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consolidated claim and then subject to audit by the Department of Supply and Services. The provincial Government is well aware of that arrangement. The Minister responsible, Mr. Jackson, will be examining his alternatives in that regard, I am sure. I simply want to point out that we have used this arrangement on a number of occasions, most recently for a flood in the Northwest Territories within the last month. It is there and available to help.

Natural disasters are just that, disasters. We wish they did not happen. We are grateful that in this instance there was no loss of life. We are sorry about the loss of property. I hope and believe that we have taken all necessary action to ensure that the damaging effects of the loss of property are ameliorated to the best of our ability. I think this Government's commitment to forest industries is demonstrated by the existence of the Ministry of State for Forestry and the very generous forest management funds which will be spent in the next few years, as well as our ongoing commitments to forest fire-fighting equipment. This is an important part of the forest management program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Jim Fulton (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, the issue of the fires burning over the past week in eastern Canada is most serious, and I am pleased that we have an opportunity for an emergency debate on it. There has been an enormous loss of our national forests, provincial forests, and in many cases private woodlots. The fires have primarily been in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Newfoundland has had the worst fires in 25 years. Some 17 major fires have burned over 81,000 hectares of forest land. That is in excess of 300 square miles, which is larger than some countries.

The worst fires on record in Newfoundland were in 1961 when 4 per cent of the province was razed. Some 400,000 hectares were lost and 8,600 people had to be evacuated as their homes were endangered by the fires. The worst fires have been near Great Gull Lake and Westport on the northeast coast of Newfoundland. Water bombers have been sent from as far away as Saskatchewan to assist in putting out some of these very large fires. This past Saturday some 1,000 or more people were evacuated from their homes in Grand Falls and near Windsor in Newfoundland, and also at Gander and near Baie Verte.

At the same time, in New Brunswick, over 1,000 people were evacuated from the nearly 100 forest fires burning in the region. In New Brunswick the fires have claimed close to a full year's harvest, and 25 times as much forest land has burned this past week as was lost in the whole of last year, some 40,000 hectares, or over 150 square miles. As one Member who spoke previously pointed out, many more tens of thousands of hectares of brush and scrub land have also been lost. There have been about 50 fires in New Brunswick, 11 of which were out of control at one point or another over the weekend in the areas of Newcastle, particularly near Tracadie, which was

levelled by fire in 1935. Many of the trees burned near Tracadie had reached the stage of maturity and were about to be harvested.

Great efforts have been made by forest industry workers, government workers, volunteers and the Salvation Army. There have been many heroes, yet unsung, who put their lives on the line to protect homes and property and in an effort to put out some of these large fires. Ontario sent a Canadair 215 water bomber to New Brunswick. Other planes, 35 in total, have been there fighting the fire, including some from Quebec and, as the Associate Minister of Defence (Mr. Andre) pointed out, through our agreement with the U.S., from the State of Maine.

One of the questions which remains unaddressed by the Government so far is what is going to happen to private woodlot owners. This is clearly and primarily a provincial responsibility and we can only hope there will be an early joint statement from the federal and provincial Governments, particularly regarding reforestation of some of those private lots and Crown lands which have been so severely damaged.

One thing I find peculiar is that the companies have been making statements, today and yesterday, indicating they can continue their harvesting simply by altering their cutting plans. This is not possible for many of the small private woodlot owners and I certainly understand that. Although my grandfather moved west around the turn of the century from New Brunswick, for the century and a half before he moved his family operated, and continue to operate a furniture factory that required the operation of a number of woodlots to provide the hardwood. I know how deeply the loss of private woodlots can affect individuals.

The Minister indicated there are plans under way to compensate those affected as a result of the Gagetown accident and that he has initiated an investigation and board of inquiry to look into it. It is clear that the fires were due to shelling, apparently from a misfired missile. We have to look at the evidence given by Captain John McComber, who is reported to have known the fire danger was listed as very high, and that during target practice last Tuesday, they continued to use high explosive live ammunition, for the reason he gave publicly, so that the shells being fired some 10 to 15 kilometres away could be viewed through binoculars.

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Under further questioning, it is interesting to note that Captain McComber pointed out that during conditions which are listed as extreme, the target practice is halted and they use white phosphorus ammunition only, which has no incendiary capacity, as did the highly explosive ammunition that was used on Tuesday, which caused an extremely damaging fire in the Gagetown area.

In that fire, 1,000 people had to be evacuated from their homes in and around Upper Gagetown and Burton. On Friday the Moncton airport had to be closed for about an hour. There