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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call meeting 74 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to order, please.

I welcome our witnesses with us today. We have Mr. Terry Quinney, the provincial manager of fish and wildlife services with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Welcome, Mr. Quinney. From the Alberta Wilderness Association, we have Mr. Cliff Wallis. Welcome. From the Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council, we have Mr. Reginald Melanson, executive director, and Luc Robitaille, chair.

We're going to proceed in the order I just mentioned. We begin first with a 10-minute opening statement from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Mr. Terry Quinney.

Mr. Quinney, proceed, please.

Dr. Terry Quinney (Provincial Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters): Good morning. Thank you, again, for extending the invitation.

My presentation to you this morning focuses on answering your study question of, “How can the federal government improve habitat conservation efforts in Canada?” I will answer the question by referring you, firstly, to certain recommendations from the recent National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Congress, and secondly, by presenting a business case example from Ontario, namely, the community fisheries and wildlife involvement program, CFWIP.

It was approximately this time last year, if memory serves me correctly, that I appeared before your committee during your study review of the Species At Risk Act. At that time I extended the invitation, if it were possible, for members to join us at the national fish and wildlife congress, which took place in Ottawa this time last year. I'm pleased to be able to share some of the final recommendations that are now available from that very first inaugural Canadian National Fish and Wildlife Conservation Congress last May that was co-hosted by the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters in association with the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and a number of conservation organizations like Ducks Unlimited and Wildlife Habitat Canada.

The goals of that congress included inspiring increased efforts for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats into this new century. Among the highlights of the recommendations I would like to present to you is the recommendation that the federal Government of Canada declare fish and wildlife habitat conservation a national priority, that we collectively build a wildlife constituency by educating youth, enhancing nature education and outdoor guidance, and reaching out to all citizens to recognize the value of natural capital, to make stewardship a core value and improve the public's connection to nature and wildlife.

The recommendations also include expanding support for fish and wildlife conservation through public education and initiatives that foster participation and activities such as fishing, hunting, and other outdoor-related activities. Among the final recommendations is that the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in collaboration, for example, with cities and municipalities, should develop a national fish and wildlife strategy that includes fish and wildlife and habitat conservation priorities. Thus, we're encouraged by the government's announcement last year of the intention to formulate a national conservation plan, and we envision habitat conservation to be a priority within that new national conservation plan.

We also collectively believe that fishing and hunting deserve a prominent place at the table when we discuss elements of a national conservation plan, and that will, of course, include our relationships with responsible resource development and management, because of course, fishing and hunting activities are a vital part of Canada's economy and have a huge financial impact right across our national economy.

With that, I would like to offer a concrete business case, if you like, in terms of how the federal government may participate in improving habitat conservation in Canada.

● (0850)

I want to present an example from my home province of Ontario where for approximately 25 years a very successful community-based fish and wildlife habitat conservation program has been in place. I've referred to it as the community fisheries and wildlife improvement program. That program saw a very modest investment from the Ontario government of $1 million a year. Recently, that program has been reconfigured, and I'll refer to that a little later.

But what I want to emphasize is that with that modest investment leveraging each year, an amount of over $20 million in total value resulted from this community fisheries and wildlife improvement program. The specifics include the fact that over 35,000 community-based volunteers contributed over 200,000 person-years in support of 600 projects across the province, including: habitat restoration, fish culture and stocking, tree planting, and stream bank fencing and stabilization. All of which, of course, are under the mandate of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

The point is that for that modest investment, huge returns were occurring. More recently, the Government of Ontario has decreased its contribution to that program and renamed it, but the point is that the track record has shown that these partnerships and modest investments, by all levels of government, can result in huge returns on investment.

With that, I hope I have provided at least some examples to illustrate how the Government of Canada can improve habitat conservation efforts in Canada.

Thank you for your attention.

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

We'll move now to Mr. Cliff Wallis, the vice-president of the Alberta Wilderness Association.

I neglected to mention at the outset that the Forest Products Association of Canada witness, Mark Hubert, had a medical emergency and is unable to join us today, so we'll attempt to reschedule Mr. Hubert.

Mr. Wallis.

Mr. Cliff Wallis (Vice-President, Alberta Wilderness Association): Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members.

It's a great opportunity to be here to speak to a subject important to me and to many Canadians, the subject of habitat conservation in Canada. The AWA has been working in this area since the late 1960s. We work with governments, private landowners, and first nations to achieve greater protection for wild species, wild lands, and wild waters in all the natural regions of Alberta.

I know you've received some good input already on some of the same themes that I hear from my colleagues here today, including the views of our sister organization, Nature Canada, a few weeks ago. We support the notion that all wildlife species deserve a no net loss of productive capacity of habitat as a principle underlying federal policy and law governing habitat conservation. We are in complete agreement that we need strong networks of protected areas focusing on areas of highest conservation value. We have examples such as important bird areas, habitat for species at risk, and un-fragmented, un-roaded areas. In Alberta we have things called environmentally significant areas that have been mapped.

Canada is a signatory to many important conventions on biological diversity, migratory birds in the wetlands, and for example, Ramsar. We've made commitments to protected areas. Unfortunately, we haven't met our targets nor, I believe, the aspirations of most Canadians who consistently state in polls that this notion of protected wildlife and their habitat is important to them. I have many examples of those polls if you want to see them. They include rural people as well as urban people. There's a myth that there's a split there. We have different ways of going about it, but there's a lot of support from Canadians for this.

Canada has led in the past in establishing national parks, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, and national marine protected areas. We need federal and provincial governments to complete these systems if we're going to meet our goals. Unfortunately, one could characterize government policy—not just federal but also provincial policies—as going fast on economic development and slow on conservation. This must come more into balance. We would argue that conservation, especially in some threatened regions of the country such as the grassland region, needs to be sped up dramatically. We can't just talk about it anymore. We have to act.

In 2011 Canadian farmers got 16% of their revenues from federal and provincial governments, according to the OECD. All together, direct support payments to farmers totalled almost $2.5 billion in 2011. Yet, an insignificant amount of money goes into subsidies for conserving biodiversity either on private land or on leased public lands. Even less of that subsidy ends up with ranchers who steward large areas of native grassland that support a rich biodiversity and some of the largest populations of species at risk in Canada. Since the removal of agricultural subsidies, although it may be a good idea, seems politically unlikely, we believe that all these subsidies need reform. A good proportion of the subsidy, we believe, must go toward providing the ecological goods and services that Canadians say they want.

We have not looked critically for some time at the forest industry and energy subsidies, but we did look at them over the eighties and nineties. Both direct and indirect subsidies of these industries have worked against conservation and promoted massive changes in habitat quality in Alberta. While we would be happy to see all these types of subsidies that promote habitat degradation removed, again, it's politically unlikely. At least some of them should be refocused on conservation and the provision of ecological goods and services.

As an immigrant, and one who came to appreciate Canada and its wild spaces after coming here from the UK, I believe it's important to help connect new Canadians to wild spaces and wild species. As someone who has spent a good part of my youth and my later life outdoors, I've been fortunate in that regard. I think it is essential to find ways to connect and reconnect our young people to the outdoors, both for health and conservation support reasons.

The AWA is working with local ranching communities and first nations on initiatives such as the sage grouse partnership in southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, and the Hay-Zama committee up in northwestern Alberta. We co-manage with the local community a large protected area in the grasslands of southeastern Alberta along the Milk River canyon, and we advise on management of the Hay-Zama wildland park, as we phase out oil and gas activity in that internationally significant wetland complex.

● (0855)

These types of processes, which government facilitates but does not lead, have been some of our most rewarding. In the end, a national approach to conservation must be both place-based and people-based, and must be well resourced. If we fail on any of those, we won't be as effective as we should be.

The AWA recommends considering the following: a no net-loss principle for conservation, especially on federal lands; completing Canada's system of protected areas and conservation lands at all levels of government; finding ways to engage Canadians, particularly new Canadians and youth with wild places and wild species; reform agricultural and energy policies to fully recognize the value of native habitats and the communities, ecosystem services, and biodiversity that depend on them; institute payments for ecosystem services from private and leased public lands through both private markets, such as those being created for carbon credits, and direct government payments.

As I said, this is an area where we'd rather there be no subsidies, but if there are going to be subsidies, let's balance it out. We also need to expand support for first nations' interests in biodiversity conservation that builds on their traditional linkages of their cultures and economies with wild places and wild species. We need to conduct a review of all federal lands to determine if they are being well managed for biodiversity and ecosystem services, and no federal land should be sold without such a public review.

There's an example of the Suffield military reserve, which is being managed for multiple use right now and contains a national wildlife area, but the British Army is reconsidering whether they're going to continue in that area. That may be an opportunity for conservation.

The government is dismembering the PFRA, and the Govenlock pasture is actually in federal ownership. It's one that we believe should be designated a national wildlife area and would contribute to the conservation of many species at risk, including sage grouse.

We need to provide education and extension services that enable private land managers to manage their land and businesses in ways that are both profitable and sustainable, and that continue to support that full range of ecosystem services and their associated economic benefits.

The last one is this notion of matching funds. Political parties get a very good match on their donations, if you wish, and charities don't get anywhere near as much. We believe that conservation charities and other charities.... What better way for the public of Canada to express its support than by donating to these organizations that do so much good work across Canada? If we had a better match, I think a lot more would get done.

Thank you.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wallis.

We will now move to the Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council.

Mr. Robitaille, proceed, please.

Mr. Luc Robitaille (Chair, Holcim Canada Inc., Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members, for providing Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council the privilege to be here today and present to you some thoughts of the council members on habitat conservation in Canada.

The council is relatively new. It started in 2009. Its purpose is to help Canadian businesses understand and incorporate conservation, sustainable use of biodiversity, and the ecosystem services it provides into their long-term planning and everyday business activities. Today, this has been accomplished through a series of case studies on business best practices, the development of corporate and SME biodiversity conservation guides, workshops, surveys, and the adoption of a business declaration.

The council has gained national and global recognition for its accomplishment, and is currently the chair of the global business and biodiversity partnership. The parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity have for some time been exploring ways to enhance private sector collaboration in achieving the goals of the convention. The eighth meeting of the parties of the convention in Brazil, in 2006, initially identified the need for business involvement in biodiversity conservation. The CBBC has been active at both the COP 10 in Japan and COP 11 in India. In fact, we're planning to host a preparatory meeting in Montreal this October for international business interest, prior to COP 12 that will take place in South Korea in 2014. The council is positioning itself to provide Canada's private sector response to the COP decisions.

As well as contributing to the substance of the decisions themselves, we believe that healthy, natural habitats and ecosystems sustain Canada's economy, provide invaluable ecosystem services, and contribute significantly to the health and well-being of all Canadians.

Now I will answer the questions that were raised in your study here.

What types of stakeholders are involved in habitat conservation?

Broadly stated, all Canadians, including Canadian business, are stakeholders in habitat conservation. Industry will continue to play a key role in conservation of habitat in Canada. Over the past few decades there's been an increased expectation for industry to plan and integrate biodiversity conservation into business operations. The role of business in conservation is critical in addressing regulatory requirements, but also in optimizing the value of ecosystem services and in helping to achieve well-thought-out targets for conservation.

In fact, many progressive businesses in Canada are setting their own conservation targets, and in a transparent manner, challenging themselves to meet their own conservation expectations.

However, in order for business to become effectively involved in conservation activities, there needs to be a comprehensive and easily accessed source of data that is based on good science. Business does not only want to be active, but it wants to ensure it is effective and that work is done in areas where work is needed most.

Examples of projects that have taken place in Canada include the following. You have the OPG involvement with community partners to support regional ecosystems. You have Holcim's quarry rehabilitation program, which has restored more than 200 hectares at the Milton quarry to a fully functioning natural habitat, and is also leading an effort to develop an industry-wide standard for sustainable aggregate extraction. There's Syngenta, with its wetland habitat restoration program. You have Canada's peat industry, which has entered into a certification program for peatland restorations, and you have Suncor participating with universities for ways to restore—

The Chair: Could I just ask you to slow down just a bit? Our interpreters are doing a great job, but it's difficult. I'll give you an extra 30 seconds to finish, if you need that.

Thank you.

● (0905)

Mr. Luc Robitaille: All right. No problem, Mr. Chair.

Xstrata has implemented Canada-wide biodiversity evaluations and management plans for their properties.

It's very difficult to quantify the work that has been done by a wide range of stakeholders, including business, as much of it is not reported. Much of the business-associated habitat conservation work is actually carried out not by individual businesses but frequently through partnerships with local or national conservation groups. There's also a lot of work carried out by individuals on their properties. But there's no single entity that produces an annual report of all habitat conservation activities in Canada.

The second question you asked was about “publicly available knowledge and expertise on habitat conservation”. In Canada, there is much readily accessible information on habitat conservation. The information is available in documents, online, through conservation organizations, from government, and also through industry associations. Some specific examples of information and expertise available include: NatureServe Canada, through its conservation data centres, which provide information on species at risk; Carolinian Canada, with its Big Picture project, which identifies natural heritage systems of large core natural areas, other significant natural areas, corridors, and linkages; and information provided by various types of NGOs in Canada.

There's a collective of substantial expertise throughout Canada. However, some of this information may be scattered, mainly through the diversity of ecosystems, but also through the sheer size of our country. In 2012, the CBBC conducted a survey. It found that 84% of respondents found the accuracy of data available to them was deficient, and 79% of respondents found there was not enough data to meet their needs.

What are the most effective habitat conservation groups?

Well, it's difficult to put a name to the most effective habitat conservation groups in Canada without additional criteria, such as the number of acres conserved, the effective use of funding, community engagement, species of concern, and such things. Small local groups can be very effective, and they often have local support, including from business. They normally tackle smaller projects, but the cumulative effect of these projects is often as important as larger projects. Local groups are also aware of local issues that can often garner hands-on support for conservation actions.

National organizations can be more effective in getting a broader base of support and frequently have research-oriented sections within their organizations. However, these organizations may pursue higher-profile projects that may be more costly but may not necessarily meet the need for conservation. Ducks Unlimited Canada, when it comes to on-the-ground conservation activities, is one of the stellar organizations in Canada. One of the important components that gives strength to an organization is its members. Not only does DUC have a great membership, but these members dedicate substantial time to helping raise funds for the organization and to working on conservation projects.

How is “conserved land” defined and accounted for in Canada?

There are many conservation techniques that are used in Canada, such as fee simple acquisitions, easements, conservation agreements, stewardship agreements, and such. There are so many ways for this to be accounted for, and some organizations may count the same acres several times, whether they're secured, restored, or managed.

There are also different definitions of specific terms. For example, one organization may consider an acre secured through a time-limited stewardship agreement, while another may consider this acre to not be secured but only influenced. This can have a great influence on the numbers of conserved acres in our records. Conserved lands can mean different things to different people. For some, it can mean only land that is removed from human impacts, while for others it may mean that it is managed in ways that allow for healthy habitats and species while also allowing human activities, as long as they are environmentally and economically sustainable.

The definition of conservation seems to be a universally accepted term. The main difference between countries is how this activity is accomplished. When looking independently at land or water conservation, businesses tend to focus on the concept of integrated landscape management, which ensures that important conservation values are conserved regardless of the official status of the land, while allowing compatible development activities where they can be undertaken without causing a net permanent loss of important conservation value.

● (0910)

When it comes to recovering a species, how do best management practices initiatives compare to prescriptive government-related measures?

The best management practices are often referred to as stewardship initiatives and are activities that are implemented generally on a voluntary basis. They are usually up and above regulatory requirements. Prescriptive and government-mandated measures are usually the minimum business must do to maintain their regulated licence to operate. These measures will guarantee a specific habitat quality that should ensure the continued health of a species in habitat conditions. These measures are often very effective in providing direction to business and legislators in the long-term planning exercises to help conservation species in habitats, but it may not be enough to stop the decline due to other circumstances.

Businesses that adopt and implement best practices are showing a commitment to conservation and are often going well beyond their regulatory requirements. These voluntary steps above prescriptive measures may be what are required to put the species and the habitat well on the way to recovery.

How can the federal government improve habitat conservation in Canada?

The federal government has created national parks, wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, and such, but there is still more that needs to be done to conserve our habitats and species, so we can rely on them. The federal government must not only lead by example, but must provide the tools, resources, and incentives for others to become actively involved in habitat conservation activities.

These include: completing national environmental assessments at the regional and ecosystems level; implementing conservation measures to measure the ability of natural habitats to provide the services needed to maintain environmental and economic sustainability; completing and following up the national conservation plans; ensuring that federally held lands have a habitat conservation plan in place, not only for species at risk; developing conservation education programs that are aimed at all sectors of society, including schools and businesses; providing support to NGOs that are struggling to assist Canadian businesses to develop and implement environmental conservation into their daily business activities;—

The Chair: Mr. Robitaille, we need to have you wind up very shortly.

Mr. Luc Robitaille: I have two sentences left.

—providing financial incentives through a wide variety of public-private partnerships; and taking measures to improve timely and comprehensive conservation data availability.

Thank you very much.

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

We'll move now to the rounds of questions by committee members. The first round will be a seven-minute round.

We'll begin with the government side, Mr. Sopuck, for seven minutes.

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

Dr. Quinney, can you describe the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters? How many members do you have and how many different affiliates do you have?

Dr. Terry Quinney: The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters has approximately 85,000 dues-paying members. In addition, we have over 700 member or affiliated community-based clubs. In addition to that, of course, we have many important partners and supporters from the private sector who help us accomplish our conservation programming.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: How many of those clubs and affiliates are involved in habitat conservation?

Dr. Terry Quinney: Easily over 100.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: These are active programs we're talking about, on the ground?

Dr. Terry Quinney: These are active clubs whose priority mandate includes on-the-ground, in-the-water fish and wildlife conservation projects. In other words, people getting their hands dirty and their feet wet.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Again, I'm so very impressed with the hunting and angling community in terms of the on-the-ground work they do. Quite simply, the hunters and anglers of Canada do not get the recognition they deserve, although I'm very happy to say our government has created the hunting and angling advisory panel of which OFAH is a part. The influence of the hunting and angling community not only was felt in the past but will be significantly increased over the next little while.

Dr. Quinney, in terms of OFAH and your relationship with agriculture, Mr. Wallis talked about payments for ecosystem services to farmers. Is that something OFAH would support?

Dr. Terry Quinney: Firstly, may I say that in the province of Ontario, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters was a charter contributor to the experimental ALUS—alternative land use services—program that specifically targeted the farming community with reference to encouraging, through financial incentives, farmers to supply nature-based benefits from their lands, for example, fish and wildlife.

● (0915)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Excellent.

Mr. Wallis, we had a discussion last week about the IUCN criteria to measure conserved lands, and to my surprise and the surprise of many members of the committee, some of Canada's crown jewels, in terms of conservation lands, don't quality under the IUCN criteria. It seems to me that the IUCN criteria are woefully deficient in terms of what they measure, because they significantly undercount what Canada is doing. Would you agree that the IUCN criteria are not really adequate to describe Canada's efforts?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I'm not sure that they are inadequate. They describe a certain part of the effort. I think that's more correct.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Right.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Where we have failed is on the side of large protected areas. There are area-dependent species, like caribou and sage grouse, that need areas free of industrial activity. Many species will benefit from better management practices, but we need to do a better job on actually protecting larger blocks of habitat. I think that's where we've been deficient. Alberta didn't meet its targets under Special Places 2000, for example, and those were business plan targets from a very conservative government. If that government can't even meet its own business plan targets, then we have a serious problem.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: The problem, though, is that we're never measuring ecological outputs. All we do is measure what I call artificial inputs. For example, we had the natural areas conservation program, under which both Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada were provided with funds to secure and manage some of Canada's crown jewels of habitat. I have a 320-acre conservation easement on my own farm through the NCC, which was done many years ago. Again, to my surprise, none of those crown jewels of land count under IUCN criteria. They don't count under most criteria, yet the environmental amenities that they conserve, and the ecological outputs from those lands are very significant. Again, these artificial criteria that just measure inputs are deficient. Don't you think they should be measuring ecological outputs?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think we have other measures—for example, species at risk—and I think those are telling us how well we're doing on the land. In the grasslands, for example, we have a high number of species at risk, because I don't think we've done the job of protecting enough areas. It doesn't mean to say that those private conservation efforts—I work with private landowners who are doing conservation—don't actually meet the IUCN criteria; they're just not measured. There are other proxies we have for telling, so you have to consider all of the things and not just look at the IUCN.

It's an important measure, so we can measure that. But I agree with you that we need to be measuring other things. Some of those measures are telling us that we're still failing, and hence, I think we need to refocus on areas that are in trouble, and support private investments in private land for conservation and measure that. I think they're all part of the equation. I don't think we're doing a good job on measuring that, so I'll agree with you there.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Robitaille, give me a precise definition of biodiversity.

Mr. Luc Robitaille: For our company it means managing the various species, the diversity of species that are present within the boundaries of our site and also the variety within each of the species. It also goes beyond that and goes into the protection of different habitats that these species depend on.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's not quite the question I asked. When we talk about biodiversity targets, for example, what is actually meant by the term “biodiversity”; not how you manage for it, but how do you define it?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: For me it's the diversity of species and the diversity within species that are present.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: The problem is that's a circular argument, but we'll come back to that.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck, your time is up.

We will move now to Ms. Leslie for seven minutes.

● (0920)

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. This is proving to be very helpful.

Mr. Quinney, I'd like to start with you. You talked about fish and wildlife habitat becoming a national issue. You'd like to see it as a national issue and in some respects, I certainly agree with that. I think that anglers and hunters are known nationally as good stewards of the environment and of these wild spaces, and it makes sense, because you're really at the front lines. You're seeing, seasonally, the changes that happen from season to season. You're out there in those spaces so you can see, over time, the changes that are taking place.

I think about the impacts of some recent legislative changes to our ability to protect wildlife habitat as you pointed out. I think, in particular, about changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act, and changes to the protection of fish habitat. I remember when you were at committee testifying about navigable waters, and you said that changes to the act could dramatically alter the ability of Canadians to continue using thousands.... Sorry, I don't know if it was you. I'm going to retract that. It was a witness from the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

Was it you?

Dr. Terry Quinney: I'm certainly pleased to comment, whether it was that exact quote or not—

Ms. Megan Leslie: Sure, okay, I just didn't want to put words in your mouth.

Dr. Terry Quinney: I've commented on the navigable waters act before so—

Ms. Megan Leslie: Sorry, I'll continue. I just didn't want to get anything wrong there.

So it would dramatically alter the ability of Canadians to continue using thousands of miles of waterways currently protected under the act. When I think about the Navigable Waters Protection Act.... I mean literally somebody could build a dam and turn a waterway into a terrestrial habitat. That actually is something that could happen under this act. So I wonder if you could comment on the impact, a loss that might occur from these changes, loss of wild spaces, changes to our ability to conserve habitat, through these recent changes.

Dr. Terry Quinney: Thanks for the question because I think, at least in my mind, there's been considerable confusion across this country with reference to changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. My understanding of the act, and I've been with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters for approximately 25 years now, is that act is not an environmental protection piece of legislation. It was specifically targeted to protect rights of navigation and therefore access. As a result, organizations like ours—the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters—have been very supportive of this Canadian right to navigate our waters. In other words, our ability to access habitats, our ability to go to places to go fishing and hunting can be directly related to our continued ability to navigate public waters. Therefore we want to see that right to access maintained.

On the environmental protection pieces of legislation, there are other examples of that. You referred to, for example, recent changes to the federal Fisheries Act. We've been working, I believe, quite cooperatively with the federal government based on the commitment to enhance recreational, commercial, and aboriginal fisheries. We've been working to improve what was the status quo. To be frank, the status quo in Ontario had not been working. We needed improvements and we're encouraged that the federal government has given that commitment to work with us to improve the status quo.

Ms. Megan Leslie: That's great, thanks. I appreciate your answer.

Mr. Wallis, I have a question for you about prairie farm rehabilitation. With this transfer of PFRA lands, my understanding is that there isn't actually a transition plan in place yet. So do you think that this is a transfer that should happen now or do you think there should be a delay until we can make sure that we come up with a way to value the conservation through talking to governments, pasture patrons, key stakeholders? Would you support a delay in that?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Certainly a go-slow approach. I don't think there was any investigation into the value of those lands and how they're going to be protected. But obviously the people of Saskatchewan are speaking up and I think this process may be slowing down. There are two pieces. There is some federal land involved, the Govenlock pasture. That's the one we're saying is in former sage grouse range. It should stay in federal ownership and should be managed as a natural wildlife area. In our perspective with the current pasture patrons, and the like, things can continue on in Govenlock, but we need to refocus the effort there.

For the other ones that were provincial lands but were leased, again before you give them up, make sure that there are safeguards in place to ensure those biodiversity values that many of those pastures had will be conserved. That hasn't been done. We've gone through a similar process in Alberta with public land sales where there was no public input, no evaluation, and it's had negative consequences for biodiversity. So again we need to review all federal lands and before PFRA gets rid of theirs, we need to review those.

● (0925)

Ms. Megan Leslie: So there are lessons to be learned from that experience in Alberta.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Yes.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I assume I have a bit more time.

Mr. Wallis, I'm going to continue with you. What are your thoughts on voluntary versus prescribed approaches to environmental conservation?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: There have been a number of studies on this. They're both important, but as I think I mentioned earlier, there are area-sensitive species, such as woodland caribou and sage grouse, that absolutely need areas that are off limits to industrial development. These are large areas. It's the one area of conservation where governments have failed in their land use policies and failed to act.

The best management practice, if you wish, is no industrial development, no industrial-scale harvest, in their ranges. The oil and gas industry in Alberta tried for decades with the caribou. I sat on the Alberta Caribou Committee advising the deputy minister in Alberta on caribou, and they just came to the conclusion that none of those best management practices were working. We needed areas set aside.

It's not that governments can't do it. I worked on the Hay-Zama, for example, working with oil and gas, the first nations, and the government. They're out of there by 2017. They made a decision. They made a commitment. We had a process. It wasn't government-led, but it was government-facilitated, and the neighbourhood, if you wish, came to the conclusion that oil and gas was not compatible with saving that wetland complex. Oil and gas was allowed to produce in the less sensitive areas, but only up to a certain point, and then they're gone.

We need to be looking at similar things for such species as sage grouse and caribou. As I say, best management practices are only part of the puzzle, not all of it.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Leslie.

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

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Wallis, I'd like to continue with you. Your organization has been doing this since 1965. You're one of the oldest in Alberta in that regard. Can you tell me about some of the key successes your organization has had in that time?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: In southeastern Alberta there's the Milk River canyon, the Milk River natural area, and the Kennedy Coulee ecological reserve. We co-manage that site with the local ranching community, the local county, and the fish and game association.

We've done probably the longest-standing biodiversity research in that area. We have an ongoing monitoring program. We contract out the grazing. It's all self-funding. That's the nice part about it. Government facilitates, but they're not the ones pushing. We actually have the largest recreation lease, if you wish, on that piece to manage that area on behalf of the government.

Mr. Brian Storseth: That's the provincial government.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: That's the provincial government there, yes.

Up in northwestern Alberta, in the Hay-Zama complex, it's an area we've worked on since the mid-1990s with the Dene Tha' First Nation, the oil and gas industry, the Alberta government, and groups like Ducks Unlimited.

The very first thing we did was re-regulate the complex so that oil and gas was done in a much better way. Then we eventually created a wildland park and we determined areas that were too sensitive to allow oil and gas to continue. Oil and gas got out of there very quickly, and then designated an area where they could keep producing, get the economic benefits, and then get out of there in a very coordinated reclamation way. As I said, they'll be out of there by 2017.

Mr. Brian Storseth: In your experience in southern Alberta, which, as I understand from my research, has been tremendously successful, what level of government have you been working with and that you find best to work with to achieve these successes?

● (0930)

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Well, I think the participation of all levels of government is important, but I think the most important thing for long-term success is getting the local community onside. That means putting our baggage at the door and trying to figure out what our end goal is.

We often agree on the end goal, but different people have different ways of getting there. I've learned that I want to change the trajectory and get towards that end goal. That's the most important thing. If you get the local people onside, you have the county government onside and you have the provincial government onside. The federal government is usually happy to see how things have gone on.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Absolutely.

One of the keys in this area, as I understand, has been the engagement of local landowners as well. Is this correct?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: That's true, yes.

Mr. Brian Storseth: How have you been successfully managing that? Is it through incentives or is it through other forms?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: There are two parts to it. One is to respect their views, their traditions, on the land.

The other is government providing a box in which to play. If the provincial government hadn't said, “We want to create protected areas in the grasslands. You guys go out and tell us how to do that”.... It was hands-off for the government, but they said, “Here's what we want in the end.” It's very important to have that box to play in and for people to be told, “There's a reason we want to do this. This is government policy. Now tell us how to do it.”

I think that's what made it successful. We met our goal. We got a protected area. It wasn't necessarily protected in the way we'd originally envisaged, but it worked. It's been the longest-term partnership we've had.

As I said, it hasn't cost the Government of Alberta anything, because the revenues we generate from grazing contracts with the local ranchers go into the biodiversity research, the fencing, and everything else that supports the management of that site.

Mr. Brian Storseth: As I understand it, it's been government involvement through overarching targets but not overly prescriptive. There's a need for flexibility, and not necessarily incentives or actually cash in pockets for local landowners but other ways to incentivize them and make sure they're involved in the eventual outcome of the decision. That's how you've had that success.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: That's right. As we go forward in the neighbouring area on the sage grouse partnership, we are looking at incentives where we think that there's a hardship placed on the landowner because of the way we're trying to manage for species at risk. So it's something he normally wouldn't do. We need some form of co-payment so that they're not the ones bearing the burden of society's wishes to see those species conserved.

Mr. Brian Storseth: I also note that you have mentioned the $2.5 billion in direct subsidies that this government has given to farmers for the last year. I agree with you, this government has been very generous when it comes to farm subsidies as there have been some tough times in the Prairies, whether it's floods in Manitoba or droughts in Alberta and Saskatchewan. You talked about changing that. How would you look at changing that to enhance habitat conservation?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think it's just refocusing some of those same funds. If we're going to have support payments, let's tell the rural people what kinds of products, what goods and services, we want them to provide for us. I think in the polls going back a long time Canadians, rural and urban, say wildlife habitat, wildlife conservation, is a very important thing to them. So how do we pay for that? We'd rather pay those people. We need stewards on the land looking after it. It's a lot cheaper to have them looking after it than government agencies many times. You need everything from those strictly protected areas to areas that are conserved through local management with payment.

Mr. Brian Storseth: You're not suggesting more money?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: No. Our organization would just rather there be no subsidies that lead to habitat degradation. I think the first thing is to redo all those subsidies and see whether there are ones that are pushing things negatively on the habitat side. Those should be absolutely removed. If we're going to support our rural communities, let's find other ways of doing it with the same funding, saying we don't necessarily want more of something we can't sell for a good price. Society has said we want these products, and we're willing to pay you for that.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Create a value for those products.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Create value, and I think there are some pilots starting right now on the sage grouse in southwestern Saskatchewan. I think they will be a telling tale of whether that's going to be successful or not.

Mr. Brian Storseth: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: About 15 seconds, you can get a lot in 15 seconds, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Unbelievable, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Your time's up now.

We'll move on to Ms. Duncan.

● (0935)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for your testimony.

Mr. Wallis, I'd like to begin with you. You've given us a lot of recommendations. You talked about grasslands, and you talked about how this needs to be sped up. Could you give this committee a specific recommendation, your wish list, please?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I would recommend the review of all federal lands in terms of whether we are doing the best job of managing for biodiversity. I would also recommend stopping the transfer of those PFRA lands until they're evaluated and making sure there are safeguards in place if they're being transferred back to the province. I would recommend creating a national wildlife area for the Govenlock pasture, specifically there. That would be something immediate for an area that's in much trouble.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you. So those are your three recommendations?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Right.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You also talked about subsidies for ecological reserves. I'll ask you to give your specific recommendation to the committee, please.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: It's for ecological goods and services payments. It's to redirect existing subsidies into areas that benefit biodiversity. That would be agricultural support systems, and removing subsidies for the forest and energy industry that work against biodiversity. I think those are the premises that we have. But the first focus is on the agricultural supports, and more focused on, for example, ranchers, and then providing areas for the management for species at risk. That's a big problem in the grasslands. For many of Canada's species at risk the biggest concentration has been in the grassland region. If we had some way to pay ranchers for stewarding that land, for improving management practices, that would be a way to start.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I appreciate that. Thank you. So it's the agricultural way to help the ranchers.

Can you now talk about looking at the energy subsidies? Can you give your specific recommendation? You can break it into steps for the committee.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: It has been some time, as I said, since we looked at the energy subsidies, but I don't think that all of the economics are going into the royalty system and everything. Our view is that there's an indirect subsidy, at least for the oil and gas industry. With stumpage fees for forestry, there's another subsidy there.

Again, we think that some of those need to be re-examined and the ones that are most damaging. I don't have any specifics, so I'll leave it up to you and hopefully others are providing that input.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: The recommendation would be to review the subsidies....

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Review any of the subsidies....

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: —and to remove those that are the most damaging.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Exactly.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You talked about support for first nations. Can you give your recommendation to the committee, please?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: In my experience, first nations seem to have been left out of the biodiversity train, if you wish. They have a very strong interest in protecting it, but quite often their interests are superseded by external economic interests. We need a way of, again, providing support to those communities getting larger areas free of industrial development—because quite often they're very compatible with our area-sensitive species like caribou. I'm not sure how much the federal government can do, certainly in the provincial areas.

But, for example, in the caribou recovery, we've set an important goal to reach at least 65% of undisturbed habitat for each caribou population. If the government would work with the provinces and the first nations to enforce that standard, if you wish, or goal, then we'd start reversing the decline in caribou. That's a specific example that I think can be started and worked on right away, and it is consistent with existing government targets.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

I'm going to pick up on targets. You've mentioned several times today caribou and sage grouse. Can you talk about Canada's targets? Have we achieved those targets, what we need to achieve those targets, and can you speak specifically to your recommendations on targets and your recommendations on caribou and sage grouse, please?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: No, I don't think we've met our targets. Maybe we never will. Certainly I want to change that trajectory towards meeting our targets. In areas like the boreal forest in Alberta, we're going away from that at a very rapid pace. We need moratoria on certain areas until the plans are completed so that those caribou ranges can meet that 65% goal.

In areas like the grasslands, as I said, the conservation target in Alberta was something like 1.3% of the grasslands to be protected. They didn't even meet that target. IUCN or the world commission on development was looking at 12%. We're saying 17% or 20% should be a natural region target for some sort of conservation. Whether it's IUCN or something else, we're still a long ways from that target, and the species at risk tell us that.

● (0940)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So your specific recommendation to this committee would be moratoria on....

Mr. Cliff Wallis: On industrial development in a number of caribou ranges. We've far exceeded the amount of development that's allowable under the goal.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You also talked about dismembering the PFRA. Is there anything you want to add there, a specific recommendation to the committee? Or do you feel you've covered it?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think I've covered it. But the key take-away is an assessment of all federal lands, and before you're disposing of any federal lands or transferring them, there should be an assessment of how they're contributing to your biodiversity and whether you want to get rid of them.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I have 15 seconds. What do you want to say about sage grouse?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Sage grouse, it's a sad story. It should be at the top of mind of every Canadian because we're just about to lose that species in Canada.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Your recommendation is....

Mr. Cliff Wallis: To protect the Govenlock pasture as a start, and work to get industrial development structure out of the landscape.

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

We move now to Madame Quach for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here today.

My first question is for Mr. Wallis.

We were just discussing protected areas, and I would like to know the size of protected area networks. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society also spoke with us of the need to develop them and said that we needed more of them.

But why are we hearing about networks of protected areas? How is the network important?

[*English*]

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Yes, the Alberta Wilderness Association has a whole pamphlet on it. The network means you have core areas that are protected from industrial development, but if that's all you have of these core areas, then it's not going to be enough.

Mr. Sopuck talked about other things on the landscape, so we need everything from industry, farmers, and ranchers doing best management practices to connectivity through corridors so wildlife have migratory pathways. We need to look at those interconnected systems, how the whole landscape is being managed. Otherwise we don't really have a system of protected areas.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Very well.

You also promote the protection of national parks. I believe Mr. Robitaille also raised this earlier. I will let him speak a little later. Twenty-nine million dollars in cuts were made to Parks Canada recently. We hear about raising public and youth awareness as regards protecting habitats and living in harmony with nature, but how can we protect habitats when these kinds of cuts are being made?

What is the impact of these cuts on the protection of national parks?

[*English*]

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Where do I start? I think the national parks have been underfunded for a long time and further cuts aren't going to help. A lot of monitoring programs have been curtailed. Certainly in the past we have had some of the best research and science in our national parks system, and we were leaders in the world.

I worked on CIDA projects overseas because of Canada's reputation. I see that reputation declining, and I think those kinds of cuts are leading to that loss of prestige. It's unfortunate, and I think it will affect our management capability. I think it has already started to affect our management capacity within those parks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

Mr. Robitaille, you referred to cuts that have also been made to the scientific sector. In your opening remarks, you mentioned that it is essential to have sources of extensive scientific data.

You mentioned a survey in which, I believe, 79% of respondents said that they did not have enough information.

Do you have any recommendations for us as to scientific data, so the federal government can help the private sector choose best practices?

● (0945)

Mr. Luc Robitaille: I would like to start by putting the numbers in context. I provided two numbers: 79% of respondents felt that there was insufficient data and 84% of respondents felt that the quality of information was insufficient.

I will use my company as an example because of course that is what I know best.

We are currently drawing up a plan that will help us identify the most sensitive areas in terms of biodiversity. We can use other sources, for example, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's red list. There are also others available. It is quite difficult for us to quickly survey our sites and identify those that require immediate action. There are probably a hundred sites in Canada.

Access to data banks and, especially, access to GIS would be very useful. It would be much easier to immediately focus on those sites. We are just beginning to set up this program so what we have at this point are basic data. Ideally we would be starting off with data that would send us in the right direction.

It was stated earlier that conservation and biodiversity improvement requires the participation of several sectors, such as business, government, NGOs and individuals. At this point in time, we have no means of consolidating that and identifying opportunities. Using connectivity could help us link those activities that we do on our own site to other activities in other areas. This would lead to improvements that we could never accomplish on our own.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Robitaille and Madame Quach. You're a little over time there.

Mr. Lunney, you have five minutes, please.

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

Well, Mr. Robitaille, as we all know, can talk very quickly. I want to just go back to something you were engaged in when the chair intervened in your earlier remarks. You were discussing some of the measures that your organization has implemented. One of the things that went by in that rather rapid procession was something to do with the Milton quarry and efforts there to recover that land.

Could you take a moment to explain that to us and tell us what your organization members were up to there?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: That's one of our sites. I'm very familiar with it. It's a facility that is about 400 hectares. Out of that we have already restored over 250 hectares of land. In my mind, it's a perfect laboratory of how the thinking has evolved on what quarry rehabilitation should be. In the past it was just put some dirt, put some grass, plant whatever is available, and we'll be happy.

We went to a second generation, which is very visible at the site, where we tried to mimic natural landforms a little bit more. Now we're in the third generation and we're working with several partners at trying to figure out what the landscape would have looked like if we had never been there. So we're trying to re-establish faces that look like the Niagara Escarpment. We're trying to have different types of shallow water.

Last Friday, as a matter of fact, we had a meeting with several NGOs to try to figure out the best way to go. In the past we planted trees. We removed trees so, naturally, we said we were going to replant trees. Now these guys are telling us that the environment that's really missing in our area is grassland. So right now we have to go back to government and tell them that these plans that we presented of planting trees may be more effective if we have a greater variety of environments.

So we're engaging a lot more with local communities and with NGOs so that our net long-term impact is a lot more beneficial than what was there before.

● (0950)

Mr. James Lunney: That's great. It's amazing what can be done when people get together creatively to restore habitat that has been disturbed. We have a prime example of how it can be developed over time. Out on the west coast on Vancouver Island we have the Butchart Gardens, a quarry that is a major tourist attraction where a tremendous variety of plants are showcased on the west coast.

But talking about impact over time, Ducks Unlimited were here recently. They have been working for 75 years now in helping to restore wetlands. Organizations such as the Ontario Federation of Hunters and Anglers are represented here today. But over 75 years, if I remember the testimony, they have secured something like 6.4 million acres. Now, apparently, that land that has been conserved by Ducks and by the Nature Conservancy and others is not counted in our conservation efforts. Do you have any suggestions on how we can manage counting land that has been conserved where tremendous efforts have been made by all kinds of organizations?

Dr. Quinney, I'll bring you in on this as well. I would ask both of you to comment on this perhaps. You talk about how $1 million was leveraged over $20 million for over 600 projects, if I have that right. On the west coast, we have the Pacific Salmon Foundation that is doing similar work, tremendous habitat restoration work involving community organizations.

How can the federal government leverage this kind of work and contribute through a national conservation plan and still have those efforts considered somehow towards our conservation efforts and objectives? I'll let you both jump in on that.

Mr. Luc Robitaille: I'll let Reg answer the question on Ducks Unlimited because he has worked a lot with them.

Mr. Reginald Melanson (Executive Director, Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council): Thank you. When you're looking at tracking acres, or composite conservation, it's a problem. It is a huge problem because one of the first issues is that acres come and go. You may have a conservation agreement for 25 years, and you have 200 acres. All of a sudden you're at year 26 and you've lost 200 acres.

There are all types of things, and also the length and type of conservation activities that are going on, so it's very difficult to track down. For example, I used to manage the North American waterfowl management plan, and we work on a tracking system called the NTS, national tracking system. We started working on that in 1992. We're still working on that. It's very difficult.

If you take one organization, they're fine. You can track their acres, and they can do it. Government, for example, gives out grants for money. Part of the grant agreement process is to report back with their accomplishments, but when you start trying to track different organizations and government to see what has been accomplished, you're getting the use of different definitions. For example, you're going from a stewardship agreement, which some consider to be influenced, while others consider it to be secured.

So you could have an increased stake that you don't actually have. I used to have a fairly good sizeable lot myself, and I did a lot of habitat conservation. I did about a quarter-mile stream rehabilitation. I did a lot of work, and I know a lot of people who do that, a lot of people. That will never show up in any report anywhere.

The Chair: Mr. Melanson, that's an issue we're going to have to struggle with at committee.

Your time is up, Mr. Lunney, but maybe we can come back and follow up on that with a future round.

We'll move now to Monsieur Choquette.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for your testimony.

Mr. Robitaille, you started talking about the importance of scientific data, and, I believe, connectivity tools that allow us to know what else is happening.

Is that a recommendation you would make to this committee? The federal government cannot do everything, but do you think the most important points they should focus on are sciences, connectivity, and the ability to obtain information on those areas that urgently require conservation?

You think that this is what we should be working on, and that therefore resources and funds should be invested in science, do you not?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: I'm going to give you a business perspective, in particular that of the CBBC members. We are all experts in our own area but we're not necessarily biodiversity experts. It is difficult for us to find the best practices in the right areas and make appropriate efforts.

The government is a very good reference point in terms of consolidating all that data and at least providing some basis for interpretation. This would be of huge assistance to businesses wishing to improve their activities in that area, and it would be just as beneficial for ecosystems and biodiversity.

● (0955)

Mr. François Choquette: In fact I believe you recently published a document called “Canadian Business & Biodiversity Leadership Declaration”.

Could you tell us a little more about that declaration? How could it help guide the committee in terms of habitat conservation?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: We are just in the process of drawing up that declaration. I don't remember exactly how many points it contains. I believe there are about a dozen. In order to become full-fledged members of the CBBC, businesses have to sign that declaration. At first, we did not want that to prevent businesses from joining the group, especially since so much can be learned from leaders in other businesses. Eventually this declaration will be mandatory for all members, but the purpose is to encourage people to improve their performance in that area.

We're still working on the declaration. As I mentioned earlier, the group was only created in 2009. We are beginning to work as a group on all those points but the basic declaration has now been drafted.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much.

Earlier on we were speaking off the record, about the importance of preventing climate change and about the much greater role that the federal government should be playing. We're speaking about conservation, but we're also speaking about the impact of climate change on habitats, for example drought and the melting of glaciers.

Other witnesses have recommended that the committee undertake a study that would focus solely on the consequences of climate change. Would you support that recommendation?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: That is one of the issues we discussed with NGOs last week. Our sites often contain areas that have not been exploited yet. We would like to use those areas, that will eventually be used for extraction, as laboratories. We would like to do tests in order to determine whether or not it would be appropriate to reforest or rehabilitate a site, and which species would be best adapted to that area when we are trying to rehabilitate it in the future.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Robitaille. Your testimony has been very informative.

Mr. Wallis, I would like to ask you the same question. Over the course of our study on habitat conservation, we've spoken about melting glaciers, drought , etc. These will have significant consequences. The issue of climate change and how it will have a negative influence on habitat conservation has also been raised.

Would you also recommend that this committee undertake a separate study on climate change?

[*English*]

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Certainly. As a review of federal lands, how they contribute to assisting with, for example, carbon sequestration and things like that, I think it should be rolled into your work.

It's a big topic, so I'm not sure—climate change as a whole—but maybe parcel it out and see what contribution federal lands should be making to things like working with climate change issues, including carbon sequestration.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wallis and Mr. Choquette.

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

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our guests today. This has been very enlightening in a lot of ways.

Mr. Robitaille, it's a bit of a different angle, but I want to talk to you a little about the business aspect. Obviously, you're working with industry and with businesses that are seeing the need to be part of the solution here and are very actively involved in that.

In regard to the business aspect, is a business ever able to streamline and still effectively deliver their products?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Streamline, you're talking about the biodiversity now or—

Mr. Lawrence Toet: The business, yes.

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Well, obviously, we represent a wide variety of businesses. There are extractives. There are companies that are in the agricultural sector. There are companies like ours that do not have a direct impact on biodiversity, it's more through our land holdings—

● (1000)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I'm just talking about, though, from a business standpoint. As a businessman, are you able to ever look at your business and streamline your business, and still deliver your product very effectively?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Absolutely, because for us it's a critical part of our licence to operate. If we don't manage lands correctly, it will be very difficult for us to move forward either with our current operations or with our future operations. So it's a critical element for us to deal with biodiversity to make sure our business is aligned with the needs of the ecosystems and also our stakeholders. It's part of the business right now. It's not an element that's added on. It's something that we have to consider right from the start.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Would your company see the only solution to improving your ability to deliver your product as having to spend more money? I'm strictly talking from a business aspect. We'll get to the biodiversity in a second, but strictly from a business aspect, can a business, spending less money, actually deliver their product very effectively?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Yes, I believe so.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you, that's important.

I'm sure as a businessman you've also had your managers in many times to look at how we are spending our resources. Are we spending them in an efficient and proper way? Can we cut back on some of the spending of those resources and still deliver our product efficiently?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Yes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Yes, so it's an ongoing thing that any business does and the bigger the business, the more savings you'll find going through those processes.

The only reason I make that point, Mr. Robitaille, is because you said earlier if a company was cutting back on something, like cutting back on spending, all of a sudden you would destroy the real capability of that company. That's a very untrue statement and I just wanted to have that clarified.

Some of the work that you did talk a little about and one of the statements you made was that industry will play a key role in conservation going forward. I was very intrigued by that statement because I also believe it to be a very true statement. You gave some examples. You talked about OPG and the Milton quarry, and some of the peat industry work. I was wondering if you could expand on just one of those cases. I know you talked a little about the Milton quarry, but maybe you could talk about some of the work the peat industry is doing.

To talk about the aspect of understanding that the work that these organizations are doing, to a large degree.... It is unfortunate that they're paid lip service and never counted when we look at what we're doing for conservation efforts in Canada, when we look at these international things such as IUCN. They don't count all that work as being anything that's contributing to our conservation efforts in Canada and the fairness of that with the great work that industry is doing. Could you comment on that?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Reg can help me on the peat assessment, but I can give you an example from my sector.

Right now, on the aggregate side, we're working with Environmental Defence and other NGOs at developing a standard, which I mentioned in my presentation, on aggregate extraction. We're even trying to push this standard further to include cement and also ready-mix operations. This will include which types of lands are suitable for our type of operations, how it should be handled, and how much recycling we should be doing before we extract new materials.

The standard is meant to be totally broad, not only our operations on the site but also how our products are being used, so that we can manage this. It's a volunteer standard, a little bit like the FSC that was developed years ago. We think this standard is even ahead of where regulations would let us act today.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: So you're saying that industry is ahead of regulations and it's not because they have to be regulated, but because they have a stewardship initiative within themselves.

Mr. Luc Robitaille: Absolutely, and the more you engage with NGOs, academia, and so on, the more you learn, and you can stay ahead of regulations most of the time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Toet, your time is up.

We'll move now to Monsieur Pilon.

[*Translation*]

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

My first question is for Mr. Robitaille.

Given that your work also involves quarries, I was wondering if you have ever heard about the Carré Laval, in Laval. It is a quarry that has been closed. There were 30 to 40 feet of water in the bottom. When the subway was built, any extra material was put in that hole. Currently, the city does that any time it needs to dig.

What do you think about that kind of quarry rehabilitation?

A few months ago in fact, people were thinking of building a 10,000-seat arena on that site but they have since changed their minds. What do you think would have happened if they had gone ahead with that?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: It is difficult to say, especially when you are working in urban areas. Often businesses will have their idea of how to redevelop a site but the city will have a completely different idea. We also have a quarry in Laval but it is still a working quarry. We have already started working on rehabilitation, precisely in order to find sustainable solutions for the community.

Previously we used to draw up our own plans but we have decided to work with communities from the outset. Every five years, we consult the community in order to ask them what they feel is the best way to use that site in the future.

Some things are no longer done the way they used to be. Landfills are completely different now. The same is true of quarry rehabilitation.

Biodiversity never used to be a factor. You simply reforested the site. Now we try to improve ecosystem quality even in urban areas.

● (1005)

Mr. François Pilon: The fact of the matter, though, is that there was already 30 to 40 feet of water at the bottom of that quarry. What do you think will happen?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: It is difficult to answer that question because I am not familiar with that particular site. So I cannot tell you which technical solution will be required. On the other hand, it is clear that longstanding problems are going to have to be resolved.

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Wallis, do you think that some areas should be fully protected and that they should not be used for industry or even agriculture?

[*English*]

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I don't know about nothing, but certainly what I call industrial scale harvest, industrial development, is incompatible with some species like caribou and sage grouse. I think the research is quite clear on that point, and it does contribute to our protection of biodiversity, if we protect large areas for those species.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Robitaille, there are witnesses who appeared before this committee who advocated for development at any cost. They did not feel that conservation should be a priority at all.

Can you tell us why it is in businesses' interests to respect biodiversity?

Mr. Luc Robitaille: That is exactly the purpose of the standard that is currently being drafted. Originally the organization responsible for this was the SERA but it is now called the Cornerstone Standards Council. The intent is to designate areas where there should be no activity whatsoever and to draft rules on how to develop areas where there will be development.

The areas for our company's purposes are often urban or at the periphery of urban areas. In many cases, these are not green fields or forests. They are areas where there is agriculture or second- or third-generation forest.

Proper rehabilitation often leads to better diversity than in what was there before our activities. That is what we are integrating into our model. We are determining which areas should not be used, how we should proceed, and what we should leave behind after we have finished our use of the area.

Mr. François Pilon: I would like to come back to Mr. Wallace now.

How would you describe Canada's current efforts in the area of conservation? Do you think they are sufficient or insufficient?

[*English*]

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think we're trying, but we're certainly not meeting what the people of Canada have said they want. Provincial and federal governments had set targets, and whether they're IUCN or other targets, whether it's species at risk, we're not meeting our commitments there. So I think on that level we're not doing enough.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pilon. Your time is up.

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

Mr. Brian Storseth: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wallis, I do apologize, but I have only five minutes this round, so we're going to have to go a little more quickly.

When you talk about the people of Canada knowing what they want, I guess I'm not sure what you mean by that. I'm from northeastern Alberta. When we talk about caribou habitat, could you talk to me about what you see as the root causes—I'm hesitant to get into root causes these days—of the problems with caribou, particularly those caribou?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Caribou are facing an onslaught in Alberta of the double jeopardy of large-scale forest extraction as well as oil and gas development. The layering of those two things on the landscape is just too much for them, so their populations are declining. As I said, the oil and gas industry in western Alberta tried to do it through best management practices and through rearranging their footprint, and they failed. They acknowledge that failure.

● (1010)

Mr. Brian Storseth: It has nothing to do with the fact that these caribou are very susceptible to disease and that they only breed every three years? Those are not natural issues for these caribou?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: There are many issues that lead to it, but the ultimate cause is the industrial development on the landscape. The proximate cause may be a wolf killing them because of the way the landscape has been changed. There are many reasons for caribou decline but the ultimate cause—and industry agrees with this—is industrial development. The question is how we rearrange our affairs on that landscape to protect as many caribou populations as possible.

Mr. Brian Storseth: So you would agree though that the fact that they breed every three years is a problem for maintaining their—

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I'm saying there are biological factors, but that's not the caribou's fault. You still have to go to the ultimate cause of the decline. That's like saying our bodies don't tolerate smoking very well....

Mr. Brian Storseth: So if industry is the cause, then for these 148 caribou that exist on the air weapons range in northeast Alberta, the 500-pound bombs dropping in the area aren't a problem? The problem is the industrial development that happens?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Well, I'm not going to comment specifically on the bombing, but I'm saying that for the vast majority of caribou in Alberta, it is industrial development.

Mr. Brian Storseth: But we're talking about two particular.... In your AWA press release you talk about the caribou in northeastern Alberta and the caribou of northwestern Alberta, the Little Smoky caribou. In northeastern Alberta, you state there is 64% industrial disturbance. I'd ask you to tell me what your definition of industrial disturbance is, because the military tracks this very vigorously as the majority of the habitat is on an air weapons range. They say it's closer to 17%.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Well, you have to separate out northeastern Alberta from the military range. If you look at Global Forest Watch's report, the government's own study on the Athabaskan regional plan, and even Shell's own study, they show that the industrial footprint exceeds what caribou can tolerate on the landscape. It's not any one study. It's not just the AWA. There's a clear message there that we've exceeded the amount of footprint on the landscape that caribou can tolerate in virtually every caribou range in Alberta.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Now you're talking about the caribou habitat north of the air weapons range, because that's where it runs up there. I'm assuming you have been up there. I've been up there hunting and fishing. To me it looks like a fairly pristine wilderness other than some seismic up there.

I guess I have one more question for you regarding your call for a moratorium on development. Are you suggesting that we should have a complete moratorium on oil sands development, especially on the in situ oil sands development, which has far less environmental footprint on the landscape than does, say, the type of development that you would see in Fort McMurray? If that's what you're asking for, what I don't understand is where the balance comes from that, especially since we know that these caribou do have issues when it comes to breeding.

My last question is whether you are familiar with the studies that have been done up on 4 Wing Cold Lake as well as the studies that that were done around Goose Bay when it comes to the supersonic flight overpasses by military jets having been shown to actually increase the sexual desires of caribou and actually get them breeding even more often.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brian Storseth: This is true.

The Chair: I hate to cut you off there. Your time for the question is up. I want the responder to have a little time to respond.

Thanks, Mr. Storseth.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I just think we need to do a lot more. No less a person than former Premier Lougheed, who unfortunately passed away, said we needed a moratorium on oil sands development. It's not saying no to oil sands. It's saying, let's stop until we get it right and rethink this for all sorts of reasons, caribou being one of them. So who am I to argue with such an august personality?

The Chair: Mr. Wallis, I'm sure Mr. Storseth would welcome a written response to his question.

Mr. Brian Storseth: The chair doesn't like the word “sex”.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thanks for that editorial comment.

Ms. Rempel.

● (1015)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): That's a tough act to follow, Mr. Chair.

I think I'll pick up on my colleague's line of questioning, and then move into another area of questioning.

Mr. Wallis, perhaps you could define for the committee what you would deem a complete moratorium on oil sands development?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: It's a moratorium on new oil sands development. So that means not accepting new applications for oil sands development.

You can shade that however you like, but the group working on cumulative effects management—actually working industry and NGOs—came up with a way of developing over 50% of that area for oil and gas development and protecting caribou. The government didn't accept those recommendations. They went with the 20% figure rather than the 44% or 46% figure. I think industry and the NGOs do lead, by the way. Government often follows, which is unfortunate, but we need government leadership and that's not what we're getting.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Again, to re-emphasize my question, could you perhaps define what you deem as a complete moratorium? Can you comment?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: The moratorium would be on new applications, going forward.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Okay. For how long...?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Well, it's until we get the plan implemented and working. I don't have a timeframe. All I know is that there's nothing in place right now. There's no moratorium, although it looks like it's just changing right now. Within the last week the Alberta Minister of Energy has actually said—

Ms. Michelle Rempel: So you don't have a timeframe for the complete moratorium as part of your recommendation.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: No. Let's protect caribou first.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Given that, I'm guessing there probably isn't an economic cost analysis associated with your recommendation related to a moratorium?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Actually, there have been economic studies done by the University of Alberta and others on the whole notion of that. But, again, it depends on what your timeframe is of your economic analysis as well.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Right, so without a timeframe—

Mr. Cliff Wallis: We're not saying no to industrial development any time in the future. We're just saying there's so much of it on the landscape right now. There are social pressures. They can't find people to actually do the work up there. There doesn't seem to be any rush to continue, so it depends how you measure things.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: For committee, could you ballpark the economic cost and perhaps give a timeline with your moratorium?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: It depends. If you say no to industrial development forever, that cost is totally different from—

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Give me a ballpark number.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: It could be in the billions of dollars.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Okay, thank you, Mr. Wallis.

I'm going to move now to Mr. Quinney.

Along this line of questioning, the case that I'm trying to build is that we are a natural resource-based economy, and I think, yes, Canadians do care about ensuring that we have habitat conservation. A lot of the testimony that we've had here has been very positive in that regard, but a lot of what we've heard from a wide variety of witnesses is that people also understand that we have to have the concept of a working landscape. Would you agree with that characterization?

Dr. Terry Quinney: Absolutely. In fact, I'd go further, and this may sound a bit heretical, but it will only sound heretical initially. I'd ask the committee members, and panel members as well, to consider framing a number of these questions in the context of habitat supply as opposed to habitat protection, and I'm going to tell you why. A fundamental ecological characteristic of habitat is, regardless of whether human beings are present on the landscape or not, that habitat will change. So I'm suggesting that collectively we think about, then, what do we want in terms of the benefits that habitat can supply to people? In doing so, that will force us not only to think about the present but the future. We want these benefits. We want these values to continue in perpetuity, in the case of, for example, fishing and hunting opportunities. But in order to do that, we have to think into the future and we have to think about some fundamental ecological imperatives—

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I'm sorry to cut you off. With the 10 seconds I have left, would you characterize that, perhaps for this committee's approach to looking at habitat conservation, a balance between economic stewardship and environmental stewardship could be contextualized within that comment that you just made? Would that be the correct approach to take?

Dr. Terry Quinney: My short answer is yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

● (1020)

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

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to come back to Mr. Wallis.

Mr. Wallis, we talked about targets earlier. Canada's committed to 17% of land being protected. We've protected 10%. We've committed to 10% of marine protected areas and we've done 1%.

We heard last week that in four years we could achieve our targets using the Aichi targets, quote, “as we would interpret it”. That concerns me, it sounds like changing the accounting rules. I'd like to know what you think of it and then talk about protected areas.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I give a lot of testimony at hearings and before the courts. Measuring things is a very complicated subject. I like to look at multiple measures. That may be one measure that we use. The IUCN targets are another measure. Is the trajectory of our species at risk going up or is it going down? I think we need to look at all the measures and decide which ones shape public policy.

I think the IUCN has presented a credible system of measurement that's able to be verified, by and large. We may not be doing enough on the private land stewardship side, so that's another measure that we should roll into the system. You don't replace one with another, though. Multiple measures is the way I would go.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I like that. Multiple measures. I guess my concern is, “as we would interpret it.”

Mr. Cliff Wallis: If all you're trying to do is reach a number, I think you've failed. If the species are still going downhill—you have species that are actually going to disappear from Canada within years, not decades—that's a big problem. You can fool yourself with any number of numbers, even the ones IUCN uses, if we're not actually doing the right thing on the landscape. I think it's a very complicated topic, and we need to be doing a better job of it.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I'll come back at the end to a recommendation regarding that, but I would like to ask you about SARA. Does SARA need implementation?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Obviously. I think the sage grouse is a classic case of how it has failed in implementation. It's very young though, so we're trying to find our way through it. I don't think we've worked enough with local communities to implement that on the ground. There's been heel dragging. We've taken the government to court and tried to get emergency protection orders; it's not the way to do business.

We'd rather be doing it in a much more collaborative way. That's the way we do 90% of our work. But I don't think the door has opened for that. The resourcing is not there, the interest or commitment doesn't seem to be there. The will of the people out on the land is, so we need to get those two more in sync.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: The recommendation is that SARA needs implementation, needs to be resourced. Would you like to make a recommendation there?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think we need to start some pilot programs where we work on landscapes. One of the best places to start is the grasslands of southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan, looking at the PFRA pastures, the federal lands, provincial lands, at sage grouse, and all the complex of species at risk using ecological goods and services payments. Maybe a pilot program there would be a great place to start.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You also talked about multiple measures. Would you like to make a recommendation? I also thought I heard you say we can fool ourselves by using any number, so what would be your specific recommendation here?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: I think we have great science expertise in this country. Policy-makers need to listen more to that expertise and not try to invent new measures. If they're unhappy with the measures, tell the scientists what they would like to measure to achieve their public policy targets. Make sure the two are matched. But don't fool yourself with trying to measure this number when in fact your policy target is for something else.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

You also mentioned a review of all federal lands. Would you like to make a recommendation there?

Mr. Cliff Wallis: Let's start somewhere. We can start small. Let's start with the federal lands within the grassland region, because it's a critically imperilled ecosystem globally, temperate grasslands are, and certainly there's a concentration of species at risk. I would say that's the very first place to start.

It should be a staged approach to reviewing our federal lands and their contributions to biodiversity.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

● (1025)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've come to the end of the members wishing to ask questions.

I'm going to take the chairman's prerogative and ask one short question, and hopefully I'll get a very short answer.

Mr. Wallis, you commented in your opening statement that we need to do a better job of engaging new Canadians and young people. I'm wondering if you could give me a 30-second or a one-minute response as to how we would do that.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: There are many programs; through NGOs is a great way to start. We have field trips. We've implemented field trips for new Canadians, specifically, to get them out into the landscape. Groups such as Nature Canada have “getting kids into nature” programs. Other organizations have the same.

Again, I don't think it's well resourced. Probably the school curriculums need to be looked at again. We focus so much on computers and being indoors, and we're getting afraid of the outdoors. We need to change that way of thinking.

It's a big topic, but I think it's absolutely essential if we're going to have Canadians well informed on the issue of conservation.

The Chair: Have you made that recommendation to our provincial governments? Education, as you know, falls under the provincial mandate.

Mr. Cliff Wallis: True, although there are a lot of extension services. There are the national parks. There are ways we can get people from cities into nature, into urban nature as well as other types of nature. Again, we need to do more of that, and the federal government can play a role.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm getting some static from my members, so I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.