



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 036 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, May 15, 2012

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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

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• (0830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): I want to welcome everyone to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, which is travelling. This is our 36th meeting in this session of Parliament. We are studying a national conservation plan. I want to welcome the witnesses and thank them for being here today.

We will proceed. We travelled yesterday on Vancouver Island. It was very interesting and informative. The discussions and the tour were more general in nature. We will be focusing on the six points of providing advice to the government in creating a national conservation plan. In the presentations and in the questions from members of the committee, please stay focused on our mandate. Each of the witness groups will be given up to ten minutes, which will be followed by questions.

We begin with the Association of Professional Biology for ten minutes.

Thank you.

Ms. Pamela Zevit (Registered Professional Biologist, Past President, Chair, Practice Advisory and Professional Ethics, Association of Professional Biology): Thank you very much.

Good morning.

Honourable members of the standing committee, on behalf of the Association of Professional Biology, I would like to express our appreciation at being invited to provide input on this important national endeavour. Before I begin I would like to provide a brief background on the association so that you may have a better understanding of the important role we and our members play in the development of conservation policy at all levels.

The APB has formally represented the interests of biology professionals in British Columbia since 1980. The association was originally formed by academic, government, and private sector interests to collectively bring recognition, credibility, and legislative accountability to the professional practice of applied biology. Our members represent and adhere to the highest standards and expertise in the application of science and professional ethical conduct across a broad range of disciplines, and that varies from conservation biology to environmental toxicology, land and resource management, and impact assessment, just to name a few.

I'd also like to point out that we are the only group who are governed by an act in Canada. So that makes us rather unique here in

British Columbia. The perspectives from our members on what is required to ensure a successful national conservation plan in Canada are as diverse as our areas of expertise. The following attributes or must-haves represent a sampling of what is deemed essential as a starting point for this process to be effective.

Main components need to include the following: recognize that habitat loss and degradation is the primary, present threat to species and ecosystems in Canada; protect the habitat species need to carry out their life processes, and to survive and recover if they're at risk, whether this habitat is inside a park or in the areas between; locate and acquire parks, buffers, and connective areas where primary habitat for species at risk exists; manage and design parks, and the areas between parks, with climate change adaptation and mitigation in mind.

How do we view a more detailed vision for a national conservation plan? First, think like a landscape. As Aldo Leopold said, "To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering." The foundation of effective conservation planning must include the identification and protection of a diverse range of ecological communities, with a focus on those of high conservation importance. Such communities typically support key survival habitat for a range of common and at-risk species and maintain biodiversity across multiple scales. Their connectedness must be maximized, and conversely, this means fragmentation must be minimized with areas in between included in the landscape equation.

One of many tools to maximize on the challenges of maintaining landscape connectivity when faced with protected areas that become habitat islands is to invest in creative conservation financing, such as funding compensatory land acquisition and incentives for stewardship on private land. A good example of that is the federal habitat stewardship program.

Second, maintain natural processes. To remain resilient in the face of long-term natural shifts in native species' population dynamics, interspecies relationships, ecological succession, and energy flow must be allowed to occur in as complete and unimpeded a state as possible. Admittedly the notion of what is truly a natural process versus those that are the result of centuries, if not eons, of human intervention may be debatable. However, a significant amount of scientific, defensible, and quantifiable research on thresholds and tipping points for these processes has been, and continues to be, made available to guide planning and decision-making. An example of these types of natural processes is predator-prey relationships. Some of the most explicit ones in the media right now are things like dealing with predator control around wolves and caribou, managing the effects of invading non-native species, and allowing for natural processes in flowing water systems. This includes the natural movement and shifts of highly productive areas like flood plains and deltas. While there will always be situations that will need careful consideration in this regard, the interventionist approach of the past to force natural processes to meet human needs has only served to exact costly and irreversible effects on our natural assets.

Third, water is essential. Linking surface, groundwater, and marine resource protection is fundamental, whether working at the local watershed level or nationally. Water, in particular fresh water, is not only essential for all life but directly and indirectly tied to the maintenance of our economies.

• (0835)

A national conservation plan should reflect this and embody undertakings to maintain the highest values in water quality, reduce competition and conflict over water rights between human and non-human interests, and ensure that conserving water resources continues to be supported across all sectors.

Fourth, identify common ground. The APB recommends that a national conservation plan be inclusive across geopolitical, sectoral, and cultural boundaries. Ensuring effective collaboration while identifying conflicts to be resolved before they stall or undermine the processes will be essential to achieving this plan. Science-based interests and industry must be integrated with traditional ecological knowledge resources, i.e., first nations, as well as the vast public infrastructure of citizen science and environmental non-government resources. Bringing together this mosaic of interests has distinguished Canada in the past as an international leader in environmental protection and conservation.

Fifth, plan for the future now. Given present growth trajectories and resource development pressures, conservation planning must incorporate the potential for land-use activities to occur that impact the landscape in the future. While the public, resource managers, and decision-makers may be at odds over where, how, and to what degree this should occur, it is prudent to identify areas of potential conflict sooner rather than later, where resource development overlaps with areas of conservation importance.

This will assist with both conservation and resource development planning for the future. As well, cumulative environmental impacts will be avoided if high-priority conservation areas can be protected by legislation now and therefore be avoided during future activities. Greater certainty can also then be provided to industry by identifying

where development may occur or requiring greater mitigation measures before activities are even planned.

In a global context, the scientific consensus and recognition of the present and long-term effects of climate change and biodiversity loss must not be ignored. It is important that the public and decision-makers be committed to scientifically informed choices. Do we wish to see ongoing conservation planning that is focused solely on a "last chance to see" approach around species and ecosystem protection? Or do we want to be proactively supporting the necessary research and adaptation actions that will address present and future impacts, and protect as high a level of biodiversity and ecosystem goods and services as possible?

Sixth, best science and informed decision-making is not optional. Recently proposed legislative changes suggest the federal government is on a path contrary to a commitment to sound conservation principles. This is especially relevant with respect to conservation and impact mitigation, and includes: issues around changes to the federal Fisheries Act; limits placed on government scientists to directly communicate with the public, a number of whom include registered biology professionals in British Columbia; using changes to tax legislation to limit activities of environmental organizations, again a number of which employ registered biology professionals in this province; publicly stated support by federally elected decision-makers for major infrastructure projects before environmental and cumulative impact assessments are even developed, much less completed; changing standards for environmental assessments, including timeline restrictions; and recent significant cuts to Parks Canada and other natural resource ministry staff involved in species conservation and protected areas establishment. All this is happening with no visible support for the environmental science and resource management professionals who will be expected to provide the expertise to address the outcomes of these changes.

In closing, a robust national conservation plan must be based on best science, inclusive collaboration, and strong precautionary laws and policies that effectively protect species and habitat across multiple scales and jurisdictions.

However, the Association of Professional Biology is faced with a conundrum. How do we continue to further support something so fundamentally essential as a national conservation plan, when we feel it is only being done through a façade of federal commitment to protecting and sustaining Canada's biodiversity?

The APB would be happy to provide its extensive expertise in the evolution of a national conservation plan. However, this must be based on a mutual recognition that conservation science and protecting Canada's rich ecological capital are as integral to the federal government's decision-making processes as components to the country's economy.

We look forward to working with you further when we can be confident that this is the case. On behalf of our board of directors and our membership, thank you for your consideration and listening today.

• (0840)

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we proceed to the next witness the hearings today are formal hearings. They are to hear professional advice from the witnesses and provide advice to the Government of Canada in creating a national conservation plan. I provided the courtesy in allowing the witness to finish the presentation, but I would ask the witnesses not to use this as a platform to provide a political critique. This is a very important hearing, not an opportunity—

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): On a point of order, Mr. Chairman, what are you doing?

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, please wait.

I'm asking the witnesses to provide advice to this committee. It's not an opportunity to make political statements. That will be the only warning I'm going to provide in that respect.

The next witness will be from the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, for 10 minutes.

Thank you.

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin (Director, Terrestrial Conservation, British Columbia Chapter, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you, Mark.

For those of you reading along, I'll be doing a slightly shortened version of my presentation.

My name is Chloe O'Loughlin. I'm the director of terrestrial conservation at the B.C. chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. We are Canada's voice for public wilderness protection. It's our vision to protect at least half of our public land and coastal waters. In Canada, 90% of the land and all of the oceans are public—they belong to the governments.

Today I will explain how a well-framed conservation plan would play out in British Columbia and give you on-the-ground examples at the provincial and community levels. My colleague, Alison Woodley, presented in Ottawa about the nationwide play-out, and I wanted to talk to you about how it would look in the small communities.

In 2009 and 2010, we celebrated with the federal government, the provincial government, and the related first nations two wonderful achievements. One was the establishment of the national marine conservation area around Haida Gwaii, and the other was the announcement of a national marine conservation area around the southern Gulf Islands. These are huge achievements that were

received very well by the public, and there is lots more that needs to be done.

We believe that a successful national conservation plan should focus on four elements, at least. These are to protect, connect, restore, and engage the public.

Protection includes completing and caring for a network of protected areas for Canada, including the completion of the system of national parks and marine protected areas.

Connection means connecting the working landscape with these protected areas so that wildlife can move between the protected areas, through the managed landscape, and around industrial development. This is best achieved through regional land use and marine spatial planning, and then ensuring that there's a strong framework of environmental laws.

We strongly support the restoration of degraded ecosystems, and we encourage you to include Canadians, especially children and youth, in conserving nature. In British Columbia, we're working with the federal government in establishing new national parks in northern B.C., in the South Okanagan-Similkameen, and in the expansion of Waterton Lakes National Park into B.C.'s Flathead Valley.

Just yesterday we released our national report called "12 by 2012", which assesses the degree of progress that has been made towards establishing 12 new key marine protected areas in our coastal waters, four of which we're working with you on in British Columbia.

National parks and marine protected areas are an important part of our national and provincial identity. They are as popular as hockey and the Canadian flag.

Around the world, protected areas are recognized as the cornerstone of conservation strategies. Our national parks and marine conservation areas are not only essential to achieving our mutual goals of protecting wildlife and healthy ecosystems for future generations, they are also immensely important to preserving Canadian identity and culture, supporting healthy citizens and communities, and providing substantial economic and job development benefits to local communities, the province, and the entire country.

In my position I have travelled all over the province and have met thousands of citizens from diverse backgrounds. I can tell you that the Government of Canada connects in a highly visible and positive way with citizens in the smaller communities through your national parks and marine protected areas.

In the face of a rapidly changing climate, it's also important to ensure that these protected areas are connected together in a way that allows plants and animals to move and shift in response to these changing conditions.

●(0845)

The national conservation plan can integrate two fundamental elements—the protected areas and the well-managed land and seascapes—under one framework. Success depends on doing both in a coordinated way. As I said before, the plan will only be successful if it is supported within a strong framework of environmental law.

Protected areas, such as national parks and marine protected areas, contribute significantly to our prosperity in British Columbia. According to the report, which is called *Economic Impact of Parks Canada*, in B.C., the established national parks like Mount Revelstoke National Park, on average, contribute \$37.1 million per year to our province's GDP. They provide labour revenue of \$25 million—this is per park, per year—and tax revenue of \$3.5 million.

Visitor spending, which is very important in these communities, is on average \$49 million per year. The economic benefits are enormous. In addition to that, each national park hires between 20 and 25 permanent jobs, and 570 spin-off jobs, such as extra people in the hotels and motels.

These parks and protected areas help our tourism sector immensely—locally, provincially, and across Canada—to gain international recognition, grow new emerging markets, increase our competitive advantage, expand the length of stay in the shoulder seasons, and significantly increase visitor spending.

Marine protected areas help support our sustainable fisheries in British Columbia, the province in which seafood production alone was valued at \$1.4 billion in 2010. Marine protected areas act like fish nurseries, so the abundance of the fish increases significantly. They also tend to be larger and they have more successful reproduction. The marine protected areas are crucial to our fishing industry. They contribute as well to economic diversification, opportunities for investment, and population diversification.

I'm working to help establish a new national park in the South Okanagan-Similkameen, so I've talked a lot to the people in those communities. Oliver has no hotel, and they really would like to have a hotel. They believe that if there's a national park, they will be able to get investors to invest in a new hotel, which is important to their community.

In Penticton, they are always worried about losing their airport. They believe that if there's a national park they could encourage an additional carrier, which would ensure their local airport stays in place.

Osoyoos is comprised of a lot of retired people—a high percentage of retired people in the Okanagan—and at this point they're going to lose their high school. They believe, and it's been proven, that young people will move to be near a national park. The population diversification that's so important in the Okanagan could ensure that Osoyoos gets to keep a high school. The local citizens are really interested in the new permanent jobs that will result from the national park because this will allow their family members to stay in the community and their children to have summer jobs locally that will last the entire summer. These are important at the local level.

The national parks and marine protected areas help Canadians connect better to nature. Multiple independent studies have shown

that spending time in nature improves both the mental and physical health of Canadians. We would support programs in the national conservation plan that would reconnect kids to nature. By working in partnerships with others, this is really possible.

In summary, the plan could make significant differences to conservation on the ground, provincially, and in the small communities across B.C. and across Canada, if it focuses on six outcomes.

●(0850)

One is to complete the network of protected areas for Canada, specifically completing all of the national parks in Canada and the marine protected areas that are part of the system's plan, ensuring that the protected areas are nested within the landscape and within seascapes that are managed to sustain wildlife and healthy ecosystems. In order to do this, we need to have regional planning and marine planning as well, throughout the country and on all three of our coasts.

It would position Canada as a global leader by committing to exceed the current international biodiversity targets of protecting 17% of land and 10% of the oceans by 2020. We have the opportunity to do this. We could be world leaders, ensuring that the conservation initiatives are grounded in strong science, traditional knowledge, good environmental laws. This should be a national conservation plan for all Canadians, inspiring all Canadians to participate in your plan, and then providing the programs and partnerships that reconnect our children and youth to nature. It could be inspirational in leadership and provide a legacy for generations to come.

●(0855)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we will hear from the Pacific Salmon Foundation. I want to thank them for their participation in yesterday's tour of Vancouver Island.

Dr. Brian Riddell (President and Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Salmon Foundation): Good morning, committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on the initial steps in developing a national conservation plan, a plan I think will be welcomed by many environmentally conscious Canadians in light of recent announcements associated with the budget bill.

Let me first say that in my opinion the four-page document provided—the backgrounder and the national conservation plan—is a very good starting point, particularly the first paragraph that emphasizes the importance of nature to Canadians.

The backgrounder reads like a strong commitment of government to protect our iconic landscapes, seascapes, and wild species. I sincerely hope that the commitment is real, that nature will be valued as more than a driver for our economy, and that the value of the ecosystem services provided to Canada will be better appreciated and protected for generations.

Success in developing this plan is going to have its challenges, but if my experience over 30 years with Pacific salmon throughout British Columbia is representative, we will be able to draw on a wealth of experience, expertise, and stewardship from community organizations, universities, industries, and NGOs.

However, to build strong collaboration and to use this expertise, I suggest that we begin this NCP process by describing a set of national goals and setting out the commitment of the federal government to achieve them. Without a strong will to implement this plan, there's little point in building great expectations in the public or expending the effort required to achieve a national program.

I want to limit my comments to three major points in building the NCP and to describe one example of an effective conservation policy already developed in Canada—Canada's policy for wild Pacific salmon.

There are three priority issues I want to emphasize in developing the plan. First, in a country of the scope and diversity of Canada, the national plan should be hierarchical in structure, with national goals and principles, and a regionally specific implementation that recognizes the diversity of landscapes and biological systems across Canada. It's appropriate to have consistent principles across our country, but we have to recognize that ecological systems vary by region and are determined by the interaction of landscapes, climate, and biological systems. Within these ecological zones, measures of biological diversity or the use of key species as indicators define another stratum for consideration within regions.

Second, the plan should be a science-based process in the delineation of ecosystems. This should comprise terrestrial, fresh water, estuaries, and marine environments so that the methods are repeatable, make use of available knowledge and expertise, and include monitoring to track successes or failures and to learn from our experience through time.

We are not starting from zero in this effort. There is an extensive literature related to these methods. For example, there is the work of the Nature Conservancy at a website called conservationgateway.org, and a publication that describes what we're undertaking, *Conservation Area Design*. It provides an excellent starting point for the structure of the plan.

Third, the development of the NCP should be inclusive and involve localized stewardship groups to incorporate their local values and interests, to monitor their environments, and to monitor progress towards regional objectives. These community organizations provide exceptional value in labour and local knowledge, as well as an important tie between communities and the local natural environments. This is not a new recommendation. An excellent statement of the potential value of local stewardship called "Canada's Stewardship Agenda" was published by Environment Canada in 2002.

• (0900)

The example I want to present was developed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and is entitled *Canada's Policy for Conservation of Wild Pacific Salmon*. It was completed in June 2005 after six years of extensive public consultations and more than

a decade of scientific debate. I provided you copies of this yesterday, on your tour.

This policy has subsequently been applied to Atlantic salmon in eastern Canada and is widely recognized as a model framework for the sustainable management of Pacific salmon to maintain their adaptability to environmental change and for the inclusion of communities in decision processes that affect them.

You might think of the policy as the result of three intersecting circles. One circle represents the physical landscape and climate that determines the major ecological zones in British Columbia. The second circle represents the biological features of Pacific salmon populations, the dynamics of their interactions between populations—I mean the spawning aggregations—and the ecological interactions that define the productivity of the salmon population. We use productivity in the sense of how many progeny are produced from a pair of spawners. The third circle represents the human impacts overlain on the salmon and their environment.

With this intersection, these circles describe the conservation need for a particular Pacific salmon group or species. To address these issues within one national policy—the wild salmon policy—the consultation process agreed to five strategies or action steps within the policy.

One is to define the geographic range of each salmon species and population, and for each to describe management targets and a monitoring plan to understand the state of these resources. Second is to, within each conservation unit, assess the habitat quality and quantity and monitor habitat trends over time. Again within the conservation unit, the third is to assess the ecological conditions within the unit, assessing both the value of salmon to local ecosystems—for example, the marine nutrients provided as salmon return from the sea—and the importance of local ecological processes to the productivity of Pacific salmon, such as, for example, the availability of fresh water or the condition of local estuaries for juvenile salmon. Fourth is to develop an open and transparent process to involve local community groups in decisions that will directly affect their communities. And the last one is to conduct periodic evaluations to assess progress and to adjust as we appreciate changes that are necessary.

There actually is a sixth strategy, which you'll see in the policy, but it pertains to the annual implementation of fisheries management decisions, since the intent of the policy is long-term but fisheries must be managed on an annual time scale.

While this example may not seem directly analogous to your task to develop a national conservation plan of much greater scope, I would suggest that the steps involved are analogous to your task and would be particularly useful at the regional level of organization for many other species.

Now, Mark, I don't say the next part as any criticism at all; it's a statement of fact that I want to emphasize for a specific salmon that we talked about yesterday. The comment is simply that given the current concern about changes in the Fisheries Act and habitat provisions, I feel that I have to emphasize that the diversity of Pacific salmon that we enjoy in Canada is a direct reflection of the diversity of habitats available and the direct tie between salmon and those habitats. We can't have healthy, productive Pacific salmon without protecting the diversity of their habitats and the functioning ecosystems that they exist within. Pacific salmon really are a direct reflection of their habitat and the ancestral lineages that led to what we see today. The wild salmon policy will protect both, through time and under various climate changes.

What I think will be different in your task at the national level, compared with the regional wild salmon policy, is how to incorporate what I simply refer to as "big picture" issues that will be overlain on the current status of species and our habitats—for example, the management and conservation of fresh water in Canada. I also include climate change responses and impacts in B.C. of particular interest, such things as mountain pine beetle interactions, and we have marine impacts in the Strait of Georgia.

• (0905)

I also think we need to draw attention to the care and protection of Canada's three oceans and their biodiversity. I draw your attention to the very recent publication from the Royal Society of Canada on marine biodiversity status. It's available on the RSC website.

Finally, for consistency with international obligations that Canada has already signed on to, I would think that the structure of the program will have to very much be hierarchical in nature. It's possible, then, that these larger issues might be addressed by specific advisory processes to assist you in how to identify what these pressures are and provide an appropriate response to them within the national plan.

I very much look forward to more discussion on this very worthwhile task. I expect you will receive a lot of advice and opinions, but I hope you will make use of the extensive expertise in Canada, make use of the many past efforts and publications, draw on communities' local knowledge and willingness to assist you, and of course, in my reference to "communities" I most certainly include the first nations of Canada with their local and traditional knowledge.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you.

Lastly we'll hear from Trout Unlimited Canada.

You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Jeff Surtees (Chief Executive Officer, Trout Unlimited Canada): Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the committee on behalf of our organization for the opportunity to appear today and to make submissions. My name is Jeff Surtees. I'm the CEO of Trout Unlimited Canada.

Our organization is a national habitat conservation organization. We were created 40 years ago, in 1972, with the mission to conserve,

protect, and restore Canada's freshwater ecosystems. We were started by anglers, by people who like to fish, and we're now supported by anglers and non-anglers alike across the country. We're governed by a volunteer board of directors and have volunteer chapters in the Maritimes, in Quebec—well, we have one in Quebec, but we're going to have a lot more soon—in Ontario, in Alberta, and in British Columbia.

We work with communities and we work with local volunteers. We take pride in being an action-oriented organization. We are completely non-partisan and non-political. The bulk of our funding comes from Canadian individuals and corporations, and only a small amount from government sources at this time. We've always worked cooperatively with industry and governments of all stripes. Our members believe we've earned our place at the table by being an organization that fixes things. We like to do more than to talk about doing.

Our habitat work involves stream restoration, monitoring, and assessment, all based on sound science. To our members, a cold-water stream or river is a place of almost infinite beauty, a place where life begins. Our work also involves educating schoolchildren through our Yellow Fish Road program. In that program, thousands of participants go out with their class or community group and paint a small yellow fish on a storm drain in their community to remind people that everything in the physical world is connected. Storm drains are connected directly to rivers, and by pouring something down a drain you're pouring it right into some animal's house.

We were provided with five questions to guide our submissions today, and I'm going to focus my remarks on just the third and fourth of those questions, which were: what should the guiding principles of a national conservation plan be, and what should the conservation priorities of a national conservation plan be? Then we'll make a short comment on the fifth question, which is, what should the implementation priorities of a national conservation plan be?

The first question—which is the third question—is what guiding principles should govern in a national conservation plan. We have four guiding principles to suggest. They are very consistent with the comments that have been made to you by the other people giving testimony today.

The first guiding principle that we suggest is that the national conservation plan must be based on sound science. Conservation and restoration require a deep understanding of the biophysical conditions and processes that create habitat where animal and plant populations live. A conservation plan must use the best science available to ensure that we maintain and restore these biophysical functions. When we say "based on sound science"—and we hear that phrase in a lot of contexts these days—to us it means that the plan is guided by information that is measurable and is measured; that it identifies the links between physical structure and the actual functioning of a watershed or landscape; and thirdly and very importantly, that it addresses the cumulative effect of all activities within the watershed or landscape.

The second suggested guiding principle relates to scale. Conservation planning must be done at an ecologically relevant geographic scale and on an ecologically relevant time scale. We submit that the proper geographic scale for the individual components of the national conservation plan must be, at a minimum, the scale of the entire ecosystem or the entire watershed in question. The proper time scale must be very long. The decision has to be based on thinking that is at least decades, if not hundreds of years, into the future rather than on the expediencies of the day.

The third suggested guiding principle is that the national conservation plan should strive to educate all Canadians about ecology. We just have to raise the bar of common knowledge. Increased ecological literacy should, we believe, lead to a deeper level of caring, which should, we believe, lead to positive participation in community action. People who care and people who know a little more will care more and will do more in a positive way.

● (0910)

The fourth and final guiding principle that we suggest is that the implementation of a national conservation plan must be adequately funded and resourced. It absolutely must have long-term support from all levels of government. If the plan includes work to be done by groups like all of ours here at the table, there must be mechanisms in place to help those organizations within the non-profit sector to remain sustainable. Many very good organizations spend a great deal of time and effort just trying to stay alive.

I'm going to move to question four, the conservation priorities that should be included in the national conservation plan. Our belief is that if we get the guiding principles right, the conservation priorities should flow directly from them. I'm only going to comment on conservation priorities that fall under Trout Unlimited Canada's mandate as an organization, which is dealing with small freshwater streams and rivers. Many other priorities that other organizations will probably put forward will be equally valid.

Guiding principle number one that we have suggested is that the plan must be based on sound science. The science that we have put together shows that work can be prioritized and be made more effective that way. The prioritization we use is this. The highest priority work to be done on small streams and rivers is that work which improves water quality. First, you think about quality. The second highest priority is work that maintains or improves the quantity of water in a system. The third and fourth highest priority work would be to improve physical habitat, and to work directly on managing fish populations through stocking or removing fish from a system, and in both cases, focusing on the maintenance and restoration of native species before non-native species. Again, the conservation priorities to be consistent with the guiding principles would be implemented on a minimum of a watershed scale in a manner that can be sustained indefinitely.

I'll move to question five. I have a brief comment on it. What should the implementation priorities of a national conservation plan be? This is a very difficult question for us. We had a lot of debate among our board members, and I have received a lot of calls from our members about it. It's a difficult question for us to address right now because, Mr. Chairman, we were asked to stick to the agenda—

the matter directly before the committee, and I will do that—but everything is connected.

The work that is being done under Bill C-38, the changes that are being made, directly affect the work of this committee. It's a fact. When we're asked for recommendations about implementation plans, we think, "How we can do that?" We have to know what the regulations are going to say that are being brought in under the changes to the pieces of legislation in the bill. That's where the implementation is going to be. It is connected to the national conservation plan. As I say, we will work cooperatively with whatever system our elected representatives put in place. We will work under that, and we will offer our services to help. We believe, as an organization, that if an activity, industrial or otherwise, causes harmful alteration, disruption, or destruction of fish habitat, an environmental assessment must be triggered. That is being changed, we think. We have to be against that.

A national conservation plan, to live up to its name, has to be a big thing, a grand thing, a thing of great vision, something the whole country can be proud of, and something that is supported across all levels of government—municipal, provincial, and federal. The whole of government has to act in a way that is consistent with that theory, or little will have been accomplished.

I thank you for your work on this committee and look forward to participating further. Those our submissions.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will have a first round of questions from members of the committee, and I'll introduce them. Ms. Fry is with the Liberal Party, welcome. Monsieur Pilon and Monsieur Choquette are both with the official opposition, the NDP. Mr. Toet and Mr. Lunney are with the Conservative Party.

In the first round there are four questioners. We will begin with Mr. Toet. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all our witnesses with us this morning. I think the importance of what is occurring here and the importance of a national conservation plan for Canada for today and for the future and for the growth of our country has been very clearly articulated in your presentations.

One of the things I wanted to touch on here is the education aspect—the education of our youth and our urban residents. I think it was touched on a little in almost every presentation and I believe it's very important. I think we both fit into that a little. We have a lot of urbanization in Canada. We have a lot of residents of Canada who aren't exposed to conservation in the way they could be, and I really appreciated, Mr. Surtees, that you were working with children with sewer drains and things like that.

I wanted to ask a few questions regarding the education aspect. Ms. O'Loughlin, you talked about the support for connecting children and youth to nature by working in partnership with others. Can you just expand that a little? Have you seen ways that have worked effectively, or do you have ideas or inputs from your organization for effective ways that we can do this?

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: Yes, I do, thank you.

It's well known that our children are not getting out into the wilderness. They are staying in front of their computer screens, and if that continues, we'll have a drastically different kind of Canadian. So last year, we worked with Parks Canada, B.C. Parks, Mountain Equipment Co-op, and the Child and Nature Alliance to hold a program whereby we brought 40 youth from diverse backgrounds—first nations, new immigrants—to a wilderness camp near Vancouver and spent three days with them, getting them out into the wilderness and teaching them leadership skills.

Each one of those youth went back to their community and held an event of their own planning. A small amount of money was supplied by the partners to those youth, once they submitted their plan and budget, to hold an event in their own community. We taught them media relations, how to advertise, and those kids did amazing different kinds of events—runs through the wilderness where you stopped every mile and got a playing card and the person with the best poker hand at the end of the run won a prize, events where they took 10 others on a kayaking trip.

It was a great program that could be duplicated across Canada, and Parks Canada would be able to provide the federal government leadership and develop those partnerships.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you.

Mr. Riddell, you talked also in your presentation about the necessity of involving local groups. I'm a huge believer in that also. Yes I was intrigued; in your presentation, you also talked about needing a hierarchical, top-down approach. I know you've done some great projects in your area with regard to this.

Can you expand on how those two can work together cohesively because I understand what you're saying, but those two statements almost seem at odds with one another. How can those two items work together for the benefit of all?

• (0920)

Dr. Brian Riddell: Sure, thank you.

I think that Jeff's comment that everything is connected is probably where you start. I see this as a continuum that we build from the base up, not as two different directions. There is a need to have consistency at the national level for principles that we would all include. I think what you're looking at is a top-down leadership—a definition of principles that we can all buy into and that are fairly distributed across all of Canada's natural resources and landscapes. At the same time though, there is a great wealth of knowledge that we can build on from the local stewardship groups up. One can feed into the other, and they can mutually support each other. I don't see a conflict in any of these.

It's very unlikely that local scales would have any sort of high-level principles that I'm referring to that would be at odds with each

other. I think they just build a very strong supporting network that would really strengthen a national conservation plan.

The other thing that we didn't deal with a lot yesterday is that these people in the communities are there for the long term. Probably the best example are the first nations. These people have chosen to live where they are, and they'll be there for a long time. They're an invaluable way to monitor climate change, provide feedback to a network with first-hand and local knowledge about what's going on with our resources and our natural beauty, and so on.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: We saw a lot of that yesterday—the local community initiative. You're not taking away that initiative; you're just saying to have the principles guiding it, so that it's not a top-down, heavy-handed approach but rather a guiding and principle-based approach from the top, allowing these community initiatives to go forward.

Dr. Brian Riddell: Yes, it should definitely not be heavy-handed. You want to stimulate the initiative at the local scale. By stimulating it and resourcing it to some extent, as Jeff has said, you'll get excellent return and excellent support. They will know that their interests are being attended to, that we're all in this together, that there is not a division in this, and that we can design common goals.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Surtees, you talked a little bit about education. I'd like to expand on that. You talked about the one plan you have for educating youth. It is a huge challenge.

I come from an urban area. I was fortunate enough to have parents who spent a lot of time with me and brought me out into the wilderness areas of Manitoba. It was a great experience, and I continue to do this with my children. But there are a lot of urban children who do not have that opportunity.

How do we continue to reach out to them? Are there certain principles we should be using as a guide as we go forward, no matter what association it is? I know the fishers have some great programs. I'm assuming the trout fishers have them. I know that in Manitoba some of the fishing groups and the angler associations have some really good programs that just get kids out fishing on the Red River, which runs right through the centre of Winnipeg. You don't have to take them hundreds of miles away, but rather can get them to understand how nature works together right within the structure of the concrete jungle, so to speak.

Can you give us some thoughts and ideas on how we can reach out more and more to these youth, and especially involve the ones who to some degree don't have a family supporting them or a background in conservation? How do we reach out to them?

Mr. Jeff Surtees: It's a big challenge, and you're entirely right about city kids' lack of exposure to things that are wild. I was certainly one of those kids. I grew up in a small city but wasn't really exposed to too much outdoors.

What I'm told by professional educators is that the amount of involvement doesn't have to be that much; it just has to be something. I realize it's a provincial responsibility, but there has to be curriculum material that gets kids involved in the outdoors. They have to know where their food comes from. Food does not come from Safeway. It comes from animals, for the most part, and plants. Children have to understand where it comes from.

Getting involved in outdoor activities, whether through the national park system, through hiking, photography, bird-watching, hunting, fishing—all of these things—is important. And it can start to happen at a very young age. I think it only works if the base level of knowledge is built up a little bit, and then through community groups, that's where the kids will really get the opportunities. It can't be forced on children. They just have to be exposed to it.

Someone—I believe it was Robert Bateman—came up with a plan to put something in the curriculum whereby all kids would have to learn 10 natural plants and animal species. That's a great idea. Most kids couldn't name 10 wild plant species, I don't think.

● (0925)

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Jeff Surtees: Thank you.

The Chair: Monsieur Choquette, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

A lot of things are in progress with respect to the national conservation plan. There is much talk here about protecting habitat and water, groundwater and surface water.

Mr. Riddell, we had the opportunity to speak yesterday about protecting water and habitat. I noted that British Columbia has the same problem as Quebec when it comes to industry. We cannot put in place a national conservation plan without having scientific data and good regulation.

The shale gas industry and the coal bed methane industry that is active here, in British Columbia, uses an enormous amount of water. It is a concern of a lot of residents in my area, Drummondville, and elsewhere. I've also heard people say that it was a concern here.

What regulation should a national conservation plan include so that water is not contaminated or depleted? The water currently being used by the shale gas industry runs off into the ground in such a way that the water is lost, which affects the water level.

Could anyone with some knowledge about this say a few words?

[English]

Mr. Jeff Surtees: I'll speak very briefly and limit my comments to the production of shale gas.

The research we've done as an organization indicates that the bigger problem with shale gas production is the infrastructure that's required to produce the shale gas. That's as big a problem as the use of water, and when I say infrastructure, I'm talking about roads, pipes, all that kind of thing.

What sort of regulation should be put in place is a very big topic. We have to protect areas that can't be replaced—areas like the Skeena River system in B.C.

I'll pass to Mr. Riddell.

Dr. Brian Riddell: I have to agree; it's a huge question. There is a lack of regulation right now, to be honest. The concern is very great. There is extensive shale gas development in northeastern B.C., and there have been efforts to expand into major salmon watersheds.

It does take a huge volume of water. Depending on the type of material you're fracturing, the water can come back in an unusable form and the water quality is greatly degraded, so there is strong opposition in some of the really pristine habitats. Jeff referred to the Skeena River, which is in central northern British Columbia. There are areas there that are in pristine condition, and that is where Shell Gas wanted to develop. I'm sure you're aware there was extremely strong opposition to that, partly because there is a lack of a regulatory framework at this time.

I think you're touching on a problem that many people, I think even internationally, are looking at—you hear mixed reviews. Some areas seem to be okay with it. They aren't finding heavy contaminants. Other areas are being shut down because the contaminant loads in the fresh water are unacceptable. It may be very site specific in terms of what the real regulation has to be.

● (0930)

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: I can give you an on-the-ground example, and that's in northeastern British Columbia. Major oil and gas development happens there, and it's an important part of British Columbia's economy. We believe there should be balance between conservation and industrial development, and that area right now is very worrisome.

The most endangered boreal caribou in Canada are there, and Treaty 8 first nations are very worried, not only about contamination but also about the groundwater level and whether there's going to be enough water in the future.

I believe it's a matter of regulation and self-regulation by industry. There are many companies up there, and as my colleague said, they're all building roads, pipelines, and paths. They could be working together much more effectively to build one road, one shared pipeline, and that may be a matter of real leadership from the Government of Canada and the encouragement of the best of industry to take the lead and show how it can be done.

Northeastern British Columbia would be a great place to work on this and then showcase that to the rest of Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Miss Zevit, I would like to finish my question with respect to this area.

There is a change to environmental assessments in the regulation measures of the national conservation plan. Now, instead of triggers, it will be lists. Should shale gas also figure in the lists?

[English]

Ms. Pamela Zevit: I would say that from a broad legislative perspective and looking at policy, any particular extraction or resource development activity needs to be part of a comprehensive plan in which cumulative effects are factored in, so that includes mineral exploration, oil and gas exploration. In British Columbia, of course, we do have significant issues around that. The province has looked at issues of providing some level of accountability around chemicals that are used in shale gas exploration and reporting.

More broadly, we really do not have good harmonization between national and provincial legislation on things like cumulative effects so that we can identify priority areas that need to be set aside for conservation, where we are not going to be touching those areas because of their significance and the role they may play now and in the future as part of conservation, whether it's for species or rare ecological communities.

The short answer is yes. We do need to have shale gas and other types of resource extraction as part of a comprehensive planning process to ensure we are avoiding significant impacts in the future.

The Chair: All right. Time has expired.

Next we will hear from Mr. Lunney, for seven minutes.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being with us today.

We had a fascinating day yesterday, touring sites on Vancouver Island of stream restoration and various projects. British Columbia salmon are iconic here, and on Vancouver Island we had a lot of habitat destruction because of the interaction of humans with their environment. We saw some great examples of restoration yesterday.

Your organizations, both the Pacific Salmon Foundation and Trout Unlimited, have been big time involved in working with local groups, habitat enhancement societies, various agencies such as B.C. Conservation Foundation—with us yesterday—and Streamkeepers, organizations like that. I think Dr. Riddell mentioned some 350 organizations that the Pacific Salmon Foundation has worked with.

Yesterday we saw the Millstone River in an urban area of Nanaimo and the great work that has been done. There are two kilometres of spawning channel through a park that now has a whole community's support behind it, with children helping to see that salmon come up through the stream, connecting the watershed there with very promising returns.

I wanted to just take us back up to where we were yesterday, for the record, and that's Nile Creek, one of the other projects we saw. Nile Creek restoration has been going for a number of years and has been described by many as a model of stream restoration.

I just wonder, Dr. Riddell, if you'd take a moment to describe what makes that particular project what many consider to be a model for stream bed restoration.

● (0935)

Dr. Brian Riddell: Well, I don't think there's too much that's really unique about Nile Creek. I think you're hearing it as a model in terms of the extent of community organization that has gotten behind them.

You heard them provide examples of huge leveraging. They were saying that for every dollar that could be provided by a foundation like ours, they could leverage twenty times that. I think the number is actually more like eight to ten times, to be honest, but the fact is that they are very well organized. They involve highly professional people. They really build strength by going out and finding people in their community with backgrounds who can contribute to how to operate their society.

They have been dedicated to this for probably twenty years. They have received national awards because of their success in bringing back pink salmon and coho salmon. As you heard, though, a lot of it depended on interacting with the appropriate people and with government departments, both provincial and mostly federal.

Basically, they've been extremely good at taking a professional approach to this. It's a local society, but they've gone out and gotten the appropriate support. They have wonderful community support. They are a model of what the community organization can do. I think the biological recovery is really a reflection of the commitment of the entire community to protect the downstream, to restore the estuary, to protect the flow of the water, and to continue to provide them with the money they need to work on an annual basis.

Mr. James Lunney: I should acknowledge DFO habitat expert Mel Sheng, who's been involved in these projects for many years and is right on the ground, working with volunteers. He was able to accompany us yesterday.

I also want to draw attention to the fact that I believe they started with sowing the stream with pinks that were virtually extinct from the Nile when they started. The success of the pink returns actually helped to bring the coho, because I don't think they actually sowed coho. Some of the coho actually followed the pink and re-established themselves in these spawning channels. Is that correct?

Dr. Brian Riddell: Not quite. They did start with pinks, that's correct. They were very successful in restoring a good run of pink salmon. Pink salmon can become very abundant very quickly, because they have a fixed two-year life cycle.

Essentially what they did is restore the ecosystem first, so it's certainly a model in that sense. They protected the habitat, they provided the water, and they restored the ecosystem function by providing heavy nutrients to the river system. Some coho did come back naturally, and other coho—you saw the small hatchery—were supplemented. You made reference to the restoration biologist and the building of the kilometre-long side channel.

The productivity of coho in that river is abnormally high. The success is maintaining a habitat, restoring the ecosystem, providing the habitat expansion, protecting the water flow—all things that, if you think back on it, are kind of a natural progression. Their success was that they overcame the pressures around that stream. They protected the water, they worked with the community and the agricultural groups, and they put the whole picture together.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Great. Thank you.

I want to turn to Ms. O'Loughlin.

[*Technical Difficulty—Editor*]

Okay, thanks for that.

We're talking about parks and the parks system. We've done a lot of work in the last few years to expand parks territorially. Kluane Park was expanded, as were Great Bear Rainforest, the Gwaii Haanas of course, which you mentioned, East Arm of Great Slave Lake, and the Ramparts River.

We've expanded the footprint of our national parks considerably. About 10% of the second-largest country in the world is actually already preserved or conserved in one form or another.

You mentioned the Similkameen and the challenges when you're talking about establishing a new national park. You made some comments about the businesses and Osoyoos and the school and so on, but when I drove through there recently, I saw the signs that said, "No national park".

Can you speak to the dynamic, since you've spent some time there, of helping people work through the process of understanding the benefits of a national park, and can you tell us where the resistance is coming from locally?

• (0940)

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: That's a good question.

I think people who are opposed to the park, who put those "no national park" signs up.... There's no indication whatsoever of public support. Those signs could have been put up by one person or 10 people or a thousand people. There have been three public opinion polls in the area that show significant support—more than two to one. The polls showed that between 63% and 80% of the population in that area wants the national park. The regional district made a formal request to see the results of the eight-year, multi-million dollar study that was funded through the federal government. The regional district, the chambers of commerce, the tourism associations, the big wineries, and the organic food organizations do want to see the results of this study so that they can make decisions on the park, and I understand that report has just been released today.

The area impacts on 11 ranchers, and three of them want to sell their ranch specifically to Parks Canada for a national park, and the other ranchers would be allowed to continue to own that land and their cattle tenures for as long as they want to, and Parks Canada would be helping them and working with them.

So the opposition, now that people are educated, comes from a very small group of people, but business, tourism, and local citizens are very interested in the national park.

The Chair: Time has expired.

Ms. Fry, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, everyone.

I just wanted to ask a couple of questions.

Internationally Canada has signed on to an agreement stipulating that 17% of land and 10% of ocean be conserved. How far are we from that? How much have we done so far, and where do we need to go from there?

That's my first question.

We used to have an oceans strategy that sunsetted a while ago. Do you believe that the oceans strategy should be brought back? What are the elements of the oceans strategy that we should bring in to ensure we fulfill the 10% conservation requirement for our oceans?

James said that, as a British Columbian, he knows the salmon is iconic in this province. It's more than a fish. The salmon in fact is an indicator of how habitat is doing. So the big question I want Brian to answer is whether he believes that the ebb and flow of salmon is a natural thing or that it reflects the habitat. That's my second question.

My third question is what do you think would be the impact of the proposed Enbridge pipeline coming through British Columbia? How will it impact on our ecosystem, and in what ways will it actually be contradictory to a national conservation plan for British Columbia? What will the tanker traffic do to the fish and ocean habitat?

Ms. O'Loughlin, I think the first one is for you, regarding 17% of land and 10% of ocean.

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: Great. [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*]

We have a big opportunity to protect a lot of our country. Many countries around the world have no land left to protect—for example, the United States.

Canada has a big responsibility in the world to exceed those targets. I think in the marine environment it's less than one per cent that is protected, and terrestrially there's less than 10% protected. [*Technical Difficulty—Editor*]

So if we had marine planning, which brings together industry, local communities, and environmental groups to plan where the traffic should be, where the protection of the fish should be, where things should happen.... A marine-protected area is zoned. It's not entirely protected. We need a portion that's protected.

There are four areas on the coast that need marine protection, which means marine planning. The government could certainly provide the leadership to make that happen and to figure out where things can go and where things need to be protected, and it's a very collaborative partnership process.

• (0945)

Hon. Hedy Fry: How much of the land is currently protected?

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: I believe it's less than 10%.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Okay.

And the oceans strategy?

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: The oceans strategy is really important on all three coasts—to have leadership that would say it is really important to our country, which has the biggest coastline in the world, to protect our ocean resources.

With climate change, our oceans are changing drastically. If we don't have healthy blue, we say, then there's no green. If our oceans are not healthy, it has major impacts on the land. Oceans produce half of the oxygen we breathe.

So an oceans strategy is just critical, and would be a major part of a national conservation plan.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

And Brian, the salmon-habitat relationship?

Dr. Brian Riddell: Yes—three loaded questions in seven minutes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Hedy Fry: You can deal with loaded questions, Brian. Go on.

A voice: And I get the pipeline question?

Dr. Brian Riddell: You get the pipeline, yes.

Is the variation in Pacific salmon populations natural? Absolutely. Does it explain all of the fluctuations? Absolutely not. There are local environmental effects. There can be long-standing effects due to overfishing that we're still correcting. There can be the combination of several factors that lead to the cumulative effects that Jeff spoke about in his presentation.

I tell people that Pacific salmon are very difficult to summarize quickly because there are 4,000 locations of streams and Pacific salmon in British Columbia, and there is a wide diversity of different types of pressures. But there isn't any question that what we're seeing determining salmon returns in British Columbia now is in the ocean. What's particularly interesting is that as we apply new scientific methods, we're really determining that a lot of the variation in survival is determined in the first few months at sea—so in Canadian coastal waters. And close to us, the particular area of concern is the Strait of Georgia.

So yes, natural is a big player, definitely, in the long-term trends, but it doesn't exclude that there are localized pressures we have to deal with that can be related to development, urbanization, water extraction, and so on.

You asked about the pipeline. I'll make a quick comment on this, because of course with Pacific salmon we're definitely concerned about this development.

This, to me, is the epitome of a risk assessment in that if you built this system and it worked fine, ultimately the environment would heal and people say, "You know what? We can have both." The problem is that the risk is a function of the.... What's the risk of something occurring? What's the probability of it occurring? What's the effect of it when it occurs? And the effect could be enormous.

So this is the epitome of risk assessment, and that's what really has people concerned. It will cross 778 streams and rivers from Alberta through B.C. It will cross three major drainages with very important salmon populations. You're really talking about a very heartfelt concern in the local communities here.

I challenged one fellow recently who was tackling us with "Why can't we have pipelines if you have forestry?" Well, it's not the same. And it's not to imply that we don't regulate forest-cutting, for heaven's sakes, right?

So yes, it could actually work, but they have to acknowledge that pipelines do leak. They will certainly not tell you that they don't leak. All we have to hope for, if it comes through, is that we do it in the very best way possible and minimize the risk to freshwater ecosystems. We need to have very rapid response, because they will leak; it is only a matter of time.

The tankers are another big story. I personally think that tanker traffic.... If you look at the history of tanker traffic around the world, the incidents are very rare. But I'm sorry; we have examples on the west coast of some very bad experiences. We lost a ferry because somebody simply fell asleep and ran into a rock. These things will happen when you have very large volumes of traffic, and how do you minimize that risk?

The Chair: Unfortunately, your time has expired.

We will have two questioners. They will have five minutes each.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pilon, you have five minutes.

• (0950)

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin with a question for Miss Zevit, Mr. Riddell and Mr. Surtees.

You all said that science was important. What would you like to see included in the national conservation plan so that you are certain that each project is truly supported by scientists?

[*English*]

Ms. Pamela Zevit: *Merci.*

In regard to summarizing some of the comments I made previously, ensuring that we understand ecosystems are not static, that we have to think long term in regard to our conservation planning—whether it's through securing lands that are a priority now or that may be in the future because of issues such as climate change—we have to be very proactive as part of that process. There needs to be firm commitments from all levels—whether it's local, regional, provincial, or federal—that are well harmonized about setting aside and conserving areas and identifying priorities in that regard, whether it's issues such as species at risk or what type of development may occur on the landscape in the future.

If there are going to be significant pressures, we need to identify them now. There needs to be consensus on how we deal with that as part of “thinking like a landscape”, which was one of the issues of most priority that I identified.

With regard to big-picture thinking for the application of sound science, I think all of us have actually referred to that in our presentations. We need to have a strong affirmation that this is going to play a role in how we implement a national conservation plan.

Dr. Brian Riddell: When I refer to a strong scientific basis, I'm referring to things like a quantitative basis that we can apply repeatedly across the landscape in defining and monitoring ecosystems, so we can determine the status through time. Monitoring allows us to learn and adapt over time. Without that, we will not be able to monitor exactly what's going on and adapt to the changes.

The other one is very simply applying ecological principles that have been developed around the world in defining parks—size of parks, the complexity of parks—and then finally ecological systems.

Mr. Jeff Surtees: Going hand-in-hand with that—and I don't know if it's a precondition to the plan working, but possibly not part of the plan—the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Environment Canada, have to have enough money to do their work. They have to have the scientists to collect the data. They have to have the systems in place to use the data properly. They have to have the funding to allow them to do enforcement. There's no point in having penalties in legislation if nobody is there to police and prosecute.

Other than that, I agree with everything that everybody else said.

Ms. Chloe O'Loughlin: I agree with everybody. I just want to put a plug in for science-based marine planning as well. When you look at the ocean, it looks like a flat nothing, but underneath the ocean there are different ecosystems. On land we have desert and mountains and alpine forests. In the oceans there are different ecosystems as well.

It looks completely different when you're under water in different parts of our coastal waters. It's very important to do the science so that we protect representative areas of Canada's different ecosystems. As we are protecting the desert and grasslands in South Okanagan, we need to also to protect specific ecosystems under water, and that's science-based.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Thank you.

Mr. Riddell, you said in your presentation...

• (0955)

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Merci.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: I only have a few seconds left?

In that case, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

To close off this group of witnesses, Mr. Lunney, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks for that.

To come back to the Pacific Salmon Foundation, I want to acknowledge 25 years of the organization working with local volunteer groups. That's something to celebrate.

You made reference to Canada's policy for conservation of wild Pacific salmon. I think you said it was six years in development, released in 2005, and a lot of consultation and planning went into the development of this particular document.

You said you thought some attributes in this model are transferrable perhaps to other ecosystems, other species, other landscapes, if you will.

What is it about this particular planning process that you would recommend for a national conservation plan, which might be adapted to developing a plan that would apply to other landscapes?

Dr. Brian Riddell: That's a great question, James, because we had 10 years of debate within the department and brought in experts on the science. We brought out three drafts of the policy.

I think the mechanism here was that people put into words what they were trying to accomplish and then put it out there for comment and criticism. It was given wide distribution. We received hundreds and hundreds of comments that were then scrutinized, and we've come back with an improved policy that we think addressed the public comments and the weaknesses.

There were three formal releases, including the final one accepted in 2005. It was a true interaction. We were not dictating the policy. We had as much debate among scientists as we did with other members of the public and other NGOs.

I think what made it a success in the end was that in the last three years there was a formal advisory process of about 80 people representing various walks of life in British Columbian organizations. They were brought together at least twice a year for a direct discussion on where it was going, what changes were made. We listened to them and gave our response to them for comment again. So it was really bought into at the end.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you for that.

There has been a lot of discussion about science and science-based interventions, and so on. But when we're talking about complexities, it's one thing to discuss the ecosystems on the land, which are much easier to study and get boots on the ground, and measure and quantify.

If we're talking about the oceans, a lot is going on out there that we don't fully understand when you have very complex, large-scale systems. We don't understand everything about that system, about what's going on in the ocean, let alone how climate change might impact ecosystems.

At least one of you here is a scientist who worked on fisheries issues for many years. Could you comment on the complexities of understanding what's going on in the ocean?

Dr. Brian Riddell: You're right in that we don't understand all the complexities, but we do know enough about how to start defining the ecological zones of Canada's coastal waters, and we do know what we need to measure to monitor for climate change. We can address Canada's oceans.

I would refer you to the Royal Society's panel report—it's available on their website—which was two years of work by quite a strong panel. You can review that material.

I have no concern myself. We know enough that we could draft a policy for our oceans.

The biggest response is that it's not cheap working in oceans. You need specialized equipment; you need ships. We're very badly behind in ships on the west coast, but the oceanographic side is much stronger.

But there are new tools that allow us to do real-time monitoring. We have proposals where we can use what we call "community science" to monitor oceans. Many people who used to fish want to be on the water and have vessels that we can adapt to collect information and monitor things through time. There's lots of opportunity for the development of an ocean policy like that.

Mr. James Lunney: Do I have time for one more question?

The Chair: You do not. Unfortunately, time is about to expire so I want to thank the witnesses.

Mr. James Lunney: I have a good one, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sure it is, Mr. Lunney, but time has expired.

I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today. It's been very helpful.

We are going to take a 15-minute health break, and we'll start again at 10:15. We'll suspend.

•(1000) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1015)

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for being with us today as we look for advice in the development of a national conservation plan.

Each of you has received the six questions the committee was looking at, and I would appreciate your comments being focused on those six questions.

In a practical sense, we have translation provided for you. If you're answering questions, we found in the last session that in some cases the volume was too loud and we were getting feedback. So if you're speaking, make sure you have your earpiece away from the microphone and your volume down so that you don't get feedback.

We're seeking your advice, so please keep your comments non-political, non-partisan. You've been called here as experts, and we look forward to your input. You will have up to 10 minutes to make a presentation, and we will begin with the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

Thank you.

Mr. Alan Martin (Director, Strategic Initiatives, B.C. Wildlife Federation): Thank you very much, Mark. It's a pleasure to appear before the standing committee, and we will focus on the six questions. I believe you do have the presentation in front of you. I will be speaking to the presentation, and my colleague, Neil, will assist me in answering questions during the question and answer session.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation is one of the oldest conservation organizations in British Columbia. Its vision is to lead the conservation and wise use of British Columbia's fish, wildlife, and habitat. Conservation and sustainability is the priority of our over 40,000 members, who include 110 different clubs distributed through the province. Our members donate over 30,000 hours per year in stewardship activities, many of which are focused specifically on habitat conservation.

The pie graph says that most of that comes from a small section of our membership, so there's certainly room to grow in terms of our members and the public contributing towards conservation.

B.C. Wildlife Federation's goals are there for your review. I don't think I need to read them out to you. We need to get on to the six questions, but I think as an organization we want to become a recognized, credible leader of conservation of the province's fish and wildlife resources, and there are a number of different strategies we are using to move that forward. I think one of the most important strategies, and one I think is important for the national conservation plan, is moving forward through strategic partnerships with a range of organizations that have the same long-term vision for the sustainability of fish, wildlife, their habitats, and ecosystems.

Our strategic priorities certainly increase the investment in fish, wildlife, and habitat management in the province. I think funding is always an issue in terms of maintaining resource sustainability. Certainly our members' primary interest is conservation, but we certainly have a focus on increasing opportunities for hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation.

One example of a stewardship program we have is the B.C. wetlands education program. It's fairly focused. Its objective is clean water, functioning habitat, and healthy fish and wildlife populations. It has been going on for 16 years. It focuses on stewardship training and education, and it delivers projects in communities throughout the province. The result on any annual basis is 100 to 150 people who are trained in wetland stewardship and doing four to five projects, but the knock-on effect is that they are able to continue to do these stewardship activities on an ongoing basis throughout communities and landscapes throughout the province, particularly for wetlands that are very sensitive to habitat alteration.

As for the national conservation strategy, the first question is what the purpose should be of this conservation strategy. I think simplicity is important in communicating what the strategy should be. We believe it should be to protect, maintain, and restore the natural capital of Canada by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the sustainability and resilience of natural systems.

The emphasis is on protecting, enhancing, and restoring the sustainability and resilience, and I think that if these landscapes and ecosystems are functioning—they're natural, sustainable, and resilient—it is an outcome everybody can agree to.

I think the goal of the national conservation strategy should be simple. I think Canada should be the recognized world leader in conservation, given its tremendous natural capital from coast to coast, and particularly here in B.C., given its abundant range of species and ecosystems and habitat. That's the goal. That's the outcome we want from developing this plan.

I think the national conservation strategy's guiding principle is natural capital. You can define that as habitat, ecosystems.... It's an all-inclusive definition, but it's best conserved by protecting and enhancing existing natural habitats.

• (1020)

Effective conservation initiatives must be implemented and evaluated on a landscape or watershed scale, or their marine equivalents. Landscapes and watersheds have finite capacity, after which natural capital is lost. It's sort of like the medical analogy that prevention is worth a lot more than a cure, and often, it's a lot less expensive.

I think we need to implement adaptive management approaches, supported by science and experience, at a number of different levels. This is something that should be a collaborative approach. I think there is a place for command and control, but I think you would get much more done through collaboration with communities and first nations on a landscape scale than you would with a single, top-down national strategy. I think it has to be inclusive and collaborative, with both communities and first nations.

On conservation priorities, I think maintaining the natural capital is the long-term outcome. There are certainly species and habitats at risk that need to be addressed. Certainly I think we need to move from a single-species approach to more of a community and ecosystem approach in dealing with species and habitats. The ultimate outcome we want in a national conservation plan is to maintain the sustainability and resilience of natural landscapes and ecosystems in both the terrestrial and aquatic environments.

What are our implementation priorities? In B.C., we have a good conservation framework for species and habitats. What it doesn't have is the legs to implement it. We need to increase monitoring and reporting on a landscape scale in both the marine and aquatic habitats. I think our future is with the next generation, and increasing opportunities for information and education in schools has to be a key component. The more people become separated from the natural environment, the less relevant and important it becomes. Information and education are critically important.

Finally, fostering collaboration between communities, first nations, and various levels of government to deliver conservation solutions is important. You had a tour with Brian Riddell of the Pacific Salmon Foundation. The Living Rivers trust fund took \$20 million, and through collaboration with various private sector and community groups, tripled that investment in terms of dealing with watershed and fishery sustainability issues. That is a model for implementation on the ground, and there are many other models as well.

Our implementation priorities are to increase funding and tax incentives for conservation of critical habitats and conservation land purchases. Not everything can be done through regulation. I'm not saying that regulation is not an approach, but where there are critical habitats, particularly on private land, either purchasing that land for conservation purposes or having incentives for the use of the land is compatible with maintaining natural capital and other opportunities for conservation. It is a very powerful tool. It is being used in B.C., and I think it can be very effective nationally.

We need to collaboratively assess and regulate the development of landscapes and watersheds to maintain functioning ecosystems. What the code says is that there are limits to development. It has to be looked at on a landscape basis. Not all landscapes are created equal. Some are more sensitive than others. If you want to maintain the natural capital, sometimes sooner or later, you have to say that this is the limit for particular types of development.

The consultation process is very simple. I think you need a national consultation process for the plan and the elements in it. I think you need regional consultation for delivery, because you have different governments, different communities, different first nations, and different ecosystems. So the priorities are probably quite unique when you move from province to province.

• (1025)

In terms of action, I think action starts at the landscape level, with community and first nations consultation for developing those plans. You need to leverage financial, technical, and community support, because these are the landscapes that people live in, and they are the landscapes in which you will get action and support for the overall outcomes of your plan.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you, Mark.

The Chair: Thank you for being here.

Next we will hear from Ecojustice.

You have 10 minutes.

Mr. Devon Page (Executive Director, Ecojustice Canada): Thank you for having me.

My name is Devon Page. I'm the executive director of Ecojustice. Ecojustice's mission is to use the law to protect and restore the environment. We're unique to the extent that we employ both lawyers and scientists to develop our cases. The primary activity we undertake is providing free legal services, and we do that independent of a client.

We choose cases based on the issue and their ability to create a precedent that will serve to protect the environment in the future. We have an extensive history of litigation concerning species and habitat conservation and protection, and it's one of the core areas of Ecojustice's function. So naturally, my comments today on what the national conservation plan will look like will focus on issues of law.

In Ecojustice's experience, species and their nest area habitats are not meaningfully conserved unless they are protected by law. Whatever the national conservation plan becomes, repealing or weakening Canada's national environmental laws is incompatible with conservation and with the long-term goal of protecting species and natural systems that support our economy, our culture, and our health.

In particular, protecting Canada's threatened species and habitat through strong federal legislation must be a central part of the national conservation plan. An example of why this is necessary can be found in B.C., where you're currently hosting these meetings. We are currently in the midst of an extinction crisis internationally, and in Canada, British Columbia has the highest number of species of any province, but it also has the highest number of species at risk, and the fastest rate of decline. According to the B.C. Conservation Data Centre, at least 1,918 species or distinct populations of wildlife in British Columbia are now at risk, and significant portions of some ecosystems have already been lost.

Loss and degradation of habitat is the leading threat to species and ecosystems in Canada. Loss of habitat is the primary cause of endangerment of 84% of Canada's assessed species at risk. Protecting Canada's species and ecosystems requires strong national legal protection for species—and more importantly, the habitat species need to carry out their life processes—and for the habitat those threatened species need to survive and recover. This is true whether the habitat is inside a park or in the areas between parks.

It's not just a matter of losing a few species here and there. The loss of Canada's native plants and animals directly threatens our economy and our health. Species are the basic building blocks for natural systems we rely on to provide us with clean air, water, carbon storage, pollination, food, and raw materials for industry. The long-term health of these natural systems depends on maintaining the diversity of their species.

Weakening national environmental laws and the protections they provide for the habitat of fish or migratory birds or other species will aggravate Canada's extinction crisis by ignoring the primary cause of

that crisis. It will also directly threaten our long-term economic health.

Again, I want to reiterate that it's our position that protecting Canada's threatened species through strong federal legislation must be a central part of a national conservation plan.

Currently, Canada is proposing to change national federal protective laws for the environment. One example of how that can have impacts on a national conservation plan is illustrated at home, regarding changes to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Two years ago in British Columbia, the federal and provincial governments each completed a separate environmental assessment of the original proposed Prosperity gold-copper mine at Fish Lake, British Columbia, using their own provincial or federal regime. The B.C. environmental assessment approved the project. The federal panel's assessment found that the proposed mine would cause significant effects on the environment and on first nations. In July 2010, the then Minister of the Environment called the environmental assessment one of the most condemning he had ever read. As a result, the federal government rejected the project, and Fish Lake—a lake known for its abundant fish stock—was saved from being turned into a tailings pond. The loss of Fish Lake, as an example, would do no good to a national conservation plan.

Riparian areas are the areas where ecosystems are richest. Current changes to federal fisheries law will jeopardize riparian areas in Canada. As well, currently we understand there are plans to weaken the Species at Risk Act. The current budget implementation bill includes one change that allows SARA permits to be granted with no expiry date, which means an unlimited right to jeopardize critical habitat. This situation will directly influence the survival and recovery of species.

In Ecojustice's opinion, given species decline in Canada, weakening Canada's primary federal environmental protection laws will jeopardize national conservation planning.

•(1030)

We take the position that rather than weakening laws, strong national legislation to protect all species and their habitat before they become at risk is crucial to achieving any kind of meaningful conservation goal in Canada, and therefore must be an important part of the national conservation plan.

Creating more parks is important but is no replacement for maintaining the ecological integrity of the areas outside parks. Protecting habitat for species and ecosystems in the areas between parks is crucial, because parks cannot cover a large enough area, or often the right area, to adequately address the need for habitat protection. Currently there are studies—I've referenced them in my paper—showing that most of Canada's parks are not where species are or where they will be.

Protecting habitat outside of parks requires at least two things: environmental laws that enable strong, science-based, precautionary habitat protection; and creative conservation financing, including funding for compensation and incentives for stewardship on private land.

It's also important to note that whatever the national conservation plan becomes, it must be designed to both protect species, ecosystems, and habitat in the present and enable their adaptation to climate change. I'm sure there are other people who have more expertise than I, but we're already seeing in B.C. the migration of species north in the face of increasing temperatures.

A particular comment that we want to make is that it's our understanding, based on activities that have been undertaken by the federal government, that there may be an emphasis on endemic species as opposed to peripheral species—species that are at the end of their range in Canada. These are typically southern species that have their primary range in the U.S.

We take the position that peripheral species are crucial to a national conservation plan because they make up most of our southern ecosystems. Maintaining these species in the United State will not address our need for functional ecosystems in Canada's most populous areas. The best available science strongly supports maintaining these populations, particularly in light of climate change.

The linkage between the Species at Risk Act and the national conservation plan is currently unclear. Our recommendation is that a strong Species at Risk Act can be used as a key tool to meet the purposes of the national conservation plan around managing species habitat between parks. It is designed to hit the habitat that is already dropping below tolerance levels, as indicated by its species at risk. Our recommendation is that the federal government move immediately to enact the regulations related to stewardship agreements and private land compensation for activities that affect private landholders. The act has required those regulations to be in place since its inception, and they've yet to be introduced.

Finally, we hope and trust that the committee and the federal government want the national conservation plan to be something that actually conserves Canada's species and natural systems—something more than a branding exercise to fill the vacuum left behind following the evisceration of Canada's environmental laws.

We have three recommendations for this committee: a central purpose and guiding principle of the national conservation plan must be to protect Canada's species and their habitat for the benefit of all Canadians, present and future; maintaining and strengthening strong national laws to protect Canada's species and their habitat must be a goal of the national conservation plan; and in particular, maintaining and strengthening the federal Species at Risk Act should be a conservation priority set out in the national conservation plan.

Those are my comments. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you.

•(1035)

The Chair: Thank you.

Again, I'll remind the members who are sharing their expertise as witnesses today to focus on the six points in developing a national conservation plan.

Next we'll hear from the Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia.

Mr. Scott Ellis (Executive Director, Guide Outfitters Association of British Columbia): Thank you for the opportunity to present and provide input to the committee on the national conservation plan.

First, a little about Guide Outfitters Association so that you can understand our perspective and where we come from. The province of British Columbia is unique; it's divided into guide territories. Guide outfitters have the exclusive right to guide non-residents for big game. The division of the province into guide areas builds a sense of ownership, so guide outfitters are invested in what's going on and the dynamics in their guide territory. It's the beginning of wildlife stewardship, so they take a holistic approach to managing wildlife ecosystems and what's going on within their guide areas.

One thing that's critical as we go forward is that guide outfitting has been around since the late 1800s. We promote super, natural British Columbia. I think everyone thinks about what that is, and whether it's here in British Columbia or across Canada. We're obviously looking for a pristine environment and a sustainable and wise use of all Canada's resources.

So our vision is that we're advocating for a healthy guide outfitting industry, obviously, but it's critical that's based on healthy and long-term perspectives in wildlife management, ecosystems management, and what's going on in the landscape.

GOABC's a non-profit organization established in 1966 and represents 80% of the guide outfitters in British Columbia. The model we have here was adopted by the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. So I think as we go forward you can also see that we don't necessarily have to create all the models. There are already some processes in other jurisdictions that we can look to.

As a consumptive user, hunters have a proud story and when you look at the funds that range from surcharges on licences and tags, our community of anglers, trappers, and hunters have raised over \$140 million for fish and wildlife enhancement around the province of British Columbia, which is put through the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation.

What I tell people who don't understand the role hunters play in conservation is that hunting is a good thing, because it means there's a surplus and we're stewards of that. We take a very long-term perspective on how we do that with wise and sustainable use.

So if you look for the first hunter conservationist out there, you will see people like Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier or President Theodore Roosevelt, who understood the value of wildlife and the need for sustainable use. They're the founders of national parks throughout Canada and the U.S. and had a vision. So I would suggest we look to models that are already there, like the North American model for conservation. It's developed through efforts of hunters and anglers to stipulate law and science to manage wildlife for sustainability. Many species in our jurisdiction, in British Columbia specifically, have rebounded well with this long-term, sustainable use model.

We have a role to play as consumptive users in trying to inform our sector about how to care for wildlife rather than care about the hunt, and how to do good things with the natural resources out there. Part of that is we always have to balance the social, political, and economic pressures on wildlife, and I think that's something that can be done.

We take steps to hold symposiums and work on wildlife inventories and look at new models for doing DNA better and faster, so we know the population estimates and what the trends are, whether they're increasing or decreasing, and the cub or calf recruitment. All these things are very critical as we look to see what's going on.

Someone mentioned earlier that it's easier to know what's going on in the landscape than it is in the oceans. I'm not necessarily sure that's the case.

Specifically on your six questions. What should the purpose of the national conservation plan be? We're looking for long-term priorities for the next century, providing overarching guidance in conservation for the provinces and the territories and tangible goals for strategies for the future.

• (1040)

Goals for the national conservation plan.... Educate Canadians on sustainable use. We have an opportunity to put these types of things in the school curriculum, rather than just the odd tour or the odd field trip. Actually put it in the curriculum and talk about sustainable use, talk about the commitment to the resources, the management of ecosystems. Take a holistic approach, which I think you've heard before, not just piecemeal—one species or one part of the ecosystem—but a whole overarching plan for the landscape, and develop synergies among stakeholders and all levels of government and municipalities and first nations.

Regarding the guiding principles, again, it's wise use, it's sustainable use, based on science and laws, creating a surplus of the renewable resources, and collaborating with first nations and local communities.

As for implementation priorities, these include a holistic approach, regular assessment of landscapes and watersheds, some types of tax incentives for conservation and rehabilitation projects—similar to what we would do with the HCTF—and dedicated funds for fish and wildlife inventories.

What consultation process should the minister consider when developing a national conservation plan? It's local knowledge from those living and working on the land. Local knowledge is expert

knowledge. You have a lot of traditional knowledge as well from first nations. You have a variety of stakeholders here. You can leverage their expertise.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, we will hear from the World Wildlife Fund, Canada, and you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Linda Nowlan (Director, Pacific Conservation, World Wildlife Fund (Canada)): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

WWF Canada appreciates the invitation to appear before your committee.

Our mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

As one of Canada's oldest and largest conservation organizations, with offices in all corners of the country, we're eager to do what we can to make this make this plan a leading example for the world.

Today, as I speak to you, WWF is releasing its eighth *Living Planet Report* in major capitals and business centres around the world. In fact, it is actually being delivered from space today as I talk to you. That was late-breaking news, not in my written remarks. This is our own state-of-the-world publication, a global accounting index that tracks the state of biodiversity and the human footprint on earth.

This report's clear message is that we are taking more from our planet than our planet is able to give. The findings are that biodiversity has declined by 30% since 1970, while our demand on the planet, our footprint, has more than doubled. If we imagined countries as businesses, Canada ranks as one of the worst-performing capital managers. We have the eighth largest per capita footprint of any country on earth. If every citizen of earth consumed as Canadians do, we'd need 3.5 earths to supply our needs. There is an urgent need for the plan we are discussing today.

In the short time we have, I will outline WWF's top three priorities for the national conservation plan, followed by some more specific recommendations on conservation and implementation priorities.

Our top three recommendations are, number one, to aim high. Our conservation goals should exceed our development goals. Number two is to celebrate Canadians' pride in nature with an innovative public engagement program. Number three is to challenge the private sector to match the government's conservation activities.

Before going into detail about these priorities, I'd just like to say a few words about why we are here and the opportunity we have to create something lasting and meaningful.

It won't come as a surprise to any of you, but we are the envy of the world for our wealth, especially our natural wealth. People around the globe are in awe of what Canadians have at our disposal and for our enjoyment, both out in the wilderness and in cities.

Across the bridge, Vancouver has pledged to be the greenest city in the world by 2020, and has taken major steps to reap the environmental and economic benefits from its greenest city action plan. Canada's national conservation plan should match the ambition in this goal.

Here in B.C. we have amazing natural wonders like the Great Bear Rainforest and Sea on the north coast, where one of the world's last intact temperate rainforests meets some of the planet's last large wild rivers and most productive cold water seas. It is an area of incredible abundance, which I was lucky enough to visit last fall. I was amazed at the experience of walking up streams so choked by salmon that it was hard to navigate. Where would B.C. be without salmon?

The Fraser River, right outside our window, is the greatest salmon-producing river on earth. More than two billion juvenile salmon spend weeks or months in the estuary before beginning their ocean migration.

How can our national conservation plan safeguard this incredible natural wealth? This brings me back to our top three priorities.

First, we need to aim high. We recommend that the federal government's plan for more than 500 development projects representing over \$500 billion in new investments in the decade ahead should be matched with an even more ambitious conservation plan. The government is to be congratulated for the huge progress we've made with protected areas on land. We need similar progress in protecting our marine and freshwater environments.

We join with other witnesses you have heard from who have emphasized the need for Canada to meet the international legal commitments, in particular commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Aichi biodiversity targets. We suggest matching priority outcomes of the plan to the Aichi targets, as the U. K. biodiversity strategy has done.

Second, we recommend that the plan celebrate Canadians' pride in nature with an innovative public engagement program—this century's version of the excitement generated by our centennial celebrations in 1967.

WWF has an intensive focus on public engagement and participation, and we would be pleased to share our experiences. Earth Hour, the largest public involvement event in Canada, is organized by WWF, and is participated in by 10 million Canadians and 100 million people around the world.

• (1045)

It's a symbolic activity, to show a commitment to climate change action. Earth Hour asks you to turn off your lights, to switch off, for one hour each March.

We're now building on public recognition of Earth Hour to reach more substantive conservation goals. The committee members have noted the importance of reaching people who live in cities as part of the NCP. The WWF network will continue Earth Hour's positive momentum through the Earth Hour city challenge, a new initiative that highlights and rewards city governments that are prepared to make substantial long-term efforts to combat climate change—an integral part of any national conservation plan.

Third, we invite the government to challenge the private sector to be a full participant in the plan. One example we're proud to highlight is from one of our corporate partners. By the end of 2013, Loblaw, Canada's largest purchaser of seafood, has made a globally leading commitment to source 100% of all the wild and farmed fish sold in its stores across Canada from sustainable sources. We're collaborating on this with Loblaw, as well as with other scientists, science advisors, government agencies, and seafood vendors.

Those are our top three priorities for the plan. We've prepared a written brief that addresses the purpose, goals, and guiding principles for the NCP, which I will leave with you.

In the time remaining, I will talk about conservation and implementation priorities for the plan.

WWF recommends that the plan include bold steps on water, climate, and people, including actions to protect the Great Bear Sea, the marine counterpart to the Great Bear Rainforest. This region generates \$104.3 million in revenue and provides 2,200 long-term jobs.

We recommend recovering the Grand Banks ecosystem, including Atlantic cod productivity.

We recommend maintaining natural flow regimes in selected large wild rivers in every basin across Canada. The federal government has the constitutional responsibility to protect fish and their habitat, and that includes the rivers, streams, and wetlands on which they depend. The Fisheries Act sets a vital national standard for protecting fish habitat. The proposed changes to this act, which would dilute this national standard, are of grave concern to us and many others. They are not compatible with a national conservation plan.

We also recommend priorities for establishing the last ice area in Canada's far north and a Canadian energy strategy.

Our implementation priorities are to complete Canada's protected area networks, both terrestrial and marine. We recommend establishing recovery programs for every species listed in the Species at Risk Act as soon as possible. This includes all the freshwater and marine fish that have lagged behind terrestrial species in being given the legal protection they need.

Species at risk need their critical habitat protected. As my colleague just explained in detail, if we want healthy salmon populations we need to protect salmon habitat. The Species at Risk Act is the tool we use to keep species healthy across the country. We urge you to strengthen this act as part of the national conservation plan.

Another implementation priority is to protect natural flow, and the federal Fisheries Act is a key tool to conserve, protect, and restore rivers across Canada.

Our final implementation priority is to support credible globally recognized marketplace certification systems, such as the Marine Stewardship Council for fishing, which helps to secure natural capital while maintaining Canadian business market share internationally.

In closing I'd like to tell you about the WWF gift to the earth program. A gift to the earth is a public celebration by WWF of a conservation action, which is both a demonstration of environmental leadership and a globally significant contribution to the protection of the living world.

We awarded WWF's gift to the earth to Parks Canada, in 2011—congratulations, Parks Canada—and in 2007, we made the gift to the earth award to the architects of the Great Bear Rainforest agreement. We were very happy to celebrate that event with leaders from the federal and provincial governments, first nations, and other stakeholders.

We'd like to be back before this committee in five years with a new WWF gift to the earth, for your contributions arising from this plan. We stand ready to work collaboratively with government and industry to put an ambitious national conservation plan into action.

● (1050)

Once again, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to share our views with you.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I will introduce the members of our committee who are with us today. It's a fraction of the committee that normally meets two times a week for two hours.

We have Hedy Fry, with the Liberal Party, and we have Monsieur Pilon and Monsieur Choquette, who are with the official opposition party, the NDP.

To my right are Mr. Lunney, from the area of Nanaimo, Mr. Toet from Manitoba, and me, Mark Warawa.

The first round of questioning will be seven minutes.

We will begin with Mr. Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the witnesses to our session today. I appreciate the presentations you have taken time to prepare as well as the valuable time you are taking to be here to provide input to the committee and our work.

I wanted to just start with the B.C. Wildlife Federation. You have 40,000 members. You've been going quite a while in British Columbia. You've engaged a lot of people. Your members are all

interested in the environment, but they also include groups that are hunters, anglers, and others, I understand.

● (1055)

Mr. Neil Fletcher (Education Coordinator, Wetlands, B.C. Wildlife Federation): That's correct.

Mr. James Lunney: You're donating over 300,000 hours per year to stewardship activities. We saw some of that work yesterday. Partnerships of people who have an interest in the environment are engaged in local habitat restoration and in all these discussions—hours and hours of discussion. Sometimes getting projects to move ahead takes a lot of work and planning, but nothing actually happens without involvement on the ground. I wanted to just acknowledge organizations that have taken such an interest and that actually get people on the ground working to improve the environment.

You've raised some interesting points in your presentation.

You're talking about the program of training. I believe that was in your presentation. You were talking about having trained 100 to 150 people, and they're doing about 40 projects. So you put them through a training program to understand how to do some work. They are doing about 40 projects focused on wetlands. Could you expand a little bit on what that particular activity is all about?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: Sure.

I am the coordinator for the wetlands education program. We run wetland-keeper workshops as well as a wetlands institute, which is a seven-day intensive workshop where we train community members from all walks of life. They include people who are doing stewardship work at a watershed level, first nations, and just keen volunteers who want to come out and learn more about wetlands stewardship. We provide them the resources and trainers to better implement projects on the ground.

Mr. James Lunney: Do you bring them to a central location in Vancouver here, or do you move around the province, where other people are?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: We move around the province.

Mr. James Lunney: How many programs like this, the seven-day program, would you do?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: We do roughly five to six workshops a year. They attract about 20 to 30 participants per workshop.

Mr. James Lunney: That's commendable.

We're hearing from witnesses that it's important to conserve. It's important to connect, as in wildlife corridors, and to restore habitat. We saw a lot of that yesterday and how important that is. One of our objectives is to connect people to the outdoors. Increasingly, where we have urbanization, we have urban populations and some young people growing up without a connection. They're connected in other ways, through electronic and social media and so on, but connecting to wildlife and outdoor activities, turning over a rock to understand what's under there, and just engaging with nature.... It's a concern to us. It is not only our young people but also many new Canadians. We're welcoming a quarter million people around the world who haven't necessarily grown up with the kind of interaction many Canadians have enjoyed with parks and so on.

I'll start with you, but maybe Guide Outfitters and others who are involved in actually working with people on the ground engaged in the environment would like to connect. Do you have ideas on how we can engage new Canadians and young people in these types of activities?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: Well, from our own experience, we run a Wild Kidz camp in the summer in two locations in the province. These are free camps that we provide with financial support from various funders. About 20 to 25 children will attend these camps. A lot of them have little to no experience outdoors. It's a five-day retreat for them, basically, and they get hands-on experience fishing, hiking, and doing nature activities.

Mr. James Lunney: Is there one particular area you're doing these camps, or is it around the province in different areas?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: It's around the province.

Mr. James Lunney: Great.

Mr. Alan Martin: There's one further comment I'd like to make. A surcharge on hunting and guiding and trapping fees goes into the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. That agency supports a program called Project WILD, which is delivered in the schools, both primary and secondary, and focuses on connecting students in various school districts with the outdoors. It provides grants to schools to get people out and involved in either interpretive or enhancement projects.

I think the funding of these types of programs in schools, particularly in B.C. but probably elsewhere in Canada, is a barrier to, first, connecting all schoolchildren with the outdoors and providing them with information and education on the importance of the natural environment, and second, what they can do as individuals to lessen the impact on that.

• (1100)

Mr. James Lunney: Can you tell us when that program started and how widespread it is?

Mr. Alan Martin: It started at least seven years ago. It has certainly been enhanced over the last year, but I will get you the detailed information on that.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay. Thank you.

In your presentation, you talked about the consultation process. I thought it was of interest the way you very succinctly summed it up: a national process for the plan; regional consultation for the delivery; and in terms of action, engaging the communities and first nations in consultation for action.

So we need a national process in consulting, which we're working through, but in terms of delivery, we actually have to do consultation locally, as Canada's ecosystems are so varied and different. Then, for implementation, if we don't engage the population there are some serious challenges. I just wondered if you wanted to expand on that concept, because you very succinctly summed it up.

I would also just throw this out. Budget 2007 had \$225 million for partnerships with organizations like yours, Nature Trust and Ducks Unlimited. When you're talking about a way forward, is that the kind of plan that would be helpful?

Mr. Alan Martin: I think it depends on what issues you're dealing with, at what level. I think we need, as Mr. Page and others have said, a national plan that is clear in terms of the outcomes we want from a national plan. But there is a diversity of interests in habitats across the province, so let's not get too caught up on what the regional differences and priorities are. If you fly in at a too-low level of altitude, you're going to start talking details when those are really regional issues in terms of implementation.

In terms of delivery, I think if you deliver at a landscape level with communities, first nations, and organizations that have an interest in there, you're going to be much more effective. So—

The Chair: Time has expired, unfortunately.

The next questioner is Monsieur Choquette, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Devon Page.

We have a lot of questions about the national conservation plan. For example, question 5 aims to determine the NCP implementation priorities. We see that this would take strong national legislation, as you mentioned. But currently, the budget implementation bill unfortunately weakens certain environmental laws, including the provisions of the Fisheries Act dealing with habitat protection and environmental assessments.

I would like to know what your recommendations would be for strong legislation, to include them in the national conservation plan.

[*English*]

Mr. Devon Page: Up until about seven or eight years ago the federal government was undertaking a review of environmental protection laws that concluded that our current federal protection regime for the environment was too weak. In terms of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Fisheries Act, concurrent reviews were proceeding, which sought to extensively strengthen those two laws.

For example with the Fisheries Act, two preceding bills might have made it to the final orders but were lost in prorogation or it might have been before that. In any event a lot of work was done on what those laws would look like if they were going to meet current and future needs in terms of ensuring sustainable protection of the environment. If the committee wants anything in depth on that, since we participated in all those committee hearings, we'd be happy to provide the committee with the process.

The only two other comments I would make are, that in terms of laws to protect the environment, Canada is largely in a state of infancy. One example is in 1973 the United States passed the Endangered Species Act; we passed ours in 2002. The development of the laws also reflects being in a state of infancy in terms of understanding the relationship between us and the environment. All I would do is recommend to the committee to look elsewhere for examples of what forms a basis for strong laws to protect the environment.

In particular, Europe is light years ahead of us, and even the United States has measures in a lot of ways. We're now seeing a commitment to sustainability in more progressive jurisdictions that's captured throughout all components of the law. Its manifestation is so much more science-oriented and thoughtful, when it comes to its application on the ground.

• (1105)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I would like to ask another question about the involvement of private companies in the national conservation plan. A lot has been said about education and awareness. I remain convinced that these are very important aspects, as the Conservatives mentioned. On my side, it is funding and the importance accorded to science that poses a problem. Unfortunately, Parks Canada has experienced budget cuts, which resulted in reduced park access. There have also been cuts to science, when we should be investing in that area.

Should the private sector be more compelled to participate financially? Yesterday, for example, we visited a site that had been devastated by a logging company. It was the population that restored it. Should we not instead make sure that the companies restore the sites after they have used them?

[English]

Mr. Devon Page: The answer is yes.

One of the shortcomings of Canadian environmental protection laws is that we fail to incorporate the cost or the harm associated with the activity. What that means for private companies that act on the ground is that the water is free, the air is free, and the land is largely free. Sure, there are royalty schemes, but in no way are any current royalty schemes developed to incorporate the risk posed to the environment and the cost to society of the degradation that occurs. Again, fairly straightforward models are being developed and applied in the United States and other jurisdictions, which incorporate the cost to society in terms of development and require the private actor to pay. This is after the fact that we'd like to see a more proactive approach taken to progressive laws on the ground. One example is in other jurisdictions they apply the "polluter pays principle" to ensure that those who profit from activities that harm the environment pay for the consequences.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Page.

I would now like to ask Ms. Nowlan a question.

You said that it was important to aim high with our conservation objectives and targets. The Aichi targets are the following: 10% for hydraulic areas and 17% for land areas.

Would it be enough to achieve those objectives by 2020, or should we aim even higher to make sure we achieve the minimum?

Ms. Linda Nowlan: Thank you for your question.

[English]

I would say we should definitely reach even higher. Those are minimum standards. We're legally bound to accept them. Canada's a wealthy nation. We can and should do better. We're wealthy in terms of money, in terms of people, but also in terms of our natural heritage.

Another government that is not too unlike the current government here is the U.K.'s. They have just released their biodiversity strategy, and the U.K. is committed to protecting 26% of its marine areas. That's well above the 10%. If the U.K. can do it, I would suggest we can too, with the longest coastline in the world.

Definitely, our target should be a lot higher than the minimum we are legally bound to protect. Canada can and should do better.

• (1110)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much. People tell us that it isn't realistic to achieve even these 10% and 17% targets, but your answer confirms that it is in fact possible to achieve these targets if we invest the time, money and resources. Thank you very much for your answers.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Choquette.

Next we will hear from Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A couple of presenters had talked about the need for an approach that recognizes the contribution of the working landscape in the conservation plan.

I guess there are some discrepancies and some questions as to the idea of whether we work on the basis of a carrot or a stick. Some mention was made, I believe in Mr. Martin's presentation, regarding the idea of incentives.

I wonder if you can expand on that a little, how we can have an incentivized program that would recognize work done on the working landscapes to enhance the conservation program across Canada.

Mr. Alan Martin: I think incentives work at a number of different levels. First, I think there are tax incentives and other financial incentives to protect the functioning of the habitats. Those can be in the form of tax relief or grants or other mechanisms.

There are also incentives in terms of other activities such as education, monitoring, and to a certain degree, enforcement in terms of reporting how the landscapes and the ecosystems are functioning. I think a good plan will have a balance between the different tools—whether they be regulatory incentives, information, or education—that support the outcomes identified in the national conservation plan.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Page, would you agree that this incentive-based process could work very effectively, rather than it being a case of looking at these situations from a very negative aspect from the people on the working landscape, and that we would have systems in place as we go through the process of establishing this national conservation plan that would acknowledge that and put incentives in place for people, rather than having to deal with them on the after-effects?

Mr. Devon Page: Yes. I'd agree with everything Alan said.

The only other comment I would make is that extensive analysis of this was undertaken when they were designing the Species at Risk Act and understanding the optimum way to manage the land doesn't rely on prohibitions and command and control.

Parliament undertook several studies related to incentives and how to incentivize proper land management. I refer, for example, to the study of Peter Pearce that was tabled in Parliament. In Ecojustice, our expertise is in the law, but when we looked at the application of the law in Canada, one of the things we realized was the shortcoming that few levels within government had invested in understanding the relationship between the law and private landowners or in trying to facilitate the appropriate cooperative relationship. There has to be a component of incentivizing that relationship.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: So we have an opportunity in this plan to be looking at enhancing that proposition.

Mr. Devon Page: Absolutely.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: We also heard from a lot of witnesses that we should support and build upon existing successful conservation measures. There are successful, great stories out there. We saw a lot of them yesterday when we did our tour on the island, and we saw the great stories that are out there. I'm just wondering if our witnesses here would be willing to share with us some successful programs they've seen and outline what it is about those programs that they see as being at the core of the program being a success. I don't want you to get into big details—we don't have time for that—but just give a quick overview.

Maybe, Mr. Ellis, you could share with us initially on that, a program that you've seen as successful and why you believe it was very successful.

• (1115)

Mr. Scott Ellis: I think that first off there has to be an interest in what they do. That's when we talk about a national process and regional implementation, and then when you talk to boots on the ground. You need to find a way to have buy-in, and how exactly to deliver that model.

The B.C. Wildlife Federation, I think, have several. We talked about Project WILD. We talked about the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and the work that they've done. So specifically from the Guide Outfitters Association of B.C., we've invested in trying to communicate out in wildlife workshops, and we've used different ways to communicate out, but not necessarily this specific type of approach.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Ms. Nowlan, do you have a story that you'd like to share with us, and could you also tell us how it worked out

and how we could use that as a platform as we go forward with this plan?

Ms. Linda Nowlan: Yes, I think I could probably give you a few, but I'll try to limit myself.

WWF had a very successful endangered spaces campaign, and we worked together with governments from all levels to increase the amount of protected areas in Canada. I think the factors in that successful multi-year campaign were setting very ambitious goals, as I've already mentioned, working in cooperation, and inspiring the public. Those are three fundamentals for programs that I think you can incorporate.

The federal government can do a lot to support private sector conservation as well, as I mentioned. I think of supporting things like the Forest Stewardship Council in forest certification, the Marine Stewardship Council in marine certification, which are really positive examples of using the power of the marketplace. Consumers learn more about the products they buy, make those choices, and companies have an incentive to adopt more sustainable practices. So that would be another group of programs that I'd mention.

We run the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup each year, in cooperation here in B.C. with the Vancouver Aquarium, sponsored by Loblaws. That's another very successful program.

I'll just finish with, in 1967, during the centennial, the government really was trying to inspire people to take action. It was our 100th birthday. Everyone was very happy, and 5.5 million Canadian kids took part in the Canadian Centennial Medal program, where you got a medal for fitness award. So I would suggest something like that, some feel-good, fun, inspiring, youth-oriented, contest medal award would be a great part—a small part but a part—of your national conservation plan.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Time has expired.

Ms. Fry, you have seven minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm beginning to hear even in these last two sessions that any kind of plan we look at as a conservation plan must be comprehensive. We heard earlier on that it's important to have marine and land protected areas. Ecojustice Canada said that's not enough. In fact, you have to be strong and have very strong federal laws with regard to the EPA and SARA. We also heard that having lots of local groups doing protection and rehabilitation is important, and that there needs to be a way to support that as well as to look at private sector conservation.

We've heard that we need to look at a comprehensive and integrated strategy and that one size doesn't fit all in terms of the region. Ecojustice made the point that there needs to be a way of if not penalizing then at least making sure that industry that is harmful to the environment has to pay, so there is some way of ensuring that its harm is mitigated. I heard you sort of hinting at that. How would you see that happening? That is my first question, and it's for Ecojustice.

The second question to you is how we strengthen rather than weaken—which I believe we're currently doing—the national laws, and how we harmonize national and provincial laws. Are they harmonized or are they sort of working at odds with each other?

Those are the questions I wanted to ask Ecojustice.

I want to ask anybody else who wants to answer how they see us looking at supporting private sector conservation.

• (1120)

Mr. Devon Page: How much time do I have?

Hon. Hedy Fry: You don't have a lot, so you just have to do what lawyers do well—be quick and succinct.

Mr. Devon Page: Okay. Well, I'm going to start with the second question first, which is about strengthening national laws and harmonizing them. One of the distinctions I want to make regarding harmonizing laws is that there's a difference between ensuring that bureaucratic delays don't jeopardize the goals of an act and ensuring that the act itself is sound—

Hon. Hedy Fry: You mean implementing it and enforcing it.

Mr. Devon Page: Right. So we take the position that the current laws we have, while not optimal, are being characterized as ineffective as laws when in fact bureaucracy and failure to implement effectively are what have jeopardized them. They're being weakened, not because they're ineffective on their own.

It's a cover for laws that actually are quite sound and that for years were quite effectively protecting the environment. I'm speaking specifically of the Fisheries Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. As they are written, if they were applied, they could be effective.

We were before the Supreme Court of Canada two years ago, and they commented that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act has all the tools you need to ensure the harmonized, comprehensive implementation of environmental assessment in Canada. So one of my comments is that you have to preserve Canada's current laws.

Where I find the environment does best is when governments wrestle for jurisdiction, where they wrestle to take charge of the environment; it's the tragedy of the commons. When they're wrestling to avoid jurisdiction and obligation to take care of the environment and that tragedy of the commons, that's where the environment suffers. That's what we're seeing right now. We're seeing the federal government seeking to divest itself of responsibility as steward of the environment by characterizing the laws as constituting unnecessary red tape. In fact, however, they don't, and that's not what the courts have said, and that's certainly not what the laws say.

So in terms of strengthening the laws, the first thing we have to do is to continue on the trajectory we were on 10 years ago, which is to strengthen the current laws we have in both the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Fisheries Act. We're on the trajectory to better incorporate sustainability principles. That's not the same as saying they don't need to be modernized—they do—but those acts were put in place—in 1977 for the Fisheries Act, for example—because people understood that there's a relationship

between our well-being and the well-being of fish and fish habitat. That well-being is being jeopardized by the current changes.

So my first point is that you have to preserve our current laws and you have to strengthen them to incorporate current principles of sustainable development in law, which will take me to my second point, which is on the cost of using the environment.

In Canada, unlike most other progressive nations in the world, corporations don't pay for the cost of their activities. The tar sands is a classic example. There is no charge paid by a corporate actor to use four barrels of water for every barrel of oil they produce. How can that be? In other jurisdictions there'd be at least a carrying charge. You can talk about royalties, but the royalty structure in no way creates the fund that would enable reclaiming the lands after the extraction activity is undertaken.

As for the cost of using the environment, we just have to start charging the cost, and that's all there is to it. It's pay now or pay later. Alan made a comment that the principle behind sustainable development and the laws that enable it is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. So you take that ounce of prevention now as opposed to having the cost later. Well, we don't apply that principle in any context to Canadian industrial development.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Can I just ask you one thing? Is there a best-practice country we should be looking at? Is Norway, for example, a best-practice country? What are the best-practice countries?

Mr. Devon Page: There are best-practice countries almost everywhere in the world. There's no one country that stands out as having all the environmental laws we need.

Certainly the Scandinavian countries are way far ahead of Canada. I would say that mostly the Commonwealth countries lag behind, but of those, Canada is the farthest behind. There's a reason for that. There's a perception of abundance, and risks associated with industrial development aren't seen immediately. People believe that they're out of sight, out of mind.

Scandinavia and the European Union have strongly invested in progressive legislation in a way that I could only hope legislators someday see fit to do in Canada. Even in the United States, they're far more progressive than we are in terms of laws that protect the water, the air, and the land.

• (1125)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Does anyone, in 15 seconds, want to tell me how to deal with private sector conservation?

Mr. Alan Martin: I think there's a good model in Shuswap Lake, as a planning exercise. It involved all sectors, and everybody came to the conclusion that the values they have, whether they be residential, farming, or whatever, were related to the value and the sustainability of that large ecosystem. Through a collaborative approach, they mapped the lake, provided information, and provided education. And where behaviour didn't change, they used regulations, such as the Fisheries Act, to change the behaviour. But it was collective effort, not an individual effort.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you. I'm getting dirty looks from the chair here. Go on.

The Chair: Never.

Next we have Monsieur Pilon.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes.

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Chair, my first question is for Ms. Nowlan.

You said in your presentation that Vancouver wanted to be the greenest city by 2020. Do you think the national conservation plan could require or at least encourage other Canadian cities to do the same thing? How could the plan achieve that?

Ms. Linda Nowlan: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

Yes, I think if you want the national conservation plan to focus on urban centres, as I've heard committee members say and have read in testimony, challenging Canada's cities to be the greenest city by 2020 would be a good challenge to put out there and work on with them. Giving them part of the gas tax certainly would help them fund activities. Their tax base is not the same as the federal government's.

But why not have the national conservation plan set the goal of having Canada be the greenest country in the world by 2020? Thank you for setting me up to be able to make that remark.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: My next question is for Mr. Martin.

You spoke about wetlands. We know that a lot of them are destroyed by urban development. Do you think the national conservation plan should specifically target wetlands, or should it remain general?

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Martin: I think the national conservation plan should be general. I think the outcome, or the question it should ask, is what percentage of activities need to be done on those landscapes and wetlands to maintain ecosystem functioning. I think wetlands are a priority, but depending on where in Canada, they're not the only priority.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: My question, which is sort of along the same lines, is for Mr. Ellis and has to do with outfitters.

Do you think the national conservation plan should really target outfitters or remain general? Do you think it would be enough to keep the stocks for outfitting operations?

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Ellis: Yes, thank you.

Again, from our perspective, we're looking for a holistic, comprehensive plan that doesn't target wetlands or a specific species. We want to look at the landscape holistically and say that this is what's best; this is how we manage this whole area with all the species. It's an entire-ecosystem approach.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Page, we've been told that companies aren't liable when they destroy things. Should we go so far as to

impose a fine, or should we simply require that they restore the land back to its original state?

[*English*]

Mr. Devon Page: That question presumes that they've acted and they've harmed the environment. They should restore the land, to the extent that they can, but one thing that has been demonstrated clearly—and I'm not picking on the tar sands—is that they have yet to prove they can restore centuries-old peat bogs to perform the ecosystem services they did previously.

If they've acted in contravention of the law and we look at remedies that would right society for that, there has to be both the fines so they're punished for their behaviour, as well as an obligation to make whatever restorative steps they can.

• (1130)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Martin, you said that prevention was better than restoring. Can you talk about that a little more? In what way is it better to act in a preventative way than to restore things later?

[*English*]

Mr. Alan Martin: I think the major issue around prevention is that most of the assessments are done on a site basis and not on a landscape basis. As a result, our resources, our natural capital, are being eroded away through a death by a thousand cuts.

We don't look at the big picture, as Mr. Ellis has pointed out.

The Chair: Okay.

Next, Mr. Lunney, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you for that, Mr. Chair.

Again, thanks to the witnesses for their participation and input to us.

Mr. Ellis, I understand your guide outfitters group raised some \$140 million toward conservation efforts. Did you mention that in your remarks?

Mr. Scott Ellis: That's the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation. It surcharges dollars to anglers, trappers, and hunters. They pay a surcharge into the HCTF, which is made up of vested stakeholders. It then takes applications and distributes that money for conservation enhancement projects around the province.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay. That's a useful model that might be expanded in some other ways. If you have ideas on other mechanisms.... I know we had discussions about a Pacific salmon stamp and how some of those funds come back to the west coast.

Programs like that might help to provide a larger pocket of money to advance habitat restoration and so on. If you have other ideas of that nature, we'd sure be glad to hear about them.

Mr. Scott Ellis: We could probably make a submission, but we'd be supportive of any user-pay model where the proceeds go back into the sustainability and wide use of that resource.

There are many examples in this province where those funds go into general revenue. We'd prefer them to be put into the specific use they came from. Whether it's the salmon stamp or a surcharge for a licence, or whatever it might be, you could spend those resources very wisely. I think the people who abuse the resource will be happy to do their part, both supporting it financially as well as in-kind, whether that be volunteering for projects or the like.

We can send you some information on that.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks. I touched base earlier on the \$225 million that was in the budget a few years or multiple years ago for acquiring sensitive wild lands for organizations like Ducks Unlimited, Nature Trust.

I wonder if anyone at the table can comment on the usefulness of a program like that—how far it went, and any examples you might be aware of in British Columbia that have benefited from that.

Mr. Alan Martin: There are a large number of examples in terms of the purchase of properties. As Scott has indicated, the surcharge funds from the habitat conservation fund go into a number of different accounts. One of them is habitat enhancement for both fish and wildlife. Another one is stewardship activities. A third is public education.

There is also a funding envelope for land purchase. The habitat conservation fund is a funding agency but works in collaboration with Nature Trust, the Land Conservancy, the Land Trust. They collaborate on an opportunistic basis to purchase these lands and put them under management agreements. I think the most recent purchase in British Columbia, the biggest purchase, was the Darkwoods property on Kootenay Lake.

Those programs are effective. They're effective at getting a range of sizes of properties, and they're terribly oversubscribed.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks for that.

Ms. Linda Nowlan: Can I comment on that?

• (1135)

Mr. James Lunney: Yes.

Ms. Linda Nowlan: I was involved in a subprogram of that granting program whereby the federal government made a large grant to be administered by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, when the attempt was made to share some of that money with smaller land trusts across the country. So I was on a small committee where we looked at applications from smaller groups across the country to see if they would qualify for some of those funds, using the same very detailed and very credible procedures that the Nature Conservancy had used.

It was very interesting because a few things became apparent. The smaller groups had to come up with matching funds, just as the Nature Conservancy did, in order to access the federal funds. It's one thing for the Nature Conservancy to come up with whatever, \$10 million for Darkwoods, and B.C.'s land prices are a bit out of control, but it's very hard for a small land trust in Manitoba, for example, or Newfoundland or Nova Scotia to come up with that 50% matching funding.

So I suggest if you're going to look at expanding or reauthorizing that program, that the matching fund part not be the same for the

small land organizations, and that special consideration be given to disparities in real estate prices across the country.

The Chair: Time has expired.

[*Translation*]

You have five minutes, Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Chair, I have a quick question for Devon Page.

First, I appreciate the time you are giving us. Do you have the time to send us the recommendations you just mentioned regarding the environmental legislation? You can send them to the clerk, and we will be pleased to add them to our reports. I cannot require you to send them, but if you want to, we will be very pleased because this is a great concern of ours.

You spoke about peripheral species. Can you explain a little more what you mean by that? I'm not sure, but I think it was Mr. Ellis who spoke about an holistic approach rather than a species-specific approach. Can you expand your thoughts on that and tell us what you think about it? Mr. Ellis could then comment.

[*English*]

Mr. Devon Page: Both at a provincial level and in the course of our monitoring the federal government's activity on the species at risk file, what seems to have emerged is the challenge of grappling with the extent of Canada's at-risk species population in terms of what that means on the part of capital investment. So we've seen an intention to develop a filter, which would exclude from protection those species that are peripheral to globally significant populations that live elsewhere.

In Canada, half our endangered species have more significant populations south of us. We're on the northern fringe to many populations, so the application of that policy would see that a species that's considered to be globally significant elsewhere—to have its main population elsewhere—would not be one to be prioritized for protection.

All I can say is, from the perspective of the scientists we engage to guide us in developing our legal programs, we've been advised that there's no scientific basis for making that distinction between the two populations. So maybe my only message to you is to be on guard for that, because it seems to me that it's being proposed under the guise of saving money when it has no basis in science. That's about the only comment I would make. If you want specific examples, almost every example of species in Canada is peripheral.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Page, could you say a few words about the species-specific approach, rather than the ecosystem-based and holistic approach? Mr. Ellis will then be able to continue on the same topic.

[English]

Mr. Devon Page: Ecojustice takes the position that you need both. An ecosystem-based approach at its best would enable protection of individual species in the necessary habitat, but the model that we've seen developed in Canada seeks to reduce the amount of habitat available to species to as small as possible. Since we do that by stacking the habitat and trying to pick one area that captures the most species and offering that as proxy for protecting their habitat, current science suggests that you need to look at both the species-by-species basis to determine individual needs, and then you need to look at the well-being of the ecosystem to ensure it sustains their needs.

Mr. Scott Ellis: I would probably concur. I think you need both.

In B.C. we use a conservation framework. We look at different species and species at risk to try to rate them or prioritize them. I think one of the species that ranks very high is the mountain goat. The reason is that we have most of the world's population of mountain goats in British Columbia, so it ranks very highly. I think that's very important.

Then what we do is take a step back and ask how we look at all the factors, rather than just at mountain goats as a species by itself. We look at helicopters and oil and gas exploration. We look at the mountain goats' habitat and what they need. We look at their predators and what's going on in their environment.

I think it's a balanced approach. Sometimes what we've seen is that it gets very specific on that specific species, and it doesn't really look at the whole picture and all the impacts.

•(1140)

The Chair: Time has expired. Mr. Toet, you have the last five minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I want to talk a bit about wetlands. Maybe Mr. Fletcher or Mr. Martin could respond.

As we go through the national conservation plan, and I'm going to use Manitoba as an example, we have a major degradation or loss of some of our wetland areas. We also have a very major issue in Manitoba with flooding, as anybody across Canada would have seen on the news over the last several years. Last year especially we had some major flooding issues.

I believe there is a connection between those two items, and we have an opportunity through this plan, as we go forward with it, to enhance also natural disaster flood protection through revival of some of our wetland areas.

I wonder if you could comment on that and talk about the education work that you've been doing—I think you mentioned that 150 students had been trained so far—and the participants that you have had in your courses. Do you believe that's an accurate statement, or is it also something you see as being very helpful going forward in flood protection areas, so that through this, we can also deal with some natural disaster aspects.

Mr. Neil Fletcher: Absolutely. I agree that flood protection is a huge value of wetland that is often underappreciated, the ecological service that is provided.

I can speak from a B.C. example that wetlands here are valued at about \$100 billion in ecological services per year around the province—flood protection being a large aspect of that. One thing that we're struggling with is having strong protection as far as laws and regulations around wetlands. Often they're underappreciated at all levels of government. I know the federal government has a no-loss policy, but that only applies to certain lands. It's a struggle for provincial governments to go to that next step and do that protection. If there is any support we can get from a federal perspective, that's very helpful.

One concern is with the Fisheries Act and some of the changes to the legislation with respect to the protection that is being provided currently for wetlands that are fish bearing. There is a concern among conservation groups that might be diminished if there are changes in the legislation in that regard.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Right. That notwithstanding, I understand there are some concerns because of some unknowns to a large degree. We talked about the Manitoba example. Wetlands conservation across Canada is a very important aspect of this plan going forward. When we talk about some of the priorities, where would you place that in the Prairies as we go forward through this plan of really looking at wetlands rehabilitation? It encompasses so many items across the conservation spectrum.

Where would you see the wetlands rehabilitation as a priority, not only in Manitoba but across Canada?

Mr. Neil Fletcher: I would be biased because I run the wetlands program. I would have to say that watershed planning is a really important aspect of any consideration, and watersheds travel across multiple jurisdictions. The issue is that we're not looking at a watershed level and understanding how wetlands fit within those ecosystems. I heard of one example where one drop of water was going through 13 jurisdictions before it reached the ocean, I think, just stressing the point that collaboration and partnership building is extremely important. Wetlands fit into that picture, however they also need to be integrated with the level of protection that steams, lakes, other bodies of water, as well as other areas are being provided. Making those connections will help to integrate them into the larger landscape.

•(1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Time has expired.

I want to thank the witnesses again for being here today. Your testimony was helpful as we draft recommendations to the government in the development of a national conservation plan.

Colleagues, we will suspend for lunch and a health break. We will reconvene at 1 p.m. sharp.

We're suspended.

- (1145) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1300)

The Chair: Welcome, everyone, to the third and last session of today's testimony from witnesses as we work on development of a national conservation plan.

I want to thank each of the witnesses for being here. Each of you, as a group, will have ten minutes, and I encourage you to share your expertise. The focus of our study is the six questions that were provided to you, focusing on guiding principles, priorities, goals, and the purpose of creating a national conservation plan.

We were on Vancouver Island yesterday and had a tour. Tonight we head to Calgary, and in a week and a half we'll be in Halifax.

Your testimony is very important. It will help guide our committee as we continue our studies.

We will start with Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust, for 10 minutes.

Mr. David Bradbeer (Program Coordinator, Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust): My name is David Bradbeer, from the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust. I'm here to bear witness before the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development with regard to the proposed national conservation plan.

The focus of my witness testimony today is to discuss specific examples of collaborative conservation efforts being conducted on the south coast of B.C. To frame the context of these examples, I will quantify the ecological significance of the lower Fraser River delta, and within this context, I will discuss the specific actions taken by our local non-profit organization, Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust, to conserve wildlife species on a working landscape. I present these examples to you as a model for future collaborative conservation efforts and recommend that such models, in conjunction with habitat retention, be explicitly included within the national conservation plan.

B.C.'s largest river, the Fraser, travels 1,360 kilometres from its headwaters in the Rockies before reaching its outflow on the south coast of the province, where it forms the lower Fraser River delta. The lower Fraser River delta provides a mix of habitat for wildlife, including tidal marshes, sloughs, lowland shrub-tree communities, forested highlands, remnant grasslands, and intensively managed agricultural fields. These habitats are used by migratory birds, which travel from the Canadian Arctic, the interior of B.C., Central and South America, and Asia.

The diversity of migratory birds is represented by four species of loon, five species of grebe, five species of wading bird, eight species of owl, 25 species of waterfowl, 13 species of raptor, 29 species of shorebird, 15 species of gulls and terns, and over 70 species of songbirds. Of these wildlife species that rely on the lower Fraser River delta, several are listed under Canada's Species at Risk Act, including 12 that are listed as species of special concern, six that are listed as threatened, and seven that are listed as endangered.

The lower Fraser River delta is a critical migratory node for bird species. It supports the highest density of wintering raptors and the highest density of wintering water birds in all of Canada. For these

attributes, it is recognized as a Ramsar site and a western hemisphere shorebird reserve, and is considered one of Canada's most significant, important bird areas. Without the lower Fraser River delta, the majority of birds using the area would not be able to complete their migration north and south.

Farmland on the lower Fraser River delta can support many of these migratory birds. The initial diking and drainage of the lower Fraser River delta, which began in 1868, would have impacted the capacity of the landscape to conserve wildlife. However, farmland has proven its capacity to retain some of the functional elements of wildlife habitat that existed beforehand.

Farmland can conserve wildlife species, because first, it is directly adjacent to other high-quality habitats, such as tidal marshes and mud flats. Second, the fertile soils are managed for high, primary production of cash crops, which in turn can be utilized by wildlife directly and indirectly. For instance, waterfowl feed on harvested vegetable crop residue. Third, agronomic grass crops can be managed to emulate historical grassland habitats and can thereby provide food, roosting, breeding, and nesting habitat for a myriad of grassland species. Fourth, field margins can be managed as shrub-tree habitat. Fifth, and most important, farmland can be managed to increase the capacity of the landscape to conserve wildlife, and this management can be actively incorporated into existing cash crop rotation.

The work conducted by the Farmland & Wildlife Trust is an example of farmland management that increases the capacity of the landscape to conserve wildlife, while economic activity within the region is maintained. The Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust has been working within the farming communities of Delta and Richmond since 1993 to provide wildlife habitat and to steward agricultural soil resources. Our mission is to explicitly recognize that wildlife conservation can be supported by farmland habitat and that management can be carried out by farmers in a manner that also improves soil fertility.

The primary method of implementing wildlife conservation on local farms is through the six stewardship programs administered by DF&WT. Through these programs, farmers enter into formal stewardship agreements with DF&WT. Each agreement specifies management goals. Farmers carry out the management defined by the agreement on their farm, the result of which is the improvement and/or creation of wildlife habitat. The management practices also contribute to long-term soil management and crop productivity.

The Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust raises funds to provide farmers with a cost-share payment through these stewardship agreements. The cost-share covers a portion of the cost incurred to manage farmland for wildlife.

•(1305)

There is an incentive for the farmer to share a portion of this cost because of the management benefits accrued to soil fertility. With this model, our non-profit bears a portion of the cost that would otherwise be too prohibitive for the farmer to incur. We get this funding from several sources, including endowment funds, other NGOs, private organizations, municipal governments, as well as federal sources such as Environment Canada.

I'll briefly discuss two stewardship programs that DF&WT uses to cooperate with wildlife conservation. They're the grassland set-aside and the winter cover crop programs, and both programs provide grass habitat for wildlife and improve soil fertility.

Through the set-aside program, farmers plant agronomic grasses and leave them to grow for up to four years, allowing the fields to quickly become tall grass habitat that emulates historical grassland ecosystems that were present prior to the diking and draining in 1868. This dense vegetation provides shelter for small mammals, which in turn are food for raptors, owls, and wading birds, and is also a good habitat for grassland songbirds. This kind of management is specifically targeted as well to conserve four species listed under Canada's Species at Risk Act.

Farmers can also use the set-aside program in their crop rotation because it breaks pest cycles and increases soil organic matter. It can be difficult for farmers to take land out of production like this, but the cost-share provided through the stewardship program helps cover the costs of seed, equipment, time, labour, and in some cases, rents on the field. After four years, the field is returned to cash crop production, and the grassland set-aside program affects over 500 acres of farmland annually on the lower Fraser River delta.

I'll talk briefly of the winter cover crop program, another one of our programs that's targeted at migratory waterfowl conservation. Cereal grasses and clovers are planted after cash crop harvests in the late summer and early fall. This vegetation protects the soils from heavy rains. In fall, as populations of migratory waterfowl build, the winter cover crop fields provide feeding habitat for ducks, geese, and swans. The waterfowl feed on the winter cover crop through the winter.

The benefit to the farmer occurs when he ploughs the winter cover crop into the soil in spring, just before planting a cash crop, thus improving soil tilth. An average of 3,000 acres are planted on an annual basis on the lower Fraser River delta. The ability of winter cover crops to provide feeding habitat has made them an important tool for conserving migratory waterfowl populations. They have also helped mitigate conflict between waterfowl and farming operations, because waterfowl can drastically impact the viability of hay production by overgrazing the crop. The cover crops lure the waterfowl away from the more economically important hay and pasture crops, and this reduces grazing damage to the hayfields.

Currently, it's important to note that farmers on the lower Fraser River delta are compensated through the federal safety net program for damage caused by waterfowl.

In closing up here, DF&WT has conducted research studies to validate the efficacy of these practices for conserving wildlife. Research has assessed the abundance of small mammal prey in

grassland set-asides, and the extent to which different winter cover crops support migratory waterfowl. Assessments to date have confirmed that these stewardship programs are contributing to wildlife conservation by functioning as high-quality habitat.

The kind of landscape level management carried out by the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust must be considered in the context of challenges to conservation. Presently, industrial, commercial, and residential developments and the associated transportation corridors are being developed and expanded on the lower Fraser River delta farmland. The landscape changes associated with converting farmland to other uses diminishes its capacity to conserve wildlife and ecosystem function within one of Canada's most significant, important bird areas. To conserve populations of migratory birds and species at risk, farmland habitat must be retained.

The DF&WT model can be emulated in other regions of this country where landowners are equipped to enact conservation practices, but have been given no incentive to do so. When combined with habitat retention, this model can conserve wildlife. Providing cost-share funding can ensure farmers are not bearing the full cost of conservation management, and thereby have incentives to carry out management that conserves wildlife and ecosystem function.

The main point I must make here is that when there's a cost associated with managing a landscape for wildlife conservation, that cost cannot be placed solely on the landowner. The value of the environmental goods and services must be recognized and paid for by society so that those goods and services can be realized.

From this specific example of the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust, I will comment on the proposed national conservation plan. The purpose of the NCP should be to retain the existing ecological function of Canada's ecosystems, especially those that are critical to the conservation of a wide array of species.

•(1310)

Within this context, the NCP should explicitly recognize the ecological function of the lower Fraser River delta, including its critical importance as a node for wildlife migration. Furthermore, a specific objective of the NCP should be to retain the existing ecological function of this delta by preventing the further development of farmland.

Another specific objective should be to support conservation models that engage private landowners in the management of existing farmland habitat, similar to the work conducted by the Farmland & Wildlife Trust. This kind of collaborative model ensures that managed private lands can connect protected habitat, thereby increasing our capacity to conserve Canada's wildlife.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we'll hear from West Coast Environmental Law Association, and you have 10 minutes.

Ms. Jessica Clogg (Executive Director and Senior Counsel, West Coast Environmental Law Association): Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Clogg. I am the executive director and senior counsel at West Coast Environmental Law, which is dedicated to safeguarding the environment through law. Since 1974, our staff lawyers have successfully worked with communities, non-governmental organizations, and all levels of government, including first nations governments and the private sector, to develop proactive legal solutions to environmental problems.

We commend the federal government for its commitment to developing a national conservation plan. A number of previous witnesses have spoken to the central elements of such a plan, much of which I agree with. In particular, I note in agreement, the framing of my colleagues from CPAWS who spoke at an earlier hearing and summarized these succinctly as “protect, connect, restore, and engage”.

In my submission today, I therefore wish to examine in greater depth three issues that crosscut these elements and should inform a national conservation plan. First is the imperative of climate change and nature conservation; second is the need for sustainable land and water management outside protected areas; and third is the honourable treatment of constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights. Above all else, a framework of strong federal and provincial environmental laws must provide a backbone of an effective national conservation plan.

With regard to climate change and nature conservation, the impacts of climate change on our land and water are sobering. Globally, 20% to 30% of animal species are likely to go extinct. The biological underpinnings—

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but would it be possible to lower the volume in the room? It's difficult to follow the interpretation. I don't know if there is a way to resolve the problem.

I'm really sorry.

•(1315)

Ms. Jessica Clogg: Is there something I can do?

[English]

The Chair: Push the mike just a little bit. Mr. Choquette is trying to listen to the translation.

[Translation]

Ms. Jessica Clogg: Very well.

[English]

Mr. François Choquette: There's a lot of noise in the room.

Thank you very much. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Please proceed, thank you.

Ms. Jessica Clogg: I was emphasizing the fact that the impacts of climate change on our land and water are extremely sobering. We have truly reached a point where the biological underpinnings of our natural capital, our natural heritage, which sustains Earth's life support systems are truly at risk. This includes threats to our clean water, food, ecosystem services—such as air and water purification,

and waste treatment—and life-sustaining services, such as recreational opportunities.

Canadian communities are already grappling with water shortages, forest fires, and here in B.C. certainly the mountain pine beetle epidemic, underlining the need to evolve the way we manage our land and water to take climate change into account. This needs to be a central consideration in a national conservation plan.

This includes the imperative to complete our protected area system, particularly our representative system of national parks, and to design these in a way that takes into account the best available scientific information about climate change. This means augmenting the elevational and latitudinal breadth of protected areas, essentially allowing species the space to move north. It means simply protecting more and doing it smarter.

I recommend to you a recent editorial in the journal, *Conservation Biology*. It emphasized that scientific reviews and studies based on empirical evidence and rigorous analysis consistently indicate that somewhere in the range of 25% to 75% of a typical region must be managed with conservation of nature as a primary objective, if we wish to reach conservation goals and biodiversity protection goals. The realities of climate change militate towards being at the more conservative end of that spectrum.

There may be an additional economic silver lining for doing so. Massive amounts of greenhouse gas pollution are emitted when we degrade natural ecosystems, for example, through logging. Where areas are set aside from logging or from other ecosystem degradation, those avoided greenhouse gas emissions may have a new economic value in emerging carbon markets, as that avoided living carbon is not released into the atmosphere.

Second, I wish to speak to the need for sustainable land and water management outside of protected areas.

Clearly, large, interconnected, representative protected areas must be the cornerstone of any national conservation plan, yet any conservation plan that stops at the borders of protected areas will fail.

In many areas of Canada, habitats that once existed in large blocks have become fragmented by human activity. Outside of protected areas, small patches of older forests may be left, surrounded by clear-cuts, and seismic lines and roads may bisect the landscape. Perhaps most critically in an era of climate change and warming climate, fragmentation can limit the ability of organisms to move in response to changing climate conditions. And I'm quoting here from one of the articles cited in the notes you have: “Even with completely unfragmented landscapes, some species will not be able to move with the rapidity necessary” to avoid extirpation or extinction.

For the past two decades, maintaining or improving connectivity across landscapes has been the action most frequently recommended by scientists for enabling biodiversity adaptation to climate change, and again needs to be a central and forming principle of a national conservation plan.

I need to be clear that I'm not just talking about wildlife corridors. We need to be actively managing the matrix, the area outside of legally protected areas, to maintain functioning natural ecosystems. We need to be thinking about what needs to be left behind on the land to maintain habitat and ecosystem services to give species, and ultimately ourselves, a fighting chance in the face of climate change. Strong environmental laws and conservation-focused land and marine planning are key tools to improve the sustainability of natural resource management.

In particular, as was flagged previously in our submissions on the seven-year review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, a more proactive spatial regional approach to cumulative effects management could go a long way to addressing existing gaps.

I wish also to speak to the honourable treatment of constitutionally protected aboriginal and treaty rights. For the past decade I've had the privilege of working with a number of first nations as they developed land-use plans within their territories and engaged in government-to-government negotiations to reconcile these plans with the plans and regulations of the crown.

● (1320)

I wish to point out that many of the most innovative recent land-use outcomes and conservation gains in British Columbia have emerged from such reconciliation negotiations. A national conservation plan needs to fully embrace the role of first nations governments in shaping land-use outcomes and the constitutional imperative of maintaining and restoring the ecological basis of first nations cultures.

Finally, I want to emphasize that a framework of strong federal and provincial environmental laws must provide the backbone of an effective national conservation plan. For decades, Canadians have depended on our federal government to safeguard our families and nature from pollution, toxic contamination, and other environmental problems through strong environmental law. Canadians hold dear our natural heritage and our ability to have a say about resource decisions that will affect our lives. A national conservation plan cannot hope to effectively achieve its vision and give effect to the principles and elements articulated by the many witnesses you have heard from without a backbone of strong environmental laws, many of which will be dramatically altered by Bill C-38, the 2012 budget implementation bill currently before Parliament.

We are particularly concerned about changes to fish habitat protection and the new approach that limits which projects will be assessed under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the narrowing of environmental effects to be considered. We urge the standing committee to consider in its recommendations the central role that must be played by strong environmental laws in any national conservation plan.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Finally, we will hear from the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada.

You have 10 minutes.

Dr. Damien Joly (Associate Director, Nanaimo, Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for inviting us here today to speak before you and to discuss the development of a national conservation plan for Canada.

My name is Damien Joly. I'm a wildlife epidemiologist with Wildlife Conservation Society Canada.

WCS Canada was founded in 2004 as a Canadian non-governmental organization. Our mission is the conservation of wildlife and wild lands. We do this through science. Our focus is essentially "muddy boots" biology. Our scientists get out in the field. We do the necessary research on the ground to fill key information gaps on Canada's fish, wildlife, and ecosystems. We then use this information to work with aboriginal communities, government and regulatory agencies, conservation groups, and industry to resolve key conservation issues.

WCS Canada welcomes the opportunity to present our thoughts to the standing committee. We believe there's a strong role to be played by the federal government in conservation, and here we will outline what we see as the key elements of that role. We must first, however, express our profound uncertainty regarding the outcome of this process, given the number of recent actions by the federal government that are already undermining any potential for the success of a national conservation plan.

In the past few months, this government has proposed the repeal or revision of key conservation-related federal legislation, particularly the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Fisheries Act as well as cutting federal scientists' positions and departments involved in environmental and conservation issues. These reduce the role of the federal government and seriously weaken the ability of any government or society at large to promote conservation with a robust scientific basis.

Regarding Canada's biodiversity, the natural systems that sustain us are at risk. Urbanization, agriculture, oil and gas production, mining, forestry, and then supporting infrastructure, such as roads, have resulted in a substantial human footprint across much of southern Canada. The Canadian government's own science confirms widespread deterioration in environmental values that includes losses in wetlands, grasslands, and old growth forests; decreasing river flows; declining populations of native species; increasing invasion by non-native species; and accumulation of contaminants that threaten wildlife and human health.

These are clear signals that ecological functions in terrestrial and aquatic systems are being impaired in significant ways. Meanwhile, in northern Canada, investment in natural resource development has been steadily rising over the past decade, and the Government of Canada has made it clear that this trend will continue. Much of this attention and activity are occurring in globally significant boreal and arctic ecosystems. Rather than increasing investments in monitoring and oversight of environmental values accordingly, Canadian governments have chosen the opposite strategy. Budgets for information-gathering systems focusing on biodiversity and ecosystem change have been cut back each year and government-led assessment processes are being modified to hasten decision-making on developments.

• (1325)

The Chair: I would encourage the witness to focus on the purpose of the testimony today, which is to provide advice on the development of a national conservation plan. I would suggest that you're off topic and request that you focus your comments and keep them germane to the discussion.

Thank you.

Dr. Damien Joly: Of course. Fair enough, Mr. Chair.

WCS Canada presents three fundamental areas of focus for Canada's national conservation plan: conservation beyond protected areas, conservation in protected area establishment and management, and species conservation. In our opinion, a national conservation strategy must integrate all three elements, and each must be supported with investment in scientific and aboriginal traditional knowledge systems.

When we're talking about conservation beyond protected areas, really parks aren't enough to protect Canada's biodiversity. We need to be looking at conservation in the matrix that we see beyond protected areas.

The plan must foster a comprehensive approach with provinces and territories that addresses a wider set of environmental, social, and economic impacts than permitted by current land-use planning and environmental assessment processes. This means replacing piecemeal decision-making processes governing individual development projects with strategic land-use planning and environmental assessments performed at regional scales, and creating national standards for resource management and monitoring in landscapes and waterscapes beyond protected areas. A focus on the maintenance of ecological flows—the movements of organisms, water, and nutrients—across lands and waters will likewise be critical.

In sum, a proactive approach to addressing cumulative land-use change beyond protected areas will be fundamental to fostering both resilience and adaptation of Canada's natural heritage for future generations.

Here I'm going to shift topic a bit and talk about conservation in national parks and protected areas. Establishing and managing national parks has been a cornerstone of Canada's conservation strategy for over a century. While Canada's terrestrial protected areas network has increased since 1992, only about 10% of the land base and 1% of marine systems have been designated, well short of the CBD's 2020 Aichi biodiversity targets.

As opportunities for meaningful establishment of new areas are rapidly disappearing, a key priority under the national conservation plan must be to complete the national park system, filling important gaps in representation of freshwater, marine, and some terrestrial ecosystems. Gazetted areas must be large enough and designed with enough foresight to provide meaningful habitat quality for area-sensitive species, and be as resilient as possible to a changing climate and changing conditions beyond park boundaries.

Care must be taken to ensure that rigour in scientific monitoring of these ecological benchmarks is not undermined by economic drivers such as enhanced visitor use. In order to find solutions to these many challenges, the Government of Canada will find that working in tandem with provincial, territorial, and aboriginal governments can encourage innovative approaches to achieve land protection that address the unique environmental and social context comprising Canada's natural systems.

The third pillar I'll talk about is species conservation. Species are the most visible building blocks of biodiversity, the variety of life on earth, and the foundation of Canada's commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The status and health of fish, wildlife, and plant populations serve as barometers for how our natural systems are faring. Warning signs in Canada are indeed evident, with species at risk lists increasing in size every year, while relatively few species are recovering sufficiently to be removed from such lists. Still more Canadian species are displaying concerning signs of decline in parts of their range where human impacts are at their most intense, while as yet intact areas serve for the time being as critical population and habitat strongholds.

An effective national conservation plan must place conservation of all species, particularly those of conservation concern, as a key pillar both to target its effort and as a means to monitor its success. Further, we caution that because of the strong evidence for the relationship between species diversity and ecosystem function, the value of the individual species cannot be underestimated. This means that any approach that places the highest value on those species that are of economic or even cultural importance to humans risks being dangerously short-sighted.

In conclusion, at a time when regulatory and information systems are increasingly hard pressed to keep pace with mounting threats to conservation from resource development, climate change, and growing human population, the imperative for a national conservation plan could not be more clear. We applaud the committee's efforts to develop such a plan.

WCS Canada recommends that this plan contain these three pillars: conservation beyond protected areas, protected area establishment and management, and species conservation. A serious and useful plan would show commitment by the Government of Canada to Canada's obligations under international treaties and agreements, a renewed commitment to federal investment in science, and a reversal of legislative changes that weaken our ability to conserve Canadian biodiversity for future generations.

• (1330)

I just want to end with a little story. My grandfather spent six years overseas during World War II. He spent the final year in Holland dismantling land mines and other unexploded ordnance. It was his job to deal with these weapons.

One of the things he learned during that year, as you might imagine, was to not make decisions you can't come back from. When you make a decision, you really want it to be a decision that, if you figure you've made an error, you can come back from. When you're working with land mines, that's an important lesson. He taught me that lesson. What I worry about right now is that we are making decisions we can't come back from. Our grandchildren will not live in a world we want them to live in because of our decisions about our environment today.

Thank you for letting me speak.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Now, before we begin questions, I would like to introduce you to the members of Parliament before you. There are a dozen members of Parliament on the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in the House of Commons. Today you have about half of us.

Member of Parliament Hedy Fry is from the Vancouver area, with the Liberal Party. We have member of Parliament, François Pilon, and member of Parliament Choquette, both from around the Montreal area of Quebec. They are with the NDP, the official opposition. We have member of Parliament Lunney from the Nanaimo area, and member of Parliament Toet, from Manitoba. My riding is in beautiful Langley, British Columbia.

We will open up to questions. The first four questioners will have seven minutes each.

We'll begin with Mr. Toet. You have seven minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

I want to start with Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust. Mr. Bradbeer, I find your story about what has occurred in the Delta region quite intriguing. I'd like to just ask some questions about the program, the establishment of the program, the individual programs, and the stewardship program.

Who initially writes those programs? Is that a collaborative effort between the farmers and a stewardship group? Or is it written first by a stewardship group, and then the farmers sign on to it? Can you kind of take us through the process of how that's working?

Mr. David Bradbeer: Yes, to answer that question, we have to go back in time to how the trust formed. But essentially, it was a group

of farmers and conservationists who came together when some money was made available through the expansion of the Vancouver International Airport. Compensation money became available. The groups realized that there were benefits to both wildlife conservation and farmland soil stewardship. That's how the idea of the program was initially brought together.

Nowadays, when the stewardship agreements are written, the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust is represented by a volunteer board of directors. Four are from the farming community, and four are from the conservation community. We've agreed upon and have legally binding stewardship agreements that lay out all the management guidelines the farmers must undertake. The guidelines were created specifically so that we could achieve wildlife habitat values, and at the same time, soil conservation. Those agreements are formally entered into on an annual basis with the farmers.

Does that answer your question about some of the processes?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Yes, absolutely, it does.

There is a financial and a productivity reward for the farmer, as you outlined in your presentation. Is that the only reward, so to speak, the farmer reaps from this, or is there a much more far-reaching reward than that?

Mr. David Bradbeer: I'd say that a lot of those farmers like seeing wildlife, so that's pretty rewarding for them. There is that reward.

• (1335)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: What I'm getting at is whether there is a one-for-one return on dollars for the farmer, or is there not? Is there another reason?

Mr. David Bradbeer: It varies. In these areas, I think sometimes you can line up the benefits versus the costs accrued. My speculation is that indeed there is a one-for-one return. You can't overwork these soils in perpetuity. They break down too quickly, and you need to rebuild that structure. That is only possible through the reintroduction of soil, organic matter, and specifically, the action of grass roots on the soil. So in that case, yes, they are basically going to break even at the end of the day.

Sometimes I think that calculation is a lot harder to do, especially with the winter cover crop program, which has, I would say, compared to the set-aside program, a much more hard-to-realize benefit for the soil. But it's a long-term process.

I can't give you a hard and fast number on that, but the perceived benefit for the farmers, I think, is evident, because they keep coming back to the programs.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: What percentage of farmers are collaborating in the program?

I get a sense they're not doing this just for a financial gain.

Mr. David Bradbeer: Are you talking about a benefit to the community in terms of conservation?

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Yes.

Mr. David Bradbeer: In general, the community as a whole is a lot more accepting of the farming operations when they can see that these farmers are taking an active role in wildlife conservation. Not many other landowners have the capacity to enact that kind of wildlife conservation.

We can all put up bird feeders in our backyards, but conserving some of these species at risk only takes place on a large-scale working landscape, so that benefit is accrued to the farmers in that they are recognized within the community as contributing to wildlife conservation above and beyond the benefits they accrue to their own farming operations in maintaining the viability of that operation.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Dr. Joly, you talked about several different things in your presentation. One of the things I think we've heard from a lot of our witnesses is that they've been able to share success stories with us because there are success stories out there. We can talk about the negatives, and they definitely do exist and nobody is denying that, but I think one of the ways we build on society as a whole is when we highlight success stories. Success breeds success, so to speak. I think that also applies very much to conservation.

I wonder if you could articulate for us some success stories and look at the core attributes and how they could also be applied to other programs in a broader perspective.

Dr. Damien Joly: Sure. Before I answer, within WCS Canada we all have different areas of expertise. My particular expertise is global health. I work on wildlife health projects around the world. I'm here representing WCS Canada so I can give you an answer, but I'm not necessarily going to give you the best answer that another scientist with WCS Canada would be able to provide, because my work is primarily on other things beyond conservation species in Canada. I do have more of a global reach.

A good number of the greatest successes we've seen stem from the work of WCS Canada, but a tangible example is the increasing size of Nahanni National Park in the Yukon and the work that John Weaver, one of our scientists, did in terms of determining the range of distribution of the critically important species in that landscape—understanding where bighorn sheep go, where grizzly bears go, where the mountain caribou are going and what kind of landscapes they need, what kind of ranges they need, and then developing a new boundary for Nahanni National Park based on solid science.

Our work at WCS Canada and everywhere WCS works around the world is really... We've found our greatest successes come from taking a step back from... We never take a step back from our conservation values, but we take a step back from the controversy and we look at things to try to derive answers from science, putting on the unbiased glasses of science and trying to understand how best we can conserve, achieve our conservation goal, through science.

• (1340)

The Chair: Time has expired.

Monsieur Pilon, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bradbeer, your program is voluntary. Do you have statistics on the percentage of farmers who subscribe to this program?

[English]

Mr. David Bradbeer: We have approximately 40 farming operations involved in the program on an annual basis.

Usually, within our grasslands set-aside program, 20 farmers are enrolled in that program on an annual basis, given the limitations of the program's capacity and the wait-list we have for the programs.

Mr. François Pilon: How many farmers are there around there?

Mr. David Bradbeer: I would say in total there are probably close to 80 farming operations of different sizes and scope.

Some of the farms that we do not cooperate very heavily with are blueberry farms, because there's a perennial crop already in the ground. We have other activities we can do on those farms, but generally some of the farms are not conducive to collaboration.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Should the plan require all farmers to subscribe to your program or to a similar program?

[English]

Mr. David Bradbeer: I'm sorry, I didn't get that last one. Can we get programs that apply to all farmers?

If that's what you're asking, there are different ways of doing it. Not all farm operations are compatible with this kind of conservation. The big thing to point out is that the big vegetable farms, which have almost half of the acreage of the farms in Delta, are compatible with these programs. The type of work we can do on the vegetable farms emulates habitat that was historically present on the Fraser River delta for things like grassland habitat, which is what we do through the set-aside program. Those farms are best equipped to do that.

Some of the farms already have soil organic matter management because of their rotation, such as dairy farms. We do have some cooperation with them, but not to the same extent as the vegetable farms. Though those farms don't cooperate in the programs, they are contributing to wildlife conservation.

One thing we need to do with regard to say, blueberry farms... As you suggested, can we make programs that are compatible with their farming operations? Indeed, we can. Native trees and shrubs can be planted along the margins of these fields to increase habitat for birds, pollinators, and to accrue benefits to the farm, such as windbreaks and shelter belts.

We actually piloted a project this last year with a blueberry farmer. We installed a hedgerow on that farm.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Thank you.

Ms. Clogg, you spoke about expanding the protected areas. Do you think that some urban areas should also be protected?

[English]

Ms. Jessica Clogg: Yes, of course. Green space protection is required everywhere. What we need to think about in a holistic way is the maintenance of ecological integrity and functioning ecosystems.

Many of our urban areas are already heavily impacted, but our organization has worked over many years to look at ways of greening our urban areas and mechanisms that can be used, and ways that our cities should be adapting to climate change, including nature conservation.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: You also spoke about corridors that connect the protected areas. Can you tell us a little more about that and explain what you mean by "corridors"?

[English]

Ms. Jessica Clogg: The broader point I had hoped to make was that when we talk about landscape connectivity I'm actually speaking more broadly about the need to maintain functioning ecosystems across the landscape. As an example, in British Columbia right now there's a pilot project ongoing with the Ministry of Environment. It is attempting to establish objectives, targets, and benchmarks for key ecosystem values, and then to develop baseline information and use that information—those objectives, benchmarks, and indicators—as a mechanism for decision-makers in making choices about approving development and human activity in a way that does not negatively impact on ecosystem integrity and our ecosystem services.

There is a lot in the literature about landscape connectivity. Ultimately that is about the ability of any given species to be able to move across the landscape and go from one area of habitat to another, and that's going to depend on the species. Too often that is thought about in a relatively impoverished way. People do talk about wildlife corridors, and of course that's important, but we need to look at the landscape as a whole.

There's a concept that is sometimes called "porosity of the landscape", the ability of species to move through barriers like roads or development. We need to be thinking in a fairly holistic way.

I want to say one more thing specifically about corridors. In an era of climate change, to the extent we are talking about movement corridors, we need to be very much thinking about connectivity of cross-climate gradients as a key element of landscape connectivity—essentially allowing species to move from warmer areas to cooler areas. While we're designing landscape connectivities, we need to be taking that into account. It's not only looking at barriers to movement and the types of human impact on the landscape, but also allowing species to move northward. That is going to become more and more critical in an era of climate change.

•(1345)

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: You also spoke about agreements with aboriginal peoples. Agreements with aboriginal peoples often compensate them for damage caused by this or that company. What would you like to see in the agreements between governments and aboriginal peoples?

Ms. Jessica Clogg: I'm sorry, but I didn't hear the interpretation clearly.

[English]

Mr. François Pilon: Usually when there are negotiations between *les Autochtones* and the government, they just give money, and that's it. Can you elaborate on what would be a good negotiation?

[Translation]

Ms. Jessica Clogg: That wasn't the case for this example in British Columbia.

[English]

Let me speak about one example in particular.

One of the most recent and most powerful reconciliation agreements was with the Council of the Haida Nation. That agreement exemplifies many of the principles I was talking about as being important in a national conservation plan.

First of all, both the Haida and the province took an ecosystem-based approach in developing their land-use plan. They ultimately protected over 50% of the archipelago. But beyond that legal protection, which was agreed to in a government-to-government way between the two parties, they also put in place a network of other reserves and conservation areas, wildlife habit areas, etc., that was negotiated between the parties and eventually legally implemented. So there was a strong network of protection outside of protected areas.

I commend to you the example, and I think it went far beyond a financial arrangement. It looked at the climate change implications. It had a high level of conservation and a number of innovative economic measures, as well. So I commend to you that example to go deeper.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Lunney, you have seven minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, and thanks again to our witnesses for joining us today and contributing to this important discussion.

One of our previous witnesses was talking about.... This applies, I think, to Mr. Bradbeer's remarks. We talked a lot about connectivity, connecting ecosystems. And I heard him talk about matrices between preserved and conserved areas. I think your work with farmlands in the Delta region is particularly interesting in addressing some of those concerns. You talked about the many migratory birds and so on, that come through the Delta area and about what a rich area that is.

As you've been engaging farm communities with habitat improvement, as we're seeing some of that.... How many years have you been working on this? Are we seeing dividends already in terms of increased wildlife use in those areas where you have seen some positive changes?

Mr. David Bradbeer: Yes. We've been working since 1993. It is getting close to 20 years that we have been conducting this work.

Part of our work has been assessing how well some of these programs have worked in acting as habitat. Indeed the area, because of the high-quality adjacent tidal marsh habitat, has a lot of wildlife using it. But with the advent of these programs, we've actually seen the use of the fields increase. We've measured that using various methods.

We've looked at waterfowl use of farm fields. Generally, farm fields are good habitat for waterfowl. But we've seen them move into the cover crop fields that we've established, use them during their fall migration periods as well as during the wintering periods, and then again in spring migration.

We have some somewhat cursory evidence that some shorebirds also benefit from certain types of cover crop fields. Some of our work has really showed the value of these grassland set-aside fields to wintering raptors. So we've measured the abundance of small mammal prey on the landscape and compared that with other non-set-aside fields, fields that aren't being managed for wildlife. Indeed, the number of small mammal prey is higher in those managed fields, and the corresponding number of raptors, which we're targeting for this conservation, is higher as well.

I'll just point out that we directly target four of the species listed under the Species at Risk Act for conservation through that set-aside program.

• (1350)

Mr. James Lunney: Great.

One of the points that I wanted to bring out earlier with user groups, who are actually out there engaging with wildlife, is that observation is the foundation of science. We do a lot of talk about science, but sometimes I think we forget that the ground level, the foundational level, is actually observations on the ground.

With your work, and your observations there, is it mainly your own organizations doing observations? Are the farmers engaging in wildlife assessment counts, and so on?

One of our other objectives is engaging community. You've been at this 20 years. I'm just wondering who you're using to make the observations at this stage. Are the farmers participating and/or is the broader community getting involved in observing or taking advantage of some of the wildlife increases, to make known the advantages of this type of program?

Mr. David Bradbeer: Yes, we're trying to get more into that. We rely on a lot of citizen science. There are some coastal water bird counts that Bird Studies Canada has been coordinating. There are Christmas bird counts. We don't formally run them, but we definitely take advantage of the data that's available.

The farmers usually are the eyes and ears on the ground. They go out and look at wildlife and also tell us things that are going on in the landscape. More formally, which is what I think you're trying to get at, how are we engaging the broader community in this kind of observational work? To be quite honest, it's a bit of a challenge sometimes for our small organization to get data that's collected in the same manner across the board. If it's not collected in the same manner, it's not as usable, and it's harder to make comparisons.

To that end, we're engaging the Young Naturalists' Club, some of the Vancouver and lower mainlands groups, and we have a proposal in for a youth science project. They'll actually be the eyes and ears watching and conducting wildlife assessments using standardized monitoring procedures. That will fulfill two of our roles: wildlife population assessments, and engaging the community at large.

Mr. James Lunney: In part of your presentation, you said that the primary method of implementing conservation on local farms is through the six stewardship programs administered by your organization. I imagine that these programs are adapted according to the type of farm, the actual location, and so on. Can you tell us a little bit about how that actually works?

Mr. David Bradbeer: Do you mean how the programs are targeted?

Mr. James Lunney: You mentioned two.

Mr. David Bradbeer: I mentioned two. I mentioned the winter cover crop program and the grassland set-aside program, our two largest programs. We also have a hedgerow program for native trees and shrubs along the margins of fields. We have a grass margins programs, which is kind of a mix of set-asides and hedgerows. It's just a strip of grass along the field. Our two totally agronomically focused programs are the field liming and laser levelling programs.

Mr. James Lunney: That's super. We saw some examples of the importance of those native grasses in inner tidal zones and so on. The right grass in those areas greatly expands fish habitat, how much it's used, and how much insect activity then feeds the fish and so on. I recognize how important that is. In fact, I took a little stroll along here between sessions and saw some examples of that, just up the river, where a couple of herons were in the water right opposite where the grass was at the edge of the water. That speaks to the issues we're talking about today.

Ms. Clogg, you mentioned wildlife corridors and making sure that we connect areas. Roads can be a barrier. We see on the highways, often, wildlife fences to keep them from getting on the highways. None of us wants to collide with wildlife. We all see deer standing there as we drive by on the highway and wonder whether we should stop and risk getting killed or hope that the deer doesn't try to cross before somebody runs it over.

You raised another interesting point. Do we have examples of best practices somewhere we can incorporate in highway design to make sure that corridors pass under or pass over, or that there is some kind of corridor? How well are these things used? Maybe that's not your area. Maybe others can comment on it.

Also, you raised the interesting point that as climate zones move north, some of the southern species are going to take advantage of that and move northward as well. How can we take advantage of that? Could you, or maybe one of the others, comment on how we can take advantage of those concepts?

• (1355)

Ms. Jessica Clogg: First, with respect to corridor design and major transportation corridors, obviously, there are biological specialists in all of these areas.

Let's take a species, such as the grizzly bear. Once you start getting over 0.6 kilometres per kilometre squared of road density, you are going to have some very significant impacts on that species. While, of course, in an extreme circumstance, you're going to want to be assisting that species in crossing the highway, so to speak—and there are best practices with respect to that—really, I think the broader message is that we need large, interconnected, protected areas and management of the matrix in a way that maintains its porosity so as to maintain these species.

There are many specialists. There's lots of good literature about roads.

With respect to the movement of species, again, the implication that needs to be drawn is that we need to expand our protected areas. We need to enlarge them, and this is both in terms of our existing protected areas and in terms of completing the protected area system. We need to expand them northward and upward to maintain the ecosystem representation we have and to allow those species to move in response to changing climatic conditions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Ms. Fry for seven minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much.

Thank you for your presentations. They were very clear.

Today we heard about all of the things that one needs to do. Setting up protected parks is not the only thing. You need to have strong national laws, etc. You all pointed that out and you said you need to look at working with incentives for farmers.

I wanted to ask about what those incentives could be for people who own private land. Can you give me some idea of why we're not putting forward enough incentives? What are the ways in which we can create those incentives?

That's my first question and it is for the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust.

I also want to say we were talking about the need to strengthen rather than diminish the laws we have now. So what do you think we could do to strengthen our EPA and what can we do to strengthen SARA? That question is for Ms. Clogg.

Then, Mr. Joly, you made a very important point. You said that we should never do anything we can't undo. In medicine, which is my profession, we always say, "first, do no harm". There always needs to be evidence that what you're doing, while it sounds good, down the road is not going to create harm that you can't reverse.

I wanted to ask the three of you to comment on those things. Perhaps you can comment on what incentives you think could be used for private lands, etc.

The Chair: Before you comment, you could get a number of diverse questions from members around this table, but you still have to answer and deal with them within the scope of this study.

Relating to Ms. Fry's request for comments on how can SARA can be made better, as long as your answer ties in to the building of a national conservation plan, that would be appropriate. But to make comments specific to SARA legislation would not be in the scope of today. Keep that in mind when you are commenting.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I hope that isn't eating into my seven minutes, but I just wanted to say we heard repeatedly today that in regard to a conservation plan, one of the key pieces of a good conservation plan has to be strong national legislation, and these are the two pieces of legislation that actually do deal with conservation. So I think it's in order.

Go ahead, Mr. Bradbeer.

The Chair: No, just hold on one second.

Ms. Fry, I've given direction to the witnesses, and I hope you'll respect the comments of the chair. Any comments have to be tied to the scope of the study today. That's the ruling of the chair, Ms. Fry.

I don't want to eat into your time. If you're raising a point of order, then we'll stop the clock. Is that what you're doing?

• (1400)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, I am.

The Chair: Okay. What's your point of order?

Hon. Hedy Fry: My point of order is simply that I did not ask any question here that is outside of the scope of this. I think I know what the scope is. I think every single witness has mentioned these two pieces of legislation, so I'm just asking about it. It is within the scope.

I heard how strong national legislation in terms of conservation and species at risk has to do with environmental sustainability. So I'm just asking what they think would strengthen it. It's a part of the plan. My point is I didn't think one needed to suggest that it was beyond the scope, because it was totally within the scope. That's my point of order.

Thank you.

The Chair: It's not a point of order, but—

Hon. Hedy Fry: Well, you did break in and ask me for one.

Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I would really like to get on with the answers if you don't mind. I think it's within the scope. We've all agreed that it's within the scope. Perhaps we could get the answers.

The Chair: I would ask Ms. Fry to respect the comments of the chair.

Hon. Hedy Fry: And I would ask the chair to respect that the member here actually is within the scope.

The Chair: Ms. Fry, you're out of order.

Hon. Hedy Fry: You suggested I was outside of the scope, Mr. Chair, and I wasn't. I'm just repeating that I'm not outside of the scope. So when you make a comment that makes it sound as though I was outside of the scope, I'm just saying that I'm not. That's all. I'm just responding.

The Chair: Let's all cooperate.

Ms. Clogg, could you comment and keep it in mind to be within the scope?

Thank you.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, my first question was to the Delta Farmland & Wildlife Trust about incentives for—

The Chair: Very good.

Thank you.

Mr. David Bradbeer: In answer to your question, incentives can be varied, and I think you have to look at specific examples.

Briefly, to try to provide some framework for going forward, the incentive has to somehow at least match the cost incurred. In our case we have seed, equipment, time, labour, and fuel costs associated with establishing these fields. So the incentive has to at least somewhat balance that.

Where we can't cover all the costs of the farmer who's incurring this cost on his land, then maybe there has to be some other accrued benefit. In this case, it's the benefits to soil fertility that drive the farmer forward.

Hon. Hedy Fry: What can governments do as incentives? Could it be a tax credit? What is an example?

Mr. David Bradbeer: Precisely. It could be a tax credit, or perhaps a cost-share payment. With a specific look at the fisheries habitat on private farmland where riparian corridors are moving through, many farmers are hesitant to enact all the management necessary to maintain those corridors because it's a cost to them. They lose land out of production.

Perhaps yes, it could be a tax credit model, or direct cost-share through local non-profits. That seemed to work for us, where government regulation makes that harder to do. Engaging regional organizations, I think, is the way of specifically targeting said management.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Clogg: In response, I will say first that I sincerely believe that protection of species at risk, protection of the environment and human beings from toxins, protection of migratory birds, all of which are cornerstones of our federal environmental laws, should be cornerstones of a national conservation plan. With respect to strengthening those pieces of legislation as a component of the plan, let me speak first to environmental protection.

Whether it is done through that piece of legislation or otherwise, establishing legal limits on greenhouse gas emissions that do not allow exemptions for the oil sands is fundamental. I spoke briefly in my remarks about the tremendous impact that climate change is having on our land and water. At the same time that we are including in our national conservation plan mechanisms for using nature-based strategies to adapt to climate change, we cannot ignore the

imperative of getting our greenhouse gas emissions under control. It's fundamental to any conservation plan.

With respect to species at risk, when we look at the range of human activities and resource development that impact on critical habitat of species, obviously many of them are things which result from provincial approvals or tenures granted under provincial jurisdiction. For example, in British Columbia today, we do not have species at risk legislation. Clearly there is a gap that needs to be addressed.

In terms of strengthening the coordination both between the province and the federal government and with aboriginal governments, and in terms of the way we make decisions, I want to come back again to recommend the concept of proactive, regional, cumulative effects assessment. This would be something that would not be triggered simply by any one project, but something that would be done proactively and spatially, and would be focused on the needs of valued ecosystem components. When we start doing that, and we start taking on that sort of planning-based approach to assessment, that is a way in which all of those crosscutting laws can be strengthened and implemented in a more efficient and effective manner.

• (1405)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much.

Mr. Joly, if we have time.

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Damien Joly: I'll come back to the comment about science, and from my perspective, an investment in science and stressing the importance of science-based conservation decisions. I will use an example from epidemiology, my discipline. John Snow didn't know why he was breaking the handle off the water pump when he stopped the London cholera outbreak in 1854, but he had enough knowledge and information to understand that if he broke the handle, he would stop the cholera outbreak.

I'm not saying we should use science to paralyze us, but we need to use the best science we have to be able to make the best decisions that will lead to long-term sustainability of our ecosystems and the protection of wildlife.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Hedy Fry: That's fine, thanks.

The Chair: We will now begin the five-minute sessions of questioning. We will begin with Mr. Choquette for five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses. I have a lot of questions to ask but very little time. Five minutes isn't much time for all our questions.

I would like to talk a bit about climate change. You all spoke about climate change and the importance of fighting these changes, in the NCP. You aren't the first ones to tell us this. Yesterday, during the visit, everyone was talking to us about climate change and its impact, saying that an NCP cannot ignore it.

Unfortunately, with the budget, we no longer have the Kyoto Protocol Implementation Act. However, there should be something else to ensure that climate change is taken into account. We are also losing the national roundtable on the environment and the economy, which had done a very good study to explain why climate change will cost more if we tackle it later rather than right away.

Mr. Joly and Ms. Clogg, I would like you to make some brief and very specific recommendations to the committee on climate change. Could you also tell us why it is absolutely essential that the NCP discusses it?

[English]

Mr. Damien Joly: Thank you for that question.

I think addressing climate change has to come on two fronts. One is mitigation, trying to slow down the process of climate change through a control of carbon. I think there should be strong language, because we really don't know what that road will look like down the way. We really need to do everything we can to put the brakes on that. I think an element in the national conservation plan that addresses mitigation is really important.

The second component is adaptation, to design our conservation strategies—and we've all talked about this—in a way that will allow animals, plants, and the organisms that we care about to adapt to a changing environment. We need to have that latitudinal and altitudinal connectivity and porosity that allows them to adapt so that we don't see extinctions over time of the species we care about because of climate change.

So really, my focus would be around adaptation and mitigation.

Ms. Jessica Clogg: I agree completely.

I would only add one additional layer with respect to nature-based adaptation strategies—namely, while some level of climate change is now considered inevitable, we do have the ability to regulate other stressors on the land base. Whatever type of federal or provincial approval we're talking about, whatever type of proactive land-use planning or cumulative effects assessment we're talking about, we have the ability to reduce other stresses from human activities, from resource development. We need to be taking that precautionary approach when we look at the elements of a national conservation plan.

We need to be protecting more and protecting it smarter.

• (1410)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: The other point I wanted to mention has to do with science.

We unfortunately lost the national roundtable on the environment and the economy, but what should the recommendation be for science? In my opinion, there cannot be a national conservation plan worthy of its name without taking into account these matters, and I would like to know what you would recommend in that respect. If we do not focus on science and conduct studies and assess the current state of the situation first so that we can improve it, this won't work. What do you recommend with respect to investing in science? What do you think the sources of funding could be? The federal government wants to grant funding to this, but the problem is always

the same. Who should provide funding in this regard? Could industry contribute more?

What do you think? Mr. Joly, Ms. Clogg and, perhaps, Mr. Bradbeer, I'll give you the rest of my time to tell us what your recommendations would be. The clock is ticking fast.

[English]

Ms. Jessica Clogg: I actually wonder if one of my colleagues, particularly my colleague here who works directly with science and scientific research, might be better positioned to answer that.

Mr. François Choquette: Okay.

Mr. Damien Joly: Sure.

To be fair, there is a great role for industry and for the non-governmental side of things to fund science. I mean, that fundamentally is what WCS Canada is—a scientific organization. We fund through private funds, through grants, through other different mechanisms, not strictly through public funding. But the advantage of investment of public funds in science is critical. Public funds can be used to look at long-term questions that go across borders, that aren't limited to specific industrial or economic needs.

I always think that, you know, the government governs for our grandchildren, and we do science for our grandchildren and for our great-grandchildren. I don't have any yet, but I will some day. The idea is that public funding and public investment in science—through restoration funds to NSERC to restoration of the scientific community within the federal government—is critical. That, with funding back to universities, is critical for us to be able to look at the long term.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Toet, you have five minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you again, Mr. Chair.

I also have children, and hopefully one day grandchildren too. My question has to do with the educational aspect. Connectivity has been touched on a little bit in your testimony. The connectivity between young Canadians, urban Canadians, and the need for conservation is something that has been just barely touched on, I think, during this session of testimony, and I think it's a very critical and important element of us going forward.

In fact, Mr. Joly, I was a little intrigued by your statement, and maybe you can speak a little further to this, where you kind of said that with regard to the national parks, there's no need for enhanced visitor experience. I think I know a little bit where you're going with that, but I'd like you to articulate a little bit further whether you really meant by it that...because I think education and experience make up a huge part of us going forward on conservation methodologies throughout the country.

I just want to give you an opportunity to maybe clarify that statement a bit.

Mr. Damien Joly: Sure, and I appreciate that, thank you.

We're all conservationists because at some point in our childhood, we connected with nature. We had an experience that meant something to us, where we started to say that the environment or wildlife or fish or plants meant something to us.

If that doesn't happen, we don't get conservationists. If we don't get conservationists, we don't get conservation.

Reaching out and meeting and introducing conservation ideals to children, to people who have never had the experience before, to people my age and older, I think is critically important. And I think parks can play an incredible role in allowing and connecting people to that nature, to building conservationists.

What I was trying to get at is that we shouldn't let visitor use and the economics of this use of sites necessarily drive the purpose of a park. We shouldn't let that override the intrinsic importance of conservation within those parks. There is a balancing act. Let's face it, unless we get gate sales or the public putting value on these parks, there isn't going to be funding for those parks. We're going to lose more than the 638 parks staff we just did in this last budget, unless people value parks.

I think it's important to get people to those parks, but not at the expense of conservation of species and landscapes and biodiversity within those parks.

•(1415)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Great. Thank you for that.

It is a very important aspect. I grew up in an urban setting, and yet I was very involved in conservation aspects because of what my parents did. They spent time with me and brought me to these areas and showed me in a very physical way what it was all about and why it was so important. It is a critical element, and I'm glad you had an opportunity to clarify that.

Regarding that, going further, maybe you could speak to this, Ms. Clogg. How can we integrate the education of urban youth especially? That's what I'm focusing on because we have a bit of a dilemma there. We have a situation in the age of the computer and the Internet. It's a beautiful tool in a lot of ways, but it also has held some of our young people captive, so to speak, within their homes, and they haven't gone outside.

How can we change that dynamic in a very tangible way and get young people really involved and desiring to be part of conservation?

Ms. Jessica Clogg: I think it's an amazing question. Regrettably, it's not one that being an environmental lawyer clearly positions me to answer.

One observation I would have from working in the Lower Mainland, but also in communities around the province, is how surprising it has been for me to watch young people, who are much more connected to the environment around them than one would ever think, and have very articulate views of potential threats to the beaches they appreciate, to the air they breathe. Perhaps I'm turning it around and saying that I think there are many youth leaders who....

I had the privilege last week to travel with an 11-year-old from the Powell River area, who spoke more eloquently than I ever could

about her concerns about oil tankers and pipelines, and so I think that part of the answer is to connect with youth leaders, with young people who have made those connections, and allow them to guide us.

Again, aside from my own desire to get my kids out and about and adding to nature, it's not an area that I have particular expertise in.

The Chair: Time has expired.

Next we will hear from Mr. Choquette. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll ask question 4 directly: what should the conservation priorities be?

We have had a number of discussions with other witnesses to determine whether we should focus only on one species or if we should have a more ecosystem-based or more overall approach. Would you agree that an overall approach would be more effective?

Yesterday, in Nanaimo, we had the opportunity to meet with a lot of people who work on the ground to save salmon. These people are doing an excellent job. But the approach is species-specific. When I asked them questions about other species in the ecosystem, they unfortunately had no answer. This wasn't bad faith, but they didn't have the financial means to do everything.

Should we really ensure that the approach is more global and have the financial means to do so?

[*English*]

Mr. Damien Joly: That's an excellent question. If I could air the dirty laundry of the Wildlife Conservation Society a bit, this is something we struggle with all the time. Do we take the global approach, or do we pick a handful of species and focus on those species? This is something we struggle with.

I think this is why we've put a lot of thought into the three-pillar strategy we put forward today. One is looking at that matrix of landscapes outside of protected areas and developing land-use planning processes that allow us to protect habitat on a broader scale in addressing cumulative impacts from the things we do to landscapes. As well, it's marrying that with a protected area strategy that is complete and is representative of Canada's ecosystems. Then the third pillar is to focus on particular species of concern.

I think conservation is a crisis discipline. You're always trying to save the last of the last. Until we see more significant investment in conservation, that's always going to have to be how it's going to be. We really look at the most critically endangered species in the context of already having developed land-use planning outside and inside parks.

•(1420)

Ms. Jessica Clogg: If we think of the core elements of protecting, connecting, and restoring landscapes, it's unquestionable that those sorts of coarse filters and fine filters of the ecosystem and species-based approaches have to go hand in glove. My understanding of the conservation biology literature is that in order to maintain the habitat that is going to maintain the broad swath of species, some of which we may not have even identified yet, we're going to have to take those ecosystem-based approaches.

At the same time, there are important reasons for picking focal species for planning purposes, both species that have large area-based needs that help us understand how much we need to set aside, as well as species that have special needs that are threatened or endangered.

The key piece here is a question of what might be called conservation design. What are the processes and mechanisms we need to put in place for land-use planning, spatially based cumulative effects assessment, that allow us to ask those questions and apply both lenses to the question?

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I would like to go back to these two aspects you mentioned.

I'm now asking question 5: what should the NCP implementation priorities be? Of course, we're talking about amending the Fisheries Act that aims to protect fish habitat. You said that it was important to protect the fish habitat because it is what makes it possible to have an effect on all the others.

With respect to environmental assessments, I recall that during the hearings, several individuals emphasized the cumulative effects. Unfortunately, this aspect is ignored in Bill C-38. But these two pieces of legislation are very important for putting in place a national conservation plan. The Fisheries Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act will have to be reviewed.

My question is for you, Mr. Joly and Ms. Clogg. Briefly, what recommendations do you have?

[English]

Mr. Damien Joly: You want specific recommendations about Bill C-38, or recommendations for the plan in light of the changes.

Things like the changes to the Fisheries Act are going to make it very difficult for us to take a broad-based approach to conservation of species. We're going to find we're in a long-term debate about this stream being important for this reason and not that stream, so this stream doesn't matter anymore and we can do what we want.

I think it's being able to roll that back to say the ecosystem is important, because an intact ecosystem is what gives us the clean water we're all drinking right now. That comes from intact ecosystems. When we start making changes and making commercial or even cultural value-based decisions about certain streams—I just used that as an example—I think we're going to find that in the long term, we will lose the whole, bit by bit, by taking it apart.

The Chair: Unfortunately I think you've crossed the line in not staying on scope. If we could answer the questions, regardless of

how they're asked, that stay within the scope.... Time has expired also.

Mr. Lunney, you have the last five minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bradbeer, in your presentation you mentioned land use in the delta going back to 1868, and bringing the fields back to be somewhat similar to what they might have been. I believe your comment was that they "quickly become tall grass habitat that emulates historical grassland ecosystems" present on the LFRD prior to 1868. You mentioned 1868 earlier as part of your presentation.

Curiously enough, 1868 was the year that the current Fisheries Act passed in Parliament. It's an immense problem. The definitions in the Fisheries Act are totally out of touch with modern realities, unfortunately.

There is this delicate status quo in all the user groups of fisheries: first nations' cultural, ceremonial, and other uses; as well as commercial and recreational fisheries. A very delicate balance has been worked out, the status quo, and there is paralysis about dealing with updating this law, which desperately needs to be done.

There's so much room for fearmongering. With the modest changes that are actually included in the current legislation, there's lots of room for fearmongering. I'd like to assure the witnesses that it is not the intention of this or any other government to destroy the environment.

A previous witness mentioned the economic opportunities we have in this country. She feels that we need a robust conservation plan to balance any development objectives the government may have. That's exactly what we're attempting to do. It is a balancing act. In case anyone around the table has lost track, if we lose our economy, we also lose our opportunity to make the environmental investments people are asking us to make and achieve those important goals.

I found it interesting that you mentioned 1868 in your presentation. There have been a lot of changes since 1868, and the legislation does need to keep up with them.

Bearing that in mind, I think it was Mr. Joly who mentioned an expansion of the Nahanni. That's something this government did. There was a lot of work that went before in analyzing it. There was a huge expansion of the Nahanni National Park, the Great Bear national park, the Ramparts River—I think that's 33,000 hectares—the eastern side of Great Slave Lake—10 million hectares. If you consider the land that was set aside for land claims up there, it's another 62,000 hectares. This is the largest conservation achievement in Canadian history.

This government is very interested in actually achieving some conservation objectives. That's the purpose of this study, actually. We're moving towards that and we appreciate your being here to help us recognize how we can get there.

Having said that, my colleague mentioned engaging and involving young people. Some of our witness groups have creative plans on how to get more people turning over rocks, catching critters in the pond, looking at pond life under a microscope to see what a hydra and aquatic organisms look like.

How can we engage more young people in interacting with the environment? There's a large segment of our population that is still not being reached. I think you answered a question from Mr. Toet about parks.

I'll just throw that open again. Do any of the witnesses have any suggestions on how we can further engage young people and new Canadians, for example, in the environment?

● (1425)

The Chair: You have one minute.

Mr. Damien Joly: Engaging new Canadians, old Canadians, and re-engaging children of cultures that have lost that connection to the environment is about exposure. It's about taking kids out to see the beautiful country they live in, and the wildlife and plants that are part of it.

I drag my own children away from their PlayStation and their Wii, sometimes under duress. We take them outside to Mount Benson. We take them to Departure Bay. We take them out to the areas you're very familiar with. They actually like it once they're there and the fights stop. They stop bickering.

It's about convincing people to get outside and enjoy the environment, the country that your government and other governments have continued to protect for the last 150 years.

Our culture is based on our natural resources. We can't lose sight of that.

The Chair: Time has expired, but if you have a very short comment, proceed.

Mr. David Bradbeer: Have a national youth expeditionary force, but the expeditions are within Canada. Keep it cheap. Get kids out. A lot of kids in the city don't get the chance to get out, so you have to do something about it.

The Chair: Very good.

We have concluded hearing from the witnesses. I want to thank you for being with us.

As we've found, through the questions and the answers, there's a connectivity with all issues regarding the environment. We appreciate the passion you bring to this table. We, too, around here have this. My responsibility is to keep us within that very narrow scope. It is difficult.

If you would like to provide additional input to the committee on a broader venue, then please forward a letter to me, as the chair, or the clerk, and we'll distribute your comments to the members of the committee. The comments are welcome, but unfortunately the scope is narrow.

Thank you again for being here.

I want to also thank the people who have travelled with the committee and made this trip possible. Setting up a room like this to look like a committee room, it was our staff who are going along with us: the clerk, the analysts. The interpreters have been translating for four-and-a-half hours today, so I want to thank them. Thank you everybody for being part of this team.

We head to the airport and head to Calgary, where we will hear from some additional witnesses.

Again, thank you so much for being with us.

We're adjourned.

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