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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (0850)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP)): Good morning. Let's get this committee session started.

Hello to our witnesses.

My name is Megan Leslie and I am the vice-chair of this committee. I'm not normally the chair, so please bear with us as we get through this with me in this new role.

[Translation]

The witnesses will first have 10 minutes to make their presentation. Committee members will then be able to ask them questions.

[English]

I will give everybody a heads-up that it's possible we may have to break for votes. If votes start, we'll be notified by a light here in the room and it means that we'll have to suspend. I can't predict if that will happen, but that was just to give you a heads-up in case it does.

Perhaps we can start. We have Joe Farwell, chief administrative officer from Grand River Conservation Authority; Mary Granskou, senior adviser with the Canadian Boreal Initiative; and by video conference, all the way from Calgary, Fawn Jackson and Bob Lowe from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

Welcome to you all.

Perhaps we can start with Mr. Farwell from the Grand River Conservation Authority.

Mr. Joe Farwell (Chief Administrative Officer, Grand River Conservation Authority): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning. My name is Joe Farwell, and I'm the chief administrative officer for the Grand River Conservation Authority. I am pleased to have this opportunity to provide you with input on habit conservation in the context of the national conservation plan.

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

Our watershed is located immediately west of the greater Toronto area, and at 6,800 square kilometres it's the largest watershed in southern Ontario. It's about the size of Prince Edward Island. There

are 39 municipalities in our watershed, with a population of close to one million, most of whom live in the rapidly growing cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, Guelph, Cambridge, and Brantford. It's also one of the richest farming regions in Canada, with farmers working 70% of the land and producing an incredible variety of products.

The Grand River Conservation Authority is the oldest water management agency in Canada. It was created more than 75 years ago, when the industry leaders at the time realized that they needed to work together to address severe environmental issues of flooding, pollution, and inadequate water supplies. As a result, our river has undergone a remarkable recovery, which was highlighted in 1994 when the Grand River was the first river in a working landscape to be designated as a Canadian heritage river.

The GRCA was created, first and foremost, as a water management agency. By early in our history we learned that managing water also means protecting the land. The severity of floods and droughts are determined, in part, by the health of our wetlands and our forests.

One big part of our success over the years has been that we've adopted an integrated watershed-wide approach to managing our natural resources for both land and water. The GRCA owns more than 20,000 hectares of land. Throughout Ontario, conservation authorities own a total of 150,000 hectares, and much of that land was initially acquired for water management purposes. Land was acquired for dikes and dams, and flood plain properties were acquired to limit development.

Over the years, those parcels of land have become protected spaces, providing a host of other benefits. They provide rich and varied habitat, from forests to wetlands, and they are connecting links between our larger, natural spaces. They help protect and restore the form and function of natural ecosystems and landscapes. A good example is the Luther Marsh wildlife management area, west of Orangeville. This 5,000-hectare property was acquired in the early 1950s for a water management reservoir, but since then it has become one of the richest habitats in southern Ontario, and home to close to 250 bird species. Significantly, one reason for its success is that it's a product of many partnerships among the GRCA, provincial and federal agencies, the private sector, and the surrounding communities. These partnerships have provided the long-term vision and stability that are needed to help plan and finance the development of rich, protected habitat. These are long-range projects that needed to grow over decades, so they needed commitment to match that time.

As I mentioned earlier, most of the land in our watershed is in private hands, and about 70% of it is farmed. We've worked very closely with the farm community and our municipal partners to develop a rural water quality program. The program has encouraged farmers to adopt best management practices to protect water on their land, and by extension, water in natural space throughout the watershed. Our municipal partners provide funding for financial incentives, and in little more than a decade close to \$34 million has been invested in 5,000 water protection projects. Of that total, grants amounted to \$13 million, with farmers contributing more than \$20 million in labour, materials, and cash.

Again, one source of its success is the strength of the partnership and the stability provided by long-range financial commitments from our funding municipalities. Building relationships is the heart of successful collaboration, and it takes time and continuity to do that. Canada's best value investment in stewardship programs like this is in the long-term commitment to the environmental farm plan. Slow and steady wins this race. Programs such as these are becoming even more important as more and more natural spaces are under stress.

There is, of course, the pressure caused by urban growth. Although Ontario and many of the municipalities in our watershed are working hard to promote intensification of our urban areas, it's inevitable that the urban boundaries will grow. Second, high commodity prices encourage farmers to start growing crops on marginal lands, and this can put pressure on woodlands and wetlands. In those circumstances it's even more important to ensure that our publicly owned, protected spaces are well managed now and into the long-term future.

One final point I'd like to make is that any national plan has to include regional plans that are fine-tuned to local ecological and environmental needs. A plan for lands in the Great Lakes Basin will look much different from one for the Prairies or the Rockies, even if the underlying goals are the same.

It's in our nature to look at things from a watershed perspective, and we think any national plan should also have that view in mind. It's been our experience that federally funded programs, which we've been able to take advantage of, tend to be focused on the needs of specific species. We would prefer to look at a broader context to the natural environment and its ecosystems. If you can protect or enhance an ecosystem, the needs of a species will be met.

The federal government can create a vision and expectations for conserving natural spaces. It can promote the fact that healthy ecosystems, public health, and economic well-being are all tied together. It can recognize that conserving natural spaces can provide great social benefits to Canadians. The federal government can integrate these goals and principles into the full range of federal environmental programs and cost-sharing partnerships.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'd be happy to respond to questions now or later.

• (0855)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much. Your testimony will certainly be helpful.

We'll actually hear from all the witnesses and then we'll begin the questioning rounds, so thanks very much for that.

Ms. Granskou, from the Canadian Boreal Initiative, would you like to begin?

Ms. Mary Granskou (Senior Advisor, Canadian Boreal Initiative): Thank you. Good morning Madam Chair and members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

I apologize for making my presentation in English.

[*English*]

My French is not sufficiently good that I can be well understood.

We're here today to talk about habitat conservation, and I'd like to start with a brief summary of who we are.

The Canadian Boreal Initiative is guided by a vision and a framework that was negotiated across a broad group of leading resource companies, conservation organizations, and first nations. Those members around our table—and we call this group the Boreal Leadership Council—comprise leading resource and financial companies in Canada, including the TD Bank, Suncor, Al-Pac, and Domtar. They also include first nations across the country from the Kaska to Treaty 8 to Poplar River First Nation to the Innu Nation in Labrador. They also include environment and conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and others.

We were launched about a decade ago. We're actually heading into our second decade of work supported by a strategic partnership among Ducks Unlimited Canada; Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; and the Pew Environment Group. They all share a commitment to work to protect species that move across international boundaries, such as ducks and geese that reside in the boreal for part of their year. We act as a secretariat to our council, and our collective goals are to achieve a balance between sustainable resource development and protection of about half of Canada's boreal region, all in a manner that respects and advances aboriginal rights and interests.

We get behind real solutions. For instance, many of our aboriginal partners are bringing forward land use plans that balance development and protection in unique and sustainable ways. They are increasingly enjoying the support of governments and are coming on stream now in an implementation phase in a number of areas of the country. We work across the energy, forestry, and mining sectors as well as with banks and conservation organizations, as I've mentioned. In our experience, the objectives that we support—encouraging world-class, sustainable development and marrying that with world-class conservation—are mutually reinforcing in many places. As a testament to that fact, our goals are increasingly being brought into government's objectives moving forward. We work with all levels of government—federal, provincial, territorial, and aboriginal—on a range of interests.

I will just mention the boreal region, which as you know, stretches across the country from Newfoundland and Labrador through to the Yukon. It spans over half of Canada. It's an area of very rich natural resources and rich conservation and wildlife values. There's no question that the boreal is an economic engine for northern economies. Many of these communities also want to see how development can be balanced with ways of protecting their traditional livelihoods, wildlife lands, and waters. Planning for this integrated sustainability is key, and we're tremendously focused on supporting that.

There is a proud history of support within Parliament for land and water conservation including recent and newly expanded national parks, such as the Nahanni in the Northwest Territories. We're pleased to see the committee studying this question of habitat conservation and to see the federal role in supporting this.

I essentially have five major recommendations. The first is that we encourage the committee to continue its support for national parks and national wildlife areas. They're vitally important to completing the network of Canada's protected areas, as you know. They are flagship programs that are highly valued by millions of Canadians, and they protect nature in ways that are celebrated around the world.

● (0900)

On the federal programs that are needed to create national parks and to effectively manage sites such as natural wildlife areas through time, it's very important to recognize that the need for ongoing support is vitally important. So we encourage you to continue to look at that.

Our second area of recommendation is around the Northwest Territories in particular, which is undergoing a change in jurisdiction in how the responsibilities for land and water are managed. As you know, there has been a recent devolution agreement in the Northwest Territories, and this is a tremendously important time. We are just encouraging the committee to ask questions about devolution in terms of seeking assurance that the mechanisms are there to consider, create, and manage the new protected areas that are coming on stream.

We're encouraged by some of the recent statements by GNWT, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the assurance that the support will be there federally as well to continue to support the working groups that are working on broadly supported proposals for new protected areas, and also the land withdrawals that provide

interim protection for these areas until they can be designated. There are new sites that are coming on stream. What is really needed now is a process to drive forward. Right now the GNWT is developing a mineral strategy to guide mining, and we need a retooling of the protected areas strategy as a companion initiative.

Our third area is supporting tools for effective wildlife mitigation. I will focus on two areas in particular. One is the species at risk regime, and the second is comprehensive environmental assessment. Both of those are building blocks for habitat conservation across the country.

We would like to simply say about the Species at Risk Act that now is the time for stability. We would encourage that now is not the time to reopen it. What we really need is time to bring the cooperative work that's happening right now to fruition. Chief among those is... I'll give an example of one we're engaged in, which is called the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, which involves the entire forestry sector, working with first nations, environmental groups, and governments to advance their forestry plans and at the same time protect caribou that are within their licence agreements.

There are many other examples of good collaboration.

The second area within the mitigation tools is environmental assessment. I just want to flag that there is one project in particular, Ontario's Ring of Fire, that would really benefit from another look at how environmental assessment can be done in that region. It is one of the most important mineral finds in our generation in Canada, and it makes sense to get it right.

Right now I just wanted to flag that the current comprehensive study will likely not meet the particular needs of the first nation communities. What is going to be helpful in creating a foundation for both development and habitat protection in that very large region would be to bump up the review to a panel review in that case.

The other mention I want to make is that supporting land use planning is one of the key tools to reconcile development with habitat conservation in the north of Canada. There are many examples across the country, including in Alberta and Manitoba. They are emerging in Ontario. They're moving in that direction in Quebec and in Labrador. In British Columbia there are agreements around land use plans, and in the Northwest Territories. It's a very broadly scoped tool, and it's regionally defined and adjusted. These are processes that advance only with the support of the parties, which are the first nations and the governments in the regions in question.

We would just like to finish by encouraging the federal government to support land use planning as a key mechanism for both wildlife habitat and development, and a number of provinces would welcome the same.

Thank you very much.

● (0905)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much, Ms. Granskou. I'm sure you'll get lots of questions in the main round.

We've heard from a conservation authority, as well as a conservation coalition. Now we're going to hear a bit from the industry perspective and some of the conservation measures that the Cattlemen's Association has taken.

Mr. Lowe, I believe you'll be testifying, and Ms. Jackson, you're available for questions. Is that correct?

Ms. Fawn Jackson (Manager, Environmental Affairs, Canadian Cattlemen's Association): Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): I'll give you the two-minute mark when you have about two minutes left.

Go ahead.

Mr. Bob Lowe (Vice-Chair, Environment Committee, Canadian Cattlemen's Association): Madam Chair and committee members, my name is Bob Lowe. My family and I farm in Alberta near the town of Nanton. Beside me is Fawn Jackson, the environmental manager for the Canadian Cattlemen's Association.

Thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of Canada's beef producers with regard to the national conservation plan for Canada. As vice-chair of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association environment committee this area is of great interest and importance to me.

Ranchers are in a unique position when it comes to business and the environment as we are able to own and operate dynamic, profitable businesses within a natural habitat that supply many ecosystem services to the Canadian public. We feel there are many opportunities for us to collaborate to reach conservation goals through a stewardship approach. Ranchers hold the front line on North America's threatened and disappearing grasslands. Grasslands sequester much carbon for us, play a key role in storing and filtering water, and are the home to an abundance of species at risk. Needless to say we have an important role to play.

Ranchers have been and will continue to be involved in habitat conservation as it is the nature of our business. As ranches are passed down from generation to generation, an enormous amount of regionally specific environmental knowledge is accumulated. Ranchers have partnered successfully with many environmentally oriented organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, Cows and Fish, MULTISAR, and provincial organizations such as the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, Manitoba Conservation Districts Association, and Alberta's rangeland management branch.

The key to the success of these collaborations has been the emphasis on stewardship approaches to conservation, as well as the dual priority of helping ranchers reach their operational goals. Many of these organizations face declining financial resources despite the fact that the importance of their work continues to grow as they help to achieve conservation and economic goals for Canada.

Further support of these programs will have positive impacts on achieving both conservation and agricultural objectives. One way to achieve support for these programs would be through the Species at Risk Act habitat stewardship program. A portion of the habitat stewardship fund should be placed aside specifically for agriculture. The programs that get the funding should be supported by agricultural producers, and the funding should be timely and accessible. There could be potential for the agricultural industry to

administer these funds to ensure the highest amount of efficiency and effectiveness.

The Canadian beef industry supports the intention of the Species at Risk Act to protect and recover wildlife species at risk in Canada. We encourage this government to take a made-in-Canada stewardship approach to protecting species at risk, and avoid the confrontational atmosphere south of the border. The Canadian beef industry encourages the government to do everything possible to implement an act that is truly based on the stewardship approach and respects private landowner rights, as we will be able to achieve much greater success through collaborative stewardship than cumbersome regulation.

We believe that regulators have to keep two basic principles in mind. Number one, if a species at risk is viewed as a liability to the land manager it will always be at risk. Number two, if a species at risk is found on a rancher's land it must be assumed that the land manager is doing things right.

The government can help to foster improved relationships between agriculture and conservation as collaborative stewardship efforts will help optimize the output of both. We need stronger ties between Environment Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and a regulatory environment that supports a stewardship approach.

The Government of Canada could also help by creating a seed fund for ecosystem service programs. Farmers and ranchers do their best to manage their lands in the most sustainable manner possible. However, financial or other resource constraints may limit the uptake of new environmental technologies or practices. The benefits derived from positive environmental management practices may also be greater than those received by the individual producer with the broader public benefiting, and consequently the incentive to invest at an individual level may be below the optimal level. Financial support would enable and incent producers to adopt practices that enhance ecosystem services provided to society. As a friend of mine said, "If it's for the public good, perhaps the public should pay".

The CCA has a vision for a national framework for ecosystem service programs that are delivered regionally. To make any ecosystem service program successful it is recognized that local solutions must address local priorities with both buyers and sellers involved. We thus encourage this government to develop a program that local groups could apply to in order to access seed money to support regional ecosystem service programs.

● (0910)

Thank you for the opportunity to present. I look forward to Fawn answering your questions.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much, Mr. Lowe. You came well under time, but the information was all there, so thank you.

[Translation]

We will now go to questions.

Mr. Sopuck, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thanks.

Ms. Granskou, you talked about the partners in the Canadian Boreal Initiative. You talked about aboriginal communities, governments, and companies. One group of people were conspicuously absent from that list, and that's the natural resource communities themselves. I didn't hear anything about the Thompsons, the Prince Alberts, the Timminses, and so on. Are those municipalities and towns part of this, because those are natural resource dependent communities?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Absolutely, they're very much a part of the regional solutions that we support. For instance, any land use planning process needs to engage the communities that are in their region and in the surrounding region, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I understand what you said, that they need to be engaged, but as you listed out the partners in the Boreal Forest Initiative, those communities were conspicuous by their absence. I strongly recommend that they be respected for their contributions, their presence in the boreal forest, and that their influence be felt.

Ms. Granskou, you talked about balancing development and protection, and that sounds like a zero-sum game. Having been in the forest industry in the past...you take a working forest and the second growth that comes up can be a treasure trove of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Do you think development and conservation are mutually exclusive?

Ms. Mary Granskou: In our view—and it's borne through experience of the solutions that we've been supporting—the two can travel together. You can make decisions around the most highly valued areas for wildlife, at the same time as you make decisions around what are the most highly valued areas for development in a region. There are times when there is an overlap, but many times there are ways to recognize, in a boreal context, that you can move forward and protect an adequate level of both.

Perhaps I could just take 10 more seconds. One of the features of a land use plan is that they are renewed, so in essence they're evergreen. They're not developed once. They are renewed typically in regular cycles so that as new information emerges, you can adjust your plans accordingly.

• (0915)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Yes, except, again, the dichotomy between development and conservation came out in your answer as well.... I firmly believe you can have both development and conservation on the same hectare of land. Again, listening to Mr. Lowe's testimony, from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, should teach us all that the way the ranching community operates, that same hectare of land delivers both at exactly the same time and place, so I have real difficulty with this dichotomy.

Mr. Farwell, on page 3 of your presentation, you talked about providing financial incentives to producers to basically deliver ecosystem services, to use Mr. Lowe's phrase. Can you go into a bit more detail about that? I find that very interesting.

Mr. Joe Farwell: Certainly. We have a long-standing history of working with the farm community in our watershed. It actually dates back probably 25 to 30 years, whether it's through tree planting or buffering riparian watercourses. About 20 years ago, one of our major municipalities adopted a program where they recognized that the contribution of pollution, manure, things like that, to the watercourses from the farm community could be reduced by buffering streams and building manure storages and carrying out conservation tillage. So they adopted a program, and we deliver their program on their behalf, where they'll provide capital funding to farmers to carry out stewardship programs, as Mr. Lowe pointed out. It's been an extremely successful program. The farmers actually contribute about two-thirds of the overall cost, so when we talk about partnerships, that's a long-standing partnership we've had with the farm community.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Farwell, again, your testimony was very congruent with that of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, even though you're from vastly different parts of the country. The ranching and farm community has been pushing strongly for a nationwide ecological goods and services program. It crops up all the time. Would the conservation authorities in Ontario, in your view, be supportive of a nationwide incentive-based ecological goods and services program on the farmed landscape?

Mr. Joe Farwell: I can certainly say that a similar type of program is what we're delivering through the rural water quality program, and it makes a lot of sense. We're working with the landowners. As I mentioned, 70% of our watershed is farmed. Almost all of our watershed is owned by private people. We have to work with the public to actually achieve goals. We can't possibly achieve it on our own.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I was interested in Luther Marsh, the wetland restoration. In my experience on the prairie landscape wetlands are actually one of the easiest habitats to restore, even when they're gone. Is that your experience as well? Could you talk about Luther Marsh, from where it was when it was purchased to how now it's a functioning marsh? What was the process there?

Mr. Joe Farwell: Luther Marsh's history is that it was a poorly drained portion of Ontario with soils conducive to the formation of wetlands, so very high-organic soils. In the 1950s, they recognized that it would be important to have a large water storage feature at that site, partially for flood control but mostly water supply. The water from our reservoirs is used to dilute the effluent from the sewage treatment plants for roughly a million people, so storage of water is very important to us. This wetland, essentially, was a wet area and now it's a standing marsh, and it actually is almost self-sustaining. It's a relatively easy site to restore. Put water there, and if the underlying soils are correct a wetland will emerge.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's interesting, because just outside Winnipeg we have Oak Hammock Marsh. The process is exactly the same. It was a poorly drained marsh that producers were struggling with, and public authorities purchased the land in the sixties, reflooded it, managed it as a marsh, and it was brought back. So I very much appreciate that Luther Marsh example. Again, the hand of human beings can be light on the land if we take that stewardship approach.

I appreciate that. Thank you.

• (0920)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much, Mr. Sopuck. We've started off a pretty good conversation here.

[Translation]

We will now go to Ms. Quach.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you, Madam new Chair of the day.

I would like to thank the witnesses for sharing this important information with us. It is really very relevant.

I will first ask Ms. Granskou a question.

Could you tell us more about the five recommendations you shared with us at the end of your presentation? The first talks about supporting national parks and national wildlife areas. Ultimately, you're proposing an increase in funding programs and help for managing the sites.

Recently, Parks Canada had its budget cut by \$29 million, and scientists, including biologists, were let go.

We are wondering how, in these conditions, we can continue to protect parks, habitats and ecosystems. It becomes even more important to reinvest in these programs.

What do you think of these cuts?

[English]

Ms. Mary Granskou: I'll just start by mentioning that as governments in Canada struggle to regain our footing in the economy, we recognize that budgets do change. What we're flagging is that when there's an opportunity to reinvest, we would stand behind these programs as being a great investment for wildlife habitat protection in Canada. There's no question that Parks Canada, like other departments, will need to reprofile some of their capacity in order to address the need.

But I guess I'll finish by saying that there are many partners in Canada who are committed to working with the federal and other governments to support our parks and their management capacity and abilities, to showcase Canada's great strengths on park management. There are many partners in Canada who are putting their shoulders to the wheel to help in this time.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I would like to add that our parks can be very profitable thanks to tourism. The more we invest to properly manage and protect them, the more we can benefit from them in an environmentally friendly way — I am thinking here of eco-tourism — and the more we can profit.

You talked about the importance of environmental assessments and gave examples of them. How can they contribute to creating a balance between development on the one hand, and protecting the environment and habitats, on the other?

[English]

Ms. Mary Granskou: I'll use an example in the Ontario Ring of Fire region. As all of you know, an environmental assessment is a tool to lay the table for solutions. When you're working in a northern context, one of the fundamentally important steps that needs to be

taken is to allow for northern municipalities and northern aboriginal communities to be able to be heard, so that any of the partnerships and solutions flowing from those assessments can then be informed by the collective experience and information that's drawn in the assessment process.

I could go on. This is a lengthy conversation, but in that particular case, that is really one of the fundamental realities, or opportunities, we would say.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: You talked about the Northwest Territories and new areas protected by Parks Canada. However, it is not enough to designate an area; monitoring mechanisms must also be implemented and people have to take care of maintenance.

Can you tell us more about the fact that there needs to be funding and people for conservation to be done, and that it isn't enough to designate land for it to be conserved?

[English]

Ms. Mary Granskou: Absolutely. There are some very interesting examples that will be coming on stream, and the Northwest Territories is one prime place for them.

There are a couple of initiatives related to a particular new proposed national park. It's called Thaidene Nene in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, an area of high recreational and tourism value in the Northwest Territories. They're actually looking at how they can engage community members in an aboriginal rangers' program, which would develop monitoring information that could be useful for the management of the area and also might assist in terms of environmental assessments or industry proposals. In that case, there's also a dialogue happening to look at solutions around stewardship lands that may have both—you may have conservation values you want to protect, and development values—and how you reconcile them. That's a good example of what Mr. Sopuck is raising about stewardship across the broader landscape.

That is one example. But we do need new ways of getting the job done, so we're quite excited about some of the proposals that are coming on stream.

• (0925)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

I would now like to put a question to Mr. Bob Lowe.

You talked a lot about programs that allow farmers to manage their land in a more environmentally friendly way. You also talked about developing ties between Environment Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Can you tell us about current shortcomings and what the government could do to encourage other farmers' initiatives for habitat protection?

[English]

Mr. Bob Lowe: This may not be CCA policy, but being in Ottawa and being in Edmonton a few times, I don't understand how the Department of the Environment can come up with environmental solutions without consulting the departments of agriculture. There doesn't seem to be a cross communication there. When you consider the amount of land base that agriculture covers in Canada, it should be part of all the talks on any environmental policy, in my opinion.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Ms. Quach.

[English]

Next up we have Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and my thanks to our witnesses. It's very interesting again today, as it has proved to be throughout this study.

Mr. Farwell, I wanted to talk briefly about Luther Marsh and follow up a little bit on some of the questions Mr. Sopuck had. From your presentation, it seems this property was acquired in the 1950s. What state was that land in when it was acquired?

Mr. Joe Farwell: It was marginal land, as you would call it today. It would have been undrained. It's very flat, pancake land with hydric soils, so very organic soils. It's difficult to drain, and it would have taken quite a drainage scheme to dry it out and turn it into farm land.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: It was in the 1950s that it was acquired. We heard from a previous witness that a wetland area would take hundreds of years to recover. It sounds as if there's been a huge recovery here in a much shorter time. Can you clarify for me what the timeframe was? It was purchased in the 1950s. What time was spent on working through this process?

Mr. Joe Farwell: I would say it's a wetland that formed over centuries and centuries. It was wet ground, hydric soils, very damp, undrained. It was one type of wetland. When you put water on top of soils like that it turns it into a standing marsh. It's called Luther Marsh wildlife area. It's still a wetland. It's just a different class of wetland than it would have been. Wetlands form over hundreds of years. You can take hydric soils, flood them, and turn them into a marsh relatively quickly. That's the kind of timeframe we're dealing with for Luther Marsh.

• (0930)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: We have a lot of wetlands that have been drained, especially in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. They would have the same conditions in the soils. Nobody's really touched the soil conditions, as such. Would this be something that, in your estimation, would be able to be recovered in a reasonable timeframe?

Mr. Joe Farwell: We work very closely with Ducks Unlimited, and I was glad to hear other witnesses speak about other partnerships like that. When you flood an area like that, you can start to attract wildlife and birds very quickly.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Lowe, I was intrigued by one of the statements you made. You said if a species at risk is found on a property, it must be assumed that the landowner is doing something right. I'd like you to expand on that. I think it is important to recognize that a lot of times we find these species on somebody's farmland, and the assumption is that somebody's got to come in and

do something to protect it. What you're getting at is that the landowner has done something right, because the species is living and thriving on that property. I want you to expand on that a little bit if you could.

Mr. Bob Lowe: Can I give that to Fawn?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: It is often thought that you need to put a glass bowl around some of these species, but what these ranchers are doing on the land is obviously the right thing. I think what we need to enable within the Species at Risk Act is how to replicate that sort of stewardship in other areas. How can we use the stewardship functions in the act to build upon those experiences, the knowledge they have of the land, and then apply it to other places?

It's not easy to manage for a species at risk. Take a species like a Burrowing Owl. They need ground holes and the land needs to be grazed off very well. Then you have a Sprague's Pipit next to it that needs a totally different environment. I think enabling producers by helping them find the knowledge and the teamwork they need would be a great way to ensure habitat conservation in Canada. I think we'll see much better outcomes if we're able to work in this fashion.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: What you're saying is that the assumption should be that the environment has been protected, and actually we should be using this as a lesson and trying to see if we can replicate this particular lesson in other places, rather than making the assumption that if we don't do something immediately that species will not survive. After all, it has been surviving in that particular landscape and under those particular conditions. Rather than using it as something to stop the farmer, or the cattleman, from continuing the practice he's been doing, we should be learning from those practices.

Is that a fair summary of what you said?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Bob Lowe: Also, I think it was Mr. Farwell who brought up managing for an ecosystem rather than a species, and I think that's very important.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you, Mr. Lowe. That's great. Actually, it's exactly where I was going next with Mr. Farwell, to that comment, because I wanted him to speak about it a bit.

It was toward the end of your presentation where you said we should be looking at the protection of a broader concept of the natural environment and ecosystems, rather than individual species. I was hoping you could expand on that, because it is an important consideration as we go forward.

We heard from other witnesses too that through the Species at Risk Act that we have right now, sometimes what we do to protect one species actually ends up destroying another species, so we have to look at a broader picture.

Mr. Joe Farwell: I'm not sure I can say it any better than you just did. You really do have to look at a broader picture and look at the incremental impact or the consequential impact of action to protect one versus another. If you protect the ecosystem, the species will have a place to exist.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Great, thank you.

I'll just come back to you for one minute, Mr. Lowe, on the wetlands aspect of it. You talked about the lands of the farmer, the grasslands areas you work on, and the cattle land. The wetlands also make up a part of that, right? Is wetland restoration in some of those grassland areas something that the Cattlemen's Association is open to working on?

• (0935)

Mr. Bob Lowe: We'd be open to it, and at least in the native grassland areas, the wetlands are still there. Nothing has really changed.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Yes, but there are a lot of grasslands throughout the provincial areas, throughout the prairie areas, and we've seen a lot of those wetlands drained. Would that be something you would encourage us to look at, to bring back some of those wetlands? It creates a natural environment that is also conducive....

Ms. Jackson.

Ms. Fawn Jackson: I understand your question in terms of to how to re-establish wetlands that have been lost on the prairie. The thing that is really unique about ranching land is that wetlands rarely get drained. They're part of the habitat. They're part of the water source on ranching land, so the proportion of land that gets drained is actually quite low.

However, working to improve riparian areas is a focus of our organization. We work with Cows and Fish, an organization out of Alberta that works with ranchers to understand riparian health assessments, how grazing impacts the riparian area next to them, and so on.

So certainly making improvements and perhaps re-establishing, if that is felt as a need in some particular areas, but it's mostly a non-issue on grazing land.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you, Mr. Toet.

Thanks to our witnesses.

We're going to keep the conversation going with Ms. Duncan.

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

If I could begin with Ms. Granskou, you talked a lot about land use plans and environmental assessments. Could you make very specific recommendations to the committee?

What would be your wish list with regard to land use planning? How could the federal government best support land use planning?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Thank you for that.

Actually, in my rush to use my 10 minutes effectively I skipped over the recommendation. There is a program that currently does support land use planning. It's under Aboriginal Affairs. It's focused right now on supporting first nations on reserve lands, which are much smaller areas than what we're talking about and what provinces are working on in many parts of the country.

Our recommendation would be to adjust those terms of reference so that the current funding envelope could go to provincial exercises that engage over a broader area with all the right interests, be they

first nation companies, northern municipalities, environmental groups, and others.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you. I appreciate that.

You also mentioned you're moving to implementation plans. What specific recommendation would you give the committee to help with implementation, particularly including first nations, for example?

Ms. Mary Granskou: There are places where Canada is engaged, such as the Northwest Territories.

One of the questions that comes up, and back to an earlier question.... We need to ensure that the implementation capacity is there. For instance, if the federal government or if Canada were a party to a land use plan and were part of an implementation agreement, that would ensure that the resources would be effective into the future, whether they were a lead party in that case or not. Often there are other partners who want to play a stewardship role, who also participate in implementation. There are examples in different parts of the country.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: You talked about sustainability. Is there anything you want to say about finances?

Ms. Mary Granskou: In terms of finances—this is very much a theme with our other colleagues, as well—we're moving to a place of creative partnership. The capacity that any dollar can bring now can be replicated by others. We're in a very interesting time in Canada in terms of being able to advance very innovative and strategic partnerships for habitat conservation.

• (0940)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I appreciate that.

Mr. Farwell, I'm going to pick up on the partnerships piece. What would the recommendations be to this committee—very specific recommendations—on how we help you do partnerships?

Mr. Joe Farwell: We've worked through the environmental farm plan for many years. Filing an environmental farm plan is one of the requirements to get funding support from our rural water quality program. Continuing to develop and enhance the environmental farm plan is an important contribution the federal government could make.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So the recommendation would be to build on the environmental farm plan.

Mr. Joe Farwell: Continue to support and build on the environmental farm plan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: You also talked about marginal lands and your rural water quality program. Is there a recommendation you would like to make to the committee regarding how land might be acquired to limit development?

Mr. Joe Farwell: I don't actually have a recommendation that's specific to our watershed.

We're an organization that owns a lot of land, 20,000 hectares. We're in a very highly populated watershed. We find that the landowners do as good a job managing the land as we're able to. The land is part of an active farming community. We recognize that it has to be drained in the places it's farmed. Acquiring more land may not actually be a solution, and it's certainly not necessarily, in southwestern Ontario, the best value.

The best value comes in working with the people who already own the land to implement practices that conserve it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: You talked about marginal lands. Could you expand on that, please?

Mr. Joe Farwell: There's a real potential threat with the high value of cropping right now. We've seen an awful lot of land that hasn't been tilled. There's an awful lot of drainage equipment out on the landscape right now in our watershed. Some of the lands that were not really profitable to farm five years ago might all of a sudden be profitable. That's a reality we're facing in our watershed, and we're not sure there's a quick and easy solution.

We provide incentives to plant forests and preserve them, through our rural water quality program, but incentives aren't really strong enough in the face of really high value corn, and things like that.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So the recommendation to this committee would be what, please?

Mr. Joe Farwell: To provide some local assistance, possibly, for some of these environmental goods and services.

Mr. Lowe referenced that it's the public good that benefits from environmental goods and services, and it is quite appropriate that the public contribute to some of that.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: My last question will be to Mr. Lowe.

Could you make a specific recommendation to the committee, please? You've talked about the lack of communication between Agriculture Canada and Environment Canada.

Ms. Fawn Jackson: Only last week I was in Mexico City at the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. It's an agreement between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. Previously, when the meeting was held in Canada, we had somebody from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, as well as somebody from the Canadian Wildlife Service, as well as the producer organizations. Each country is represented.

I think that when we all get in the same room, we have lots of similar goals. I think it's simply working together and understanding how we can collaborate, how we can combine resources, and how we can combine expertise, so it's a new way of thinking in terms of getting people with common goals in the room, even though they come from different backgrounds. There's great opportunity there that we can build on in the future.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pilon, you have the floor.

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

My first question is for Mr. Farwell.

The Grand River is located in your area. It is an area with high-density residential development and urban sprawl. What are the consequences of the development on fauna, on flora and, especially, on wetlands in that area? Do you think that most wetlands can be restored quickly or does that vary, all circumstances being different?

● (0945)

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Farwell: Thank you.

Certainly, I think all circumstances are different. Our watershed is highly populated, so of course that's going to impact people. People live in five major cities and throughout the watershed the majority is farmed. A big portion of our watershed, if you go back 200 years, would have been forested, wetlands and grasslands, like much of the country, I guess. I would say there certainly have been impacts.

In terms of restoring wetlands, there are places for it. They can be restored. A lot of times when there's a city where there once was a wetland, you're not going to restore that wetland, so it becomes important that you have some place like Luther Marsh and other similar wetlands.

The other piece we've started to really pay attention to is restoring riparian corridors in order for habitat species to migrate along the corridors, so little sections and buffers along our rivers and streams get some incremental benefit connecting nodes of habitat. We're never going to turn southwestern Ontario back into a wetland or a forest, but we can do our best to preserve what we have for wetlands and connect the ones that we can.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: I have another question for you. During your presentation, you said that your conservation authority had an integrated approach, that it seeks to protect both land and water. Could you tell us more about this approach? Do you recommend that the federal government have a similar approach?

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Farwell: I would certainly recommend that the federal government adopt a similar approach. We're fundamentally a water management agency, but a long time ago folks recognized that you cannot manage water effectively without understanding what's happening on the landscape. That's why we do things like plant trees. Runoff from a farm field that's been fully cultivated can be of a much different quality than runoff from a forest, or a farm field that's been put under conservation tillage. We think that the two have to be considered together, and through our water management planning, we work with both water and land. If you try to separate the two, you won't help either one of them.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Ms. Granskou, your organization aims to protect sustainable commercial interests and ensure long-term economic advantages for northern communities. In your opinion, has our country progressed toward achieving these goals?

[English]

Ms. Mary Granskou: Yes, we definitely have. If we compare where we are now to where we were ten years ago, we've now developed a depth of experience in advancing solutions that meet the needs of everyone around the table. That's quite heartening. There's a long history of stewardship agreements in southern Canada. In northern Canada, I think we're creating the space and the experience and taking that same model forward, so we are very encouraged.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: I only have 30 seconds left. I will continue during the next round.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You have almost one minute.

[Translation]

Mr. François Pilon: Since I have almost one minute, I will continue. I will be brief.

Mr. Lowe, each year, your organization gives an environmental stewardship award to a cattle producer whose conservation practices exceed standards. Can you tell us a bit about the person who won the prize this year?

[English]

Mr. Bob Lowe: Christoph Weder was Alberta's nomination, I guess you'd call it. I'm not sure what you want to know. He's taken an area in northern Alberta, and as with all of them, our qualifications are not necessarily what's happening now but the improvement that's happened over a course of years, how the improvement has come. Christoph basically won because, of the nominations we had, he proved to be the most environmentally sustainable manager.

• (0950)

Ms. Fawn Jackson: They did a species assessment and had something like 130 different birds on their property. There's an enormous amount of conservation for habitat on those ranches.

Thanks for the question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much. That's impressive.

We'll move on to Mr. Lunney.

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

Thanks to all of our witnesses for being with us today.

I want to start with the Grand River. After 75 years, it's the oldest of the 36 conservation areas in Ontario. Recently, according to your testimony, it was named a national heritage river. I want to say congratulations. This is a very effective working model with the Grand River Conservation Authority.

I lived in the area for 15 years, but I've been gone from the area now for more than 20 years. I want to comment that in those days the Grand had already had such an amazing recovery. Canoeing on the Grand is a very popular pastime now. It's another world when you get down in the water and travel along that corridor.

So I've been away for more than 20 years. What are the challenges facing the Grand today?

Mr. Joe Farwell: The challenges facing the Grand are many. We're addressing them through a water management plan, working with our municipalities. The challenge, I would say, is intensification. Certainly there's an awful lot of urban development, and with all of the sewage that gets treated and then the effluent that's put into the river, it becomes extremely challenging for the river to assimilate that. Our municipalities are doing great wonders spending on upgrades to the sewage treatment plants. We need to continue to work with the farm community to minimize the amount of nutrients that run off into the streams. We have a really strong working relationship with them, so we remain optimistic about that.

One of the things we're facing at the Grand right now—I think across the country you'll see this—is this really radical climate shifting that seems to be going on. We go from very dry periods, like last year, to very wet periods. It becomes a challenge when you have a managed system like the Grand and only so much reservoir space to take the spring runoff and only so much water to dole out over the summer. The Grand is a highly managed system. The snow is collected through runoff into the reservoirs and discharged over the summer, so it's not just sewage treatment plant effluent discharged in the Grand.

I would say the big challenge for the river is the intensification and the shifting climate.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks for that. Maintaining water levels and flow levels is going to be an ongoing challenge.

My colleagues have already worked through the effective model you have with a small amount of money over a long period of time, over a decade. The \$34 million is a substantial amount, but there are 5,000 water protection projects and the total of the grants amounted to \$13 million with farmers contributing. There's the partnership thing again. Because of the longevity and the hard work that's been going into this, you have buy-in from the community and that word "partnership", that's sustainable. We're hearing that as a very effective model.

Mary Granskou, you used that language about creative partnerships as well. You had a tremendous group of people come together with the Canadian Boreal Initiative, a wide spectrum of people coming together to create the coalition and the agreement. What does that look like now? Do these partners still get together on a regular basis to discuss issues or is it institutional management that's carrying on the vision that was created initially?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Thanks for your question.

The way it's implemented is that there are meetings twice a year, and we're continually looking at renewing the membership. Each of the members has their own action plan that covers their own area, field of work, whether it's a company, a community, or an NGO. They're now moving to a funding model where they want to initiate projects that they can get behind in very specific terms. So we're continuing to evolve, because if you don't evolve you're going to lose interest and support. So we're continually doing that, including where the sectors are that we don't have membership for.

For instance, in British Columbia, very key is the mining sector. So we have very active dialogue on that question, for instance.

• (0955)

Mr. James Lunney: You have a huge area with a small population. I think active engagement is going to be an ongoing necessity.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): We'll end on that point.

Mr. James Lunney: I was just getting to a really good question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Five minutes is short. Perhaps one of your colleagues can ask your question for you.

Monsieur Choquette.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

I would like to raise something. Perhaps it escaped me, but I have not heard about climate change yet. Last week, in the House, the NDP presented a motion on climate change, which was voted on yesterday. I think this aspect is very important. If our national habitat conservation plan does not talk about climate change, the plan will not be effective.

Unfortunately, in five minutes, I don't have much time to talk about it, but I did want to say that it is very important to tackle climate change.

In this regard, Ms. Granskou, you mentioned that in 2007, I think, 1,500 scientists from all over the world expressed their support for the goals of the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework. Could you remind us a bit of what those goals were, and tell us if they are on their way to being achieved? Could the federal government do things to accelerate or facilitate the achievement of the goals of the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Granskou: Thank you very much.

They have advanced significantly. For instance, in the provinces, several provinces have stepped forward to really embrace the vision of advancing, with a stewardship model, the goals to sustainably develop approximately half of the landscape, and to look at conservation regimes in the other half. One of the drivers, actually, is this change in climate because we're going to need to manage in a forward-looking way with very dynamic solutions over very large areas, if we're going to preserve jobs, the economy, and species.

Quebec is a great example. They have their Plan Nord. It's a very serious initiative launched by Premier Charest. It is now into the government of Madame Marois, so they've preserved the initiative. They're reframing it. They're continually developing initiatives within it that are going to advance the goals in very serious terms.

So you really can't get more serious than that, than a jurisdiction that takes it on. I'm sorry, I'm probably over time here, but how can the federal government provide support? I think number one is to support land use planning. I would put that at the very forefront of what the federal government can do right now.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Would that be your main recommendation?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Granskou: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: That's great, thank you very much.

In this respect, I would like to come back on important tools for species conservation. I think you talked about that in your third recommendation. You spoke first of the stability of the Species At Risk Act. That act should therefore not be reopened, right?

[*English*]

Ms. Mary Granskou: Yes, what we're saying there is that we need time. For instance, a number of provinces are in very advanced stages of action planning for different species. There are collaborative tables under way. I'll give an example in Quebec. You know a number of the northern first nation leaders are getting together around what a collaborative strategy would look like across our nations. It's very historic, what's happening there.

You have other places where agreements are starting to crystallize to be able to advance, in concrete terms, action plans in their region. All we're saying is to allow for that implementation. That's really our core point there.

• (1000)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Very well.

You also talked about environmental assessments. Of course, here we had the misfortune of seeing the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act be in part distorted. In addition, some of its strength was taken away, to the point that it does not allow for proper project assessment or appropriate consultations.

You represent several groups, including first nations. That shows the importance of what a good environmental assessment should do. It means sitting down with the groups concerned and implementing something that would be good for everyone.

Is that also what you would recommend for having good environmental assessments?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): I'd ask for a quick answer because we're out of time.

Ms. Mary Granskou: Just briefly, I would say that what's vitally important is to ensure that whatever assessments are done with provinces are the right solutions—important now more than ever.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Mr. Storseth, it's all yours.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. May I say, you're a refreshing change in the chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you to all the witnesses.

Ms. Granskou, I'm very thankful that you talked about the Ring of Fire, and how important a mineral find it is going to be to our country and to the first nation communities that are in the area. You talked a lot about needing to make sure that all levels of government work together to ensure we come up with the proper end results. You've also talked a lot about land use planning and the importance of land use planning.

Land use planning, as I understand it, is predominantly something done by the provincial jurisdictions. Would you suggest or agree that federal money in some cases like this would be best used going directly to the provinces to come up with these solutions?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Support could go directly to the provinces, but more importantly what we recommend is that the support go to those processes, where provinces, first nations and others are at the table working together. That would be the prerequisite for support. Because if you don't have that partnership agreement, you're not going to advance the outcome.

I don't know if that answers your question.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes, definitely. My questions revolve a little bit around the electricity need that is in that area and that region. You're absolutely right, this is something that the provinces and the first nation communities need to be at the table to talk about.

Thank you for that.

Mr. Lowe, would you agree with me that producers are the first line of defence when it comes to habitat conservation?

Mr. Bob Lowe: Definitely. They are the people there.

Mr. Brian Storseth: So when we're talking about that, I think it's important—and it's been raised several times—that we respect landowners' rights, making sure that we work with producers hand in hand so that we respect landowners' rights and create more incentives, rather than regulations.

Is this something that you and the Canadian cattlemen would agree with?

Mr. Bob Lowe: Yes, that's our focus. For anything to succeed it has to be incentive-based, not regulation-based.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Do you have an example of any incentives that have been successful in this field in the last several years?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: Yes. I think it can be either recognition-based or it could be in the form of a payment.

In B.C. there is a program that is paying farmers for... It's just getting up and running for species at risk. There are the ALUS programs across Canada, the alternative land use services programs, that pay farmers as well.

The key is that you don't want to create species at risk or any other habitat as a liability for the producer, because if they don't want it on their lands because they see it as being a risk to what they're going to be able to do on that land, that's a big problem for all of us. What we

want to do is make sure they understand that their private property rights are respected. We can move forward in that sort of atmosphere.

•(1005)

Mr. Brian Storseth: I absolutely agree with you on respecting the private property rights.

What level of government would you recommend as best to work with local producers in this? Would it be the municipal level, the provincial level, or a cross-national level, the same rules for everyone?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: Over the last year we've really looked at ecosystem services programs trying to figure out what is our policy on them and under what principles would we now support a program. One of the big things was that it needs to be locally driven, so at the municipal level.

However, when talking to these numerous organizations that have been trying to get up and running, I've asked, "What would have helped you to get up and running? What were your biggest obstacles?" Lots of them said that just the start-up of getting people in the room, getting a staff person on board, all these sorts of things, and having somebody to lean on for expertise.

That's where our recommendation comes from, for creating a seed fund that these regional programs could apply for. They might need, sort of, \$60,000 to get up and running. Then after that they would be on their own in bringing the right partners together. We think that it could be a really effective use of government dollars to get things started on the right track.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I think that's an excellent point.

How much time do I have?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): None, even with the compliment. We're pretty strict here.

Thanks, everyone. This is a good discussion, so we'll return to Madame Quach.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My next questions will be for Ms. Jackson.

You said earlier that wetlands are rarely drained. You say it would be better to work with ranchers so they have a better understanding of how environmental assessments work and how to protect riparian areas on grazing land.

Mr. Lowe, you talked about creating a common fund for producers in order to put in place better environmental practices on farm land.

I met with a group of producers who said that to put in place better agricultural practices, the federal government would have to invest more in research and technological innovation. Could you talk a bit more about that? How could we help producers so that land, habitat and ecosystems would be better protected? At the same time, do you think that as a result, cattle and animals could be in better health and provide more to the local, regional and perhaps even national economy?

[English]

Ms. Fawn Jackson: You make an excellent point on the research front. We can't develop best management practices unless we know what we should be doing and how we should be doing it. I think research and innovation are always a good investment, so we certainly support that.

You talked about how to manage riparian areas and grasslands, and how to develop BMPs, best management practices. I think that's really important. That is an area where we, as an agriculture industry, need support. As I mentioned before, it's really difficult to manage for a multitude of resources. Not only do you have to know how to take care of your animals, you have to know how to market your animals. You have to know how to take care of your riparian area and your species at risk, and the list goes on and on.

You can imagine that for a family farm—our average herd size in Canada is just over 60 head and is run by a family—that's a lot to take on, so support for those areas in terms of research, in terms of extension, is integral to conservation and agricultural efforts going forward.

Does that answer your question?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Yes, that is very helpful, thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Granskou.

You also talked about the issue of the mechanism for habitat protection. We know that in its last budget, the federal government changed fish habitat protection, for example.

Do you think that undermining environmental protection, stripping environmental assessments and decreasing protection for lakes and rivers could have consequences on biodiversity? I imagine that is the case for the boreal forest, because there are also rivers and lakes there. What effect can that have on protecting habitats and ecosystems that are found in the boreal forest?

• (1010)

[English]

Ms. Mary Granskou: First of all, I want to say that fisheries is not my area of expertise. The last thing I want to do is comment on something on which I'm not qualified.

In terms of how we move forward, Canada is a federation. It's a combination of federal, provincial, regional, municipal regimes. It's the combination of all of it that's going to be key in a particular region.

One thing I will underscore is that the boreal in some places is half water. It's very much managing a landscape and advancing the best practices that recognize that what you're doing is working across an

area. For instance, in northern Ontario, when you think of building a road across that landscape or waterscape, you're thinking about a road, but also—pardon the metaphor—part road, part bridge, in effect. It's a very dynamic, complex landscape for engineering.

It's the decisions we make, and supporting the right decisions is absolutely fundamental to the lasting nature of any solution or infrastructure.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. Woodworth.

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

My thanks to all of the witnesses, and a particular warm welcome to Mr. Farwell.

I appreciate your being here and I want to convey publicly the regrets of our chair, Dr. Harold Albrecht. He was very interested in coming today to hear your evidence but had an unavoidable prior commitment and couldn't make it.

I want to ask some questions that may be a little bit technical. I'm going to resort mainly to Mr. Farwell, if I may. I would like, first of all, to inquire whether the Grand River Conservation Authority has worked with, benefited from, or contributed to what I understand goes under the acronym of NAHARP, the national agri-environmental health analysis and reporting program.

I wasn't really aware of how much the GRCA was involved with farm planning until I heard your evidence, and I don't know whether this is a tool that you use or not. I hope I'm not putting you too much on the spot by asking.

Mr. Joe Farwell: I can certainly confirm that I'm not familiar with the acronym, so I don't believe we've done any work with that program.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I may send you some information about it because I would like the GRCA to be plugged into that.

I also was interested in your comments about the environmental farm plan. Again, the acronym has changed. I'm hoping the program delivery is the same. Around April 1, 2009, that shifted into the Canada Ontario farm stewardship program. I wondered if you knew anything about that.

Mr. Joe Farwell: Certainly. We still participate through that program. One of the real special parts of that program, as I understand it, is that farmers sit down in workshops and work through their environmental plans. There's some learning that happens. There's some commitment that happens when we work through a workshop. Then from that some funding can flow to carry out some improvements to any environmental features on the land.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Does GRCA have any direct role in participating in those kinds of stewardship programs with farmers?

• (1015)

Mr. Joe Farwell: Certainly we do. We don't deliver the workshops under the environmental farm plan—that's carried out through different groups—but we do actually have a connection. A requirement for our funding programs is participation in the environmental farm plan, so we're very familiar with how it works.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good. I also wanted to ask you about the GRCA's rural water quality program. I noted that it's done in conjunction with all three levels of government. I wondered if you could tell me what participation the Government of Canada has in the rural water quality program that GRCA runs.

Mr. Joe Farwell: The Government of Canada doesn't provide direct funding assistance. That all comes through our municipal partners through the environmental farm plan, and so continuing support for that plan becomes an important piece.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's very good. My impression is that this rural water quality program, by controlling the amount of fertilizer and manure that goes into the Grand River, is having an impact with respect to the health of the Great Lakes, specifically Lake Erie. Am I right about that?

Mr. Joe Farwell: That's absolutely right, and that was the main draw to pull the federal group into the discussion of our water management plan, so the federal government has representation on the development of a watershed plan because of its interest in Lake Erie.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's very good. I'm hoping this committee might get to a study of the Great Lakes watershed overall, and if so, we may have you back to tell us a little more about that.

I was also interested in the species work that GRCA has done, and I'm remembering a federally assisted program to protect or recover eagles in the Grand River watershed. Am I remembering that correctly?

Mr. Joe Farwell: We deal with a really wide range of programs and seek funding sources where we can, but I'm not familiar with that one.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay. It relates to the area of ecosystems management that I wanted to ask you about because there is a value to being species-specific in some cases. But I also understood you to say that there might be other value in taking a broader ecosystems approach. Is that correct?

Mr. Joe Farwell: Absolutely—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): If we could have a quick answer, it would be great.

Mr. Joe Farwell: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right, we're out of time. I would like to explore it but—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): You can go ahead. The answer was yes. That was a quick answer.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I have more questions. I would have asked a few more, but I'll stop there.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thank you.

We can't always predict what happens around votes, but it seems there is less likelihood that we'll be going into votes, so it seems we are going to have our full time here today.

Next we have Ms. Rempel. Maybe you want to continue with Mr. Woodworth's questioning, or maybe not. It's up to you.

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

The spice of life: we never know what's going to happen.

Ms. Granskou, you said a few things that I wanted to give you an opportunity to tease out. You and your organization have appeared before committee before, and one of the things I think we all appreciated is the level of effort that went into putting a partnership together. You achieved that.

One of the questions we are looking at right now is best practices for habitat conservation, and one of the themes you'll notice that's coming up in questioning with all groups is how we can maintain a working landscape. How can we acknowledge the fact that there are economic demands on our land, and how can we balance that with the need for conservation?

Could you make some brief remarks to the committee about how that partnership was put together? How did you get all these groups with disparate interests to the table in a depoliticized fashion, and what have been some of the best practices for maintaining that partnership?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Sure, thank you for the question.

The partnership arose because there were increasing conflicts, so in essence that was a driver for all the parties around that initial table, to explore whether they could work together way before the framework came along, which was our consensus document. The solutions were not as evident then, and there was strong leadership by some of the members on all the interests. Whether it was the resource sector, the first nations, or the conservation organizations, they wanted to work on solutions, so the framework came out of that desire to drive to another place.

The partnership has been held together through direct experience and results. The results we have seen and have supported are driving further work together, so the more we see actual implementation of land use plans.... They won't be perfect solutions, but they are today's agreements around finding a way to accommodate interests and to move forward on our shared objectives. Alberta's Lower Athabasca regional plan is one where our membership table in Alberta was very active in making recommendations.

We look forward to continued new practices and informing that process as we move forward in addressing questions.

• (1020)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: To drill down a little bit more, who brought that first group to the table? What was the impetus or the catalyst for actually getting the discussion on forming a partnership together? Was there a specific instance? I'm simply curious, because it seems to be working well.

Ms. Mary Granskou: It is. As I mentioned, there were leaders who were feeling there had to be another way and actually wanted to test the model. Could a broadly based, sector-based approach work in a landscape that is so vast? It really was a major experiment.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Further to your comments on land use planning, over the last couple of years this is a theme that's been recurrent in this committee. When we look at cumulative impact assessment, especially when it comes to habitat management, do you think that is the best place within a land use planning framework because it informs policy, rather than looking at it on a case-by-case basis?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Let me use a live example. I don't mean to keep coming back to Ontario, but I refer to the Ring of Fire because it's coming on stream. What do we need? We need land use planning and the province has committed to that. We need to financially support that, which is a challenge. We need environmental assessment that's going to lay the table for the whole region, so that the right decisions and the right information can be gathered to make those decisions. We also need a table for a provincial-first nations dialogue.

We're hopeful that some of those steps are going to be taken in what we hope will be real terms in the near future. You need all of those in order to advance. It's not one single solution, but it's how they fit together cohesively.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): That's all the time you have, I'm sorry.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Really? I didn't compliment you and I still got cut off.

A voice: It doesn't work.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Now we go to Ms. Duncan, who has five minutes as well.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Granskou, I'm going to be short. Would your recommendation to this committee be that SARA needs stability—don't open it—and it needs implementation?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Yes, and we're not saying never to do that, but right now we're at a very formational time in terms of being able to land solutions.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Mr. Lowe, you mentioned that a SARA habitat fund might be useful. Do you have a specific recommendation to the committee, please?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: Sure. Some of those organizations we listed that we work with apply to the habitat stewardship fund for support. Some of their comments have been that it would be really great if some of it could be directed specifically at agriculture, because they see such great opportunity there.

As well, they have concern about the fact that many of these organizations are small organizations and it takes a lot of effort on the paper front to get access to some of those dollars. Any way we could improve that process would help them a lot as well.

•(1025)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Ms. Jackson.

Mr. Farwell, Mr. Woodworth mentioned in 2009 there was a change in the program. At the beginning, you mentioned the environmental farm program. Do you have a preference?

Mr. Joe Farwell: I don't have a real preference at all. I don't think the actual workings of the program have changed that much, it's the delivery and the name of the program that has changed. But we don't really have a preference.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: But you would still like it expanded, is that the recommendation?

Mr. Joe Farwell: We would still like it expanded.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You also mentioned shifting water levels. It's not only a problem in the Grand, it's the Great Lakes lowered water level, it's reduced precipitation in the prairies, all linked to climate change. Do you have a specific recommendation to this committee, please?

Mr. Joe Farwell: My recommendation is that the nation work to actually understand what's happening through monitoring. Within the Grand, we're responding by examining the rainfall patterns and the shifting changes in modelling what could potentially happen. I think that has to happen on a national scale, and really, monitoring is probably a key piece of it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So increased research and monitoring at the national level, that's your recommendation?

Mr. Joe Farwell: Yes, certainly.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, thank you so much.

Mr. Lowe and Ms. Jackson, you've mentioned these are real issues for riparian areas and grasslands. What recommendations would you make to the committee to help you conserve these areas, please, the specific recommendations, your wish list?

Ms. Fawn Jackson: I think our wish list is going back to that habitat stewardship fund, as well as setting up an ecosystem services program. I think that would enable us to really capitalize on the opportunity for agricultural land to produce the services that the whole public wants.

Mr. Bob Lowe: There was a study done west of Calgary on riparian area management and what the actual benefit was to the city of Calgary's water supply. This was monetized to the point that this fellow actually came up with a dollar figure that it would cost each resident of the city of Calgary each year in their taxes, if certain things happened to the riparian areas along the rivers. I think a wish list from us to the federal government would be to maybe publicize these points as to what we can do in terms of the actual health of ecosystems or riparian area management through just grass management.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Is that all you want them to do, to promote awareness? Or is there support that they could provide to you so that you can continue to do this?

Mr. Bob Lowe: If we got into the ecosystem services part, the first thing you have to have is a market. You can't sell something without a market. The federal government would be, in our opinion, the facilitator of the market, for whatever it will be, whether it be clean water, or clean air, or a species, whatever.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much.

We will continue. It's back to Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Granskou, you had talked about land use planning. Every province is a little bit different. Can you give me examples of land use planning that you see as being very successful?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Sure.

There are emerging models, and then there are models that are now being implemented. They range from the Innu Nation in Newfoundland, working together in Labrador, to setting the table for planning outcomes in Quebec where they have the policy approach called Plan Nord. Ontario's made major commitments. There are some plans that have come into place in Ontario's northern region. There are many more to come. Manitoba has five first nations that have worked with the province to develop Pimachiowin Aki on the east side of Lake Winnipeg.

Others will come on stream in the future. I mentioned Alberta and the Lower Athabaska plan. In the Northwest Territories you have a plan in development with the Dehcho First Nations. There are numerous examples. In British Columbia, they're bringing land management agreements into place, such as with the Kaska Nation and the Taku. Those are a few examples.

•(1030)

Mr. Brian Storseth: You had talked about the need for making sure all the different partners were at the table. Of all these examples, is there one that sticks out to you as really highlighting the way it should be done?

Ms. Mary Granskou: There are great examples. The key ingredients, really, are having the right parties at the table and having consistent financial resources available. We see that kind of rolling up and rolling back, which is one of the absolute keys, and then government being there ready to implement. Those are some of the key ingredients.

I don't want to single out one because all models are regionally specific. Each one of them has its own special qualities. It's like trying to pick a favourite child.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lowe, we had talked about producers and the role they play in the ecosystem. But would you agree with me that producers are actually an integral part of the ecosystem? They're actually not something that I would see as being foreign to it. They actually play a natural role in it. I think a lot of people don't necessarily understand the difference between, perhaps, ranchers or cattlemen, compared to what we would have with some of our grains and oilseeds producers. Could you also talk a little bit about the water management, and the importance of water management to our cattle producers?

Mr. Bob Lowe: By and large, the ranching industry is intergenerational. If we were to manage things on a one-year, five-

year, or ten-year cycle we would quickly go broke, because we would have no water or grass left. In order for ranching to be profitable, you're looking out 50 or 100 years.

You can drought-proof yourself by grass management and water management to an extent, but not totally. To an extent, good management, just by the way it works, takes into account climate variability. I don't know if I'm answering your question, but we need to manage sustainably or we can't do it.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Oh, absolutely, and the point of the question was that producers themselves, especially ranchers, are an integral part of the actual habitat.

I know that on our own farm we have to make sure that we look after the dugouts and everything. If you were to develop haphazardly, without that 20-year or 50-year vision, you wouldn't have the ability to be ranchers at the end of the day. I think that's the point that we're both trying to make.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Bob Lowe: We're as—

Mr. Brian Storseth: Go ahead.

Mr. Bob Lowe: I was just going to say that we're as much a part of the environment as the deer, the grizzly bears, and the sage grouse. We're all in one place.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Yes, absolutely.

Thank you very much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much.

We've done really well on time today. We actually got through an entire round of all the parties asking questions.

This is at the will of the committee, and I turn to you for direction. Do we want to continue with questions or do we want to adjourn a little early, maybe prepare for the next round of witnesses, and give these kind folks a bit of a break?

Mr. Lunney, did you want to chime in?

Mr. James Lunney: I have one little question.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Do other folks have questions?

Mr. Lunney can ask his question and then we'll adjourn.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks very much.

I wanted to go back to the boreal forest coalition and Ms. Granskou.

You do a lot of work in the north with first nation groups. The question I have is simply about incorporating traditional aboriginal knowledge. Can you give us an example of where traditional aboriginal knowledge was an asset in coming up with the agreement or implementing management strategies?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Yes, absolutely.

I'll give the example of the caribou recovery strategy that was developed by Environment Canada. They did a good job, and it was a very challenging task to attempt to incorporate some traditional knowledge in what they came up with. They had a credible outreach process that was appreciated by a number of first nations, and that work is continuing amongst the first nations. That's one example.

• (1035)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Thanks very much.

I want to first thank the MPs for not being unruly on my first occasion in this role.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Ms. Granskou, did you want to add something?

Ms. Mary Granskou: Could I finish with an invitation?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): Sure, absolutely.

Ms. Mary Granskou: To the Manitoba members here, we're having a reception with the Boreal Initiative and Boreal Leadership Council in Winnipeg in a couple of weeks.

Mr. Sopuck, I would invite you to come and speak with them about municipalities. We'd really welcome that.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Megan Leslie): That's great. Thanks for that.

Thank you so much to all the witnesses. This has been excellent food for thought in our study. We really appreciate what you've been able to bring to the table.

Thanks very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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