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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to order. This is meeting 47. We're continuing our study today on the licensed hunting and trapping in Canada.

We have appearing by video conference from Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation, Mr. Ward Samson.

Mr. Samson, welcome.

Mr. Ward Samson (Member, Newfoundland and Labrador Wildlife Federation): Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

From the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters, Mr. Tony Rodgers, executive director.

Welcome, Mr. Rodgers.

Mr. Tony Rodgers (Executive Director, Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters): Good morning and thank you.

The Chair: Just appearing now from the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation by video conference as well, Mr. Charles LeBlanc, president.

Welcome to our conference.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc (President, New Brunswick Wildlife Federation): Good morning.

The Chair: We're going to start with Mr. Samson for his opening 10-minute statement, and we'll proceed after Mr. Samson with Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Rodgers. Each has a 10-minute opening statement followed by questions from the committee members, alternating between government and opposition.

With that, Mr. Samson, please proceed.

Mr. Ward Samson: I'm just thinking about this forum. Most of what you're dealing with is federal jurisdiction. Most of the concerns, not all of the concerns but a lot of the concerns, we have in Newfoundland are under provincial jurisdiction. I'm not sure if this forum is the actual place to discuss them or not but I'll discuss them anyway. Most of the jurisdiction we have in respect to hunting and trapping is provincial.

In Newfoundland what we have now is that we have had our trapping seasons changed this year for the first time. Prior to this year our trapping season began in October, around about the 20th. This year it was November 1. As a result people, on the island part of the province basically weren't able to capture any fur because of the winter that we have in November. Most of the people on the island part of the province trap and catch most of their foxes, mink, and coyotes in October. When the season starts in November and basically extends into March, we have maybe a couple of weeks in November. After that the winter sets in and we have an exorbitant amount of snow plus the frost, so the ability to catch foxes and coyotes is very limited. This is the first year that we have had this season for the province and we've had this season for the province of Labrador and the island of Newfoundland. What we are asking is that we basically have a couple of seasons or two different dates, one for the island and one for Labrador.

On the island part of the province we think, and maybe rightly so we're not sure, that most of the trapping that we do on the Labrador part of this province is in pine marten. The pine marten is endangered on the island and we do not trap them. We don't have very many here, but in Labrador they do.

One of the other things we've noticed is that we've had a decrease in moose hunting licences on the island part of our province. But it has only been residents who have received this decrease. Outfitters in the province have not received this decrease. They basically have the same licences that they have had, or the same quota they've had, for a number of years. This year there has been a decrease in the moose hunting population on the island part of the province but outfitters in our province have not seen a decrease. So what we are saying.... I know they have a percentage. The outfitters in our province have a percentage of the moose hunting licences in the areas as designated. However, what we would like to see is that if you're going to decrease the number for local hunters then you decrease the hunting for everybody, not only for the local hunters.

I know, basically, that we don't necessarily talk about fishing in respect to hunting and trapping, but I'm going to make a couple of comments here. In Newfoundland I represent people, the NLWF represents people, who hunt and fish for food. In Newfoundland what we have is a five-week season basically for our food fishery, and that food fishery with respect to fishing and cod fishing is five fish per day or 15 fish per boat.

● (0850)

The season runs about five weeks. We are having major problems with that. If you leave my hometown, and you travel for an hour and a half, and you go hunting and fishing, and go jigging for cod, you have to come back with five fish only. If you take in more than five fish that's against the law in Newfoundland. That's a federal jurisdiction.

We also have concerns with respect to.... We would like to see fishing for cod increased where we can capture so many per day and have that daily fishery. In the past what we used to do is that a number of us would go out and catch fish. We would give this to the older people in the community who could not fish. We can't do that today. We're not allowed. It's impossible to do that.

In summary we have had our moose licences decreased in our areas in the province. We've had our season changed with respect to trapping in our province. The food fishery that we have in the jurisdiction, and we know that it's run by the federal government, is extremely limited. I would like to say—and I know this is national—that some of the people I represent, the people that we represent, do this for food. We don't do this for anything else. When we go hunting moose, we don't hunt antlers. People don't want antlers in our province. We don't. We hunt food. It's the same with fishing.

With respect to salmon fishing...I know it's going off on another topic. We have four fish per day in our licence for salmon fishing. We take this as food. That's it, as food. It's not for pictures, or paintings, or anything else. When you can catch a salmon, you catch it. It becomes yours. It's not anybody else's. It's not pictures. It's not to catch it and land it, and see how big it is. We catch it and we eat it. It's simple. We have a whack of different interest groups in the province that see this as a business. There can be a business attached to it, I suppose, but if you're going to attach a business component to this then why do you have to have your citizens of your province, the people that I represent, told that this is what you have to do, more or less? If you don't do this, then basically you are a criminal.

● (0855)

The Chair: Mr. Samson, we're coming to the end of your time. Possibly you can address some of the concerns that you still have when you're responding to questions by members in the question round.

We're going to move now to Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Bonjour, messieurs et mesdames. Thank you very much for having us this morning.

The New Brunswick Wildlife Federation was formed in 1924 to address a drastic decrease in big game populations. Our founding fathers understood the North American conservation model concept to be the answer to saving wildlife. Trapping is part of that model.

Culturally, hunting and trapping in our province are valued heritage activities, with traditions passed down from generation to generation. We have many traditions in New Brunswick, and I'll name just a few. For those hunters who can relate to the restless evening the night before an early morning duck hunt, we have a hunters breakfast at a local diner or at the Lion's Club. A lot of people can relate to the opening day of deer season after all the preparations—the scouting-the-trail cameras, the reconnaissance, the purchasing of all the equipment needed—to make our hunts more pleasurable. Here in New Brunswick we have the coveted moose hunt, a three-day hunt where most will spend the whole week, and many previous weekends, in the search and pursuit of our quarry. As well, unique out here is what we call the “cast and blast”; you can angle for Atlantic salmon in the morning and in the afternoon you can go for an upland game bird hunt.

Aside from those hunting and trapping activities, you have many families gathering at deer camps or moose camps after the hunt or even during, where they can celebrate the great outdoors and what it provides to us. Many will meet after the hunt to share food, music, and friendship.

Economically these are very important endeavours. Licence sales alone in the province were estimated at $3.7 million last year. We had 1,300 trapping licences. We sold 50,000 deer licences and 4,700 black bear licences; 2,000 of those were non-residents. We have 4,600 moose tags as well as 150 non-resident licences, with 70,000 applicants vying for the 4,600 moose permits.

Hunting, angling, and trapping benefit our rural communities where we have a slower economy. They purchase food, fuel, and other necessities for the hunt. Many hunters and anglers and trappers invest in camps and equipment, and not only for the initial building of the camps. They purchase materials for the annual upkeep as well. Our pelt exports from New Brunswick last year had a $1.2-million value.

Participation in hunting and trapping is more prevalent among the middle-aged and seniors, but licence sales tend to increase when wildlife populations thrive. Trapping will see an increase in licence sales if the price of fur is up, but because of the large investment involved, these increases are modest. As was previously said, we had 1,300 of these trapping licences last year, and that was with depressed prices.

Hunting and trapping courses are very popular in our province. They're filled to capacity around the province. It bodes well for the future that maybe our youth, or new people, are coming into these heritage forests.

In terms of contribution to wildlife management and conservation, hunters and trappers are very sensitive to the issues affecting wildlife. If we do not recruit the youth into these heritage forests, who will protect the habitat that supports fish and wildlife? You know, when we use it, we own it. We seem to be more passionate if we do participate.

Trappers in New Brunswick have signed on to the agreement on international humane trapping, and only certified traps are used. With these measures, they support the protection of fur bearers of special concern. Trappers who want to harvest bobcat, otter, and marten in our province must apply for tags that are allocated by species and zones. Trappers, upon harvesting, must affix a tag to the pelt and present the carcass of these animals to the regional office to obtain their export permits. The animals are sexed, aged, weighed, and the reproduction success determined, giving good baseline data to the provincial biologists who manage these populations. The role of science research and monitoring is critical to determine any change to the environment or disease that will have detrimental effects on wildlife populations. Trapper information helps to further this research.

With regard to wildlife enhancement programs and policies in New Brunswick, when purchasing a licence in New Brunswick, five dollars from each licence goes to the New Brunswick Wildlife Trust Fund.

● (0900)

This, together with the sale of conservation licence plates for our vehicles, provides funding in excess of $1.2 million annually, which is distributed to non-profit groups for wildlife conservation and educational projects, including trapping courses and other projects.

In conclusion, these are our general wildlife and trapping comments for New Brunswick. Our federation fully supports and endorses trappers' role in the conservation and wise use of our fur-bearers, as well as their role in providing income for their families, harvesting surplus animals in the population, and providing baseline data for provincial biologists and research.

The biggest threat faced by wildlife is habitat management. Last year, our province increased its softwood harvest by 20% and reduced the old growth conservation forests from 28% to 23% while, at the same time, cutting deer yards that are crucial to deer wintering survival.

This is why we call for reform and why we support the traditions of hunting and trapping in our province.

I thank you.

● (0905)

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

We'll move now to Mr. Tony Rodgers, executive director of the Nova Scotia Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

Mr. Rodgers.

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I'm nursing a bit of a cold so you'll excuse me if I have to go to my water from time to time.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about one of my favourite subjects and one of my greatest pleasures, hunting. In a province of less than a million people, Nova Scotia has a large number of residents who participate in hunting and trapping as well as angling.

The Nova Scotia government requires those who wish to hunt and trap to take an appropriate training course in order to obtain an outdoor identification number known as the wildlife resources card. Over 100,000 people in the province possess one of these cards, and most of these people are attached in some way or another to 100,000 people who support them: a wife, a husband, a boyfriend, a girlfriend. These folks added together make for a large portion of the provincial population who directly support hunting.

All of us are direct descendants of successful hunters. Humanity survived on this planet because of the skills of hunters, and this remains a fact today in many places on the Earth. Hunting, fishing, and gathering are still activities for survival on a day-to-day basis around the world, and that includes Canada, as many of our first nations rely on the skills of their hunters for subsistence hunting and on non-native hunters to provide a variety of wild food for the family table, food that is free of feedlot antibiotics and growth hormones.

I congratulate you on the motion to study and examine the cultural significance of licensed hunting and trapping in Canada, a subject by far under-studied and far less understood by many in urban Canada. Perhaps this committee will help shed light on the huge impact these activities have on the economy and the culture of Canada.

Let me first say that hunters, trappers, and anglers pay for wildlife conservation in Canada. It is we who reach into our pockets and pay for the privilege to use the natural landscape of Canada and harvest its bounty. We reached so deep into our pockets to spend on these activities that we brought out $13.5 billion the last time a survey was done. In addition, $1 billion is generated by the outfitters of Canada. These are the men and women who operate lodges for hunters to enjoy and hunt out of, and to top off the economic figure, trapping is valued at $700 million in Canada. So that is over $15 billion a year in an economy in only a four-month season.

In Nova Scotia, hunters and trappers are levied an additional five dollars over and above the cost of their licences. This is a wildlife habitat conservation stamp. In the past season, that stamp raised over $275,000. These dollars are spent by a committee led by hunters on wildlife education, research, and the purchase of land. In the past 15 years, as an example, the fund has raised $2 million, given directly to university students to help them with their research on wildlife species. It's important to note that many of these species are animals that we're not hunting. That is what I call economic sustainability.

As a nation, we have been harvesting the land for fur and meat for hundreds of years and continue to do so in a sustainable harvest. It was not always that way. At one point in our natural history, we had a near disaster when commercial hunting almost destroyed the abundance of wildlife by over-killing for money. One hundred years ago we lost the passenger pigeon. It became extinct because of food hunting and feathers for ladies' hats. We almost lost our wild herds of bison and elk. They were killed to feed workers building the railroads in Canada and the United States. That calamity was stopped in time by sport hunters and some enlightened politicians. Two to be noticed are Louis St. Laurent and Teddy Roosevelt. They recognized the problem and did something about it, and that was the North American model of wildlife management. It was developed and grew out of that intervention. The animals did come back, some species in better shape than they had been before the commercial hunt.

Today this model of wildlife management is hailed as the best in the world, and at its centre are hunters, hunters' money, and hunters' regulated harvesting. Hunters and trappers have never had to go to any level of government looking for capital money to get a hunting area. Many activities Canadians participate in require large amounts of money to enjoy, and they could not take place without buildings like hockey rinks, gymnasiums, soccer fields, and of course, spending millions of dollars to landscape a forest and turn it into a golf course. For us, it's just the fields and streams we need. In fact, hunters have become the leaders in wetland conservation in North America.

● (0910)

Hunting and trapping are very important activities to the people of Nova Scotia and Canada. I know that some members of this committee have spoken out publicly against the decision to study hunting and trapping. Please don't slough this off as being unimportant. The lessons learned by hunters through bringing some animal species from the brink of extinction may hold some knowledge for you in learning how to deal with other problems and issues in the natural world and may indeed be the blueprint for the recovery of some of these species.

Too often, hunters and trappers are marginalized because of what we do. I speak of taking animals for food from the wild. When I do this, I have a greater appreciation for those wild things than most people and I learn from the animals. I strongly suggest that you would be very wise to listen to the people who present to you at this committee and learn from them. For a stable harvest and a sustainable economy leads to a culture of caring for wildlife and its habitat.

It's really too bad that we're not all hunters. I guess I'm just one of the lucky ones.

Thank you.

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

Thanks to all of our witnesses for all of your very good testimony this morning.

We're going to proceed now to the rounds of questions from our members. I'm going ask our members to be sure that you identify to which of our witnesses you'd like to address your question so that we can help them with putting on microphones, and so on.

We're going to begin with Mr. Sopuck, for a seven-minute round of questions.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, presenters. Your presentations were extremely interesting.

I want to comment on Mr. Samson's point about federal and provincial jurisdictions. He's exactly right. Wildlife management is a shared jurisdiction, with allocation largely done by provincial governments. But the federal government does have a significant role in waterfowl, and we have a number of very important habitat conservation programs.

One of the reasons for this study is to receive advice from groups such as yours as to what we as a federal government can do.

I'd like to address Mr. Rodgers' comment regarding some of the criticisms about this study. I want to be very clear that the Conservative members of the panel—and I don't really want to get partisan here but it's important to get it on the record—strongly supported it and advocated for this study. We're so pleased. We think that this study will shed a lot of light on a very important conservation community in this country that, as I think all of you were alluding to, simply does not receive the credit that this community—and I'm a member of this community—deserves for the work they have done.

Mr. Rodgers, you're a permanent member of our hunting and angling advisory panel, which was an election commitment of ours in 2011. Can you elaborate on the role of the hunting and angling advisory panel and the use you see the panel as having?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Yes, Mr. Sopuck. Thank you very much for the question.

The hunting and angling advisory panel was announced by the Prime Minister a few years ago, to bring groups like mine and groups of a national nature such as Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl foundation together to discuss common issues and to try to nip problems in the bud and get out ahead of things that could be difficult for government to deal with.

We've had a great opportunity, through the leadership of Greg Farrant of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters and others, to get our items on the agenda and to have an opportunity to speak to Minister Aglukkaq and Minister Shea on a face-to-face basis to deal with issues that we have in our provinces and are dealing with nationally. We really appreciate the opportunity to be on that panel.

As a matter of fact, I was talking to Mr. Farrant yesterday. In his presentation he'll be dealing with many of the issues that HAAP has been dealing with.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: This is again to Mr. Rodgers.

Both you and Mr. LeBlanc talked about the extra funding that hunters provide via their hunting licences for habitat conservation. Of course, our party is very proud to be a low-tax government, which is why the hunting and angling groups sometimes puzzle some of our members, because you're always asking to be taxed. I find that quite endearing. Of course, you would want the extra income that you're talking about raising via licence fees and excise fees, and so on, to be directed to wildlife conservation, and I heartily agree with that.

Mr. Rodgers, can you talk about the hunting and angling advisory panel's work on potential new funding sources for wildlife conservation?

● (0915)

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Just a little bit, Bob....

The element that we're looking at is that in the United States there were two funds that were developed to tax hunters and anglers on the equipment that they purchased. It was a small tax levied, for instance, on the purchase of a boat or a fishing rod or a shotgun, or whatever. That money was peeled off and put into a separate account with the federal government. Each one of the U.S. states then had the opportunity of applying for an equal share of that money by putting up money of its own, and by doing so, you had matching dollars. All of those dollars ended up being a benefit to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

A similar discussion is now going on here in Canada where we are looking at perhaps an opportunity to do something similar. I know what you mean about our asking to be taxed. I don't know if that's the proper way of terming it, but certainly in the wildlife habitat stamp that we have in Nova Scotia, we were the ones that brought the idea forward to government. We said, let's make a stamp and take the money directly. Government does not touch a cent of that money. It comes directly into a pool that we manage. My board has three people on a board of five to direct that money, and just a number of years ago we went back to government and asked them to raise it from three dollars to five dollars. We don't have a problem taking money out of our own pockets to do what we want to do and we're not afraid to tell other people what we are doing too.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I couldn't agree more.

Mr. LeBlanc, I was very interested in your comments about trapping in New Brunswick and the relationship between trappers and the scientific community in gathering data. You also talked about certified and humane traps. You're probably quite familiar with Environment Canada's humane trap development facility in Vegreville, Alberta. Can you just talk about the evolution of humane trapping over the last couple of decades, from where it was to where it is now?

Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

I'm going to say that I know very little about trapping; that is not in my domain. Today I represent a group of 25 organizations around the province, so we couldn't bring in an individual for every aspect of hunting and trapping, but I do know there's been a change. Some will find that it's been a financial strain on the trappers, yet they love this sport enough and respect the animals enough to make sure they're humanely dispatched.

In the province, the government has addressed more humane ways of.... We can, for example, carry a firearm to the trap line in order to dispatch. In the past, that was not allowed, so there's a will to humanely harvest an animal.

To your specific question, I can't speak to the evolution of this trap.

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

Mr. Bevington, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Thank you.

I think I come from one of the regions of Canada where there is probably the highest per capita trapping and hunting percentage of the population, and that's the Northwest Territories. We have a very large interest in that. The Government of the Northwest Territories has estimated subsistence hunting at $60 million a year. That's a considerable sum.

We're very interested. I think what I'm interested in, and what we've seen, is that climate change and habitat disruption have impacted us tremendously, especially with the caribou herds in the north, where there are bans on hunting now in many communities because caribou herds have declined precipitously. Some put it down to climate change. There are some very logical arguments on why that's happened in that regard. Others look at the impact of linear development of the diamond mining industry in the Slave geological province as affecting caribou migration.

Those are some of the issues we face. I think that's where I want to go with my questions.

Mr. Samson, when you were last in front of this committee, you talked about your concern about loss of habitat. You quoted Chief Seattle who said, “We do not inherit the world from our ancestors, but borrow it from our children.”

The Conservatives have weakened laws that protect habitat. What role should laws and regulations play in habitat protection?

● (0920)

Mr. Ward Samson: Habitat, I think, is extremely important. In Newfoundland, what we've had on the island specifically is that we've been having habitat destruction for a number of years specifically in our forest industry. We've been replanting with Japanese larch. The department of forestry tried planting with fir trees for a number of years, but they found that the moose were eating the fir trees. Now, basically island-wide, they've taken on the proposal of the Japanese larch. The moose don't eat those.

As I was saying before, in the last 50 years we've had some reduction in the moose population. As you know, the moose basically is an invasive species. They were introduced into the province with many other species, the mink being one of them. We don't have much forest left in the province. We have a lot of forestry access roads, and of course, we have this new predator, the coywolf he's called, or the coyote, but they're large and they're predating on the caribou and the moose. It's simple. We have to take care of the environment. If we don't, there won't be anything for anybody.

Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. LeBlanc, do you see similar aspects occurring in the New Brunswick forests? Do you see this as one of the major issues surrounding your ability to harvest and to protect the species that you're engaged in harvesting?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Yes, sir, very much so. If we don't have habitat, there will not be healthy populations of animals. It's hard to monitor the impact of the changes made to the Fisheries Act or other regulations lately because we have yet to see the charges that anybody has laid. The province finds itself in a hard economic situation and we're open for business at the expense of the environment. That is a big concern to our federation. Forest companies need to have fibre, which is fine, we understand the concept that we need to feed our pulp mills. But maybe they were doing too much spraying, so our habitat is.... The actual cutting of forests is good for some species, but the spraying is detrimental to others. Yes, habitat is number one. If we don't have it, we are not going to be able to sustain our heritage.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You don't have the same problems they have in northern Alberta with linear disturbance of forests, where cut lines, seismic lines, and access roads have created a web of linear disturbances, which aid predation in many cases and which upset the animal species there. Is that something that happens in New Brunswick as well?

● (0925)

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: We do have windmills. We have large windmill industries that some of our members will say have disrupted animals. We have large clear-cuts that have forced migrations of deer herds to private forest, where they don't have the habitat. Now the province is cutting old growth forests and protected deer yards. The deer population is down, so we justified cutting them all because there are no more deer in them. Yet, if we have mild winters and we have an abundance of deer, the next harsh winters they have no place to hide or to feed. This year we're having a tremendous amount of snow, and I assume our population of deer will decrease by probably 50%. So, yes, we do have some movement. It does happen in some respects.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Toet, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our guests today. Your input to this point been very helpful.

Mr. LeBlanc, picking up a little bit on some of the questions that you just had, you made the statement about the province allowing certain types of cutting, etc. One thing that I think is important to understand is that obviously, forest management is a provincial jurisdiction issue. We know there is going to be some crossover here, but I think it's important that we all have that on record and noted, that it is a provincial jurisdiction issue.

Mr. Rodgers, I just wanted to start with a question for you. You touched quite a bit in your opening remarks on the financial contribution of hunting and trapping communities. Many of the others also did. It's amazing when you hear some of the numbers on how much contribution there is, and the willingness of the community to actually be part of that. You're not saying somebody else has to do it, but that you're very willing to be a part of it. I applaud you for that.

I also want to get your perspective on a few other aspects of hunting and trapping. If you could, please speak to these three points: the cultural significance of this; the contribution of hunters and trappers to wildlife management and conservation—I know you touched on it a little bit, but I think it's a very important aspect and as the environment committee we're very interested in hearing about that contribution, what you're doing there—and then the role of scientific research in wildlife management.

If you could touch on those three things, I would very much appreciate it.

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Thank you for the question. I'm going to work backwards.

Our federation has a strong position with respect to science when it comes to wildlife management. We don't want any decisions made politically unless they're backed up by science.

We've had that problem in this province before. We have an overabundance of deer in Nova Scotia. At one point, back around 1985, the decision was made that there would be a two-deer limit on the mainland of Nova Scotia and only a one-deer limit on Cape Breton Island. That went over like a lead balloon, because once they found out that there was only one deer for the Cape Bretoners, the decision was made to have it one across the board. When that decision was made politically, the herd on the mainland collapsed. There was an overabundance. They ate themselves out of house and home and just crashed. It made a terrible mess of the whole thing, and it took years to rebound.

When it comes to science, we want to see the science done properly. In our province we're lagging on that because we don't have the same number of staff in our wildlife division that we used to have years ago. It seems that when somebody retires or somebody moves on to some other job, they don't hurry up and replace that person. It's unfortunate; that work still has to be done.

As I said, it's not as if they're not getting any money from the people who are interested in it, because we are paying for it. The management of the deer must be left in the hands of the government. Having said that about the science, we can't start dictating to government that we want this, that, or the other thing. We can make recommendations based on observance and anecdotal evidence we may get from our membership, but the long and short of it is that if it doesn't come down to the clear, hard facts of science, then we shouldn't be making any decisions at all.

On the cultural thing, to me, it's me. I hunt, therefore I am, is I guess the way to put it. It's what I do. My home has wildlife paintings and prints all the way around. In my den you'd swear you were in a museum of animals, because that's part of what I do.

I'm a year-round hunter. There are people who are hunters, but they're only hunters for that one week in the season. They come out on the Friday, hunt till the following Saturday, and that's it. They go back home and don't think of it again. But there are many more of us who dedicate more time to this and are more curious about what's going on.

The culture that the first peoples of Canada have, I share with them. That's the way I feel about my access to wildlife, and I want to have that continue.

Thank you.

● (0930)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you.

Mr. LeBlanc, did you want to add to that at all?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: I can't add any more value than what Tony has said. He reflects, probably, the voice of all hunters in our province as well.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I just want to pick up on one of the comments you made, Mr. LeBlanc, in your opening remarks. You said the New Brunswick Wildlife Federation was established to protect wildlife populations, and you said that trapping is important to this protection.

Could you relate to our committee why trapping is such an important aspect of this protection, and tangibly how it works?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Trapping, as I said.... They can only harvest excess animals in a herd, so by default if they have a successful trapping season, you'd have to assume that the herd is healthy and has reached its carrying capacity. They do not allow an overpopulation, which actually will cause sickness among the animals. They also turn in the carcasses to the biologists in our province, every number, every pelt, to make sure that in fact these animals are healthy, so they play a very important part. It's not as if they are hare-hunting, where we don't know how many hares are harvested. When the fur-bearers are harvested, we know exactly how many animals, so it would be very indicative of the population and the health of these herds.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I have just one more question, Mr. LeBlanc. You made a comment that I found very interesting, and the role that this plays in your outlook. You said, “If we use it, we own it.” I just wonder, in just a few short seconds, if you can expand on what you mean by that. It's pretty clear in itself, but do you want to add to that a little bit?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: As hunters, we go out in the forest. We are not a bunch of moronic people who just go there to kill animals, or to make animals suffer. We understand nature. It's not about just killing and hunting. We go there, walk in the woods, and I find the hunters who are out there feel it, know it.

The urban people.... You know, I go to Ottawa quite often. It's a nice town, nice people. The air stinks; it's not the same as out here.

We're out here, and we are trying to protect what we have. Hikers want to protect their trails. Tony had an issue about Sunday hunting. We were talking about how people were against us going Sunday hunting because they want to have access to the forest without having hunters there. They own the forest. Those people who are hiking might not want hunters, but when it comes to environmental issues, they know we are going to protect it. They will be passionate. They will talk with funding and they will lobby government. We can move people, because they are passionate about that. This is where we're saying anglers—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to move to Mr. McKay for seven minutes.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you to each one of you.

Mr. LeBlanc, if you want to come to Ottawa for better air, come in the non-parliamentary season.

Each of you represents an important provincial association, and each of you has articulated your concerns. I want to know whether there are any fees or licences that you pay directly to, or obtain from, the federal government.

● (0935)

Mr. Tony Rodgers: There is licensing under the Migratory Birds Convention Act for people who want to hunt ducks, geese, and upland birds, such as Wilson's snipe and others. Yes, you pay a fee, and there is a habitat stamp attached to that. That voluntary eight dollars goes to Wildlife Habitat Canada, which is a giving organization. It receives the money and, in the same form as a lot of our provincial organizations, gives that money back to the hunting community to use on hunting projects.

For instance, it would give money back to Ducks Unlimited to make more nesting areas or improve habitat in some fashion. Yes, there is at least one licence that we give to the federal government.

Hon. John McKay: I have no idea what percentage of shooting is attributable to ducks or geese. I would think it's significant, but I don't really know.

For this habitat stamp, does the money actually go through the federal treasury and then come back out?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Sir, that's a question over my pay grade. I'm sorry. I can't answer that one for you. I know that these licences are sold primarily at the post office, so the post office would turn in both sides of the money, the eight dollars for the licence and the eight dollars for the habitat stamp. As for where it goes from there, I have no idea. I'm sorry.

Hon. John McKay: Thank you.

What about regulations? Are there any direct federal regulations that are attributable to the federal government?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: In the same fashion, sir, under the migratory bird act, this is a three-country act, actually, which includes Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The regulations are dealt with on that international basis in order to determine populations of animals, bag limits, and things of this nature. So yes, those regulations would come through, but again, in consultation with those other two countries, because a migratory species is flying back and forth across the border. It has no idea where it's landing except that it's on the water, so there have to be these regulations.

Because these regulations are in place, we've had an abundance of these types of animals. I don't know what the numbers are either about the take, but I can assure you that it's very sustainable and doing well. As a matter of fact, I think we have a goose population problem in some areas of Canada because of an overabundance of these animals.

Hon. John McKay: I can tell you where you have a goose population problem: Toronto.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. John McKay: I think we could even have a shootout in Toronto at some point or another and we'd be happy about that.

What do you see as the regulatory weaknesses, then, with respect to any environmental role the federal government would or would not play? Generally speaking, the attitude around here is that these are provincial issues. There's primarily a benefit to the provincial economies. I buy your argument that on migratory species there is an international component, but largely, the attitude around here is that the federal government should butt out, that it's not really needed. Is there an area where the federal government should be playing a more robust role?

Well, that generated stunning silence.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. John McKay: I'm directing that to all three.

A voice: I'm going to jump in there, because—

The Chair: Mr. Rodgers...?

Hon. John McKay: Or Mr. LeBlanc or Mr. Samson?

Mr. Ward Samson: My connection got denied. I didn't hear the question.

Hon. John McKay: I'm sorry. It's a short and simple question. Is there an area where you feel the federal government should play a more robust role in either hunting or trapping?

The Chair: Mr. Samson, Mr. Rodgers, and then Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Tony Rodgers: I'll jump in on this one. I believe that at this point the federal government is playing a robust role with respect to hunting and trapping. On the trapping scene, they have been involved with the international standards for traps, as Charlie LeBlanc mentioned earlier, and I think they continue to keep that role and keep on top of that situation.

We have another situation, too, which is vaguely related to us. That's the taking of seals and seal hunting. I believe the federal government has made its point to the European market that we're in favour of this, because it's part of what we do, part of our culture, and part of the sustainable harvest. I don't like being bullied around by other people from other countries who think they know better than the people on the land. I'm glad the federal government is stepping up to the plate and having something to say about it.

Thank you.

● (0940)

The Chair: Mr. LeBlanc.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Yes. I would reflect Tony on the seal issue. In Minister Aglukkaq, we're very fortunate to have a minister who understands the importance of wild game meat to her culture and who takes on the fight of supporting hunting.

I guess one thing we would like to see through Canada—and I've seen some rumblings in Ottawa—is around the actual right to hunt, fish, and trap in this country. The country was built on trapping. It is our heritage. It's Canadian heritage, so why can't we have a legal right to hunt and fish in the country?

The Chair: That leads to Mr. Samson for 30 seconds.

Mr. Samson, would you like to respond?

Mr. Ward Samson: Yes.

The government seems to be doing okay. It may not be so provincially, but federally I think it is okay. The Conibear trap, as Tony mentioned, is working fine. I think you can do some more experimentation there.

With respect to hunting and trapping in Newfoundland, jurisdiction is a major problem for us. We have a tern hunt in Newfoundland whereby we hunt terns. But we have to have a gun to hunt terns; we have to have a licence. Legally, we can hunt terns without a licence, but in order to carry a gun in Newfoundland you have to have a federal bird licence. But you can hunt terns without a federal bird licence.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

We're going to move now to our five-minute rounds of questioning, and we'll begin with the NDP.

Mr. Rousseau, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

When I was young, some of my uncles, my cousins, and basically a lot of my family members hunted and trapped. Fewer and fewer of them do today. In fact, my uncles and cousins are now fairly elderly.

I'd like to explain something to you. I live in southern Quebec, specifically the Eastern Townships. There are the Appalachians, the mountains and a lot of space. However, urban sprawl and the development of certain companies that take up more and more land have had a significant impact on hunting and trapping in Quebec. What's it like where you live?

My question is mainly for you, Mr. Samson. In fact, you seem to be saying that hunting and trapping is used by your members for subsistence, among other things.

[*English*]

Mr. Ward Samson: Could you ask the question again? I didn't understand your question. I didn't read you.

The Chair: I think the question concerns your testimony, in which you indicated that the bulk of the trapping and hunting that occurs in your jurisdiction is for food. It's for subsistence living. If you could respond to that, Mr. Rousseau would appreciate it.

Is that accurate?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Yes, that's accurate.

Mr. Ward Samson: Thank you.

What I was saying is that the people we represent....

I've eaten muskrat and I've eaten beaver. A lot of people do that. With respect to trapping, we don't eat mink. It's not very agreeable to the palate.

To the majority of the people in the province, if you kill an animal, that animal becomes your responsibility. We do not believe in hunting animals for antlers. We believe in hunting animals for food. We believe in trapping animals for fur, but we also eat some of those animals we trap. Basically, if you kill something, you eat it. It's your responsibility.

With animals, you don't hunt the antlers. You don't take something...with salmon, catch it, have it on the line for 20 minutes to an hour, and then release it and say, “Fine. You're gone. You can spawn now.”

We don't like that.

● (0945)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Thank you.

Mr. LeBlanc, you mentioned in your testimony that members of your federation want to be involved in management, especially of ecosystems and natural habitats.

What concrete actions are you taking to ensure that you have others who will continue after you and, at the same time, that the species that might be at risk will continue to survive?

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: I will answer you in French. Is that okay?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Yes, that's fine.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Throughout the province, some of our people are involved in projects. Some projects are under way.

[*English*]

I'll have to do it in English because the translation is distracting me, okay? I'm very sorry.

On what we're doing to enhance, we have environmental projects that are done by our members, as well as education. Education is probably the biggest aspect. Many of our clubs have classes, do hunter education and firearm safety courses, and have campgrounds to try to introduce the youth to the outdoors and make them understand how important the environment is.

Is that the answer you were looking for, monsieur?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Yes, absolutely, Mr. LeBlanc.

My next question is for Mr. Rodgers.

Mr. Rodgers, you said that commercial hunting has caused species to disappear and that it will cause others to, as well. In your opinion, traditional hunters have been able to stop this slaughter.

Are there any endangered species that you are paying attention to in order to ensure that future generations will have access to them?

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Rodgers: We certainly are in Nova Scotia. The province has spent a lot of time, a lot of money, and a lot of energy on hunter education programs to ensure that our young folks coming into the program learn the values around hunting and fishing. Part of that training is a whole course on ethics, how we should treat wildlife and how we should deal with it in the future.

If you don't mind me going back to the question you asked Charlie with regard to the hunting spaces, you are right that we are losing a lot of land to commercialization. A lot of areas where I used to hunt as a young man have apartment buildings on them now, and it's a sad situation. What's worse is that we're losing some of the hunters as well, as was mentioned earlier. I'm afraid it has more to do with what the children are interested in these days, and that's sitting in front of a computer screen, playing games, and not getting out of doors, enjoying the wildlife and taking advantage of it. We're going to try our best, and we are trying our best, to try to bring them back in.

We also took a hit to our hunting and fishing community—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rodgers.

We have to move on to our next question. Hopefully you can work your response into another question as we sit in front of our screens here, when we'd rather be out, well, doing something else, probably.

Mr. Woodworth, you're next for five minutes.

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

My thanks to the witnesses for participating in this committee. It really is important for citizens across the land to do what you're doing today and to help members of Parliament better fulfill their roles.

Just before I get into the questions, Mr. Rodgers, would you like to take 30 or 60 seconds to finish the thought you were just trying to make?

● (0950)

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Yes, Mr. Woodworth. I appreciate that.

All I was going to say was that our hunting community took a hit 20 years ago when we had the introduction of the long-gun registry. When that came in, it just turned sour. A lot of men and women just gave up the sport. They got rid of their guns and we lost them forever. We also lost the billions of dollars that those folks may have contributed over the past 20 years.

I hope we never see anything like that again, because it will again have a negative impact not only on us but also on wildlife.

Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I just thought that as a matter of courtesy you should be permitted to finish that.

Actually, Mr. Rodgers, because we've already started together, and also because my own roots through my father are from Nova Scotia.... My grandfather was a great hunter. One of my favourite stories of his was how he managed to bag two moose with one shot. I've never known whether that was a realistic possibility or not.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I want to ask you some questions, Mr. Rodgers, and I'll ask the other gentlemen to listen in. If I have a chance, I'll come back to them and ask the same questions.

How many members do you have in your federation of anglers and hunters, Mr. Rodgers?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: We have 6,500 members and supporters of the federation.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Do you have an estimate of how many people in Nova Scotia, beyond the 6,500 who are your members, participate in hunting and angling?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we have a wildlife resources card in Nova Scotia. There are 100,000 people who actually have that card.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Very good.

A few years ago this committee did a study on the Species at Risk Act. Quite frankly, we heard a lot of good evidence and a lot of good ideas about how the Species at Risk Act might be tweaked to improve it. Regrettably, that was in the previous parliament. As you know, that parliament had to be dissolved in 2011, so the committee never actually finished and reported on that study.

I'd like to ask you about the Species at Risk Act, Mr. Rodgers. Do you or your members in any way participate in some of the activities under the Species at Risk Act, either through assessments of species or through recovery or management plans?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: We do. As a matter of fact, I think the most important part of what we do goes back to that five dollars that's collected off of our licences, which is used to generate money for research. Many of the students at Acadia University apply for that money in grants in order to study, in most cases, species at risk—Blanding's turtle and animals of that nature.

One of the species at risk in Nova Scotia is the mainland moose, the moose on the mainland portion of Nova Scotia. The moose in the Cape Breton highlands are in fine shape but those on the mainland are not. We have spent time and money on that. As a matter of fact, it will take a short story. There was a small bog up in Cumberland County that we went into with a crew of men and lumber. We had to build ramps into this particular bog because the moose were getting trapped in it. They were unable to get out even when we collapsed the sides of the bog, so we made ramps for them to be able to pull themselves out. This is just one example of the things we're interested in with respect to the mainland. That, again, is not a huntable animal for us, but that was something we knew we had to do as good stewards of the wildlife resource.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Actually, perhaps I'll go to Mr. LeBlanc for a moment and ask the same question.

Can you tell me whether your group or your members have participated in activities such as those Mr. Rodgers just told us about? If you know that and have an example, I'd be interested to hear it.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: We're always asked to participate and have our comments on species at risk. The only one that I've been involved with would be salmon-related, not hunting-related, because they want to list the Atlantic salmon. I've had some input into that. In terms of other species and our species here, none of our species in New Brunswick are targeted for listing.

● (0955)

The Chair: We'll move now to Mr. Choquette.

[*Translation*]

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

My first question is for Mr. LeBlanc.

Before I ask it, I would like to say that it was very interesting to learn that the only real federal legislation on hunting and trapping is the Migratory Birds Convention Act, 1994. That's important to keep in mind.

If I've understood correctly, there has been a drop in the number of moose in recent months, and deer have had problems because of the harsh winter. We know that there will be more and more problems related to climate change, such as very long periods of cold or very hot periods.

What action do you think the federal government should take to tackle the climate change issue?

[*English*]

The Chair: Is that for Mr. LeBlanc?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: My question is for Mr. LeBlanc.

[*English*]

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Climate change is a very complex issue to get into.

I have members who would say we're not affecting the climate. Personally I believe that we as humans are a cause of it. What can we do? We could try to minimize our impact in the sense of making better choices. A lot of my members are using vehicles that consume a lot of fossil fuels, so maybe we could try to help there. I understand the federal government is reluctant to reach emission targets or to try to push legislation, because doing that is not good for business. Business is not good for the environment, and bad environment is not good for animals.

That's all I can give you today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. LeBlanc, I would like to add something to what you just said.

You represent hunting and fishing organizations with about 4,000 members. As you mentioned, hunting and fishing clearly have a direct impact on your region's economic development.

How do you assess the risk of having ecosystems that are more fragile because of climate change and habitat loss? How do you see the economic future of the people you represent? Could climate change and the destruction of habitat really cause economic damage?

[*English*]

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: We will definitely see some changes. We already see changes with migrations of species to other areas of the province. We've had a lot of flooding in our province lately, and we've seen some very fast increases of rivers. So on climate change, it's warm. We get flooding—and not at the normal time in the spring, so a lot of the outfitters or people who want to pursue fishing might not be able to participate in these sports.

As far as animals are concerned, it could be bad if the province were to warm up. Deer in our province are in the northern edge of their habitat, and if our province were to warm up, I guess we might see more deer. I'm not quite sure what other animals would suffer.

But yes, climate will affect our industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Since I have only 30 seconds left, I will ask you, Mr. Rodgers, if you have anything to add.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Charlie's pretty much said it. The changes are coming subtly—in some cases, a little bit more or less subtly. For instance, some birds are migrating back to the north ahead of schedule. I don't know what to tell you about climate change in Nova Scotia this year. I think we'll be ice fishing in July with the way things are going in the opposite direction.

Our main concern with respect to wildlife and protection of wildlife is more with habitat than climate change. If we keep cutting down trees the way we're doing in Nova Scotia, there won't be a place for them to live anyway, regardless of what decides it. We're burning wood to generate electricity. Biomass piles are going into big furnaces. It's not going to take long before there won't be anything around anyway.

● (1000)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

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

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask a question to Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Rodgers. You both talked about the roles of science and trapper information in determining surplus animals, things like that. You just spoke about habitat.

I know you do work with the federal government, Environment Canada, or your groups do. Could you elaborate a bit more on what hunters and trappers do to contribute to science and conservation management?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: In Nova Scotia hunters are involved with a number of things in that respect, Dr. Carrie. For instance, in the harvesting of whitetail deer or a moose, the hunter is asked to return the jawbone of the animal to the department of natural resources. That gives them an idea of the condition of the animal. It also gives them some idea of the animal's age by looking at the wear on the teeth. Trappers are asked to turn in the carcasses of certain animals to do the same thing, and I know that our hunters have been out doing counts for the department of natural resources. They also report animals that have been hit by cars and things of this nature so that they can take a bone marrow test to determine the quality and the condition of the animal. There are a lot of things we can get involved in.

We also do antler measurements. We measure the outside circumference of the antler and report it to Natural Resources Canada, and that gives them an idea of growth, health of the animals, and things of this nature. We don't just sit back on our laurels. We actually get in there and pitch information back to the biologists for them to use.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: It's the same thing in New Brunswick. We do participate. You can turn in jawbones. We don't have a program where everybody turns in the jawbone, but those who want to, do. During hunting season the department of natural resources will put bio stations around the province, where they'll go into more detail on the harvested animal. They would weigh it. They would take a jaw out. They would sex it. They would find out if it carried young, or if it was bred last year. They take this information during the season. As well, there are some 4,000 animals struck by automobiles around the province, and every one of those has the data taken and input into the overall.... It looks at the overall herd for moose, deer, bear.

So yes, we do participate.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you very much for that. I think it's important that the committee understand how essential hunters and trappers are for conservation management and for habitat.

I want to go to Mr. Rodgers for a minute. You mentioned demographics. Could you describe who is participating in hunting and trapping in your province? You mentioned how important teaching ethics is. You touched upon youth and how important getting youth involved is. Could you let the committee know a little about the demographics in your province?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Yes, well, we're all getting a little long in the tooth in Nova Scotia. I think the average age of our hunters is running at about 55 years. We're trying to bring more people into our program.

Yes, the youth get training. We also put on training programs around the province for youth to attend to get first-hand experience at shooting sports and at trapping as well.

We're also looking at a small increase in the number of women who participate in the sport. As a matter of fact, last weekend at the sports and RV show in Halifax there were quite a few women, who had formed their own club in order to participate in a one-on-one woman camaraderie thing as they participate in hunting. We think this is tremendous.

Let me put a little more information into this thing too, just to show the committee. In Nova Scotia we also have a program called Hunters Helping the Hungry. We donate part of our bounty to the food bank in Nova Scotia to feed Nova Scotia. Last year we put in more than 2,000 kilograms of protein. They have a hard time getting protein. This is something that's very important to the community, so we're also giving back in that respect—not only the money but part of the kill.

● (1005)

Mr. Colin Carrie: I'm curious about your outreach to new Canadians. Are you seeing new Canadians taking up the sport and having an interest in the role of hunters and trappers and the way we manage the wonderful habitat we have, here in this country?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: My only experience in that, Dr. Carrie, is at the sports and RV show when new Canadians approach us. They can see us and they have a talk. I'm quite surprised, actually, how little they know about what they are allowed to do.

I think the most startling thing to some of them is that they are allowed to own a firearm, because in the countries they came from, that was a no-no; you wouldn't be allowed to have one at any cost. Then they're told yes, you can, and here are the steps you have to go through.

Hopefully we will get some of those new recruits into our system. It's coming and it's slow, but it's a learning curve. People have to have that information first, and then they'll delve into it, I'm sure.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Carrie.

At this point we have one further committee member who wishes to ask a question, Mr. Sopuck.

Does any other committee member want to ask for another round, or are we going to conclude?

Okay. We'll hear Mr. Sopuck for five minutes, and then we'll conclude our questions for today.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity.

Where you three gentlemen live, many of your communities, especially the sealing communities, have been victimized by the animal rights movement. Are you seeing much activity on the animal rights front in your area these days?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: We're not. Every once in awhile, PETA will jump up and try to do a campaign. That's the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. They will come in and try to do a campaign, but it's usually a splash and they're gone again. My observation has been that there are probably 10 people in the province who are dedicated anti-hunting, anti-shooting people, so that's not a real concern.

Mr. Charles LeBlanc: Mr. Sopuck, here in New Brunswick we don't have a big problem. The province of New Brunswick is vastly rural, so people understand the importance of trapping and hunting. It's not all of our population. We have 100,000 people participating in the sport out of 750,000, but they are tolerant of hunters. Our provincial laws allow us access to pretty much everywhere on crown land, of course.

I think we don't have a problem with it. Federally we hear them, and they don't serve us very well, but provincially New Brunswickers understand the importance of this sport or these endeavours.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I want to bring your attention to quotes from a couple of New Democratic Party MPs, which greatly disturbed me. Along with the three of you, I have been fighting the animal rights movement for about 20-plus years. I agree with both Mr. Rodgers and Mr. LeBlanc that this is a movement that has been dampened down. As hunters, anglers, and trappers we're actually in pretty good shape.

But on October 27, 2014, Jean Crowder, the New Democrat MP for Nanaimo—Cowichan said that she supports legislation in which "animals would be considered people and not just property." That is a direct quote.

Similarly, Françoise Boivin, the New Democrat MP for Gatineau, Quebec, in the same debate said that animals should be treated—

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Choquette....

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Is this really part of the study we are doing?

I don't think we are looking at private members' bills from the New Democrats. Also, the New Democrat MPs aren't here to defend themselves and explain why they said these things. I don't think this relates to our study. We should reread the motion related to this study to see if it is part of the laws and rights concerned. I think we are talking about economic development related to hunting and trapping, not animal rights.

● (1010)

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, in fairness, if you look closely at the motion, it clearly talks about the cultural significance, and certainly what Mr. Sopuck is getting at does speak to the cultural significance of hunting.

Mr. Sopuck, please continue.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you. I will continue with Ms. Boivin's quote where she said animals should be treated with "the same protection that we afford to children and people with mental or physical disabilities."

As well, a number of your groups, and Mr. Rodgers, I see, in a letter of November 24, 2014, which was signed by about 15 hunting and angling groups across the country to all MPs, talked about Ms. Morin, the NDP MP member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, and her Bill C-592. According to the letter that many of your groups signed, this bill could unintentionally criminalize all sorts of accepted, necessary, and traditional practices. Everything from food production; hunting, fishing, and trapping; research using animals; sports and entertainment; and private ownership would be impacted.

We also note, for Mr. Bevington's benefit, that the Northwest Territories Wildlife Federation signed on to this plea for MPs to defeat this NDP bill.

Mr. Rodgers, maybe I'll just ask you, given that time is very short, to comment on the issue of what you've just heard.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Sopuck referred to this as an NDP bill, but it's actually a private member's bill.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I stand corrected. Fair enough, I stand corrected—this private member's bill from an NDP.

Mr. Rodgers, could you comment, please?

Mr. Tony Rodgers: Thanks for the question.

We are always on guard for legislation and ideas and proposals that are going to have a negative effect on the ability for us to hunt. We went through this process earlier today when we talked about the economics, the culture. Can you imagine a country without hunting in it, the loss of revenue to wildlife and wildlife habitat? Every time we see something of this nature, and this is not the first time.... I've been with the federation for 26 years, and believe me—

Mr. Jean Rousseau: This is not the subject of the motion.

Mr. Tony Rodgers: —I've been looking at lots of legislation come this way. We're just going to stand on guard against that sort of thing, and whenever we see it we'll bring forward a letter and correspondence to make sure that people understand our position.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That brings us to the end of our comments for today.

I want to thank our witnesses for being with us today. You've pointed out many of the economic, cultural, and actually sustenance needs in terms of the hunting and trapping community.

I want to applaud you as well, Mr. Rodgers. I would never have thought of the aspect of donating some of that protein to the food banks. That is certainly a very worthwhile initiative on your part.

Thank you, committee members. Thank you to our witnesses for their patience in dealing with the technological challenges that we have. At this point we will move to adjourn the meeting.

Hon. John McKay: Before we adjourn, I submitted a motion, Chair.

The Chair: Is it a motion dealing with committee business?

Hon. John McKay: Future committee business....

The Chair: Is it committee business? We'll move in camera.

Hon. John McKay: Yes, we wouldn't want anybody to hear about this.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's been our practice, Mr. McKay, just to be fair.

Hon. John McKay: I know. You have a lot of different practices.

The Chair: It's not mine; it's ours. The committee sets the parameters of our group, so you have to keep that in mind.

Hon. John McKay: I get it entirely.

The Chair: It's the collective will of the people.

We're moving in camera, so we'll suspend for one minute while we go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]