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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): Good morning, committee members. I'd like to call meeting 73 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to order.

We're pleased to have with us today a number of witnesses, including from Ducks Unlimited Canada, Mr. Greg Siekaniec and Jim Brennan; from the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Mr. John Lounds, Michael Bradstreet, and Lisa McLaughlin; and from the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Mr. Jonathan Scarth.

We'll proceed in that order. Each group will have a 10-minute opening presentation, followed by questions from committee members.

We'll begin with Ducks Unlimited Canada, please, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Siekaniec, welcome to the committee.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec (Chief Executive Officer, Ducks Unlimited Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I would really like to thank you for inviting us here to appear before you to discuss a subject that is obviously at the very heart of Ducks Unlimited Canada's mission. We appreciate being given the opportunity to provide our thoughts on a national conservation plan for Canada and hope to impress upon you the central role that habitat conservation should play within it.

In addition to my remarks today, I also refer you to our written submission, which addresses in more detail the questions your committee has been tasked with coming up with answers to.

As Mr. Chairman said, my name is Greg Siekaniec. I am the chief executive officer of Ducks Unlimited Canada, and am from Stonewall, Manitoba.

Joining me today is Jim Brennan, our director of governmental affairs, based here in our Ottawa office.

Ducks Unlimited Canada is our nation's leading wetland conservation organization. Our 365 employees work to conserve wetland and upland habitat in every province and territory, and we don't do it alone. We are fuelled by the passion of nearly 139,000 grassroots supporters, including over 6,200 volunteers, who recognize the rich tradition of hunting and the role that hunters have played in conserving habitat across North America.

Our efforts are also complemented by thousands of conservation partners across the country, such as the two organizations appearing alongside me today, as well as private landowners, our most important conservation stakeholders.

We've made good use of the resources provided by supporters, partners, and governments. In fact, our annual spending between 2008 to 2012 resulted in several direct economic benefits each year: $77 million in GDP, 969 full-time equivalents in employment, $60 million in employment income, and $16 million in operating profits for Canadian businesses.

Our appearance before you comes at an interesting time for Ducks Unlimited Canada. As we celebrate our 75th anniversary, we've been reflecting back on accomplishments while leaning hard into the headwinds of change that await us.

Looking back, we do have much to celebrate. We have invested over $2 billion in Canada, securing 6.4 million acres of habitat, and influencing an additional 105 million acres through policy and extension work.

Looking ahead, however, we see many challenges on the horizon that concern us, the largest of which is habitat loss. When we addressed this committee last year, we quantified the rate of wetland loss. Since that address last year, Canada has lost an additional 32,000 acres of its already-depleted stock of wetland habitat. If you think about it, that means a wetland area over half of the size of the old city of Nepean has vanished in just over one year.

When you imagine that rate of loss occurring across the country, you begin to understand the magnitude of the issue. Ontario alone has lost more than 70% of its historical wetland base within developed areas. The Canadian prairies, the nursery of North America's waterfowl populations, have lost up to 70% of their wetlands since they were first settled in the 1800s.

This rate of loss is hard to keep pace with, despite all of our collective efforts. In fact, if Ducks Unlimited Canada could replace all the wetlands lost in Saskatchewan every year, it would cost two times our annual budget for the entire prairie region. For every day we lose ground, both figuratively and literally, Canadians are burdened with real economic consequences.

Consider again the fact that the acres Ducks Unlimited Canada secures in one year provide over $4 billion in societal benefits: flood control, climate regulation, water purification, tourism, recreation, and so on. Now imagine those benefits being wiped out, nullified, because we are being outpaced by wetland loss that could be prevented.

What is the solution to this dilemma?

Wetland conservation must take place on both working and unsettled landscapes. I will use prairie and boreal Canada as examples to illustrate how we feel this can possibly be done.

Based on our scientific studies, which should underpin any conservation actions, we have identified these two regions as priorities for continental populations of migrating waterfowl. Prairie Canada is a priority area for Ducks Unlimited Canada because up to 50% of North America's waterfowl are hatched and fledged within this area. The prairies also host family farms, ranches, and commercial agricultural enterprises, all of which are under pressure to both increase productivity and decrease environmental damage.

To conserve habitat in these working landscapes, we believe a mixed approach is required, one that includes market-based incentives to restore lost and degraded wetlands as well as a regulatory backstop to retain those that remain. While there are a number of incentive programs being implemented, we believe the most successful ones will be developed in such a way that they compel stakeholders to invest in the long-term security of vital habitat.

● (0850)

Ducks Unlimited Canada also has a keen interest in the unsettled landscapes of boreal Canada, because 30% of North America's waterfowl populations depend on this region for breeding and nesting. We see great opportunity for the national conservation plan there as well.

Resource extraction, particularly minerals, forestry, and oil and gas, will continue to be the main driver of economic growth in the north. We understand this while also recognizing the inherent rights of northern populations to determine their own environmental, political, and economic futures.

That being said, we've learned many important lessons in the southern landscapes of Canada and do not wish to see the same rate of loss replicated in the north. To avoid this, collectively supported and balanced conservation actions can safeguard northern habitats through land-use planning initiatives such as the Northwest Territories protected areas strategy.

Whether we are talking about working landscapes in the Prairies, the boreal forest, or elsewhere in Canada, the conservation community understands that this country will continue to grow and develop and that a national conservation plan must make allowances for this.

We accept that unavoidable habitat damage or loss will continue to occur. However, proven solutions are available to address this trend. Some provinces in Canada, and many U.S. state governments, have implemented mitigation programs within their legislative and regulatory frameworks.

We believe the Government of Canada should work with provincial and territorial governments to develop national standards and guidelines for wetland mitigation and other conservation offsets.

A mitigation framework is just one example of where the federal government can take a leadership position in habitat conservation. In addition to ensuring consistency across jurisdictions, it can provide much-needed funding to leverage the untapped financial support and energy of other NGOs, governments, and conservation-minded citizens.

With the development of a national conservation plan, the Government of Canada has an opportunity to harness the momentum building within the conservation community while removing barriers to its success.

For any of us entrusted with habitat conservation—and I mean any of us—choosing not to act is a decision in itself, a decision that will enable the continued loss and degradation of valuable habitat. If we choose to live with the status quo, we must be prepared to live with the consequences—historic levels of flooding, loss of biodiversity, as well as a variety of climate change impacts that will only compound the issues we face today. Many already-degraded systems—Lake Winnipeg, for example—will only recover with a strategy that ensures a net-gain emphasis in wetland and grassland habitat conservation.

The challenge is daunting, but Ducks Unlimited Canada sees it as an opportunity that exists nowhere else in the world. We have inherited an incredible natural legacy here in Canada, and the public has high expectations that we will all act responsibly.

This is a huge task, and no one body, whether government or non-government, can tackle it alone. With funding and legislative leadership from the government, Canada's conservation organizations are ready to tackle the challenges before us. Ducks Unlimited Canada has 75 years of experience and a strong base of conservation-minded supporters ready to go, and we applaud the Government of Canada for taking this important step in building a national conservation plan.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and engaging in a dialogue on conservation.

Thank you.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Siekaniec. And thank you for honouring the time commitment.

We'll move now to Mr. John Lounds, president of the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

Mr. Lounds.

Mr. John Lounds (President, Nature Conservancy of Canada): Thank you. Good morning, bonjour.

Thank you for the opportunity to present today. I'm John Lounds, president and CEO of the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Joining me today is Michael Bradstreet, who's our vice-president of conservation, and Lisa McLaughlin, who heads up our securement and stewardship practice for the organization.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada is one of the country's largest habitat conservation organizations. For 50 years we have facilitated long-term conservation solutions. We work most often in those parts of Canada where private ownership dominates the landscape. This is where 90% of Canadians live, work, and play, and where you'll also find more than 80% of our terrestrial and freshwater species at risk.

We are a non-advocacy organization that works with communities and willing landowners to determine the best possible solutions for nature and for people. This morning we would like to address the committee's specific questions by sharing with you our framework for conservation action; the results of what we consider to be an extremely successful model, the natural areas conservation program; and provide a couple of additional thoughts for a national conservation plan based on our experience.

The committee was asking what actions conservation organizations take to achieve their goals. At the Nature Conservancy of Canada we primarily do three things: we leverage government and other incentives to develop private sector partnerships; we work to build partnerships with landowners and communities across the country; and we rely on conservation planning at multiple levels to guide our actions.

Both public and private benefits flow from the land. Our ability to deliver effective, on-the-ground conservation is sustained by a variety of government incentives. Whether through tax credits for charitable donations or the ability to match individual contributions to federal funding, these programs are critical in encouraging Canadians to engage in the protection of our natural heritage.

The power of government incentives cannot be overstated. In fact we believe a national conservation plan can build upon the current suite such as property tax incentives, eco-gifts, easements, ecological services support, and environmental farm plans. Incentives that can be leveraged help us raise private support. Without the incentive, we can't leverage. Without the leverage, the government investment is less effective. We need both to achieve great habitat conservation in this country.

Few organizations in Canada have the capacity to work from the local to the landscape scale from coast to coast. As valuable as this may be, the Nature Conservancy of Canada could not carry out its work without a broad network of partners, including communities, first nations, other conservation organizations, corporations, and landowners.

We know that some of the best stewards of the land are the people who live on it. Innovative agreements with ranchers and farmers help us support working landscapes where conservation and agriculture coexist. Using voluntary measures and working with willing landowners, we have consistently been able to deliver wins for nature.

At NCC we believe in no random acts of conservation. A conservation planning framework guides us from securement to stewardship. We work at three levels to conserve and care for natural spaces. At the highest level we have ecoregional assessments that identify, document, and map large units of land and water and their vegetation and animal communities. Eighteen assessments are now publicly available, providing a comprehensive picture of the southern regions of our country. Within these ecoregions we define smaller, specific areas that are a priority for conservation, based on biodiversity, opportunities, and threats. We call these “natural areas”. To date we have 82 of these natural areas. Within these natural areas we pinpoint the properties where targeted securement and stewardship action can achieve conservation success.

This three-step process, based on the best available information, ensures that whatever we achieve locally will also positively impact the larger landscape. Incentives, partners, and conservation planning are three key ingredients in the Nature Conservancy of Canada's recipe for habitat conservation.

You will no doubt hear many witnesses tell you where the government hasn't got it right. We'd like to tell you about something where the government has got it right in our view, which is the natural areas conservation program. In 2007 the Government of Canada made a bold investment of $225 million in this unique public-private partnership led by the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

● (0900)

We are grateful for the investment. We are grateful for the collaboration of our colleagues here at Ducks Unlimited Canada, and for the contributions of local land trusts. We are pleased the government has extended the program in Budget 2013, and we believe the program should be a major component of the national conservation plan.

How successful has this program been? We, along with Ducks Unlimited Canada and the 17 land trusts, have now conserved more than 875,000 acres across all 10 provinces. Natural habitat has been conserved for 148 species at risk, and individual, corporate and other supporters have leveraged federal funds in the order of almost $2 for every $1.

An independent evaluation of the program was completed in June, 2012. The evaluation concluded that the program had been successful and had been delivered efficiently and effectively. It also concluded that there was a demonstrable and continuing need for this kind of private land conservation program in southern Canada.

Well-designed public-private partnerships, such as the natural areas conservation program, can achieve extraordinary results for habitat conservation.

What else should a national conservation plan include? We have two suggestions. The first is an inclusive counting of all conservation actions being undertaken across Canada, and the second, measures to ensure a net benefit or gain for nature from development.

We believe the national conservation plan must start with an inclusive definition of conserved land. The most quoted metric is for "protected land", as defined by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the IUCN. By this standard Canada has protected about 10% of our terrestrial landscape for nature. This underestimates the great conservation work being done and fails to address the Aichi target definition of "effective area-based conservation measures". For example, most private lands conserved by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada and others, are not counted under the IUCN's definition.

Due to the peculiarities of Canada' s division of powers, it is also difficult to count many lands as protected under the IUCN category, given that subsurface rights are held by the provinces.

Knowing where we are is critical to knowing where we should go. We must bolster community and private conservation engagement by counting all efforts to conserve natural habitat. We can then take this and categorize an inclusive list by type of conservation activity, providing us with a fuller expression of conservation achievement in Canada.

We believe that through more habitat conservation and better reporting we can actually reach the 17% target required under Aichi by Canada's 150th birthday in 2017, three years ahead of schedule. The Nature Conservancy of Canada, of course, would be pleased to assist in this effort.

Several witnesses at the committee have advocated the principle of no net loss. We think a national conservation plan must do better and ensure a net benefit—as my colleague, Greg, said, "a net gain for the environment".

The plan should establish a model on which economic development and land conservation and stewardship can co-exist. We have an opportunity to deliver a framework that involves the private sector in habitat conservation, particularly resource extraction companies and private landowners. Dismissing the notion of an adversarial relationship between the economy and habitat conservation, the plan should recognize the private and public benefits derived from the land.

We urge the committee to recommend that the government first allocate more resources to stewardship and best practice initiatives that enhance species recovery and complement the regulatory framework. Both of these create a clientele that volunteer-based non-governmental organizations can engage and lever conservation action. Second, study the potential of biodiversity credits to advance habitat conservation. These credits could allow industry to go above and beyond the regulatory requirements for environmental impact avoidance. Currently, impact avoidance focuses on the immediate geography of a development, regardless of the quality or significance of the natural area.

Biodiversity credits can be more flexible. They can be used to deliver conservation outcomes at priority natural areas anywhere in Canada. They can maximize the benefits to biodiversity conservation or ecological services at a national level. In this way we can help create a net benefit for nature.

● (0905)

In closing, we recommend that the national conservation plan be based on delivering incentives to the private sector to encourage habitat conservation. It must engage a broad network of partners, and it should be based on a sound conservation planning framework. It must establish an inclusive definition of conserved land and count all of our effective habitat conservation actions.

Finally, the natural areas conservation program is a public-private success story. We encourage the committee to consider this program as a cornerstone of the national conservation plan.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lounds.

We'll move now to Mr. Jonathan Scarth of the Delta Waterfowl Foundation.

Mr. Scarth.

Mr. Jonathan Scarth (Senior Vice-President, Delta Waterfowl Foundation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

My notes are before you. I appreciate the opportunity to offer some observations based on our experience with North American conservation programs over the past 70 years. Delta Waterfowl is an international charity. We're dedicated to the conservation and sustainable use of waterfowl.

What can we learn from ducks as we design the national conservation program? As it turns out, a great deal. Ducks are one of the best-studied animals in the world, and habitat programs aimed at their conservation and management have been the best-funded conservation programs of any within wildlife conservation, mainly because of the contributions of hunters through their licence fees and significant philanthropic support.

The waterfowl community has spent a lot of money and tried a lot of approaches to enhance waterfowl populations, so in combination with the well-developed understanding of duck biology, there are some important lessons to learn.

Ducks need both wetlands and upland cover within which to nest. Their success nesting and brood-rearing on the prairies accounts for the vast majority, about 80%, of the fluctuations in their population. The vast majority of their important nesting grounds are privately owned and dedicated to agricultural use. As such, they provide a superb metric for the health of the working landscape in Canada.

Broadly stated, as you consider the national conservation program, there are three policy tools available to governments: land use regulation, habitat purchase, and incentives. These are not mutually exclusive, but let's have a look at them in turn.

With regard to land use regulation, it's a common first reaction for governments to try to achieve conservation objectives through land use regulation prohibiting habitat destruction. Statutory prohibitions create the appearance of both political action and, since the costs of enforcement are poorly defined, a low-cost solution. That is why prohibitions have been a common feature of such legislation as the Migratory Birds Convention Act, the Fisheries Act, and provincial water legislation.

Land use regulations to address waterfowl population declines during the drought of the 1930s were introduced at both the federal and provincial level. The federal prohibitions were introduced after the Migratory Birds Convention was entered into by Canada with the United States, and then Mexico. The provincial prohibitions and permitting provisions relating to wetland drainage were introduced shortly thereafter.

None of these prohibitions, which have been in place for decades, have had any perceptible effect on wetland drainage or on waterfowl populations. Why is that? It's mostly because enforcing regulatory prohibitions on private land without any compensation amounts to a regulatory taking—a form of expropriation. They are morally unenforceable, so they have had little effect on species conservation, whether it be fisheries, species at risk, or waterfowl.

Perhaps that's why the recent debates over reforms to legislation governing fisheries and navigable waters have been heavy on process and devoid of any evidence of substantive ecological effect. This type of regulation simply doesn't work.

Another factor is resources and expertise. Over the past 30 years, there's been a transfer of biological expertise from government to the resource development industry and consulting sector. The regulators now, at many levels, lack the resources for enforcement and efficient administration of the myriad approvals required to avoid the punitive prohibitions in regulatory legislation.

On the federal front, this is exacerbated by a narrow constitutional position, which of necessity has to tread lightly given the broad reach of provincial powers over property rights.

Habitat purchase is the second tool we wanted to review. The main intervention we've tried more recently is to buy land to set aside for conservation. It has been used by governments and has been a central mission of our friends at the table this morning.

Habitat purchase has been a primary focus of waterfowl management efforts in Canada since 1986. We've spent about $2 billion, and we've purchased something in the neighbourhood of 400,000 acres within a prairie landscape of tens of millions of acres—less than 1% of the land base, and too small to have any effect on the rate of wetland loss or on waterfowl populations.

Waterfowl hatch rates have not improved significantly. In fact, the most recent comprehensive data we have shows a 5% loss of wetlands during the first 15 years of this program. Even the more focused target areas showed no significant difference in loss rates.

Despite the small footprint we have effected, we have consistently generated a negative reaction to these purchases from local communities. It is evident from this experience that there is neither enough money nor political support for habitat acquisition on an ecologically significant scale.

Finally, in our view, the best chance to achieve significant conservation benefits is through incentives, leaving the land in the hands of the landowner and paying them to produce the public goods we want, such as wildlife and clean water. The most successful conservation program in memory has been the conservation chapter within the U.S. Farm Bill south of the border, which paid landowners to set aside habitat areas.

The next question is, who is in the best position to deliver them? The Canadian approach thus far has been largely limited to delivery by government agencies and NGOs. I believe the administrative capacity to deliver broad-scale conservation incentive programs already exists in local governments and crop insurance agencies, for example. Given the provincial dominance in this field, they vary province by province. In Canada we have not yet fully explored the potential to engage these organizations in this new role of delivering conservation incentives.

● (0910)

Seeing the disappointing results of land use regulations and habitat purchase, Delta sat down at the table with farm organizations several years ago to design a conservation program for the working landscape. The result was our alternative land use services concept, ALUS, which is incentive-based and delivered with the help of local governments, crop insurance agencies and, of course, landowners. In testimony to your committee from our farm organizations, you have heard reference to this concept since they contributed significantly to its development.

ALUS requires a co-payment by the producers and provides an annual payment to retain land in conservation use. More importantly, it engages the farmer in a conversation about where best to grow crops and where best to grow wildlife on their lands. Our evaluations have been very positive. We've seen 70% rates of participation, with large numbers of participants who have never participated in a conservation program before. Administrative costs have been low because of participation by organizations with existing administrative capacity, such as local governments and crop insurance corporations. ALUS has even attracted cash contributions from local municipalities, a first for conservation in Canada.

The opportunity with ALUS is that it's a politically sustainable, private-public partnership to deliver conservation incentives analogous to, and every bit as important as, the new generation of infrastructure programs that attract support from all three levels of government and the private sector.

Where will the money come from during this time of global fiscal restraint? The beauty of the ALUS model is that it aggregates incentives from a variety of private and public sources. Contributions have come from federal and provincial departments of environment and agriculture, from local governments, from resource developers, and duck hunters.

An example is the legislation passed by the Province of Alberta to address greenhouse gas emissions. Since 2007, $105 million has been paid to Alberta farmers for conservation tillage practices alone, and more practices are being approved with direct habitat benefits, such as wetland conservation and perennial cover. These will have large benefits for wildlife, while sequestering carbon. There are similar mitigation funds available for wetlands and fisheries.

Some of our ALUS communities are raising funds from local residents to support local conservation efforts and we are developing a structure for ecological credits to support these conservation incentives. ALUS creates the opportunity for a direct connection between resource developers and the private landowner community. There is an opportunity to bring together hunters, farmers, and rural communities to integrate conservation into mainstream delivery mechanisms and make wildlife habitat an asset instead of a liability.

Mr. Chairman, my specific responses to the five questions of your committee are in my brief at page 4. I would focus on one, and that's question (e): “When it comes to recovering a species, how do best management practices and stewardship initiatives compare to prescriptive, government-mandated measures?” There's no question in our minds that based on the experience with waterfowl conservation, incentive-based approaches have created measurable results and land use regulations have not.

Thank you very much. I'd be pleased to answer any questions.

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

We'll move now to seven-minute rounds with our committee members.

I want to inform our committee that at the end of the meeting, roughly 10 minutes before adjournment, I will reserve 10 minutes for committee business. We'll move in camera for a couple of motions that have been given on notice.

I'll move to Ms. Rempel.

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

Thank you to everyone for coming today. It's always a pleasure to see all of you. You've spent so much time at this committee in the last couple of years. Thank you again for coming out.

Mr. Lounds, I'd like to start with you. What really tweaked my interest this morning were your comments with regard to Canada's amount of protected land and some of the ideas you had on counting it. On the IUCN categories that you mentioned, I believe there are different categories of how to classify protected land.

I was wondering, based on your experience, whether you could you talk a little bit about how Canada ranks internationally with regard to protected land, both in terms of the percentage and gross area, and how those figures vary based on what category of the IUCN definitions you would look at. Maybe you could also speak to whether or not the lands that you protect under the NACP with conservation easements are included in some of those totals.

● (0915)

The Chair: Mr. Lounds.

Mr. John Lounds: Thank you.

For those of you who are not familiar with the IUCN categories, there are seven categories of protected status of lands, but generally the ones that are used to calculate whether lands are protected in countries and measured internationally are the top four categories. Within those categories, in order to be included, you need to have ensured that subsurface rights have been removed so that there's no opportunity for any mining or side drilling or anything like that.

This is the problem that I related to you about the provinces having jurisdiction over subsurface rights in this country, and not the federal government. It's going to be very difficult to actually come to some kind of agreement about that. Ten per cent of Canada's land base is under that protected status. I have the numbers here. By area, we'd be second in the world. By rank, we'd be fifth among G-8 and G-20 countries.

In regard to my reference to other lands, including those owned by Ducks Unlimited and us, many of them are not included because subsurface rights still exist for those particular properties, even though the likelihood of actually having any drilling or mining taking place is quite low. So we're trying to encourage.... How do we come up with another way of thinking about this that actually works for a country like Canada?

If you think about commitments that have been made by the Province of Quebec, for instance, to conserve half of its boreal forest, and with the Province of Ontario doing similar things, I think there are probably opportunities to think about new ways in which those could be included within our thinking about what is actually conserved across Canada.

Adding those types of conserved areas into what we do would change the ranking and probably bring Canada to number one status in terms of area, no questions asked. If we did that, it would bring us to about third in terms of rank. It's a combination of getting more habitat conservation work done as well as rethinking a bit how we look at what is conserved and what isn't.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: My colleagues opposite are probably thinking that somehow this has some sort of nefarious purpose or nefarious negative effect on the ability to conserve land and species habitat. If we were to include the lands that you've protected under the NACP or, say, those in some of the work that Ducks Unlimited has been doing, do you think this would somehow have a deleterious affect on habitat conservation or species management?

Mr. John Lounds: I might ask Michael to help me answer that question.

I'd say that with the work we're doing on the ground, what we're dealing with is the potential that perhaps at some point there might be, say, oil found under that particular property and therefore we wouldn't be able to conduct our conservation the way.... I think that's unlikely for a lot of the properties we have, and it is something that we'd probably try to mitigate as well, so that for habitat and species purposes there wouldn't be any real effect from that.

Now what we need to be thinking about is how we actually keep the same amount of land in that conserved status going forward. In a case where there happens to be drilling that takes place on one property, you don't want to just keep losing that, as my colleagues here have pointed out. You want to be able to replace that in some way. That's partly why we're interested in the biodiversity credits and other kinds of notions that could be part of a plan like this.

● (0920)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: That's excellent.

Just building on that line of thought with regard to my colleagues from Ducks Unlimited here, I had the opportunity to visit your facility at Oak Hammock Marsh this summer. It's quite clear that the loss of wetland has an impact on the environment in a wide variety of areas. The work you've been doing has been done to restore wetlands but to also be cognizant of the fact that these areas exist on a working landscape. Is that correct?

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: That is correct.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Based on that, do you think it is possible, based on the work you're doing, to have conservation of species habitat and balance that working landscape concept? If so, what do you think would be some of the key principles that we should be considering in making that balance work?

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Thank you very much.

That's a good question. Do I think there can be a balance? I think the answer is yes. I think we are out of balance in many areas right now. The work that it will take to bring that back into balance will have to focus on restoration, on the groundwork of putting back some of the ecological goods, services, and values that healthy watersheds, as an example, provide.

There are also areas that are in relatively good condition and/or not degraded right now, which you could balance with an approach to keep it in that condition and status. I think there's absolutely that opportunity.

Some of the incentives that you would have to use, obviously, are payments to landowners for the purposes of water storage and grassland filtering. Some of the payments that you would pay to a landowner for the purposes of keeping existing good habitats, and grass—where it is—native habitats, and native prairies, again could include an incentive base, such as a conservation easement, short-term agreements for 10 years, 20 years, and 30 years and/or in perpetuity. It all affects the valuation of the land price that you're willing to pay and what the landowner is willing to accept.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Siekaniec. We're going to have to stop there.

Thanks, Ms. Rempel.

We'll move now to Monsieur Pilon.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

My first question is for Mr. Siekaniec.

Ducks Unlimited Canada is a known leader in wetlands conservation. We know that those wetlands are very important for biodiversity of both flora and fauna.

Could you tell us why it is so crucial to protect wetlands and how maintaining them is a key environmental issue?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I'm not sure I understood the question there. I did indicate that protecting conservation lands for the purposes of biodiversity conservation is extremely important, and that is how you conserve the biodiversity of the environment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Why is it so important?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: It's important because it provides that opportunity for the habitat to exist over time, where you have the opportunity to look at it and say are you conserving the measurable outcomes or biological products that you're interested in.

From the standpoint of the Ducks Unlimited conservation mission, it really reflects on waterfowl habitats and conservation, in which we invest in the science to be able to determine, when we put an investment on the ground, whether we are getting the net results that we're after—which is biological productivity and output for waterfowl populations, and in the associated wildlife and flora and fauna that comes with that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Do you believe the federal government is doing enough for conservation, and how could it improve it given that we can still improve the way we conserve wetlands?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I absolutely agree with you that the federal government can do more. I think the opportunity that exists right now is to leverage other organizations, both conservation and/or private organizations and landowners in such a way that they're willing to keep conservation habitats on their lands and in partnership with others.

There is almost untapped potential for us to provide incentive funding for other organizations and groups to go out and earn money in such a way that they can invest and multiply the money that gets put back on to the ground.

[*Translation*]

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

Your organization does a lot of work in partnership with other local organizations, and you have an integrated approach based on the connectedness of protected areas. In other words, you are working to link natural areas through corridors.

Could you explain to us how that works?

● (0925)

[*English*]

Mr. John Lounds: Certainly.

Basically the way we do it is by focusing at the moment on these 82 natural areas. Within those natural areas, you'll have various properties. We're trying to have conservation arrangements on a core of those properties, and then to be able to link them within that natural area that's been deemed important from a conservation planning point of view, because there are species at risk there or whatever other ecological values we're looking at.

Some of those arrangements have not yet been made between those places on a working landscape. As Mr. Scarth said, we often rely on what individual landowners are doing in those particular parts of the world because they haven't formed part of those particular natural areas that have been deemed to be priorities for actual investment.

As we go forward, it's a matter of looking at how we do a better job with conservation for those particular corridors. I'll ask Michael if I get this wrong, but certainly out west and in many parts of Canada, you'll often find that they follow riparian corridors, which seem to be the places where you end up with the most biodiversity and rationale for why you'd want to do conservation in those places.

Correct?

Okay.

[*Translation*]

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

Climate change is central to discussions about the environment. Do you believe, based on the research conducted at your foundation, that it is important to consider this problem now?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Merci.

I agree. I think there is an opportunity to generate funds for conservation, particularly at the provincial level with the example set in Alberta with the Climate Change and Emissions Management Act. Through the model that I laid out, I think there is a tremendous opportunity to invest in perennial cover and wetlands to sequester carbon.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have a minute.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: I have a final question for Mr. Scarth.

Do you believe that public consultations and hearings should be one of the priorities in the process of implementing habitat protection?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: I think we know a lot, based on our experience. I believe there is enough knowledge both within and outside government to move forward. I think it's time to move forward.

The Chair: You have a little time.

Thank you, Mr. Pilon.

We're going to move to Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much for your very refreshing testimony before our committee.

We normally get groups, which is fine, and they're always talking about process, so it is very refreshing and productive to hear from your three groups that have generated real, positive environmental outcomes on the ground. You're all to be commended for that.

Mr. Scarth, I am very interested in the Alberta example of your alternate land use services projects there, especially when you noted that, “Some of our ALUS communities are raising funds from local residents...”. I find it absolutely remarkable that local residents are dipping into their wallets to improve habitat conservation outcomes in Alberta.

Can you elaborate on the pilot projects you have in Alberta and expand on their results and outcomes, especially related to how the community feels about them?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Thank you.

We are working with three counties in Alberta now. Counties in Alberta are very large geographically, and they have significant administrative capacity. They have embraced with open arms the concept of delivering and managing the process of conservation incentives. We were taken aback by their desire to not only invest municipal funds in these programs alongside the private dollars and the provincial and federal dollars that we were aggregating for them, but at a local level they have begun to canvas and raise funds from local citizens within their counties for conservation locally, through PayPal accounts.

I'm sure everyone here knows that the municipal level of government provides a very good tax deduction if you donate money to a municipality, and they are leveraging the position they have with the local investment in conservation.

As I said, it's becoming as important to them as the infrastructure funding because it is very much related to their mandate with regard to water management, to know where the wetland should be to hold back water and avoid damage to their roads and water infrastructure.

● (0930)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

You made a point in your summation that land-use regulations really haven't delivered conservation results on any meaningful scale.

Can you elaborate on that and perhaps give some specific examples?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Well, in our field we've had habitat regulations for decades, both at the federal level under the Migratory Birds Act and in each province, where there have been permitting for and prohibitions against diverting and draining wetlands for decades —really, since the 1940s. They have never been consistently applied. I believe the reason is that they cannot be enforced unless there is a robust incentive program built into the regulations, and such has not been the case.

We need to think about how to lead with incentives and not with regulations. From a land-owner perspective, you immediately create a real liability on their property, if you are contemplating an effort to enforce regulations that basically punish them for having burrowing owl habitat or wetlands on the property. It sends exactly the wrong message. We should hope to help them look at that habitat as an asset and something they should foster.

They know their land better than anybody in this room. They know every nook and cranny—where they can grow crops, where they can leave wetlands, where they can encourage the growth of wildlife. If we can empower that local and private land-owner knowledge on the landscape, we'll have some real effects, I think.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

Mr. Lounds, I share your frustration with the way that protected land is defined. To me, a much better approach would be to assess the ecological functioning of a piece of land, regardless of whether there is some lawyerly definition of what it is. It's the ecological function that actually counts with these lands.

If we look in Canada at the state of our landscape overall, we have problem areas of course, but if we looked at intact ecological functioning, where would our measurement end up?

Mr. John Lounds: Obviously, Canada is a big country, and however you designate and define what is protected and conserved, we have a lot more land beyond that amount in a natural state. There's no question about that.

The conservation question becomes, where do you need to focus the efforts of habitat conservation? It's in places in which you've had a lot of loss. So we're talking about wetlands, grasslands, and endangered species habitats, and those sorts of things.

As to a number, I don't know that we could give you an actual sense on that.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: But the point is that it would be considerably higher than what is measured using the IUCN definition, would it not?

Mr. Michael Bradstreet (Vice-President, Conservation, Nature Conservancy of Canada): Yes, it would be. The challenge, however, is that putting Ellesmere Island into a protected category does little to preserve pronghorn antelope in the southern prairies. We need to be more sophisticated in our way of thinking about what Canada has done in conservation, based on the extent of our geography and the wonder of our ecosystems.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Siekaniec, I was interested that both you and Mr. Lounds talked about wetland mitigation, conservation offsets, biodiversity credits, and so on. It's endlessly frustrating to look at some developments in which the developer is forced to mitigate right next door to where the environmental effect took place, while 200 kilometres away is an absolute jewel of a piece of environment that is under real threat and that would deliver real conservation benefits, if it were conserved.

Would you recommend that the federal government or all governments be much more flexible in terms of mitigation policies?

● (0935)

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I would recommend that there be a flexible framework put in place, one that is thought of in an adaptive management perspective, such that if you designed and implemented a conservation strategy or a rule or a regulation to get a desired intent, and you went through time and looked at it and measured whether it was effective, you could take that opportunity to make adjustments to it and then end up delivering on what your goal or conservation strategy was.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck. We'll hopefully have time for another round later.

Ms. Duncan.

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

And thank you to the witnesses for very interesting testimony. You've brought a lot of recommendations that I hope to follow up on.

I'd like to begin by asking Mr. Lounds what percentage of land and water Canada has committed to protecting and what percentage has actually been protected.

Mr. John Lounds: Well, it depends, as I said,—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: What has Canada committed to?

Mr. John Lounds: The old definitions were under the IUCN categories.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I believe those are still the definitions.

Mr. John Lounds: Well, in the IUCN category the target was 12% for each country, and Canada is at 10% using those. The new Aichi target, though, adds another type of category, which is effective area-based conservation measures. The way that is defined is by the laws that are put in place provincially or municipally to—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Could you please tell me what percentage it is now? I understand there are rules—

Mr. John Lounds: Under the IUCN rules, the new target is 17%.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That's what I wanted to know. So it's 17%, and we're at 10%.

Could you tell me what it is for water, please?

Mr. Michael Bradstreet: I believe it's 10% for marine.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: And we're at 1% for marine. So the percentages are 1% for the 10% target and 10% for the 17% one. I just wanted to clarify that.

Mr. Lounds, you said that by Canada's 150th birthday, which is in 2017, we could meet our commitments. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: We believe we could, yes, and that's using the new definition. I don't want to confuse apples and oranges here.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Well, it would be using what you're proposing, is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: It would be using the Aichi target definition, yes—as we would interpret it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Well, that's the key, "as you would interpret it". To be fair, and with respect to my colleagues across the way, it could also be interpreted as changing the accounting rules. It could be.

Mr. John Lounds: I would also argue, as I've said, that all the good work being done by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ducks Unlimited—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: We celebrate the work you've done.

Mr. John Lounds: But we don't count it. I don't know why we don't count it.

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

I would like to ask Ducks Unlimited a question, because you've brought many good recommendations today. Regarding prairie Canada, you have talked about market-based incentives and regulatory backstops. If you had your wish list, what would your wishes be? Make your wish list to this committee.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Well, if I had my wish list so that I could go out to prairie Canada and deliver conservation, it would include having a very strong financial support, so that I could approach landowners who have a working landscape to keep them on the land, working through conservation easements that allow them to maintain a family-based operation or a ranch-based operation that actually keeps them there, as part of the community and part of the tax base of the area and its economic drivers. We would then also get conservation value out of their involvement, by way of their engaging in the strategies that promote grassland, waterfowl conservation, and other wildlife-associated and flora and fauna benefits that come with that.

I would probably use conservation easements as the primary strategy, if I had my number one opportunity.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That really helps. Thank you.

You also mentioned regulatory backstops.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I think regulatory backstops are something you simply need to have as a recognition that these key habitats are extremely important. What we see now is that through the loss of the habitats out there, we are passing on potential issues to communities in downstream areas, whether from a water quality standpoint or the historic floods that occur almost on an annual basis now. There has to be some recognition that you can't just continue to push off your issue onto another area of the country.

I think a regulatory backstop does simply that: it promotes the idea that we need to be cognitive of what we have on the landscape and that "we want to work with you in order to conserve".

● (0940)

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

So the recommendation to the committee is market-based incentives and regulatory backstops.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: That's correct.

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

Also, for boreal Canada can you give your specific wish list, as specifically as you can make the recommendation to the committee, on land use planning? We've heard about land use planning over and over again.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I think in boreal Canada there's a tremendous opportunity to do two things. One of them is to set aside what I would call core conservation areas that are recognized for the value to conservation they provide and promote. The next thing, after the set-asides, is that you have to bring in the best allowable management practices in that area. That's where you have the opportunity to move to a fairly restrictive regime or to a more liberal one. Within the areas that are not set aside as natural protected areas, wildlife conservation areas, we want to work with industry as they go through development and help them to think about conservation first. Let's establish best management practices while we develop and while we think about what needs to be an economic driver within a given area. We've learned that if we think about it ahead of time we typically end up with a much better product.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: We agree: conservation up front. Thank you.

You also mentioned—and I wish I had time to ask about these—mitigation programs, national standards and guidelines, a mitigation framework, and funding. What's your wish list?

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: My wish list? Wow, that's a great question.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: It's good stuff. We need to dig here.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I would love to see the federal government invest $50 million a year in a conservation strategy for wetland and grassland habitats. These habitats are very near and dear to Ducks Unlimited Canada and our other conservation partners here at the table.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I appreciate that, and I'm out of time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Duncan.

I'm going to move now to Monsieur Jacob.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for coming to meet with us this morning to inform us about this subject.

My first question is for the representatives of Ducks Unlimited Canada.

In my riding, Knowlton, in the Eastern Townships, there is an organization that has now moved to Eastman, which is still in my riding. That organization is the Appalachian Corridor. The people of that organization worked and still work miracles with a small budget to protect wetlands and promote the biodiversity of the flora and fauna.

Do you know these types of organizations? What contribution do they make and what work do you do in cooperation with them?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I apologize, as I personally do not know that organization. But if they are delivering wetland conservation, I'd be very interested in working with them hand in hand.

I would have to ask my colleague whether or not he's familiar with them.

Mr. Jim Brennan (Director of Government Affairs, Ducks Unlimited Canada): I'm not directly familiar with them, but our Quebec program may well be. Unfortunately, our Quebec director is not with us today.

We work extensively with local, on-the-ground, community-based conservation organizations. I could name some. For example, in Ontario, we've worked with Habitat Haldimand in the lower Grand River area. We've done some very interesting work with them.

That is a very important part of our business planning, working with community-based groups, because we don't have the resources to do the conservation work that needs to get done on many of the landscapes across the country. So working with community-based groups is central to our business operations everywhere in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Thank you.

I am still speaking to the representatives of Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Some witnesses who have appeared before the committee since we started this study felt that the environmental value of wetlands was undeniable and that too rapid development leading to the infilling of wetlands, for example, could have disastrous effects on biodiversity and the environmental health of those places.

Earlier you spoke about appropriate balance. So, first, do you agree with the statement I just made? Second, how can we ensure that the development and protection of these places is carried out simultaneously without the one undermining the other?

● (0945)

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I agree with the comment. I believe that unchecked development, without some thought given to the conservation impact, can be detrimental to many areas. I believe we have some good examples of that, which we are trying to figure out how to correct right now. The Lake Winnipeg basin is an example.

I believe that there are opportunities for conservation and development to go hand in hand, so as to result in a conserved status along with the development. I'd like to make reference to the native plant solutions that we have in Winnipeg. We work hand in hand with developers to put in good, functioning wetlands within community developments. These are developments that people can use, places where they can actually allow their dogs to swim. They are a much more healthy environment than just retention ponds. This is an example of how development has gone hand in hand with our interests and our strategy to better the landscape.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My next question is for Mr. Scarth.

Do you believe that scientific research is essential for the conservation of habitat?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Absolutely, but I would say it's more important that we apply the knowledge we have in policy development.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Jacob: All right.

How has science helped your foundation gain better knowledge of the actions that should be taken to conserve duck habitats, for example?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: We know more about raising ducks and how ducks survive on the landscape than we do about any other animal in the world. We can measure the actual ecological production of waterfowl, for example, at a level that is not possible for most other species.

We know a lot about what types of landscapes can actually reproduce ducks and grow the fall flight of waterfowl, and that is why they're a really good measuring stick for biodiversity. We can understand how some landscapes produce ducks, and other landscapes don't produce ducks. That's why they provide a very good signature species for policy development. You can measure the results of your habitat work with ducks, unlike any other species.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Jacob.

[*English*]

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

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

I'll start with Mr. Siekaniec, from Stonewall, Manitoba. My mother was born in Balmoral. So we're almost neighbours in some fashion there.

I just wanted to flag this for the committee. In your presentation—I don't know if you went through it, because there is more here than you could say in your 10 minutes—I think your answer to our first question about the most effective conservation organizations was that they tended to possess seven qualities. You listed several items: that they are science-based, have grass-roots support, that they lever resources, that they target conservation of priority habitats, and have a landscape approach to conservation, and that they reach out and collaborate, and employ adaptive management to continuously improve their programs.

I think that's the best answer we've heard so far to that particular question, so I want to thank you for that.

I want to say congratulations to Ducks Unlimited for their 75 years. We all appreciate the work you have done for so many years, and all of you at the table today are leaders in this realm.

Having said that, I want to flag over to another part of the discussion about ALUS and politically sustainable private-public partnerships to deliver conservation incentives. That was dealt with in Mr. Scarth's presentation, I believe, but others have been talking about this as well.

In your presentation, Mr. Scarth—I'll start with you—you mentioned the best program in memory, the conservation chapter in the U.S. farm bill south of the border. We've heard from other farm organizations about the ecological farm plan here in Canada, in which some 74,000 farms, or about 50% of the farms, are involved.

Can you compare these programs for us? What is it about this U.S. farm bill south of the border that maybe has qualities that we haven't incorporated in our environmental farm plan?

● (0950)

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Thank you for the question.

I would contrast the environmental farm plan as a road map of how to do conservation on a farm, whereas the conservation reserve program that I referred to in the U.S. actually provided incentives to deliver that plan. It really paid an annual amount to landowners in the prairie region of the mid-western U.S. to grow perennial cover and to set aside wetland and upland cover areas. In the last 20 years of measuring production from these lands, as I covered in my previous answer, that is the only program that has created a significant increase in waterfowl production, bar none.

That program was responsible for an incremental production to the continental population. Nothing else we've done has even come close to the effect of that program.

Mr. James Lunney: You mentioned 20 years of measurement. Is that 20 years since it was incorporated?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Correct. It was incorporated into the 1985 farm bill by the U.S. Congress. At the same time, in Canada we began our North American waterfowl management plan. There was a natural experiment of sorts north and south of the border, and the Americans won hands down on this. They invested heavily in conservation and they saw a dramatic increase in production of wildlife from south of the border, while we were going in the opposite direction.

Mr. James Lunney: Is that concept consistent, then, with what we heard from Ducks Unlimited?

In your response to the question about wish lists by the previous member across the way here, you mentioned conservation easements. Would conservation easements be part of the program you're talking about? Is that one concept?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: No, it's different. I would have the U.S. Farm Bill in the incentive category. I'd put easements in the acquisition category. I think the more certainty you insist upon, the less of a footprint you're going to affect, so if you want to buy land, if you want to buy easements, you will have a long-term effect, but you will have a long-term effect on a small footprint of the landscape because landowners are not willing, in my view, to give up and sell that much land that you would have any significant effects.

What the U.S. did was incorporate incentives directly into its farm policy, which was a significant step, so no longer is it being delivered as an add-on or a peripheral program. It was at the heart of the U.S. Farm Bill and it was able, therefore, to really get attention and to make a significant investment in incentives. That had a remarkable effect on wildlife production in the U.S., and, as I said, it is the only program we can point to in the last 30 years that has had a significant impact ecologically.

Mr. James Lunney: Thanks for that, Mr. Chair.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have a minute and 30 seconds.

Mr. James Lunney: On a list of incentives, Nature Conservancy, you mentioned a bunch of tools for leverage. I would like you to list that again, if you could, but could you just pick the most effective tool in the leverage basket?

Mr. John Lounds: Is that directed at conservation particularly? Tax incentives for donations is one way, but certainly, in our world, the removal of the capital gains tax on ecological gifts, the eco-gifts program, has been a huge incentive. But it doesn't replace actually being able to bring matched money to the table under a private-public partnership. It's that combination that seems to drive people.

Jonathan was mentioning how to get more people to do this. We found a lot more people interested in easements as a result of those kinds of incentives being available on the landscape. The question is that you can get more people involved, but perhaps you don't have the same permanence of the outcome versus having a smaller group involved, regarding permanence, so what's the combination of those things that makes the most sense going forward.

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

We'll move now to Madam Quach, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks to all of you for your testimony.

I have a number of questions for Mr. Siekaniec.

You talked a lot about the loss of wetland habitats. In fact, 70% of wetlands in Ontario have been lost. The same is true in the Prairies, hence the importance of protecting them to a greater degree, given all the benefits those wetlands afford. Ducks Unlimited Canada went into my riding, in Beauharnois, and, as a result, wetlands are now part of the Beauharnois landscape near the hydroelectric power station. We are now seeing life re-establish itself around the station.

You mentioned that $4 billion in benefits are generated as a result of biodiversity in ecosystems. Can you tell us a little about the services that ecosystems render in the fight against climate change, for example, and in the protection of habitats?

● (0955)

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Thank you.

Ecosystem services are extremely important to society as a whole. As we've already discussed a little bit, when you change a landscape to a point where the ecosystem services are not provided, you have far-reaching and very significant impacts and damages that do occur.

Again, as I mentioned, whether it be about flooding, invasive species movement, or erosion, there are a lot of values and benefits that are gained when you have a healthy, fully functioning ecological system along with the biological diversity that it affords.

It is extremely important to note that even if there is a 70% loss, if you have an opportunity to preserve what's there, that should be number one, because the investment you have to make in restoring and repairing is huge in comparison. Again, that goes back to the balance that has to be reached between putting conservation on the ground and working hard to ensure that you keep working landscapes in mind, that you work with landowners to keep them fully functioning within the basic communities and counties.

[*Translation*]

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

To study all these environmental benefits, I imagine you had to deal with scientists and researchers so that you could measure them. Can you tell us how useful scientific research is in habitat conservation?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Yes, thank you very much. Science is really the backbone of Ducks Unlimited Canada. We believe that science is what guides your conservation strategies and it guides you in where you make conservation investments.

Jonathan spoke eloquently of how we much understand about waterfowl. That also extends to how much we know about waterfowl habitats, the wetlands and the grassland areas they depend upon. Through our science-based decision support system, we can now make very informed decisions as to where the most important areas are so that we actually go and target our work.

So within landscapes we have focal points and can drill down to a much more detailed level and can tell you that if we're going to put money in the ground to do this mission, here are the most important places to invest.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: All right.

With regard to all that and the government's role, you talked a lot about the need for the federal government to establish standards and targets in order then to measure advances and make adjustments.

Do you have any specific examples of targets that the federal government could put in place in order to make progress, to prove its leadership and to assist organizations in entering into partnerships and meeting challenges?

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Yes, I think you've heard a great deal of discussion about how we really should strive for some level of recognized conservation status on the landscapes themselves within Canada. Now, very clearly, we're having a discussion about whether or not we're measuring them in some adequate manner or means, but I think we can get to a point where we simply recognize that we need to have some level of conservation to be able to feel and recognize from a science base that we're meeting the objectives that we've identified when we set out.

I believe that you can reach those through partnerships, and the partnerships begin, as I said, with our key constituents of private landowners, but they extend through the communities, municipal governments, country governments, and provincial governments as well as the federal government. I think everyone has to be engaged in recognizing that ecological goods and services, healthy landscapes, and ecological function are extremely important to the health and well-being of a society as a whole.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Quach.

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

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses. It has been very interesting today.

Mr. Scarth, you mentioned three counties in Alberta that have engaged in this. Can you name those counties?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: Yes. The county we began working with two years ago was the County of Vermilion River, east of Edmonton; and more recently we began working with Parkland County near Edmonton, of course; and then Red Deer County just joined the program a few weeks ago.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Excellent. Thank you.

You talk very highly of the land use framework in this regard. Which level of government do you find best suited to dealing with private landowners and engaging them?

● (1000)

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: The municipal government, I would say, is the closest to the ground. They are responsible for difficult neighbour decisions on land use, for example. They're responsible for the drainage system. In many cases they're responsible for the local roads, which are related to the drainage system. And they are transparent and do annual financial reports. In the case of Vermilion River, they have a GIS person who can track what work they do, and we found them to be remarkably receptive in Alberta to the notion of actually managing the dollars. And just to be clear, the model I'm projecting is that they would receive the money directly from the municipality and pay it to the landowners.

So what we're trying to do is to support them in developing the capacity to aggregate these various incentives from the federal government, the provincial government, the private sector, developers, and duck hunters, and deliver them in a coherent way that is supported by the landowner community, which we have not done. We have not been supported by the landowner community in the work that we've done today to date, and I think there's a model here where we can have something that is politically sustainable. That's a term I use.

Mr. Brian Storseth: And when dealing with landowners, you find incentives to be far more productive than regulations?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: There's no question, and I think the evidence is already before us. We have had regulations on the table for 40 or 50 years and they have not been enforced, because I don't think they can be enforced. You are basically expropriating property rights by telling landowners without incentives, without compensation, “Thou shalt not drain that wetland”.

The evidence is there. It has not had any impact.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lounds, you also talked about the importance of incentives in helping create and foster the relationships so that people see this as a benefit to their organization or farm or whatever it may be that they're working with. I was very interested when you were talking about utilizing partnerships and incentives to actually achieve a net gain in habitat conservation. Most of people we've had before committee just talked about no net loss, but it's a different way to look at it.

Could you talk about this a little bit—and then also, because our chair is very stringent with time, I'll throw out my other question. Could you talk about some of the industry's partnerships? For instance, I am chair of the mining caucus. Could you talk about the successful partnerships that you've had with the mining industry and how those have worked?

Mr. John Lounds: Thank you for the question.

I like to characterize the whole no net loss conversation around the fact that when we talk about development we talk about the net economic benefit from a development. We talk about the net social benefit, the hospitals and schools that get built. But when it comes to the environment, for some reason we talk about no net loss rather than what the net benefit can be for conservation and the environment going forward. So as a principle in terms of how we think about these things, I've been trying to say that this may be a better way for us to think about it and, obviously, we'd like to see the plan come to that same kind of conclusion.

In terms of how we designate and define protected or conserved areas, is there a made-in-Canada way of thinking about this that might be different from those of other countries in the world, one that is grounded in our own particular politics and the way we've got a division of powers here?

So some of the conversations we've had with the mining industry and others revolve around the essentially temporal nature of some of those resource developments. Some mines exist for 40 to 50 years. Could you actually think about the way in which a mining proposal comes forward? As long as you are not damaging irreplaceable habitat, is there a way you could actually come up with a mitigation strategy and other kind of strategy that obviously reduces the impact of that particular development in that area, but that also creates some kind of credit or offset that can be used to do other conservation lands, so that at the same time we do the development, we'd get another credit or offset in another important area?

You have also set up the mechanism for 40 or 50 years from now so that you reclaim that development and restore it appropriately such that it turns back to nature, and in the end you actually have some kind of net gain for conservation and the environment. We want to encourage thinking about that.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Do you have an example of that with the mining...?

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Storseth. We're going to move now to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. Brian Storseth: May I just say you are one of the top two chairs we've had this week.

The Chair: Nice try.

Voices: Oh, oh!

● (1005)

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks very much to our witnesses for being here with us today. For some of you, it is a pleasure to see you again.

My question will be more about the fight against climate change. You spoke about it briefly, of course, and I think that, with regard to Ducks Unlimited Canada and habitat conservation, for example, climate change is currently having an impact in those areas. Other witnesses mentioned that it might perhaps be important to conduct a study solely on climate change so that action can be taken on habitats, for example, in a way that is more beneficial, given the impact of climate change.

When do you think we could have a study that focuses solely on climate change?

I will begin with Mr. Lounds.

[*English*]

Mr. John Lounds: The subject of climate change is not our area of expertise. Actually, we think about this the other way around. We think about having a habitat conservation program or plan and the benefits that result from that— carbon storage, carbon sequestration, water, etc. From our point of view it's a very productive way of thinking about how we address broader environmental problems and issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lounds.

I will remind Mr. Choquette of the parameters of the study of our committee. We're discussing habitat conservation and not climate change.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In part F of our study, we ask how the federal government could step up efforts in the area of habitat conservation in Canada?

In your view, is the fight against climate change an important part of what the federal government should do?

We have a sector-by-sector approach. Some provinces, such as British Columbia and Alberta, have opted instead for a carbon tax. Quebec now has a carbon emissions trading market. That is an option favoured by the NDP as a solution at the federal level.

Mr. Siekaniec, what do you think of that?

[*English*]

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, I'd be quite interested in hearing my colleague's line of questioning should he point out that wetlands produce natural carbon sinks. So do grasslands. Conserving habitat and a habitat conservation plan would certainly help to adapt to climate change, including some mitigation measures. But I think bringing up the regulatory approach around climate change and greenhouse gas emissions might be a bit of a stretch for today's scope, and I'd ask you if that's the case.

The Chair: I did indicate earlier, Mr. Choquette, that I would like you to focus your questions within the scope that we agreed to as a committee prior to our entering the study.

Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am bringing you back to part F of our study.

How could the federal government step up habitat conservation efforts in Canada? I think the fight against climate change is an essential factor in this area. Other witnesses have mentioned that we must combat climate change in order to ensure habitat conservation.

I am going back to Mr. Scarth.

Earlier we talked about climate change. My colleague Mr. Pilon talked about it. We see that the influence of early melting pack ice and predator behaviour, for example, has a negative impact on mass reproduction.

Mr. Scarth, do you believe that is mainly caused by climate change?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: No, I don't think so.

In think the main focus should be on how we address mitigation policies for all development, whether that be the development of oil and gas, the development of hydroelectric power, or the development of agricultural land. The focus should be on finding ways to convert that development into mitigation policies that have real benefits ecologically. That should be the theme of the work. Where we'll find some real benefits is in the reinvestment of proceeds from developments across the board into habitat incentives where they will have the most effect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

Mr. Siekaniec, I would like to hear you talk about the impact of climate change on habitat conservation.

Is it a significant factor that the federal government should address with respect to habitat conservation? Could that be of assistance?

● (1010)

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I think that any science-based organization needs to be thinking about and cognizant of climate change impacts. At some point you are going to have to face the adaptation strategies that species are going to need to be sustained within a healthy and operating ecosystem. Part of that is going to be through delivery of the connectivity that is needed to allow natural expansions and changes in habitat and habitat use by species.

So the answer is yes. We're going to have to be paying attention to that, as will any scientific-type organization with a conservation mission.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

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

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

My thanks, witnesses, for all the great ideas that you've been proposing. If you don't mind I would like to single out Mr. Bradstreet for thanks.

I've been trying to convince committees around this place that targets are a trap laid by unscrupulous politicians for unwary electors. Your comment that we might preserve Ellesmere Island and do nothing about the longhorn antelope, I think you said, in southern Alberta and that we have to be more sophisticated than that is an excellent articulation of my concern. I'm almost thinking I should get it printed and framed and put it on my wall. I want to thank you for that articulation.

Apart from that, I have questions for the Nature Conservancy. I'll start with Mr. Lounds and begin with the 2007 commitment by the Government of Canada, which I understand was $225 million over the last five years or so.

Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: Yes.

It was $225 million over six years.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

How many acres of land were conserved as a result of that?

Mr. John Lounds: It was used in durable or permanent conservation of 875,000 acres.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right.

I understood you to say that all or a good portion of that 875,000 acres would not be calculated under one of the categories for Aichi. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: That's correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I want to try to understand that, so I'd like to tell you what I've gleaned from the evidence, and you can tell me if I'm right or wrong.

The old IUCN management categories did not include the one that has now been added by Aichi and is known as effective area-based conservation measures. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: The IUCN categories were designed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The question of which is adopted as a definition for international agreements or treaties is somewhat different when it comes to the IUCN. Traditionally the definitions for IUCN categories have been used. So we still have those, but the Aichi agreement added other effective area-based conservation measures. I think at this point in time there are still conversations going on about exactly what is meant by that. I think Canada should get its voice into that discussion.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: And if we wanted to deal with the lands that have been conserved, that 875,000 acres we're talking about, do you think that with an appropriate interpretation of effective area-based conservation measures, those might be included?

Mr. John Lounds: We believe they would be included—

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I think I got the point that—

Mr. John Lounds: —as would be Ducks Unlimited's properties as well.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I think I got the point that a major reason why such lands don't count under the previous categories is the fact that there remains a provincial jurisdiction-based possibility, however remote, of mineral development on some of those lands. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: I will pass this question over to Michael.

Mr. Michael Bradstreet: I'd like to try to help the committee understand the philosophy of IUCN's protected area strategy.

They take a triangle from the centre of the earth to the top of the atmosphere through a property boundary, and all subsurface, surface, and above-surface rights are to be restricted for conservation.

Globally, everybody has forgotten what happens above the surface, because there are airplanes, there's climate, and there's light pollution, but the bureaucrats who run IUCN have focused very strongly on the subsurface aspect of conservation.

From a biodiversity conservation perspective, if the subsurface rights are not developed, it doesn't affect the conservation value that we're aiming to conserve. Even if they are developed, depending on how they're developed, it may not affect the conservation values that we're trying to conserve.

That's really what its basis is—not adding on the other effective area-based Aichi targets. It's this philosophical position of IUCN of what a protected area is.

● (1015)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Right, so there—

The Chair: Actually, Mr. Woodworth, the time is up.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Holy cow!

The Chair: Time flies when you're having fun.

Mr. Toet, you're welcome to pursue that line of questioning.

I recognize Mr. Toet, for five minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): I'm not going to go too far into it. Maybe Mr. Woodworth will have a chance to come back to that.

I did want to thank all of our guests here today for the great work they do.

I do find it somewhat shameful that for much of the work you have accomplished you get lip service as being greatly appreciated. You're doing great things, yet at the same time you're being told that it doesn't really count. I can sense some of your frustration in that and, hopefully, we can work forward to having the great work you do be really and truly counted, because it should be.

That brings me to Mr. Scarth. It concerns me when we hear of these things not being counted. The program that you're running with ALUS is a great program, but it raises a red flag for me. I don't want to discourage the program, because I agree with you that it's largely the way to go, but once again I think we're going to have a situation where it's not going to count.

What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Jonathan Scarth: I find the IUCN discussion to be somewhat akin to measuring inputs and ignoring outputs, because any of the lands that we're talking about may not be productive, biologically, but they may be more productive if they're managed. So I think it's much more important that we measure the biodiversity outputs of the lands that we are investing in, as opposed to measuring some artificial construct of what inputs are going in.

We have that capability. For example, waterfowl get counted every spring by the Canadian Wildlife Service, and we have indexes of how many birds are in prairie Canada and across the U.S. I believe that these are much more useful measurements of the health of the landscape than some construct of whether this land is set aside or not. It may be better to manage these lands to produce wildlife than to do otherwise.

In many areas of Manitoba, for example, the most productive areas for wildlife production are on the privately owned landscape, not in the parks where the forest is over-mature and not actively managed. You find big game exiting parkland areas to go into the farmland, because that's where the food is, that's where alfalfa is for them to eat.

I think it's much more important that we focus on outputs from our investments, as opposed to the inputs. I think there are some signs of that starting to happen.

The Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute has set up monitoring stations around Alberta to measure biodiversity over time, and I think that kind of model is much more interesting to me than these other categories.

I agree with you that the fact there may be some potential for subsurface development adds insult to injury. Often those developments have fractional impacts on wildlife production. Especially horizontal drilling for oil and gas, you can have oil extraction take place with minimal or no surface disturbance. To have that impact, the classification and some important yardstick, to me, is absolutely ridiculous.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I can actually attest to what you're saying; I watch it all the time on my own property. I have a bush behind me and I have a farmer's field across. I get to see it all the time with the wildlife, especially in the fall, with the deer coming out and feeding in the evening and going back into the bush again, and also with all the ducks and geese going through the same process. We see it all the time, so there is a great conservation aspect that's already on that working landscape.

I just want to pick up quickly, Mr. Siekaniec, on your comment about developers. I'm assuming that you're talking about developers within the urban areas who are actually embracing this whole concept of creating a wetland rather than just a retention pond. There's value in it in a lot of ways, not just ecological value. Perhaps you could speak to that aspect of it too.

Also, one of our other witnesses said that people were actually willing to pay a premium for properties around those types of facilities. Maybe you could speak a little bit as to why you would see a premium attached to that, where people are really willing to pay extra dollars to live in close proximity to a wetland setting like that within their residential area.

● (1020)

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Thank you.

Yes, we have found very keen interest now, particularly in the Winnipeg area, by developers to build what we would call naturalized wetlands versus retention ponds. Retention ponds mean just draining the water, letting sediment settle out, and pushing the water on through. You keep them mowed all the way down to the water's edge and attract Canada geese, algal blooms, and various things. The veterinarians will say, “Don't let your dog swim now, this time of year, because the algal blooms are harmful to pets”. We have found that by putting in naturalized wetlands, which have all the components of cattails, the plants that are supposed to be there, and tall grass in and around the edges that provide an additional buffer strip, communities are supporting them in a big way. They're keeping geese off of their yards and their lawns. They are providing phosphate filtration by the cattails there—which are a natural marsh attenuation of nutrient loading. It's a very positive net result and developers are embracing these naturalized wetlands in a keen way.

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

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

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): I have a question, though I missed some of the testimony. I'm very interested in your organizations. I want to congratulate you for the leadership you show to governments of all levels.

I wanted to ask a question based on question (c) of the study: “What are the most effective habitat conservation groups or organizations...?” But really the aspect of that I'm interested in is this. What are some very effective models for partnerships amongst the private sector, public sector, NGOs, local communities, and first nations? Is there a model that could somehow be part of the conservation strategy that the study is about? I'm thinking about the South Okanagan-Similkameen conservation initiative, because that's one that I worked on in my time as an environment minister in British Columbia. It seemed like those really multi-layered partnerships that pulled things together and could move ahead with conservation at that point were the exception and not the norm.

Mr. John Lounds: Thank you.

In my presentation I talked about the natural area conservation program as one of those kinds of private-public ways in which you can make more happen on the ground by bringing in leveraged dollars, and focusing it from a conservation planning point of view. But it also involves several land trusts at Ducks Unlimited Canada and lots of other partners on the ground that help out with volunteer stewardship work, etc.

But to your specific geography, we've been pleased recently that we've been able to acquire three properties right along the Canada-U.S. border, in concert with the landowners there, to help with the conservation of the South Okanagan-Similkameen. We've been involved and Ducks Unlimited has been involved for several years in the various partnerships with the Nature Trust of British Columbia, local landowners, and others there who are interested in conservation of what I understand is arguably one of the regions of Canada that has the most species at risk found anywhere.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Is there a specific framework that can be proposed for this conservation strategy? It seems to me that every region and every group invents its own way of doing partnerships. Some of them are great, some of them not so great. Anyway, that's just my thought, that if we could cookie-cutter the really effective models and have them as part of the strategy, we could take the best practices—

● (1025)

Mr. John Lounds: We actually have found that the partnerships are as diverse as Canada itself. Part of it depends as well on the type of land you're trying to conserve. Ranchlands in Alberta are quite a different partnership from what you're going to get in eastern Canada, for instance. But maybe I'll ask—

Ms. Joyce Murray: Okay, so maybe there are some incentives for partnerships. Obviously, you don't have the same types of organizations in every situation, but you need something to bring all the partners together, and land use planning does that.

This is for my information, because I didn't catch your presentation, Mr. Scarth, and I'm very interested in this alternative land use services program.

I was introduced to a model in Australia in the middle of the last decade. I'm not sure if it was in Victoria or New South Wales, but it was about incentives for conservation and ecological functioning. It was science-based, but it was not about giving money if groups did conservation. It was about the model or algorithm for quantifying ecological net benefit on the landscape based on the quantification of soil, water, fauna and flora measures.

Then the landowner would make a bid. We can improve these factors by *x* amount for $100 a hectare, and whoever could do the most with the least money would get the money. It was a very interesting way and the opposite of the approach, “We'll give you money, and you'll do what you can”.

Are you familiar with that? I had some presentations on that, and the ministry experts felt they had cut their costs a lot and created a lot more ecological value. Is that how yours works?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Murray, but your time is up.

We're going to have to give time for witnesses. You know we have five-minute rounds, and you can't use five minutes for a question and get an answer.

I committed to leaving time for committee business, but we have a few minutes for one more question.

From the government side, we have Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I'll be very brief, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lounds, very quickly, in the first round of funding for the NACP, I believe the government committed approximately $225 million. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: That's correct.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Then in Budget 2013 we've committed additional funds. Is that correct?

Mr. John Lounds: Yes, an additional $20 million.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Excellent. So can you briefly give us some overview of the number of species that you feel have been protected due to the conservation efforts that you've made under the NACP, especially species listed under SARA? I'll ask the same question of the colleagues from Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. John Lounds: It's 148 species at risk.

But maybe for more detail, Michael, do you want to comment on that?

Mr. Michael Bradstreet: Did that answer your question?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Perfectly.

And to Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: I'm going to have to go with the number that was just given.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Would each of your organizations characterize the NACP funding and the additional NACP funding under economic action plan 2013 as something that will help to ensure the conservation of habitat for species at risk into the future as well?

Mr. John Lounds: In the places where we apply the funds, yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Excellent, and to Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. Greg Siekaniec: Yes, where we apply funds and the species are present, the benefits will be retained.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Fine.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to adjourn the meeting. We're going to have about a three-minute recess to allow our witnesses to leave and then we'll reconvene for some committee business in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]