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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call to order the 70th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

We have with us today four groups as witnesses.

From the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, we have Lisa King, director, and Larry Innes, legal counsel.

From the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, we have Alison Woodley, national conservation director.

From the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, we have Ron Bonnett, president.

And from the Grain Growers of Canada, we have Richard Phillips, executive director.

Welcome to all of our witnesses today. I think you're all familiar with the process. We have a 10-minute opening round for each group. Following that, each of our committee members will have an opportunity to ask questions. First is a seven-minute round of questioning, which includes both the questions and the answers, and we'll move to a five-minute round after that. We have a two-hour meeting this morning.

We'll begin with Lisa King, director, industry relations, from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation.

Welcome, Ms. King.

Ms. Lisa King (Director, Industry Relations Corporation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation): *Edlanet'e*. Good morning.

My name is Lisa King. I'm here with my co-worker, Larry Innes. My ancestral name is Deskelni, which means “keeper of the river”. I'm a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation. We call ourselves the Denesuline people of the Dene nations in North America.

Most of our membership lives in Fort Chipewyan, a remote fly-in community 235 kilometres north of Fort McMurray, on the north shore of Lake Athabasca, where the Peace and the Athabasca rivers meet.

Our territory extends throughout the Alberta Athabasca oil sands region. It has been dramatically affected by the extensive exploration and development of the massive unconventional oil and bitumen reserves that have been under way for nearly 50 years.

Oil sands developments have been expanded dramatically over the past half decade, to over 1.7 million barrels per day. There are plans to more than double this production by 2021. This has significant implications for the habitat conservation in the region and for the aboriginal peoples who depend on the wildlife, fish, and medicines that this land provides, what we call the traditional resources.

Our first nation recognizes the importance of responsible development of these resources in our region, to Alberta and to Canada as a whole. But unlike government and corporate decision-makers in Calgary, Ottawa, Houston, Paris, and Beijing, our people are the ones who have to live with the consequences of rapid and reckless industrial expansion. ACFN members are the ones who directly experience those impacts.

For centuries, our ancestors thrived on the bountiful traditional resources of our land. Our territory, which is almost at the centre of the vast Mackenzie watershed, provided an abundance for our people. We harvested moose, caribou, and bison from massive herds. In the spring and fall we took what we needed from the delta, which even today supports one of the largest concentrations of migratory waterfowl in North America. We fished from the abundance of species in Lake Athabasca, traded with our neighbouring Dene and Cree nations, and more recently sold fur to the European fur trading companies. It is no accident that Fort Chipewyan became one of the most important posts in the North West Company's vast network and accounted for a significant portion of that company's fur business.

When Canada's commissioners for Treaty 8 came north to our territory, they observed the most extensive marshes and feeding grounds for game in all of Canada, far surpassing those in the east. Numerous surveys conducted by 20th century scientists have confirmed that our lands are, or were, among the most significant in North America in terms of quality of the wildlife habitat and the diversity of species it sustains.

It is also important to recognize that when our ancestors signed Treaty 8 over a century ago, it was at a time of massive change. The railroads had pushed west, bringing a wave of new settlers to our territory. Then, as now, government officials assured our people that our traditional livelihood would be protected, and that we would continue to live as our ancestors had always done, from the bounties of our land.

Both Canada and Alberta recognize the importance of our territory as wildlife habitat. Canada's largest national park, Wood Buffalo, was carved out of our lands in the 1920s. In the 1950s, the Government of Alberta declared much of our land to be a game preserve. These actions, even though they were intended to protect habitat, had impacts on our people. Our treaty rights were not respected, and many of our hunters were prosecuted by game officers while the hunters were trying to provide for their families.

Today we supposedly live in more enlightened times. We have a Constitution that guarantees that our aboriginal and treaty rights will be respected. Many of our young people are continuing to practise our traditions using the lands our ancestors had. We have always stewarded to nourishing not only the bodies but the spirits of our people. I am among those Denesuline who continue those same traditions throughout our lands. But in Canada and Alberta, our treaty partners are not honouring the promises that were made to our ancestors. They are failing to protect the wildlife and lands that sustain our livelihood.

● (0850)

I am here to tell you that all the things our people have experienced and endured—the closure of large parts of our territory to hunting, the establishment of a national park, the ongoing loss of productive hunting lands to settlement, the damming of the Peace River by the W.A.C. Bennett Dam, and the oil sands developments around Fort McMurray—have been nothing more than a prelude to the massive changes that industry and government have planned for our land.

My partner Larry will continue.

Mr. Larry Innes (Legal Counsel, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation): We believe it is important to inform the members of this committee, and government as a whole, about what we're seeing on the ground about the challenges for habitat conservation in this region, for there is nowhere else in the country that faces more difficult challenges. Decades of letting the market decide has resulted in the allocation of leases for development with little regard for the ecological and cultural values that are at stake.

To address this challenge, over the years, ACFN, together with industry, conservation groups, governments, and other first nations, has worked through a number of processes to develop recommendations on thresholds necessary to maintain species habitat and biodiversity within the region. Under one such process, conducted under the umbrella of the industry- and government-sponsored Cumulative Effects Management Association, or CEMA, there were recommendations that no more than 5% to 14%, at a maximum, of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo should ever be under intensive development at any one time, and that the level of disturbance outside of those intensively disturbed areas should be limited to 10% of the range of natural variability through disturbances like fire or insect outbreaks. However, currently more than 14,500 square kilometres of the entirety of the 68,000-square-kilometre regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, or 21% of the region, is either already developed or approved for development. Some 51% of the region is under lease and is subject to both ongoing exploration and future development.

It's clear that the existing development footprint has now far exceeded the CEMA recommendations for habitat. This is going to have profound impacts for wildlife, for habitat, and of course for the aboriginal people who depend on them. In effect, government and industry are ignoring their own advice. The Government of Alberta's lower Athabasca regional plan is not yet a solution, as the province has yet to develop a biodiversity framework for managing habitat outside of the small core of existing and proposed protected areas.

What we're here to say is that it's simply not possible to talk about habitat or conservation in the oil sands without taking into account the pace of development and the degree to which restoration is lagging behind development within the region.

It's somewhat shocking that in Alberta, oil companies are not actually required to restore disturbed wildlife habitat to its original state. They are permitted to return it to what is called “equivalent land capacity”, which is a much lighter standard. It's under those regulations and under that lighter standard that they remove buildings, recontour some of the disturbance, stabilize the soil, and revegetate it. But this does not mean that they are in fact returning the land to the productive wildlife capability it had before. This is particularly true in the case of wetlands, which scientists tell us take thousands of years to regenerate, where they regenerate at all. Wetlands, as you know, are incredibly important for fresh water, for water fowl habitat, and indeed for carbon storage. It is this fact that needs to be taken into account when we hear the messages from industry and the Government of Alberta. Everyone acknowledges that disturbance is taking place, yet to place our hopes in yet unproven reclamation technology is perhaps, at this point, a leap too far.

These technologies have not been proven, and there is significant scientific uncertainty about whether the equivalent land capability standard, as currently practised, will ever support future traditional uses by aboriginal people. As such, future generations have no certainty that wildlife will be protected or that harvesting traditional resources, as guaranteed under the treaties, can continue forever.

We can't, as Canadians, afford to be wrong on something like this. We need better science, we need traditional knowledge, and we need informed policy that takes into account these facts, as they are, on the ground. In more than 40 years of oil sands operations, only 48 square kilometres have been restored. This is insufficient.

We've got about one minute, so I'll just turn it over—

● (0855)

The Chair: You're over time, so could you wrap up quickly?

Ms. Lisa King: We believe the only way forward is for our people to be essential in decisions that are made about the future of this region. This is what we understand our treaty with the crown to require. The treaty is about sharing a land, but it requires the crown to honour the promises it made to us.

The ACFN takes responsibility to protect land seriously. We have our own laws and traditional teachings to guide us. We have been bringing forward our solutions to the problems that government and industry are creating but seem unwilling or unable to address. We know there are solutions to the challenges we face, but they will require government and industry to take a different approach.

The Chair: Thank you, and thank you, Mr. Innes. We're going to move now to Ms. Woodley.

If you have further comments to make, maybe you can weave them into some of the responses later on. We want to honour the time of all our witnesses today.

We're at about 11:30, so we'll move ahead.

Ms. Woodley.

Ms. Alison Woodley (National Conservation Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you very much.

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations on terrestrial habitat conservation in Canada with the committee.

My name is Alison Woodley. I'm the national conservation director at CPAWS.

CPAWS is Canada's voice for public wilderness protection. Since our creation in 1963, we've played a key role in the establishment of over two-thirds of Canada's protected areas. We have 13 regional chapters in nearly every province and territory, as well as a national office here in Ottawa, and over 50,000 active supporters across the country.

Our goal is to ensure that at least half of Canada's public lands, fresh waters, and ocean environments remain permanently wild for the public trust. We are involved in efforts to create and manage parks and protected areas and in landscape-scale conservation initiatives in all regions of the country.

Today I'd like to focus on three key points.

First, Canada needs to complete an effective network of protected areas, and this should be the cornerstone of the national conservation plan. The federal government can participate in that by completing the national parks system and by leading a nationwide effort to complete a national protected areas network.

Second, protected areas should be integrated into the sustainable management of the broader landscape through land use planning and through other landscape-scale initiatives. One example I'll speak to is the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement.

Third, the national conservation plan should enable progress on conservation in all regions of Canada by supporting a suite of tools and approaches. For example, the tools that are needed on the 10% of Canada that is private land are different from the tools and approaches that work in the 90% of Canada that is public land. We need to support a full suite of tools to ensure that our national conservation plan and our habitat conservation efforts work in all regions of the country.

But I'd like to start by just making a few remarks about why habitat conservation matters.

Habitat conservation is about protecting life. It's about protecting the full diversity of life on earth, the very life support system of the planet.

Biodiversity provides fundamental services to people, like clean drinking water. It decomposes our waste, pollinates our crops, and buffers us from natural disasters. It provides medicine, food, clothing, building materials, and much, much more. It supports our health, our cultures, our economy. Biodiversity provides significant economic benefits from both ecosystem services and the nature-based tourism industry that relies on it.

The Northwest Territories protected areas strategy, which I was involved with for many years, has a motto that says, "The land takes care of us, we take care of the land". To me, this captures the essence of why habitat conservation and protected areas are so important. If we want the land to take care of us, we must take care of the land.

The primary threat to biodiversity, both globally and in Canada, is habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Action to protect and restore habitat is fundamental to conserving biodiversity, to conserving the life support system of the planet.

Yet, in spite of all of our efforts today, Canada and indeed the world's biodiversity continues to decline. It's clear that we need to do more.

So what do we need to do?

I'm going to comment here on a few of the elements we need to do, not the full, comprehensive suite of everything we need to do, but the elements that we're involved with particularly.

There is agreement around the world, including by major international institutions, that protected areas are the cornerstone of conservation efforts. The World Bank said: "An ecologically-representative, diversified and well-managed protected areas system is the most effective way to safeguard biodiversity."

While we have many spectacular parks and protected areas in Canada, and while our system does continue to grow, we still don't have an adequate protected areas system in place. There are many gaps. Less than 10% of our land in Canada is protected, and most of our protected areas are far too small and isolated to effectively protect healthy ecosystems.

We need to accelerate our efforts. There are opportunities, moving forward, and as we move forward, we really should be considering other potential models of protected areas. We need to incorporate our protected private lands and, in particular, indigenous protection models into our suite of tools that we recognize and pull into our reporting.

● (0900)

Australia has done a good job of integrating private and indigenous conserved lands into its national reserve system, and I think there is huge opportunity to do something similar here in Canada. There is lots of potential to accelerate our work on protected areas. There are national park proposals in the Northwest Territories, Labrador, B.C., Nova Scotia, and Nunavut. There are six national wildlife areas proposed and being worked on in the Northwest Territories and several territorial protected areas under consideration there as well. In Quebec and Ontario there are commitments to protect at least half of the northern territories. Manitoba, Quebec, and Nova Scotia are actively creating significant new protected areas. Getting these over the finish line and achieving this potential will depend on political will and on having adequate resources to complete the protected areas.

Accelerating our efforts to complete an effective nationwide network should be the cornerstone of a national conservation plan. Last year CPAWS recommended—and we continue to recommend—that setting a target of protecting 20% of our land by 2020 is both ambitious and achievable.

While protected areas are crucial, we know they alone will not be enough to achieve biodiversity conservation. Sustainably managing the working landscape is critical to ensure that wide-ranging species can move between protected areas and to enable plants and animals to shift in response to changing conditions. This connectivity will become more and more important in the face of a changing climate. Land-use planning is an important tool that can bring together protected areas and sustainable management of the working landscape.

An innovative project that we're involved with, which contributes to conservation of the working landscape and brings the protected areas and working landscape together on public lands, is the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement. CPAWS is a partner in the CBFA, which covers a massive area of land—72 million hectares—under tenure to members of the Forest Products Association of Canada. Through the CBFA, CPAWS and our partners are working with the forest industry to develop protected areas and caribou conservation plans and to strengthen industry conservation practices. We are working with aboriginal communities, with provincial governments, and with mayors in various regions of the boreal forest. Our aim is to find solutions that address both conservation and economic goals, and to implement these solutions on the land.

Other projects we're involved with that bring together protected areas and the working landscape include the Forest Stewardship Council certification program, and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, which works to conserve the natural heritage of the western mountain landscape.

I'd like to make a few comments about using the right tools in the right places. Canada is a vast and diverse country, geographically and culturally, and different conservation tools and approaches are needed in different parts of the country. For example, land trusts, private stewardship initiatives, and programs like eco gifts are very important conservation tools in southern Canada, where there's a high percentage of privately owned land and a dense population.

As you move further north, into the 90% of Canada that is public land, different tools are needed. In the middle of Canada, where much of the landscape is allocated to resource harvesting, protected areas and land use planning combine with habitat protection under the Species at Risk Act, and initiatives like the CBFA and forest practices certification systems are important to tackle habitat conservation challenges.

Further north still, in the territories and the northern portions of many provinces, landscapes are still largely intact, but large-scale development proposals are very quickly emerging. In these areas there is an urgent need to identify and protect important conservation areas in advance of development. Conservation in these areas is often led by indigenous peoples and linked to land claim agreements. Land use planning and protected areas are key habitat conservation tools. A few examples include land use planning that's going on in the Dehcho and Sahtu regions of the Northwest Territories, land use plans led by the Innu of Labrador, the Northwest Territories protected areas strategy, and the establishment of large provincial protected areas proposed by indigenous communities in northern Quebec and Manitoba.

I'd like to end with just a few recommendations.

Specific recommendations for federal action that we're making include first of all completing Canada's network of protected areas. The federal government's role includes completing the national parks system and the six national wildlife areas currently proposed in the NWT and making sure existing parks and protected areas are well resourced and managed to protect their ecological integrity. The federal government can also play a role in leading this nationwide effort to complete an effective network of protected areas.

● (0905)

We also need to link protected areas in the working landscape, and the federal government can play an important role by supporting regional land use planning; supporting collaborative landscape-scale initiatives like the CBFA; maintaining a strong effective federal Species at Risk Act; implementing the boreal woodland caribou recovery strategy across the country; and leading the development of a nation-wide ecosystem health monitoring and reporting program linked to our protected areas system so that Canadians can better understand the conditions of wildlife habitat in Canada.

With that, I'll wrap it up. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Woodley.

We're going to move now to Ron Bonnett, from the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

Mr. Ron Bonnett (President, Canadian Federation of Agriculture): Thank you, and thanks for the invitation to come and present to your committee.

As mentioned, my name is Ron Bonnett. In addition to being president of the CFA, I'm an active farmer near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

CFA has been long involved with a number of environmental initiatives, whether it be species at risk or the national conservation plan that's been announced. We have been supportive of the whole concept of developing a national conservation plan. That plan has to be based on the whole concept of sustainability that looks at economic, social, and environmental components in order that it be effective.

Canadian agriculture, in perspective, is a strong economic driver in the Canadian economy. We participate with 8% of the GDP, and we're the third-largest contributor to GDP after the finance sector and non-food manufacturing. One in eight Canadian jobs depends on agriculture, and our trade export has gone up to $40.3 billion in 2011, up 271%. Farmers now produce two times the output with only half the resources that we had in 1961. With respect to value added, it's 34% higher than it was in the previous five-year average.

I'm going to switch this around and put some of our recommendations right up front. The first is to ease the real and perceived regulatory burden that the species at risk and migratory bird acts place on private landowners. Second, focus on the management of critical habitat—"protected" is a result, not a state. Third, take steps to allow innovative and effective conservation and stewardship programs to thrive in the Species At Risk Act. Fourth, the national conservation plan should enhance the value placed on habitat by promoting innovative incentive programs for ecological goods and services. Finally, we need to complete the development of compensation regulations to really drive results.

Where does agriculture fit into this? Habitat in agriculture is part of a multi-faceted agricultural landscape. We're a major component of Canada's working landscape. We have 64.8 million hectares—7% of the farm land. I think when it comes to habitat protection, we bat above our weight, because a lot of those critters, we like to call them, love that interaction between the farm and the forest. They use agricultural land as part of the landscape they work on.

Agriculture provides this important habitat—550 species of terrestrial vertebrates utilize agricultural land. If you look at species at risk, over 220 species of terrestrial vertebrates on agricultural land are assessed as high risk nationally. What we need to look at with any national conservation plan is how to lever up this private land to get results for habitat protection.

That raises the question of how habitat is protected in agriculture now.

There are a number of federal and provincial agriculture department programs. Thirty-five percent of farms have developed an environmental farm plan; 74,000 farms—or 50% of the agricultural land—are covered by these plans. These plans go into looking at habitat protection and where your species are, trying to come up with solutions for those. Ninety-four percent of the farms with an environmental farm plan have implemented the beneficial management practices. There are a number of different programs in place. Alternative land use services programs in P.E.I and Manitoba are taking a look at how we can drive incentives in different regions.

We have the Environment Canada habitat stewardship program, which is in place to help drive stewardship initiatives.

With regard to conservation groups and programs, there are a number of partnerships that have been developed. I mentioned ALUS—alternate land use services. We have Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Wildlife Habitat Canada, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Cows and Fish—a number of different programs where farmers and other groups are finding common ground to meet some of the objectives of habitat protection. Some municipalities as well have local incentives to try to encourage different types of habitat protection.

● (0910)

The state of habitat, though, on agricultural land has declined in the last number of years. Part of that is driven by factors outside of agriculture, perhaps some land that was in pasture land before has gone into crop land, mainly because of economics. I think one of the things we have to look at when we're looking at putting programs in place is how we can make sure the incentive is there to encourage habitat protection.

One of the big challenges in conserving habitat on agricultural land is that most productive agricultural land coincides with areas of high biodiversity. The value for this land in production means that natural and semi-natural land moves to agricultural production, leading to loss of landscape. So we need to take a look at the economic aspect of it.

How can the national conservation plan improve habitat conservation efforts on private land? I think one of the quick ways is to ease the real and perceived regulatory burden that environmental legislation places on private land owners. Prohibitions on crucial habitat on private land for federal species should not be automatic, but should only occur after a consultation with landowners. The real focus behind that is to see if there are management practices that can be used to address the need, as opposed to an outright ban. It's fair to say, too, as a farmer, that if you come in with a regulation, there is immediately a pushback, but if you come in with a partnership, with an incentive, there's a willingness to try to cooperate.

Focus on the management of Canadian critical habitat. I made the statement to you before that "protected" is a result, not a state. I think all too often we start looking at specific items within habitat protection as to what the perceived result is that we want and how we get there.

We need to take steps to allow innovative and effective conservation and stewardship programs to thrive in the Species At Risk Act. Currently the terms “protection” and “effective protection” of critical habitat are not clearly defined. There's a lack of a definition for these terms, which impedes farmers, conservation groups, and governments from developing compliant stewardship programs. Once defined, existing programs—for example, environmental farm plans—could become species-at-risk compliant. We could build that in to the whole process. In the United States, they have the ability to develop conservation agreements with assurances to bring regulatory certainty to farmers, so that they know what they're facing.

The national conservation plan should promote innovative incentive programs for ecological goods and services to enhance the conservation value of habitat. By enhancing effective government programs like habitat stewardship programs, you will drive success and stimulate public-private and private-private partnerships between conservation groups and landowners. Modest amounts of government funding can incent tremendous conservation outcomes from conservation groups.

The final point would be to complete the development of compensation regulations. That focus should not necessarily be on compensating for lost land, but it should develop an appropriate compensation framework for incentives that guide landscape-based conservation programs. By guiding those programs, we get the outcomes we want without having to set aside all of the land.

That brings me to the conclusion of my comments. Again, going back to the first statement, there are five key points: ease the real and perceived regulatory burden; focus on management of critical habitat; take steps to allow innovative and effective conservation and stewardship programs; enhance value placed on habitat by promoting innovative incentive programs; and complete the development of compensation regulations.

Thank you.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Bonnett. You have a full minute left.

I just want to point out to the committee that if you weren't following the outline that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture gave you, please make sure you refer to it. There are some excellent points in print for you to get back to later.

We're going to go now to Mr. Phillips, from the Grain Growers of Canada.

Welcome, Mr. Phillips.

Mr. Richard Phillips (Executive Director, Grain Growers of Canada): I'll just draw everyone's attention to the handout we have, with some photos. There were some captions, but unfortunately I didn't have time to get them all translated, so I will just speak to the actual photos.

The Chair: I just figured you assumed that we wouldn't be able to read that well, Mr. Phillips. Thank you for the pictures. We enjoy them.

Mr. Richard Phillips: That's not the case for all members, but thank you for your honesty, Mr. Chair.

My name is Richard Phillips. I am with the Grain Growers of Canada.

In the first photo you'll see the smiling family with the children. This is Franck Groeneweg. Franck farms just outside of Regina, Saskatchewan, about three hours south of where my farm is.

Franck is originally from France. He comes from south of Paris, actually. Franck is a farmer with 7,500 acres to put in, in the spring, and 7,500 acres to take off in the fall.

Franck is a very modern farmer. He uses the most modern technologies and crops and machinery available to farm in as environmentally friendly and sustainable a way as possible.

The next photo there is a picture of a field. I just want to touch on some things there and point out some stuff to you. This is a half section, which is 120 acres, so it's one mile long and half a mile wide. And 283 acres are zero till. Zero till means that Franck just goes in and seeds directly and doesn't move the soil around, cultivating or working it up to control weeds.

That 283 acres you see is carbon sequestration. He has 37 acres, or about 11% of the land, set aside for wildlife conservation.

This is what a lot of farmers will do. I think you'll find most farmers, where there is a chance to preserve some habitat and farm efficiently, will do so.

There are some small lines indicated. This is where the water has been running across the field, and he's seeded some grass in there. When you seed the grass in there, you just go through with your machinery. You just lift your machinery up as you go over top of it and then you drop it down again. That allows you to go almost a full mile with your machinery.

Today's machines are much larger than the farm machinery we used to have. You simply can't be turning around the way we did when we used to farm, in and around all the potholes and all the slough. So most farmers have cleaned up their land to have these long runs, because they make efficient use of their machinery and their time.

In total, of Franck's 7,500 acres, he has just over 900 acres set aside for environmental purposes. Zero tillage, with less soil disturbance, provides for wildlife habitat conservation.

On the next page there is some stuff on Ducks Unlimited I want to go through with you. There is a partnership that we, as farmers, work with very carefully across Canada. It's not just on the prairies.

There is a photo here of what winter wheat stubble looks like. If you plant winter wheat in the winter, wheat stubble will trap snow through the winter, and in the spring you don't have to work the soil at all because the wheat just regenerates and comes up. That allows the wildlife to nest in there. There is a photo of an egg in a plant providing nesting cover for ducks there.

On the next page you'll see the eggs again. If you look closely, you can actually see a duck sitting in the wheat field there, in the photo on page 8.

That's the sort of stuff you get if you can avoid working your fields at all in the spring, but that's not reality for a lot of farmers because we don't have winter canola that we can plant in the fall, and we don't have a lot of winter crops, and even for winter wheat there is a limit to how many acres you can grow in there, because of winter hardiness, as you go further north.

There are also other things we do with Ducks Unlimited, such as delayed hay cuts, for example. If you have a forage crop and you leave it a little bit longer, there is a chance for the ducks to hatch out of their eggs and get back to the water before the hay is cut.

Those are the sorts of things we do. Again, it's an economic partnership with Ducks Unlimited.

The last photo is just of the ducks. I just want to say that farmers do like being good stewards of our land; we do like habitat, and we do like having water fowl and wildlife around.

As Mr. Bonnett mentioned, though, we need partnerships with society, because there are some areas in which society can play a role in helping us protect that land. He mentioned the ALUS program. You'll hear more about that on Thursday from Doug Chorney, from Keystone Agricultural Producers, with which society has partnered to preserve land and set it aside.

I also want to bring back a reality. I want to go back to this picture of the field and tell you a true story about some land I bought three years ago. Looking at how we can drive the tractor almost a mile up and down, I bought some land, and it had a lot of bigger trees and potholes. I could not find a single farmer to farm that land for me, because there was no place he could even drive a half a mile without turning the big machinery around.

All the farmers said, “I'm sorry, but even if you give it to me for free, I'm not going to farm it, because I don't like that much overlap in my chemicals and my fertilizers and my seed. It's just not worth the trouble, time, and hassle.”

● (0920)

We cleared off a bunch of the bush on the land so that people could make a half-mile run. Now, we did leave places for wildlife at the sides, but the reality today is that I see a lot of tree rows being knocked down so that people can make those longer runs. Just for the reality and the economics of farming, that's what's happening. I see this a lot in Ontario.

We did leave some bush, and I have some bees on my land, but at the end of the day, in order to allow farming to continue commercially, I couldn't find anybody to do it unless I did some clearing of land. That's the reality of what we face as farmers.

We want to be good stewards. If we can work with society in general to set aside more land for preservation, that's great.

Thank you very much. I look forward to the questions and some open discussion.

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

Thanks to all our witnesses.

We're going to move now to the opening round of seven minutes each. We're going to begin with Mr. Sopuck.

Go ahead, Mr. Sopuck.

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

Thanks to our witnesses for being here.

Ms. Woodley, what is your definition of “protected area”? What exactly do you mean by that?

Ms. Alison Woodley: At CPAWS, and in Canada generally, we endorse the international definition for a protected area that's put forward under the convention on biodiversity and the IUCN, which has various elements. It's an area that is managed to protect biodiversity as a first priority.

It recognizes that there are many other benefits but that the management of nature, or the protection of nature, has to be the first priority. It has an element that says there needs to be a clearly defined area, so there need to be lines on a map of what area it includes. It needs to be protected in the long term. Those are the kinds of elements that are part of that definition, so we use that.

We also clarify. Because there can be discussions about what that means, at CPAWS we also have a clear definition that it's an area where there is no industrial development—no commercial forestry, no oil and gas exploration or development, no mining, no major hydro, that kind of thing.

● (0925)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: In your comment about the World Bank, in talking about managed areas, I think this is an important point to make. You used the phrase that these areas are managed for biodiversity. We know that some kinds of forestry, such as commercial forestry, for example, can be used as a tool to enhance biodiversity. Don't you think that's kind of an artificial distinction to make when the actual goal is the conservation of biodiversity? What does it matter if it's commercial forestry or not? The whole point is biodiversity conservation.

I have come from the forest industry myself. Well-managed second-growth forests are incredibly diverse in terms of the wildlife they support.

Ms. Alison Woodley: Yes, and obviously sustainable management of the broader landscape is absolutely important, and the forest industry plays an important role, but the protected areas are areas that are set aside from that level of impact. The forest industry recognizes as well the importance of protected areas. The Forest Stewardship Council certification has a methodology to identify protected areas within it. For example, one of the goals of the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement is to jointly identify areas that should be set aside as protected areas.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: One of the things under the Species at Risk Act, given its regulatory nature, or at least parts of it, Ms. Woodley, is that it potentially makes habitat for endangered species on the private landscape a liability to the private landowner. Don't you think we should be looking at this so that endangered species habitat on the private landscape could be considered an asset to the landowner?

Ms. Alison Woodley: CPAWS works on public land. That's our niche, so we're not involved in private land as much. I will defer that question; however, I think that.... Well, I'll just defer the question.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Again, Ms. Woodley, in terms of conservation agreements with private industry under SARA, for example, to conserve habitat for endangered species, the problem with those agreements under SARA is that these industrial proponents, even though they enter into good faith conservation agreements and do all the right things for endangered species in their areas, are still liable if something happens to an individual of that species.

There is a push to indemnify them from this so that they will even more eagerly embrace the notion of conservation agreements. Would you recommend that we go in that direction?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Well, my understanding is that yes, the act certainly enables the signing of conservation agreements, both for that kind of voluntary stewardship initiative and for those under the permit section of the act. One of the challenges we see is that those stewardship tools, those tools to actually implement the act, have not been fully elaborated on.

The policy frameworks, the regulatory frameworks, haven't been created. There's a whole suite of tools for implementing the act that were envisioned in the design of the act, and they really aren't being fully used. There's a lot of work to be done to actually make those more usable and the act more implementable, using the tools that will incent people and help people to actually meet the requirements of the act.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's not quite my point.

The point is that current legal advice is that no matter what a proponent does in terms of a conservation agreement.... The white sturgeon is a particular example. If an individual of that species is somehow harmed in spite of all the conservation work, the proponent is liable. The problem is that it makes them reluctant to enter into these agreements.

Mr. Bonnett, I'd like you to elaborate on the bobolink issue in Ontario. I know it's particularly vexing for producers there, given that they are creating the habitat for this SARA-listed species. Again, the regulatory approach has the potential to really inhibit their farming operations.

Could you elaborate on that one?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Yes.

There were changes proposed for bobolink protection that would almost make it a crime to do any damage to the habitat. It goes against the economic side of farming. A lot of the harvesting of the hay and the harvesting of alfalfa, in particular, has to be done when it's at its prime state to get the maximum economic value. The issue is that when you're harvesting for hay, you could be damaging the bobolink at the time of nesting. The regulatory system doesn't really take a look at how to solve the problem. The reality is that solving the problem would be delaying the harvest of that crop or putting some other types of management processes in place.

I'd even go back to our own farm. We have livestock, and we set up a rotational grazing system where we have 30 different paddocks that we rotate the cattle through. At any given time during the year we've got all kinds of different habitat there at different stages. What we've seen is a lot more wildlife within that landscape. If you have a system that encourages late harvesting, maybe with an incentive program to do that, or encourages rotational grazing, which may require fencing and a watering system, that actually drives the result, as opposed to putting a regulatory system in place and hoping that solves the problem.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonnett.

Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

We'll move now to Madame Quach.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank everyone for being here today.

My first questions are for Ms. Woodley, regarding parks.

You said that one of the cornerstone actions would consist in creating an effective network of protected areas, in places like national parks, marine areas and so on.

I asked the Library of Parliament to look into this for me. According to the document I received, in the latest Conservative budget, the funding for a number of species protection programs will decline over the next few years, thus putting habitat conservation at risk.

For instance, according to the table, the funding for the biodiversity program for wildlife and habitat was $139.4 million in 2011-12, while the forecast spending for 2015-16 is $84.6 million. So we are talking about a reduction of $50 million in funding for biodiversity and wildlife initiatives.

I can give you another example. The expenditures for heritage resource conservation—which is directly related to Parks Canada—were $172 million, but they will be $154 million in 2015-16.

How do you think this could jeopardize habitats?

[*English*]

Ms. Alison Woodley: Thank you.

CPAWS has expressed our concerns about the impact of the cuts, particularly to Parks Canada, which is the one I'm most familiar with. In particular, this applies to the cuts to the ecological science and monitoring program. Parks Canada has built one of the best monitoring systems to monitor the health of ecosystems anywhere in the world. It's recognized around the world and has been adopted by other countries. But it does require resources. In this, the impact of the cutbacks was that about one-third of the scientists and the technical capacity were lost from that program. We are concerned that it will not be able to be implemented. We think it's unfortunate because it is such a world-leading program, and it's really an effective program. In fact, a year and a half ago *The Globe and Mail* talked about it as Canada's latest export, this ecosystem monitoring program that Parks Canada had built. Then a year later a significant amount of the funding was gone.

So it is a concern to us. We are concerned that without being able to measure in our national parks, specifically measure the state of the ecosystems and keep track of that over the long term, it's going to be very hard to have the early warning signals that are needed to be able to address the problem. It's much more difficult to address them the longer you wait. It's much more efficient to address the ecological challenges and take action if you catch the problem early. Yes, it is a concern.

[*Translation*]

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

I have another question for you, concerning a report published in 2009.

Earlier, you talked about the Species at Risk Act, which was heavily criticized by environmental groups. You said that there was no problem with the act itself, but rather with its enforcement.

Do you have any explanations or specific examples of what is not used or enforced to adequately protect species at risk?

● (0935)

[*English*]

Ms. Alison Woodley: I mentioned one of them a few minutes ago, which was that the kinds of policy frameworks and regulatory frameworks that were envisioned, that are needed to implement some of the tools in the act, like conservation agreements, are not fully there. The other example, which was mentioned by my colleague here, is the compensation mechanisms. The act actually does include the ability to develop a compensation mechanism, but that hasn't been developed, so it's not happening.

Clearly, regulatory measures should include programs that enable people to meet those requirements, that incent people to meet those requirements and help them to do that. One of the weaknesses in the implementation is that those tools that were envisioned in the act have not been adequately taken advantage of and really elaborated on and applied so that people are able to meet the requirements.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Okay.

In your presentation, you talked about models that can be used to protect lands—including private and indigenous lands. You mentioned Australia. Could you elaborate on what we could apply here, in Canada?

[*English*]

Ms. Alison Woodley: Australia has recognized that parks and protected areas are not just the venue of governments. In many countries, the protected areas are considered government protected areas, federal state and provincial government protected areas. What Australia has done is they've built a framework that brings all of the efforts to protect lands together under one common framework, with clear goals and targets. Then they've set up a funding mechanism at the national level, so that if you meet the requirements under the plan, basically you can apply for resources. There's a kind of round table mechanism where all the interests are brought together and guide this work.

They have included in their protected area system, for example, private lands that are under long-term protection measures, which could be land trusts, those kinds of mechanisms. They've also brought in indigenous conservation areas under the same framework. That I think has a great deal of potential in Canada. I've heard presentations by several first nations who are entrusted to protect lands, to have that as part of this network of protected lands, and to be counted as such.

I think if we can start to explore what that might look like and how we might incorporate it into our accounting mechanisms.... Right now we count how much protected area and land we have under the IUCN categories through a mechanism called CARTS, which is the conservation areas reporting and tracking system. It's run by Environment Canada and the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas. There's been some work done. That's quite new.

We've done better at that accounting, but we could do better. We could broaden the scope of what we bring in under that umbrella. I think it would help to encourage more land conservation in ways that work for those who want to conserve their lands and also help us get to our targets.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Woodley, and Madame Quach, *merci beaucoup*.

We're now moving to Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Thank you. I'm going to give Mr. Sopuck one minute of my time to follow up.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Ms. Woodley, you made the point that there are no incentive programs under SARA. I'm pretty sure that's what you said. Just to correct the record, under SARA there is the habitat stewardship program. It's about $15 million a year. It's been going for about a decade now. That has generated, you would agree, real conservation results. I have a number of landowners in my own area who are beneficiaries of that. So to say that there is no incentive program in place is really not accurate, is it?

Ms. Alison Woodley: If I said that, I certainly didn't mean there are no incentive programs in place. I think there are tools within the act that have not been fully elaborated and could help to better support work under the act. So, absolutely, the habitat stewardship fund and other incentive programs do exist, but we can also do more under the act.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Woodley.

Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is to the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation representatives. Thank you for coming here today. We're interested in looking at habitat conservation programs and methodologies that first nations are carrying out.

Are there any examples of programming within your area that you carry out, and how do you partner with other local agencies?

Ms. Lisa King: We've recently developed one. It's led by one of our elders, Mr. Pat Marcel. We call it our bison and caribou stewardship plan. I would say it was ACFN-led. We've been sharing it with Alberta, with Canadian representatives, and with industry partners in our area. It's to map out the areas we see as critical habitat for those two species, the bison and the caribou.

We'd be pleased to share these with anyone interested. It'll show you some of the tools, the areas.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great.

What methodology do you employ in gathering...? We've heard from other witnesses of the challenge in actually looking at species' ranges and gathering the data needed to come up with conservation plans, mapping out their migratory pathways, and all these sorts of things. There's a wide variety of ways to achieve this result. We've heard from other witnesses that we should also be including indigenous first nations knowledge in these. Perhaps you could speak a little to the methodology you used within that.

Ms. Lisa King: Most of it was based on harvesting and where our nation members have traditionally used those resources, so where there have been known herds of the caribou and the bison. There's an area called Ronald Lake. It's not far from our reserve land, called Poplar Point, which is along the Athabasca River.

Members tell us where they are out on the land. It's intensive interviewing of what they're doing on the land, what species they're harvesting. They also tell us what the habitat looks like. The Ronald Lake herd.... It's a beautiful, rich habitat for a large herd of bison, about 150 species in there, 150 members of the bison. Right now, the area is under proposed development. There is a company that is proposing to mine out huge areas of their habitat. We create these stewardship plans to inform members such as you to take a break and really look at protecting this species. These are species that are important to ACFN—and surrounding communities, not just ACFN.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you very much,

I'm going to go down to Mr. Bonnett. In your brief you spoke a bit about the terms “protection” and “effective protection” of critical habitat, that they need to be defined. You talked about the lack of definition.

Could you speak to why you think there's a gap, how you or your organization would define this, and why?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: It boils down to looking at things for the long term. When you have a term like “protection”, that almost creates the impression that it's an outright ban on any damage to habitat. If you look at something like effective protection, that, in our mind, would mean that you're taking steps over the long run to protect habitat.

I'll give you an example that's sort of related. The government took action on it about a year ago with respect to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. One of the things we do in agriculture is put drainage systems in to drain excess water off agricultural land. Those drains are installed over a period of time, but they have to be maintained about every 15 years. If you take the term “protected”, when you go in to do drain maintenance, you're actually destroying habitat, and you're going to destroy some of the fish that are in that small stream in the short term. But if you look at the broad term, the fact is that you're maintaining that; you're creating ongoing habitat. The fact that you have a management plan, that you do maintenance and construction over a period of time at any one time, again, means you have habitat protected.

Getting definitions around those terms gives confidence that the things you're doing are looking at the long-term goal as opposed to one short-term event.

● (0945)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: We have heard other witnesses talk about the need to look at a whole ecosystem approach to managing species rather than just a single species. That might be a gap in some of our current policies. It's been a constant theme, regardless of the witness group.

If we were looking at that approach as a best practice, could you talk about how you could, or if you could, incorporate the concept of a working landscape within the whole ecosystem management for species approach?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think it would be fairly simple to incorporate. As I mentioned we have had great success in developing environmental farm plans on farms, where we step back and take a look at all the environmental issues. If habitat protection were included as part of that, you could put a long-range plan together.

One of the things I should mention that needs to be addressed is making sure that when we enter into long-term agreements...they have to be long term. These aren't three-year or five-year things. These are 20-year things we're moving into, and I think there has to be confidence of programming support and a regulatory framework that incents people to enter into those types of agreements.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

We'll now move to Ms. Duncan for seven minutes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses. It's been very interesting, and we appreciate your time and effort.

Ms. Woodley, one of the questions we've been asked to address is best management practices and stewardship initiatives, compared to prescriptive government-mandated measures.

You mentioned SARA, and that we need a strong SARA, so I'm going to focus on SARA.

When we compare stewardship initiatives with government-mandated measures, what are the most relevant end points, performance measures, we should be comparing, given that the objective is species recovery?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I think the relevant end point is species recovery, as the status is the state of the species and the recovery progress in recovering that species.

I think to look at which is best is perhaps not the right way. In our view, we need both. We need both the regulatory framework to set the bar on what's needed and to set the standard in a consistent standard. Then you do absolutely need those incentives and those mechanisms in place to facilitate getting there and to make sure those who are affected are able to do what's required.

Our sense is that there are good examples of how SARA is working in that way. Just to give you one example, the recovery strategy for boreal woodland caribou, which was released last October, is a real example of progress. This strategy tackles the needs of one of Canada's most wide-ranging and sensitive species. It was developed in collaboration with eight other jurisdictions, affected aboriginal communities, a broad range of stakeholders, and thousands of Canadians. It's not perfect, but it's already making a difference.

There are provinces across the country who proactively began to develop action plans for caribou in anticipation of that recovery strategy coming out, which was required under the regulatory framework. The forest industry and environmental groups under the CBFA are using the science that was developed by the federal government to inform that recovery strategy. We're using it on the ground to plan.

I think that's an example where that regulatory framework has incented progress across the country. We've managed to get out this very complex recovery strategy, and now we're starting to work on implementing it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thanks, Ms. Woodley. That would be a good case study for the report.

With respect to these performance measures, could you tell me the best possible study design that would allow us to infer the comparative effectiveness of the two types of instruments?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I think you need a scientist to design your study, so I don't really have an answer to that question.

Obviously a scientific approach would be good and a rigorous model of looking at the various options. Again, I think there is lots of evidence that we need both of those, at least case-study-type evidence. I don't think the data has been collated on the other, but I may be wrong. I don't know. I can't answer the question.

● (0950)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That's what I wanted to ask. Has any such study been conducted? If not, how far away from this ideal design are the studies that have been conducted?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I can't answer. In my inbox I actually have a suite of studies that somebody shared with me, and I wish I'd had the chance to read them because it might have helped me to answer the question. I will look at them and I'll share them if they're applicable. I'm not sure exactly whether they tackle that question or not.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

With such evidence, probably at best there is weak inference.

Ms. Alison Woodley: My sense is that there is not a lot of evidence that looks at that question currently. I'm sure you may be able to design a study. I'm not sure what it would look like, but right now on the table again the question may be looking at two complementary.... These are complementary strategies, I would say, that need to go together, and that would be how we would look at it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Exactly, and anything we'd do we would like to be evidence-based.

Ms. Alison Woodley: Absolutely.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: In your view, to what extent have the habitat provisions of SARA succeeded, say, on a scale from zero, being dismal failure, to 10, being a real success, and on what evidence would your conclusion be based?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I'm not going to put a number on it because, again, I'm not confident enough in my analysis to be able to put a number on it.

Obviously, habitat protection is critical. We know that for over 80% of species at risk, their key risk is habitat, so protecting habitat is going to be the solution to that, and restoring habitat.

There are examples where it is working. The act is a decade old, but it takes a long time to recover a species, so we're not going to see instant results. In some cases, some species recover faster than others, and there have been some success stories, but it's a long haul. We're only just getting to the point where recovery strategies are identifying critical habitat, and we need to move on to action planning so that that translates the critical habitat measures to the ground.

We are getting there. We are making progress, important progress, and we're accelerating the rate at which recovery strategies are being developed, but we need to get them done and we need to get to action planning, and that requires concerted effort. That's where we're really going to see the habitat protection measures for many species playing out and the species recovering.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Should the act be implemented or streamlined?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Our sense is that the key challenges with the act are in implementation, and we're recommending that this be the focus moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Thank you, Ms. Duncan and Ms. Woodley.

We'll move now to Monsieur Choquette for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank all the witnesses who are here today.

Last week, we heard from another first nations group, which provided us with a very relevant and interesting testimony. They said that, before conservation work can begin, we first need to agree on what habitat conservation is. The meaning of conservation could vary from one group to another.

It's important to see that there is a difference between private and public lands. We also need to see what those lands are used for. That changes our view of what habitat conservation should be.

In particular, you talked about the Athabasca River and your region. Could you give us some recommendations on what must be done to ensure adequate conservation of your land and habitat? For instance, you talked about how quickly the expansion of oil sand extraction is occurring, compared with how quickly habitat is being restored. You also talked about the fact that, following restoration, the habitat is no longer what it used to be.

You may go ahead and answer.

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa King: We've been working with industry and government for about three years now. We want to create what we call a traditional land and resource management plan. What that will do for our land, our traditional territories, is map out where it is that ACFN members are using the land, what they are using the land for, and what they are harvesting—plants, berries, moose, caribou. It will map out what that is and the health of those resources as well.

First you do a mapping exercise to find out what we're doing on the land, where those traditional resources are, and how we can protect the health of them. But it's really challenging. We've been doing this for three years, trying really hard, and we haven't had much support in developing this. We can share with you our proposal. We've shared it with other federal departments that were ready, so we can share it with any of you as well. But that's the first step, to map out what it is that ACFN members are using the land for, those traditional resources. Then, over time, you monitor them. You check their health over the years.

We know emissions are a huge risk to the health of those resources. Not only is the water flowing from the Athabasca Rive, and the effluent going into that water is impacting those resources, but what is the change in those resources over time? Development is not going to go away, but shouldn't we get a handle on how existing development is affecting those resources now, before we approve more projects? Shouldn't we determine the health of those resources, those berries that our people eat, those plants that we need? Before we keep going with, yes, more development, let's hold on here. Let's take a look at what exactly is the health of those resources.

The first thing, for sure, is to develop that traditional land and resource management plan. That's what we would like to do.

● (0955)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much for your recommendation.

Is there anything you would like to add, sir?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Innes: If I might add to that, as Lisa has pointed out, the intent is not only to map where the resources are, but also, and I think this is the critical point, to establish thresholds or limits that we can then monitor against performance, to ensure that the values we're trying to sustain—whether they be livelihoods for indigenous people, whether they be clean air and water for all of us—are actually maintained. Then we can challenge industry and governments to basically exercise stewardship within those thresholds and create the opportunities for innovation with new technologies, to create better and more effective regulatory mechanisms that are directed towards stewarding those thresholds as goals, and appropriately incentivize industry to perform against those measures.

We think that is the most effective way going forward, particularly in a region that is under tremendous pressure, such as the Athabasca Chipewyan territory.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Monsieur Choquette.

We'll move now to Mr. Lunney.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Thanks to everybody for your contributions on a fascinating and important discussion.

I want to pick up on the discussion about Australia. Some of my colleagues got in ahead of me on this particular thing. I'll make my question brief on this.

When did Australia adopt this management plan for protected areas of various types? Has it been in place long enough to be able to evaluate how well it's working?

Ms. Alison Woodley: That's a good question. I don't have a precise date for you because I haven't looked at it for a few months. It's in the last decade that they have adopted a strategic plan going forward under this framework. They've done a number of interesting things. It is at the strategy state. It is starting to be implemented; there's funding in place for it, so it is moving forward. I don't have an exact answer to how successful it's been so far. I'm sure they're tracking it, and I could get back to you with anything specific.

Interestingly, the most recent piece of that project is a nationwide connectivity strategy. There's a huge recognition that connectivity of the landscape is critically important and that we need to enable wildlife, particularly wide-ranging species, to be able to move through the landscape. They've come out with a national-scale strategy to look at continental-scale connectivity. There is connectivity of protected areas. They are also looking at it under a framework of climate change, because they've had some serious impacts from climate change in Australia, with wild fires, etc., and they've recognized that they need to get on with this.

● (1000)

Mr. James Lunney: That's a great segue to my next question, really, because ecosystems, as came out in the earlier discussion regarding management, are not static. So establishing a protected area that's working really well now.... Even if it's not disturbed in any way, it may suffer from other forces beyond human intervention. That came out in the discussion about managing drainage systems on the farms. If we have an absolute in place, you might be prevented from actually maintaining what in the long term is an effective habitat enhancement mechanism. I appreciate the way you answered that very succinctly.

With that in mind, I want to just pick up on one of your observations and recommendations that came out of a previous discussion.

One of the recommendations, Mr. Bonnett, from your organization was that the national conservation plan should enhance the value placed on habitat by promoting innovative incentive programs for ecological goods and services.

I was out of the room briefly, so I hope someone hasn't already covered this, but I wonder if you could expand on that. What does that look like? What kinds of incentives and creative ideas might your organization suggest to help us in this worthy objective?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think there are a number of things we could be looking at.

To start with, I'd base it in the initial phase on looking at the environmental farm planning process, because that then identifies some of the areas where habitat could be protected. When you go through that process, you evaluate what you can do, if you're going to make some changes, to mitigate damage on habitat. These incentives could be a number of things. For instance, it could be some co-shared funding to put in alternative water systems to keep cattle away from stream beds. It could be developing partnerships with some of the conservation groups that are already out there, whether it be Delta Waterfowl or Ducks Unlimited.

The other thing we need to look at is the whole concept of developing pilots. This gets back to the management aspect. I think one of the better examples of where pilots were developed was the alternative land use services program. A number of pilots were developed. They actually demonstrated that they could be an effective tool to protect habitat, without a lot of outside investment. I think when we're looking at those pilots, what we should be starting to look at is how to take it from a pilot stage to a program stage. I know that's one of the frustrations on the farm side, that when we do a pilot, we may find something that works very well, but then how do we lever it up so that it could be replicated in different provinces? The reason I say replicated in different provinces is that we have to understand that what is done out west might be a wee bit different from what's done in eastern Canada. But the concepts are the same: to identify what needs to be protected. The base of that would likely be an environmental farm plan program, and then you'd have long-term programs that would drive the result you wanted.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lunney. We're out of time.

Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all of you.

I'm learning a lot today, and all of my questions are about things I don't understand.

Chief Allan Adam from the Chipewyan First Nation was here. It would have been a couple of years ago, wouldn't it? When he was testifying he was talking very much about living off the land, people having to really live off the land, harvest off the land, eat the animals and the fish coming from the water. That got me thinking about some testimony we heard last week from the Maritime Aboriginal Peoples Council and the Assembly of First Nations. They talked about habitat degradation as violating a treaty right.

That's something I had never thought of before. It's a very new concept to me, and the way you've been talking in your testimony really underscores that idea of healthy habitat being a treaty right.

Can you tell me a little bit more about this? It really is something new for me.

Ms. Lisa King: I'd start by saying that it was promised in treaty. When we signed treaty, it was the grass grows, the sun shines, the rivers flow. Those are resources. The land is a resource, and it was healthy. The water is a resource, and it was healthy. The habitat is also a resource—the land—and it provides for us. Over the years we've continued to use those resources, and we still do today.

And degradation, it's true...I go out on the land, and I've heard of my family opening up a moose and seeing the liver full of spots. First of all, that you have to look at the liver.... We never used to have to really inspect our food before.

My aunt was eating fish with me just the other day, and said to me, “Fish from the Athabasca River really smells different.” We had a fish from Saskatchewan just to compare, and it was really tasty. But just cutting and opening that fish, you could smell what was almost an oily smell. You could smell the petroleum.

You shouldn't have to eat that way. That's not what we were promised when we signed treaty. We were promised to continue our livelihood, so why are we eating that? And it's degrading over the years. That's not acceptable. It could impact our health, the health of our people, of my son. I have a son. He's only four months old. What's going to happen to the future of our members if our land's degrading over the years?

So in my opinion as well, it does break treaty. We're not given those resources to continue.

● (1005)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks, Ms. King. I appreciate that.

My next question has to do with another thing that I don't understand.

Mr. Bonnett, you were talking about the environmental farm plan. You were talking about how many farmers are engaged with this. What I don't understand is how you have that information. Who's coordinating it? How do farmers know how to engage with an environmental farm plan or know that this crop would be a good space for nesting birds? How is that organized?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: The simplest answer would be to say that we have very developed farm organizations in Canada. Each province delivers the environmental farm plan within the province.

I'm in the province of Ontario, and the Ontario soil and crop association takes over the administration of this program. They've developed workbooks that identify everything from water protection to fuel storage, manure handling, and habitat. They create chapters, and then workshops are put on to walk people through that.

I think the beauty of that—

Ms. Megan Leslie: So it's the associations? Sorry, I just want to be clear: it's non-government associations. So it's associations leading the charge and the organizing.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: Yes. This whole process started back in the early 1990s in Ontario, when the farmers themselves realized that there was increased pressure to respond to environmental concerns. They decided to get ahead of the wave and start doing some of the work themselves.

The government's role is to provide funding to assist in the development of the workbooks, identify best management practices, maybe do some pilot projects. Then the workshops are organized and co-funded with money from....

The latest Growing Forward program has some of that funding flowing through to the local level to do that environmental farm planning.

The Chair: You have about nine seconds left, Ms. Leslie, so I think it would be a little difficult to get both a question and an answer in.

I'll move now to Mr. Woodworth.

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

My thanks to the witnesses.

This is a complex area. There is a lot of meat and a lot of different perspectives, and it's hard to know particularly where to focus.

My own interest, being from southern Ontario, has to do with a matter that isn't necessarily, and certainly isn't exclusively, within the jurisdiction of the federal government. That is the issue of land use planning.

Ms. Woodley, you touched on that somewhat, and rather well, I thought, so if I may, I'd like to direct some questions to you for specifics.

I'll begin with the question of the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, which I think you used as an example of a kind of land use planning. Am I correctly perceiving that or not?

Ms. Alison Woodley: It has planning within it, so it's not a formal land use planning designation, per se.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Right. It's a tool.

Ms. Alison Woodley: But yes, there's conservation planning that stakeholders are doing together and presenting to governments.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's one of the things I wondered about, the question of stakeholders and governments.

I'm mildly familiar with the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement. I know it involved private sector and also NGO stakeholders. I think in the midst of your testimony I got the message that it was incented by government regulation. I wondered whether there was any direct government involvement at any level in the development of that agreement.

● (1010)

Ms. Alison Woodley: In the actual agreement itself...the agreement is signed between environmental groups and forest companies who are members of the Forest Products Association of Canada and the Forest Products Association. In the process of developing it, we certainly talked to governments about it and let them know what we were up to, and we kept them in the loop to the degree possible when you're having these kinds of discussions.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: There was feedback from the stakeholders to the government. Was there any support or feedback from any level of government to the stakeholders in the development of that agreement?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I'm not quite sure what you mean.

The agreement is between the forest industry and the environmental communities, members of a subset of that, to actually come together and see if we can pull together some joint recommendations for land management.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If I could just sum it up, because we have such little time—

Ms. Alison Woodley: Sorry, I'm not quite getting—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: This was not a government-supported initiative. It was entirely private sector and NGO.

Ms. Alison Woodley: In its negotiations? Yes.

The government has expressed support, and is in fact supporting the agreement.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: How is the government supporting it?

Ms. Alison Woodley: There is some funding that goes from Natural Resources Canada to the secretariat of the agreement through FPAC.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And did that occur only after the agreement was finalized?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay.

Ms. Alison Woodley: It's largely to provide technical support and to enable the agreement.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you know the amount of funding that Natural Resources has provided?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I don't have the number in my head, no.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: On another different but related subject, I understand that there is a federal-provincial-territorial committee that is currently looking at ways in which to improve land use planning in Canada. Are you familiar with that committee?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I'm not. No.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: One of your recommendations was about integrating protected areas into the working landscape and to do so supporting regional land use planning. Would you be able to provide any more specifics about the kind of support you would like the Government of Canada to provide? I will preface that question further by saying that so far, at least, the consensus I've heard is that the actual land use planning decisions are best made by those who are close to the land rather than being top-down driven.

So within that context, what can I suggest to the Government of Canada as the best way to support that, which I regard to be fairly critical also?

The Chair: Your time is up, but we'll give Ms. Woodley 45 seconds or so to answer.

Ms. Alison Woodley: I think there are a couple of ways. Certainly, the federal government has some jurisdiction in some areas of the country. For example, in the Northwest Territories, the federal government has some responsibility for land use planning itself. So in those cases, directly supporting and participating in those land use planning exercises and supporting the technical analysis, etc., is really important.

Across the country, in areas of provincial jurisdiction, for example, I think the federal government could play an important role in providing technical expertise and support and land analysis. The government has that kind of expertise and capacity and could support land use planning in that way, and also in facilitating and supporting the participation of stakeholders, indigenous peoples, and various groups, and enabling people to come to the table.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Woodley.

Thank you, Mr. Woodworth.

We'll move now to Monsieur Pilon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): My question is for Ms. King.

In your presentation, you talked at length about oil sands. I would like to know whether you think there is a way to develop oil sands while preserving your ancestral rights.

● (1015)

[*English*]

Ms. Lisa King: I'm sure there is a way. Chief Adam has always said he's not against development. He's in support of responsible development.

I'm surprised that over the years I haven't seen a whole lot of changes in how the oil is developed. They've been using the same technologies for over 50 years. Why aren't we using new technologies? Why do we still need to use so much water from the Athabasca River?

There have been changes in the emissions. There are less emissions coming out. There are less coming out of the stacks, so that has improved, but we can always improve. There is always technology to improve how development is done.

The other thing I would suggest has to do with the pace. We worked really hard with Shell to support their project. Right after the hearing was done, two months later they announced another brand new project.

Why do we need to dig it all up right now? Why can't we simply sustain digging out this oil over the years? Why do we need to dig a bunch of big holes in the ground all over our land right now? Let's finish this hole, clean it up, and then go to the next hole and clean that up. That's a key thing, doing it responsibly, doing it over time so our way of life isn't changed. That would be huge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: My next question is for Mr. Innes, and no one here will be surprised that it is about wetlands.

You said in your presentation that there were many cases of wetland destruction in your neck of the woods. Have you ever noted any concrete effects of wetland destruction on water levels in the surrounding rivers and lakes?

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Innes: We are, and it's important when we talk about the boreal forest in the Athabasca region to realize that “forest” is perhaps a misnomer. Actually, 60% of the Athabasca region is wetlands, all contained within a forested matrix.

What results from disturbance of these wetlands is that they dry and then they convert. This can be caused by some fairly low-impact activities, like the cutting of a seismic line or the installation of drainage. When they convert, that water storage and carbon storage is significantly diminished.

What we've seen throughout the region—and I have a couple of statistics here—is that the loss of wetlands is accelerating. More than 28,000 hectares have been slated for development.

What scientists, including eminent scientists like Dr. David Schindler, have suggested is that this will have irreversible effects, not just on water levels, but also on the quality of water within the region.

We're now at the point at which the pace is accelerating. When we look at the watershed as a whole, from the entire Athabasca extending north into the Mackenzie, there is a significant amount of concern being expressed that the cumulative effects of both development within the region and the increases of temperature expected under climate change may result in some very significant and adverse impacts on that very important ecosystem within the Athabasca.

[*Translation*]

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

There are still a few farms left in my region. Right now, in April, birds are feeding on the leftovers of last year's crops. However, as soon as farmers start planting their seeds, they will set up noise-making canons to prevent the birds from eating the seeds. Do you see this as an environmentally responsible method, or are there other ways for farmers to prevent birds from eating their seeds?

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Bonnett: I think you have to understand that some of these birds look at the farmers' fields as very easy to get at and free food. In a natural habitat, they would be foraging somewhere else. I think one of the things we've seen develop over the years is that the wildlife have become very adapted to finding an easy and cheap food source, and farmers' fields are that source. Putting things like cannons in place is not designed to harm the birds; it's designed to move them to a more natural habitat to do the feeding. Maybe the birds are a little bit like us. They're sometimes a little bit lazy to go and work for their food. The cannons are only designed to move them there.

I can actually give you a concrete example on our own farm. Thirty years ago, we had very few sandhill cranes in our area. You might have seen one or two. Now there will be thousands and thousands of them that come. One of the big challenges we have now is when we plant corn. When the corn comes out of the ground this far, they don't just snip it off; they pull it out by the roots, and they'll just walk right down the rows. But if you put the cannons in and chase them off, they'll go into the wetlands and other areas and find their food there. It's just a matter of recognizing that it's the economic value that has to be considered on the agricultural side, that there are times when we have to move those species someplace else.

● (1020)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bonnett, and thank you, Monsieur Pilon.

We'll move now to Mr. Storseth for five minutes.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming today. It's been very interesting, actually.

I'd like to ask Ms. King a couple of questions, and then I'll move over to Mr. Bonnett.

Some of the things you're talking about are increased monitoring programs, increased use of world-class technology—we should be using the best technology in the world to monitor some of these things—and more transparency when it comes to the monitoring programs.

You'd agree with all of those statements?

Ms. Lisa King: Yes. Years ago there was a program called RAMP, the regional aquatics monitoring program. We were a part of it. We sat at the table with the groups—industry was there, government was there, and first nations were there. We had to pull ourselves away from the group because we found that it was largely led by industry. Even though we were at the table, our voice was so small we weren't being heard or listened to. It felt like it was industry-led monitoring. I would sit there and tell industry, you guys are just monitoring yourselves; the fox is taking care of the henhouse here.

Just two years ago, I believe, that whole program was replaced by that world-class monitoring program. You had to really expose what was going on. They weren't monitoring correctly.

Mr. Brian Storseth: When we're talking about technologies, in the area that I represent around Cold Lake and the Cold Lake oil sands, it's predominantly in situ, which is a technology advancement that doesn't leave big holes in the ground, as you said, nor the environmental impact. But I was curious when you were talking about thresholds. I just want to get a feeling on this. For instance, some of the problems with the caribou are due to the fact that their breeding patterns are sluggish, compared to other animals, when there are large wolf uptakes in the population. When we're talking about monitoring thresholds, are we also talking about decreasing the amount of hunting if things start to...? That could be a use of technology, where in the past we wouldn't even necessarily know that there was a decrease in population numbers. Would we also be looking at decreasing the hunting and consumption from first nations as well?

Ms. Lisa King: We've done that in the past during fur trading. You would only harvest the furs in certain areas. You'd let that part grow and you'd harvest the furs from a different area. We've always done that.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Excellent.

I have one last question for you. I've got several first nations communities that are developing. They have oil companies. They're worth $100 million. What about those communities that choose to develop their land in that capacity? That surely can't be a breach of the treaty rights if it's their own decision to develop it, is it?

Ms. Lisa King: Fort McKay First Nation was looking at doing that. It would be good to have McKay speak on that.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But you would agree that it should be their decision?

Ms. Lisa King: Yes. They did propose that I think about three years ago with Shell, and then they withdrew it from the application, and I'm not sure what happened.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you. I'd be happy to follow up after. I do have to ask Mr. Bonnett a couple of questions.

We heard from some of the witnesses last week that there should be increased regulations on private property owners, particularly farmers. Could you give me your thoughts on that?

There's also been what I would consider a misconception. As somebody who actually owns agricultural land, I know there's often talk of the old railway lines, which used to go through that now are no longer used for railways, as being prime preserve for habitat. But in fact my experience with those lands, at least in our areas, has been that those were areas that were highly contaminated before and really have no use as agricultural land. Would you agree with that?

What do you think of increased regulations on agricultural producers and the response we would get from agricultural producers?

● (1025)

Mr. Ron Bonnett: First of all, the normal response from agriculture producers when regulations are introduced is usually a bit of pushback.

I can see the role of regulations as the last ditch effort, but it shouldn't be the first response. The first response should be trying to clearly identify what it is you want to protect and what needs to be done to do it, and then try to put programs in place that would do that. That's where you get into some of the partnerships. Some of the biggest successes we've had have been when people have gone to the environmental farm plan. They identified things that were necessary and they utilized some of the government incentive programs to go there. That had a lot more impact on making a difference than putting regulations in place.

I remember several years ago we were working in Ontario—that's when I was the Ontario federation president—and we had a conservation official who was having a discussion. She was saying that the law says you should have a 30-metre setback from a water stream. She was saying that they could put regulations in place to do that but that she found that if she worked with farmers, they could actually get 10 metres on the ground rather than 30 metres on a book. I think that's the concept we have to take a look at: what is the outcome and how do you get there?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Storseth.

We move now to Mr. Toet for five minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses today. It has been very revealing.

I want to start with a little comment to Mr. Innes. As Mr. Pilon discussed, I'm also a big fan of wetlands and the need for wetland rehabilitation. I'm sure you must be very happy with—I'd assume you are aware of—the work that some of the oil sands developers are doing with Olds College in looking at wetlands rehabilitation, at how to rehabilitate it properly, and at the role they all play. I thought it was really interesting that you brought that up. When this committee visited Olds College, I was very excited to see the work going on, and that they are also working very closely in conjunction with industry to make sure that we're doing the right things for wetlands rehabilitation, because it has to be done.

I just want to turn to Mr. Bonnett quickly. You talked about using agricultural lands, as they are a habitat area to a large degree. I witness that every day where I live. My property has bush on it, but across the road is a farmer's field, and I see constantly that it's being used by the deer, the geese, the ducks, and even the coyotes and foxes are using it as natural hunting areas. They're using the bush to live in, but they're actually using this as their feeding area.

When you see this happen on farms, is this something that farmers are actually encouraging? Is this something where they are doing things to help, or are they trying to set back some of these things going forward?

Mr. Ron Bonnett: There is no one direct answer for that. I think most farmers actually enjoy seeing some wildlife interacting with their landscape. I think the real issue is when it becomes an issue that goes beyond the economic threshold and they run into severe economic losses.

One of the things that we do see happening is that farmers are starting to look at ways to mitigate that. Richard mentioned the grass waterways. That does create habitat, and it doesn't actually create that much loss. In fact, in the long term, because you can use the equipment more efficiently, you would likely have a net economic benefit.

On our own farm, I've fenced back quite a piece from the water course, and I have geese and ducks and beavers swimming around in there in the summer. By putting that in place, I actually have a water source to draw on for my cattle if I get a dry season.

I think the short answer is that farmers enjoy seeing wildlife habitat, but they do need some programs in place sometimes to make sure they don't suffer huge economic losses.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: So it just comes back to balance again.

Mr. Ron Bonnett: It goes back to that whole thing of balance.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Phillips, in the example you gave us, you showed about 11% of this land left as protected on this particular area by the farmers. I got the sense that it's something we're seeing more and more of and that farmers are really working towards this. I also got a sense from you that they would rather set aside larger areas than a whole bunch of smaller areas.

Is there also work amongst the farmers to cooperate and create interconnectivity between those areas so that we would be able to do some rehabilitation on those lands and bring back some of the wetlands, especially in our prairie regions, where we could use that natural sponge, so that in areas such as where I come from, in Manitoba, we're not looking at major flooding issues every year?

● (1030)

Mr. Richard Phillips: By and large, I don't think there's that much cooperation. If you just go back and look at this map here, an example of what you would be talking about is this little piece of land in the upper right-hand corner there. If you're farming the big field in this part, how do you actually get to it? Do you have to cut a path through the bush to get over to farm that little piece? Or do you get a neighbour to farm it? Or is that where the alternative land use service would be? Maybe the public should rent that little piece of land from him and just leave it there and quit trying to go through all the stuff to do all that.

When I'm talking about farmers being happy to set aside land, it is as long as we can maintain the use of our machinery and farm efficiently. I think we're happy to have a piece of that land set aside. That's the point I was trying to get at.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: But there would be a willingness and an openness. It maybe isn't happening today, but because they're willing to set aside this land, and to do it in a cooperative manner, as you say, that actually creates the biggest impact, the most public good, so to speak, as they go forward.

Mr. Richard Phillips: Yes. If you could get the neighbours to cooperate in something like this, to where the land would continue on, well, then you have a wildlife corridor to move up and down, versus the next guy clearing it all off and you're the only guy left with a piece of bush.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Phillips.

Thank you, Mr. Toet.

We'll move now to Ms. Duncan for five minutes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Ms. Woodley, I'm going to come back for one more question. I really am focusing on evidence, because I think any decision that's taken has to be an evidence-based decision.

An important provision of SARA relates to the so-called safety net, which imposes a duty on the minister to recommend that the GIC issue a safety net order if the minister is of the view that a species on provincial crown land is not effectively protected. I'm wondering, in your view, to what extent has this provision of SARA been successful in protecting habitat on provincial lands? I know you weren't keen on giving me a scale last time, but can you give us some indication?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I think it's important to have. The safety net is important because it acts as a backstop to the patchwork of endangered species legislation that exists in the provinces and the territories. It enables the federal government to step in where the species are not being adequately protected at the provincial level. With the jurisdiction the federal government has over species at risk, I think that's appropriate, and it's an important part of the legislation.

Again, at my fingertips I don't have a response based on a peer-reviewed paper that kind of shows what the evidence there would be. But it's clear that it's important and has acted as an incentive for provinces to actually get their own legislation in place, for example. Having that federal role there and the ability to do that means that provinces have developed stronger legislation, in some cases, since the act has been developed. I suspect those kinds of measures are the pieces that would incent a province to act and get their own strong legislation in place.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Is there a specific recommendation you would make to this committee regarding this aspect?

Ms. Alison Woodley: It needs to continue to be there as part of the framework of the federal Species at Risk Act, absolutely.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Ms. King, what would be your wish list to this committee? You were very clear in saying we have to be there, we have to be part of the decision-making. Is there something you would like to see in the report that would make your being there easier?

Ms. Lisa King: To better understand how the province plays a role. When we live in Alberta, we don't feel a federal presence, so implementation: How is it going to be implemented? How is Alberta going to cooperate? Or will they?

● (1035)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Do you have the necessary resources you need to undertake the research to be part of the discussions?

Ms. Lisa King: Most necessarily not, we do not have the resources. We have barely enough resources to keep up with the development that's going on, on our lands.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: To Mr. Innes or Ms. King, what would be the recommendation you would make to this committee regarding resources to support your work?

Mr. Larry Innes: The main objective for ACFN is to develop what we've described as this traditional lands and resource management plan that we see as the foundation for enabling the establishment of thresholds to protect treaty rights and livelihood. But it also significantly creates a framework within which government and industry, federal and provincial as well as the developers within the region, can then more effectively consult at a strategic rather than a transactional level with ACFN and other aboriginal communities.

What we face today is basically death by a thousand cuts. You're asked, in the course of your work, is this particular development okay? Oh well, what about this one? And it doesn't fit within a framework. Perhaps the most important thing for us to do is to bring that consultation and the plans and the programs that are developed to mitigate from an environmental perspective, but also to accommodate on a rights basis, into a framework that actually has measurable results against established thresholds and benchmarks. That is what is lacking in this country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Innes, and thank you, Ms. Duncan.

We have one and a half or one and three-quarter rounds left. I understand Mr. Sopuck and Mr. Lunney would like to speak, so if you want to share your time, that's up to you.

Mr. Sopuck, I'll turn it over to you.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Ms. Woodley, regarding the boreal forest, I think it's important to put some numbers around this. This is not a panel about the oil sands, but the oil sands seem to come up over and over again. The area of the oil sands is about 147,000 square kilometres in Canada. To date, between 600 and 700 square kilometres have been mined, which is a very small portion of the oil sands, and of that 600 to 700 square kilometres, about 60 have been reclaimed. So it's an ongoing process of mining and reclamation, leaving aside the quality of the reclaimed land that I would argue does have a sound ecological function built in—but we'll leave that aside for a minute.

If one looks at hydroelectric development in the boreal forest, for example, in Quebec 23,000 square kilometres of boreal forest land has been flooded. In Manitoba, where I come from, it is 8,000 square kilometres, and in Ontario it's about 7,000 square kilometres. Keep in mind that the northern boreal forest that's flooded by hydro development will never, ever be reclaimed to anything near its natural state, whereas in the oil sands it's a very minuscule area that has been mined, and it's a constant process of reclamation.

Don't you think that in terms of Canada's overall boreal forest, which I think is 10 million square kilometres, the oil sands area, from a nationwide perspective, is very, very small?

Ms. Alison Woodley: I would defer the comments on the impact of the oil sands to my colleagues who are living on the ground there. I think they're the ones who are understanding the significant impacts and have presented their concerns and their recommendations today.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Well, just before that, again to you, in the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, do the groups there recognize the impact of hydro development on Canada's boreal forest?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Absolutely. There's a myriad of pressures on the boreal forest from multiple sectors. It's important that we look at all of these as we look at the impacts on the boreal forest and really put all efforts in play to protect our boreal forest. We have to look at all of those impacts, not only one.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'd like to ask Mr. Phillips a question now, and I'll switch gears completely to the privately owned agricultural landscape.

Given that land use on privately owned farm land is dictated by world markets, what do you see as the trends in world markets for grain in particular? What effect will the trends in grain prices worldwide and the demand for grain have on habitat conservation efforts on the privately owned agricultural landscape?

● (1040)

Mr. Richard Phillips: It's going to put a lot of pressure on it, because as grain prices remain strong and as demand remains strong, farmers are moving to maximize their farming operations.

The other piece I maybe should raise here is that a lot of farmers have retired and they've rented out their land, so you have fewer farmers, a lot of the younger farmers, and more and more acres subject to the bigger machinery.Those are the guys who want to come in and farm a minimum of a mile straight down and straight back, and that puts pressure on the landowner to clean up the land if he's going to maximize his rental income. That's what I meant when I said we may need to look at ways to move the habitat around to the margins of the land where it's not going to interfere with the commercial operations, or it'll be scrubbed off and it'll be gone.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I have just a minor correction, Mr. Phillips. Not all farmers are guys.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Richard Phillips: Yes, I stand corrected.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: In my constituency anyway, but we'll talk about that some other time.

Given that agronomic development has created strains of crops such as GMOs, for example, that will allow us to have higher and higher yields on smaller and smaller parcels of land, don't you think that will be a mitigating factor, in that if we get the programming right, given modern technology, producers will farm their best lands even better and perhaps provide more opportunities for “risky” and marginal lands to be used as habitat areas?

Mr. Richard Phillips: I'd say that the majority of the focus will be on the good land. You'll never get rich farming poor land. It's the marginal lands that get set aside first for the conservation effort. Whatever incentive program there is to continue putting more land into those conservation projects, it will be the marginal land that goes, and we will focus on the good land.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Sopuck and Mr. Phillips.

We'll move now for our last round to Ms. Leslie for about four minutes.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Woodley, you talked about protected land. I can't remember if you said that it was too isolated. Was that the word you used? I guess the point of my question is about segmentation, segmentation of habitat, and picking up on the contrary of what Mr. Toet was talking about with the interconnectivity. How do we actually connect to these lands?

I was impressed to hear about the efforts farmers are making to preserve certain lands, but the reality is that you look at the map and it's a piece here and a piece here. I wonder if CPAWS has done any work for recommendations about that: How do we figure that out? How do we increase that connectivity? When we're looking especially at private lands and indigenous lands in combination with public lands, how do we best map out what lands are being conserved, why, and how, and prevent that segmentation of habitat?

Ms. Alison Woodley: That's where land use planning is really critical, I think. It's landscape-scale planning, whether it's formal land use planning or conservation planning, but at the landscape scale. I did talk about how most of our protected areas are isolated islands, and that's a problem. We need the protected areas, but we need them connected together.

Through a landscape-scale planning initiative, whether it be land use planning or other mechanisms, we can start to look at where the core areas are that need to be protected based on the mapping that's done on the areas of high conservation value, and how we can manage that landscape in between so that the species that need to move can move. It doesn't mean that there's necessarily.... It might mean that there's a protected corridor. It might mean that the landscape is managed in such a way that it's permeable to wildlife, so that wildlife can move up through the riparian corridors between protected pieces.

I actually really like the idea of cooperation among private landowners so that you can look at a landscape scale, take everybody's little piece, and make sure it's working together in the best possible way. That's really what we're talking about here: making sure the pieces work together.

Ms. Megan Leslie: So who does that? When I think of land use planning, I always revert to municipalities. Who does that coordinating?

Ms. Alison Woodley: Well, it depends where. For example, in the Northwest Territories, there are very impressive land use plans that have been developed by the Dehcho First Nations and the federal government. That's still in process and needs approval, but there has been a huge amount of work. In the Dehcho Region around land use planning, it builds in the core protected areas, the connections between them in making sure they're connected together, and the sustainable management of the landscape. The Innu have led a similar process in Labrador.

In southern Canada, it is more of a municipal responsibility, under conservation authorities, perhaps, in some areas in southern Ontario. I'm not as familiar with that private landscape because I don't work there as much, but in provincial governments, for land use planning...there has been a commitment in Ontario, through the Far North initiative, that they will protect at least half of the far north through land use planning, through community-based and indigenous community-led land use planning.

● (1045)

Ms. Megan Leslie: If you had your druthers, would it be organized by distinct ecosystem or by...?

Ms. Alison Woodley: From an ecological perspective, an eco-regional approach would make a lot of sense. They need to be knitted together at various scales. A municipal plan needs to be nested within a regional plan, and it goes up from there. You can have various levels of connectivity too. At the municipal level, you might talk about these riparian areas and about making sure there are protected corridors at that scale. At a regional scale, you need to think more broadly and think about a landscape kind of management approach. It really depends on the scale you're talking about.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Woodley and Ms. Leslie.

Our time is up for these two hours.

I want to thank our witnesses for their investment in time today, their efforts in habitat conservation, and their help with this committee's study.

The meeting is adjourned.