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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, March 8, 2012**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Mark Warawa**



## Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, March 8, 2012

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)):** Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to the 25th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. Today we have witnesses from the Department of the Environment and Parks Canada.

Welcome, gentlemen. We look forward to you sharing with us as we begin our study on a national conservation plan, which I think is very important to every member of this committee. I think you'll find the questions that you receive insightful and very productive.

Mr. Keenan, are you the only one speaking or are all three of you speaking?

**Mr. Michael Keenan (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy Branch, Department of the Environment):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will lead off. Mike Wong, the executive director of Parks Canada, will pick up and have additional comments.

**The Chair:** That's very good. You have up to ten minutes.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Then there's Robert McLean, the executive director of habitat and ecosystem conservation at Environment Canada, and we're going to give him all the hard questions.

**The Chair:** Okay. Very good.

Proceed, please.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for inviting us to speak to you today about the national conservation plan.

[Translation]

Since the government committed to developing a national conservation plan in the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, Environment Canada, in conjunction with Parks Canada, has undertaken preliminary discussions with a broad range of partners. The focus of these initial discussions has been on identifying key priorities, opportunities, and challenges, as well as the potential main features of a plan.

[English]

Based on these early conversations, there's clearly strong support for the idea of developing a national conservation plan that builds on existing successes but also identifies innovative approaches to

conservation, including, for example, the stewardship on working lands. As well, a national conservation plan, we've heard, should include terrestrial, marine, and freshwater components.

To put it in context, the Government of Canada is making progress on conservation. In the past six years, for example, the government has taken steps that will add over 150,000 square kilometres to the existing lands and waters administered by Parks Canada—a roughly 50% increase. During that time, total federal protected areas, counting all of the different types of protected areas, have grown by about 11%.

To give you some examples, the government has established three new national wildlife areas in Nunavut, and is in the process of establishing five more in the Northwest Territories as well as the Scott Islands marine national wildlife area out west. The government is focusing on protecting key species and gathering and sharing information to support decision-making in protecting their habitat.

The government is working on a voluntary basis with Canadians and prioritizing stewardship efforts through a range of programs, including the invasive alien species strategy, the ecogifts program, and the natural areas conservation program.

For example, the eco-gifts program provides private landowners with tax benefits for donations of ecologically sensitive lands. The natural areas conservation program is administered by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and other conservation organizations to purchase ecologically sensitive lands.

However, despite significant efforts and progress on conservation issues across Canada, many challenges remain. Biodiversity and ecosystem integrity continue to decline as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive alien species, and other factors.

Continued conservation efforts are definitely needed in all parts of Canada, and all segments of society have a contribution to make. This is part of the reason why the government sees the national conservation plan as a truly national plan and not simply a federal initiative.

As the primary authorities for land and resource stewardship across much of our country, provinces and territories play an integral role in conservation. Aboriginal groups, environmental organizations, industry, and individual Canadians are also making significant contributions to conserving Canada's natural environment.

A national approach to conservation could help to better establish and advance mutual conservation priorities among all of these players to maximize efforts and achieve partnership where, together, the federal government and its partners and stakeholders can do more, in aggregate, to accomplish more in terms of conservation.

This is the thinking in terms of how a national conservation plan could help contribute to Canada's long-term prosperity by helping to conserve and promote the awareness of natural spaces and species that underpin the environment, human health, and, in a very important way, the Canadian economy.

In terms of our initial thinking, a national conservation plan could be centred around three key elements: first, conserving Canada's natural spaces; second, connecting Canadians with nature as well as connecting habitats and ecosystems through stewardship efforts, the so-called wildlife corridors; and third, restoring degraded ecosystems and recovering the habitat for critical species.

In January of this year, Minister Kent held a round table with participants from a number of non-governmental organizations, private sector associations, leaders in the conservation area from across the country, as well as representatives of first nations. It was a good opportunity to hear from an array of conservation experts about what they see as being key elements of a national conservation plan.

A number of the key themes that emerged from the round table are helping to inform the work of the plan going forward. For example, round table participants identified connecting urban, new, and young Canadians with their natural environment as a possible element of a national conservation plan. While Canadians are generally proud of their natural heritage, many people have limited opportunities to interact directly with nature. Increasing their opportunities to connect with nature would provide a way of encouraging greater direct individual action in terms of conservation.

• (1535)

As I noted earlier, there's a great deal of interest in examining innovative approaches to conservation that could complement the existing successes and existing practices and be a key part of a national conservation plan. The industry representatives who participated in the round table suggested that while the private sector is actively involved in conservation, through a national conservation plan we could provide significant additional opportunities for them to share best practices, to put in place new practices, and to enhance stewardship on private lands and on working landscapes. As well, there would be interest among many in private industry and land owners in discussing economic instruments for conservation efforts that can add to the tool kit for advancing the conservation goals of our country.

A key theme that came out of the round table was the issue of measuring progress on conservation. This ties to the issue of fostering the development of innovative approaches to conservation and stewardship. It's a question of looking at going beyond some of the traditional measures of protection to get a sense of the degree to which we are making progress on conservation through innovative instruments that facilitate conservation on working landscapes, through advanced practices on private lands that may not be part of what we measure as conservation right now.

An important theme that emerged was the need to actively involve the provinces and the territories in the development and implementation of a conservation plan, so the work of the different players on a shared ecosystem is coordinated towards the common objective. In fact, in recent years a number of provinces and territories have developed their own biodiversity targets and resource strategies. While they focus on conserving biological diversity within a particular province or territory, they also involve achieving an economic outcome, and they're also a key part of adding up the efforts across the country.

There are useful lessons to be learned from provinces and territories—what they've done and where they've succeeded—and we need to bring that into a national conservation plan.

[*Translation*]

In terms of the federal contribution to a national conservation plan, it will be important to capitalize on the government's leverage in different areas—the federal government's international reach, science and data collection and management capacities, and its ability to bring together various groups and individuals to engage in open dialogue.

[*English*]

In conclusion, Environment Canada looks forward to the standing committee's deliberations and insights and views on how best to develop a national conservation plan.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Keenan.

Next we'll hear from Mr. Wong.

• (1540)

**Mr. Mike Wong (Executive Director, Ecological Integrity Branch, Parks Canada Agency):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to first of all thank the committee for inviting Parks Canada to speak about our role in the development of a national conservation plan.

I would like to reinforce the comments Mr. Keenan has made regarding the value of a national approach to conservation that builds on existing successes and identifies innovative approaches to conserving the health and diversity of Canada's wildlife and ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations of Canadians.

We're hearing from our counterparts in North America and other countries that coherent broad-based approaches to conservation are central to sustaining our ecosystems, economies, and the communities we all live in.

[*Translation*]

As you are aware, Parks Canada, along with our partners and stakeholders, contributes significantly to the key elements around which a national conservation plan can be framed, particularly in the thematic areas that the ministers' round table participants told us are important to them.

Parks Canada is reaching out to urban, new, and young Canadians, for example. We are developing new models for establishing protected areas. And we are using state-of-the-art technologies in our conservation and engagement actions. Our successes in these areas are due, in no small part, to our strong collaborative partnerships with the provinces and territories, aboriginal people, the private sector, and non-governmental conservation organizations.

[English]

I would like to take just a few minutes to outline for the committee how Parks Canada's mandate and some of our recent successes can provide an important basis for building a national conservation plan. These include conserving large natural spaces; connecting ecosystems and habitats; restoring ecosystems and habitats and bringing back native species; and connecting Canadians' hearts and minds and engaging them with nature. We have many successes to build upon and we are taking steps with our partners in all four areas.

As you know, recent successes in protecting large, natural spaces have included several world-leading achievements, which led the World Wildlife Fund International to bestow the "Gift to the Earth" award to Parks Canada in 2011.

The establishment of the Gwaii Haanas National Marine Conservation Area Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, in partnership with the Haida Nation, in 2010 led to Canada achieving a world first: a protected area that extends from alpine mountain tops to the deep sea floor.

In 2009 the Nahanni National Park Reserve was expanded to six times its original size through a strong collaboration with the Dehcho First Nations and with the support of the Government of the Northwest Territories. This was a landmark achievement for Canada, possibly one of the greatest in a generation. The expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve protected magnificent natural spaces. It also ensured that the Nahanni watershed will remain connected and that iconic wildlife like the grizzly bear, woodland caribou, and Dall sheep would continue to roam freely across this northern landscape.

In 2006 the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario signed an agreement to designate the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, which, at 10,000 square kilometres, is the world's largest freshwater protected area. Since 2006 the Government of Canada has taken actions resulting in the creation of new protected areas within Parks Canada's network, or that have set the stage for future conservation decisions, totalling over 150,000 square kilometres. This will result in a 54% increase in Parks Canada's system of national parks and other protected areas.

In the southern regions of Canada, wildlife habitats have become fragmented, and opportunities for species to move and adapt to changing conditions are increasingly limited. Innovative solutions such as the construction of wildlife overpasses and underpasses, where the Trans-Canada Highway runs its course through our Rocky Mountain National Parks, allow bears, elk, and other native animals to range freely through their habitat without the risk of collision with automobiles.

We're also finding solutions to make sure that the health and integrity of our treasured natural places remain strong. We're using

space-based technology, in collaboration with the Canadian Space Agency and the Canada Centre for Remote Sensing, to map and monitor the health of Canada's most remote northern parks.

Where it's needed, we're taking action on the ground; for example, through completing a massive restoration of lakes and rivers impacted by past logging practices in La Mauricie National Park in Quebec.

Also, we're bringing back native species. The reintroduction back into Grasslands National Park of plains bison and the black-footed ferret, which was thought to have been extinct for most of the 20th century, are inspiring examples of success in restoring the natural landscape.

Canadians continue to be inspired by their national park and national marine conservation areas. As they celebrated our centennial with us last year, we took innovative steps, especially with urban and new Canadians, to help them connect with the environment and get out into nature.

For example, many outreach activities were organized to celebrate Parks Canada's centennial in urban areas. In collaboration with multiple partners, we brought genuine Parks Canada experiences to downtown Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver through a day of hands-on activities for urban Canadians to learn more about Canada's protected heritage areas. Our innovative learn-to-camp program opens the door to new opportunities for urban and new Canadians to get outdoors and interact with the natural world while experiencing a unique Canadian camping experience.

Parks Canada also offers a number of exciting and connecting opportunities for youth to understand and experience their national treasures. Among these are programs like My Parks Pass, encouraging grade eight students and their families to come to their national park and connect with nature.

● (1545)

Another example is the Xplorers program, helping children ages six to eleven discover and explore Parks Canada places by means of a booklet that contains a selection of fun activities. In 2011 over 70,000 children participated in this program, at 43 places across the country.

New technologies are allowing us to provide enhanced experiences for our visitors. Through Explora, for example, visitors and hikers at more than a dozen Parks Canada sites across the country can now access GPS-triggered tours about the nature and history of the location using their smart phones.

In addition, Parks Canada has partnered on innovative broadcast productions to reach Canadians where they work, live, and play. Over the last two years Parks Canada has connected Canadians to their national protected places through productions such as *A Park for All Seasons*, *Operation Unplugged*, *La Part du Monde*, and the Gemini-award-winning *National Parks Project*.

As we reach out and connect with young Canadians, we are listening to them and enabling them to contribute to defining the future of conservation in Canada. In February of this year, for example, Parks Canada hosted workshops with youth from the greater Toronto area to gain their perspectives to help shape the vision and concept of Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley. Youth engagement will continue as the establishment process evolves.

We continue to hear from our stakeholders that national parks and other protected areas must remain a cornerstone of Canada's approach to conservation. New and innovative approaches to the establishment of new protected areas, like the Rouge Valley national urban park, can serve as models for new elements of Canada's conservation toolbox.

Our stakeholders are also telling us that we need to work broadly, engaging all parts of Canadian society in implementing a full spectrum of conservation activities. A national conservation plan could serve as a framework for bringing together new partners in the fisheries, agriculture, and forestry sectors, for example, to find innovative ways to connect protected areas together through ecologically healthy and sustainably managed working landscapes and seascapes.

[Translation]

A national conservation plan has the potential to inspire Canadians to work together in delivering on our conservation commitments. With protected areas as a key pillar, these renewed efforts can also provide benefits beyond biodiversity conservation by securing services like clean air and clean water that Canadians and our economy depend on.

Canada's national parks, national marine conservation areas and other protected areas can serve as the conveners and catalysts for bringing Canadians together in working towards a shared vision for conservation.

• (1550)

[English]

Parks Canada looks forward to the points of view and insight of the committee on the development of a national conservation plan.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Wong.

We will begin our seven-minute round of questioning with Ms. Rempel.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC):** Thank you so much for coming today.

I think I speak on behalf of the entire committee—at least I hope I do—in saying that we are very excited to get started on this study.

It's an issue of importance to many Canadians. I think it's one we can find a lot of common ground on.

The reason we wanted to bring you out today was because we want, as a group, to develop a really good structure or a call for witness feedback, so the output of this study allows the minister to embark on a robust consultation process, etc. Our government members have met, and we were kicking around some ideas on what that structure would look like and some of the areas we could get witnesses to comment on. Some of the things we thought about including would be commenting on purpose, why have an NCP, some of the goals the NCP should achieve, and some guiding principles.

What came out of the round table was a set of guiding principles for the plan and some conservation areas of focus: What, as a government, should we be focusing on with regard to conservation priorities, outcomes, or success metrics that the plan could focus on or hope to achieve? What would be the implementation strategies? And then there would be some recommendations for the minister on embarking on a formal consultation process once this information has been collated by committee. Again, this was sort of a high-level brainstorming on some areas.

I was hoping maybe you could comment on that scope and give me your thoughts, based on the work you've done to date, on any other areas we should include and whether there's stuff in there that maybe isn't relevant, etc.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I wish I'd thought of that list, actually. It's a really good list.

As you work through something like this, starting out with the broader idea of purpose and goals is absolutely right, and moving along to principles and then beginning to bring it down to concrete examples. I would say that in our early thinking we tried to keep both of those two dimensions alive, because we absolutely want to foster and encourage people to bring ideas in.

For example, in the round table one of the things I think the minister heard quite frequently is that you actually have to have a vision. There has to be some passion behind it. You have to have some kind of place on the hill in the future that you can get people to buy into in order to bring the partnership together and the collaboration. Starting there, I would submit, makes a lot of sense. Things like guiding principles are very helpful. So that would be fantastic and very helpful.

Things like metrics and implementation strategies are really good. The one thought we've had is that you do want to be able to have some sort of indication of what you are succeeding in, of what success looks like. What is the definition of "success"? So it can come to the metric issue.

From the early discussions we've had, when people come in with energy, they come in with ideas of principles and things like that. So it's a great way to start.

In terms of implementation strategies, it's an interesting issue. Ultimately, one needs to get there because it's about creating a consensus for what you're trying to do, for why you're doing it, what you're doing, and then the how. The one thought we've had is that it's a question of timing, and it would be interesting to get the perspective of the committee on this. At this point, we're really trying to get people to come with ideas. We've had some early discussion with two groups, Ducks Unlimited and the Nature Conservancy of Canada, about organizing a workshop of specialists on innovations—so where are there neat things happening, where people have tried something and it's working?

As part of the implementation strategies, it's something that does testing and is innovative and brings in the idea of new approaches, and it's finding evidence in Canada. The one thing we've discovered is there are a lot of interesting things happening at a local level that may not have a direct Government of Canada connection, but they are still accomplishing things. And it's bringing those in.

In summary, my first response is that a framework like that would have a tremendous amount of promise because it would deliver on the grand ideas we're trying to bring in, and also it would root it in practical implementation. It sounds fantastic.

• (1555)

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Again, going back to the concept of developing a call or a structure for the study, one of the things we had talked about with my colleagues on the government side was really keeping that call quite high level and open. So it's saying—to your comment—come with your ideas, inform us.

Do you think that approach has worked so far on the round table? I know that guiding principle document, if we can call it that, was a good output. Have we had a lot of response so far from groups that are interested in coming, etc.?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I would say we have had a pretty good response from groups who are interested in coming, because we haven't asked, and they've been coming and volunteering. We did the round table. We're working on assembling an innovation workshop. But people are proactively and prospectively sending us in suggestions. So there is a sense of excitement out there. My sense, from the kinds of interventions at the round table, is they do want to come in and they want to share the passion for where we're trying to go and also the practical elements. By having elements that do both, based on the initial response we've gotten, I think it would generate, quite frankly, a good response.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** I'm sure I'm running out of time, so I'm hoping one of my colleagues somewhere will pick up on this line of questioning.

I'd really like your thoughts on categories of stakeholder groups that we should be inviting to committee and on an approach to consultation within the committee, knowing that there will be additional work undertaken once we've provided a summary of these discussions along that framework. Maybe you could begin expanding on that. We'd really look to your advice on that as well.

**The Chair:** I'm going to have you hold those thoughts, and thank you, because your time is up.

Ms. Liu, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP):** Thanks.

Before I begin my line of questioning, I'd like to wish my sisters around the table a happy International Women's Day. It's worthy of being mentioned.

I would like to continue what Ms. Rempel was asking about. We have noticed that the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy produced a report in 2003. It's a report that is of incredible quality. They met with hundreds of witnesses. It's really quite extensive. We'd really like to look to the report, as my colleague said, as a guiding document for this committee.

We also know that this report produced 20 recommendations for the federal government. I was wondering if we could start exploring those recommendations, because that would really give the committee a hint of where we should concentrate and what kinds of topics we should think about.

I'd like to spend my time going through the recommendations one by one and maybe gathering your comments on them. It would be useful if you could tell us what's been done about the recommendations, or what hasn't been done. And if nothing's been done, could you just elaborate on why, what the barriers are, and why no action has been taken?

I am not sure if you have the recommendations in front of you, but I'll read them out. If you want me to repeat them, you may ask me to repeat them.

The first recommendation is as follows:

The Round Table recommends that the federal government accelerate conservation planning in two areas where unique opportunities exist to plan in advance of major industrial development. These areas are the Mackenzie Valley...and Canada's boreal forests.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Do you want to go one by one?

I looked at that report a while ago. I think it's about eight years old or something. I would say one general thing about it. I think it was very valuable in terms of bringing a very important idea to the national conservation plan, which is the value of Canada's natural capital. I think it was the key sort of intellectual underpinning of the report.

As I recall, one of the most valuable things in it was that it got that idea in. That idea is sort of catching on now, but back in 2003 it was a concept that was just coming into the mainstream. The reason that's important is that implicit in the ideas behind a national conservation plan is a recognition of the incredible value of Canada's natural capital. It has value in and of itself, but it also has important economic value in the ecological goods and services that flow from it. You can see that in the Canadian boreal forest agreement, for example. It's a key underpinning principle.

Before we go recommendation by recommendation, there's an idea I wanted to give credence to, because I think it's a very important idea. You can see in a lot of the work that's been happening internationally and within Canada that the economic value of nature to our industry and to our way of life is now better understood. I think that's very positive.

In terms of conservation planning and the recommendation on the Mackenzie Valley, there's obviously been a tremendous, extensive environmental review of the Mackenzie Valley gas project since then. There has been a tremendous amount of work done on the part of the federal government.

I think the second part was on the boreal forests. There has been a significant advance through the Canadian boreal forest agreement. I would say that it is a landmark achievement. Twenty-one forest companies and nine environmental groups have come together to establish a vision for the value of Canada's boreal forests in terms of producing fibre, with jobs in sawmill towns across the country, and in terms of the broader ecological benefit of the boreal forest and all the benefits that flow from it, such as water purification, tourism, etc.

Interestingly enough, I would say that on that recommendation, you can see that there have been significant advances in both dimensions.

•(1600)

**Ms. Laurin Liu:** That's good to hear—awesome.

Based on the length of that response, I'm guessing that we won't get through all 20 recommendations in seven minutes. I appreciate your response, and I would really appreciate if the witnesses would consider tabling with committee their reactions—I saw there were recommendations—and give us an idea of where we have gotten to in terms of reaching the goals of the recommendations. That would be really useful. Again, if you could, state what has been done and what hasn't been done. And if there are things that haven't been done, why?

We also know conservation. There are various ministers in federal bodies that are involved in conservation. I was wondering if you could list them for us.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Sure, we would be happy to do that.

I should say one thing about the NRTEE report before we go off it. My memory of it is that as you go through the 20 recommendations, the price tag is quite high. It did have an idea of collaboration and partnership, but it was also proposing a fairly significant amount of new government spending in different areas. In that context at that time, it may be looked at in a certain way, but I think part of the national conservation plan challenge is to bring this national partnership together, but in a way that I would say fits the fiscal context of the time. That's an important interpretation point on the NRTEE point.

In terms of the federal bodies—

**The Chair:** Point of order?

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** I'm also interested in how the report could align with our study, but if there is going to be a written response tabled, I'd ask that it be scoped within the confines of what our study will be approaching, which is the development of a national conservation plan.

**The Chair:** That is a good point. At this point, we don't have the framework. The witnesses are under no obligation at the request of any one member to provide any report. At this time, it may be a little premature.

If you wanted to continue on in your response to Ms. Liu's question.... Thank you.

•(1605)

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** To pick up on the last question of the member, it is a very good point. It's one of these things one has to be very careful. Environment Canada is not the only federal agency involved in this activity. We have been working, and in the early stages it's very boring work. It's not something one brags about in public. We've been working with our federal colleagues to engage them, to get them excited, and to get them keen to participate in the development of the thinking and the options in the matrix of a national conservation plan.

For example, one thing we heard very clearly from the round table is to bring in all of the dimensions—the terrestrial, the marine, and the freshwater. In a federal context, Environment Canada has a key role to play. Natural Resources Canada has a key role to play. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has a particularly important role to play. Because of the importance of working landscape and the large amount of Canadian territory under cultivation, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada has a particularly important role to play. Because of the importance of engaging first nations as landowners and as stewards of the land, AANDC has a particularly important role to play.

We have been working in bringing together a sense of common purpose among federal departments. We have been quite pleased at the initial response. There is a sense that it's time to do something like this to bring all of the different parts together. Keeping the home team organized is sometimes a bit of a challenge, but we're fairly optimistic that we have a start on that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We have eight minutes and 41 seconds. Out of seven minutes, that's quite good.

Mr. Lunney, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC):** Thank you very much.

I just want to start by saying that it is quite a remarkable accomplishment in the last number of years, the past six years, that 150,000 square kilometres have been added to the area designated as protected areas, as it were, and a 54% increase in Parks Canada's jurisdiction.

I don't know how many Canadians would actually know that we had the World Wildlife Fund International bestowing a Gift to the Earth Award to Parks Canada in 2011. I just don't know that many Canadians actually know about that. It seems to me that's a good-news story, expanding the Nahanni National Park six times.

There's a lot of interest in this national conservation plan. Although we've made some steps forward, we have a long way to go. We have a tremendous natural heritage here in Canada, with the huge geographic area we have.

To Parks Canada, I see you mentioned in your mandate here conserving, connecting, restoring ecosystems, and connecting with Canadians' hearts. I'm sure we're very interested in all of those areas and how they connect to this study we're doing.



I wanted to just talk about habitat for a minute, because habitat restoration is such an important part of the west coast, where I come from. You've done a lot of great habitat restoration work in the last 20 years on the coast. There was a major project in Parks Canada, Lost Shoe Creek, for example, where they worked with partners—in that case it was the Central Westcoast Forest Society—and worked up and down the coast with the Pacific Salmon Foundation. There was tremendous public support among stream keepers. Bringing them back stream by stream, of course, is the Pacific Salmon Foundation's motto.

We're talking about habitat restoration. How do you see that factoring into a national conservation strategy?

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Certainly in the areas in southern Canada where habitat has been fragmented, there are huge opportunities for ecological restoration. As you mentioned, we have seen some of those successes of bringing back salmon to some of the streams in our national parks. The last time I was here we talked about the removal of invasive species from some of the wildlife habitat.

In addition to the ecological conservation gains from these activities, it should really be noted that these activities are very much engaging the local community. We have examples of that where we have ecological restoration projects in our parks and the local communities come out to lend a hand.

One example would be on the other side of the country, in Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site. Over 1,000 individuals from surrounding communities have come out in the last five years and put in over 100,000 volunteer hours to help restore the Blanding's turtle population, to help survey rare plants and local fish in the national park, as well as to remove invasive species, such as, in this particular case, green crab.

In addition to the conservation aspect, there's very much what Parks Canada sees as an engagement effort to again bring the communities out, and bring the youth out for them to learn about nature as they help us carry out this work.

• (1610)

**Mr. James Lunney:** Thank you for that, Mr. Wong. We know volunteer involvement is actually crucial, and we want to explore and expand Canadians' participation in environmental stewardship.

In British Columbia we have such vast areas that have small populations. I see in your comments you mentioned the wildlife overpasses and underpasses along the Trans-Canada Highway. I know that in driving through the interior of B.C. up through to Kelowna all along the highway we have fences to keep wildlife off to avoid collisions between vehicles travelling at pretty good speed and wildlife, and fences to allow wildlife in and out.

I want to ask about effectiveness. Do we have evidence on how wildlife are using the corridors that are provided this way across our transportation corridors? How effective have these strategies been?

**Mr. Mike Wong:** First of all, these overpasses and underpasses are extremely effective. When we installed these overpasses, we also installed cameras. When wildlife cross these various laneways, we have actual photos of grizzly bears, cougars, and elk that are using these overpasses and underpasses.

It's quite interesting. Last year one of our parks staff gave a presentation in Washington, D.C. It was at a conference on innovative technology for highway transportation, looking at it from an ecological perspective. In fact it was one of the award-winning presentations, just because of its innovation and also the types of results it's bringing forth.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Along the same lines, wildlife are very ingenious and creative. I'm just wondering if that has created any situations of conflict where a predator might be staking it out, waiting for the elk to come along, or some other animals to cross. For example, out on Vancouver Island, on the Puntledge River in the Comox area, where there are lights over the bridge, the seals actually are lying there on their backs when the salmon are migrating and just waiting to bite a fish coming right by over their heads. They're very creative.

Have we noticed any areas of conflict that have been created because of these funnels?

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Given the data that we have right now, we have not seen any of those, but I think that may in fact be simply a lack of data rather than these events not occurring.

**Mr. James Lunney:** Thanks for that. Now I'd like to come back—

**The Chair:** Mr. Lunney, unfortunately, your time has expired.

I'm going to keep it very tight, because in the last 15 minutes we have two items, one of which is Ms. Liu's motion. So I'm going to keep it tight so that everybody will have a chance to ask a question.

Next we have Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

This is very interesting and extremely important. I hope the committee will indulge me here.

The way I work, I need to have a good understanding, which means I need frameworks. I'm hoping you will table these with the committee, and as an MP I hope you'll respect that we have the right to ask for this information.

I'd like to see a framework, and I think it would be useful for everyone, of what is currently in place in terms of conservation at the federal level, and also what's in place with the provinces, because we need to have that understanding before we go anywhere else. That's the first thing I'll ask. If you'd table that, I'd appreciate it.

The second thing I'd ask is this. I think we really need to understand the environmental and sustainable development goals Canada has committed to, both nationally and internationally, because if we're going to work on a conservation plan, I would hope that we'd be working to meet those goals. So I'd be grateful if you could table that.

The third piece of this is specifically around an inventory of the federal legislation and policies that are currently in place that would have implications for a national conservation plan. Sorry, I'm asking for a lot, but I've got to figure out the framework.

Then I'm going to come back to Ms. Liu's point and then I'm going to ask some questions. I think what she raised is really important, with that report. I recognize it's a 2003 report, but it would be interesting to see what has been completed, what is in progress, what is not addressed, and you mentioned cost was an issue. Perhaps we should see those four things.

So I'd appreciate it if those could be tabled with the committee.

What should be the guiding principles, in your opinion, to support the development of a conservation plan, please?

•(1615)

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you for that.

You have laid out a significant request. There's one part I can respond to right now, and that is, there's a very useful instrument on the context of the overall environment and sustainable development goals that I think helps build the frame and the context you're seeking.

I have one with me because I carry it with me everywhere. It's the first federal sustainable development strategy, tabled in 2010. This strategy focuses on four areas across the government of Canada: climate change and air quality, water quality, protecting nature, and greening government operations, all of the overarching objectives of the Government of Canada, all of the targets, and all of the implementation strategies. It runs on a three-year cycle, and we're just getting into the long-term reporting on this. It will report, on a three-year cycle, on the progress that is being made through all of these implementation strategies in achieving these targets in order to meet these goals.

So as an overarching instrument, it's quite helpful, particularly the section on protecting nature, because this is really about trying to advance those goals and targets.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** I have seen the report, thank you, and I've read the report.

But really, what are the commitments we have made both nationally and internationally? I'd like to see that outlined. Could we have an understanding of what progress has been made to date on each of those commitments? If we're going to build this plan, this plan should be feeding into those commitments.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** In the back of this report, in section 4, it lists all the Government of Canada's national and international commitments, and targets are actually listed.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Have we listed completed, in-progress, and not addressed?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** The second progress report, which is coming next spring, would actually do that.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Could we have an interim report on this?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I think we can come back in terms of the information requirements, but—

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** —I don't want to lose the connection to this, because ultimately it does feed into our reporting to you, to Parliament, on the progress that's being made in achieving these goals and targets.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you very much.

I would like to see where we are today as we head into this. That would be really helpful. Thank you so much.

I'll come back to you. What should be the guiding principles supporting the development of a conservation plan?

•(1620)

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thanks for that question.

As we've moved forward we're beginning to sketch out—I would say with a little bit of trepidation because we don't want to declare what they should be—some key guiding principles in terms of a national conservation plan. One of them is that it be national in scope, in terms of bringing all partners together.

A second guiding principle is breadth, in terms of going beyond traditional protection. We've been framing that for now in terms of advancing on three pillars—conservation, connecting, and restoring—in order to establish a broad breadth to it.

A focus on, I would say, collaboration and innovation and bringing in place new practices and bringing new players in, in terms of recognizing working lands and private lands, would be some of them.

In the interests of time, I'm going to stop there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Choquette, you have five minutes—actually four and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Thank you very much. I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

I would like to support my two colleagues, Laurin Liu and Kirsty Duncan, in the request they put to the chair. Could the witnesses provide a detailed report of the work that was done by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy in 2003? We want to know to what extent these objectives have been attained. It is quite possible that some of these objectives have not been achieved and there are no doubt reasons to explain that.

Do you want to answer my question now or later?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** It would be up to the committee to decide that.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Okay.

My first question deals with the national conservation plan that the Conservatives committed to developing in 2011. The 2010 Speech from the Throne mentioned the creation of over 85,000 km<sup>2</sup> of national parks and national marine conservation areas. In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, no specific figures were given.

Is creating 85,000 km<sup>2</sup> of national parks and marine areas still one of the government's objectives? If so, what percentage has been conserved so far?

[English]

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I would start by saying that the government has set out a fairly ambitious agenda of protecting spaces, and it has made significant progress in doing that. I would say it is well on its way in terms of achieving that.

There are probably two groups of activities. It's the significant protected spaces that actually have been put in place, and it's the ones we're currently working on.

Mike, you may want to talk a bit about Parks Canada, and then you may want to talk a bit about the national wildlife areas.

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Thank you very much for the question.

This year has been a very busy one for Parks Canada in terms of park establishment. Members may recall that we achieved the land withdrawal for the protection of Nailicho, which is located on the northern part of Nahanni National Park Reserve. We're continuing the negotiations to formally have that created as a national park reserve. In addition, we are working with the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador on the creation of the Mealy Mountains National Park located in Labrador. Recently there was an announcement that Parks Canada is working with the Province of British Columbia on a feasibility study on creating a national marine conservation area in the southern Strait of Georgia.

All these activities are ongoing and are listed in our corporate plan as our park establishment priorities.

• (1625)

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette:** Thank you very much.

Since time is flying by, I'll ask one last question.

Fleeting reference was made to Minister Kent's famous round table. Could you provide the objectives of that round table? I gather that no one was invited, that it was people who came forward voluntarily.

Do we have the list of those people and, if so, could we get it?

If you don't have time to answer the question, I would like to ask you to provide us with all the information available, in writing, with the committee's agreement. Otherwise, please explain to us why the information isn't available.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Unfortunately, the time has expired. But the committee could consider asking for details on that round table: who was invited, the goals, and the outcomes.

Next we have Ms. Ambler.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our guests today for your thoughtful presentations.

My first question is to Mr. Wong, on engaging young Canadians in conservation at the round table. The opportunity to generate excitement, enthusiasm, and a passion for conservation was

discussed. I believe that should start with young people, and it's most easily done.

I'd like to know how we're reaching out to young Canadians, specifically urban young Canadians and new Canadians. You mentioned that in your presentation. You also mentioned using state-of-the-art technologies to attract Canadians. We all know that youth use social media more than older folks like me. How are we using these? Are they effective, and are they helping to generate that passion for conservation?

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Let's look at youth engagement in some of our workshops on the Rouge Valley National Urban Park. In February, when we had this workshop in collaboration with the University of Toronto at Scarborough, it was a very exciting event. The youth were asked to tell us what they thought should be in a national urban park and how we should go about creating one. This generated a lot of positive input, and we will continue to have engagement with the youth. The Rouge Park is an exciting effort on our part. It's the first time that Canada has created such a model, yet we have the opportunity to engage approximately 20% of Canadians who live around this future national park.

With respect to other initiatives for engagement, we have quite a large number. These include our national parks project, where we partner with musicians who have visited national parks. We use these musicians' videos as a way of engaging youth across the country. On the other side of youth engagement, we have recently launched a project called Operation Unplugged, where we asked selected youth across the country to drop all their smart-phones and electronic devices and travel to national parks and national historic sites and then use social media to tell other youth about their experiences.

• (1630)

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** They have to leave behind their iPhones?

**Mr. Mike Wong:** It's called Operation Unplugged.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Okay.

**Mr. Mike Wong:** This will be a six-episode documentary that will be coming to television. This is done in partnership with GlassBox TV and VIA Rail.

We have activities in the parks and historic sites themselves. I mentioned the GPS guide that's available in some of our parks. We also have activities such as geo-caching. Rather than go on a traditional hike, they're in the national parks looking for treasures and trinkets. These are just a few of the examples we have of youth engagement.

**The Chair:** Thank you; your time has expired.

I needlessly cut short Mr. Choquette's time. He had asked a question regarding the report on the round table in January. He wanted some details on objectives, attendance, and outcomes. Could you comment on that?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I'd be happy to.

The main purpose of the round table was for the Minister of the Environment to begin pulling in ideas, suggestions, inspiration, and direction on how to move forward with a national conservation plan. The minister wanted to develop a broader consultation agenda.

There are about 20 members. We invited people from aboriginal organizations, private sector organizations like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Forest Products Association, a number of environmental non-governmental organizations like the World Wildlife Federation and Nature Canada, conservation organizations like Ducks Unlimited, and academic experts such as Stewart Elgie from the University of Ottawa. It was an opportunity for them to offer their advice on how to move forward in developing this.

There were strong suggestions that we need a national program with a clear national vision. There was advice to go broad, to be innovative, to develop the existing tools and programs, to look at new programs, to think seriously about economic instruments, and to be inclusive when developing the national conservation plan.

I would characterize it as a beginning—the first of many conversations on national engagement in developing a national conservation plan.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, you had 30 seconds; I cut you short. My apologies. I was thinking that we were to be done by five o'clock, so I was backing up the clock, but it's 5:30. That gives us much more time. You have an extra two minutes out of that. Well done.

Mr. Pilon, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP):** Thank you.

I would like to ask a few very specific questions in order to understand the ecological gifts program. My questions will be specific because they deal with an issue that affects my riding, namely, Lapierre Island.

Through the ecological gifts program, Lapierre Island is now appraised at \$14 million by the government, when it was bought for \$400,000 a few years ago. What steps were taken to get to that?

[*English*]

**Mr. Robert McLean (Executive Director, Habitat and Ecosystem Conservation, Department of the Environment):** Thank you for your question. Three certifications are required for the ecological gifts program. First is the ecological sensitivity. The second is if the recipient organization is qualified to receive the ecological gift. The third—and an important one—is fair market value.

We have a process, an independent appraisal review panel, that examines all the appraisals that are provided by the donor. We use the Appraisal Institute of Canada guidelines for determining the value. Appraisals are based on the highest and best use of the property. If I recall correctly, the property in question was zoned for two 14-storey buildings. As the appraisers appraise, they don't base their appraisal on what's on the site now, which might be worth \$400,000, because there are no structures on that property. Standard appraisal practices for such fair-market evaluation are based on highest and best use.

The highest and best use is based on the potential to put two office towers or condominiums of 14 storeys in height on that property.

That's why there's such a large difference in the value of that particular donation.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Pilon:** I don't understand how 12 or 14 storey buildings could be built on this island when next to it is the Highway 25 bridge and the government had to wait 40 years before it could build it. There never would have been a bridge next to this island.... But that's another matter.

[*English*]

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Point of order.

I might ask that my colleagues keep their comments germane to the development of a national conservation plan in the said framework today.

**The Chair:** That is a legitimate point of order, and I encourage Mr. Pilon to make sure that his discussions and questions are germane.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. François Pilon:** Could you please name all the federal programs dedicated to conservation?

[*English*]

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you for that question.

I might miss a couple, but I'll be highlighting a few of the key programs, filling in some of these elements of the framework.

We could start with the eco-gifts program, on which you asked a particular question. As my colleague laid out, under certain conditions there is tax assistance for donations of ecologically sensitive land. That has resulted in 400 such donations since 2006, I think. A similar program is the natural areas conservation program, which is a \$225-million program in collaboration with conservation organizations, whereby they manage and pull together opportunities to either fully protect ecologically sensitive land or put conservation easements on it to protect habitat and the natural state. There have been 800 transactions. So those two programs have brought in, in the last six or seven years, about 1,200 parcels of ecologically sensitive land from across the country into some state of conservation to protect the local ecosystem.

There are a number of other programs, if you think of that on a conservation stream. If you think of a remediation stream, some significant federal programs have been aimed at remediation. There is about \$49 million in the Great Lakes action plan. A lot of that is committed to remediating contaminated sediment in the Great Lakes area as part of our commitments with the U.S. under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

There are a number of those so-called areas of concern where we've been able to bring them, deal with remediation, and essentially take them from being a hot zone back to a more sustainable context. There is a range of additional programs.

I think I might turn it over to you, Bob, to talk about the habitat stewardship program and a couple of others.

**Mr. Robert McLean:** Yes, certainly.

One program I would draw the committee's attention to is a program we share with the United States and Mexico: the North American waterfowl management plan. It started in 1986. To date, in Canada alone, there are nearly 21 million acres of habitat that have been secured and in fact enhanced and improved. There are nearly 108 million acres of habitat that have been influenced. The overall investment, much of which has come from the United States, is just over \$1.8 billion since 1986 in this partnership-based program, with \$900 million coming from the United States.

It's a partnership-based program, which often is viewed as the way a conservation program should work. It engages not only the conservation community, but also, and in particular, the agricultural sector. The program has expanded into the western boreal as well, so there's an awful lot of partnership-based work happening now with the forest sector.

With respect to the habitat stewardship program Mr. Keenan just alluded to, it has been in existence since 2000. To date, we have over 2,000 projects that have been implemented, with legally binding habitat conservation of about 160,000 hectares. With respect to habitat improvement and one of the restoration questions, on average over the life of the program, about 30,000 hectares of habitat have been improved, and about 725 kilometres of stream-ways have been improved each year since the start of that program.

So those two programs are very significant with respect to the national conservation plan.

•(1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Toet, you're next.

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Thank you.

I have a very short time, so I'm going to get straight to a couple of questions. For the first question, I'd appreciate a fairly short response.

There have been some questions about the stakeholders who are at the table, at the initial round table. I'd like to expand on that a bit. Maybe you can even respond to that with some kind of other submission. It's not so much about who was there, which is also important, but I'm sure that there were also many names, organizations, or groups that came up, through that round table, that maybe should be included.

I'd love to have some feedback from you on that. It would help us to also expand on the people we should be hearing from as we go through this process.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Sure, we'd be very happy to do that. Maybe I could just rattle off what we think of as some key groups or categories—I think that was an earlier question that came up—and then we'd be happy to dig up a list of people we've come across in them.

One is obviously the large conservation organizations, the national ones. Also, because of the shared ecosystem in North America, to some extent some of the American ones have partnerships in Canada, and they also have interesting practices.

As well, I would say, there are the national wildlife organizations, the anglers and the hunting organizations, the Trout Unlimited types of organizations, because they have a very keen interest in preserving the natural ecosystem.

Industry groups are engaged in this increasingly, we find. I mentioned a couple earlier, but there's a fairly wide range of industry groups that are organizing themselves and are doing some interesting practices on the land.

There are the local conservation organizations that are doing some highly innovative things, whether it's the Beaver Hills tradeable conservation credits out east of Edmonton, or the tradeable water quality in the South Nation watershed just east of here. Bringing these local organizations into the mix would be very helpful.

Of course, there are the aboriginal organizations. There's a range of aboriginal organizations that need to be part of this. They have a particularly important perspective and some interesting ideas.

The other category is what I would call academics and specialists. These are people who have studied innovative mechanisms and innovative arrangements. There are people who have looked at what has been happening in other countries and at some experiments on the ground and getting that in.

Very quickly, I would say that these would be the categories to think of. We'd be pleased to dig up some of the contacts we have and share them with the committee.

**Mr. Lawrence Toet:** Thank you.

I also wanted to talk about the innovative ways of doing this so that we also have a positive economic outcome on things. We can also use rehabilitation of conservation areas and biodiversity in the ecosystems to deal with local and ongoing issues. One of the things that comes to mind—I'm from the wonderful province of Manitoba, so I know all about flooding—is whether there has been any talk of that initially around the table, of how we can use some of these ideas to bring forward solutions to these issues that will also have great conservation opportunities at the same time.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I'd say in general, absolutely. Flood control is a great one. Think of the Canadian boreal forest agreement, in terms of changing the rules of engagement on 76 million hectares across the country. I think they took about 29 million out of production, and the rest they're producing differently. As you manage that differently you have a big impact on flood control in the country, right? In the Manitoba context, that may or may not be that relevant, but in general across the country it is.

In the riparian zones, bringing back some of the narrow strips of conservation around the riparian zones, in terms of the grasslands and the trees, can have a significant effect on water and flood control.

It's interesting. If you look at the broad boreal, I was reading a study recently where they calculated that it produces—in terms of the forest products we all know so well—a tremendous amount of economic value for Canada. It's something in the \$50-billion-a-year range, I think. But in terms of estimating the benefits of flood control, the pest control by habitat for birds, the tourism, they worked it out to something like \$90 billion a year in terms of economic benefits, in terms of avoided floods, avoided damage, etc. So finding those in a local context where it's particularly important, such as in Manitoba, and finding ways to advance those objectives through conservation is definitely a win-win.

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Time has expired.

Ms. Leslie.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing here today.

The chair pointed out earlier that you're not obligated to follow up in writing on things, but picking up on Ms. Rempel's and Mr. Toet's questions, it would be really useful for all of us if you did come up with other names or organizations or themes of what kinds of stakeholders we need to hear from. That would be useful for all of us. We're here today trying to develop a framework or a scope for our study, so the more information we can get to narrow that or focus it, the better.

Also, picking up on Ms. Liu's request about the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, that report was about conservation in Canada, and it had 20 recommendations. I'd be worried we'd be duplicating some of the work there. So I would find it very useful to have an update on where we are with regard to those recommendations and whether some of them have been achieved. That would really help us with our scope.

I have a series of questions, which I don't think I need long answers to, just to help us again figure out where we are here. Can you tell me which federal department is mainly responsible for relations with provinces on conservation? And which departments are mainly responsible for relations with other countries on conservation? Would both be Environment Canada, or are different departments responsible for each?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Very briefly, in order to capture the bulk of the federal-provincial relations on conservation, Environment Canada is a key player, but one would have to include the Department of Fisheries and Oceans because there are so many issues in the aquatic environment. As well, I would say the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Natural Resources. That cluster would cover it. We exercise, obviously, some significant

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Agriculture—okay.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Agriculture, because if you think about it, there is so much land in this country that's under cultivation, and the environmental best management practice is a key determinant of the overall protection of nature in the country.

I think if you went internationally, it would just be the same story again. You have a lot of areas where Environment Canada would

lead a delegation but where the expertise would be in another department; sometimes it's our department, and sometimes it would be in another department. So we try to work as closely as we can with our federal partners and keep the home team organized in order to move ahead together on these things.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** For example, the Department of Foreign Affairs would never be involved with something like that.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** The Department of Foreign Affairs would be involved with something like that, and in fact in a legal sense is always the head of the delegation, if you will. We often receive our instructions from the Department of Foreign Affairs, and we work closely with them, but the expertise on any international conservation agreement would likely rest somewhere between EC, DFO, and NRCan, and possibly AANDC as well, because many of these issues have an important aboriginal peoples dimension.

• (1650)

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Thank you very much.

Can you list the international conservation agreements to which Canada is a signatory?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Yes. It's a pretty long list.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Okay, then perhaps table it.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** We could come back and table it. There's a fairly long list and there are a number of categories. But we'd be happy to provide that.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Is it possible, in that list, to also table the measurable objectives under those agreements?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** It is. And at risk of sounding as though I'm actually trying to push here, like a travelling Fuller Brush salesman, the federal sustainable development strategy was our attempt to really pull together all of that in a government-wide context. I would recommend section 3 of the federal sustainable development strategy as a key starting point to see all of the Government of Canada's domestic and international commitments with respect to protecting nature.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have a little over a minute.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Can you let us know what the government's main land conservation commitments are and what the deadlines are under those commitments?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I can. I don't have them off the top of my head.

Do you, Bob?

**Mr. Robert McLean:** The target that was identified at the most recent conference of the parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity was 17% for terrestrial areas and 10% for marine areas. In terms of Canada's progress, we are at about 10% for the terrestrial areas and about 1% for marine-protected areas.

**The Chair:** Madam Leslie, unfortunately your time has expired.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Mr. Chair, could I add a quick clarification?

**The Chair:** Yes, perhaps you can just finish up on that.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Those targets were global aspirational targets. It's an area where it is not necessarily an absolute, hard commitment taken on by the Government of Canada, but as a signatory to the convention it's one we, among all other governments, try to strive toward.

I should mention one more point, with the indulgence of the chair. In the context of the national conservation plan, there is an interesting discussion about goals and targets: What should we establish as our goal for the national conservation plan in areas like this to motivate partnership and collaborative action?

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Sopuck.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC):** Thank you.

This is just a comment, Mr. Keenan, about your comments regarding the boreal forest industry. You made it sound as though we have \$50 billion worth of commercial activity and \$90 billion worth of other activity. You made it sound as though they're mutually exclusive. I hope you didn't mean that, because a well-managed, harvested boreal forest can also deliver those other non-monetary benefits that you discussed.

I don't need your answer on this, but I make that comment. The concept of working landscapes delivering environmental benefits is very important.

In that vein, in your two documents, which I'm reacting to, the lack of priority on working landscapes and the conservation activities of private landowners and agriculturalists bother me. Don't you think it is on the working landscapes where the greatest conservation gains can be made?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you.

I know you didn't ask for an answer on the first part of your question, but I'd just like to say—

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** My time is very tight, so I'd appreciate succinctness.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** —I agree completely, and I think you expressed it better than I did.

On the second part of the question, our sense is that we are seeing in the country a natural expansion of the conservation agenda from beyond the traditional protected areas, which remains very important. It will be a key pillar going ahead towards bringing in and thinking about how we manage private lands, and in particular, how we manage working lands in order to advance conservation goals. Our sense, early on, is that this will be a key area of opportunity and advancement in progress in the context of a national conservation plan—not the only area, but absolutely a key area.

Finding those arrangements where you can combine the two activities is key, which is why we're very happy, for example, coming back to the issue of the home team. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada sees this as a positive element of an agriculture agenda, where you can manage your production on the working agricultural lands of the country in a certain way and you keep the production. You also advance the conservation goals.

• (1655)

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Of course the corollary to this is that getting rid of legislation that threatens the ability of landowners in rural communities to make a living is also an important conservation priority, and changing from a regulatory approach like the Species at Risk Act to an incentive-based approach is what I will strongly be pushing for in the development of this national conservation plan.

In terms of the documents, the emphasis does seem to be on the drawing of lines on maps and keeping people out. I would make the point that biodiversity on working lands can actually be much better conserved than on these preserved lands. I am particularly struck by the example of Grasslands National Park, and people have to realize that the only reason those conservation values were maintained was because they were working landscapes under the active management of ranchers.

Would you make a comment on that?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I'd make a very general quick comment. I think our sense is that part of what will likely be new in the NCP is that it would be bringing in a much greater focus on working lands. We actually don't believe that it's an either/or proposition. We believe that both dimensions are actually useful and productive and you've just got to find the best, most productive, next step among the wide range of choices, whether it's working lands or protected lands.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** On the private land landscape, the regulatory approach to conservation has been an utter failure, which is one of the reasons that rural and agricultural communities have reacted so badly to this. I make the point that in the documents you put out there's a real lack of acknowledgement of rural agricultural and natural resource communities.

I took down the list of your key groups and categories. I did not see rural communities mentioned there. I did not see natural resource communities mentioned there. And I did not see farm groups. You probably want to put farm groups under industry, but agriculture is as much of a culture as it is an industry. I would urge that they be included. What I find in all these kinds of documents and discussions is that rural natural resource and agricultural communities are always forgotten, and that simply must change.

Regarding your points about connectivity, joining preserved areas, have you given any thought to the fact that in between these preserved areas there is often privately owned land, natural resource harvesting lands, lands of importance to rural economies, often managed sustainably? Don't you think that's an issue, the fact that people live in these areas you want to connect?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Thank you for that.

I should point out I confess I'm guilty of including agriculture into the industry groups. But the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association were participants in the minister's round table, and I think we'll treat them as a separate category in the future.

I think you raise a really good point and a really key point: that in terms of connecting natural spaces you're doing it in areas where people live and where people work and where people produce. I think one of the benefits for us is that a promising opportunity of the natural conservation plan is figuring out the collaborative arrangements whereby you can work with those stakeholders and figure out a way together where sometimes very small adjustments or changes, or just being aware of factors, can create a more conducive natural habitat.

I think one of the interesting things, and it's a great sort of contrast.... I was in Hamilton looking at Randle Reef, which is a contaminated sediment area that we're trying to pull together in a tripartite solution for the Great Lakes. Around the corner is Cootes Paradise, and then there's the Cootes to escarpment area, where a whole bunch of people have come together voluntarily and landowners have made marginal changes to how they manage their properties, which has created a natural ecosystem much more conducive to habitat. I think it's a great success story along the lines of what you're describing.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately time has expired, Mr. Sopuck. You're going to have another chance in a little bit.

Ms. Rempel.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** I actually just wanted to pick up on some of the comments Ms. Leslie made going back to the scope and structure of the study with regard to participant listing and then some of the supporting information we've all talked about. I wanted to summarize that as we close off here and get your thoughts.

What I've taken from today is that if we were to group the types of participants we should be inviting or making sure we're touching on, I've got aboriginal organizations; private sector organizations, which includes industry trade associations—to my colleague's comments on making sure that we include them—agriculture, forestry, and natural resources; non-governmental organizations, so conservation groups and other non-government organizations as well. And we have federal government departments—and you had expressed the depth and the breadth, so we've got Agriculture, Fisheries, etc.; other levels of government, according to some of the comments that came up here, so provincial, urban, and rural municipalities as well; and then academia.

Do you think that's a good sampling, based on who you invited to the round table, and that if we have some people under each of those lists that would probably give a good cross-section on the issue?

•(1700)

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I think that's a great group. I don't recall if you had said aboriginal organizations at first.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** I did, right off the top.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** You did. Okay, good. Excellent. I think that's a fantastic list.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Going into some of the supporting information that we've all talked about today, I just wanted to summarize the sorts of groupings we should be looking at: our international agreements under this topic; to Ms. Duncan's comments, an inventory of existing initiatives, both federally and

provincially; and some of the federal strategic documents that are existing.

Mr. Keenan, you brought up the federal sustainability strategy. If we looked into those three key areas for supporting documentation, is there anything we're missing? Or are there any other categories of information we should be using as background?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I think it's included in the inventory of existing programs on the ground. It's the programs you're getting at, I assume.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Yes.

I know some of my colleagues have chosen to get into content today, but I really wanted to give you maybe just two minutes very briefly to provide some closing statements on scope and your thoughts around structure of discussion. It's just because we will be heading into that in a subcommittee shortly.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** It's difficult to comment extensively, only because my initial reaction is that you framed that in terms of what you've proposed, and the list of questions and issues sounds like a pretty reasonable scope to start. It gives the breadth of bringing the ideas in.

I can't think, offhand, of any key group of stakeholders or experts who wouldn't be included in the categories that you've listed. Looking at our national-international commitments and our current activities is a very good way to ground it. I think one additional suggestion is to bring that same idea in as we bring the stakeholders in—What are your ideas? What are you doing—and bring in those two dimensions.

It seems like a pretty good thing. I can't think of anything to add or suggest, to be honest.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, great.

With the time remaining, could you briefly outline, bullet-point level, the consultation activities that have happened to date, just so we can make sure we're not duplicating that on the front end?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Sure.

There have been fairly informal consultations to date. One of the key anchor points is the round table that the minister held in January, which has been a point of discussion here. Leading up to that, we've had some consultation, largely with conservation groups who were keen to talk to us about a national conservation plan, who were keen to offer their suggestions and perspectives. It was mainly the key national groups like the NCC, Ducks Unlimited, etc.



We've worked on organizing the home team to try to get those five departments thinking about this and getting excited about it. We've done that. That's obviously very backroom but important work. At both the ministerial level and the officials' level, we've engaged our provincial colleagues, both in the environment ministries and in the natural resource ministries—sometimes they're the same ministry, but in many provinces they're not—in terms of updating them about what we're thinking of doing, how we want to work collaboratively, and beginning to get ideas and suggestions from them. We're currently working to try to organize, more from an officials' level, a technical workshop on innovations in conservation. We can begin to look at what is out there for ideas, what is out there for pilot projects that somebody's tried, that look promising. And we can just start building, in our own offices, a better sense of what the potential majors are that could support a future vision.

As we move forward, though, the minister is keen to go from these informal discussions he's having to a higher-profile formal consultation. I imagine he'll be doing a speech at some time in the near future and kicking off a more formal engagement of key partners across the country.

In that context, obviously, the insights and advice of the committee would be very helpful.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Ms. Rempel for summarizing that material. I think that was a really good review.

I'll just say, again, I really hope you can table that information I've asked for.

I'm very interested in evidence-based policy, so I'm wondering if you can address one thing we haven't talked about: research. If all this good work is happening, I'd like to know about the monitoring. That's one piece we haven't mentioned here. What monitoring, what research—and should this be part of the plan?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** When you say “monitoring and research”, what are you referring to?

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** I'm referring broadly to research. When you're—

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Are you referring to conservation?

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** If we're putting in place a conservation plan—and there is eventually going to be a conservation plan, and we're going to implement it—I think research needs to be part of this overall structure. Right now we don't have that there.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** It's interesting, because the sense we're getting from early conversations on national conservation is that part of the value is that you create a framework. We're a bit hesitant to declare the framework should be X because we don't think it's up to us to do that; we think that needs to work through the consultations. But as you create a framework and a sense of common purpose and collaboration, you bring together many different activities that aren't connected, and you can connect them around a common purpose or set of objectives, goals, targets, principles, etc.

We haven't mentioned it, but one of them is research, quite honestly. A tremendous amount of research on ecosystems happens within Environment Canada, and a tremendous amount happens across the country in academic institutions. Just simply aligning that and having that contribute is a major step forward, without getting maximum value from what we're already doing in research and monitoring. We're hopeful that this can be worked in to be part of that.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** We should add that to our framework.

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** Sure.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** There is research in many parts of the environment, but I think we should specify the monitoring piece. I think it would be useful to break that out. Do you agree with that?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** I do, and my sense is that there is a fair bit of research out there. There is publishing—the Ecosystem Status and Trends Report, etc.—that gives us a sense of things that are happening. Bringing that analysis into the discussion is a key part of fostering the good development of a national conservation plan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** We'll add research and monitoring to the framework then. I appreciate that.

The other issue I'm quite concerned about is the steep decline in the health of our oceans. We have communities that depend on healthy oceans for their long-term sustainability.

I am concerned when I hear it's 10% by 2020. I believe it's much higher. As we know, we're 1% of the way there. I've heard “aspirational” today. I would hope it's more than that.

Some people are asking for 12 marine protected areas by 2012. Are we going to make the 10% by 2020?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** It's difficult to tell you what the total of all future government decisions is going to be in terms of 2020, so it's difficult to say yes, no, or maybe. What might be useful, though, is a sense of some of the activities in marine protected areas.

Mike, you may wish to speak to that briefly.

• (1710)

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Thank you very much.

Certainly it is a challenging goal, not just for Canada. When we were in Japan, negotiating these various targets, all countries expressed the challenges within those aspirational goals.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Some countries are doing much better than we are.

**Mr. Mike Wong:** Yes, agreed. Australia is one example.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Australia is, absolutely.

**Mr. Mike Wong:** For our part, we are placing quite an emphasis in terms of looking at our national marine conservation areas, working with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on the marine protected areas. Lancaster Sound is one example of the progress, and the Southern Strait of Georgia National Marine Conservation Area is the other one.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Our final questioner will be Mr. Sopuck.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** In terms of the national conservation plan, my strong recommendation will be that a much greater emphasis be placed on the working landscape. I have to reiterate that is where the greatest conservation gains can be made.

In terms of Ms. Duncan's point about oceans and fisheries, I consider actively managing harvested fisheries in the same category as a working landscape. That has to be the priority of the national conservation plan.

I don't want to minimize it, but putting lines around maps in remote areas.... You have to ask yourself about the conservation gain of a wetland program in prairie Canada that deals with the flood control issues, which my colleague was talking about, where one would see really serious and beneficial gains.

So just to throw it out to you, how would you see a wetland conservation program on the private land agricultural landscape in prairie Canada unfolding?

**Mr. Michael Keenan:** It's a great question. I would agree with the proposition that getting a wetland program unfolding in the prairies would have immense value.

One specific example is the work we did on Lake Winnipeg. There was a significant challenge there in nutrient management for a whole bunch of reasons. Through getting that shoreline working and back to a natural habitat and getting some cattails back, there was a tremendous pullout of phosphorus. I know that's not flood control, but it's an example of a wetland that's helping tremendously to get an ecosystem back into shape.

On how to roll out a wetland program in the prairies, I don't have any insightful advice right now, other than the fact that if you're going to do that, given the nature of the prairies, you are into working the landscape and getting the farmers to till the land to preserve those potholes. They become temporary reservoirs of water that prevent the rush to the river systems, etc. In the context of the beneficial management practices and the agricultural management practices, there have been some gains there in recent years.

I used to work at Agriculture Canada in a previous life and talked to landowners on this. Some of them are very committed to finding ways to put some of the hedgerows back; putting some of the natural features back in the farms they're operating now for profit; and in doing so, providing habitat for waterfowl and better flood control. So there are opportunities there. On how to do it, we need advice.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** As Mr. McLean knows from another picture show, I'll probably have some advice as things roll out. That's a promise. I think we can design some incredibly positive programs, but throughout this process I'll focus like a laser on the working landscape, because that's quite frankly where the action is.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, the time has expired.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here: Mr. McLean, Mr. Keenan, and Mr. Wong. What you have provided us in the way of testimony has been very helpful.

Colleagues, we will suspend for two minutes and then we will go in camera to talk about future business.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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