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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order. I'd like to welcome everyone to this 30th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development as we continue our study on the national conservation plan and what that would look like.

I want to thank each of the witnesses for being with us today. We'll hear from each of our witness groups and then we'll have some questions for you. We've started a little bit late and we're going to be ending a half hour earlier than we had thought. We have three groups and each group will be given ten minutes.

So in the first half hour we'll be hearing from you, and then we'll have questions for you. We will begin with the Canadian Wildlife Federation for ten minutes.

Mr. Rick Bates (Executive Director, Canadian Wildlife Federation): Good afternoon. My name is Rick Bates and I'm with the Canadian Wildlife Federation. David Browne, our director of conservation, is also here.

I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to offer comments. First I'd like to commend the government for taking the opportunity to create a national conservation plan for Canada. The plan has great potential to leave, for all Canadians, a lasting legacy of an integrated landscape with healthy and productive natural capital that supports a strong economy and healthy communities. I wish you well in your work.

I'll touch on three things during my comments: the first is the committee's question regarding conservation priorities; the second is the proposed goal of connecting Canadians to nature; and the third is the committee's question regarding implementation priorities.

In regard to the first question around conservation priorities, we face many challenges as a society, including the need for broad watershed and seascape planning, the demands of responding to species at risk and habitat fragmentation, and the needs for connection between terrestrial habitats. But with limited time today, perhaps the most important one for us is that in a national conservation plan the many issues facing our aquatic environments, both freshwater and marine, need to be thoroughly recognized and comprehensively responded to throughout the plan. For a good review of the issues facing our three oceans and recommendations on ways to respond, I'd encourage the committee to review the recent report from the Royal Society of Canada Expert Panel, “Sustaining Canada's Marine Biodiversity”, which was published in February 2012.

In terrestrial habitat conservation, we appreciate that perhaps the greatest need is in developed areas, the so-called working landscape, which will require creativity, the use of a wide range of tools, and the engagement of the whole society to achieve the goals in this area. In particular, we encourage the creativity and development and application of market-based mechanisms such as tax relief for Canadians who take actions that provide public good—for example, farmers who leave buffer strips that filter runoff from important waterways—offset programs to encourage conservation of important natural areas to compensate for destruction or degradation of other areas, and incentive programs to encourage quicker adoption of best land-use practices.

In the proposed goal of connecting Canadians to nature, one important challenge within such a goal is to elevate the level of conversation among Canadians around the trade-offs between industrial growth and conservation. Our public conversation is highly polarized now, of course, into either “anti” or “pro” positions. This doesn't recognize the reality that there are trade-offs required when you do conservation or when you expand industry. This polarized situation heightens conflict and makes decision-making longer and more difficult. There are tools to help shape these conversations from an either/or to examining how it can be done, and they present Canadians with options for level and type of industrial impact and the implications of these options for our country's natural capital and for our GDP.

In our view, one of the best tools for such integrated decision-making and communications is through land-use planning models that can quickly and clearly illustrate the expected changes on a landscape and through the wide range of indicators important to society, such as employment, GDP, and the impacts on natural capital such as water quality, air quality, and wildlife abundance and type.

Large area planning processes like that also provide many other benefits, including clear consideration of cumulative effects of multiple developments, so decisions incorporate impacts of both the specific proposed project and other existing or planned projects in the watershed, for example. They can also speed up and improve decisions by providing regional perspective and by establishing agreement on acceptable impacts in different areas. Once complete, they can also help coordinate the actions of Canadians.

The goal of connecting Canadians to nature must also respond to challenges such as the need for strengthening concepts of sustainability, education curricula, improved opportunities for outdoor recreation and learning, and access to natural outdoor spaces in urban areas.

● (1540)

On the committee's question regarding implementation priorities, Canada is far behind its public commitment to establish conservation areas. This is true in terrestrial areas, but it's particularly true in marine areas.

We appreciate that it's a complex business to identify and respond to the needs of the many different interest groups involved, but it's no more complex than approving a major industrial development like the pipeline. We understand the government's role to render decisions on industrial projects within two years, and we think a national conservation plan should include an equal commitment to speed up the timelines around the creation of conservation areas so that they too are made within two years.

A national conservation plan has the potential to focus and coordinate actions across society. An important step in this would be a strong commitment from across the federal government. To achieve that, our hope is that ownership of the plan, its champion within government, will be at the highest level—the Prime Minister's Office, the Privy Council, the Major Projects Management Office, or other similar integrating body with clout.

In closing, we at the Canadian Wildlife Federation look forward to continued opportunities to help build and shape the plan, as well as joining with others in a commitment to implement it over time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bates.

Next we'll hear from Nature Canada.

Mr. Davidson, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Executive Director, Nature Canada): Thank you very much. It's a privilege and an honour to be invited to speak today about establishing a national conservation plan for Canada.

Since our founding in 1939, Nature Canada has been instilling in Canadians a respect for nature, an appreciation for its wonders, and a will to act in its defence. It began when our founder, Reginald Whittemore, launched a magazine, *Canadian Nature*, in honour of his late wife, Mabel Frances, an educator and nature lover. Over time, the magazine sparked a movement of naturalists in every province and territory of this country, people who worked together to create and sustain a nature nation, a place where every Canadian felt a personal connection to the natural world.

Today, as the national voice for naturalists in this country, Nature Canada continues the work in building a nature nation, and it's in this spirit that I'm happy to join you here today.

The first question you asked us to consider was what should be the purpose of a national conservation plan.

We often hear Canada described in superlatives: the longest river, the largest lakes, the most contiguous forests and wetlands, massive wildlife migrations, and unfathomable mineral and energy riches. Consider this: 20% of the planet's wilderness, 20% of the world's fresh water, and 30% of its boreal forest lies within our borders.

Many Canadians make their living, directly or indirectly, from its bounty, and many more continue to enjoy the outdoors recreationally. Yet, increasingly, Canadians appear to be losing touch with nature in Canada, even as nature is experiencing worsening pressures: our wildlife is disappearing, our forest and grassland habitats are increasingly fragmented, rapid climate change is threatening the north, and our real-time connection with nature and the outdoors has declined. So while it is often stated that Canada is seen as a nature nation, and that this is part of our national identity, this is something that should never be taken for granted. We believe, then, that the purpose of the national conservation plan should be to build and strengthen a "nature first" ethic by inspiring and motivating Canadians to value and conserve nature.

The second question you asked us to consider was what should be the goals of a national conservation plan.

The goals for the national conservation plan should focus on finding ways of collaboratively harnessing the efforts of all sectors in society:

1) Seek innovative and inspirational ways of raising awareness of the value of nature to all Canadians, especially our young people. We need a conservation youth corps, and we need more programs like My Parks Pass, which facilitates 400,000 eighth graders to engage in our treasured national parks.

2) Encourage corporate social and environmental responsibility to achieve excellence in nature conservation. Recognize corporations like General Motors, which has as a goal to conserve wildlife habitat around each of the business units worldwide by 2020, and TransCanada Corporation, which has allocated millions of dollars to help secure critical wildlife habitat and engage naturalists in their conservation. There are many others.

3) Identify new and innovative mechanisms to fund nature conservation in Canada. Consider perhaps the establishment of a nature challenge fund to support local community stewardship of natural places.

4) Develop a reporting mechanism that accurately reflects the state of nature in Canada based on existing data management systems like NatureServe and make this information publicly accessible.

5) Act globally. Air, water, wildlife, perhaps no better represented than in our migratory birds, move freely in and out of our country. Our commitments and obligations under international conventions to which we are a party, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Migratory Birds Convention Act, must be reflected in the substance of the national conservation plan.

The third question you asked us to consider was what guiding principles should govern a national conservation plan.

We considered three: inclusivity, partnership, and momentum.

What do I mean by inclusivity? We all have a stake in a healthy, balanced environment. We all benefit from the many ecosystem services that nature provides. The development of a national conservation plan should and must involve all regions of the country and all stakeholders.

● (1545)

In terms of partnerships, the pressures facing the environment are really too complex, and the scope of nature conservation too vast, to address without marshalling the collective efforts of committed Canadians, NGOs, industry, academia, government, and others. Work must be coordinated, efforts synchronized, and lessons shared among partners striving towards a common goal.

In terms of momentum, this is absolutely critical. We must build on the work already under way to conserve nature in Canada. There are legions of volunteers already on the front lines of nature conservation. Volunteer caretakers are adopting important sites for biodiversity and are working with local communities to do that. There are many Canadians who already dedicate time to protecting or stewarding their environment. Some have dedicated their whole lives to this cause. Let’s build on what they’re accomplishing today.

The fourth question you asked us to consider was what conservation priorities should be included in the NCP. At Nature Canada we stumbled on this one, because there were literally dozens of priorities. We boiled them down to a set of about six.

First, among children especially, increase awareness of nature, including our wildlife, our protected areas, and the services nature provides to our well-being. That is about building the nature nation.

Second, make sure that there are no extinctions on our watch and that the great flyways and migratory routes are secured. Ensure that the causes of species endangerment and decline are identified and mitigated so that no more species become at risk.

Third, aim for 20% protection of Canada's land and seascapes, exceeding the Aichi targets established by the Convention on Biological Diversity. This includes a push to complete the national parks strategy. Not only that, provide greater recognition for Canada's official national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries, which support much of Canada's biodiversity and yet are virtually unknown by Canadians.

Fourth, maintain and improve upon existing environmental legislation and make it an effective tool for nature conservation.

A fifth and obvious one is to ensure the quality of Canada's great lakes, river systems, and aquifers, which we seldom hear about.

Finally, in terms of priorities, let's leave a legacy of environmental leadership. Let's make Canada a global leader in nature conservation by meeting and exceeding our obligations under international nature conventions, such as the CBD, the Convention on Biological Diversity. And provide leadership and support to countries that share our conservation goals but perhaps not our capacity to implement.

On the fifth question, what the implementation priorities of the national conservation plan should be, first, let's find a cost-effective way to engage all Canadians, in part by leveraging existing networks.

Second, enhance cross-jurisdictional communication, participation, and cooperation, including cooperation between different departments at each level of government. All jurisdictions have a role in realizing Canada's national conservation objectives, and all jurisdictions should be at the table for these conversations.

Let's make sure to include and engage first nations and aboriginal government organizations in all our discussions at the beginning, at the outset.

Finally, meaningful, balanced working groups of stakeholders from all sectors of Canadian society should be brought together to oversee conservation plans within ecologically relevant regions, such as ecoregions and/or ecozones.

Finally, you asked us what consultation process the minister should consider using when developing the national conservation plan. We kind of internalized that one. Instead of thinking about the consultation process, we thought more about what Nature Canada could potentially provide to that process. I would just like to fill you in on an initiative that was supported by the federal government and that we think could provide a platform for further dialogue.

In 2007, the federal government provided about $1 million to help facilitate one of the most extensive consultations ever undertaken among the naturalist community in Canada. This resulted in a Canadian Nature Network strategy, which you have copies of. In essence, the Canadian Nature Network strategy aspires to be an inclusive alliance of all who care for, have passion for, and celebrate nature.

The network aims have three specific foci. The first is to protect nature in Canada at all levels, including species, habitats, and ecosystems. The second is to connect all Canadians to nature and to promote a nature ethic. The third is to empower all levels of the network by enhancing communication, reducing duplication, and increasing local capacity.

● (1550)

Led by Nature Canada, the network has accomplished much in terms of contributing to science, on-the-ground conservation, positive impacts on policy development at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels, and nature education. As such, the network, with its hundreds of organizations and over 60,000 dedicated members, provides a unique platform to facilitate and implement a dialogue on a nature conservation plan.

In conclusion, we are very excited by the opportunity, we recognize the challenge, and we look forward to inspiring Canadians to engage in a national conservation plan to build that nature nation.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

Next we'll hear from Nature Conservancy Canada, Mr. Lounds, for 10 minutes.

Mr. John Lounds (President and Chief Executive Officer, Nature Conservancy Canada): Good afternoon. Bonjour.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to present to the committee today as you consider the development of a national conservation plan.

I'm John Lounds, president and CEO of Nature Conservancy Canada. Joining me are my colleagues, Michael Bradstreet, our vice-president of conservation,

[*Translation*]

and Nathalie Zinger, our vice-president for Quebec.

[*English*]

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is a national, not-for-profit charity, and for 50 years we've worked with Canadians to conserve and care for some of Canada's most special natural areas.

As we look ahead to the next 50 years, we applaud your efforts to develop a national conservation plan, a plan to move conservation objectives forward and to better connect all Canadians with nature.

Today we'd like to offer the committee suggestions for its consideration in three key areas. First, we'd suggest that the plan can and should position Canada as leading the world in conservation, owning the podium, so to speak, among all nations in its lands and waters conserved. Second, we would encourage the development of a shared plan that acknowledges and builds on the accomplishments of all Canadians. Third, we would recommend a plan that will mobilize the private sector in support of conservation and lead to conservation solutions that also support responsible economic progress.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper said it well when he announced the Government of Canada's natural areas conservation program partnership with the Nature Conservancy of Canada in 2007. He said, "The great outdoors is at the heart of the Canadian identity." We couldn't agree more.

Canada is the world's second-largest country by area. We have more than 20% of the globe's wilderness, 20% of its fresh water, 24% of its wetlands, and even more of its intact forests, Arctic, and maritime lands. These habitats support a rich variety of plant and animal life and provide critical ecological services, such as carbon sequestration and water storage and purification.

The ecological services provided by Canadian forests, wetlands, and prairies are globally important. Canada's boreal peat lands, for example, measurably cool the global climate.

Ecologists generally agree that as much as 30% to 50% of landscapes should be in some conserved status globally to ensure biodiversity conservation and the delivery of ecological services. The planet is a long way from that goal.

Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Canada and other signatory nations have committed to national goals of 17% in protected areas or, and I emphasize this, other effective area-based conservation measures by 2020. We believe Canada can and should meet this target by 2017, our nation's 150th birthday, and exceed it by 2020.

Going beyond this current commitment would position Canada first internationally, in the extent of lands conserved, an area more than the combined geographies of France, Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Canada can and should own the podium in conservation, and we can do this arguably better than any other country because we are blessed to have our natural estate still largely intact on our land and in our culture.

Secondly, a shared plan begins with sharing our achievements. Canada, using international standards, currently reports protected areas of about one million square kilometres, or 10% of our land mass. That figure underestimates our reality. Remarkably, Canada has never added up the many and varied conservation efforts of Canadians. Think of the individuals, the communities, the conservation groups, agencies, corporations, and first nations and all they have done to conserve nature, natural areas, green space, and wildlife, and consider the following, which are not recognized in that 10% figure: conservation authority lands in southern Ontario; community pastures of prairie Canada; lands owned and stewarded by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and the over 150 local and regional land trusts across the country; lands conserved through the Nunatsiavut and Dehcho land claims; northern landscapes that will be conserved through Quebec's Plan Nord and Ontario's Far North Act; and the Flathead River Valley and the Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia.

A national conservation plan must establish a consistent system to track and count all these conservation achievements on public and private lands. Let's at least report where we are to inform where we're going.

● (1555)

Finally, a successful national conservation plan will identify ways to engage Canadian communities and the private sector in conservation, thereby connecting more Canadians to nature.

Our experience informs our views. With more than 45,000 financial supporters and hundreds of science and conservation partners, we know that collaboration is at the heart of conservation success.

Using a science-based approach, we work in places with high biodiversity values and have helped conserve more than 2.6 million acres in those places. That's 100 CFL fields—not counting the end zones—every day for 50 years. Our staff live and work in communities, many in working landscapes, seeking voluntary conservation agreements and creating winning solutions for families, businesses, and nature.

Communities benefit from the use of our lands for hiking, fishing, nature viewing, hunting, and other activities, subject only to the conservation needs of each natural area. We wish to suggest, therefore, that the committee consider including at least three concepts in the plan to mobilize the private sector.

The first of these is public-private partnerships. These partnerships have advanced and continue to advance conservation across the country as they lever private sector investment and donations to deliver on-the-ground conservation results.

Our experience with the natural areas conservation program over the past five years is illustrative. More than 800,000 acres of land have been secured for conservation, with willing vendors and donors in every province of Canada. These lands include the full range of Canadian habitats, including habitat for more than 117 species that are at risk. The program has also matched each federal dollar invested with nearly two dollars of private sector funds and donations, resulting in three dollars of conservation for every federal dollar invested.

The second area we would recommend is that of innovative tools and incentives that can be accessed by Canadians across the working landscape to encourage conservation. Many formally protected areas are surrounded and linked by natural real estate that is less regulated but may be effectively conserved if the tools are offered to private landowners.

Programs such as property tax incentives, ecogifts, covenants, easements, and servitude—Quebec's private nature reserve system—and environmental farm plans already encourage private stewardship. Others should be developed.

Some suggestions might be: allowing severances for conservation purposes; providing tax relief for conservation lands and grants in lieu from senior governments to municipalities; arbitration to resolve conservation agreement disputes, rather than court proceedings; delivery of ecological goods and services by the farm community; and allowing lands held in inventory for development to be eligible for ecogift treatment. In the spirit of a shared plan, while some can be addressed federally, many would need provincial attention to be realized.

Lastly, we wish to suggest that the committee look closely at the potential of what are called biodiversity credits or offsets for development. Sometimes this is called habitat banking.

The economic story of Canada has largely been one of the development of our natural resources. How might we improve our ability to lead the way, both in conserving landscapes and in natural resource development? The concept of biodiversity credits, or habitat banking, may hold the key.

These credits are means by which industry can contribute to environmental protection and conservation over and above, or as part of, the regulatory requirements to avoid, mitigate, and compensate for a project’s environmental impact. Much like municipal conditions of approval requiring a developer to provide for public open space, a similar approach could be used for pipelines, mine sites, or even hydrocarbon footprints.

Currently, impact avoidance and mitigation have focused on the immediate geography of the development itself, independent of the quality or significance of the natural areas involved. While impact avoidance and mitigation may be restricted to the development site, biodiversity credits can be designed to be more flexible. Because they could be used to deliver conservation outcomes at scientifically identified priority natural areas, wherever they may be in Canada, they can maximize the benefits to biodiversity conservation or ecological services at a national level.

In closing, we anticipate a national conservation plan that is a shared vision to guide Canada in the conversation of our lands and waters. We welcome the opportunity to continue this dialogue with you.

● (1600)

At the Nature Conservancy of Canada, we like to say that we create results you can walk on. I'd like to invite committee members to walk with us, to visit some of our on-the-ground projects, and to meet Canadians who have cared for their lands for generations and have drawn us into their dreams.

Please explore our work further. We've provided materials on the natural areas conservation plan, the Nature Conservancy's annual report, and also a map showing where various projects under the plan have been delivered over the past five years.

We encourage the committee not to try to address everything. Let's try to do a few important things very well: establish Canada as an international conservation leader by owning the podium; consistently measure and track all Canadian conservation efforts, public and private; enhance and adopt innovative mechanisms to engage the private sector in conservation, such as public-private partnerships, enhanced conservation tools and incentives, and biodiversity credits.

Canada's 150th birthday is not far away. Let's celebrate in 2017 by advancing a plan to ensure the essence of Canada—our natural heritage—is still here, and better, when Canada turns 300.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lounds. That was very interesting.

We will begin our first round of questioning with seven minutes per questioner.

We'll begin with Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. I know that we're quite excited about this study, and your testimony today was very useful.

The first thing I want to start with is that all three groups here today discussed the concept of a working landscape.

Mr. Bates, you spoke to that very eloquently. Perhaps you could go into a little more detail—succinctly—on what that means and why that's of relevance to the development of a national conservation plan.

Mr. Rick Bates: A working landscape, the way we think of it, is typically southern Canada, where it's more populated and more developed, with more roads, more fragmentation of habitat, and more development. Why it's important is that there are many species, particularly species at risk, in many of those areas, land is more expensive to deal with, and solutions have to be more flexible because there are more people.

Every person has a different socio-economic situation, with different land, perhaps, and different conditions of that land, so it's far more difficult to come up with conservation solutions in those areas. It requires far more creativity.

● (1605)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: When you're talking about it being more difficult to come up with conservation solutions, what are some of those challenges?

Mr. Rick Bates: I think the biggest one is rewarding individual Canadians for the good conservation work they do. Right now, we as a society talk a lot about the need for stewardship and the importance of stewardship, but it comes down to the individual making choices to benefit all of society. To a large degree.... I mean, there are some good examples of individual organizations and individual situations where there are incentives provided and there is encouragement of best practices, but I think it's an area where there's an opportunity for a great deal more creativity and direct rewards for individuals.

There's the example I used of a landowner leaving a buffer in place to prevent, say, agriculture chemicals or some other thing from leaching into the water, or to at least filter it before it gets there. That's a benefit to all of society—all of us benefit from it—which that landowner is paying for directly by not cultivating that land.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: You also made a really interesting statement related to the land-use planning framework in that trade-offs are required when making decisions. What are some of those trade-offs you're speaking to? What are some of those solutions? What's the sweet spot, I guess, for some of these conservation planning activities?

Mr. Rick Bates: I think the sweet spot is good conversation, where we aren't polarized and either completely opposed to development or completely in favour of all development.

It means getting to a spot where we can have a rational conversation among Canadians around the pros and cons, where the options for development are put forward—and not just, say, a single one, but perhaps different options—and where you can see the implications from each option. You can see what the impacts are on GDP, on employment, and on health and education, as well as what the impacts are on the natural capital—so water quality, air quality, water quantity, wildlife, and types of wildlife. At that stage, we'll be having a good conversation and making better decisions and faster decisions.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: That's very helpful.

Mr. Davidson, you sort of alluded to this statement within your brief with some information that reads:

> Balance environmental protection with sustainable economic development by using broad, landscape-scale approaches to land-use planning that considers conservation first and defines opportunities for complementary economic development of the remaining "working landscape".

Based on the experience of your organization, are there some examples of this balance that are working well right now?

Mr. Ian Davidson: Yes, there are a couple of examples that I think you should be aware of. My colleagues are very aware of them.

One of them is called the North American waterfowl management plan. It has developed joint ventures, primarily across the working landscape in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. It was set up to conserve waterfowl and wetland habitat, but the approach they've taken is unique. It has brought together the conservation community, the agricultural community, and governments from various jurisdictions to sit around a table—not unlike this one—to actually figure out how we can make conservation work on the landscape.

It has been in operation now for about 25 years. Is that about right?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Ian Davidson: It has brought close to $1 billion, I would say, into the working landscape, not only in Canada but in the United States and Mexico. We could provide you more information on that, but it really and truly is one of those flagship joint venture initiatives that we should be aware of.

The other one I would bring to your attention is one that's still very much in the early stages. There is a species at risk—the greater sage-grouse—in the southern parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan. A lot of efforts have been undertaken to try to conserve the species. It's found in leks, which are really important areas and very important sites where males and females come together in April and a courtship process takes place. These are very sensitive areas. When you have ranching, oil development, or infrastructure development, these individual species are highly impacted.

There are efforts right now on the landscape to work with ranchers, with the oil sector, and with biologists and scientists who know what to do to try to conserve these species. While it's still at an early stage, it offers some really interesting opportunities to bridge the various sectors that are engaged in wildlife conservation in particular.

● (1610)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Just to close, I'll leave this with you, John. We've talked about some of the things that are working. What are some of the things that we need to avoid with regard to the development of a conservation plan? What things haven't worked in the past—in 15 seconds.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Lounds: I think my colleagues here have alluded to what hasn't worked in the past, or what has worked up to a point, and that is having each side of the equation—whether it be the economic side versus the conservation or environmental side—drawing hard and fast lines around "thou shalt not trespass" over my line here. What you end up with, then, is no way of actually going beyond where we are today in terms of conservation.

I can give an example. For instance, mining companies are quite worried about seeing expanded protected areas that would have subsurface rights taken away, because you never know what you're going to find there some day.

Are there some other mechanisms? That is why I put forward the biodiversity credits. Are there some other ways in which we can look at resolving these tensions? Really, they shouldn't exist. If you actually talk to the folks in the mining companies, in many ways they're just as keen about seeing areas conserved as we are.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time has expired.

Monsieur Pilon, you have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for your great presentations, especially that of Mr. Davidson. You clearly explained all the points that we had raised.

My first question is for Mr. Bates and Mr. Lounds. I am very concerned about this.

In your view, what should the objectives of the national conservation plan be?

Let's start with Mr. Lounds.

Mr. John Lounds: I am going to answer in English.

[*English*]

We could talk about that. We didn't actually put that in the presentation because we know other groups have talked about the protect, connect, restore notions when you're looking at a landscape. In fact, that is how the Nature Conservancy goes about deciding where its role is best played on the landscape.

I could have Michael Bradstreet speak to this, but basically it involves looking at ecoregions of the country to assess what's needed in an ecoregion in order to ensure that you perpetuate the species over time. Then from there you look at what is already in a protected state and what further work needs to be done so that you get to those kinds of goals. Then you drill down from there to say, where can the Nature Conservancy of Canada best work? Where is that combination of opportunity and threat that makes sense for us to be doing our work? And we drill down to a property level.

So you can take it at a high level, walk right down to a property level and take it right back up again, but the idea behind it is to think about a landscape—and normally we think in terms of ecoregions—think about that land because of its common ecological characteristics, think about that landscape in a way where you're going to perpetuate the species that are found there over time. That's basically how we look at it.

Mr. Rick Bates: I think one thing that is often overlooked in our conversation around landscapes and regions.... To be sure, habitat is critical, but one of the things we'd like to ensure doesn't get lost in that perspective is individual species. We have many individual species at risk, more than 600 in Canada. It's a challenge to keep them from going extinct, and I think we need to find some space within the plan to respond to the pressures facing individual species.

● (1615)

Mr. François Pilon: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

You say that you want to connect Canadians to nature. What do you suggest they do?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Bates: There are a number of things with connecting Canadians to nature. One is, of course, improving that level of conversation we have around development and conservation, so that we're speaking clearly and understanding clearly that there are trade-offs we need to make. When you're doing conservation, you're forgoing development; when you're doing development, you're forgoing conservation. That's a fact, and I think the more we can have adult conversations about that within the society, that's helpful to all of us. So that's one thing that would be helpful about connecting Canadians to nature.

But there are others as well. Just letting kids get outside and encouraging that play and learning outdoors where we take some of our education from theory to reality I think is helpful and fun. Conservation work can be an awful lot of fun, and I think to help instill that and to allow kids that opportunity to play is very helpful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Davidson, what types of incentives should be available to private landowners to conserve habitats and secure migratory roots?

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Davidson: Thank you for the question. I'll respond in English, if you don't mind.

Your question was about what sorts of incentives could be provided, then, for people who own lands to encourage the conservation of species, if I understand.

There are a number of different types of mechanisms for doing that. One of the ways we do that at Nature Canada is a program called Important Bird Areas. That program identifies the suite of globally important sites for birds and biodiversity across this country. There are about 600 of those.

One of the ways we try to recognize individuals is to engage the public. We call these “caretakers”, local community people who adopt a site. What we try to do is work with these communities and individuals at the site level and recognize the work they do. I think recognition is a huge part of the issue. Many people are undertaking conservation at many different levels, and often we don't get that pat on the back, if you will. We don't get recognized for the work we do.

So we believe strongly that recognition is important. We have local awards and provincial awards and national awards for individuals, for the caretakers, as I said.

In terms of other incentives, obviously there are the tax incentives. One of the things Nature Canada does is support a coalition called the Green Budget Coalition. Both of my colleagues...or at least Nature Conservancy is a member of that. One of the things we've been pushing collectively with our colleagues is for tax incentives for local property owners, particularly those who have endangered species on their properties.

The Chair: And time has expired.

Mr. Sopuck, you have seven minutes.

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

Mr. Bates, what's the weakness in the single species approach?

Mr. Rick Bates: Well, there are several. It costs a lot of money and it typically isn't ecosystem-based. You can spend a lot of time and money on one species while the entire system around you collapses.

So it's certainly a risk. I think a person has to head into either approach, either an ecosystem approach or a species approach, heads-up. You want to do a little bit of balance.

● (1620)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes. It seems to me, shouldn't the goal be the conservation of ecosystem processes as the ultimate goal, and multiple species assemblages? Often the single species approach can conflict with other species.

As you pointed out, and I think quite wisely, it could actually inhibit the conservation of ecological processes.

Mr. Rick Bates: I think the key is balance. You can be spending so much time looking at the system that you begin to lose species. When you lose a couple of key species, you can quickly lose a system.

So through a balanced approach I think you can retain both. You can spend some time on the most vulnerable species—not every individual species, but a couple of the most vulnerable that are perhaps representative of a certain type of habitat within a system—as well as look at the overall ecosystem.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes. Something I'm very keen on personally is a national wetland conservation program. Again, if you conserve the wetlands or restore wetlands, the species will come—a kind of "if you build it, they will come"—with all the attendant ecological functions that wetlands provide.

Mr. Bates, you talked about connecting Canadians with nature. Should active programs in that regard be part of a national conservation plan? I'm thinking of mentoring programs for kids, to take them out in nature. Should that be part of a national conservation plan when programming is developed?

Mr. Rick Bates: I think it's helpful, yes, absolutely, for a long-term ethic around conservation in society, particularly among new Canadians. We have many new Canadians who don't get an opportunity to be exposed to nature in the same way that people who grew up here have.

So I think it's helpful. Do I think it's something that government needs to spend an awful lot of time and money on? Probably not.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay. The reason is that your federation is composed of Canada's main hunting and fishing groups, and many of them have youth hunting and fishing programs. As somebody who got started in a conservation career when I caught my first fish at age four, I think the sustainable use of fish and wildlife resources is often neglected in these politically correct times. I think active programming to get young people out hunting and fishing will start many people on the conservation path. So I think that's something we want to look at.

Mr. Lounds or Mr. Bradstreet, would you support a broad incentive-based ecological goods and services program on the agricultural landscape, and what form would that take?

Mr. John Lounds: I think we have actually been supportive of that. We don't do that ourselves.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right. I understand that.

Mr. John Lounds: Maybe Michael knows more about this than I do.

Mr. Michael Bradstreet (Vice-President, Conservation, Nature Conservancy Canada): The answer is yes.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Again, I'd like to make the point, because it's important, that Canada is the only industrialized country that does not have an ecological goods and services program on the agricultural landscape. Again, it's a terrific compliment to what the Nature Conservancy does and what other groups do.

Mr. Davidson, early in your presentation you painted a fairly bleak picture of wildlife. You made the blanket statement that "our wildlife is disappearing". Do you really believe that? Many species may be declining, but many other species have increased tremendously over the last few years.

Don't you think it would be more appropriate to kind of do a net analysis before making a blanket statement like that? We can look at the white pelican, the cormorant, the bald eagle, the white-tailed deer, the coyote, the Canada goose, and many other species. To say that our wildlife is disappearing is a little bit over the top, don't you think?

Mr. Ian Davidson: Perhaps—depending on the suite of species you're looking at.

The one we've been focusing on—

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I look at all of them.

Mr. Ian Davidson: All species. Okay. But let's say you were to look at birds. In May, I think, or in about three weeks, the *State of the Birds* report will come out, and it will identify that a majority of bird species across Canada are actually in decline.

Based on that, and probably related to the habitat issues they are facing both here in Canada and internationally—obviously birds move out of Canada, or at least 80% or 90% of them do—there are real issues with wildlife species.

That is primarily related to the birds, but I would say other species too are at risk.

● (1625)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I guess my point is that from a public policy perspective, you would want to make fairly detailed recommendations to us so that we can focus on the species of concern. Again, my caution is to just be careful about those kinds of blanket statements, because they're not that helpful from a public policy perspective when we want to zero in and actually develop programs.

I do agree with you that certain bird species, warblers in particular, are declining. Let's make sure we focus on that.

Mr. Davidson, you talked about the sage grouse and you talked about ranching and oil. I'm a little bit sensitive to that, because I represent a ranching constituency.

Extensive cattle ranching is one of the best friends that wildlife and biodiversity ever had. Would you agree with that?

Mr. Ian Davidson: Yes, I would. I guess perhaps it was taken a little bit out of context. We had some meetings last week to talk about this issue with CEPA, the Canadian Energy Pipeline Association.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I've met those folks, yes.

Mr. Ian Davidson: It was to look at the real impacts of the oil and gas sector on the species. To my understanding, an emergency summit was held about three or four months ago to look at the plight of the species, and indeed it did look at the oil and gas sector primarily.

I guess my point was more bringing together the various stakeholders on the landscape, both pro and con in terms of the impacts to the species, and actually having a dialogue and determining specifically what can be done.

We do have a recipe, if you will, for what needs to be done. If we can bring the stakeholders around the table to actually do something, I think we can solve this situation very easily.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to move.... I have five motions. They're regarding science cuts, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, emergency response, the national round table and water, and environmental NGOs.

While this is being placed in camera, at the end, I would very much like to have this out in the open.

The Chair: So you want to use your time to deal with this motion?

It would mean, then, for us to break and go in camera—unless you had unanimous consent to deal with it at the open session.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Do I have unanimous consent to deal with this in the open?

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Oui.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: No.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, then, I will wait and do it in camera at the end.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: These witnesses have come here, and I don't want to take away from their work.

I'm going to ask very specific questions, if I may. I'm concerned about species at risk. Without significant effort, more and more of our native species are at risk of becoming extinct. Habitat loss, climate change, human activity...and I think these are things that need to be changed when we go ahead with the conservation plan.

When a species is listed, SARA requires a development of recovery strategy that identifies habitat crucial for its survival. The majority of recovery strategies released to date do not cover critical habitat despite the requirement in SARA.

I'd like to know, Mr. Davidson, should this be a recommendation for the conservation plan?

Mr. Ian Davidson: As Michael would say, “yes”.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Great. We'll make that a recommendation in the report. Thank you.

It's my understanding also that there is a safety net that can protect areas normally under provincial jurisdiction, but only if the federal Minister of the Environment approves. Is this correct?

Mr. Ian Davidson: I believe so.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: To my knowledge, that safety net has not been employed, and in some cases we do have dire circumstances.

Should that be a recommendation going forward, that we reinforce that this safety net exists?

Mr. Ian Davidson: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

There are so many opportunities going forward with this.

If we look at our marine life, Mr. Davidson, what monitoring, research, and recovery programs should be included in the conservation program for species at risk?

Mr. Ian Davidson: I think perhaps my colleagues would be better suited to answer that. The focus of Nature Canada tends to be more on the terrestrial species.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Bates...?

Mr. David Browne (Director of Conservation, Canadian Wildlife Federation): Your question is around which monitoring programs...?

● (1630)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Yes: which monitoring, research, and recovery programs we should be thinking about in the conservation plan. What would be your recommendation?

I mean, if we look at grey whales, it's been—

Mr. David Browne: There are some simple things that could be reinforced in the conservation plan. One would be a commitment to the emergency response network to marine mammal strandings and entanglements. That is run through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans with partners across the country, and it leverages some good dollars from organizations like ours and others.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So what would be your recommendation, very specifically, for the report?

Mr. David Browne: That the government commit to enhancing and maintaining sufficient funding for the marine mammal emergency response programs across the country to respond to threats to marine mammals that are at risk. That would be one.

The other aspect would be to make recommendations—although this has been worked on for years—to continue to encourage the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to look at ecosystem approaches to managing the fisheries, to considering multiple stocks at the same time, and to understanding the relationship between the species as they manage sections of the ocean. It's a difficult undertaking, and they have been working on it. I think the plan could reinforce that as a conservation objective for Canada.

I think it's generally important that the plan include, as Mr. Bates said, objectives for marine and freshwater conservation and not just terrestrial conservation.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I'm going to pick up on what you've just been talking about.

We have very clear conservation commitments under the United Nations international convention on biodiversity, and the subsequent Canadian biodiversity strategy, and a clear mandate for ecosystem-based management and marine conservation through Canada's Oceans Act and the accompanying oceans strategy. We have failed to realize these commitments.

Should the conservation plan ensure that Canada meet its obligation under these instruments?

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Should that be a recommendation in our report?

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay.

Should the establishment of marine-use planning processes be part of a conservation plan to designate a comprehensive system of marine protected areas and a suite of conservation objectives and management prescriptions? Should that be part of...?

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That should be a recommendation? Okay. Thank you.

I still have one minute.

With regard to climate change and its impact on wildlife, we have to reduce emissions to scientifically determined levels, and I think we also have to help wildlife adapt. Many species already face altered habitats due to changing climate conditions. They need our help to survive.

What would be your recommendation around climate change? Would it be to invest in conserving and restoring natural areas in recognition that growing plants and soils remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while increasing wildlife's capacity to adapt? Would that be a recommendation?

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes. I think those are clearly no-lose recommendations. There's an opportunity to benefit all by taking that kind of an approach.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay.

And I'm done.

The Chair: You are. You've got your own watch.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, everybody.

The Chair: We'll begin our five-minute rounds.

Monsieur Choquette, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen.

The three groups can answer my first question with a yes or no answer. Do you all agree that the work done by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy in 2003, including its report—with which you are obviously familiar—is a good start? Are its recommendations still valid today?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Bates: I'm not completely familiar with all the work they've done, but in principle, yes, I think the round table has done some excellent work.

Mr. Ian Davidson: I'm definitely supportive of the work but not familiar with that specific 2003 document.

Mr. John Lounds: I'd have to beg your forgiveness because my name will be in that report as an adviser, so I can't say I didn't know about it. I think it was good work at the time. I think much has changed since then. Canadians are becoming more involved and interested in conservation, people who hadn't been interested before, in terms of the work that's going on across the country.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much. I have to interrupt you because I don't have very much time.

I am going to talk about the protection of oceans. I am not sure which group is more comfortable with this topic; perhaps Mr. Bates. Right now, only about 1% of marine areas are protected. We have a nice target of 20% by 2017. I love the idea of owning the podium. I am all for it; it is a great recommendation.

Should there be a similar recommendation for protecting marine waters?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes, I think it would be very helpful to have clear recommendations and targets for marine-managed areas or protected areas, whatever term we like to use, identifying the most important areas for wildlife in the ocean and being clear about our intentions.

Mr. John Lounds: The Convention on Biological Diversity target is 17% for terrestrial by 2020. It also has a target of 10% for marine by 2020, and Canada has also signed on to that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

I would like to briefly talk about a holistic conservation plan rather than a site- or place-specific approach. Do you agree that we should have an ecosystem approach rather than a site-specific approach? Should we have a more holistic approach rather than a single-species approach? Would you agree with an approach like that?

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Davidson: I'll just give you a specific example. I'll go back to a program that we manage in partnership with naturalist organizations across the country. It's called Important Bird Areas and it focuses on conserving a suite or individual bird species. One of the problems with that, when you look at the prairie landscape, the grassland landscape, for example, is that it's really hard to take a species and/or a site-specific approach to conservation. Indeed we need more holistic approaches, so the ecosystem approach, in many respects, across this landscape, this ecosystem, and others across the country is very important.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Do you also agree, Mr. Bates?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes. In principle, the ecosystem approach is probably the most efficient. As mentioned before, though, I think you can start from either end and arrive in the same spot. But as a starting spot, the ecosystem approach is excellent, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: In terms of the follow-up to the national conservation plan, there might be some wonderful objectives, but who should be responsible for it? Should Environment Canada, Parks Canada or an independent company do the follow-up to make sure that it is done?

Mr. Lounds can answer.

[*English*]

Mr. John Lounds: As I mentioned in our presentation, I think there are some things that Canada and Environment Canada can do well, and certainly defining what we're counting and determining how we're going to go about that is something you need to bring people together, and facilitating that is clearly something the Government of Canada should be doing. Looking at what the need is and where the gaps are, helping to figure out and set a framework so that others can join in and be involved I think is going to be important. That includes how you work with the provinces and first nations and others in various communities and how we mobilize the private sector to come to the table, both with funds and with interest in the work. That's what we need to do.

So it will involve many different players, and each will have a particular role to play.

Mr. Ian Davidson: I would like to concur with that completely. I think the Government of Canada and Environment Canada is the right place to drive this forward. It wouldn't have happened unless they'd stepped up to the plate to do that.

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

We have Ms. Ambler. You have five minutes.

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

And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to discuss today and ask you about ensuring that urban Canadians are a part of this national conservation plan.

Mr. Davidson, you mentioned that nature nation envisions a place where every Canadian feels a personal connection to the natural world and that strengthening a "nature first" ethic is achieved by inspiring and motivating Canadians to value and conserve nature.

How do we ensure that urban Canadians feel this connection? If they're not fortunate enough to have a cottage in northern Ontario or in Muskoka, or if they don't live near a lake or near the banks of a river, how do we do that?

● (1640)

Mr. Ian Davidson: That's an excellent question. If I might even focus that on the young people of this country, we really believe that's where the future is; that's where we need to be spending time. We need to connect, we need to engage, we need to inspire young Canadians to really engage with nature.

There's an initiative in the United States that basically speaks to leaving no children inside. The idea is to get kids out.

I was speaking to my three godsons, and I asked them if they could name me a national park. They're exposed, they've travelled Canada, but they could not name me a national park in Canada, and I was really surprised. I think that is reflective of how young Canadians perhaps see this country.

There are initiatives out there that are trying to engage kids. I believe our national parks are wonderful jewels, fantastic opportunities to dance in these places. Parks Canada has a truly magnificent opportunity to link young people in urban areas with national parks. The project in Toronto, with the Rouge, is a first step towards that. There are other opportunities across this country, and we should be looking at those to engage young Canadians, particularly in those urban areas, because that's where our future is.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: I'm glad you mentioned the Rouge, but as someone from the Toronto area, I know the Rouge Park gets all the attention. There are lots of other great places in the greater Toronto area that are part of the same ecosystem. I was just at an event last week for the Riverwood Conservancy, which is an area in the heart of Mississauga, on the banks of the Credit River, 150 acres. People call it the "lungs" of Mississauga because it's a living laboratory of nature right in the city, and I can tell you that most people in Mississauga don't know it's there.

They have some great programs. One of them is called Hot Chocolate and Wild Birds, and it's for little kids. I notice that Nature Canada has a program called My Parks Pass for eighth-graders. That's also a great idea.

The difficulty is that so often, if we don't start with young children in schools, by the time they reach a certain age they don't have that interest. Their interests change and so on. But if a child doesn't have a parent or grandparent who instills in them those values, how can our plan help toward making sure that future generations do place a premium on loving nature?

Mr. Rick Bates: If I may, one of the important things is to support the leaders who are there. There are leaders in every community who take the time to take kids outdoors and teach them about camping, just to go camp in a backyard. It doesn't take much, but they need support. It's helpful for them to have support, and they're in every community across our country.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

Madame Quach, welcome to the committee. This is your first day here. You have five minutes.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

My questions are for Mr. Davidson, but you can all contribute if you feel the need.

Mr. Davidson, you said that conservation tools needed to be improved, including current environmental legislation. Do you have some concrete examples of criteria that could improve the current legislation, or features of the legislation that you would like us to examine more closely?

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Davidson: Thank you for your question.

I'm not that familiar with the legislative side. Obviously the tools are there in five or six very important environmental acts.

On tools for conservation, one of the things we try to promote within the naturalist network—and we work through provincial affiliates or provincial naturalist networks across the country—is the opportunity for sharing their various experiences and exchanging ideas, successes, and challenges. We find that practical experience to be a real opportunity to learn about the different types of tools being used across the landscape for conservation purposes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Bates or Mr. Lounds, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Bates: There is opportunity to do more creative thinking and program development in the area of market-based incentives for stewardship. There are some good examples out there, but there is tremendous opportunity as well.

Mr. John Lounds: I would echo the market-based incentives or tax policy. There are some things that can be done, although I know it's a very difficult area to move into.

A lot of the legislation that applies to conservation, certainly by private landowners and even on public land, is provincial. If there are going to be changes that way, a lot of that needs to happen there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

You all talked about making the public, especially young people, more aware, and getting the federal government involved in those types of activities. We already have national wildlife areas. Some of them offer nature observation activities or kayaking activities to make access to nature easier for the public at large. Are you in favour of local ecotourism as a way to connect people to nature? Is that a way to increase awareness?

[*English*]

Mr. John Lounds: Nature Conservancy Canada has many properties across Canada, so we run something called the conservation volunteer program. It's not just a program to get people out to look at the sites and learn about them; we actually ask them to assist us with the stewardship and conservation of those places.

Last year we had 1,000 people out on various properties across the country. We're looking to expand that type of work. We find it's a great way to connect folks in urban areas with conservation areas. For instance, we have one just north of Toronto called the Happy Valley Forest. Who wouldn't want to go to the Happy Valley Forest? It's a great place to take people to do this sort of thing.

Mr. Michael Bradstreet: But it is true that just outside London, Ontario, we also have one called Skunk's Misery.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do I still have time?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do you have any models that you can share with us? Are there conservation plans elsewhere in the world that work well, that have been and continue to be improved? Do farmers also contribute to those conservation plans?

[*English*]

Mr. Ian Davidson: There are some very interesting models, but not specifically related to what you just referred to. One that I'm particularly aware of is in the United States, and this goes back to the question about how to engage urban Canadians in nature.

In Chicago they started by making urban people aware of birds in their natural areas within the city. That evolved to become a nature initiative for all of Chicago. It involved 30 or 40 stakeholders from the government, the private sector, etc. It was phenomenally successful. I think there are huge opportunities for all of our major urban areas to appropriate some of that experience.

● (1650)

The Chair: Mr. Woodworth, you have the last five minutes.

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

Thank you, witnesses, for your efforts and information today.

I'm going to begin by just reminding the witnesses that our job as a committee is to try to come up with some general guidance for the minister. Then he's going to go forward with a consultation publicly in preparing a plan. So we are not actually going to prepare a plan, and I want all of you to keep your pencils sharpened so that you will have input when the minister is looking for it.

With that in mind, though, the question of priorities is important.

If I may, Mr. Bates, I'd like to direct a question to you. If I'm right, I think I heard you say that you or your group felt that the greatest need in conservation in Canada was in the working landscape. I am inclined to agree with that. I'm wondering if, in two minutes or less, you could tell me how you reached the conclusion that this is where the greatest need is, so that I can try to persuade the minister that this is what he should look into.

Mr. Rick Bates: Well, I think part of it is looking at the areas of greatest impact. That is typically our southern areas. They're intensively developed from an urban, agricultural, or industrial point of view. Where you have many impacts like that, it typically causes stress on wildlife.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I'm going to suggest that in addition to greatest impact, it's also the most immediate impact we're facing. Would that be a fair statement?

Mr. Rick Bates: I think that's true. Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Yes. In fact, if we could develop a model in the areas of working landscape, then it could be extended as development extends and would serve us well in the future. Would that be a correct statement?

Mr. Rick Bates: Yes, I think so. One of the advantages we have in areas that are less developed is the opportunity to do proactive planning, which would allow for quicker decisions.

Right now, when we're trying to make decisions around development or conservation in the developed landscape, there are so many interest groups and so many issues and problems that it protracts decision-making. Getting ahead of the game in the less developed areas with very good land-use planning models I think has an opportunity to minimize those kinds of problems going forward.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Actually, talking about land-use models makes it clear to me that the minister is going to need to consult heavily with provinces, because much of that is in a provincial jurisdiction.

I wanted to ask you, Mr. Davidson, about a comment in your presentation about reporting mechanisms and the "existing data management system like NatureServe", because I've heard from other witnesses that we don't even know what our privately conserved lands are. Certainly, from past experiences on the committee, I know there's a great lack of data when it comes to SARA, for example, and knowing where critical habitat is.

I would love it if we had a comprehensive way of coming up with a national reporting system that could comprehensively look at our inventory of existing natural areas. What can you tell me about NatureServe? Is that what it purports to do or is that something else altogether?

Mr. Ian Davidson: I'm certainly not an expert on NatureServe. It's an organization unto its own, I think. There are folks who would know more about it, but I guess from my perspective—and I'm not an expert on information management—it strikes me as an organization that is trying to work towards the conservation of nature and wildlife.

We need one place where we can actually go for information. Right now, we have to go to four, five, or six institutions when we need to find information to make the right decisions. If we had one place that we could actually go to—a repository or a clearing house mechanism—that would facilitate tremendously our abilities.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Your paper says "an existing data management system like NatureServe".

Mr. Ian Davidson: As an example—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: But you're telling me that NatureServe is an organization. It's not a system.

Perhaps we could hear from Mr. Bradstreet on that.

● (1655)

Mr. Michael Bradstreet: NatureServe is a partnership between the federal and the provincial and territorial governments. It is set up to track elements of biodiversity across Canada, and it's part of a western hemisphere partnership that does roll up and report on these biodiversity statuses. It has a capacity to track natural areas.

Indeed, I am engaged with the NatureServe world right now to try to establish a one-stop place where people can get information on protected areas of various status. The thing that NatureServe is still leaving out is private lands, and they are significant contributors to biodiversity conservation. So we're talking about how we can incorporate private lands into a software system that already exists.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If I had time, I'd ask you another question, but I'll catch you later.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses so much for being here.

Before we close and move to an in camera meeting, Mr. Lounds, you're aware of the travel by members of the committee. I'm going to give you an opportunity to give us a commercial for north of Calgary. Could you describe what might be a possible consideration for the committee to come up and see?

Mr. John Lounds: Certainly. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has done quite a bit of work along the eastern slopes of the Rockies in and around Calgary. We understand you're visiting a couple of places in the Calgary area in mid-May.

One of them that we would suggest is to visit the Providence Ranch. It's not maybe as good a name as Happy Valley Forest, but the Providence Ranch is a 1,000-acre conservation easement with the Kerfoot family. It's in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

We would be pleased to have the committee meet with the owner of the land. We would have some science and stewardship staff on hand to answer questions and show you around the property. You could hear from the landowner about what exactly this has meant for them and how it works.

We could also provide you with a brief presentation on other properties and the work that's going on both north and south of Calgary.

We would expect to be about three hours at the property, which is a great thing if you decide you want to have a boxed lunch. It's a wonderful place to have your lunch, sit outside—hopefully it won't be snowing that day in May—and have a great time. So wear your hiking boots.

There are different areas we can go to. Some of it could be a rigorous hike; there are some quite high ridges there, where you can see the Rockies from one side and Calgary on the other. Also, there are some lower areas for those who would rather have a more gentle visit.

I think it would be a great way for committee members to get an understanding of how these things work on the ground. We can talk about it here, but until you're actually there seeing it work, it's not quite the same thing.

The Chair: Well, thank you again, to each of the witnesses, for being here. This is very important as we consider all the testimony and in the near future work on a report.

Colleagues, we are going to suspend for a few minutes and then we will go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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