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• (1340)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Marc Garneau (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Good afternoon and welcome to the twenty-third meeting of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

[*English*]

We are gathered here today on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation.

[*Translation*]

Today we begin our fourth study of arctic sovereignty, security and emergency preparedness of Indigenous Peoples.

[*English*]

On today's first panel, we will be hearing from Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa, Atikamekw Council of Manawan; Raymond Lamont, chief negotiator and special projects lead, Tsay Keh Dene Nation; and hopefully, our third witness, Debbie Lipscombe, executive director, Grand Council Treaty No. 3, who is not on yet.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind you of the requirements of the Board of Internal Economy regarding physical distancing and wearing masks.

[*English*]

To ensure our orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members or witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services in English, French and Inuktitut are available for the first part of today's meeting. Please be patient with the interpretation. There may be a delay, especially since the Inuktitut has to be translated into English first before it can be translated into French, and vice versa. The interpretation button is found on the bottom of your screen in English, French or Inuktitut. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately. We will pause and try to fix the problem.

The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking,

please speak slowly and clearly and, when you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

We will begin this first panel. For the benefit of the witnesses, we will be giving you each five minutes to make opening remarks, after which we will proceed to questions. Without further ado, I would like to welcome our two witnesses.

[*Translation*]

I invite Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa, of the Atikamekw Council of Manawan, to speak first for five minutes.

Chief Ottawa, you have the floor.

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa (Atikamekw Council of Manawan): I'm sorry, but we're having a little technical problem. I can't call up my text, and I really need it. I'm trying to connect to the network.

The Chair: I presume you're referring to the text for your presentation.

[*English*]

For the benefit of everyone, if Raymond Lamont is ready, we will start with him.

Mr. Lamont, if you're ready, you have the microphone for a five-minute opening statement.

Mr. Raymond Lamont (Chief Negotiator and Special Projects Lead, Tsay Keh Dene Nation): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for inviting Tsay Keh Dene to appear before the committee.

Tsay Keh Dene is a first nation with its main community at the north end of the Williston reservoir in north-central B.C. Tsay Keh Dene people are culturally and linguistically Sekani. Tsay Keh Dene is a remote community with access via a very long forest service road and a small five-seat airplane.

Today, I will speak about four key challenges and opportunities for Tsay Keh Dene, if time permits.

First is the Finlay Forest Service Road. The Finlay Forest Service Road is the longest forest service road in B.C. at more than 400 kilometres in length. The road is also the only road link to Tsay Keh Dene and Fort Ware, which is a neighbouring first nation community. Some parts of the road are a vital transportation corridor for industry, including mining and forestry. These are industries in which the first nations are increasingly participating despite many obstacles.

Unfortunately, the road was built to a very low standard and it has only been upgraded in small sections. The road is dangerous in many sections and has been impassable many times over the years. Like other years, an emergency was declared in 2021 by Tsay Keh because the road was impassable. The community was within days of a food shortage and a lack of fuel for the diesel generators that power the community. Despite all of this, in 2021 the auditor general of B.C. cited the critical importance of the road as the only viable escape route for indigenous communities when natural disasters occur.

To finally address these challenges, Tsay Keh established a solutions table that included the province, industry and the first nations. Engineering reports and budgets were produced and we agreed on a plan. However, we need \$40 million to carry out critical upgrades and repairs to the road. We believe B.C. will provide half, or \$20 million, if we can persuade Canada to provide similar funding. We ask that every effort be made to identify sources of federal funding to augment the provincial funding. This is about safety, equity, improving the quality of life for remote indigenous communities and their residents, and promoting investment and economic development in the region and indigenous communities through safe and reliable road access.

The other topic I want to speak about is wildfires. Wildfires are increasing in number and severity in Tsay Keh Dene territory, due in large part to the effects of climate change. The community is especially vulnerable to wildfires due to remoteness, lack of a wildfire response capability, large swathes of dead and dying timber caused by infestations and poor forest management practices. The community is increasingly concerned about the growing danger of catastrophic wildfires that threaten life and property. In 2021, Tsay Keh Dene homes and cabins were destroyed by a wildfire that was not actioned quickly by the province because of inadequate resources and the sheer number of fires.

Sadly, Tsay Keh is woefully unprepared and ill-equipped to respond to wildfires when they occur and accordingly Tsay Keh is anxious to develop its own wildfire monitoring and response capability. This role is not only vital to Tsay Keh Dene's safety and security and consistent with UNDRIP and efforts to advance reconciliation, but it also recognizes Tsay Keh's inherent role as a steward of the lands and resources in its territory. The challenge for Tsay Keh is in securing resources for training and equipment. We ask for assistance in securing the resources needed to incrementally develop a wildfire response capability and in doing so mitigate the growing risk to the community and its residents from wildfire.

The other topic I wish to speak about is food security. Food security, including access to healthy and affordable food, is a growing problem in Tsay Keh Dene. Inflation, poverty and unemployment, widespread chronic conditions in the community, remoteness, the

state of the Finlay Forest Service Road and the very high cost of transportation are all contributing to growing food insecurity. Malnutrition and poor diet among community members is increasingly common.

To compound this, country food is less abundant and the cost of harvesting country food has become very high. Moose numbers are declining, caribou are threatened and key species of fish that traditionally were a staple of the Tsay Keh Dene diet are less abundant.

Tsay Keh is adapting as best it can to these challenges. In the short term, Tsay Keh intends to build large greenhouses in the community to produce fresh fruit and vegetables. The community will be self-sufficient in fresh produce and is making arrangements to sell surplus produce to industrial camps in the region. The challenge is that power and heat for the greenhouses is prohibitively expensive.

● (1345)

To overcome this, Tsay Keh Dene will build and commission a biomass plant in the community to generate clean power and heat using wood waste, including debris from the Williston reservoir. NRCan and provincial funding have been obtained for part of the cost of building and commissioning the project. The engineering and design are advanced, but a shortfall of \$9 million exists for the project. We ask for assistance in obtaining additional federal funding for the biomass project to build and operate a project that will be transformative for the community.

Finally, I want to speak very briefly about pandemics. COVID was devastating for Tsay Keh Dene. Several outbreaks occurred. People died, and many community members were evacuated from the community for medical care after becoming very ill. This experience has shown that, despite best efforts, Tsay Keh Dene is not well prepared to respond to pandemics. Lack of resources and capacity are the main reasons for this lack of preparedness. Poor housing, overcrowding, widespread chronic health conditions, poverty, poor health outcomes, limited health care services and general mistrust of governments have significantly increased the risk to health in Tsay Keh Dene from COVID and other infectious diseases.

This increased vulnerability is unlikely to improve without a substantial investment in local programs and measures designed to enable Tsay Keh Dene to promptly and effectively respond to pandemics. This includes a pandemic preparedness plan and the resources to implement that plan. We ask for assistance to secure the resources required to assist Tsay Keh Dene to effectively respond to pandemics when they occur and, ultimately, to save lives.

• (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamont.

[Translation]

Chief Ottawa, have you found the text for your presentation?

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: Yes, I found it, Mr. Garneau.

The Chair: Excellent.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: [*Indigenous language spoken.*]

[Translation]

My name is Paul-Émile Ottawa, and I am Chief of the Atikamekw Council of Manawan in Lanaudière. I was first elected in 1999 and re-elected in 2018 for a sixth term. Today, I represent my community with honour to testify not only about our perception of climate change, but also our concerns.

I would like to thank the members of this committee, especially the person who invited me, Mrs. Gill, without whom I would not have been able to participate. I am honoured to be here to share with you how Arctic warming may affect my village, which is far from this beautiful region.

My village includes about 3,000 members, and like all remote villages, it is struggling with...

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Vanessa Davies): Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

We no longer have interpretation.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Clerk.

We will pause briefly to solve the problem.

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: I will also speak more slowly.

The Chair: Thank you.

Please wait a moment.

The Clerk: It's working now, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very well.

Please continue, Chief Ottawa.

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: As I was saying, my village has about 3,000 members and, like all remote villages, it faces social challenges such as lack of jobs, recreation and housing. The latter sometimes leads to a difficult social climate, as our members often live with several families under one roof.

We are 85 kilometres by road in the forest of Saint-Michel-des-Saints, which means far from everything. We are also 270 kilometres from Montreal, 390 kilometres from Quebec City and 425 kilometres from Ottawa. These facts are significant, since we live in a remote village with a precarious access road; the slightest incident cuts us off from the world.

Why are the people of Manawan, who live far from the Arctic, concerned about Arctic glaciers melting? This concern stems from a report released by the Government of Canada in 2019 called "Canada's Changing Climate Report." The report does not give much hope for the future, and therefore for our children, if we continue to consume, overexploit wealth and destroy forests that give us life as well as all the animal and plant resources that allow us to feed ourselves. In fact, the report states that melting ice and glaciers are causing sea levels to rise faster in Canada than anywhere else in the world.

As a result, precipitation is increasing each year in the spring. This means that ice melts faster, rivers swell and water tables fill up more quickly. The temperature has risen by 1.1 degrees Celsius since 1948. This does not bode well for us, the Atikamekw of Manawan, in the coming years. If another increase of 1.1 degrees Celsius over the next 60 years comes to pass as predicted, lake and river levels will rise dramatically.

In fact, our village is in a basin on the edge of Lake Kempt. If the lake level rises, the water will not be able to drain away on its own. It will stagnate in the village, impossible to absorb. We will then have to be evacuated or even relocated. At the moment there are so many of us that even partial rehousing could take years, since we would have to rebuild. Given the lack of housing in the village, people would have no choice but to cram house with even larger numbers. Others would leave for the city, even if they don't want to. Unfortunately, when families move to the city, children lose their culture. It is very difficult to return to the village afterwards and it undermines our social fabric.

However, this would not be our only problem. There would be a lot of fires. The forest would become parched, with drier summers because of the heat. In Manawan, we are surrounded by forest. The slightest spark could burn trees in the area, as well as our homes. Our fire department would not be able to save anything. We have only a handful of volunteer firefighters and we don't even have a truck with a ladder. If our school caught fire with the students inside, the firefighters couldn't rescue those trapped on the second floor.

And because the road is bad and unpaved in places, we would not necessarily have the help of emergency services from outside, given the difficulties associated with transportation. Actually, if it rains too much, sections can be washed away. If it is too hot, the dust makes travel difficult.

Evacuating injured or disabled people would be another problem if such a disaster were to occur, as we only have one ambulance on site. If many of us had to be evacuated at the same time for our health, it would be a real logistical and health disaster.

• (1355)

Therefore, I am here to encourage governments to get ready to help not only those living near the Arctic, but also all inland indigenous peoples and communities. We will need help to fight climate emergencies, because all our communities are usually near a river or a lake.

Manawan should be a priority, for that matter, because of its location in a basin, since this makes the community vulnerable in the event of a climate emergency.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Chief Ottawa.

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now continue with the third speaker.

[English]

I understand Debbie Lipscombe is with us. She is the executive director of Grand Council Treaty No. 3.

Ms. Lipscombe, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Debbie Lipscombe (Executive Director, Grand Council Treaty No. 3): [Witness spoke in Ojibwa as follows:]

Ahaw boozhoo Makateginibik Indizhinikaaz Makwa Doodem.

[Ojibwa text translated as follows:]

Hello. My name is Black Snake. My clan is Black Bear.

[English]

My name is Debbie Lipscombe. I am from the bear clan and my home community is Wazhashk Onigam, Rat Portage.

I'd like to acknowledge the members of the committee and other dignitaries here today. I appreciate the invitation to be here to speak to the importance and significance of the federal government and Anishinabe nation working together as treaty partners in Treaty No. 3 emergency management.

This parliamentary committee hearing is incredibly timely today. Across Treaty No. 3 territory, we are faced with historically high water levels that are only expected to continue to rise over the next few weeks. Currently, Grassy Narrows First Nation has been evacuated to Thunder Bay, and many other communities are partially evacuated and sheltering in alternative locations. Many Treaty No. 3 communities are also experiencing continued erosion, loss of land and infrastructure loss, such as our water treatment plant in Wabauskang. Several communities are likely to lose houses along the shoreline and even suffer intense damage to critical band infrastructure. The destruction of these homes comes on the heels of the current housing crisis.

In order to work proactively, Treaty No. 3 is currently undertaking GIS mapping of emergency areas and resources, and taking on

flood vulnerability studies to inform future planning and water regulation. Evacuations of communities and people can be incredibly difficult for a community, and we are now operating in the second year of large evacuations. We had fires last year, and this year we're facing floods.

It's important to note that Treaty No. 3 territory extends over both Ontario and Manitoba. Treaty No. 3 has worked with our relatives in Treaty No. 9, Treaty No. 1 and Treaty No. 5 to put political protocols in place to support each other in evacuation scenarios. During evacuations, families and communities oftentimes want to go west, as opposed to east, in order to be with family, friends and other relations. For us, sometimes, there's a language barrier when our communities are evacuated to the east, as opposed to the west.

This can be difficult to resource due to federal and provincial regulations in border crossing and resourcing. Even as we work together through funding and emergency management, Treaty No. 3 still needs further expertise, infrastructure and resources to plan for future events. Flooding continues to demonstrate the importance that, as treaty partners, the Anishinabe nation and Treaty No. 3 are equal partners in decision-making in water regulation management.

We are not merely an interest group that can continue to take the brunt of the negative impacts of these conditions, which impede our inherent and treaty rights. It is through the harmonization of our traditional laws and knowledge with western science that we can continue to build upon the relationship, as outlined in the treaty.

I thank each of you for being here and I appreciate my time to share experiences with you today.

Meegwetch.

• (1400)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lipscombe.

We'll now proceed with a first round of questions, beginning with—

The Clerk: Sir, I sent you a text message. Mr. Lampreau has joined us.

The Chair: Very good. Is he ready to speak?

The Clerk: I believe so. He's in the panel and I promoted him to be a speaker.

The Chair: Very good. Thank you very much. In that case, we're combining our two meetings.

Mr. Lampreau from the Shackan nation, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Go ahead, please.

Chief Arnold Lampreau (Shackan Indian Band): I value your time at the House of Commons and thank you very much for letting me appear today.

My name is Chief Arnie Lampreau. I'm from the Shackan Indian reserve out of Merritt, the Secw'xmx nation. Our reserve lands have had devastation in the last year—fires and floods, of course COVID, and the discovery of the 215 out of Kamloops, which I'm a third-generation survivor of.

More importantly, today is about our membership, the loss of land and the costs of repairing it, because of the devastation from the fire causing some of the mudslides and the little bit of damming that's happening within the Nicola River. What we're looking at in the future is for some additions to reserve lands and also some more infrastructure for firefighting, etc.

With a lot of these things that have happened in this short while, a majority of our people were never ready for this. We have talked to the Province of British Columbia, and they have enacted an alert now, which is great.

I'm at a loss for words. I would like to say that our people have gone through a lot of hard times in the last year. I'm presently at a meeting in Vancouver with the UBCIC today, so I'm a little bit distracted. I apologize for that. There are a lot of other issues on my mind right now.

Seeing the interaction with the Prime Minister at Kamloops and the announcement of the Pope coming to Canada spark a lot of different issues for our people, as far as how we've been opening up a lot of different things in our hearts and minds. As far as the emergency part, we're looking at more training for the ESS and EOC, different objectives like that, to make our lives a bit safer and to give us a little more comfort within our homelands.

That's about all I have to say, other than I would greatly like to have some help as far as looking at safer lands for our people. Our people right now, with the lands that have washed away, basically that's what sustained us. It was about 20% of the whole IR#11, which is basically the river bottoms of that reserve land. It's gone. It's going to cost millions and millions of dollars to protect.

Thank you for your time. I appreciate everything that's happening out there in Canada.

Thank you for allowing me to have a bit of say from our little Shackan Band. Today is 200 and something days since I have been evacuated. I'm still not home. Another councillor of mine is still not home. We're still living in the Trans Mountain pipeline camp. We have been there for over 200 days. We definitely miss home, looking at housing shortages and different things like that, which affect our communities.

Thank you for your time.

• (1405)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Lampreau.

We sympathize with the difficulties you're going through. Perhaps we will get into that with questioning.

We will start with a round of questioning.

Since we've combined the two panels, I'm not 100% sure of who's going to go first for the Conservatives, Mr. Schmale or Mr. Vidal.

Whomever it is, please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I'll give it a shot.

I appreciate the testimony from our witnesses today.

I'll start with Chief Lampreau, if I could.

Chief, you were speaking with a lot of emotion, and rightfully so. We can tell in your voice you're handling a lot right now, obviously, and you're under very difficult circumstances.

Before I get into my questioning, if I could, MPs Dan Albas and Brad Vis send their regards to you and again offer their assistance. If you need any help with things, they've offered their services, as I'm sure you know. I'm sure you've talked to them about that.

Chief, if I could, I'll pick up on the end of your last comment about safer lands. If you're talking about moving, that's a very big decision. It involves a lot of partners and a lot of conversations. Out of curiosity, have you had any discussions with the federal government about moving? If you have and you're allowed to speak to them, how have those conversations gone?

• (1410)

Chief Arnold Lampreau: Right now, I haven't had the opportunity yet to speak to any of the federal people about getting a chance to move or finding safer land, for that matter.

When we look at the lands that are within the Shackan Indian Band, we have IR#11, IR#12 and IR#13. IR#12 is pretty much like a valley. It's a three-sided valley, so it goes in two different directions. It's a triangular valley. In the middle of that triangle is where they have IR#12. It's not a very big piece of land, but it's also on the side of the hill where there's basically no sunshine. It's a tight little valley.

The other parcel of land that IR#13 is on is at an elevation of 4,500 feet. It would be a challenge to live there, maintain the roads and get power and infrastructure to it to even maintain a place to live.

In IR#11, the valley of the Nicola Valley, the river bottom is what has sustained us since the reserve was developed in the years of Sprott. When we look at trying to get some land that's more feasible for... We went from probably 30 people way back in the day to 130 now. The thing is, though, as pandemics hit and the IRs... Different things like that have challenged a lot of our bands throughout Canada. Maintaining our membership has also been challenging, but the amount of land we have to sustain us is very little.

Thank you.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: I can tell in your voice you're dealing with a lot.

When the recent round of flooding happened, what was the reaction like from Indigenous Services Canada? Was there assistance being offered? Were they easy to communicate with? Can you give us a brief rundown?

Chief Arnold Lampreau: Basically, right now in British Columbia, we're getting high rain alerts in the interior. I'm on the coast. I'm receiving emails even as we speak here. My phone is pinging away. What happened in November was that we expect November rains. We always have because it's part of that area, and the rains basically give us the mushrooms and the late-time harvesting of food.

When November happened, it really caught us off guard because a lot of us were hunting and never got a chance to go fishing. We bought fish last year, and I just came out of a meeting where DFO is doing a presentation right now on fish. We spent around half a million dollars. Eight bands of us through one of our corporations bought fish from Alaska, and it cost around \$500,000 to \$700,000 just for eight bands.

When we look at the economics and the diversity of food sources and sustenance, it comes at the heels of mother earth and what she's going to provide. Just prior to the floods, we had the fire, so we basically had no more food to gather out there because everything was burnt around us. Then the fall rains started happening, and even the fish that were spawning in the Nicola River and some of the creeks that we have were basically rubbed out because of the high water that came down.

Yes, it caught us off guard. Many of our freezers were full. Some of the people did not want to leave, and 12 people stayed. We made sure that they had ample water and stuff like that, even though it was 6:30 in the morning when I was evacuating people. I called an order. I'm really glad that I did and made the right choice.

Getting back into that place was really a challenge. It cost a lot of money and three hours one way to get back into the community through the mountains and through snow, so all of our food that we had for our winter sustenance was basically spoiled. I had to send the crews back in there to throw out all our food from the freezers, basically remove the freezers out of the houses so that the smell wouldn't be there when we came back. We prepared the houses for winterizing, getting the plumbers in there, draining the hot water tanks and draining the main reservoir for the community.

All of that preparation had to be done before it froze solid, so we didn't have an additional cost to ISC and whatever, but ISC was very.... I guess what happened was that, when we went to Merritt, when we evacuated to Merritt from the flood, we got to Merritt, and then Merritt was evacuated, which makes it really tough. What happens is that, when we run to Merritt, we always say Merritt is our place of safety. It's like our other community, so when we got to Merritt, we got evacuated. The whole city of Merritt was evacuated, but not only that, we had the people who were evacuated from the fires, the Lytton people and the people from Nicomen and Skuppah down in the lower Fraser River. They were evacuated, and they were all in Kamloops.

• (1415)

The Chair: Chief, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we have to get some other questions in as well, so please just wrap up there.

Chief Arnold Lampreau: Yes, so anyway, I was just trying to say that, when we got to Kamloops, EMBC did a terrible job, just rolling it out to where ISC rolls in. ISC rolls in, and we call ISC and, first of all, we had to ask for some funding for civil engineers so that we could get drone flights right away and map out some of the devastation that happened, and they okayed that. Then the second part was a meeting with ISC again to develop a budget for zero to 60 days. We needed funding for that, emergency funding for our people, because EMBC left us high and dry in a cold ice arena.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lampreau. Perhaps you'll get to continue with another questioner, but I have to go to the next person.

Mr. Weiler, it's over to you.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate all the witnesses joining today and sharing their thoughtful testimony. I can imagine how painful it is to relive the events that occurred last year in British Columbia.

I just want to give Mr. Lampreau an opportunity to finish what he was saying about his interactions with ISC.

Chief Arnold Lampreau: The zero to 60 days came. We were really lucky to have a band manager who had that expertise and put that budget together. We submitted it to ISC. ISC said, "We'll have it to you within a week." We waited for two weeks. We never got a response. I phoned Minister Rankin. Minister Rankin said, on that day, "I'll phone you in half an hour," and it was approved.

ISC has been really, honestly, tremendously good. As far as EMBC goes, we've had no help from them.

ISC has been really good, and I really hold my hands up to them. Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

I would like to ask my next question to Mr. Lamont.

You mentioned, going through your five challenges, that one of those was wildfires. That's one of the reasons it's really important that we're doing this study today. We're quickly approaching wildfire season again, and we don't want it to be a rehash or recurrence of what happened last year.

You mentioned that some of the desires of the Tsay Keh Dene Nation were for more training and more equipment for the nation to be able to better respond to wildfires this year. In the budget this year, we have proposed just that. I was hoping you could speak a little more toward how those resources could best be allocated to help with wildfire prevention this year and going forward for Tsay Keh Dene.

• (1420)

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Thank you for the question. Before I respond directly to the question, here is some context.

I alluded to wildfires that occurred last year and that caused destruction. A large part of the Tsay Keh Dene indigenous protected area in the Ingenika was destroyed by a wildfire. That was a wildfire that was detected very early on by Tsay Keh and reported to the B.C. Wildfire Service, but it was not actioned. The fire grew out of control, and there was a concern within Tsay Keh that the fire might spread and potentially affect the Tsay Keh Dene community.

That's not an isolated case. It's reinforced for Tsay Keh that Tsay Keh must develop its own wildfire response capability. A wildfire response monitoring capability that enables Tsay Keh to action fires early on could prevent wildfires from growing out of control. Tsay Keh operates businesses, including Chu Cho Industries. Chu Cho Industries is a business that owns substantial equipment, which it uses in construction, mining and forestry. They have some capability in managing major projects. They have some capability in responding to wildfires.

From time to time, Tsay Keh has been approached through Chu Cho Industries about responding to wildfires. Unfortunately that capability is not adequate. It needs to be expanded. They're not always based in the community. They're normally based elsewhere. The plan is that if we can raise sufficient funding to carry out necessary training and acquire new equipment, Tsay Keh intends to establish a very robust wildfire monitoring and response capability. That would enable Tsay Keh to detect fires early on and, where they are detected, to respond to and action those fires before they burn out of control.

Again, I want to be very cautious. The B.C. Wildfire Service is obviously overwhelmed and under-resourced, and that's a reflection, in part, of the seriousness of the problem with wildfires in B.C. at the present time. Climate change has substantially exacerbated the problems with wildfires, and B.C. Wildfire Service is struggling to respond. Tsay Keh, as a steward of the lands and resources in its territory, believes it has a role in responding to wildfires. If we have the resources to do it, Tsay Keh can execute on this.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you very much for that.

Maybe further to that point, of course it means as much as possible being able to detect early on, but also there are ways to mitigate

that risk from coming to the fore. You did mention plans to be able to harvest dead wood that is becoming kindling for wildfires.

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Yes.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: I am just hoping you could perhaps give some recommendations to this committee on what the Government of Canada should do to focus on that mitigation point of view, as well as perhaps some traditional practices that the Government of Canada might be able to observe and be able to support as well.

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Fuel management is a major issue. I know there is an ongoing debate in B.C. about forest management and some gaps or deficiencies on how the province is approaching fuel management in B.C.

Tsay Keh in the past, historically, practised controlled burning. Controlled burning, if properly planned and executed, can mitigate the risks associated with catastrophic wildfires.

Tsay Keh has been in conversations with the province about not only developing a wildfire response capability, but Tsay Keh believes it should have a bigger role in forest management in its traditional territory. We are interested in collaborating with the province if we can obtain the resources to collaborate with B.C. in developing strategies for fuel management to mitigate the risks of wildfires.

Controlled burning is part of the solution. There are other solutions that, based on Tsay Keh Dene traditional knowledge and experience in the territory, we think can be successfully implemented.

Again, the thing that Tsay Keh struggles with constantly is that, even though we have very good ideas and we believe that we have solutions that will benefit everyone, we lack the resources to execute those ideas.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Weiler.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

As they have said, including Chief Ottawa, all the crises we're currently facing are connected to climate change. Everyone is experiencing it.

Chief Ottawa, I'd like to ask you a very broad question.

I know that Manawan had large fires in 2010. Could you talk about your experience and the gaps in community assistance?

To help the committee carry out its work, can you tell us what the government could do to support the community?

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: Thank you for the question, Mrs. Gill. It's a very good one.

Similarly with MAI and our resource law, we have a responsibility to care for all of the 55,000 square miles of our territory.

• (1440)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

Colleagues, we will now do a complete second round, and we'll start with the Conservatives. I'm going to guess it's Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Vidal, you have five minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all our witnesses today. The testimony has been very compelling, hearing about the challenges of escape roads, wildfires and the loss of homes and cabins, floods, food security, a biomass project and fuel management within the forest. The reason I list those things is that they're all things that I have personally experienced in my own riding in northern Saskatchewan, but I'm hearing about them from northern Ontario, northern B.C. and northern Quebec. The witnesses' testimony is really appreciated.

Ms. Lipscombe, I want to drill in a little further to some of your comments. You talked about evacuations around fires last year, water and floods this year, and some of the work that you've been doing. I looked on your website, and you talk about training 25 evacuation support specialists. I'm really curious about what role they play, and it might have been in some of your answer to my colleague's question just a minute ago, but I want to drill into that just a little bit. I want to understand the role they play, how you got to that place and how they help you in responding to disasters in your communities over such a vast territory that you serve.

Ms. Debbie Lipscombe: Treaty No. 3 territories cover 55,000 square miles. A number of years ago, every year in the spring, Nishnawbe Aski Nation, which is our neighbour to the north of us, had flooding situations. Then we're followed by forest fires.

Every year there is usually a community that has to be evacuated. When COVID first hit, we were confronted by the fact that some of our municipalities didn't necessarily want to have a number of evacuees come into their urban area. We asked how we begin to look after ourselves. How do we begin to build the necessary capacity within community and within our regional organizations to address some of these situations?

There was a proposal that was developed with ISC region in Ontario. We began to talk about the need to develop emergency management capacity so that we could respond regionally on the ground. Grand Council Treaty No. 3 does have an emergency management coordinator. We have another emergency management coordinator in Sioux Lookout, and one as well in the Fort Frances area, situated at our tribal council.

When you begin to build that initial on-the-ground capacity, what happens is that you begin to identify how you do training. There have been a number of proposals that have gone forward to help build that capacity. We recently completed training in Thunder Bay. What you saw on our website was the completion of that training. We find that, when we have individuals situated, they have a go-to person to go to, so it begins to build that communication and that network. You begin to talk about language.

I didn't know anything about how much sand you need to fill the sandbags or the poly you need to put in place that goes along with the sandbags. Our emergency management coordinators begin to develop that language, and they begin to know how much sand is needed and how you begin to construct sandbagging to protect critical infrastructure such as water treatment plants. You begin to build those relationships around how you do prevention versus mitigation.

Some of our communities knew in advance that they were at risk of flooding through the Rainy River, Lake of the Woods and then into the Winnipeg River. There are seven dams on the Winnipeg River. Knowing in advance as you watch those waters rise and being able to be prepared meant that you had people, boots on the ground, saying that the water just rose two inches. We know that it could compromise our water treatment plant. How do we make sure that we have the sand and that we put the sandbags in place? That only happens when you have the emergency coordinators, and they have the prerequisite training. They're that early sounding board, the canary-in-the-well type of scenario, that knows we have a problem and that we need to act on it.

• (1445)

Mr. Gary Vidal: Thank you for that. I think there is some history in a report somewhere that I read that every dollar that's invested in preparedness and prevention saves four dollars in response and recovery, so I give kudos to you and your leadership on the work you're doing from a prevention and mitigation perspective.

With the little bit of time I have left, I want to flip back to Chief Lampreau for a minute.

Chief, I sensed your frustration with the lack of coordination between the federal government and the provincial government, and I want to make sure I'm not making assumptions. That was just a huge challenge. We need to work towards better coordination maybe between the different levels of government. Would that be a fair assumption I made from listening to your testimony?

Chief Arnold Lampreau: Yes, that would be fair.

Mr. Gary Vidal: That's fine. I don't want to put you on the spot.

The other thing you talked about is ATRs.

The Chair: We're up to the five minutes, Mr. Vidal.

Mr. Gary Vidal: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's no problem.

Mr. Gary Vidal: I forgot to start my clock.

The Chair: Time passes quickly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being present here today.

My first question goes to Ms. Lipscombe.

The Canadian Arctic has unique needs and faces interconnected challenges relating to its environment, its climate as well as its infrastructure. Can you please explain how this uniqueness of the Arctic affects emergency preparedness? What should the federal government do differently with respect to these challenges?

Ms. Debbie Lipscombe: Grand Council Treaty No. 3 is located in northwestern Ontario, so we border Ontario and Manitoba. We do, however, have two communities that are remote. They are based on islands, so I think that's one of our unique challenges, being able to know how things respond and being able to respond to how things freeze up and thaw. I think that's the best I can answer that particular question with respect to remoteness and understanding the cost of being able to do the delivery of sand.

When we were protecting our island community, we had to barge sand. Then we had to do a delivery of sand. It basically went from Ontario into Manitoba, into the States and back into the community. That's one of the challenges that Treaty No. 3 faces, that one of our communities is located on an island, Northwest Angle 33. The road and ability to get to that in the spring and the fall is a unique challenge.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Mr. Lamont, can you elaborate on that too?

The Chair: Mr. Lamont, did you get that question? Are you perhaps on mute?

Mr. Raymond Lamont: I was on mute. I apologize. Could I hear the question again?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I was saying that the Canadian Arctic has unique needs, facing interconnecting challenges related to its environment, climate and infrastructure.

What can be done differently by the federal government? What is the uniqueness with respect to the emergency preparedness, and what should we do differently?

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Again, I can't speak specifically about the Arctic.

Tsay Keh Dene is a community located in north central B.C. However, it is a very remote community. The remoteness of Tsay Keh Dene presents special challenges. I spoke briefly about the state of the road. The road is a vital transportation link. It's the only viable land-based evacuation route.

I think it's absolutely critical, in developing strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change, to ensure that indigenous peoples are equipped with the resources they need to respond effectively to climate change and build resiliency. We can't overlook that, in developing these strategies, remoteness has implications for cost and for capacity.

Speaking specifically about Tsay Keh, it's a small indigenous community. The population is 250 people. A population-based approach to developing strategies or funding to implement strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change or build resiliency is not a viable approach, because we incur many of the costs that larger communities that are less remote will incur in developing resilience and developing capacity to respond effectively to climate change.

One thing that Canada can do better is to take into account the unique and special needs of remote communities in developing strategies to respond to climate change.

• (1450)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Emergency preparedness encompasses several aspects, such as emergency response plans, mutual assistance agreements, resources, inventories and training, public awareness activities, etc.

In your view, what are some of these pointers that the Canadian government should be putting more focus on?

The Chair: Is that for a specific person, Mr. Iacono?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm sorry. I was addressing the question to Mr. Lamont.

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Again, I'm not sure I understood the gist of the question. Can you reframe it, please?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: With respect to emergency preparedness, which encompasses several aspects, such as emergency response plans, mutual assistance agreements, resource inventories, training, etc., what more can the federal government do in order to help the situation?

Mr. Raymond Lamont: That's an excellent question.

One thing that occurs to me immediately is that there is a perception in Tsay Keh that Canada and B.C. are often not coordinating very well in developing solutions that benefit indigenous communities in building capacity to respond to the challenges associated with climate change, natural disasters and other emergencies. For instance, I spoke today about the Finlay Forest Service Road. It is a vital transportation link. It has major implications for indigenous communities for safety. It has other major implications.

A challenge we face is that we need resources to carry out upgrades to the road, and the question arises of how we fund that. How do we carry out those critical and necessary repairs to ensure that we have a road that's safe and reliable and that will enable Tsay Keh and Kwadacha, the other indigenous community, to respond when emergencies arise?

I think greater coordination... I don't know what the solution is. Is it formal agreements between Canada and B.C., in which they outline or establish terms of reference for closer collaboration between Canada and B.C. in the areas that you described? Training and building capacity—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamont.

[Translation]

Mrs. Gill, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A few of our reserve bands within the Scw'xmx nation have been actually having the same problems and challenges that we face here in the Nicola. They're actually postage stamp sizes of reserve lands. They're basically on the sides of hills, with not much land on the river bottoms. Right now when the river rises, because of the devastation that's happened, the gravel has risen and so has the river, so the chance of it washing away more houses is higher.

We're looking at trying to get safer land and some more housing. Some of our housing dates back to the fifties. When we brought our people back in February, some of them were unsure. They were actually scared to go back home.

One thing we did was do all the housing inspections to ensure that those houses were safe to go back to. We checked for mould, electrical, water and replaced some of the appliances. Some of these things were challenging because of COVID. Trying to get a lot of the appliances in right away was just a nightmare. Then, of course, communications were down, the Internet was down, so there was fear over telephones for emergencies. The flood was on for my cellphone and my office. My poor staff were just overwhelmed because of the fear of somebody getting hurt or having a heart attack or accident.

All of these challenges just reared their ugly faces. How do you deal with that?

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you, Chief.

For the benefit of everyone, we're going to complete this second round. There are five more minutes for the Conservatives and five minutes for the Liberals, and then we'll have to end the panel.

I honestly don't know who will speak at this point, but whoever is going to speak for the Conservatives, you have five minutes.

Mr. Gary Vidal: I think it's Mr. Shields.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think it's come up in a number of conversations we've had in previous committees. I would like to thank the witnesses for again bringing up the issue of capacity.

I'd like to start with Chief Lamont in the sense of the federal government working with indigenous people on the capacity that leads to economic development and then the coordination of safety. I think you've talked about it a couple of times.

Could you just comment, in the sense of the future, on what changes you believe need to be made for the capacity changing from the hands of the federal government to the nations?

Mr. Raymond Lamont: Tsay Keh has always maintained that we don't expect and we don't want the government to solve Tsay Keh's problems. Tsay Keh wants to have the ability to solve its own problems. In order to achieve that, Tsay Keh must build capacity and human resources. It requires capital and funding to build the capability to respond to emergencies and to make its own decisions in its own interest.

What we see is that, for many of the projects that Tsay Keh is developing, economic development projects.... For instance, we have negotiated an agreement to participate in a high-performance computing facility in the town of Mackenzie. We are collaborating on a project to build a biofuel plant that will produce clean diesel. All of these projects have major implications for Tsay Keh and Tsay Keh Dene capacity.

These projects have the potential to produce own-source revenue that Tsay Keh could use and allocate as it sees fit to address some of the challenges and the problems that we've identified. For example, there's the biomass project I spoke about today. That project has the potential to be transformative. It will create jobs. It will significantly address the issue of food security. If we had the money to build it on our own, we would. The reality is that we don't. Funding to build that project is critical.

If a first nation is empowered to solve its own problems and it has own-source revenue on which it can draw, it has the ability to make its own decisions to solve its problems. I believe that community will be more resilient and better able to respond to problems. It will have the ability to mitigate the risks.

• (1505)

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you.

Chief Ottawa, in response to the same question, when you're talking about safety and capacity, from your viewpoint in the province of Quebec, would you respond in a similar way, to the sense of capacity? Do you believe that you might have to deal with the safety issues you've identified?

[Translation]

The Chair: Chief Ottawa, did you hear the interpretation?

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: I know that the question was for me, but the sound kept fading and I only heard half of the question.

[English]

The Chair: Let's try that again.

Go ahead, Mr. Shields. Perhaps you could repeat your question.

Mr. Martin Shields: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're talking about capacity, and you have identified safety issues, whether they're to do with roads, fire or isolation. Do you believe that in a different relationship with the federal government, you could deal with the issues that you've identified, because you would have the capacity developed in a different way?

[Translation]

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: I do believe that relationships could be different, in a positive way.

I was asked earlier about my recommendations or suggestions to improve the situation. As I said in my answer, we need to change the way things are done.

I've heard people talk about traditional knowledge. In Quebec, my people still have to fight the forestry industry. Cutting timber in our territories eats up a lot of land and causes both visual and environmental changes.

That is why I implore you, let's work together to better fight climate change affecting the North, namely regions near the Arctic such as Quebec.

I rely heavily on collaboration and cooperation. We need to work together to ensure a better future for our youth.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shields.

We'll finish with Mr. Badawey. You have five minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here this afternoon. I want to preface my questions by saying—

The Clerk: I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Chair. Mr. Badawey's mike is not selected.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. Vance Badawey: How's that?

The Clerk: It seems to be fine now. Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

One of the reasons I brought this study forward to the committee, as the parliamentary secretary for Indigenous Services Canada, was mentioned earlier. It was to build capacity and ensure that, with that said, we have the opportunity to partner with the different communities and different chiefs, such as Chief Lampreau and Chief Ottawa, to look at strengthening Indigenous Services Canada's role in emergency management. As I'm sure many in the room recognize, its role in emergency management is to strengthen that resiliency, and we do it by emphasizing the four pillars of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

I have two questions for both Chief Lampreau and Chief Ottawa. First, within those four pillars, where do you see us strengthening the emergency management assistance program that we offer, the first nations and Inuit health program that we offer, the indigenous community support fund that we offer and the first nation infrastructure fund and structural mitigation that we offer?

For my second question, to add to that, how can we also leverage that and the investments that we make to then promote other infrastructure investments as they relate to strengthening the economy, strengthening health care and strengthening other areas that may be of interest to indigenous communities?

I'll start off with Chief Ottawa.

• (1510)

[Translation]

Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa: Thank you for the question.

The society we live in, especially in this era of humanity, presents significant challenges for us. We need to reduce the effects of climate change. Society industrialized from 1875 onwards, and it only took 140 years to create the situation we are enduring now. We have big problems to tackle. There are immeasurable and urgent challenges that we must address together.

They say the atmosphere is ruined. Maybe we need tougher regulations on industry to stop deforestation, among other things. Maybe we should require farmers to turn to more diversified and integrated agriculture. These examples come to mind when you ask me this question.

We should also encourage people to consume less. We should regulate various industry sectors to limit the obsolescence of all kinds of appliances. This obsolescence forces people to keep buying more efficient equipment, resulting in more pollution and even more harm to the environment.

[English]

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Chief Ottawa.

Go ahead, Chief Lampreau.

Chief Arnold Lampreau: Thank you for the questions.

Right now, Shackan band is in the highway corridor. When we look at what has happened here in the last year and over the last few years, even back to 2013 and 2017, there were mudslides and different things like that which affected our community. When we look at the economic development part or the economic viability, or even the chances of it, they are very slim to none. When we look at the amount of work that could potentially be done right now, the only thing that's really going to be beneficial to the Shackan band is the gravel pit, because of the highway rebuild through the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, and that's probably it. There is going to be a little bit of employment through that rebuild.

For economics or looking to the future, we need to look at other places to live or to move to. There is no chance of economics when you have a major devastation within your community, part of your band lands are no longer there.

You look at places like Kamloops or Westbank or you look at Osoyoos, and they basically have lakes and cities near them. There's the potential viability for development and economics and taxes. In building Sun Rivers, such as Kamloops did, you have that chance to gain revenue through housing potentials and leasing your land.

There's none of that where we live. I invite you. I've told Minister Hajdu, Minister Rankin and Minister Farnworth to come on out. I'll take you out there. I'll drive you there, and you'll actually see what's happening. Come on out.

• (1515)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Chief. I think I'll take you up on that offer.

To both chiefs, we look forward to working with you on this file upon conclusion of this study. It sounds like we have some work to do.

Thank you for your testimony today.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Badawey.

With that, I would like to thank our four witnesses today, Chief Lampreau, Debbie Lipscombe, Raymond Lamont and Chief Paul-Émile Ottawa.

As Mr. Badawey said, what this is all about is the fact that we need to deal with increased numbers of emergency situations due to

climate change. What will help this committee the most is to come up with ways to not only mitigate but also to prepare, in some cases, where it's going to happen, to deal with it when it does happen and then, of course, to recover from it afterwards.

Thank you very much for your testimony today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your frank responses to our questions. You live in an area vulnerable to climate change and the emergencies it causes. We are glad to have had the benefit of the expertise and advice of those who live there.

[*English*]

Thank you once again for giving your time today to help us with our study on emergency preparedness. Thank you.

With that, this meeting is now adjourned.

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