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# **Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Monday, October 29, 2012**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Mark Warawa**



## Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Monday, October 29, 2012

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome, everyone, to this 49th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, as we continue our study on urban conservation practices in Canada.

Go ahead, Ms. Duncan.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** It's not a motion.

I just want to bring to the attention of the committee that our chair and his wife celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary yesterday, and I think we would all want to recognize that.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** She is an angel and she is here, wearing red.

**An hon. member:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** This is as good as the dates get now. She had her wedding dress on, too; it was very impressive.

It's good to have you here, sweetheart. I'm not calling anybody else sweetheart; it was to a specific person.

With that in mind, I want to welcome the witnesses as we continue our study on urban conservation. The testimony we've heard so far has been very interesting and very much appreciated.

Each witness group has up to 10 minutes. I will be holding up a one-minute notice as we approach the expiry of your time.

We'll begin with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, represented by Mr. Kent.

**Mr. Oliver Kent (President, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society):** I have the honour of being the president of CPAWS. I think you have a copy of the prepared remarks. I'm not going to follow them exactly; I'm not that well-behaved. There's some more detail there that may be helpful to you in your considerations.

CPAWS will turn 50 next year. It's just a little bit older than your marriage. It's not a bad age for a conservation organization. I wish I was still 50.

We have 13 chapters from coast to coast to coast in Canada that are involved in campaigns to create national and provincial parks and marine protected areas in all regions of Canada. We also work to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources in the rest of Canada, because just having those parks as islands is not in the end good for

our conservation, and to ensure that existing protected areas are managed to protect their ecology.

Historically we focused largely on wilderness conservations on those big landscapes, but like this committee, we've taken an increasing interest in the creation and management of urban and near-urban conservation areas and in connecting people to nature through those areas. I think you probably have a good sense as to why that's important to this country.

One small part of this is that our national board of trustees meets somewhere across the country every May. We've now taken up the practice of getting there a half a day early and going on a bit of a field trip to see some kind of current or potential protected area near where we're meeting.

A couple of years ago when we were meeting in Victoria, we had the opportunity to go out to Gulf Islands National Park. I was just mentioning to Michelle Rempelhow pleased we were to see the announcement that more land is being added to Gulf Islands National Park.

One year ago we met in Sackville and went to the Chignecto wilderness area of Nova Scotia, and I had the opportunity to see that just around the time when the provincial government in Nova Scotia was announcing the creation of two large new protected areas in the Chignecto, which is very important for that province.

Last spring we had the opportunity to meet in the eastern part of Toronto and to go to the proposed Rouge national urban park. We got to hike through some of the areas of the park and had a briefing from Parks Canada staff on the planning and conservation work they are doing around that very important initiative.

In effect, these three experiences we had connect very directly, I think, to your interest in conservation in urban and near-urban areas. It has given us a chance to see first-hand what's being done, as well as some of the challenges, frankly, that arise in some of those locations.

Obviously we don't believe urban conservation should take place at the expense of a continuing interest in the larger wilderness areas of Canada. Those large wilderness areas are going to help us to meet our commitments internationally, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, to protect at least 17% of our lands and 10% of our waters by 2020, but I think we all know in this room that wilderness conservation is not just about putting some numbers up on a board. That's not really what turns anybody on about this.

Wilderness conservation is about healthy ecosystems and the clean air and clean water that come from them. It's about opportunities for outdoor activity that contribute to human health and well-being, and it's about sustainable tourism that helps to support the economies of local communities close to many of these parks.

Urban and near-urban conservation is never going to put up the big numbers in terms of numbers of square kilometres that we conserve as a country, but their value, as I'm sure you recognize, is that these are places that people can reach, places that ordinary people can experience first-hand in terms of the healthy outdoor activity that can take place there or their opportunity to learn about the ecosystems and the conservation challenges they bring. Perhaps that's a beginning of a broader engagement with these areas that goes beyond their immediate neighbourhood.

Urban protected areas and the larger wilderness ones are both important, but we need to recognize they are different. They need to be managed to different standards—high standards in both cases, but it's not appropriate that they be the same.

Canada's national parks benefit from a law that requires they be managed to maintain or restore their ecological integrity as a first priority.

• (1535)

I don't know how many people really have a gut feel for what ecological integrity means, but one way of looking at it is that parks should be managed so that all of their native species are present in healthy populations and so that ecosystem processes like predator-prey relationships or natural fire regimes are working well.

The law sets a high bar for ecosystem-based park management, and it's considered a gold standard around the world. Sometimes achieving that standard just requires protecting what's there now, but often parks are in locations that have been degraded in one way or the other over time, and there's a need to restore them in some sense.

We think about Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan, for example, where both bison and black-footed ferrets have been reintroduced in recent years. Doing that helps to restore the landscape as well, because landscape is adapted to being inhabited by bison. Parks Canada has also been using prescribed burns to restore the natural ecosystem in places where fire is normally a part of it.

That gold standard for ecological integrity in national parks is one that we are very committed to preserving. We believe that urban parks should be managed to a high standard as well, but we don't think that the same standard is either feasible or desirable, and frankly we wouldn't want to see the standard for those more traditional national parks eroded in order to have the same one. We think they need to be set deliberately at different levels.

We support the concept that national urban parks or conservation areas should be managed to maximize their ecosystem health rather than to maintain or restore their ecological integrity. We're not expecting that people are going to bring back caribou or wolves to the Rouge national urban park—it might be a little too interesting if they did that—but we think there's a lot that can be done to restore the biological and natural values of an ecosystem like that. We can

restore the rivers and streams. We can replant native trees and plants. We can control invasive species. We can engage a broad range of partners, including young people, seniors, and first nations, to help with this work, and one of the things that struck me from visiting the Rouge last year was the volunteer involvement that there has been historically in that area, in both educational programs and in the restoration activities themselves.

To ensure that urban parks like the Rouge are able to protect and restore ecosystem health in the long term, the legislation for these new national urban parks needs to put conservation clearly as the first priority, but it has to be looked at differently from the way it would be in the traditional national parks. Given the enormous pressures that these places will face from urban development and the millions of people who will visit these small, fragile places, it's critically important that the laws governing them include a clear statement that human use will happen within the limits of maintaining and restoring ecosystem health.

Urban conservation areas can't be all things to all people. Too many people are going to want access to them. If they're going to retain their natural values, there has to be a focus on stewardship activities in order for these areas to be resilient.

When creating protected areas, whether in cities or in wilder parts of Canada, there are some other basic principles that need to be thought about. For example, is the area big enough to sustain populations of wildlife or the ecosystems in general? If you have tiny pockets, they're really just not viable from a biological standpoint. Is it connected to other areas so that populations can move back and forth? As with any species, it's important that there be outbreeding and that the populations not be genetically isolated. If the landscape is fragmented—if things like expressways run through the middle—what can we do to deal with that fragmentation?

Urban conservation areas can play a very important part as well in connecting new generations of Canadians to nature. I think that's something we're all aware of as an increasingly important priority, and one that locations like the Rouge can serve ideally with appropriate volunteer involvement as part of that effort. There's a bit more detail on that subject in the written submission, but I'll respect the limit on time and stop now.

• (1540)

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

Next we'll hear from Ms. Lorrie Minshall, with the Grand River Conservation Authority.

You have 10 minutes.

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall (Director, Water Management Plan, Grand River Conservation Authority):** Good afternoon.

I'm Lorrie Minshall, the water management plan director with the Grand River Conservation Authority. I'm here on behalf of Joe Farwell, our chief administrative officer, who is currently on vacation.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide input on urban conservation in the context of a national conservation plan.

The Grand River Conservation Authority is one of 36 conservation authorities in Ontario that manage water, forests, and other natural resources in the most populated areas of the province. We are, by definition, a partnership of the municipalities in a watershed for the management of water and natural resources across municipal boundaries.

Our watershed is located immediately to the west of the greater Toronto area, and it is the largest watershed in southern Ontario, about the size of Prince Edward Island.

There are 39 municipalities in the watershed, with a population of about one million people, most of whom live in the rapidly growing cities of Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph, and Brantford. It's also one of the richest farming regions in Canada, with 70% of the area being actively farmed.

Seventy percent of the population get their water from ground-water wells and 30% of the population get theirs from the river system, making it the largest urban population in Canada that is reliant on groundwater and an inland river system for its water supply. At the same time, 30 municipal waste water treatment plants are discharging into this river system, so you can appreciate why it's so important that we work so hard to protect our water resources.

The Grand River Conservation Authority is the oldest water management agency in Canada. It was created more than 75 years ago, when the industry leaders of the watershed realized that they needed to work together to address the severe environmental issues of flooding, pollution, and inadequate water supplies.

We're now recognized leaders in integrated water management. In 2000, the GRCA received the International Thiers Riverprize for excellence in river management.

As a result, our river has undergone a remarkable recovery, which was highlighted in 1994 when the Grand River was the first river in a working landscape to be designated a Canadian heritage river.

Here are some of our experiences and our lessons learned.

We have assumed that urban conservation in this context means recognizing and valuing the ecological services that are provided by healthy natural systems and landscapes, and their contribution to economic prosperity in Canada; recognizing and valuing the social benefits of connecting Canadians to natural spaces, and their contribution to public health and wellness; and providing explicitly for access by all Canadians, including urban Canadians, to natural spaces.

After decades of turning their backs on the Grand, our cities and towns now see the river system as a community and economic asset to be valued and integrated into their long-range development plans. The river corridors are uniting cities through interurban trail networks that are giving people new ways to enjoy the Grand.

The reason for that success is clear. The GRCA and its many partners—the municipalities, the provincial and federal agencies, and others—have adopted an integrated, watershed-wide approach to managing our environmental assets.

This can be achieved at the Grand River watershed scale, as I have described, and also at the sub-watershed scale in the smaller streams

and wetland systems within cities. Sub-watershed planning is a best practice in urban planning for growth and economic development.

Shifting, for the moment, to the topic of protected spaces, a protected space is, from our perspective, an area in public ownership where the primary goal is to maintain the natural ecosystem functions for which it is valued. However, in the working landscapes of southern Ontario, people need access to protected spaces for two reasons: because there is little enough natural space to meet the need and, perhaps more importantly, because that's how people come to appreciate the resource.

However, providing access to protected spaces is not as simple as it sounds. Along with passive enjoyment can come overuse, safety hazards, and vandalism. In our experience, the biggest barrier to public access in protected spaces is the cost of maintenance required to achieve both goals.

• (1545)

At the same time, most of southern Ontario is in private ownership. The GRCA is a leader in the delivery of private landowners' stewardship programs and environmental education. Our long-standing rural water quality program has resulted in widespread uptake of best management practices among watershed farmers and has built an excellent working relationship among farmers, farm organizations, municipalities, and the conservation authority.

We have learned that the relationship-building at the heart of successful collaboration takes time and continuity. Canada's best value investment in collaborative stewardship should be in long-term programming. In this case, slow and steady wins this race.

In addition to working with landowners, the GRCA operates five nature centres where it provides outdoor recreation in a natural setting to 50,000 schoolchildren and families each year. Connecting kids to nature is critical because of the health benefits, of course, and to reverse the increasing urban disconnection from nature by introducing kids to nature at a young age.

We believe that the federal role in urban conservation is one of leadership. Create the vision and expectations for urban conservation and connecting urban Canadians with natural spaces, recognizing that the what and how will be specific to the varying local situations across the country. Promote the facts about ecological services and the public health and social benefits of natural spaces, especially in and around urban and urbanizing areas where there is the greatest pressure on them.

Pursue the science and transfer the knowledge to and among the local practitioners. We rely on you for science; we are not the scientists, we're the practitioners. The benefits of natural spaces—the ecological goods and services, the public health benefits, and the social benefits—are huge in relation to the cost. They are a best-value solution.

Integrate the goals and the principles of the national conservation strategy plan across other federal and cost-share programs. For example, recognize blue-green infrastructure or innovation in grey infrastructure in the infrastructure funding programs, and look to long-term stewardship and environmental education programming and support.

Thank you.

• (1550)

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

Finally, we'll hear from Mr. Penner, with the City of Winnipeg.

You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Rodney Penner (City Naturalist, Naturalist Services, City of Winnipeg):** Thank you. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this study.

The City of Winnipeg, as an organization, recognizes the importance of conserving urban natural areas, takes a very active role in managing these areas, and works closely with the local community to improve them. Natural area management in Winnipeg ranges from significant areas such as Assiniboine Forest and the Living Prairie Museum to small stands of forest, creeks, and riverbank areas.

For us, urban conservation is tied to natural heritage. This would be loosely defined as plant and animal communities historically found in Winnipeg, with intact remnants of these communities being the most valuable. Our goal is not just to protect these areas against destruction but also to ensure they are managed in a way that both protects their biodiversity and makes them accessible for people to enjoy.

We also have a focus on environmental education and we work with local community or stewardship groups to enhance and maintain natural areas. Many natural areas have the ability to be focal points in their communities and a place where people walking the trails will actually greet one another. They can be a place not just of natural values but also of cultural connection. From our experience, we have found that working closely with community groups can be mutually beneficial. We provide ecological expertise and technical assistance, while they provide community desire for a project, volunteer muscle to get the project done, and the ability to raise additional funds.

Working hand in hand with community groups on local area maintenance or habitat restoration projects works well, but there are also challenges. One challenge that I would like to note is the type of funding normally associated with environmental stewardship projects. This is often short-term, project-related funding. While this is an incredibly useful source of funding at times, at times it does little to ensure the long-term success of a project, since most habitat restoration projects take more than one or two years to establish. Longer-term project funding that considers maintenance following the project would greatly benefit success of most restoration-type habitat projects.

As a goal of connecting with nature, I think every community should have access to nature, if not within their own neighbourhood, then at least through school programming. We have worked closely with a program called “bridging the gap” here in Winnipeg, which provides opportunities for inner-city kids to experience a hike in a natural area or do some gardening at their school. When I was growing up as a rural kid, we regularly took school field trips into the city for cultural events; it would be a great start if every urban child at least got a field trip to a local natural area at some point in their schooling. For some inner-city kids we have worked with, just seeing a large urban nature park can be a huge experience.

Another significant story I would like to include is that restoration has increased natural areas in Winnipeg's park spaces by over 100 hectares. Along with numerous funded and compensation projects, most new housing developments in Winnipeg have incorporated naturalized wetlands surrounded by native grasses and prairie restoration areas.

I would like to note that the economic value of natural areas is readily visible in these new development areas. There is generally no requirement that the landscape in these areas be naturalized, but local developers themselves have become proponents of this landscape and readily incorporate it within their marketing information.

In addition, these natural areas form ideal locations for nature trails and active transportation. This benefits both health, environment, and social interaction within the neighbourhood. Naturalized wetlands in these areas also have the ability to uptake nutrients, effectively reducing nutrient loads that eventually head downstream into Lake Winnipeg. The guiding mandate for our work is our city's official plan document, titled “Our Winnipeg”. More specifically, the City of Winnipeg has an approved strategy, the ecologically significant natural lands strategy and policy.

Protection of land within Winnipeg generally takes two forms: the first is the designation as a city park, which requires two-thirds council majority to be disposed of; the second is the use of conservation easements on parcels of land still privately held, but with mutually agreed upon protection clauses.

Winnipeg's tree removal guideline also provides an avenue of protection by applying a value to trees needing to be removed for various reasons. This value is then used for replanting. As such, this method of natural capital calculation provides an incentive for protection, as well as a no-net-loss concept for reparation damage. Compensation requirements to meet no-net-loss principles have been used numerous times when natural areas have been damaged on City of Winnipeg parkland.

●(1555)

Our experience would suggest that urban conservation does not always mean it can simply be called protected and still maintain its quality as habitat and its biodiversity. Due to their generally small size and disturbance pressures, maintenance, management, and restoration requirements are often associated with ensuring protected areas do not become overwhelmed by other disturbance factors.

From our perspective, the federal government can and does play a valuable role in conservation of urban natural areas. One thing is a provision of youth internship employment funding and EcoAction grants. These are incredibly valuable. Providing support on numerous local issues through agencies like the Canadian Wildlife Service also greatly benefits our operations. Providing a level of habitat protection through acts such as the Fisheries Act and the Environmental Assessment Act is also important.

Some more thoughts for how the federal government can stay engaged and effective: consider opening a version of EcoAction funding to local municipal government and relaxing some of the reporting requirements and deadlines of EcoAction funding for local community groups. Many community groups experience burnout after completing the current EcoAction process.

Consider setting up a community stewardship funding program that is less project-based and more based on annual support for maintenance of conservation areas and general conservation-based activities.

Ensure funding for youth employment in conservation doesn't get overlooked. Young Canada Works and HRSDC grants are very important. These grant programs are used to get work done and get young people recruited into future positions. Please keep these grants coming.

Don't take away the big enforcement that a federal act provides. It can be a valuable tool at a local level when federal authorities work together with local authorities to protect habitat. Encourage the use of local level no-net-loss guidelines when it comes to habitat conservation. Support the setting up of local level habitat banking and natural capital protection through means such as Winnipeg's tree removal guidelines. Foster ways to keep staff in federal departments engaged with local conservation-related workers. Finally, mandate that educational opportunity should exist for every child to take a field trip to a conservation area.

Thanks a lot for letting me speak on this.

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

Before we begin our seven-minute round of questioning, I want to remind the committee, and particularly the witnesses, that there is a seven-question scope. Each of you has received that. You may be tempted to go outside that scope, depending on the questions you're asked, but I encourage your answers to stay within the scope.

The seven questions are these: What is urban conservation? What could the goals be of connecting urban Canadians? What are the best practices? What urban conservation initiatives are currently in use, and what are the best practices and challenges for them? What are the biodiversity and social benefits associated with urban conservation? How do you define protected space? What role should the federal government play in urban conservation?

Keeping that in mind, Mr. Woodworth, you have the first seven minutes.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much.

My thanks to all the witnesses, and in particular to Mr. Penner. You were coming up with so many good ideas so quickly I was having trouble writing them all down. I know I have a written copy of your report, and I thank you for that.

Also, I want to welcome Ms. Minshall from the Grand River Conservation Authority to our committee today. I am very proud of and pleased with the work the GRCA has done in my backyard. I'm a regular user of the trails and have canoed the Grand, and I can't tell you how much I appreciate the work you do.

I'd like to start with that, because among other things I know our current population in this area of the Grand River is about 960,000 people and that we expect it will grow to about 1.4 million people over the next 30 years. I'm going to take a guess that in the last 30 years, it has probably doubled.

Could you give us some insight into what you would say have been the greatest keys to success for the Grand River Conservation Authority in preserving and restoring conservation in such a growing and enlarging urban area? What has enabled you to be so successful, and what do you think is most important in the future? Urban areas are expanding all across Canada, and I think they could learn from your experiences.

• (1600)

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** I have to admit that setting the flood plains aside from development about 50 years ago after Hurricane Hazel—Hurricane Sandy is on its way—left us with a legacy of a natural river corridor connecting the cities through the watershed, but looking ahead, we are working now on a Grand River watershed water management plan. It's a joint plan among the municipalities in the watershed, the first nations, and the provincial and federal agencies that are connected with water and water quality management. It's a joint plan. We hope to have it finished in 2013.

The Grand has always been managed under a plan that allows the agencies and the municipalities to work together and look ahead at what's going to happen with this explosion of growth, for example, and make sure that our water quality can continue improving and that we can ensure sustainable water supplies in this watershed as well.

I mentioned the sub-watershed planning. All of the municipalities, the cities, since about the mid-eighties have been doing the sub-watershed plans—that's what we call them in Ontario—ahead of development. It's an opportunity to look at an area ahead of the community or secondary plans for development, and look for the opportunities to set these areas aside and connect them while accommodating growth in the area.

I think that has been really positive. Not only do we have the trail networks along the Grand, but we also have the trail networks in natural areas connecting into where people are living as well, connecting people more closely with nature.

All of our cities very aggressively pursue this approach, as the City of Winnipeg has been doing as well, with stormwater management plans to also look to these things in the old developed areas, the city areas that were developed before these things occurred. All of them have goals for 40% canopy cover in the city as well.

Our Grand River Conservation Foundation has also been working very hard with our industry, corporate, and private benefactors and has been pursuing an opportunity to do restoration work all over the watershed, with private assistance.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** If I could comment, all through your remarks you were speaking in terms of collaborations, not only between federal and provincial and local agencies but also across municipal boundaries and with private interests as well. May I take out of what you said that probably a collaborative approach among all stakeholders is one of the key elements to ensuring that we can plan ahead and preserve urban landscapes and near-urban landscapes?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Absolutely. Our municipal partnership and their group partnership with others is very strong in the watershed. It really has been the key to success.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** I wondered if the GRCA actually had any mandated legislative powers to do this, or if it's all done by way of cooperation among various agencies and governments.

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** The conservation authority exists as an institution. Its funding structure and those sorts of things are all set up under the Conservation Authorities Act in Ontario, so it is a

sustained institution, so to speak. However, I would say that we are not doing all the collaborative work because we are under a regulation; it really is a joint proactive voluntary collaboration.

• (1605)

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Could you tell me what collaborations come to mind between GRCA and the federal government that have been working well?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** We have several.

Right now Environment Canada is working very closely with us on the water management plan, because we're looking not only at improving the water quality in the Grand but also its impact on Lake Erie. That's one of the things, and we've been working on that for many years.

We've been working with Agriculture Canada on the rural water quality program that I was talking about earlier, which promotes the environmental farm plan and builds on that. That has been a very long-standing partnership.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Do those agencies provide expertise and scientific information for your work?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Yes, they absolutely do.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Very good.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 28 seconds.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** I'll cede that then. I don't think I can ask anything in that time. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kent, I wasn't ignoring you; I wish I had more time to get to you.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I would gladly reinforce some of the remarks that were made about the importance of river corridors and the importance of collaboration. Frankly, it's essential to all of our work across the country.

**Mr. Stephen Woodworth:** Thank you. I appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Time has expired. Thank you.

Madame Quach, you have seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for joining us today. I have a number of questions for you. I will start with Mr. Kent.

I have read the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society's report. In it, you mention a number of cuts in federal funding that have resulted in less scientific research and fewer oversight activities, which are essential.

Could you describe the impacts of those activities on urban conservation and tell us how the federal level could become involved in doing a better job with it?



**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I think our general view is quite clear in the report we published last July. In it, we refer to the cuts affecting Canada as a whole.

[English]

We're certainly very concerned about an erosion of scientific expertise and of monitoring capability.

If we take those concerns and put them specifically in the concept of urban conservation, I think we need to recognize we're going to be dealing with extremely complex environments. We're dealing with environments that have already been degraded. We need to understand the implications of that, and we need to understand that improvements are going to be complex as well.

I remember when we were in the Rouge last summer. We were out in a natural area listening to a presentation about how they were restoring the natural vegetation, the plants and the trees and so forth, which are very interesting things to replant. Then I turned around and I looked at the new townhouse development being built right behind us. You sort of say, "Okay, this is going to be a very complicated business." It's not that it can't be done, but it's going to take a much more complex kind of monitoring and more sophisticated science than a far northern area, which is much more coherent.

It's a bigger challenge, scientifically. The game has to be stepped up, frankly.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** What could the federal government do to make this complexity understood?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I think that the Rouge national urban park is a laboratory that can show that the federal government is up to the task.

[English]

Beyond that, I don't think we have any specific suggestions in terms of urban science. I think we need to get a better understanding and better knowledge about dealing with these kinds of degraded environments and the potential for rebuilding, among other things, their wildlife.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Do you think it is important to support scientists with more funding?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** Yes, clearly.

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Okay.

In your report, you also mentioned that the Dumoine River park should also include the old-growth forests adjacent. You say that a number of stretches of whitewater in Quebec could encourage ecotourism. You recommend extending the protected area, but, because of Bill C-45, there will be fewer and fewer protected rivers. There will only be 62 of them.

Do you think that the federal government should promote the development of protected zones, including the Dumoine River?

• (1610)

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** The Dumoine River is not quite in an urban environment, but people from urban areas can have access to it. A lot of people from Ottawa do. I have gone down the Dumoine myself.

[English]

I think we need to think as well about watersheds within urban areas. I know there's work going on around the concept of

[Translation]

the Montreal Archipelago Ecological Park. I am not up to date on the details. But, in principle, it seems that it is an opportunity to accomplish, in the greater Montreal area, something similar to the Rouge national urban park.

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** Thank you very much.

I also have a question for Mr. Penner.

You mentioned what the federal government could do, and what it was previously doing. You mentioned legislation to protect habitat and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. But because of the two budget implementation acts, the Canadian Environmental Protection Act has been all but abolished.

Given that legislation, what could the federal government do in concrete terms to improve urban protection and conservation?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** In our experience with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Fisheries Act, we found they were very effective tools in terms of just providing a higher level of protection for, say, a major infrastructure project. As it's being planned, the engineers and everyone involved know that there is a concern, say, with a river or a stream bearing fish or something like that. It provides that level of awareness to the professionals who are putting a project plan together.

Because we don't have the bylaws within the city that can protect higher-level biological issues, having that at a federal level is pretty valuable to us.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** You are talking about making professionals aware, but, like Canadians, they would first have to be consulted, wouldn't they?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I'm sorry; I didn't quite get the question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach:** On the topic of environmental assessment, you are saying that infrastructure professionals should be made aware so they can plan their infrastructure projects. So the federal government should consult those professionals, the experts in that field, should they not?

[English]

**The Chair:** It would have to be a yes-or-no answer, because we're out of time.

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Yes. Obviously I think the government should be in contact and openly communicating with people of various expertise.

What I was trying to point to was that there needs to be something driving the planning of a major infrastructure project to know when there's something of ecological value that needs to be protected. Having an act that lays out the things that need to be protected is what can inform project planners of the value system of what they're looking at.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Time's expired.

Mr. Sopuck, you have seven minutes.

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

I think it's important to expand on what my colleague was saying and not leave the impression that the new Fisheries Act doesn't have any fisheries protections in it at all. The new section 35 is well worth a read, and the legal opinions are that on fish-bearing streams that are important to people—on the Red and Assiniboine in Winnipeg, which I know fairly well—the protections are actually strengthened.

I have a question for Ms. Minshall. Many on this committee want the national conservation plan to have a focus on working landscapes. I was very pleased with your emphasis on working landscapes.

Would you agree that this should be a focus of the national conservation plan, and why?

• (1615)

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Just from a social perspective, people need to know them to value them. With so many people living in urban areas these days, if we want natural spaces to be valued, then people have to be able to get to them and they have to be there for them in the first place. That's a pretty obvious reason.

I think the other thing, though, is that... I'm not an expert on this and I've probably done the same reading as everybody who's here, but it seems to be pretty clear from the science that there are pretty huge social benefits of people having access to natural spaces, in terms of their health, wellness, crime levels, and everything like that. When you want to talk about livable cities, I think it is a very important aspect, and this is not to take away from the protection of ecosystem integrity elsewhere.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** You talked about the agricultural work you're doing in your watershed. To me a farm is a working landscape. That's how I would refer to it. I was very impressed with the conservation activities you have taken on there.

Specifically, what successes have you achieved in the working landscape in your watershed, in terms of wetland conservation and restoration? How did you go about doing it?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** In terms of conservation and restoration—

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** I'm speaking of wetlands in particular.

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Wetlands in Ontario are set aside from development, although we can get isolated pockets.

We have been partnering with a large number of groups, including the Eastern Joint Habitat Venture, Ministry of Natural Resources in Ontario, and the habitat stewardship program, in order to restore particular areas, and some of the very large wetland complexes in the watershed are on the authority's acquisition list. They're fragmented

in private ownership, and we've been trying to amass pieces of them together so that the bigger ones can actually be put back together eventually. That's the type of thing we've done.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Okay, great.

Mr. Kent, you talked about biological diversity. My constituency has within it Riding Mountain National Park.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I think that's the first park I ever visited as a child.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** I live right next to it, and I'm quite familiar with the conflicts and issues between the local agricultural community and the park itself. I must say it's getting much better, and not just because I'm the MP, but we'll leave it at that.

In your view, is the setting aside of wilderness areas the only tool to conserve biodiversity, or can we actively manage for biodiversity? I use the term "actively" in its most vigorous sense.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I think our view is that we need to do both: we do need to set aside wilderness areas, but we also need to be concerned with the environmental practices in the areas where we are developing and harvesting resources.

We've been particularly involved with those kinds of issues in the context of the forest industry through such things as the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, for instance, which has brought together environmental organizations and most of the major forest companies to look at, among other things, better forest management practices within, in a sense, the working forests. We've been less involved in those considerations in the context of agriculture, but they're clearly important as well.

I don't think either exists in isolation from the others. You've touched on the fact that the interface between a national park and its surroundings in terms of wildlife is a complex and sometimes difficult one. They both affect each other, and we shouldn't be thinking of either in isolation.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Of course, the definition of biodiversity still hasn't been settled because we get into questions of the number of species and of native species versus invasives. Some invasives are actually good. We use the term glibly, but it still isn't that well defined.

Mr. Penner, I have a quick question for you.

Last week, one of our witnesses talked about nature deficit disorder among kids and made a very strong distinction between the behaviour of children who are playing in natural play spaces with trees, rocks, grass, and all that as opposed to these plastic and metal artificial play structures. Can you comment on the difference in how children react to those two types of play structures?

• (1620)

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I can't say that I'm an expert in that field. We have installed a nature playground at the Living Prairie Museum, and there's one at Assiniboine Park as well. I know from my experience with my own children that it seems like a simpler design, but they can spend just as much time, if not more, playing in the nature playground than they do on the more designed structures.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** I drive by the Living Prairie Museum twice a week and I know it reasonably well. Can you quickly describe the management that you do there to maintain the biodiversity?

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** One of our big management techniques out there is doing controlled burns or prescribed burns to try to control some of the non-native grasses, the invasive species that are there. We also do a fair bit of manual weed control—removal of thistle, and things like that. We've begun plant propagation projects out there, collecting seeds from the species that are growing there and trying to actually propagate plants from them to improve the genetic diversity in Winnipeg.

**Mr. Robert Sopuck:** Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Duncan, you have seven minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses. I appreciate your comments.

I will begin with Mr. Kent.

We heard from Mr. Andrew Campbell of Parks Canada a week ago that, and I quote, “ecological integrity will continue to be the first priority as long as that's our legislative base”.

Could you comment on “as long as that's our legislative base”? We're hearing from stakeholders that there's concern about slippage regarding ecological integrity, and I would like to know what recommendation you would make to this committee regarding ecological integrity, and for what parks.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I would start by saying that we believe very strongly that the current legislation should be maintained, as I think others would in the environmental field. It really is a gold standard internationally for which Canada has been recognized.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Should that be the recommendation?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** For national parks it should be, yes, but I think we have to take a slightly different approach to national urban parks, just because of the realities of those kinds of ecosystems.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** I'm going to come back to that.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** As to more traditional kinds of national parks, I don't see any reason to waver from that standard.

We have been concerned about some instances in recent years. We felt that Parks Canada was slipping a little bit. We had a concern about the glacier discovery walk in Jasper National Park, for example. We felt it didn't really reflect that priority for ecological integrity. We sometimes have disagreements with Parks Canada on those matters, and we seek to draw those to the attention of the public. I think there has been a lot of public concern.

It's not an easy balance to strike, but I think it has to be clear what the first priority is, and what you do while still respecting the visitor experience.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** If I understand you correctly, the recommendation to this committee is that the first priority should be the ecological integrity of the national parks?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** To the extent that this committee is going to deal with national parks, that is definitely our position. To the extent

that it deals with national urban parks, I think we have to set the highest standard we reasonably can for the ecology in those parks, but it's not the same.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** We've heard the term “ecological health”. How do you define ecological health? Are there definitions out there? How do we come to that determination?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I'm not aware of a generally accepted definition. It may exist.

I am not a biologist; I have to say that I am an economist. If you were to take my advice on biology, you would be poorly served.

We interest ourselves in these issues as an organization. We speak a little bit in the written document to the kinds of things we think should be pursued in the context of ecological health—restoration of river systems and their banks, the reintroduction of plants and trees, and the removal of invasive species from national urban parks.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Might it be possible to table with the committee an expansion along these lines? You have listed questions. This is a key concept. If you could provide more information—

• (1625)

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** Yes, we certainly could.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** — I would appreciate that.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** We'll do a better job that way than with me ad libbing it.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** You have mentioned ecological health. Parks Canada has mentioned ecological health. Should this be part of legislation?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** There clearly needs to be legislation on national urban parks. We would like that legislation to be general and not simply restricted to the Rouge park. As we all start to think harder about this, we will see other opportunities to apply this concept in other parts of the country. It has to be more general enabling legislation.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Would it start with a definition of ecological health?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I agree that it should, yes.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** We need a definition of ecological health. That should be a recommendation, is that correct?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** Yes.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** City of Winnipeg, your recommendation is to provide a level of habitat protection through acts such as the Fisheries Act and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. Could you expand on this recommendation and give us as much detail as possible in recommendations to the committee?

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I can't make a recommendation about exactly what we need in the act. What we want to see is a level of federal protection such that if it comes down to a major infrastructure project or something that has the potential to destroy habitat, it is given proper valuation in the project planning and there is something in place. This could relate to fisheries habitat or to another important environmental area. If you go down to the local level and what's in municipal bylaws, we don't necessarily have clauses that will lead to protection in most situations. A federal act can do that.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Perhaps you could send to the committee very specific recommendations, because in order to do a really good job of this study, we need that. If you could perhaps give that some thought and send that in, I would appreciate it.

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Sure.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** Thanks.

I'm going to ask one last question to Mr. Kent. I have 34 seconds.

I'm going to pick up on my colleague's comments. I am concerned about the cuts to science and how we ensure ecological integrity. I wonder if you could comment on that and make very specific recommendations to the committee regarding that aspect.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** We have commented in the context of the existing park system in our report last July. What I would say is we need to raise the game in the context of urban conservation. It's a tougher, more complex problem, not a simpler one.

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan:** That's very specific. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time has expired.

Monsieur Pilon, *vous disposez de cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

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

My first question goes to Mr. Penner.

One of the essential environmental areas of responsibility you mentioned is public transit. As we all know, public transit is an important tool in reducing pollution in urban areas and in maintaining a healthier environment in our communities.

Do you think that, to be effective, an urban conservation plan should include a national government strategy on public transit? Would a strategy of that kind be a useful tool to be used in conjunction with the plan?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Potentially it would. In terms of the natural areas we work with, my expertise is specifically in the park spaces and the natural areas and not so much in transportation planning, but I know that having active transportation—bike routes and things like that—through natural areas has a double value in that people have an alternate way to transit to work or home and they also get to experience a natural environment while they're there, away from a busy street. Any way the federal government can help develop better transportation planning, obviously, would be great.

• (1630)

[Translation]

**Mr. François Pilon:** My second question goes to Ms. Minshall.

Can you tell us about the pros and cons of designating the Grand River as a Canadian Heritage River? Since it was so designated in 1994, what, if any, have been the advantages and disadvantages?

[English]

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** It actually was a turning point for the river in terms of the community's recognition of it as an asset. It really was a sewer in its old day, and up through the 1980s, even as the quality improved, people still perceived it that way. The designation really rallied the communities up and down the river, and they put up scenic route signs and actually started to make plans to integrate it into their downtown revitalization plans and to work on the trail networks more by at least investing more in them and connecting them together better. People in the area started to perceive the Grand River as an asset, which it hadn't been before, so it was a big turning point.

It did not impose any restrictions. We have to report every five years on whether or not the things for which it was valued and designated are still there and we haven't actually lost them. I suppose we could lose the designation if we can't keep that up. It is a five-year rally, again, around whether we have done our job here locally.

I can't see there was any disadvantage at all in having the designation. It doesn't place any legal obligations on anyone, but it is a rallying thing for the community.

[Translation]

**Mr. François Pilon:** Thank you.

My final question is for Mr. Kent.

We know that there is a lot of tourism in the parks and that is a source of pride. But is conservation easy with all that tourism? Should we encourage more tourism or should we restrict it in order to ensure that we do not destroy our environment?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** That really is a dilemma. In Canada, we have parks, like Banff in the Rockies, that are under great pressure because of the numbers of people going there and the potential commercial development that, of course, interests business. So the environment is at risk in Banff.

On the other hand, there are certainly parks in Canada that could handle more visitors without detriment to the environment. A little earlier, I was talking about Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan. Not a lot of people go to Grasslands National Park. I have never been there myself. I think that we have other parks that are underdeveloped.

Additionally, the Rouge national urban park could be the first national park accessible by public transit.

[English]

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

Mr. Toet, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses today. It's been very enlightening.

Mr. Penner, I want to start with you.

I wanted to assure you, despite some of the fearmongering you may have heard today, that major infrastructure projects will continue to have strong federal environmental protection. In fact, with the changes there will be an enhanced enforcement of those environmental protections, so that's a good-news story.

Also, there was a question regarding transportation. I don't know whether you have been following the news this weekend in Winnipeg, but there was a great announcement in Winnipeg regarding electric buses. The City of Winnipeg's involved, as is Winnipeg Transit and New Flyer Industries. They're doing a pilot project, having four all-electric buses that will be part of an ongoing route in Winnipeg in their natural environment there. Those are all great news stories that I was very happy to be part of on Friday.

One thing that came up in your presentation, which Ms. Minshall touched on and I wonder if you'd be able to expand on a little bit, was the new housing developments in Winnipeg and the naturalized wetlands that are surrounding a lot of these areas, with native grasses and prairie restoration areas, and how the developers were actually taking this on themselves. There's not a lot of regulation around it and no requirement to do it, but they're actually doing this going forward.

Can you comment on why, from your perspective, developers are taking this upon themselves, even though there are no legal requirements for them to do so?

• (1635)

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I think there are a number of reasons they've become involved in it. Part of it could be that even within the development community, there are individuals who have an interest in nature and want to see nature in developments. Another aspect of it is the marketability of it. The landscape is actually quite attractive. A lot of birds will come to visit these naturalized wetlands, and it creates a diversity in the community.

Another aspect of it is maintenance. The installation of the native prairie grassland and the naturalized wetlands is comparable to laying down sod and creating what we'd call a normal manicured environment, but down the road the maintenance costs are lower because we have to do less management activity to a native grassland that's installed correctly than we would in mowing turf.

There are a number of benefits, and the idea that developers want to do something good for the environment can't be ignored either.

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

On the naturalized wetlands, you were talking about the benefit also to Lake Winnipeg. Naturalized wetlands are now part of almost any new development. They're able to take up and retain excess

moisture in the spring, and it can be moved out after it's gone through the wetlands process of remediation, if need be.

Can you speak to how that could have an impact on Lake Winnipeg over the coming years?

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Well, in the drainage that's coming off the land in Winnipeg, the amount of nutrients coming to Lake Winnipeg will be a relatively minor proportion from land drainage in the city.

However, when you have a naturalized wetland, a lot of nutrients are being filtered out at that stage. They're being taken up into the plants. The retention that's going there is actually removing nutrients. In terms of Winnipeg alone it's probably a small impact, but if it is translated to a larger landscape, it could be significant.

**Mr. Lawrence Toet:** I know I'm almost out of time, but Ms. Minshall, maybe you can also elaborate. You made the comment during Mr. Woodworth's time that a lot of this happens not under regulation but under collaboration. Maybe you could expand very quickly on how successful that has been as well as why it's been successful.

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** We have a culture of collaboration. It has developed over the last 40 years, I would say.

Right now we are working with the provincial and federal agencies and the municipalities on a water management plan, which is all around waste water, water supply infrastructure, and that sort of thing, and how we are going to get a healthy river out of this.

We're working also at other scales. We've been working with the farm community all over the watershed—I think that's something like 4,000 farms—on the rural water quality program. We actually offer on-the-ground technical assistance to help them piece all the different programs together. It has been a very positive program, and over time relationships have been built.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time has expired.

*Monsieur Choquette, vous disposez de cinq minutes.*

[Translation]

**Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks also to the witnesses for being here.

My first question is for Mr. Penner. In 2007, you developed a strategy and a policy for ecologically significant natural lands called

[English]

the ecologically significant natural lands strategy and policy.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Could you tell us which elements of that policy could be useful for urban conservation, in your view? Among other things, I am thinking of your idea of no-net-loss and of putting a value on trees. What could be included in an urban conservation plan? What would your recommendations be?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Aspects of our ecologically significant natural lands strategy and policy have been incredibly valuable in looking at nature and trying to assess which are the highest-quality areas, which are the ones most in need of being preserved, and trying to plan in relation to that so that those areas aren't being destroyed.

The tree removal guideline for the city is separate from that plan. I think the two of them would work well together if an area does have to be destroyed. We can put a real value on it so that we don't actually lose that habitat integrity within the urban environment.

[Translation]

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

I have spoken with other environmentalists. We have to put a value on wetlands, for example, on trees and on other natural features. Some people share that idea. The heart says that we should not do that, but there is also the head. More and more environmentalists are of the opinion that we have to put a value on things, otherwise we are going to lose them all. There is more thought about natural environments.

For our report, would you recommend putting a value on those environments?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** A lot of times at a local level these no-net-loss guidelines and actually putting a value on natural capital can work.

The tree removal guideline is a relatively simple formula. We know what it costs to plant a tree and, depending on the size of the tree that has to be removed, that can multiply the number of trees that you have to replace.

If somebody is going to do damage to a park, we look at what it would cost to repair in terms of planting all that biodiversity again and come up with a value that will make the high-quality natural areas almost astronomical in value.

[Translation]

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

I have another question for you. It has to do with your suggestion to have funding plans. Presently, funding for projects is short term. You say that one and two years is not going to be enough. What duration of funding would you recommend to this committee?

[English]

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** For a prairie restoration project, we know that the restoration companies that do really high-quality work will work on the project for four to five years. If there were four- to five-year projects, I think that would be a good start.

[Translation]

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

I have the time for one question to Mr. Kent.

The national conservation plan already mentions Aichi targets, such as 17% of terrestrial spaces and 10% of coastal areas by 2020. Unfortunately, the report on the plan uses the words "should" or

"could"—I do not recall exactly. Basically, we do not have a clear position.

Would you recommend going over the report again and taking a clear position on the targets we must reach? Otherwise, we just have "should" or "could". That is just wishful thinking and nothing will be done.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** We believe that the figures are much too modest. We must recognize that we have to aim much higher than that. In the long term, we should be thinking about conserving half of our public lands. In fact, that is what we find in Quebec's Plan Nord.

[English]

but it affects Ontario as well.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time has expired.

Ms. Ambler, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks to all three of you for being here today.

I'd like to continue along Monsieur Choquette's second line of questioning with regard to local-level habitat banking and the use of the no-net-loss guideline.

Mr. Penner, I'd like to know a bit more about how this process works in practice on the ground, because I think that local-level habitat banking, or habitat banking of all kinds, is just generally a great idea. You've mentioned that it was used numerous times. You gave the example of the tree removal guidelines. I assume this means that if someone is digging up an old tree, they have to plant  $x$  number of new ones somewhere else. I'm wondering, first of all, if that's the only use for local-level habitat banking in Winnipeg or if there are other examples you could give us.

Also, I'm wondering if you can see urban areas like Winnipeg or other areas benefiting when natural areas further away are being damaged and the project proponents, the industry or the people doing the damage, want to or have to remediate elsewhere. Can you see urban centres benefiting from that type of habitat banking? It would not be just local, but a little bit further away, and then there's benefiting in urban areas.

• (1645)

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I would start by saying that the concept of habitat banking isn't very well developed at this stage. I think it needs a lot of work.

What we're doing right now in the city is really an uncomplicated, low-level form of habitat banking. We're looking at specific quantities being destroyed for a construction project and that construction project being charged to do replacement. It's as simple as this: if they have to destroy a turf area, they would have to replace it with turf, and if they destroy a natural area, they'd replace it with a natural area.

If habitat banking were put together well, I think urban areas could benefit, depending on how the formulas are all put together, because there are a lot of things that need to be taken into account.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Sure. In fact, I think one of the considerations—and maybe you can let me know if you agree—is to base the habitat conservation banking in real property value rather than some very subjective evaluations of projects and their value.

I've done a bit of research on it. In the U.S., in Australia, and in a number of countries in Europe, the concept has evolved much more than it has in Canada. It's based in real property, and real land values are considered. Do you think this is something that we could explore to the benefit of urban conservation here in Canada?

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I think it's something that deserves exploration and consideration. Obviously, what the value should be depends on the situation. Is it only the vegetation, or is it the actual land being removed in one way or another? That is part of the consideration.

**Mrs. Stella Ambler:** Thank you so much.

Mr. Kent, I find it very interesting that you have a lot of experience in the private sector. As an economist and a consultant in this area, how do you think we can better engage private sector organizations in conservation? How can they help us to create natural areas and to promote conservation among urban Canadians?

**The Chair:** You have to answer in about 15 seconds.

• (1650)

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** Well, in 15 seconds I would say that the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement is a very interesting pilot project in that context, and we need to take that concept to other industries.

I'd love to see the mining industry step up the way the forest industry did.

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

Ms. Leslie, you have five minutes.

**Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses. We're certainly learning a lot here.

Ms. Minshall, you mentioned this a bit in your brief, and others have touched on it. A couple of days ago we had the City of Calgary here, and they were really explicit about one possible solution—making conservation part of urban infrastructure funding. That way, we could leverage the tripartite funding that's out there and include conservation projects in it and recognize that urban conservation could be considered infrastructure in our municipalities.

Has the City of Winnipeg found that to be something lacking, or do you think that is something that would work to help secure urban space or to secure funding for urban projects?

I'll ask Mr. Penner, from the City of Winnipeg.

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** In terms of securing funding, we've worked a lot of times with various community partnerships in applying for funding. The partnership types of agreements we have and the groups we work with have been incredible. We couldn't do it if it weren't community-based. We wouldn't be able to get the type of funding for projects, and we wouldn't have the capacity to do a lot of the projects we do.

I think a lot has to do with cooperation among various levels of government and the individuals on the ground.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** The problem is that funding is available through Environment Canada, through Parks Canada, and that's it, but there's nothing preventing us from having conservation as a part of other departments.

Ms. Minshall and Mr. Kent, would something that specific in the infrastructure funding help with the work you're doing?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** There were two big examples we were thinking about when we did that. I think they were just on the borderline of connection here with urban conservation, but I think one could take it a step further.

As an example, we were looking at restoration activities in the Grand River itself, in order to improve assimilation of waste water rather than put massive amounts of money into another waste water upgrade that's really already at the limit of technology. That would be an example of using blue-green infrastructure instead of grey infrastructure.

The other example is that there's a big movement now towards integrating urban stormwater management with waste water management and water supply planning, linking them together around water reuse and what water is appropriate for what use, but I'm not sure our infrastructure funding programs go as far as to allow that kind of innovation.

You can imagine that in urban areas, especially now that they are all doing stormwater master plans to deal with their biggest problems instead of their site problems, there would be green and blue infrastructure needs serving both purposes here. It can be integrated together, but not in silos, as you say.

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** Okay.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I would make a couple of comments.

One is that I think the idea of funding restoration projects as infrastructure is an intriguing one. I can't say that we have a public position on it, but I think it's a very interesting idea. Many restoration projects are quite labour-intensive, so if you're funding infrastructure partly as an economic stabilization activity, it makes a lot of sense on the face of it.

The other comment I would make is that one of the key points about infrastructure—not necessarily infrastructure that's created for environmental reasons, but the potential impacts to infrastructure—is the whole question of connectedness. If you put in an expressway, you're severing existing relationships on the landscape. It's very important that the design of those kinds of facilities be such that those connections are in fact maintained and that there are underpasses, overpasses, whatever, so that species of all kinds, including the human species, can cross these barriers.

• (1655)

**Ms. Megan Leslie:** It prevents fragmentation.

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** Yes, exactly. Fragmentation is a critical issue in urban areas.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Time has expired.

You have the last five minutes, Ms. Rempel.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC):** I want to continue on some of the line of questioning Mr. Choquette and Ms. Leslie had brought up.

As Ms. Leslie had mentioned, we had the City of Calgary out earlier this week, and they talked about some of the best practices that they had in place. It was great to hear from the City of Winnipeg today. Mr. Penner, is there any sort of national forum to link best practices with regard to urban conservation, or are there just bodies of knowledge that are fragmented and an unofficial or loose collection of knowledge?

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** I would say we're pretty fragmented at this point. I'm not really aware of one body that's bringing everything together right now.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Ms. Minshall, you were saying that your conservation group, even though it's a grouping of municipalities, is still based in a certain local watershed area, right?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Yes, it is.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Is there a national body that you would plug in to, to share your best practices, discuss common challenges, or that sort of thing?

**Ms. Lorrie Minshall:** Within the conservation authorities in Ontario, we have an umbrella body, so we do share information that way, and we have a big annual conference in Ontario. I think that maybe the concept of watershed-based partnerships or institutions like this is more recent in some of the other provinces, because I'm not aware that there is a link.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, that's good to know.

Mr. Kent, you had a few—you mentioned them really quickly—very specific points on some of the things that are important that we could be doing with regard to urban conservation. Some of the things I jotted down were the restoration of wetlands within urban areas, control of invasive species, and restoration of tree canopy. I wanted to give you a bit more time, maybe a minute, to flesh those out. Do you have any other points to add to those?

**Mr. Oliver Kent:** I think those are the right general ones.

The real sense I got when I was in the Rouge last spring was that this is very much a work in process. In a sense, people within the community are learning as they go. I think that we need to ensure that we profit from that learning.

You talked about the need to share best practices and so forth. They have been working on things like the restoration of native grasses. They need to do it as a project, perhaps more explicitly than some of the developers I was hearing about in Winnipeg, because it's a more degraded landscape in parts of that area. Those are certainly important.

I come back to the question of wildlife, and this is one of the areas that is going to be more complex to deal with. What kinds of species might we seek to reintroduce or be comfortable seeing in urban conservation areas? There was a controversy in the city earlier this year about beavers and what should be done about beavers that were doing what beavers do, which was building dams. Apparently we're

not as positive about beavers doing that as we are about humans doing it, and where they might have chosen to do it.

Those wildlife issues are going to be sensitive ones. It's one of the areas of a potential conflict, and I think we have to be sensitive to that and intelligent about how we manage it.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Great. We really appreciate your feedback on that. I think those are concrete recommendations.

I'll close by going back to Mr. Penner.

Within my riding, I have over 35 community associations. You mentioned the grant fatigue. These are local volunteer-based organizations that are trying to apply for funding. We've heard from all the witnesses today, and over the course of time, that funding for these initiatives....

The initiatives are local in and of themselves. They're run by local expertise. When you have volunteers who are doing that, they're having to go through different layers of bureaucracy to get the funding.

Are there specific recommendations and certain programs that exist right now that you think could be improved? I think you touched briefly on the EcoAction grant. I want to give you an opportunity to talk specifically about any lost opportunities. Are there ways we could streamline the process for application or management on the back end?

● (1700)

**Mr. Rodney Penner:** Yes. The types of funding that we're often involved with in the City of Winnipeg are often related to the youth employment grants, which generally are pretty user-friendly.

With regard to the EcoAction grant, I know that can be tough for community groups. It's been a good source of project funding, but we found that after a group does an EcoAction grant, they don't feel like doing another one the next year, or even within a couple of years. It takes some time to get their energy back before they're ready for another one. If there were ways to make the reporting and administration easier and to relax certain things about it, it would be easier for community groups to handle.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Great.

**The Chair:** The time has expired. I want to thank the witnesses for the very interesting and informative information that they provided to the committee today.

Colleagues, we will suspend for two minutes so we can say thank you to the witnesses, and then we will reconvene.

● (1700)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1705)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order. We have two notices of motion.

We will begin with the Liberal motion. Ms. Duncan is not with us, but Mr. Eyking, I believe you're ready to deal with that motion. Is that correct?

**Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be back with you. We had a great trip to Nova Scotia.



I'm filling in for Kirsty, and I have a motion. Of course, everybody in this committee must be well aware of the motion.

**The motion states:** That the Committee undertake a study on the subject matter of Part 4 Division 21 of Bill C-45, A second Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on March 29, 2012 and other measures, and report its findings to the House no later than on Monday, November 5, 2012.

That's the motion.

**The Chair:** Very good.

The first speaker is Ms. Rempel.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Chair, as we commonly practise in committee for future business meetings, I move that we proceed in camera.

**An hon. member:** I thought we already were.

**The Chair:** No, we're in an open meeting.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** I was just being sure.

**The Chair:** It is the norm that we deal with scheduling in an in camera meeting. The motion is that we move in camera.

**An hon. member:** *Pouvons-nous avoir un vote par appel nominal?*

**The Chair:** All those in favour?

**A voice:** She asked for a recorded vote.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. François Choquette:** I am sorry that I did not fully understand. If the vote is to go in camera, I am totally opposed.

*[English]*

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll have a recorded vote. I'll hand it over to the clerk.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 6; nays 5)

**The Chair:** We will go in camera.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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