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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 32. Pursuant to the order of reference of Monday, October 5, 2009, we are continuing our consideration of Bill C-37, an act to amend the National Capital Act and other acts.

Joining us today, from the Regional Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development in the Outaouais, is Nicole DesRoches, general director; from the Gatineau Park Protection Committee, Jean-Paul Murray and Andrew McDermott; and from the Alliance To Save Our Greenbelt, Mr. Al Speyers, president.

I've asked Nicole if she'd like to start. I think you know the routine of presentations and then questions.

Ms. DesRoches.

[Translation]

Ms. Nicole DesRoches (General Director, Regional council for the environment and sustainable development in Outaouais): The Regional council for the environment and sustainable development in Outaouais is one of Quebec's 16 regional environmental councils. Quebec is divided into 17 administrative regions.

It has been in existence since January 1990, and, over the past 20 years, we have worked on a number of issues involving transport, wetlands, education, forests and everything directly or indirectly related to natural spaces and environmental protection.

We've also presented a number of briefs to the National Capital Commission, the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, the City of Gatineau—I won't name them all. We sit on many environmental and sustainable development committees, all to carry out our mandate for joint action and resource conservation.

We were also members of the former Coalition SOS Leamy and the Coalition for NCC Renewal. We were members of the greenbelt coalition and the Gatineau Park coalition. In other words, our agency monitors NCC files quite closely. But we are also partners, since we sit on a number of committees, including the interprovincial transport committee. Over the past five or six years, we have taken part in virtually all the consultations organized by the NCC, concerning both the park and the capital core. We are also partners in certain activities, such as the clean-up of the banks of the Ottawa River. This means that the NCC is an agency that knows us and that we know well.

A commission to manage personal and real property in the territory of a capital and its surrounding areas plays a particular role for citizens of this country. However, it should not be forgotten that actions are being carried out in an area occupied by a local population and that, consequently, an effort must always be made to strike a balance between the two. And this fact should be reflected in the preamble. The protection of the natural environment is desirable in all respects, but the human environment should not be neglected, either nationally or locally. A satisfied population takes part in the development of the capital and assists in extending its reach.

The preamble of Bill C-37 also provides that it is important to ensure that the natural environment of the National Capital Region is preserved for the enjoyment of all Canadians. However, this is quite vague because the environment must be protected based on specific ecosystems, highly developed practices and the laws of the provinces where the lands are located. For example, Leamy Lake Park is a recreational park, with a protection aspect. Mowing the lawn down to the water's edge and preserving large grassy spaces that serve no purpose are part of management from another era. Quebec's policy on shorelines, littoral zones and flood plains requires that a 15-metre band be protected. The City of Gatineau and the RMC of Collines-de-l'Outaouais have adopted regulations to that effect.

NCC staff has made efforts, except that, when this is contracted out, the subcontractors and contractors aren't necessarily aware of the new orientations or are not concerned about them. So there's a problem.

You are also aware of the other problem of the non-migrating geese: they have adopted this type of development and adore the cut grass at the water's edge. At some point, environmental protection will have to be expanded and certain elements added based on ecosystems and recognized practices.

With respect to Bill C-37, we agree on the proposed structure, that is to say that there should be a distinction between the role of chairperson of the board of directors and the head of the NCC. We also agree that public meetings should be held since the Coalition for NCC Renewal recommended that.

I now come to the changes we are proposing. In our opinion, paragraph 10(1)(a) of the National Capital Act should be amended as follows:

[...] prepare plans for and assist in the development, conservation and improvement of the National Capital Region, in partnership with local authorities having development authority and in consultation with the public, including in relation to transportation in that region, in order that the nature and character of the seat of the Government of Canada may be in accordance with its national significance, the whole in accordance with the environmental targets and consistency among the plans of the various local authorities.

The NCC has played a role in the capital's programming, planning, preservation and development since its inception.

● (1540)

Times have since changed. The development role devolved upon it today overlaps with that of the provinces and municipalities. The cities and RMCs have established development schemes and urban plans, which they did not do 30 years ago. The federal entity that has development powers over a municipal territory creates jurisdictional problems. Everyone would benefit by a better partnership between the cities, municipalities, RMCs and the NCC.

I'm not blaming the NCC, but as regards land use planning, the act could provide for the formalization of meetings to ensure consistency among the plans of all the parties.

There's also the infrastructure question. Some interprovincial bridges are the NCC's jurisdiction, while others fall under that of Public Works. That department has better teams, but its primary purpose may not be the improvement of the capital, judging from the MacDonald-Cartier bridge, which has rusted. It should be seen whether a single manager could facilitate matters for everyone. The bridge patrol is another issue. Sometimes it's the RCMP that takes charge of it, whereas at other times, it's the Sûreté du Québec or the municipal police force of one city or another. Perhaps it should be determined which federal authority takes charge of interprovincial bridges.

Under the bill, section 10 of the National Capital Act would be amended by adding the following after subsection (1):

(1.1) The Commission shall furnish, maintain, heat and keep in repair the buildings on the lands described in Schedules 3 and 4 and shall maintain and, from time to time as required, improve those lands.

Since this is 2009, we could add this: "In accordance with recognized energy efficiency standards and practices."

With regard to the National Interest Land Mass, it is interesting to note that criteria will be established for determining the lands that are part of that mass. However, it would be particularly important, in light of the problems experienced in the early 2000s, that the process of establishing criteria be transparent and that the public have access to the list of lands considered for a period determined in advance of the non-national interest designation.

The problem stems from the grey area between what is of national interest and what is of local interest. The NCC considers land surplus based on its national mandate, but does not have the authority to offer it to local entities, even if that land is of historical importance to the local community. A mechanism should be provided for, as well as a scale of values reflecting the municipality's ability to buy land back. This does not mean, however, that everything should be handed over to the municipalities. The federal government protects structures of local historical importance elsewhere in the country

through other authorities such as Parks Canada. The NCC could play that role, together with organizations in the field.

Lastly, it is important to emphasize once again that Gatineau Park is a biodiversity jewel of western Quebec and, as such, is home to the largest number of endangered species appearing on all the lists. The 2005 master plan saw a change in orientation, from being a park for recreational activities to a park for the protection of natural heritage. This led to the preparation of a conservation plan in which the public took part. Protecting the perimeter without granting protection status to what is within that perimeter protects nothing, except the perimeter itself. The Quebec parks system has instituted committees for the purpose of harmonization with the areas where parks are located to ensure transparency and harmonious relations with the community. Gatineau Park could establish a similar committee.

We also consider it incoherent, during this financially difficult period, that funding should be granted to the Commission to buy back lands that are put on the market, rather than resolve the park's status once and for all. If the purpose of the bill was sustainable development and environmental protection, we think the proposals would be different.

In economic terms, what can be said about the amounts necessary to buy back lands in these times of rising prices? We find it utterly incoherent that the government should spend enormous sums to buy back lands when those amounts could be used to move the snowmobile trail the length of the park and be invested in education and awareness or in rebuilding heritage buildings within the perimeter.

● (1545)

Buying properties that have belonged to families for generations rather than leaving them to a single family is, in our view, to care little for the social aspect of sustainable development. It is understood that citizens who are privileged to live in a park must abide by certain development and environmental protection rules.

The major problem related to the presence of houses in the park stems from the fact that, until the park has class 2 national park status, based on the criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, it is the responsibility of the municipalities, which can grant building permits and minor variances that often run counter to protection and conservation criteria.

The buildings along Meech Lake Road are one example among many. It is true that Quebec owns lands in the north sector of the park and that there has been a management agreement between the Government of Quebec and the National Capital Commission since 1993. The park is also on Quebec's list of protected areas. It is therefore hard to believe that it cannot intervene in the pursuit of this kind of agreement in the context of the management of a class 2 park. One can well wonder whether all the efforts necessary to achieve cooperation have been made.

In conclusion, CREDDO can see the efforts that have been made with regard to governance, but also the lack of will to rigorously protect the park in accordance with accepted international practice. This is not a criticism of the NCC's work, but rather a way to provide it with the full toolbox necessary to ensure environmental protection and the implementation of the Gatineau Park conservation plan.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Speyers.

Mr. Al Speyers (President, Alliance To Save Our Green Belt): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee.

My name is Al Speyers. I'm president of the Alliance to Save Our Green Belt, ATSOG.

ATSOG was established in 1993 to help protect and enhance the national capital greenbelt. We are also members of the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital and the Greenbelt Coalition of Canada's Capital Region .

Today I want to focus on a couple of points in the proposed amendments to the National Capital Act. The first point will deal somewhat indirectly with the boundaries of Gatineau Park as they appear now in the proposed act, as found under schedule 2. The other point I would like to raise relates to proposed section 18, as well as to proposed section 10.2, which deals with the national interest land mass. We'd also like to add at this time that my comments today are very consistent with comments made by Minister Baird, who appeared before this committee on Monday of last week.

First, while we clearly see the need to delineate the boundaries of Gatineau Park in order to enhance the long-term protection of the park against future erosion by development, unfortunately Bill C-37 offers no such protection for the national capital greenbelt.

It may be of interest to you that when the Diefenbaker government decided in the 1950s to implement one of the key recommendations of Jacques Gréber's report on a plan for the national capital, moneys were released by Treasury Board to the NCC specifically to begin the expropriation of land needed for the national capital greenbelt. Approximately 350 farms were thus obtained through this painful process, which eliminated the livelihoods of hundreds of people as well as those of their descendants. However, in spite of funds being released specifically for the creation of a greenbelt, today, more than 50 years later, the greenbelt remains unmentioned in any federal statute or regulation. It is, instead, rolled into the more general NILM, or national interest land mass, without any special protection of this very valuable national treasure.

We support and share Minister Baird's concerns that the greenbelt should not be whittled away and serve as a land bank for municipal projects. In our more enthusiastic moments, we had hoped that perhaps a new statute protecting the greenbelt could be enacted, such as a National Capital Greenbelt Act or something similar, to give it more recognition, more protection, more permanence. However,

nowhere in the proposed amendments do we find a direct reference to our greenbelt and nowhere do we find what the Gatineau Park now enjoys, a definition of its boundaries.

At a minimum, we had hoped that the greenbelt's boundaries could be enshrined in either the new National Capital Act or in some other federal legislation to help elevate this significant land mass and preserve it for posterity. In fact, a number of years ago we met with some senior representatives from Parks Canada to explore the possibility, the concept of providing for the greenbelt the same level of protection Canada's national parks enjoy under the National Parks Act. However, if this is perhaps not feasible at this time, we would urge that an important outcome of the current NCC review of the 1996 greenbelt master plan would be to ensure that there are adequate legislative protections for the greenbelt. This would be consistent with recommendation 8 of the panel on the NCC mandate review, which appears on page 31 of their report.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, I cannot overemphasize the need to codify our greenbelt in a federal statute. As recently as 1989, as a follow-up to recommendations made by what was then the Nielsen task force, the NCC's budget was cut significantly, and the NCC was then told to in effect sell land under its jurisdiction to make up the shortfall. To accomplish this, the National Capital Act was then amended to eliminate what is currently found under section 15 of the act, which provides the conditions under which the commission can buy, lease, and sell land. In addition, the commission's requirements under the Financial Administration Act were then also lifted so that the commission could keep all the proceeds of its land sales.

• (1550)

These changes to the National Capital Act had a profound impact on the character of the commission, which instead of being the traditional judicious steward of all our green spaces was now put in the position of having to sell off some of these lands to make ends meet. In short, the commission was transformed from the custodian of these lands to their outright owner, and now these lands are completely without protection.

The Nielson task force amendments to the National Capital Act in 1989 coincided with the need for significant areas of greenbelt land that the Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton required for a Blackburn Hamlet bypass and a Hunt Club Road extension. The greenbelt should not be a land bank for municipal projects. We are basing this observation on real events and painful experiences, of which there are more.

My second point refers to the proposed section 18 in the amendments, which states that the "Commission may expend for any purpose of the Act any money appropriated for its use by Parliament, received by it through the conduct of its operations or received by it by bequest, donation or otherwise".

It is the phrase “received by it through the conduct of its operations” that gives us some pause. Although it appears that the conditions under which the commission can buy, lease, and sell land under its jurisdiction are defined under section 15 of the current and proposed acts, that's assuming there are no deletions or changes. The commission is the National Capital Region's largest landowner, and land transactions, which are normally outside the scope of Crown corporations, are an integral part of the NCC's operations, .

Although “conduct of its operations” can be narrowly regarded as money generated from its day-to-day operations, such as admissions to special events, a broader interpretation of this phrase could easily include income generated from the sale of lands, including greenbelt lands. To avoid the possibility that section 18 could be interpreted as nullifying, or perhaps diminishing, section 15, either the “conduct of its operations” could be more clearly defined or a special clause could be added to exclude the possibility of land sales as part of those operations.

Our concern also focuses on section 10.2, which speaks to the national interest land mass, where the commission appears to have unilateral and arbitrary powers to “revoke such a designation”. In short, the commission under this proposed amendment has the power to reclassify downward any lands it deems necessary, including greenbelt lands. Already, significant sections of our greenbelt are classified as having higher or lower ecological significance. Our concern is that the ecologically less significant lands, although part of the whole, may lose their greenbelt designation to satisfy some development proposal. Under no circumstances should there be any perception that the commission might have a personal incentive to sell lands under its jurisdiction.

Mr. Chair and members, a previous administration also made amendments to the National Capital Act, resulting in significant and permanent loss of greenbelt lands. I'm here today to ask you if you can assure us that the greenbelt is here to stay in perpetuity. It is our opinion that our greenbelt deserves no less than what Gatineau Park received under this new act. Enshrine its boundaries in this act.

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McDermott and Mr. Murray.

Mr. Andrew McDermott (Co-Chair, Gatineau Park Protection Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. We thank you for calling us today as witnesses and hope that our comments will convince you to amend Bill C-37.

The Gatineau Park Protection Committee is a standing committee of the New Woodlands Preservation League, of which I am co-chair along with my friend and colleague, Jean-Paul Murray. Through our various campaigns we have fought and convinced the NCC to recognize the work of park founder Percy Sparks, persuaded parliamentarians from both houses to table seven Gatineau Park bills, and led a 2008 campaign to stop a 20-house subdivision inside Gatineau Park boundaries. Earlier this year we intervened at Quebec's administrative tribunal and managed to secure rightful NCC ownership of 61.5 square kilometres inside Gatineau park land.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, your committee has a letter to this effect to us from the Municipality of Pontiac.

The boundaries included in Bill C-37 were obtained as a result of our efforts and in cooperation with Senators Spivak and Banks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray (Co-Chair, Gatineau Park Protection Committee): Although advocated as the first national park for Quebec in 1912, in fact as the first national park outside the Rocky Mountains, Gatineau Park never acquired that status and remains the only large federal park lacking legislative protection and beyond the direct purview of Parliament.

Consequently, and contrary to national parks, its boundaries can change, its land can be sold, and roads can be built inside it, without the review, knowledge or approval of Parliament.

Since 1992, Gatineau Park has lost 8.5 km² of its territory. Although the NCC claims that the area of the park has increased as a result of the addition of Meech Creek Valley, that is incorrect. That valley lies outside the only existing legal limit, that is to say the one that was fixed by an order in council in 1960.

As well, in the absence of a proper land management mechanism, the NCC has allowed serious urbanization within the park. Since 1992, 119 new residences have been built there, 43 in the Kingsmere and Meech Lakes areas, as well as 76 in the Hull sector. Add to this a new Loblaws, a Tim Hortons, a Petro-Canada, a fire hall and five new roads. Even though the NCC claims that these facilities were never in the park, its own maps and those of Quebec's environment department prove the contrary. This carnage must stop.

Mr. Chairman, the NCC has shown on numerous occasions that it cannot be trusted to manage Gatineau Park in the absence of parliamentary oversight. It has sold lands in the park, adulterated its history, destroyed its historic buildings and permitted unbridled urbanization. And giving the NCC control of the National Interest Land Mass is tantamount to putting the fox among the chickens.

The government established the National Interest Land Mass in 1988 following a recommendation by the Nielsen Commission that it curtail the NCC and impose a managerial discipline on it and on its real estate transactions.

In addition, the Auditor General and the NCC Mandate Review Panel emphasized that the NCC was managing the NILM in an ambiguous and inconsistent manner and that the agency should be more transparent in this regard.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Over the last decades, a consensus has emerged on Gatineau Park as a result of public and private initiatives, federal-provincial cooperation, NCC consultations, and parliamentary debate. It's now generally felt that the park legislation must meet basic criteria to be reliable and effective.

Recent opinion polls provide compelling evidence of this consensus. For example, an online poll conducted by *Le Droit* last April found that 86% of respondents wanted the federal government to give Gatineau Park legislative protection. As well, in 2006 a *Decima-Ottawa Citizen* poll confirmed that 82% of the population wanted Gatineau Park to become a national park.

According to this consensus, Gatineau Park legislation should mandate conservation and ecological integrity as a top priority, enshrine boundaries, eliminate private property development, and dedicate the park to future generations.

[Translation]

Given the precedent established by the National Parks Act, any federal legislation to protect the park should respect the jurisdictions, sensibilities and territorial integrity of Quebec.

[English]

Unfortunately, careful analysis of Bill C-37 reveals that it meets none of the basic protection criteria, and fails to reflect any consensus on Gatineau Park. Moreover, Bill C-37 fails to respond to the concerns stakeholders and the public have raised before the NCC mandate review panel, and ignored several key recommendations made by the panel.

When it tabled its report in December 2006, the panel recommended greater parliamentary oversight of the NCC to ensure better accountability, transparency, and management. In particular, the panel insisted that Parliament be given final say in approving master plans for the nation's capital, as well as any changes to the national interest land mass, the NILM. The panel also urged the government to amend the National Capital Act to include a charter that would clearly define Gatineau Park's mandate and guarantee its better protection. Bill C-37 fails to provide either the greater legislative oversight the panel recommended or a charter defining a vision for the park. Instead, it gives cabinet authority to approve master plans and allows the NCC to make changes to the NILM and to Gatineau Park boundaries. As a result, the NCC's shady land deals and boundary changes will remain shrouded in secrecy and subjected to public criticism.

To fully address the problems facing Gatineau Park—fragmentation because of new roads, and urbanization because of new building—park legislation should rest on the five pillars we propose in our brief. Failure to amend the bill as suggested will allow boundary changes, residential development, and road building to continue to frustrate the public's ability to enjoy their park. Currently, under NCC management, people are left with postage-sized beaches at Meech Lake because of residential proliferation inside what should be a national park.

Also, Mr. Chair, failure to recognize Quebec's territorial integrity in this bill will be a blow to federal-provincial relations.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: We urge your committee to amend this bill to ensure greater parliamentary oversight of the NCC and of the management of Gatineau Park. Legislation to protect Gatineau Park must entrench its limits, require that environmental conservation and integrity be a management priority, eliminate real property development and recognize that Gatineau Park was created for

future generations. It must absolutely take Quebec's territorial integrity into account.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, we quote the words of Percy Sparks, the founder of Gatineau Park, to a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons on June 26, 1956:

The public interest has been largely overlooked in respect to the land policy and in policies generally, of the [...] Commission, in planning Gatineau Park. I suggest that personal, financial and political interests of land owners in the area exercises undue influence in the making of policy in respect to this great project.

● (1605)

[English]

Gatineau Park is the cornerstone of a great memorial dedicated to the 42,000 Canadian soldiers who died defending our democratic values in World War II. Yet it is the least “democratic” park in the country, and the only one that doesn't have the benefit of parliamentary oversight.

The time has come to tear down the walls of elite accommodation that surround Gatineau Park. The time has come to give the park back to the people, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Ms. DesRoches, Mr. Murray, Mr. Speyers and Mr. McDermott, I want to welcome you. Thank you for accepting the invitations.

[English]

You're aware of how this committee works. We have rounds. The first round is seven minutes, and then we go to another party, so some of the questions might be rather quick.

[Translation]

Ms. DesRoches, is that all right?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Ms. DesRoches, I thought you had an opinion on private properties located inside the park.

Do you object to those properties or do you accept the idea that there are private properties inside the park?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: I accept the idea that there are properties inside the park if people are aware that there are rules that must be obeyed.

However, even though the park has a boundary, we're still facing a lot of ambiguity. The NCC has been given the means to purchase private properties, but it cannot buy them all because the cost of those properties is phenomenal. Since the park has been given no status, and because it is the responsibility of the four municipalities that surround it—Pontiac, La Pêche, Chelsea and Gatineau—absolutely awful things have been permitted.

For those who know well how the municipal level operates, minor variances are a tool to enable municipalities to relieve certain restrictions. As you know, minor variances—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Please excuse me, madam, but we're going to be short of time.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: I agree—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What is your solution?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: The solution is that, if the park becomes a park with a status, the municipality no longer has responsibility for the park. So we avoid all these problems: for example, if someone wants to subdivide his lot because its zoned residential... At that point, the park is the jurisdiction of all three authorities. If the park is at least given a status, municipal authority is ruled out.

[*English*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay.

Mr. Speyers, I think we're talking the same language.

In Bill C-37, clause 10.4 deals with environmental stewardship. We want to change the wording. We're saying that the NCC in priority must maintain the ecological integrity of the commission's real or immovable properties in the Gatineau Park, and we want to add that it must be applied to all other NCC properties, such as the greenbelt in Ottawa and all lands of national interest as described in section 10.2.

My understanding of your main beef is that the greenbelt is up in the air without any particular protection. I tend to agree with you, in the sense that if tomorrow morning we were to give protection to the Gatineau Park without touching the greenbelt, the government—although we want to change some of the rules—could turn around and decide to dismantle the greenbelt with only public opinion as a holdback.

Is that right?

Mr. Al Speyers: Yes. That's how I read it.

• (1610)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You agree that we should modify Bill C-37 with an amendment so that the ecological integrity is maintained and respected in all of the NCC's properties, such as the greenbelt.

Mr. Al Speyers: It would be wonderful if the greenbelt could be added in name. As far as ecological integrity, as you know, the greenbelt is significantly different from Gatineau Park. Several thousand people are employed within the greenbelt. There are roads crisscrossing it, power corridors, farms, reforestation projects, and wetlands.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: By saying we would maintain the ecological integrity, we would want to see no additional commercial or industrial development. We would maintain the status quo and there wouldn't be additional changes. Otherwise, without dismantling it, a government could simply say let's build an industrial park at this end and another one at the other end, and so on.

We are saying there is a status quo to be established, and the ecological integrity should be maintained at that level.

Mr. Al Speyers: It would be wonderful if you could find the precise wording to prevent unwarranted development of and within our greenbelt without impacting its ecological integrity. Our concern is that an argument could be made that we are still preserving the

ecological integrity if we're allowed to do this and that, because the land is of lower ecological worth, value, or significance.

So perhaps you and your committee could find a wording to enhance protection from unwarranted development, loss of land, and especially its contiguity and wholeness as it is now. The link is very fragile because there are new proposals to break that contiguity.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Mr. McDermott is next, and then Mr. Murray.

[*Translation*]

I carefully read your brief. I noticed that you had put a lot of energy into it. However, I don't think you have a lot of suggestions, but you do have a lot of criticisms.

I find it hard to constantly look back in the rearview mirror. I prefer to look ahead.

Mr. Murray, you've worked with Senator Spivak.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Absolutely.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: For how long?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I didn't work with her, I worked in collaboration with her.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: In collaboration with her. So Bill S-210 was much better, in your interpretation, than Bill C-37.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That moreover is the position advocated by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society in the letter it sent to members of the Standing Senate Committee on Energy, Environment and Natural Resources.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Murray, how many members does the Gatineau Park Protection Committee have?

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll come back to that question.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Are we out of time?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, madam; good afternoon, gentlemen.

Let's continue along the same lines, Mr. Murray. In your brief, you discuss five major pillars, which illustrate your thinking on Bill C-37. In particular, there is recognition of the park as a national park. Ecological integrity is also fundamental.

There are also other important elements, including Quebec's territorial integrity. I understand the first two pillars, but I would like to understand more about what you mean by the third. There's also the fact that Parliament must have the power, not Cabinet. I would like you to give us a little more information on that point and on the very delicate question of the prohibition against building new residences.

To summarize, there's the question of Quebec's territorial integrity and the fact that Parliament should have the last word, not the Governor in Council—

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's correct.

• (1615)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The other aspect is the prohibition against construction. I hand over to you.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Nadeau.

I'll start by mentioning that all the private member's bills that have been introduced to date have drawn on the National Parks Act.

In the first bill that was introduced, we cooperated with Mr. Broadbent on the wording of Bill C-444. First we prepared a preliminary draft by cutting and pasting sections from the National Parks Act. Then we presented that to the legislative drafter to make a bill out of it. Consequently, our five pillars are essentially designed to amend the National Capital Act such that Gatineau Park is managed as a national park. However, Gatineau Park was to be a national park starting in 1912. The process was thus never completed, and the park remained the only federal park that is not a national park.

With regard to the issue of residential construction, regardless of whether it was the Federal District Commission, the forerunner of the NCC, the Greber Report in 1950, the Advisory Committee's Report on the master plan to develop Gatineau Park in 1952 or the master plans of 1980, 1990 and 2005, all the planning exercises of the National Capital Commission have provided that all private lands within Gatineau Park were gradually to be recovered. That has not been done and, since 1992, construction has proceeded on 119 new residences and the park has lost 8 km² of land. This is real carnage.

With respect to the territorial integrity of Quebec, international law and especially Canadian law acknowledge the existence of the territorial integrity of the provinces. International law also recognizes the internal aspect of territorial integrity. In other words, the federal enclaves in Quebec, such as aboriginal reserves, ports, airports, communications facilities, military bases and other entities, are internal territories with internal boundaries, but, especially where the national parks are concerned, the federal government recognizes the internal aspect of the boundaries of Quebec's territorial integrity. Consequently, the National Parks Act provides that the consent of the province concerned must be obtained in order to change the boundaries of a national park in any province.

In my opinion, if we want to manage Gatineau Park as a real national park, this matter must be considered. Contrary to what Mr. Proulx said, I'm not just criticizing; I'm also proposing amendments. Our amendments propose that the Government of Quebec be involved in the process of preparing a management plan and demand that the Government of Quebec be not only consulted, but also that it give its approval before the boundaries of Gatineau Park are changed in order to expand it.

I hope that answers your questions, Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Another aspect that we were talking about earlier concerns Parliament. How can a decision of this importance be made? Some suggest that it should be the Governor in Council

that decides, but that decision does not carry the same weight as that of the House of Commons.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's correct.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Why does a decision of the House of Commons carry more weight than that of the Governor in Council?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Because the boundaries of Gatineau Park have been changed in the past. Its territory was cut in camera without anyone knowing, whereas, as part of a debate in Parliament, there were first, second and third readings, the presentation of a report, two committee studies and the vote in the House of Commons and in the Senate. The entire process took place in public view.

In my opinion, when you talk about a national capital and national issues, the elected representatives of the people, you, ladies and gentlemen, have the opportunity to take part in the debate and to represent your voters, who are all Canadians, all Quebecers, if we want to change the boundaries of a park that is supposed to have national status.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

Ms. DesRoches, you talked about a very hot topic in the region, bridges. We know that we are on the nth study and that, of the three alignments selected in the context of the current study for which the NCC is responsible, very important environmental issues are involved. I'm thinking, for example, of McLaurin Bay, which could be affected if one of the sections is approved.

What is CREDDO's position and what should the NCC's role be in this debate on the bridges?

• (1620)

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: I simply wanted to answer Mr. Proulx. I forgot to say that I don't want any new houses, but not that the NCC should buy the old ones.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Pardon me?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: I misunderstood your question. I don't want any new houses, but not that the NCC should buy back the old ones.

As regards the bridges, CREDDO is not in favour of the construction of a new bridge. There are wetlands in east Gatineau. I won't outline the entire history of the political decisions to build the bridges where they are now.

However, in 2009, we are convinced that the two provinces, the two cities and the NCC can sit down and discuss traffic, trucking, and find a solution. All parties are currently sticking to their positions, where they have one. Those positions change every day. I believe there is a way to come up with a coherent transport plan that puts the emphasis on public transit. We can't build a bridge simply to address a trucking problem. If a bridge is built, it's obviously that people will use it to travel by car. We can't say that we're going to solve the trucking problem by building a bridge. That will simply cause others.

Furthermore, the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau constitute the fourth largest centre in Canada. It ranks sixth for traffic waiting time. We are therefore not in the worst position with regard to traffic jams and congestion. I believe certain figures have to be studied. With regard to public transit, there is a railway bridge. The only new bridge that CREDDO would agree to would be another railway bridge in the east to link the two highways. I think that, in 2009, you should start thinking in other ways than in terms of cars. Seriously, the fact that we are still talking about new road infrastructure for cars is really an archaic way of addressing the situation.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for coming here and providing a very interesting point of view about the Gatineau Park.

You'll have to bear with me a little bit, because of course my experience with national parks makes me wonder about the direction you are proposing, to perhaps turn Gatineau Park into a national park. As one who has lived next to a national park all his life, I know the depth of difficulty sometimes in dealing with national parks. Once you establish them it's very difficult to change their pattern. They have management plans that may be reviewed every 20 years. You might have a chance to intervene in the direction they take. They're designed to be ecologically very sound, and I appreciate that. As well, national parks have policies like "no more through roads". Their direction is to reduce traffic within national parks boundaries.

So I'm curious. How would you think this would be the best structure to put over this? Can you not see that this is actually quite a special area that has a number of very integrated uses that would probably need a more flexible approach for all the residents and all the people surrounding this area? That's my concern, through what I've heard from you.

• (1625)

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Thank you.

You raised a number of great points. If you look at it historically, there has been a lot of effort put into the creation of national parks, not just in Canada but in the United States, and they've gone through a lot of pains. The creation of the first parks in the United States encountered some of the same problems that happened here with respect to Gatineau Park and, assuredly, other parks in Canada. That is the conflict between users and also the conflict between the public and private owners, because if you go anywhere there is going to be development. People are going to live somewhere, and they live in Gatineau Park right now.

Again, what was supposed to be the first national park east of the Rockies was never created as a national park essentially because of a battle. It comes down to a Hatfield-McCoy situation: the private owners against the public, and the private owners won out.

If you know anything about Gatineau Park, there are three main lakes. Well, there are four, but there are three contiguous lakes—Lac Philippe, Lac Mousseau, and Lac Meech. The people on Lac Philippe were expropriated.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Francophones.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Most of them were French. The people on Meech Lake were never expropriated.

In this bill we're not advocating for expropriation. That would be the route of a true national park act. We're looking for something special here, and it comes down to right of first refusal. No one is advocating for expropriation, and I think at the same time people have to remember how fortunate they are to live in what is supposed to be a national park.

So to your point about flexibility, it's more than flexible at present.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Quebec created national parks—"national" being the UICN appellation for national parks. They have committees. I sit on one of those committees, because in Plaisance, which is now a national park, it used to be what was called a *réserve faunique*, and now it's a park and there's a committee. At first, everybody was saying "Whoa, we won't be able to go there", but there's a committee and the mayor sits on it, and people from the community. And there are diverse economic activities. It's going really well. It has been going for five years now and it's getting better and better.

I think if there are problems with national parks, maybe it's a problem of communication. When you sit down with the community around it.... And of course the community is fairly well populated around Gatineau Park. You know, part of the park is in the city of Gatineau, and there are three other municipalities around it with about 6,000 to 8,000 population, and I'm in one of them.

I think if you sit down and you deal.... Gatineau Park has a plan every five years, so I don't think that is a problem either. If you establish a committee, it's called a *comité d'harmonisation*. Everybody on the committee meets two or three times a year to discuss avenues, and there are friends of the park. I think there are ways of dealing with this. If we have more through-ways going through the park....

As I said, the biodiversity of western Quebec is the greatest biodiversity in Quebec. The park has the most species that are protected in one way or another. If we don't protect this park and we still have through-ways going through it, it will be a problem to protect its environment.

I might also say that a lot of people go out to the park with their bikes now, but they take their cars to carry their bikes. Obviously, they want to be there because of the environment, so you have to protect the environment if you want people to enjoy the environment. It doesn't mean that people can't do anything, but obviously you have to protect the environment if you want them to enjoy it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I appreciate that. I take my bike from my apartment and go all the way up into the Gatineau Hills, and I find it to be an extraordinary place. I appreciate that.

What you're suggesting, then, would be less than a formal national park but a.... I'd like to really understand what we're getting at here, because I'm very familiar with how national parks work. I want to clearly understand how you feel, if this were to be a national park, how it would work to accommodate in a very useful fashion all these pressures that are around it.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Well, it's because of the pressures that it needs to be a formalized statute. Otherwise the pressures are so great that even though you say we are protecting Gatineau Park according to the rules of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, if you don't have to, you know, you open doors, then the doors get bigger. So obviously you need a statute, a national park statute. Now, who manages it is something else, but the statute has to be a national park statute. It's the only way it will be preserved.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

As a point of clarification for the witnesses, the provinces of Ontario and Quebec have both been invited before the committee.

Mr. Mayes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question I'd like to direct to Mr. Speyers, please. Are you saying that the NCC does not have any influence on development permit applications that currently come to local governments around the park?

Mr. Al Speyers: Oh yes, it does, sir. According to my understanding, it certainly does.

Mr. Colin Mayes: So what guidelines do the local governments have to follow to ensure that the greenbelt is protected? Are there guidelines in place?

Mr. Al Speyers: Other than the greenbelt, for example, being mentioned by name and the boundaries being defined in the Ottawa official plan, in terms of actual guidelines of what can and cannot be done with the greenbelt, I'm not aware of any, sir.

Occasionally it's been our experience that there's some sort of a development proposal—for example, the one that comes to mind is the building of a large water theme park in the west end of the greenbelt. This happened just after the previous greenbelt master plan was completed. I don't think the ink was dry when it was announced that the commission was strongly supporting the development of a rather large tract of greenbelt land that had been defined in that plan as ecologically very significant—a natural area that linked the Stony Swamp waters with the Ottawa River—and yet they wanted to proceed with building.

We took this case to the Ontario Municipal Board and tried to resist it as much as possible. Fortunately, the business plan itself was faulty. We don't have the climate here to make a water theme park profitable, but it does indicate the constant and relentless pressure the greenbelt is under.

I should be fair. The NCC at that time was still under the amendments of the Nielsen task force, which allowed them to sell land and retain the proceeds. Since then, Minister Baird, as you know, restored the capital portion—I think \$10 million annually. He

has restored that, having removed at least for now the incentive for the commission to sell land and shore up its own budgetary needs.

The pressure remains. It's always there. There's road widening now with the proposed new rail system.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Do you think we need to change the jurisdictional authority in this area, or can it be done within the bylaws of the local government in the area, where they define what a greenway is and what can and cannot happen in the greenway? Do you not think that can be incorporated into the bylaws to protect those greenways?

Mr. Al Speyers: No, sir, for the same reason that the option was explored already in the 1950s as part of the national plan for the national capital, written by the great urban architect, Jacques Gréber. He also had no confidence in lower levels of government. He felt that the only way to have a greenbelt and to keep it was that the most senior level of government in Canada would have to establish it, maintain it, keep it, and preserve it.

We have no confidence at all, sir, from our long history with the local municipalities, and now, of course, the City of Ottawa. Cities are essentially vehicles for development. Their election campaigns are over 90% financed by the development community. Something has to stand in its way to keep this greenbelt for what it is.

As our city grows demographically and otherwise, it only increases in worth, value, and significance. If we are to maintain it as such and continue to make Ottawa a beacon or an example to the world, I think it's worthwhile doing what we can to keep it.

• (1635)

Mr. Colin Mayes: First I want to say, as a former mayor of both communities that I lived in—nine years in one and two years in another—I take offence at what you had to say. We take those responsibilities to govern our communities in a way that is sustainable and preserve the environment we live in.

Mr. Al Speyers: I meant no offence, sir.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: As long as municipalities only have revenue from taxes, they are always going to be subject to pressure from developers.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Forgive me for arguing this, but the fact is that they are duly elected and they're elected by the citizens. The citizens set out their community plans and direct their councils. I do believe in that.

Let's go back to the activities that are prohibited in a national park but right now are allowed in Gatineau Park and are having a negative impact on the park. Could you name a few of them?

Maybe I could ask this of Mr. Murray.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes, indeed. Well, you can build houses on private property inside Gatineau Park. You can't drink in Gatineau Park, but you can drink in a national park—beer or wine. That's a problem, if you can keep building houses. How many properties in Gatineau Park have 100 acres, 200 acres? There's the Radmore Farm, there's the Dufour property at Kingmere, there are properties that are ready to be developed.

If you develop property within a park, perforce you're creating pressure within the park, which will ultimately keep the people out. At Meech Lake you have houses all along the shoreline, which deny the people enjoyment of their lake.

They expropriated the francophones at Lac Philippe in 1954. Major General Howard Kennedy, who was chairman of the Federal District Commission, had a property, or his wife had a property, at Kingmere Lake, and he advocated expropriation everywhere in Ottawa, for the greenbelt, for instance, and for the francophones up at Lac Philippe. The people at Meech Lake and Kingmere, at the time—now the population proportion is probably about fifty-fifty English and French—allowed expropriation of the French. The people who had good parliamentary contacts and social contacts and legal contacts, well, they got to stay. As a francophone, I find that shocking. I'm appalled by that.

Sorry, I might have skated around the question—

Mr. Colin Mayes: Yes, skirted.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: —skirted, but the thing is that you can build houses in Gatineau Park on private property, and private property in all national parks is prohibited. Section 5(1)(a) of the Canada National Parks Act says no private property. What you build on in a national park is a leased piece of land, and according to national park rules and policies, mostly only for park purposes. So what is going on inside Gatineau Park right now is not for park purposes; it's for individual purposes.

As I said, we're not advocating expropriation. We sent out a brief to all members in which we explain what a right of first refusal is. It does not infringe on the individual property rights of the people; they get to keep all rights to their property up to and until the moment they decide to sell. But the NCC has a long-term policy, and it has had that policy since 1950, since Jacques Gréber, whereby it must gradually obtain all those properties for the public purpose. What we're advocating is not expropriation but giving the NCC the tools it needs to finish the job.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Do I have time?

The Chair: Monsieur Proulx.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Ms. DesRoches, a little earlier you made a comment on existing and new houses.

Could you give us an explanation on that?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: As Mr. Murray said, we can't permit new construction, but we aren't going to chase away the people who are already there. This is about the right of first refusal. When the park was created at Plaisance, there were houses, and there were agreements. However, the construction of new houses must stop.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What do you do with an owner who has more land than necessary and who decides that his children are all ready to have a house? Are you going to let him subdivide his land to enable his children to settle there?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: No, because if the park has national park status, it will no longer be under municipal jurisdiction. There will therefore be no more residential zoning or any opportunity to subdivide a lot.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: So it's preferable to ensure that the park doesn't have national park status.

● (1640)

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: On the contrary, it's preferable to ensure that it has national park status. The municipalities currently have jurisdiction over the territory.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's what I had understood.

Mr. Murray, you didn't answer me because the Chair interrupted us. How many members are there on your committee?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Two or three; it depends.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: If I ask you how old you are, you won't answer me: 39; it depends.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Could you tell me why that would be important?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I'm asking you the question to determine how serious you are.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Look at the page where we list the successes and results obtained by the Gatineau Park Protection Committee. We've managed to convince MPs and senators to introduce this bill—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Murray—

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I can answer your question concerning the NCC's powers.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Pardon me, Mr. Murray, but you are here as a witness, and we ask the questions. We would like you to answer us.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's what I'm trying to do.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: I read your brief. You talk about experts and broad consensus. That consensus exists among which organizations, Mr. Murray?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: When we talk about a consensus over the park, we consider what was said during the consultation exercise for the renewal of the NCC's mandate. The Coalition for NCC Renewal submitted a brief—Ms. DesRoches co-drafted it, I believe. They requested legal status for the park and a stop to real estate development in the park.

You'll find an exhaustive response in the brief I sent your office on Bill S-210. Of the 55 groups that made presentations during the consultation for the renewal of the NCC's mandate—I believe there are 16, including ACRE Chelsea—all wanted legal status, that is to say boundaries and a way of limiting residential development within the park. So there is a broad consensus on the subject.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: All right.

Mr. Murray, what do you do about the vested rights of the people who are already owners in the park?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: We respect them.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: However, you won't let them subdivide.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: What's the solution, Mr. Proulx? Is it to leave the park—

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Well, I'm asking you the question.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Well, I'm giving you an answer.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Tell me something. Do you live in the park?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: How far away from the park do you live?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Seventy-five metres from the park.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Have you previously bought land from the NCC?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: How much land did you buy?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: One lot, on the open market, Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What was its area?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: One acre.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: When you say “on the open market”, are you saying you bought it from the NCC or from another owner?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I bought it from the NCC.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: All right. That puts you 75 metres away from the park.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's correct.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: In your opinion, do the properties inside the park or bordering on the park have any added value because of their proximity to the park or of their location in the park?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I ask you the question. Do you live near the park as well, Mr. Proulx?

Mr. Marcel Proulx: No, sir.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No, all right.

Perhaps they do, perhaps they don't, but I don't know where your question is headed.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: It's not important. I'm asking you the question. What do you think?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I haven't consulted a real estate agent to determine that.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Good, all right.

You talk about section 43 in your brief.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You're talking about section 43 of the Constitution; let's get that straight.

I'd like to know why you refer to it. To my knowledge, Gatineau Park doesn't overlap a territorial boundary between Ontario and Quebec.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No. Section 43 states that the consent of the province must be obtained before boundaries are changed.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: What boundaries?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: The boundaries of the province.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: All right.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: The principle of territorial integrity, in international law, cuts across that of the internal boundaries of a territory. In our brief, if you read it, we talked about national parks, military bases and aboriginal reserves. These are territories in a province that are under federal jurisdiction. International law therefore acknowledges the internal boundaries and integrity of the territory. To change the boundaries of Gatineau Park, as for the other national parks, we therefore recommend that the consent of the province be requested.

Currently, the boundaries of Gatineau Park have been changed to cut off 8 km². I don't know what you were doing when that happened. I had to make 150 access to information requests to determine what happened. Not a single MP complained or talked about it when it took place. So I wonder. If the Government of Quebec had been involved in the process, it would have been more transparent.

• (1645)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: You have section 43 for that.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I think Mr. Nadeau signed section 43 last week. Perhaps you should make your comment to Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Mr. Murray, thank you for your comments. I find you very positive.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Ms. DesRoches, earlier you gave the example of the Plaisance National Park as an example of cooperation between sectoral stakeholders and the people who work on the park project, which is a Quebec provincial park. Is that correct?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Yes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That park is relatively new, if I'm not mistaken.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Yes, it's the most recent.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Do you see the same operation in the management, for example, of the NCC and of the green spaces? Do you see the same major interest for citizens and for wilderness protection groups?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: The NCC is increasingly conducting consultations and establishing committees. However, there is no official harmonization committee, as for all Quebec parks.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: A number of committees are unofficial or ad hoc committees.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Are you suggesting that this kind of thing is provided for under the act?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Absolutely.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: In that way, it would be possible to gather the opinions of people in the sector through an official, not unofficial process.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Absolutely. An official committee could involve local authorities, the cities, provinces and the NCC. There is an unofficial tripartite committee that meets twice a year, but I believe it should be official for there to be some consistency among the various planning processes.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you.

Mr. Murray, in your brief, you talk about Bill S-210 and make two recommendations. You say this: “The first is based on section 4 (1) of the National Parks Act.”

That states that Gatineau Park is created for the Canadian people. Then you say: “The second proposed amendment is inspired by section 8(1) of the National Parks Act:” and quote this excerpt:

Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Commission when considering all aspects of the park's management.

You're talking about maintenance or restoration. Can you tell us more precisely what you mean by that?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Before answering your question, I would like to provide you with a little context.

With Mr. Broadbent and Ms. Spivak, we prepared proposals for the purpose of tabling private member's bills. However, during the meetings that preceded the renewal of the NCC's mandate, people told us that didn't take enough account of ecological integrity and that amendments therefore had to be made. These two proposed amendments were accepted by the Senate committee.

With respect to restoration, when a house reaches the end of its life cycle, as they say at the NCC, it is demolished and an attempt is made to “renaturalize” the location. I also believe that the NCC's mandate is to reclaim municipal roads within the park. That's stated in the master plans; I didn't invent that. I suppose that means that, in the event an obsolete municipal road is reclaimed, the asphalt is removed and an attempt is also made to “renaturalize” the location. An example of this might be what the NCC did at Kingsmere when it created the foot bridge to the Mackenzie King estate. It removed the old road and “renaturalized” it all.

So we're talking about “renaturalizing” the areas where that should be done. I believe that Bill C-37 should recognize this principle because, in its current form, it could conflict with the park master plan. The plan defines conservation as an ultimate priority. If we say we want to grant a right of review or to manage ecological integrity somewhat, that doesn't necessarily mean we'll consider that situation as being of the utmost importance.

• (1650)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: All right.

Ms. DesRoches, I'm thinking of the very structure of the NCC and its transparent and democratic aspect—we can see what goes on there. People from across Canada take part in the management and even in the decisions of the NCC.

As for the number of people involved, do you believe that a change should be made? Do you think that people in the sector, who work on the ground, could be more involved and in a more direct way, without the nature of the NCC's role being altered?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: I think it's six members from elsewhere in Canada and six local members. When we made our presentation, at the revision stage, it lacked a little biodiversity, as it were. It was mainly business people. I've got nothing against them, but it would have been interesting for a broader variety of people to be present.

I think committees have to be established at the local level. The NCC is still dealing with the fact that it has a national mandate but that its action is local. Those two aspects clearly should combine. As regards the Commission's decisions, having regard to what could be called the separation of powers, particularly as regards Gatineau Park and possibly the Green Belt, there could be local committees. That would enable joint action at the local level.

In recent years, there has been a lot of grumbling. Lands have been put in the non-national interest land bank, but we've never known how or why. In that sense, I believe that a lot of friction could have been avoided. The Commission holds its board meetings publicly, but obviously fewer people attend them during the day. I think the local population would prefer to be part of a committee that had a more restricted mission and handled really local issues.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Watson.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing.

Just so that I'm abundantly clear on the position of our panellists, which of you wants Gatineau Park to be established as a national park—any of you?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: None of us does.

Mr. Jeff Watson: None at all? Okay, but you want essentially the same management style. Just don't call it—

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Well, I want it to be called a national park.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Okay. I thought one of our panellists wanted it at least to be established as a national park.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: But that's not within the scope of the bill.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Mr. Chairman, notwithstanding, various groups have advocated national park status for Gatineau Park over the years—

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's correct. It would require expropriation of everyone.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: —but because this is so difficult in and of itself... A national park is quite frankly a different ball game. This could perhaps be a prelude to it down the road, but...

Mr. Jeff Watson: I was going to say that we had CPAWS appear before the committee, and they're advocating as well the creation of Gatineau Park as a national park.

I would agree with you, in that I don't think this is the proper process for establishing a national park; a process exists for that. This is primarily to address what seems to me the problem with the current conversation about a quasi-national park, and that is that the discussion lacks a real national context as well, in terms of other areas that would be competing for a similar or like designation. That's why having such decisions vested within cabinet is actually a good thing. They are charged, of course, with taking a national approach. They also have to balance issues of affordability.

If I read your brief correctly, Mr. McDermott and Mr. Murray, you talk about wanting to give the National Capital Commission legislative tools to acquire in-holdings. Such legislative tools, I think, would also create a budgetary obligation on the Government of Canada, would they not, to the tune of \$380 million, which is what I think your brief cites?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No. There was a question in the Senate. Senator Nolin raised a point of order arguing that Bill S-204 was a money bill, which as you know cannot be introduced in the Senate or by a private member unless you red-line the bill. The Speaker ruled that it wasn't a money bill.

What it is is a right of first refusal. The NCC can refuse to purchase the property or it can choose to purchase the property, but it already has the budgets to acquire some properties, and it's been doing so for a long time. Most recently it spent quite a few million dollars without having any of those extra budget appropriations.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: It looks on the face of it to be a large problem, but as Mr. Murray said, it would be up to the commission whether or not they would acquire that particular property—

• (1655)

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: And only when they decide to sell.

Mr. Jeff Watson: But you'd like them to acquire all those properties, would you not?

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Over the long term, we would.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So you'd like us to incur an obligation of \$380 million minimum.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: No, the plan should be on a gradual basis. And there are so many layers to this.

Mr. Speyers alluded to the fact that around the greenbelt, the NCC would sell off lands. I remember that, back in the 1990s, when various agencies falling under the Department of Heritage, of which the NCC is one.... For example, the Canada Council for the Arts received an extra \$20 million in funding. All these agencies were receiving extra stipends, but the NCC was still forced to sell its own land. That's the main reason why it shouldn't be given the powers to control the NILM. If they're doing these shady land deals right now, once they get the national interest land mass under their belt....

I know it may sound to some as if people are criticizing the NCC and everybody has a problem with it, but there's so much secrecy involved in what they're doing that it's the reason parliamentary oversight is needed.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: And I would add that—

Mr. Jeff Watson: Well, I would submit to you that cabinet, which is the Government of Canada.... Ultimately the government is

accountable to the public as well for their decisions, so I wouldn't suggest that there's no accountability for what cabinet does.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: But the NILM right now is controlled by Treasury Board, which as you say is a committee of cabinet. Some of its members are elected. What happens with this bill is that it gives control of the NILM to the NCC bureaucrats, and there's no oversight, there's no accountability, there's no democratic link.

I would also add, to your earlier question, that what we are asking for is exactly what has been in the master plan for decades. The NCC is obligated by Treasury Board Decision 809464, from September 15, 1988, to acquire all properties in Gatineau Park. We're not inventing anything; we're not advocating anything new. All we're asking is for the NCC to fulfill its commitments and obligations.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Which would create a financial obligation on the government.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: It already has that obligation.

Mr. Jeff Watson: Well, having it is almost useless, then, if you're not going to—

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: But what we're speaking of is that instead of acquiring the land, they've allowed the building of 119 new houses and have removed eight square kilometres of land from the park.

Mr. Jeff Watson: So do you want a bill with teeth or a bill with no teeth? What are you arguing for here? I'm not sure I understand your point.

If the bill doesn't give them the teeth to actually go ahead and do it, but you'd like to them to do it, then why not say that? Why not ask us for a bill that will give some real teeth to it?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: It's because we respect the rights of private owners to continue living in the park. The situation they're facing—

Mr. Jeff Watson: So does the Government of Canada, which is why we've put forward the bill the way it is.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes, and I would correct what the press said—

Mr. Jeff Watson: I'm finished, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: —about Minister Baird's comments last week. Minister Baird said two things. In essence, what he said is expropriation if necessary, but not necessarily expropriation, if you read the transcript.

What we're advocating is what the NCC has been advocating for decades but has not been doing. There are 119 new houses in the park and eight square kilometres of land removed, without any parliamentarian raising the hue and cry, except those in the Senate and a few of the members here.

The Chair: Monsieur Proulx.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Could I answer?

I'd like to say that you can have a national park. Parks Canada has decided in its criteria not to have private homes, but the national parks of Quebec have them—"national" being the international union's definition of national parks: category two parks. There are criteria, and the national parks of Quebec belong to this IUCN definition, and there are homes.

I don't want to spend \$380 million to buy homes. I find it absolutely crazy to do so. But you can create a park that has the status of park, and the people who live in the park still own their property and can give it to their children, but they can't subdivide.

So there are ways of doing it; it's not all black and white. And I think there are ways to explore this. The park needs a status so that more houses are not built, but it doesn't mean you have to buy out everybody who's there.

• (1700)

The Chair: Monsieur Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ms. DesRoches, isn't preventing people from subdividing their properties a form of expropriation? Do you think the government should offer financial compensation?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: They're lucky to be living in a national park, which already is a major privilege. The properties have risen in value in recent years, and I'm aware of that. I don't live on the edge of the park. And my children can't live in the municipality because they can't afford to buy a house there.

I think that people would be winning and losing at the same time. They live in a national park and know that their environment is protected. That's a privilege that's worth something. Most citizens don't have the privilege of living in a park. It's tit for tat.

I think it's possible to do that. It works quite well elsewhere. I don't see why that couldn't be the case in Gatineau Park.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Ms. DesRoches, I want to touch on other aspects of the bill, including the matter of the regional transport mandate. Bill C-37 just barely touches on the matter of a transport mandate with the tips of its fingers. The Liberal Party thinks it shouldn't do so just for the tips of its fingers, but with its entire hand.

How do you view that?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: As I said earlier, there should be a formalization of the issue and of the agreement between the cities and the two provinces. We've seen, moreover, what's happened with regard to the bridge issue. The two provinces agreed to say that there were three projects to review, not just one. Thank goodness they did that because, in my opinion—this is 2009—we have to be coherent. There are two major files that we have to share in the region, whether you're on one side or the other of our beautiful river, and these are the issues of water and transportation.

So, in 2009, the fact that we are still saying we're going to do this and you're going to do that without there being any coherence is absolutely incredible. There has to be a framework for this, and I think the NCC can play that role because transportation between the two cities right now is pretty much a mess.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Would you agree—we've discussed this at previous meetings here around the table—to the idea of responsibility for the bridges being transferred to the National Capital Commission?

The Commission currently manages two bridges.

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: There does have to be a manager. I say so in my brief.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Would you agree to the NCC's doing it, with the related budgets, of course?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: Obviously, because, when I look at certain bridges managed by other authorities, I don't think they contribute much to the improvement of the capital.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Bill C-37 refers to a master plan. The Liberal Party would also like that master plan to concern the issue of employment centres in the greater National Capital Region. That means that the 75-25 policy for Government of Canada jobs should be managed through that master plan of the National Capital Commission. The Commission would thus be able to play the role of police officer. In that way, it would ensure that the Government of Canada considers in the 75-25 division, not only those positions for which Treasury Board is the employer, as is currently the case, but all positions, that is to say all direct and indirect jobs at federal organizations. So 75% of jobs would be on the Ontario side and 25% on the Quebec side. We think the NCC is in the best position to manage that.

Obviously, with this 75-25 division, there would also be the question of sustainable development, which is the question of knowing where to set up such and such a department, how to attach it to existing municipal infrastructure, and so on.

Has CREDDO already examined this matter, Ms. DesRoches?

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: We've examined all those questions, but this is a very complex issue. If we had a lot of employers, it would be easy, but it's hard to say that Health Canada will go to such and such a place and that there has to be a division of employees.

Some people don't necessarily want to work on a certain side of the river, which complicates matters. I would at least be in favour of the government automatically considering businesses on the Quebec side when it comes to awarding contracts because the inequality is more on that side than the 75-25 division on one side and the other.

As for sustainable development, people clearly have to be brought closer to the employment centres, but it's difficult because there's only one major employer. It's hard to say, for example, that Public Works in Gatineau will be this and that Public Works in Ottawa will be that, and we can't decide whether the people who want to live near their place of work will live in such and such a location. There's the entire issue of language and of belonging to provinces. So it's a very complex issue.

As I said, I would be more in favour of contracts whereby people would work on both sides of the river. That's where there's more unfairness, I think. Is it up to the NCC to manage that? I'm not sure.

• (1705)

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for attending today.

I will say that I've listened with interest in relation to the issue of the first right of refusal. I was a lawyer before this life and I do understand it. I've been involved in many commercial transactions that deal with it. Although there may seem to be no positive implications or negative obligation on landowners for fair market value, I would suggest that if a family wants to transfer land for value to another family member and to keep it in the family, indeed that first right of refusal will negate the ability to do so.

From my perspective, I think enough has been done over the years in this area, especially to francophone families and others, to take land away from families who have had it for centuries, if not decades, at least. So I do think, from that perspective, the government is treading lightly, because certainly those implications are not positive. And I do want to say that, and put that on the record, because it may not create an obligation on the landowners, but it does negate any opportunity to sell to family members and to keep it in the family.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I would suggest—

Mr. Brian Jean: My question, Jean-Paul Murray, if I may, is this. Mr. McDermott talked specifically about shady land deals. I heard that. Quite frankly, it scared me a bit. I would like to know what you're talking about there and what kind of evidence you have in relation to this, or what you're talking about as far as the description of “shady” is concerned. “Shady”, to me, means illegal.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Well, no. We weren't hinting that they were illegal. What we were saying is nobody knew about it. Parliamentarians weren't brought in. I think there were 150 questions on the order paper of both houses. Mr. Proulx might have put a few questions on the order paper to find out what was happening.

Mr. Brian Jean: You're going to have to put this in context for me.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Okay. For instance, when we say that eight square kilometres of land have been removed from Gatineau Park—119 new houses, five new roads—do you know how much work it took to just come up with those facts?

Mr. Brian Jean: I understand, Mr. Murray, but that—

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: So it wasn't transparent. “Shady” means not transparent.

Mr. Brian Jean: With respect, I don't think they took the land and put it somewhere else. What they did is they sold the land and developed it. It's an active park, just like Stanley Park is an active park, just like many parks across this country are active parks. Indeed, the residents continue to enjoy it. From “shady”, you're just talking about how, in essence, they didn't consult with you or your organization.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No, they didn't consult with you and Parliament, generally.

What I would say about shady is you build a new residential subdivision in the Lac des Fées area of Gatineau Park. Now, the NCC will tell you that's no longer in the park. Well, I'm sorry, the 1960 order in council, which set the boundaries, which is the only existing legal boundary of Gatineau Park, allowed 68 houses to be built inside Gatineau Park there.

When we say shady land deals, I mentioned earlier the Meech Creek Valley. The NCC will always tell you, “No, we've actually increased the size of Gatineau Park”. Well, they haven't. They've reduced it by eight square kilometres. When they say Meech Creek Valley is inside Gatineau Park, if you ask the NCC when it comes before you, “What is the legal boundary of Gatineau Park?”, it's the 1960 order-in-council boundary. You'll find a copy of the order in council in the Bill S-210 brief that we sent you.

When the NCC says they've expanded the park, they're not being upfront, not being transparent, because the park has been reduced in size. Lands, by a change—

• (1710)

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. Murray, by a change in classification within the park is what you're suggesting.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Well, if you build a—

Mr. Brian Jean: A use of the park. The park lands have been changed because people now live there who didn't live there before. There are houses and buildings and Tim Hortons, etc.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's right, and that's still in the park, and the NCC will tell you it's not. So that's what we mean by “shady”: it's not transparent, it's not upfront.

Mr. Brian Jean: Are you saying they have a positive obligation on doing that?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I think they should tell Parliament. If you look at the documents that were put out during the NCC's boundary rationalization exercise, they said they couldn't talk to the public about it because it would increase land speculation. That was their excuse. Well, I'm sorry, it's a national-like park and it should be treated as such. It should benefit from the full debate in Parliament that we are advocating.

Mr. Brian Jean: Do any of the witnesses here today believe that this legislation we're moving forward with as a government is not a positive step in the right direction? Just a yes or no. Is it not a positive step in the right direction?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No.

Mr. Brian Jean: Other people?

Mr. Andrew McDermott: No, it's sideways, at best.

Mr. Al Speyers: As far as it goes, sir, in our opinion it is a positive step forward—as far as it goes.

Mr. Brian Jean: Yes, and that's what my point is. I don't really understand from Mr. McDermott or Mr. Murray how you would like the government to go, because there was consultation. I believe there was something in the neighbourhood of 32 recommendations, and 31 of those recommendations the government is following.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: But there's not parliamentary oversight, and you should be asking for parliamentary oversight. You have a fiduciary and financial responsibility to your electors and all Canadians.

An hon. member: It's not a national park.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No, we don't want it to be a national park. We want it to be managed transparently.

An hon. member: It's still crown land.

The Chair: Order, please.

We have a few minutes left. I'm going to make one more round. I'll give every member, every party three minutes each.

Mr. Proulx.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McDermott or Mr. Murray, there are some tourism and recreation events or uses going on in the park. With these, some bring on user fees, some don't. How would you see the future of these different uses in the park if we were to recognize this as—I'm not sure of the terminology—an “almost” national park? Whether they be bikers, whether they be cross-country skiers, whether they be hikers—call it what you want—how would you deal with that? What would you recommend to the NCC?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I'm philosophically opposed to user fees because I think Canadians pay for the park already through their taxes. I'm opposed to anything that would limit access or constrict or reduce access of the public to their park.

You see, the fundamental philosophy, if you read what Percy Sparks said about Gatineau Park, he said essentially that they were creating a park close to the capital for the people, because only the rich could go to Banff or to Jasper or to other parks at the time.

Especially considering that it's the cornerstone of a great memorial dedicated to the 42,000 soldiers who died in World War II defending our democratic values, and it's the park of the Canadian capital, I think the park should bend over backwards to be democratic.

Some people want user fees; some people don't want cars in the park. You look at what some of the residential associations are saying, and that's what they want. They want to preserve their private park and keep the people out. So I'm saying make it public first, and user fees if necessary, but not necessarily user fees.

There, that's a good liberal response.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: That's it, thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau, it's your turn.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One of the examples I found in my research is that of Lac Saint-Pierre, near Sorel, which was officially recognized by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve. Citizens had been settled on its islands for decades without any property right. When the island was recognized, the Quebec and Canadian governments had to resolve the issue because the land did

not belong to those people. However, they had been living there for one or two generations.

To ensure it was accessible to everyone, the last occupant clause was used, that is to say that those who were living there at the time could stay there. However, once the owner left the house for good, it automatically became the park's property.

Would you be in favour of this kind of approach for Gatineau Park? Ms. DesRoches and Mr. Murray could answer.

• (1715)

Ms. Nicole DesRoches: That's one solution. There is no single solution; there are various ways of doing it. I'm sure we could find other examples.

As I've already said, there are still farmers in Plaisance National Park, and there are agreements. I don't believe that has to be black and white. It seems to me there is a way of reaching an agreement, of sitting down with people and seeing what the best solution is. The houses represent 2% of the area of the park. I believe there are roads, that the houses have gardens and dogs and that they have an impact on more than 2% of the territory. However, the first thing is to sit down, talk it out and see what the best solution is. For the moment, we're talking amongst ourselves, but the people who live in the park and the NCC aren't here. I'll always be in favour of joint action and dialogue. We can come up with solutions.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The representatives of the citizens and owners organizations appeared, and the NCC will be testifying soon. I'll ask them the same question.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Thank you, Mr. Nadeau.

In fact, it's not entirely correct to say that only 2% of the park belongs to private residents. If you look at a map of the private residences inside the park, you'll see that they clog up all the infrastructure around Kingsmere Lake, Meech Lake, the boat ramps and trail heads. That creates a kind of Berlin wall. Their impact is much more significant than only 2%.

In response to your last question concerning the last occupant, personally that would suit me. But the problem has to be solved because private property is unacceptable in what is supposed to be a public area. The right of first refusal or the last occupant would be entirely acceptable in view of the fact that that would solve the problem in the short or long terms. The problem is still a problem, contrary to what some people think. That's been part of the NCC's policy since 1950 and the Federal District Commission.

How can we be fair to the people still living there? In my view, they have a right of first refusal. The Supreme Court has clearly held that a right of first refusal would not violate owners' property rights. It's a problem that has to be solved.

A Conservative member asked whether having a right of first refusal would be a problem for the occupants. In my opinion, that's not a problem. That respects their property rights; they can live on the premises. I'm told they can even transfer their ownership to their children, through a trust or right of inheritance, if they wish. That respects the rights of the people who are there. They didn't form the park as it stands; they inherited it. Parliament also has a financial and fiduciary responsibility toward the people to enable the NCC to implement its master plan gradually.

Whatever the case may be, the last occupant right would be a very promising solution.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Jean, for a last comment.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just very quickly, Mr. Murray, you live 75 metres from the park. Indeed, the only two people who said this bill goes sideways, in essence, are Mr. McDermott and Mr. Murray, just to put it on the record.

I'm wondering, Mr. McDermott, if you live close to the park.

• (1720)

Mr. Andrew McDermott: No, I don't. I live in Ottawa, although I have a property in the Pontiac region, which is half an hour from the tail end of Gatineau Park. I know the region very well.

Mr. Brian Jean: I do too. I live very close to it, as well.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: That's nice. How close?

Mr. Brian Jean: In Hull, actually.

I use it quite extensively. It is a nice park and I think the people of Canada deserve to have the opportunity to use it. But at the same time, I'm wondering what would happen with this moratorium.

The NCC originally sold you your property, right, Mr. Murray?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes, that's right, on the open market.

Mr. Brian Jean: Yes, I understand that, but if they institute a moratorium on any further development in Gatineau Park, would it not dramatically increase the value of the properties around the park?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I don't know; I don't work in real estate.

Believe me, I've spent eight and a half years on this file. I've done the work of the environmentalists, the bureaucrats, and the politicians. If I were motivated by a pecuniary incentive, I would admit to it, first of all. But no, I'm motivated by the park and its environment. I've helped redress the history of the park, etc.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'm just curious, because I would suggest that it would. Around most parks, that's what happens.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Perhaps, but that's not my motivation.

Mr. Brian Jean: I understand that, but would you prefer the status quo rather than this bill?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes, for a very simple reason—

Mr. Brian Jean: Mr. McDermott, would you suggest the same?

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: It's because of Treasury Board representation.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Going back to the other honourable member's point before, this bill should have looked quite different. What we're suggesting—

Mr. Brian Jean: I just ask, would you prefer the status quo rather than this bill?

Mr. Andrew McDermott: No. We need to amend this bill.

Mr. Brian Jean: Would you prefer the status quo rather than this bill? It's a yes or no answer.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: We need to amend this bill.

Mr. Brian Jean: You haven't answered the question.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: I will answer your question—

Mr. Brian Jean: You have two to three members in your organization who are not happy. That's what I understand. Your membership includes two to three members.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: Yes, but look at our accomplishments: they're way wider than two or three members.

What we're saying is that the status quo would be preferable because, as it stands right now, the national interest land mass is overseen by Treasury Board, which is a committee of cabinet that has a degree of representation. If you give the control of the NILM to the bureaucrats—

Mr. Brian Jean: With respect, Mr. Murray, you have two to three members. Two of them are here today, and one disagrees with you and suggests that it would be better to amend the bill than to have the status quo.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: That's right.

Mr. Brian Jean: You're suggesting that you would prefer the status quo. So your own membership doesn't exactly agree on how to move forward on this.

Mr. Jean-Paul Murray: No, I agree exactly with what he says. I would prefer to amend the bill. If you read our brief, that's what we're saying: we can amend this bill.

But if you're asking me about the bill passing unamended versus having the status quo, I would prefer the status quo.

Mr. Andrew McDermott: Finally, Mr. Chair, if I could, I find it strange in passing that Mr. Jean somehow comes up with the notion that if Mr. Murray is close to the park, it's going to improve the value of his property—after he's worked eight years.

The Chair: I have to stop you there. I thank you for your input.

I thank our guests for their comments today. We look forward to a finished product in the near future.

For the information of the committee, we have the NCC here on Wednesday until five, at which time we're going to move into subcommittee to review all of the discussions we've had as far as future business is concerned.

I'll just remind people again that I think there is a meeting arranged for Friday to talk about amendments, but if you have specific ones, they have to be in by Monday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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