on that relationship between the departments on a whole-of-government approach with aboriginal firefighters?

• (1230)

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Absolutely, and that's how the department is advancing this file, 100% with the aboriginal firefighters. They will be creating an indigenous organization. It's indigenous-led. Responsibilities of this file will be taken over by an indigenous group. It's quite exciting to move forward in that direction.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Okay.

Is there a perceived timeline around that? Is there an overarching idea of how long that process could take to get from where we are today to where we see a separate entity that's indigenous controlled and completely engulfed by the indigenous viewpoint?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: They are hoping to be in place and operating by April 1, 2019, but there's a lot of machinery of government, legislation, approvals, and things like that, which need to happen before then.

We are working actively with them, as I said, as of yesterday. We have enabled them with funding to do what they have to do to get there.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Does anyone else have anything to add on that?

From a service delivery standpoint, Mr. Waugh spoke earlier about some of the challenges when communities are displaced and come into the larger city centres. Would you agree that, by growing that relationship, there's an opportunity to mitigate some of those challenges?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: We haven't strayed into that field at this point. We're going one step at a time, trying to get to the building codes, the standards, the basic fire prevention, fire training, and purchasing the right equipment. As they see fit in their community of expertise, it might go that way.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Okay.

As it pertains to the DFAA money or disaster recuperation money, I guess, is the structure the same as it is with the provinces as it pertains to regular municipalities?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: DFAA, the disaster financial assistance arrangements, basically apply the same way as with all provinces and territories, except there is a threshold. It's a very complex formula to establish the threshold, but basically for instance, B.C. had to reach a threshold of \$14.9 million before we start triggering, we start actually recognizing some eligible expenses and paying back British Columbia in this.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: I recognize that it can be different from province to province or territory to province, but within each province, is the same model used, the same pool of funding used for indigenous communities?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Thank you for the question.

Just to clarify, the disaster financial assistance arrangements—

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Right.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: — is a Public Safety-led program that applies to all communities in Canada with the exception of indigenous communities. For indigenous communities, it is the emergency management assistance program, which in terms of eligibility criteria is mimicking the DFAA a bit. The difference is that the thresholds that my colleague talked about are non-applicable. We will fund 100% of on-reserve cost related to response and recovery within a first nation community.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Then I guess—

The Chair: I think you've used up more than your seven minutes.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: We're going to move on. I have MP Viersen and MP Waugh, and I would ask the committee's indulgence for a couple more questions myself.

Please, go ahead.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our guests again.

I'm going to circle back again to the FireSmart program. I know that many of my communities are certified FireSmart, particularly small towns in my area.

From your perspective, has it worked? I guess that is what I'm going after. It seems to have worked in certain areas.

We had the Slave Lake fire, which burned up a big chunk of the town, a big part of the reserve, and a big part of the MD. This then spurred all these communities to pursue FireSmart. We haven't really had a test in the area since.

From your perspective, it might have been used in other jurisdictions, particularly in B.C. Did it work there?

• (1235)

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Is your question specifically related to indigenous communities?

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Yes.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We could get you this data. If the committee is interested in this we would be pleased to put it forth in terms of return on investment. One of the things that is difficult in this return on investment in mitigation is it's very difficult to correlate it. We've been trying for a while.

You have generic studies from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency that will say \$1 invested in prevention will give you \$4 in return, in reduced response and recovery costs. You have the World Bank saying it's a 1:10 ratio, but it's very difficult to make....

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Our sample size is often way too small.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: That's the challenge.

We could tell the committee how much we've invested in FireSmart by community, but the direct correlation to how that translates is very challenging.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: The Red Cross is a big part of each of these incidents and in most cases when I was in Prince George it seemed to work very well together. A big part of their job from my perspective was to identify evacuees. What else did they do beyond that?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Both of us will have something to say. Go ahead.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: As you mentioned, they can do a wide range of support and services by registering, but also with awareness programs to make sure that people know exactly what's happening. Eligibility for programs is another thing.

Vulnerable populations have targeted services to help them not only to evacuate but also to get access to some services.

Do you have anything to add?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: What's interesting with the Canadian Red Cross is that where they have existing capacity and knowledge in Canada, like reception centres, they were doing that in Quebec, for instance. They do it in B.C., and that's great. They can replicate that within other jurisdictions.

Where they don't have that capacity, for instance evacuations, they bring it from their international organization. They have knowledge. They say to us if we have a gap on emergency management, they can help us fill it. They may not have it in Canada at the moment, but they will build it, which is what they have done in Manitoba. They didn't have it for evacuations. They stepped up, got their international teams trained, and now they have capabilities. That then becomes replicable across jurisdictions.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

Last, again going back more on reserve and not necessarily to these big events that we've had, we see that fires in communities seem to be higher on reserve than in the general population, just from the research that's been presented here. Is this due to the lack of facilities to fight the fires or are more fires being started?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Yes, anecdotally there's a horrific number of deaths as well, more on reserve than not. We don't have much data. There was a reporting burden, and so we haven't been collecting data on reserve about fire incidents.

One of the recommendations is to start that. We're working on the development of a national incident reporting system.

As I said earlier, if you know what caused the fire, then you can see that some of the causes are buildings not built to code, so no standards for the buildings.

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Thank you.

The Chair: The next questioner on my list is MP Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: Can we talk about restoration? We haven't talked about that, the millions of dollars that have been lost through tourism, communities disrupted for maybe decades. I mean the way of life: traplines are gone; the wildlife is gone. Who looks after the restoration? We've talked about preventive. We talked about the fire evacuation. When they go back and things have changed, is that a provincial issue or do you guys help? How does this all work?

• (1240)

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: We mentioned the DFAA program, for instance, in the case of the B.C. wildfires, so there's a process. In the case of B.C., the B.C. government requested an advance payment of \$100 million. There's been a letter sent to the Prime Minister triggering a request under DFAA to get access to an advance payment.

We need to declare the event, and have an OIC, and there are many steps, but ultimately we can provide an advance payment to the province. We're not giving assistance directly to the municipalities, but we're providing assistance to the province. Down the road we will keep working with B.C. to see what was the total cost of the B.C. wildfires. They are going to submit other claims. What we heard, just in terms of firefighting operations, was that the cost was close to \$500 million. They will submit an additional request to get DFAA assistance in terms of dollars.

What DFAA includes in terms of eligible expenses, we can provide that information to the committee. You will see what the province can submit in terms of expenses. That includes some of the costs you mentioned also under the agriculture cost share agreements we have between the federal government and provinces. In the case of B.C., there was \$20 million announced to support farmers who have been losing revenues, based on some of the risk programs embedded into the federal-provincial agreement. Under DFAA some of that is applicable.

The provinces can submit any losses, the cost of their firefighting operations, and even more than that. We can provide a long list of eligible expenses.

B.C. will be compensated. Above and beyond the threshold, when the costs are greater than the provinces can bear, the federal government will be there to support them. The support in terms of DFAA is post-event. It's happening afterwards, but there is also the cost of conducting all the operations, for example, the Canadian Armed Forces deploying some assets. This is some of the cost the federal government will have to absorb as well.

The federal government is a good partner when it comes to that, but the province also has to be there. When it comes to tourism and other losses of revenue, it will have to do its part as well.

Mr. Kevin Waugh: I think I'm done.

The Chair: If no one objects, I will ask a couple of questions, or a few.

Can you indicate how many communities in Canada have no pressure water systems? Do we have any communities in Canada without fire hydrants or the ability to put out a fire in the local community?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: I could come back with those numbers. I don't have them with me.

The Chair: Yes, please.

If you looked at the cost per capita for people in remote communities versus those with road access, have you any idea whether it costs more for communities without access, and if so, what is the difference? Is there an argument to say every community of a certain size should have some type of road access?

Ms. Lyse Langevin: It would cost more with regard to exactly....

The Chair: I mean fire prevention—

Ms. Lyse Langevin: Fire prevention.

The Chair: —emergency service, evacuation, the overall cost per capita for those communities or individuals who are in isolated communities versus those who are connected by road.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Madam Chair, the short answer would be, for sure, there is a cost to remoteness. Many of our programs in the department have factored in remoteness in terms of the funding formulas. When we're talking about infrastructure, there's additional funding normally provided to recognize the fact that, to get the infrastructure up, you may need to use a winter road and what not, and there are additional costs to that. That is something that's factored into our funding formulas per se.

• (1245)

The Chair: Could you provide that in a little information sheet, how much more it is, so we can look at a broader picture of how much the cost is?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We would be pleased to share with you the funding formula.

The Chair: Good.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We can verify internally whether we have the actual overall cost difference.

The Chair: All right.

For jurisdictions that don't have an agreement—it sounds as if it's a few, but it's mine, and there may be others—in the early stages about the deployment of water bombers for when a fire is detected, is that INAC, Public Safety, the conservation authority in that jurisdiction? What kind of relationship do you have with the local resources?

A fire has started. Who's in charge to put out the fire?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: If we use the B.C. wildfires as an example, as I was mentioning, the system is built to have municipal responders if there are some fires. The way that fires happen in B.C. means police and firefighters will be involved at the local level. When they need more support, they will elevate it and request provincial assistance in the form of an emergency management office.

In the case of B.C. for instance, they realized that they would need some additional assistance. They put in a request for assistance, and this a government operation centre that is receiving request for assistance that has been coordinating what was actually requested by the province. In that case, they wanted to have some air support, air assets, and to have those assets be pre-positioned. Our minister gets that request for assistance through a letter. In this case, there was also an exchange between officials at the officials level.

We were contacting and working with the Canadian Armed Forces to determine what kind of resources we could position. In the case of air bombers, it would be the province itself that would look into those kinds of air assets. As I was mentioning, the CIFFC, Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre will make sure that if B.C. doesn't have enough fire bombers, they will turn to Quebec and ask if they can get more Quebec water bombers to be deployed. That is a little bit of how it works.

The Chair: Quickly, I would like to know about the Manitoba circumstance because they don't have an agreement, right?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: The system that my colleague here has described is applicable to first nations, as well. When it comes to fire suppression activities, we have agreements for those across the country—it's a different set of activities—so that they're not water bombing an area where there's forest in non-indigenous communities and not taking care of the indigenous communities. That is made to be seamless within a jurisdiction, all jurisdictions.

The Chair: Is there a difference between areas that are populated versus non-populated in terms of prioritizing fire suppression?

Absolutely, yes?

Mr. Mario Boily (Acting Director General, Government Operations Centre, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): I would say yes, absolutely, for sure. Interface fires are more important in terms of the priorities.

The Chair: All right.

I do have another question. I'm looking around the table, but I did get a request from MP Harvey for a question or two.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Just quickly, in your submission, it says:

In the recovery phase of an emergency event, the Department supports the repair or restoration of critical infrastructure on-reserve to a pre-disaster condition to allow evacuees to return home.

How is that evaluation done?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: It's a bit like an insurance company. Typically, if you had a bungalow with three rooms that burnt down or was flooded, you would get that back.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: If I went in there and I deemed it to be in substandard condition before the fire, is it restored to good condition, or is it funded to a level that gets it back to substandard condition?

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: It would be a reconstruction.

I'll give you an example. My colleague mentioned the build back better approach. This is something towards which we're moving. For

instance, in Kashechewan, we had a community evacuated for flooding; 454 people were evacuated. There were 36 houses. That's 12 people per house. We could have just built that back, but that would not have made sense.

We used the opportunity to do a couple of things. We brought it back to Canadian occupancy standards. We constructed 52 duplexes to accommodate four people per unit. We didn't build it back to have a basement because it makes no sense to have that in a flood-prone community. Previously, the model we had was a bungalow with a basement, with a furnace and other appliances in it, and when that floods, the furnace is gone.

• (1250)

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Right.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: We raised that.

That's in the spirit of building back better, making investments that are smart, and also resolving issues that are more systemic like, in this case, overcrowding.

We deal on a case-by-case basis, but the idea is to build back better and build back smarter.

Mr. T.J. Harvey: Perfect, thank you very much.

That's it.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Hearing none, thank you very much for coming and taking our questions.

You're going to provide some information for us, and we're going to be conducting, I believe, five more sessions with various people across the country. I look forward to seeing you again. Thank you so much.

Mr. Serge Beaudoin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Thank you.

The Chair: The committee stands adjourned.

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