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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call our meeting to order.

This is meeting 48 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. We were hoping to have four witnesses today; however, technical problems are facing us, so we will not be able to connect with Winnipeg, and we still don't have our connection to P.E.I. However, we have one person here who's ready to give us some information, and we'll have some questions.

At this point it looks as though we may be able to discontinue at 9:45. If we have two witnesses, it gives us time to get their statements in, as well as some questions.

I'm going to start with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Mr. Greg Farrant, manager of government affairs and policy.

Mr. Farrant, welcome.

Mr. Greg Farrant (Manager, Government Affairs and Policy, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, and fellow panellists, if you're out there in cyberspace somewhere.

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, one of the largest and oldest conservation-based organizations in Canada, with 100,000 members, supporters, and subscribers and 725 member clubs across Ontario, I'd like to thank you for the courtesy of inviting us here today to comment on an important topic of interest to millions of Canadians.

Hunting and trapping along with angling are considered heritage activities in this country and are recognized as such under various pieces of federal, provincial, and territorial legislation. At its beginning, Canada was a staples society based upon hunting, trapping, fishing, and forestry. Participation in these activities defined the country and continues to make an important contribution to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Canada today for aboriginals and non-aboriginals alike.

Hunters come from all walks of life. They are judges, lawyers, business persons, dentists, doctors, mechanics, even politicians.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Greg Farrant: Participation in hunting continues to grow. Over the last decade the Ontario hunter education safety program,

which we administer on behalf of the Ministry of Natural Resources, has trained over 250,000 new hunters in Ontario. Of particular significance is that the proportion of females and youth taking the course continues to increase. In fact, according to the 2012 Canadian nature survey, almost eight million Canadians hunt, fish, or trap, more than those who play golf and hockey combined.

Hunting, trapping, and fishing represent an annual contribution to the Canadian economy of \$13.5 billion. When the \$1 billion from guides and outfitters and the \$700 million in sales generated by the fur industry are factored in, the overall contribution from the outdoor community rises to \$15.2 billion annually.

Hunting and trapping generate economic prosperity. The purchase of goods and services associated with these activities impacts on many sectors of the economy. In fact, in the last two years, Canadian Tire, recognizing the growth of these activities, invested \$10 million in expanding sections of 170 stores across the country with products associated with hunting.

For many communities across this country, this economic contribution keeps them afloat even in hard times. Recreational hunting and fishing tourism alone injects over \$1 billion annually into the economy, provides job opportunities, and supports hundreds of small and medium-sized businesses from coast to coast to coast.

In most jurisdictions the millions of dollars generated by licence and permit sales support conservation programs and projects, either through vehicles such as the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation in B.C., the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund in Saskatchewan, the wildlife reinvestment program in Quebec, or through mechanisms such as the special purpose account in Ontario, where licence sales contribute over \$70 million of the \$95 million annual budget for fish and wildlife in the province.

Hunting, trapping, and recreational fishing also have an enormous upside in terms of tourism-related opportunities. A 2006 study entitled, “Sport Fishing and Game Hunting in Canada”, carried out by the Canadian Tourism Commission, examined the recreational activities and travel habits of Americans in particular. Not surprisingly, it turns out that with regard to U.S. tourists, there's a huge upside when it comes to hunting in this country. For instance, over the period 2004-05, 9.2 million adult Americans went hunting while on a trip to Canada. An additional 32.1 million came here to fish. Clearly, Americans know what we already do, which is that this country is home to some of the best outdoor opportunities available anywhere. This in turn opens the door for significant revenue generation and employment opportunities for a wide range of businesses and communities across the country that cater to the hunting, trapping, and fishing communities.

I know in recent days that some members of Parliament have questioned why this committee should be seized with an item related to hunting and trapping. Putting aside the place of these activities in the history of our country, the heritage and cultural perspective, and the massive economic contribution made by hunters, trappers, and anglers, perhaps I can provide another perspective on why this issue is relevant to this committee. Quite simply, hunters, trappers, and anglers are leaders in the conservation of our natural resources. In fact, they were among the first recognized conservationists in North America dating back to the late 1800s. At a time when commercialization of wildlife was destroying species at an unprecedented pace, hunters, trappers, and anglers stood up and cried, “Enough”. Leaders such as Wilfrid Laurier and Theodore Roosevelt, supported by hunters, trappers, and anglers, viewed conservation of our wildlife not only as a matter of national concern, but as a matter of national relevance. Hunters, trappers, and anglers sought to improve the worth of the two countries and recognized that prudent, wise use of natural resources and conservation of wildlife were signatures of progressive leadership.

● (0855)

How they managed at a time when vast areas of the country were still unoccupied, when an abundance of natural resources still existed, and when, by today's standards, there were relatively few people on the land, to create a movement that focused on conservation of our resources was a remarkable sign of leadership and vision. What resulted was the creation of the North American model for wildlife conservation that continues to govern management of wildlife resources in North America today.

The same organizations that represent hunters, trappers, and anglers are also among the leading conservation organizations in the country. Take my own organization, for instance. Over the last 20 years we've been engaged in the restoration of species in Ontario, most notably elk, wild turkey, and Atlantic salmon, all of which were teetering on the brink of extinction. Our invasive species program, the largest non-governmental program of its kind in Canada, works in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, DFO, and Environment Canada to prevent or control the spread of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. Our stream steward program works with local landowners and farmers to restore creeks and wetlands. Our classroom hatchery program, which is currently in 125 schools across southern Ontario—including five hatcheries at the Toronto

Zoo—teaches kids about habitat and how important it is to preserve and protect our fish and wildlife species.

Take the example of similar restoration programs undertaken by every one of our affiliates and partner organizations across this country. In 1978 the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation created the Habitat Trust Fund, which to date has protected over 65,000 acres of habitat. Ducks Unlimited Canada has completed 8,880 habitat projects and conserved over six million acres of wetlands. The B.C. Wildlife Federation's wetlands education program was created in 1996 to restore, enhance, and conserve wetland sites across the province. In 1983 the Alberta Fish and Game Association had the foresight to see that critical habitat was disappearing at a rapid rate, and created the Wildlife Trust Fund, the province's first land trust. Today that fund includes over 80 properties that encompass 36,000 acres of important wildlife habitat. In 1988 the Manitoba Wildlife Federation established their own habitat foundation, the oldest privately funded habitat foundation to receive, hold, maintain, and manage upland and wetland habitat in perpetuity. Last but by no means least is Wildlife Habitat Canada. Since 1985 they have provided over \$50 million in grants to more than 1,500 habitat conservation programs across Canada, funded entirely by hunters purchasing migratory bird permits and duck stamps. In fact, in a 2000 study, WHC undertook a national survey where hunters alone were found to have invested over \$335 million directly to wildlife conservation.

What all of these organizations and efforts have in common is the fact that they are funded either in part or entirely by hunters and trappers.

In 2012 the OFAH, along with our colleagues at Ducks Unlimited and a number of large conservation-based organizations in both Canada and the U.S., hosted the National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Congress here in Ottawa. This brought together 500 scientists, academics, federal, provincial, territorial, and state government representatives from departments on both sides of the border, conservation groups, and others who attended four days of seminars and presentations touching on every aspect of fish and wildlife conservation and every known species in North America. The results of that congress are still being acted upon today, including through the hunting and angling advisory panel, which was established shortly after the congress.

As one of two liaisons for the panel, a group that includes 25 of the largest conservation organizations in Canada and reports directly to the environment minister, we recently appeared before the federal, provincial, and territorial environment and natural resources ministers to speak to some of the same issues before this committee, which were clearly of interest to those ministers. The panel acts as a sounding board for government policies and programs impacting upon natural resources, and makes recommendations that focus on conservation and biodiversity, among others. Examples of current topics under discussion include wildlife diseases, aquatic and terrestrial invasive species, fisheries protection, enforcement, migratory bird regulations, and aquaculture.

This committee is also interested in the role of scientific research in wildlife management. One of the major tenets of the North American model of wildlife conservation is legal access for all and the use of science as the basis for wildlife management. The OFAH, and indeed all of the major conservation-based organizations in Canada, insist that the management of wildlife and fish populations must be based on science. In fact, all the organizations that I referred to a minute ago have created scholarships for university and college students to study fish and wildlife science.

Science does not provide certainty in all cases, but when an observation is made and confirmed many times, it becomes secure. Policy-makers need to understand that uncertainty will always exist, and some variations in scientific determination are to be expected, but it is not a reason to defer action.

● (0900)

Policy-makers must integrate the best available science with social and economic factors when developing policy. This requires collaboration between scientists and policy-makers like yourselves. There is a need to define what a science question is and what a policy question is. Get the science right first, and discuss the political and policy implications afterwards. Governments at all levels and of all political stripes like to say that they are for science-based decision-making when it comes to our natural resources, until scientific consensus leads to a politically inconvenient conclusion, and then governments resort to a backup plan based more upon popular opinion and emotion.

I'll close, Mr. Chair, by noting that we often hear the suggestion that hunting and trapping are of interest only to those living in the rural areas of the country, which quite frankly is bunk. For instance, in the city of Toronto, our organization has 14,170 members who are licensed hunters. This does not include those who hunt but do not belong to our organization. To parse it down even further, in the former city of Scarborough, there are currently 2,477 members of our organization who are licensed hunters, and again, these are just our members. These results are repeated in most urban centres in southern Ontario, serving to emphasize that hunting and trapping may occur in rural hinterlands, but in large measure the participants live and work in urban centres, and these activities cannot be dismissed out of hand as rural issues.

For some, a study of trapping and hunting may not have the same cachet as a discussion on climate change or on carbon taxes, although both of those issues are also of clear importance to the outdoor community. Wildlife does not exist in a vacuum, nor does it exist by accident. Given the contribution of hunting and trapping to our national identity, cultural heritage, and economic wealth, and the fact that hunters, trappers, and anglers put their money where their mouth is when it comes to on-the-ground conservation of our natural resources, I am very pleased the committee has taken the time to look at these issues.

Again, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to appear here this morning.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

At this point, we still don't have a connection with our Prince Edward Island witness, Mr. Duncan Crawford, president of the

Prince Edward Island Wildlife Federation, so we'll proceed to questions.

I believe we have Mr. Carrie and Mrs. Ambler on the list.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank our witnesses for being here.

Mr. Farrant, thank you very much for explaining how important your organization is to conservation and to our environment. You mentioned that you are involved with the hunting and angling advisory panel, HAAP. I was wondering if you could take a moment to explain to the committee what HAAP is so they know the important work that you do.

Mr. Greg Farrant: Sure. HAAP was created after the National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Congress to provide a sounding board for government policies, programs, and ideas dealing with natural resources, particularly fish and wildlife resources, in Canada. The panel meets on average twice a year. Last year it met three times, and its next meeting will be in June of this year. It's chaired by the Minister of the Environment and the co-chair the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Gail Shea. The organizations involved there are quite clearly the cream of the crop in terms of conservation organizations across this country. The meetings last for a couple of days. The first day is among the members themselves, chaired by the parliamentary secretary, and the second day the ministers join us for a thorough discussion of the items discussed the previous day. The panel has also recently submitted a report to the Prime Minister outlining some of the work of the panel and making some recommendations for action on five different items.

● (0905)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Could you take a couple of moments to elaborate on these recommendations and their importance?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Sure. One of the first recommendations we made was that there needs to be a proper and thorough economic study of hunting, trapping, and fishing in this country. If you look at the U.S., they have an enormous number of studies done by professionals and government that clearly define, for instance, what the economic impact of hunting, fishing, and trapping is in the U.S., which is somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$55 billion a year. We don't have that in Canada. The studies we have here have been cobbled together by such groups as the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation in Alberta, the B.C. Wildlife Federation, and a couple of others, plus the stats that we get out of DFO every five years. We have to work with limited numbers in terms of what the actual impact is. The numbers that I cited earlier in my presentation are a very conservative—no pun intended—estimate of the economic impact of hunting, fishing, and trapping in this country. We suspect it's much larger, but we are erring on the side of caution until those studies are actually done. We hope the government will move forward on that expeditiously.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much.

You mentioned that some people think hunting and trapping are just for rural Canadians. For example, my community of Oshawa is an urban community, but I was wondering if you could let the committee know how many members you would say are in an urban riding like Oshawa. You did mention somebody from Scarborough—Guildwood, for example. How many members would you have in Oshawa and Scarborough?

Mr. Greg Farrant: In your particular riding there are 1,130 licensed hunters, and that's just in our organization. There are probably many more, but those are the ones who belong to our organization, who are licensed hunters, and who live in your riding.

As I noted, in Scarborough the number is about 2,500. Again, that's just us. That does not include all licensed hunters who may not belong to OFAH.

It's a fact that when you hear about moose hunting in Ontario, of course most of the moose hunting takes place north of the French River, although there is some south of that. There are 1,008 licensed moose hunters in Ontario, and most of those people live south of the French River. The people who participate live in places like Ottawa, London, Hamilton, Toronto, and other urban centres, and they travel long distances to hunt moose.

One of our past presidents who lives in Owen Sound drives 25 hours to where he hunts moose in northern Ontario, but he clearly lives in a subdivision in Owen Sound, in a regular subdivision like everybody else. He does not live out in the wild somewhere. So it's a mistake to suggest that all these folks who participate in this are people who live in the hinterlands.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Chair, I'll give the rest of my time to Ms. Ambler.

The Chair: Mrs. Ambler, you have three minutes roughly, or two and a half.

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

Thank you for coming today, Greg. I appreciated your presentation and the work you do especially in the area of wetland conservation.

Before I ask about that, because I have a feeling I'll run out of time, I want to ask you this. Those numbers are staggering: 1,130 in one riding in Oshawa. I'm wondering if you know if there has been an increase in women in hunting in Canada and in Ontario. Is there greater interest than there was? Is it growing? You probably don't know how many, but what percentage would you guess is women, and is it increasing?

Mr. Greg Farrant: For Ontario I don't have to guess. In Ontario right now 20% of the people taking hunter education courses are women. Another roughly 25% are youth. Last year we put 25,000 new hunters through the hunter education program. You can do the math—you're probably better at it than I am—but 45% of those 25,000 were either young people or women.

It is certainly well documented across the country that the number of youth and women participating in hunting and fishing is growing exponentially. We see examples in B.C. We had our annual general meeting and fish and wildlife conference in Toronto over the last few days, which ended on Saturday, and one of the speakers was Kelly

Semple who is from the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation in Alberta. She is a registered hunter. She is a licensed instructor. She is a bow hunter. She is a guider and an outfitter. When you look at her, she looks like somebody you would find in an office tower in downtown Toronto and not somebody you would find in a hunting blind, in camo, in the wilds of Alberta. The Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation is a recruitment and retention organization that brings youth and women into hunting and fishing, primarily hunting and trapping.

● (0910)

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Would you say that maybe the reason women and youth are getting involved is that it's a great family activity for mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and it is something that allows them to get away for the weekend and spend quality time with their children, their teenagers in particular?

Mr. Greg Farrant: There are a number of reasons that people are getting involved in hunting, women and youth in particular. Yes, you're quite right that part of it is because of family. Hunting and fishing are family activities in many areas, and certainly if the father or husband hunts, it's more likely that the other family members will also become involved.

There is also of course the whole organic food movement that's going on, this back-to-the-land table movement for clean, fresh, unspoiled food. It's really a groundswell out there. Harvesting wildlife is about as close to the source as you can get without contaminants, without processing from industry, etc.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll need to move on a little to be on time.

We have now connected with our Prince Edward Island witness. Mr. Crawford, welcome. We're going to give you 10 minutes for an opening statement, and then we're going to proceed with questions, and because of the order we're in, we'll move to the NDP for our next question.

Mr. Duncan Crawford (President, Prince Edward Island Wildlife Federation): Thank you very much. My name is Duncan Crawford. I'm the president of the Prince Edward Island Wildlife Federation. I'm also on the board of the Canadian Wildlife Federation as a director at large, the P.E.I. Trappers Association, and I am the founder and president of the P.E.I. Archery Association. They are all intertwined. Given we're such a small province, it's not uncommon for people such as myself to be on multiple groups, committees, and boards.

Unfortunately, I never got to hear any of the previous presenters in terms of the information they are putting forth, but what I can do is give a quick rundown of the numbers for P.E.I., and it's a trend that is basically the same right across Canada.

If we look at the numbers of hunters, fishers, and trappers participating in this activity over the course of 30 years, we're down considerably. More recently, at least in the last five years, we're seeing steady and consistent gains. As Mr. Farrant just said, a lot of those gains are coming from youth and ladies in the sport.

As of last year, we had roughly 8,132 people contribute to the wildlife conservation fund. You have to buy this whether you hunt, fish, or trap, so it's a good basket to catch everybody in at least once, because we have a lot of duplication in other licence sales in that a number of people that hunt and trap also fish. We don't want to be counting twice. The WCF only collects once. Given the population of P.E.I., that gives you a pretty good percentage of the participation of people who hunt, fish, and trap relative to the total population.

That breaks down to roughly 7,000 angling licences sold last year. The trapping number is about 151 and the licensed hunter...or the hunting licences sold are just over \$2,400. It's a little difficult to get perfect numbers because we do complimentary licences for overage, or seniors, and also for youth. Some of those things have been great vehicles to either keep or get new people into this group of activities or sports.

We have a very active volunteer organization. We collaborate with Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, and the forests, fish and wildlife division to put on the hunter's safety practical component. Last year we had almost 130 kids participate. We hire a bus company to transport kids from as far as three hours away in the western end of the province, and an hour away in the east, and we all descend upon the Charlottetown Trap and Skeet Club, which is about 15 minutes outside of our capital city.

They get to do their hunter exams online, and then the practical component is coming out to the Charlottetown Trap and Skeet club where the various conservation organizations, or troop, or clubs, etc., all get together. We break the kids up into modules and that counts as their practical component.

After that, each kid gets a temporary hunter safety.... If they don't have a parent or someone to take them, we pair them up with mentors. We have a lot of volunteers that mentor within P.E.I., and that gets young people out.

We're becoming an outdoor women workshop on a regular basis: east, west, and central. That's given us great gains in the interest of ladies in the sport.

As another consistent trend across Canada, we introduced the National Archery in the Schools Program three years ago, as OFAH did last year. We're seeing tremendous gains there. A lot of people get interested, and then they start asking questions about complementary activities like hunting, fishing, and trapping. It's a good vehicle if nothing else to broach the subject with young people.

We're seeing in the last couple of years about a 1.3% overall growth and just over 3% new hunter safeties any given year. A good percentage of those, probably 20% to 30%, are females. In our youth group at least one in three of the new kids coming in is female and that bodes well for the sports of hunting, fishing, and trapping in the future.

That's all I have to say. I welcome any questions.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Crawford.

We're going to move now to our committee members for questions. They will be directing questions either to you or to Mr. Farrant.

We'll move back to the NDP.

Ms. Hughes, you're splitting your time with Madam Papillon.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Yes.

If you tell me when half my time is up, I'll make sure that she gets it.

The Chair: We'll do our best.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Thank you very much for being here.

I'm from northern Ontario and I have family members who hunt. I have a lot of family members who fish as well. I really appreciate the fact that the committee is studying this.

Mr. Farrant, as you know, last winter—not this one that we're in right now—there was quite a bit of concern on Manitoulin Island with respect to the deer population. It was a really tough winter for them. This year seems to not have been as bad. It was cold, but there was not as much snow in that area. Mind you, the Great Lakes have seen much more ice buildup on them in the last few years.

In the Arctic, it has been different. A lot of the icebergs are actually melting. I'm sure you've been following the impact this could have on hunting and fishing in those areas and how people may have to readjust how things are done. I know that in certain areas it's also the moose population that's being affected.

You talked about a science base when designing policy. I'm just wondering what your recommendations are, based on the changes you've seen in the environment related to climate change.

What kind of actions do you think the government should be looking at in designing its policies to try to mitigate the changes that are occurring?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Thank you for the question. I appreciate it very much.

You cited a couple of examples, so I'll refer to those first.

On the deer on Manitoulin Island, you're quite correct. It was a bad winter last year, and our DeerSave program had to contribute \$10,000 to cut trails and whatnot to help save those populations.

Not to be overly dramatic, but the moose population in Ontario, and not just in Ontario, but in Manitoba and Saskatchewan as well, has crashed significantly in the last few years.

There are a number of factors as to why this has occurred. Unfortunately, the response of some governments, and I'll speak to the Ontario government, is to manage hunters rather than to manage for the situation and extraneous factors. Those factors include things like climate change, as you mentioned. They also include things like clear-cutting by forestry. Most predominantly, they include things like predation by wolves and coyotes and bears.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources does not seem to recognize that there are a number of things having an impact on the moose populations. It seems intent on regulating tags for the hunting of moose without looking at these other factors. There is a moose project right now that they're engaged in. We will be participating and have participated in it, to try to get them to understand that there are a number of factors—predation, climate, forestry, a whole bunch of things—that impact our wildlife populations. It's goes beyond simply saying, “Oh well, let's just cut the tags. Oh well, let's just cut the licences”, etc.

Lake Nipissing is another example in Ontario. It used to be one of the premier walleye fisheries in Ontario, or anywhere in Canada, as a matter of fact, and was worth huge tourist dollars. Well, the wildlife population has crashed completely. The response from the government has been to cut the number of fish that recreational anglers can take. They don't touch the commercial interests there. In fact, the commercial interests have indicated quite clearly that until the recreational fishing has stopped entirely, they're not prepared to even sit down at the table and discuss it, yet it's the commercial fishing that has destroyed the walleye.

There are a number of factors that governments have to take into account, and climate change is just one of them. The clear-cutting is great for caribou but not great for moose, for instance

• (0920)

The Chair: We'll move on to Madam Papillon.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the official opposition critic for tourism, it's my pleasure to welcome our witnesses.

You are most definitely contributing to the Canadian tourism industry.

Therefore, I was a bit worried when I heard you say that we had to accommodate the Americans. In my opinion, given all the free trade agreements we are now signing, we should not forget about Europeans and others from around the world. Canada is definitely a country of open green spaces where people can reconnect with certain activities. We have the necessary space. In fact, we have all that is needed for activities such as fishing or hunting.

So I would like to know what you think about the drastic cuts to Parks Canada in the 2012 budget. That really hurt our tourism industry in terms of access to parks and trip length. The Canadian Tourism Commission also had its budget from last year cut by 19%. So organizations like yours are no longer in the brochures. We cannot develop long-term tourism with the Americans, the French or tourists from other countries. I think that prevents us from fully benefiting from an industry that could be flourishing. I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

I would also like to hear your opinion on the protection of the resource. I think that, when tourists know that we are protecting the resource, we can attract them to come here. When cuts are made to environmental assessments as the Conservatives have done, that gives us a bad reputation. That can also discourage fishers and hunters from coming to Canada, as they may be wondering what they are participating in. If we can guarantee that everything is done within an appropriate framework, I think we could....

[*English*]

The Chair: Madam Papillon, if you want an answer, you're going to have to stop soon.

Ms. Annick Papillon: Yes, I'll let him answer.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds to respond, Mr. Farrant.

Mr. Greg Farrant: I'll try to respond really quickly. The figures we have seen show primarily that the tourism industry in particular, when it comes to outdoor activities, is predominantly American. Yes, there are European tourists that come here. There's no doubt about that.

In terms of environmental assessments being cut back, our experience has been quite the opposite. In fact, we find that every decision, even the smallest decision, seems to need to go through an EBR posting or an EBR assessment. In fact, I think we're regulated to death. The Ministry of Environment in Ontario, for instance, which is responsible for that, has so many EBR postings that they've become nothing more than a regulatory agency that just seems to churn them out repeatedly.

You can't seem to take a step forward without taking four steps back and having to appear for or write responses to EBRs and go through a very lengthy process to move forward. I think the process needs to be streamlined considerably. It takes far too long to reach decisions that affect fish and wildlife or natural resources in general because of the bureaucracy around the Environmental Bill of Rights and the EBR process.

• (0925)

The Chair: We're a little beyond the time.

We'll move back to the Conservative side, with Mr. Sopuck for seven minutes.

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

I want to reference a study that just came out from Cornell University indicating that hunting and birdwatching boosts conservation activity. To quote the press release on the study, it says, "Both bird watchers and hunters were more likely than non-recreationists to enhance land for wildlife, donate to conservation organizations and advocate for wildlife—all actions that significantly impact conservation success."

In fact, the study labels birdwatchers and hunters—many of us are both, and I know you are too, Mr. Farrant—those groups of people as "conservation superstars". The conclusion is that the more time we spend in nature, the more likely we are to protect it.

I think your testimony exemplifies that.

In terms of the conservation activities of the OFAH and the land that you have helped conserve, both on your own and via public policy, can you discuss the public benefits that habitat conservation has beyond providing game to hunt?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck, for the question.

As I said earlier in my statement before the committee, wildlife is not an accident, and healthy and thriving fish and wildlife populations are not accidents. They have to be managed. They have to be managed to protect them and they have to be managed for people's enjoyment, whether that happens to be birdwatching, hunting, fishing, or whatever activity you're engaged in. People who are in the field, such as anglers, hunters, birdwatchers, hikers, campers, or whoever, are people who engage in outdoor activities of all types. They are on the ground. They have the best experience because they see what's happening on the ground while they're taking part in these activities.

These populations clearly have to be managed. With deer populations, we hear people all the time getting upset, for instance, when they hear about a deer cull. Any time you engage in a cull is an admitted failure on the part of government, whichever that might be, to manage wildlife properly. That means you've let them get out of hand far beyond what the habitat can sustain in a given area and therefore you have to cut them back. People get outraged about this and say, well, isn't this horrific. The science behind fish and wildlife management is very precise. There are so many caring capacities for so many animals on such and such a property. When it gets beyond that, it then becomes to the detriment of people, the animals, and the ecosystems, because there are just too many on the landscape. They're either destroying the vegetation or they're unable to find enough food to eat and therefore they're going to starve to death. There is a delicate balance here, but it's not something that just happens by accident.

The Ministry of Natural Resources in Ontario has statements in its policies that say hunting is the most valuable wildlife management tool they have available to them because it's managed, there's a tag system, there's an allocation system, and there's a reason that the numbers are that.

Ms. Hughes has raised a question about the moose population. Well, the reason there are cutbacks is that the moose population is declining, but you can't just simply look at that in terms of how to manage a resource or you're going to fail.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Is it fair to say that any public policies that limit participation in hunting then have direct conservation impacts?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Exactly. In a word, yes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Again, we can make a link between the long-gun registry in its initial implementation and a lot of people giving up hunting.

Is it safe to assume that supporters of the long-gun registry, either to bring it back, or back when it was brought in, had a detrimental effect on conservation?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Indirectly, yes, because one begets the other begets the other.

If it becomes too onerous, and this applies not only to the long-gun registry, but also to overly restrictive regulations, licencing issues, cost factors, and stuff like that, once there are too many of those in place, then people tend to say it's just not worth the trouble. If you have people who say it's not worth the trouble, they're not out on the landscape, they're not managing the resource. Quite frankly, people who walk away because of onerous government policies, whether it's the long-gun registry or any others.... At the end of the day it's also economics, because these are the very people who are paying for fish and wildlife programs across the country. Without those people buying licences and without those people buying products and whatnot, the economy suffers, and the fish and wildlife suffer. In Ontario, as I said earlier, anglers and hunters pay for two-thirds of the fish and wildlife programs in the entire province. It was supposed to be a 50-50 proposition with the province when the SPA was created. Instead, it's a 70-30 proposition right now, with our carrying the ball.

• (0930)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Obviously, any legislation that implements an animal rights agenda would have the same effect.

I see that the OFAH has been fighting against a private member's bill by an NDP MP, Ms. Morin, Bill C-592.

In a letter by many other organizations which your organization signed and which you sent to all of us as parliamentarians, you said that this particular bill could "unintentionally criminalize all sorts of accepted necessary and traditional practices. Everything from food production, hunting, fishing, and trapping, research using animals, sports and entertainment, and private ownership would be impacted."

I'd like to draw your attention to comments that two NDP MPs made on October 27, 2014.

Ms. Jean Crowder, the New Democratic MP for Nanaimo—Cowichan, said that she supports legislation in which, and I'm quoting here, "animals would be considered people and not just property."

On the same day, Ms. Françoise Boivin, the New Democratic MP for Gatineau, Quebec, made a point that animals should be treated with, and I'm quoting here, "the same protection that we afford to children and people with mental or physical disabilities."

I was astonished when I heard these statements in the House.

Can you talk about what a radical animal rights agenda would do to people who hunt, trap, and fish?

Mr. Greg Farrant: Well, the first thing I want to point out is that it's very easy for groups who oppose these activities to be obstructive or to raise concerns on their part that they think are valid. But at the same time, we have seen things—and I'll give you a good example, going back to 1999 in Ontario. Animal rights activists were able to influence, and I won't go into how they influenced, the government of the day to cancel the spring bear hunt, which had been around for hundreds of years in Ontario. They did it on the basis of the fact that there were cubs "being orphaned" because of hunting.

In fact, what we have seen since that time is a bear population that has spiralled out of control because the controls of the spring hunt are not there anymore. There are more orphan cubs now than ever before being reported to all sorts of wildlife centres across northern Ontario. There is more predation on moose calves, fawns, and other species by bears. There have been more attacks on people by bears, and because of that, the current government in Ontario has brought back a two-year pilot project in several northern communities to study the impact of the spring hunt, once again because it's become not only a natural resources issue but a public safety issue.

It's quite easy to raise a fuss, get something changed either legislatively or in public policy, and then walk away, and everybody else is left to pick up the pieces. That's what happened in that case.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

We'll move to Ms. Murray for seven minutes.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Albrecht, and it's great to be pinch-hitting at this committee today.

Just to let you know, I was the minister of environment for British Columbia for almost three years and worked very closely with the B. C. Wildlife Federation as well as guide outfitters and trappers. It was a very constructive partnership from my perspective, and we have shared many common objectives beyond the economic ones: the conservation and proper governance of those industries.

My comments will be along the lines of attempting to understand the similarities and differences in your provinces versus British Columbia and what's a national approach and what's a local approach.

I know that in British Columbia, even 10 years ago when I was the minister, traplines were handed out or sold and first nations interests weren't deeply considered. Guide outfitter territories were all becoming places where there was more engagement, interest, and claiming of rights by aboriginal communities.

I'm wondering how it is in Ontario, and particularly how the Tsilhqot'in decision has affected the way traplines and guide outfitter territory licensing is determined.

● (0935)

Mr. Greg Farrant: I think it's early days to determine how that decision by the Supreme Court is going to have impact in Ontario. I can tell you that we have two very large aboriginal files that are going on. There are 50 land claims going on in Ontario, but there are two in particular that have a potential for monumental impact on the landscape. One is the Algonquin land claim, which is roughly 36,000 square kilometres, including the city where you are sitting right now. The other is a court case that the Williams Treaties First Nations in Ontario are engaged in at the Federal Court. Both of those have potential to certainly affect the landscape in Ontario.

In terms of aboriginal participation, I can also tell you it is my understanding that right now, when traplines are being given up, the Ontario government is giving aboriginal individuals an opportunity for first dibs, if you will, on those traplines.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Is your organization directly in conversation with representatives from indigenous communities on these issues, or is it happening more through the provincial government?

Mr. Greg Farrant: I think it's fair to say that it happens more through the government. We have sat down at the table many times with the Algonquin first nations and talked to them about the land claim. We have been to their band councils, and they have been to our head office in Peterborough. We do have dialogue with them on an infrequent yet ongoing basis.

The Williams Treaties First Nations first went to the Supreme Court in 1994 trying to overturn the 1923 Williams treaty in which they gave up their right to hunt and fish. We were participants in that court case. The Supreme Court said the treaty was valid. They went back in 1996, and the Supreme Court again said, "No, sorry. It's still valid." They're still trying to overturn that decision, and we will be involved in that as it goes forward.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay.

Another area I wanted to ask about is new Canadians.

In the early 2000s in British Columbia, I was the minister responsible for watching the decline in hunting licences and interest in angling and so on, and we were working to bring young people in with things like family fishing day and so on. So I was delighted to hear about the youth and women becoming interested in these pursuits on the land.

The other challenge that we had for parks visits and for engagement with hunting and fishing was with new Canadians. It wasn't their culture where they came from, so when they came to Canada, it wasn't something that they automatically became involved in.

Has your organization—and I don't know if P.E.I. has as well—had specific programs to involve and interest new Canadians in these activities?

Mr. Greg Farrant: I'll speak briefly, because I know Mr. Crawford probably wants to get a word in here, and justifiably so.

Speaking of my organization, the OFAH holds women's outdoor weekends every year. We also have our youth program, Get Outdoors, which holds month-long camps in the summer.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Excuse me, because time is short, I'm specifically interested in new Canadians.

Mr. Greg Farrant: Okay. We hold a new Canadians day every year at OFAH head office. We have a large pond there that is stocked with fish. It's sponsored by Shimano. We bring busloads of people from the GTA out to Peterborough. They spend the day at our fish and wildlife heritage centre next door. They spend time fishing in the pond and getting a better understanding of what fishing and hunting are all about and the heritage activities behind them.

Can we do a better job? Without a doubt. I do say to you that the Ontario Chinese Anglers Association, which is one of our member clubs, is one of the strongest member clubs we have anywhere in Ontario. They are huge. They are centred in Toronto. Raymond Zee is their executive director. They do a massively great job working on conservation projects. They're very strong, very powerful, very big, and they raise a lot of money for conservation.

But we can all do a better job in approaching these cultures. You're quite right. The makeup of this country is changing, and we all have to do a better job in approaching those folks and finding a way to integrate them into these activities.

• (0940)

Ms. Joyce Murray: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Crawford, do you want to quickly address Ms. Murray's question as well?

Mr. Duncan Crawford: Sure, I do. It's a great question.

We have a burgeoning newcomer population, especially from China. They have a real hunger for outdoor activities, especially fishing and hunting. The government and the Prince Edward Island Wildlife Federation have tried to make sure that if any of these newcomers want information or want to take hunter safety or firearm safety programs that we have programs available to them. We went out of our way to train one person specifically to deliver this. He is a newcomer and obviously speaks their native language, and he acts like a hub to get this particular group afield.

Just as Mr. Farrant said, we host fishing derbies that are open to the public. We make sure all of these newcomer groups are notified.

The big thing is resource management. If they come from a nation that doesn't offer a lot of hunting and fishing opportunities, we make sure they understand and observe bag limits. We help them get afield and do it right, ethically and within the law. That's what's been most important to us, making sure we're available.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Crawford.

We will move back to Ms. Hughes, for five minutes.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Crawford and Mr. Farrant, I really appreciate the work your organizations do to ensure the sustainability of wildlife and their habitat. I've met with the fur harvesters and the trappers councils. Yesterday I met with Ducks Unlimited. It's really part of our heritage as well.

I want to go back to the fact that this is the environment committee, and the whole idea was to deal with climate change. I know that others have raised different issues here. I think we need to focus back on the environmental piece. There have been some impacts with respect to the weather. Take Wawa as an example. In 2012 they had a major flood. I can tell you that there's still a vehicle in the port of Lake Superior near Wawa, in the Michipicoten port. There's still a house in there. A lot of debris in there has yet to be cleaned up. We're talking about Iron Bridge and Bruce Mines, which had major floods again last year. Again, a lot of that debris was tossed aside into some of our river and lake areas.

Do you have any concerns regarding the climate change impact? Do you have any recommendations that the committee should look at putting forward in trying to address the policies that we need to put in place to try to address climate change? We know that the impact on tourism, on hunting and fishing, in Algoma—Manitoulin is huge. I'm just wondering if you have any concerns regarding climate change impact and/or recommendations that should go forward.

Mr. Crawford, you might want to start. Thank you.

I might just stress the importance of actually cleaning that debris up as soon as possible; as I said, for Wawa it's almost three years later now.

Mr. Duncan Crawford: I don't know what to say specifically on that case. Obviously weather patterns are changing. We're seeing it in P.E.I. I can tell you that I had to snowshoe to my barn and take a snowmobile to a main thoroughfare because my road's not plowed out. That's very unusual weather here.

You know, we see it. It affects wild populations and everything else. I was asked to present at this committee on the particulars of hunting, fishing, and trapping. I think we all have a vested interest in good environmental management. I missed some previous comments, but I'm sure I'm echoing what has been said with regard to science-based decisions. If we don't have healthy environments, whether that's water or land, the resource won't be there for us to access. That comes first and foremost.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Farrant, because I don't know what else to say, really.

• (0945)

Mr. Greg Farrant: Thank you. Again, thank you, Ms. Hughes, for the question.

I'm not a scientist. I'm not a biologist. We employ 17 biologists at our federation for fish and wildlife, and invasive species, and land use, and other reasons. They'd probably be able to give you a more thorough answer than I can.

Certainly any time we see impacts on the environment, whether they're due to man-made effects, things like clear-cutting or dams or whatever, and other issues like weather pattern changes, obviously it's going to affect fish and wildlife populations, and it's a concern to us. In fact, at our conference last week we had Dr. John Casselman speak about the impact of climate change on fisheries.

Again, this is because I'm not a scientist. If I were, maybe I could comment better on this. The whole issue of climate change, there still seems to be a big debate on how much of an impact it has, how widespread it is, and what exactly it is doing on the ground. There seem to be two very divergent positions: yes, it's climate change and it's doing all these things, or no, it's not, and it's not doing all these things.

I certainly think it is one of several factors that has to be considered when you are creating public policy that deals with fish and wildlife, or natural resources in general. At the same time, we see governments making decisions on things as concrete as—again, that's no pun on that one because I'm talking about dam removal—for instance, the Black Sturgeon dam in Ontario, which is going to be removed, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources. We're saying yes, but when you take that out, you're going to allow sea lamprey full rein to get into water bodies where the dam is stopping them right now. Those sea lamprey are an invasive species and they're going to have a massive effect on the fishery.

Those are the types of public policy decisions that concern us just as much as climate change does, because their impact will be

immediate, not 10, 15, or 20 years down the road. The influx of sea lamprey on a fisheries population, just as zebra mussels did in the Great Lakes, or as Asian carp might do if they ever get through the sanitary canal in Chicago and get into the Great Lakes, they'll decimate the fishery of the Great Lakes entirely if they ever get loose.

These man-made decisions, or man-made problems, are so immediate. I'm not saying climate change is not a concern because clearly it is. These other man-made decisions that are not based on science are just as problematic and tend to have very immediate repercussions on our natural resources. I think those are equal concerns.

The Chair: Thank you very much to both of you. Mr. Crawford, thank you for engaging the elements in P.E.I. to be a witness for us this morning, and putting up with the technology glitches. Mr. Farrant, thank you for being here, and to each of our committee members, thank you for your questions.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Chair, can I just ask this? Mr. Farrant mentioned that the scientists they have may be able to elaborate a little more on the climate change impact and maybe have some recommendations. If he's able to ask his scientists if they could maybe table any recommendations and any comments they have, that would be greatly appreciated.

The Chair: We'll take note of that.

We've agreed to adjourn early, because of the statement that's going to be made in the House.

At this point, we'll adjourn this meeting.

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