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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 our meeting to order. This is meeting number 53 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. We're continuing our study of licensed hunting and trapping.

We're pleased to have with us today our witness Mr. Harold Grinde, president of the Association of Mackenzie Mountains Outfitters.

Welcome Mr Grinde. We normally have a 10-minute opening statement and then our committee members will follow up with questions, which you can respond to when you're ready.

Proceed with your opening statement Mr. Grinde, and again, welcome.

Mr. Harold Grinde (President, Association of Mackenzie Mountains Outfitters): Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today about things that are really dear to my heart.

I grew up on a farm in central Alberta. I've hunted and fished since I was big enough to carry a BB gun and harass the sparrows and starlings in the yard. For the past 30 years, I've made my living in the wildlife industry as a professional guide and now as an outfitter. I've also dedicated many hours and dollars to conservation in one form or another, belonging to different organizations and going to meetings.

Recently, we spent quite a bit of time working with the Government of the Northwest Territories on a stakeholders Wildlife Act advisory group, or SWAAG, developing, drafting and tweaking the new Wildlife Act. It's finally done, after about 10 years of trying, and I think it is in large part due to the foresight of the minister to establish SWAAG and take to heart the concerns of the third party interests in the Northwest Territories.

I think we all understand and know of the deep-rooted relationship between hunting and fishing and the aboriginal cultures in the north. But in the Northwest Territories, there really isn't a big difference between NWT aboriginals and resident hunters. Hunting, trapping, and fishing have been part of northern culture from day one. It really was the trapping industry that opened up the doors to the north.

In most aboriginal cultures, hunting and taking the life of an animal is seen as a spiritual event. In many of the cultures it's a part of the right of passage into manhood. If you are not proven proficient as a hunter you can't provide for your family, and you are not allowed to marry and enter into the state of manhood. There is a deep-rooted aboriginal connection to the land, to the animals that live on the land, and to hunting and fishing.

I would like to challenge you a little bit today. I've spent pretty much my whole life in the mountains. As I said, I have dedicated countless hours and lots of finances to conservation and the preservation of habitat. I believe I have the same connection the aboriginals do. Why would it be any different? When you live on the land I believe you become part of it and you still have that same connection.

I had a good friend who was a fellow outfitter in British Columbia, he was a member of the Tahltan first nation and his name was Fletcher Day. He's gone now, but I remember one time he said to me, “Harold you have every bit as much right to hunt and fish in this country as I do. You just haven't fought hard enough for that right.”

I've thought about that many times and I wish it were true. I wish my right to hunt and fish were entrenched in our constitution; it isn't, but I wish it were. I really do believe that it is something that has been part of how Canada came to be Canada. Hunting, fishing, and trapping were part of what made Canada what it is today. Why isn't it my right as it is an aboriginal's right?

My good friend Ken Hall, who has sat with me on the SWAAG committee in Yellowknife for the past couple of years, wrote, “The cultural significance of hunting to my family is as important as it is to any other culture in the NWT, including aboriginal people. We hunt for the same reasons: for food; to practice traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation; to teach our children respect for and appreciation of the land; to learn about and to commune with nature.”

Ken is not an aboriginal person. He is a third-generation Northwest Territories resident, and he feels very strongly that it is every bit as important to him culturally and socially to be able to hunt and fish as it is to anybody else in the Northwest Territories.

I think it's really hard for those of you who have never hunted, who have never taken the life of an animal and seen the life blood flowing on the ground, to understand the spiritual connection you have with that animal, to understand that it is really an emotional thing that happens. As an outfitter, you'd be amazed how many of the hunters tear up and cry when they are successful in taking an animal.

● (0850)

People think of hunters as being macho guys who are out there to murder and slay, but for the most part I find the opposite is true. Most hunters get very emotional when they take an animal. I believe that somehow there's a spiritual connection, which is maybe not even understood, when you take the life of an animal and it provides for you. That is what hunting originally was, to provide for the needs of feeding your family. I think that connection is the reason that hunters have always taken the lead, and probably always will, when it comes to conservation.

I'm sure that by now all of you have heard about and are familiar with the North American conservation model, the success story it has been, and I think given the opportunity will continue to be. Hunters and fishermen, and even to some extent trappers, have taken the lead historically when it comes to conservation. Had it not been for this North American conservation movement, initiated and driven by hunters, we wouldn't have the wildlife that we do today in North America.

This probably doesn't pertain as much to the very far north as it does to the settled areas of Canada, but I think it would be very true everywhere. If hunters hadn't led that charge, we wouldn't have the wildlife that we do today. Because of that, I think it's crucial that we try to somehow entrench the rights of Canadians who choose to hunt and fish. I do believe they will continue to be the driving force who make sure we have wildlife, and habitat for that wildlife, for many generations to come.

I think this is a lesson we can learn well from the Kenyan example. Some of you may be familiar with Kenya. In 1977, all hunting was banned in Kenya. We won't mention names, but it was basically a bribe by a large British corporation to the government of the time, offering them money in exchange for outlawing hunting.

Today those large species of wildlife in Kenya have seen as much as an 80% decline in numbers. There are 70% to 80% of those large wildlife populations gone, which putting a stop to hunting was supposed to preserve. Most of the experts in Kenya today feel that within 20 years those large species will be extinct. Those large mammal populations will be completely extinct. There is a large movement developing in Kenya today to reinstitute hunting to try to save the wildlife of Kenya.

That's the story of the North American model. That's the story of the history of hunters when it comes to conserving wildlife. Hunters are the rubber on the road when it comes to conserving our wildlife, and I think that's true in many cases around the world. I really do believe that a carefully regulated, well-managed, sustainable harvest of wildlife is one of the best tools we have at our disposal for the conservation of wildlife and ensuring that we have both habitat and wildlife for many generations to come.

There are many challenges. I've been involved in wildlife management at several different levels, and it is very complex. One of the biggest obstacles that I see is the urbanization of our society and the disconnect between the urban masses and the land and wildlife. How do people who grew up in a city, who have never had any connection to the land, have any knowledge of wildlife, of conservation, of management? Yet with the way that we govern wildlife in most of Canada today, they have an equal say in the management of that wildlife. I see that disconnect as being problematic.

Everybody is really passionate about wildlife, whether it's me, as a hunter or whether it's an animal rights activist. There's a lot of passion, and it's hard to separate the passion from the science. Today in Canada, most wildlife management is done by government bureaucracies. I think most of us know that sometimes government bureaucracies aren't the best way to do things. They can get very weighted down and become ineffective. I can tell you lots of stories about the inefficiencies of wildlife management.

● (0855)

However, we have opportunities to maybe have a look at that. In the Northwest Territories, under the land claims process, co-management boards were set up. Wildlife management is a shared responsibility between these co-management boards and government, between science and traditional knowledge. I think that's something we are going to have to look at in this country to balance out the polarization that happens between animal rights and activists —

The Chair: You have one minute. Perhaps you could wrap it up.

Mr. Harold Grinde: Okay, I'm sorry.

The rest of my presentation is pretty much statistics. If you have the notes, we can look at them. I would say, if I don't have time to go over them all with you, we really do look at hunting and fishing as the economic engines in the Northwest Territories. At times, when the oil field moves out of Norman Wells, about the only new dollars that come into town, other than government meeting dollars, are from the hunters. It is part of of many of the communities and part of the economic engine that drives the local economies in the Northwest Territories.

Most of the numbers are in my speaking notes. I have found some new numbers. The trapping, for instance, in the NWT, under the land claims, is exclusive to aboriginals. It has declined over the last 20 years, but recently the Government of the Northwest Territories has done some very forthright and visionary programs to improve the trapping participation. Last year they had record numbers, 30-year-high numbers, of fur taken and the value of fur was up to about $2.7 million.

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

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grinde, and thank you for making your notes available. They are available in both French and English and all of our members have them.

I would be open to a motion by someone to include the rest of Mr. Grinde's written statement into his verbal one, and that would be part of the record.

An hon. member: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

Statement by Mr. Harold Grinde: On NWT hunting and fishing statistics, 40% of NWT people hunt and/or fish today. It's basically unchanged since 1983. About 45% of aboriginals hunt or fish, compared with 33% of non-aboriginals.

Today there are about 1,250 licensed hunters in the NWT, or 3% of the total population. It is important to remember that aboriginal hunters do not need to be licensed, so 1,250 licensed hunters represents about 6% of the non-aboriginal population of the NWT.

There's been a downward trend, from about 2,000 licensed hunters in the 1980s. This trend is, in part, due to a loss of opportunities for resident hunters—parks, protected areas, land claims, and the barren ground caribou season closures.

According to the 2012 Canadian nature survey, NWT residents spent $19 million on hunting, fishing, and trapping activities during the previous 12-month period.

Trapping statistics are hard to come by for the NWT. Trapping is exclusive to aboriginals under current land claims. Trapping is and has always been a traditional activity for many northerners. Trapper numbers have declined since the1980s from about 2,500 active trappers to about 750 active trappers today. Non-aboriginals can be granted special harvesters licences to trap by claimant groups, but today there are very few non-aboriginal trappers in the NWT. Many would like to trap, but do not have the opportunity. Hopefully, this will change over time and more of the abundant fur resource can be utilized.

Non-resident hunting, or outfitted hunting, in the NWT has always been a significant part of the NWT economy, especially in local communities. There has been less revenue from outfitting in the past five years because of a decline in barren ground caribou, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife ban on the importation of polar bear, and new national parks initiatives.

Outfitting was established in the Mackenzie Mountains in 1965, and hunter numbers and harvest levels have been very consistent since then. Eight outfitters in the Mackenzie Mountains contributed $1.8 million in direct and indirect economic benefits to the NWT in 1996, according to the Crapo report in 2000, including meat valued at $200,000 contributed to local communities. This would convert to about $6.5 million today and meat valued at $750,000.

The Crapo report emphasized that the revenue generated by the outfitters is “export revenue”.

Outfitters are really the main resource for wildlife population data in the mountains through hunter observation forms and harvest data.

I could not find any current data on outfitting in the rest of the NWT. The big barren-ground caribou outfitting lodges are all shut down today. At one time they were a huge part of the NWT economy.

The guided fishing sector is a multi-million dollar industry in and of itself, but no hard numbers are available. There were as many as 13,000 fishermen coming to the NWT in 2007, but that declined to about 9,000 in 2009, and is now stable.

The Chair: Also, Mr. Grinde, if you care to, in response to some of the questions, you may include some of the rest of your—

Mr. Harold Grinde: Absolutely. I'll try to do that.

The Chair: Please feel free to do that. I don't mean to cut you off, but we want to respect the time that we have.

We're going to go to our first round of questioners.

Mr. Sopuck, please, you have seven minutes.

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

I found your presentation very interesting, especially your insight into the nature of hunting and the culture of hunting and trapping.

I have a simple question to start off. This is the first time the environment and sustainable development committee has ever conducted a study like this. Why is a study like this important?

● (0900)

Mr. Harold Grinde: I believe it's important to hear from the common man in Canada, from the hunter and the fisherman, and I know you are, Mr. Sopuck, and a couple of the other members.

I think as we become more and more urbanized we get a disconnect. I believe that almost every young biologist who is given the task of managing wildlife in this country has been a little brainwashed, maybe. Very few of them have any practical knowledge, yet they graduate from college, accept a job with the government bureaucracy, and are assigned the job of managing wildlife. They don't have the practical knowledge to fulfill that job. That's why I think we need to find a balanced way to get the traditional and the local knowledge included. I think that's one thing this committee may move in that direction. I hope that can happen.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I was interested in your comments about urbanization. Just to make you feel a little bit better, I don't think the situation is nearly as bleak as you put out.

The interest in hunting among urban Canadians is increasing. In Toronto, for example, there are a number of gun clubs. There are huge waiting lists to join these clubs. Another interesting thing, regarding fishing, is that in Ontario they sell something like 920,000 angling licences, and 40% are sold in Toronto.

The situation, in terms of our urban friends—and I was born and raised in the city—I don't think is nearly as bleak as it first appears. People like yourself are very important spokespeople to talk to the urban community about what hunters have done.

In that vein, the hunter's role in conservation, you spoke about that. Can you elaborate on what the hunting community does for wildlife conservation both in your neck of the woods and in North America at large?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Where I operate as an outfitter in the Mackenzie Mountains, the Northwest Territories government really doesn't have much budget for studies. It's a very remote region so there's very little pressure on the wildlife, but they really do rely on us as their eyes and ears on the ground. Most of the data that the NWT gathers as far as wildlife population numbers and trends are concerned comes from reports that the outfitters and all of our clients submit. Beyond that, of course, there are many different private, non-profit hunting clubs, conservation groups, that try their best to do what they can to make sure they have the opportunity to hunt. Probably the best example we have today is Ducks Unlimited.

Ducks Unlimited probably has even presented. I don't know if they still are today, but I know at one time they were the largest private landowners in Canada. They owned more land...which was purchased by hunters for ducks so that hunters would have the opportunity to hunt. I have been a life member for 30 to 40 years of the Wild Sheep Foundation. The Wild Sheep Foundation is a national organization in the United States but they have Canadian chapters and affiliates.

We raise hundreds of thousands of dollars every year in Canada to put back on the ground, into studies, into habitat improvement. Those are the things hunters do. Beyond that, of course, in the United States, through the Pittman-Robertson Act, millions and millions of dollars have gone into conservation. In Canada, not so much, but always in every jurisdiction in Canada licensing fees, conservation stamps, go directly to conservation of wildlife. Those are direct contributions made by hunters.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'm familiar with the Pittman-Robertson Act. The fisheries equivalent is the Dingell-Johnson Act in the United States. As you well know, they both generate funds from levies on sporting equipment like fishing rods and firearms and ammunition, and so on.

Is that something you would like to see in Canada?

Mr. Harold Grinde: We've talked about this at HAAP. I think it's a good idea. It's a little different situation in Canada because we would probably—unless it was done very carefully—hurt the retail sector in Canada. It's very competitive. It's hard to compete with the American retailers as it is.

I think we need to put a system in place for camping and hunting equipment that does not just target the hunters and the fisherman, but also probably the campers, those who want to go out and camp. We could easily put a bit of a levy on all camping equipment so everybody puts a little bit of money out of their pocket towards it directly.

● (0905)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: It's interesting that the hunters and anglers are the one group that actually ask to be taxed. Of course, being part of a low-tax government it's problematic for us, but I have to get that on the record.

I really appreciate your comments. I appreciated your story about Kenya too. I'm familiar with that. That's interesting. That's the paradox of hunting: the more interest there is in hunting a species, the more abundant it becomes.

Can you just elaborate on that again?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Yes. Africa has a little bit different social environment, economic environment from Canada. But when you take away the value of wildlife to the people who live on the land, especially in a place like rural Canada where animals raid crops and stuff, if there is no value in that wildlife to the person, if it's blanket protection—you're not allowed to use that animal for anything—then why would that person feed those deer or those elk? In Africa, when a crop-raiding elephant that you're not allowed to ever gain any economic benefit from is trampling your crops, and your children are starving, why would you not poach that elephant when your kids are starving?

That's what's happened in Kenya, because these people have been told that the wildlife that's there is not theirs. They're not allowed to utilize it for food, for betterment in any way. The big tour companies that operate the tours are for the most part out of country and put nothing back into the conservation of this wildlife. Poaching just becomes rampant because there is no value to that wildlife.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sopuck.

Now to Mr. Bevington for seven minutes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks, Mr. Grinde.

It's interesting, you said something about the trained professional. In the Northwest Territories we have what's called a natural resources training program, which has put many people who are Northwest Territories residents into positions throughout the territories as natural resources officers. Do you think those people are inappropriate for the job?

Mr. Harold Grinde: No, absolutely not. In the Northwest Territories, you're right; our association, AMMO, has had a scholarship program. We have actually helped send many of those people to school, encouraging them to get involved. I really believe that the system in the Northwest Territories, bringing those people into the programs, is a wonderful part.

There are things that will improve over time. It's the same with the co-management boards. They are a work-in-progress. They're fairly new. They're learning their niche in wildlife management, but it will come full circle. It will become an effective method of wildlife management.

But no, I believe the native peoples, the local peoples, who are going into these programs in the Northwest Territories are wonderful. Sadly, I think their level of education when they enter these programs is.... Part of our scholarship program is an essay. Some of them had not been Word-trained to correct the spelling, and would have been almost hard to follow—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, that's kind of a—

Mr. Harold Grinde: But still, they learn. Once they get in these programs and they see that they have a career, and it's a career that they have an interest in, they do very well.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Does your association take students out on the land? I know that throughout the north most of the schools have on-the-land programs. At my granddaughter's school they go out and do things like skin animals, beavers, on these on-the-land programs. Does your association support and promote those programs?

Mr. Harold Grinde: I hosted the first camp last year at my camp. It was a northern youth leadership conference for teenage girls. Yes, we have definitely supported that and will continue to. We're doing another camp this year at the end of June before our hunters arrive.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Isn't that the way to get people in the schools, through the process—

Mr. Harold Grinde: Absolutely. I wish I could go and talk to every high school in Canada, or every junior high, or every elementary. I do volunteer in schools at home where I am allowed to.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It is a little different in the Northwest Territories. I mean, as you pointed out, we are a hunting and trapping place.

Mr. Harold Grinde: Right.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I also want to talk about the caribou. That's the real big problem in wildlife management right now. You haven't referred to it yet.

Mr. Harold Grinde: It's in my stats that the caribou numbers are in serious decline. It's not an area that I personally am familiar with. I outfit in the mountains on the west side of the river, so I'm not familiar with the barrens, other than I know what's going on. The caribou are in serious decline. All hunting has been stopped right now, even aboriginal hunting temporarily. The big outfitting camps that were out there that brought millions and millions of dollars into the territories over the last 20 to 30 years have been closed now for about five years.

● (0910)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes.

Mr. Harold Grinde: It's a sad tale. I don't know if anybody today fully understands why the caribou are in such serious decline, but they are, definitely.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes. There are larger factors at play in the world than what hunters themselves can control for the wildlife. That's the point that I think people have to understand as well, that climate change and industrialization are things that actually do impact on the animal populations.

Mr. Harold Grinde: It's interesting, because NWT caribou biologists and traditional knowledge both tell us that a massive, massive fluctuation in caribou numbers is the norm. They have seen this before. The traditional knowledge of the aboriginals tells of years where there were no caribou, no caribou, no caribou—and then they came back.

It may be related to climate change. It may just be some cycle that we don't understand yet.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, generally the caribou people in the Northwest Territories speak of a number of things. If you go up on the Alaska coast, you can see the same thing with industrialization, where industrialization cuts down the range of the caribou. If you cut down the range, you cut down the energetics of the animals because they don't have as much to feed on. Isn't that correct?

Mr. Harold Grinde: It's part of it. Caribou are a very complex species, but where you are talking about, up on the Alaska coast, the Porcupine herd is in full recovery. The numbers are on the increase. The Carmacks herd in the Yukon that was almost hunted into extinction in the gold rush a hundred years ago has made a great recovery.

I don't think it's doom and gloom for caribou. I think they will recover. As to how much of it is related to climate change and how much of it is a natural cycle, I don't know.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Maybe a better example would be the buffalo. I remember taking some dried buffalo meat to a school in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. I showed it to the kids and said, “If you'd been here a hundred years ago, you might have been feeding on this.” They just looked at it like it was from Mars.

Mr. Harold Grinde: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's what has happened. But we have a buffalo recovery. I live in an area where the buffalo, through Wood Buffalo park, have recovered somewhat, just like the whooping cranes. There are things that governments have to do—

Mr. Harold Grinde: Absolutely.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: —to ensure the protection of a species.

Mr. Harold Grinde: I couldn't agree with you more but I also think we need to find a balance in all areas of Canada, not just in the north, because the Yukon also has co-management boards. I think we need to have a balanced system of management where it's government, science, and traditional and local knowledge. And when I say traditional and local knowledge, traditional knowledge is typically seen as aboriginal knowledge. Local knowledge isn't necessarily from aboriginals. It's from somebody like me.

When it comes to the Mackenzie Mountains, where the outfitters work, where I work, there are eight of us who operate out there. Nobody has as much knowledge about what's going on with wildlife in those mountains as us, because we spend four months of the year out there. The biologist in town, he might get out there for two weeks. How can he possibly have as much knowledge of what's going on out there as we do?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Did you agree with the expansion of the parks?

Mr. Harold Grinde: I don't disagree with the expansion of the park. I disagree with the idea that, especially in northern remote regions, we eliminate hunting from those parks. Minister Aglukkaq agrees with me. At the next HAAP meeting she plans to have Parks Canada there to talk about this, because she feels that it is the right of Canadians like me to hunt and fish.

In the expanded park area, aboriginals can hunt, fish, and trap. Residents are allowed to fish only. Why aren't they allowed to hunt? It's not a matter of a problem with wildlife. Residents have hunted there forever. The wildlife populations are strong and healthy and vibrant. It's not a security issue. The new expanded portion of the park will see maybe five to 10 visitors a year. Almost every visitor who goes to Nahanni goes down the river, which is part of the old park. That expanded region is going to see very few visitors, and the NWT residents could be hunting there forever and nobody in Toronto or Ottawa or anywhere else would ever know the difference. It's such a big vast country and so remote and there are so few people who get there. We have a huge park in the Arctic that gets an average of two visitors per year, yet we're not allowed to go there and hunt. Why not? It doesn't make sense. It makes sense in Banff and Jasper that we don't allow people to hunt. There would be a safety concern. It doesn't make sense in the Northwest Territories.

That's government rigidity where you have a set of rules and it has to apply to everybody. We need different rules for national parks in the Northwest Territories.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Grinde, for your insight. I find that your comments about the importance of balance are excellent for us to hear at the table. This is such an important study because there are a lot of people on both sides. You mentioned the danger of playing politics, especially with hunting and trapping, and not really understanding it. Some of these extreme policy positions can have the opposite effect.

I never knew about that Kenya example. I think it was really important that you brought that forward because traditionally in Canada hunters, fishermen, and trappers do understand the value of wildlife. We heard from other witnesses in Europe where they have these positions where they just trap animals and then they destroy the animals. They don't even use the animals that they kill, so in regard to these ideas of blanket protection and blanket policies I think Canadians really have to understand the long-term effects of such policies.

Last week we actually had a witness here from the Association for the Protection of Fur-Bearing Animals. It was one of the NDP witnesses. He called for a ban on trapping. I was wondering if you could actually say what sort of effect completely banning trapping would have on rural and aboriginal communities.

Mr. Harold Grinde: For aboriginal communities, especially, it would be devastating to their local economies. Our aboriginal communities are trying to learn to live in a modern society. Most of the kids today don't have a really close connection to the land because they live in a village, not on the land. There are a few, in the Northwest Territories, such as Colville Lake.... Almost all of the young people in Colville trap. It is the biggest economic engine they have.

Even where non-aboriginals are allowed to trap, trapping is done in as humane a method as possible today, which is regulated by law in Canada. It is also done under a sustainable management regime. Fur is probably the greenest form of clothing that we can wear, as far as that goes. It is a completely environmentally friendly, renewable resource. I see people who want to ban trapping as animal rights activists. I struggle with that. I know that is the polarization we talked about. How do you balance it?

If we have a sustainable harvest, the populations thrive under a certain amount of use. The economic activity that it brings, the tie that it brings between the people and the land is invaluable. If it weren't for that tie, I don't believe our aboriginal peoples in the north would be so dead set against development. In the Northwest Territories, every big corporation that goes out there to try to do anything struggles to get a permit in place. I think the biggest reason for that is that tie they have to the land.

It's no different for me. The last thing in the world I want is somebody to come out and start some big mine in my hunting area. I love that place. I love that land. I would fight tooth and nail against that to the best of my ability. I don't have much ability, but....

I really believe that it is exactly like the Kenyan example. If we were to outlaw trapping in Canada, then of what value are those animals and that land to the people who occupy the land? Therefore, we would just see more development and animals being totally wasted because they become a nuisance.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That is what we heard before as well, the importance of, as you said, sustainable management. I think that gets lost on certain activists.

Could you elaborate a little bit more on the role of hunting and trapping and how they play such an important part in Canada's conservation efforts?

● (0920)

Mr. Harold Grinde: We have already talked about how almost every hunter belongs to some kind of conservation organization and puts money on the ground to try to improve habitat. I have been president of different conservation organizations, and lots of times we are handcuffed by government bureaucracies that won't....

For example, we are trying to burn sheep habitat in Alberta, on the east slope. We fight fires. Without naturally occurring fires, we don't regenerate the habitat. We try to do control burns, but we are really handcuffed and we are not able to put the money that we have raised onto the ground to do those projects.

Lots of times we are not able to actually get on the ground to improve habitat and do things. Conservation organizations do a lot as far as picking weeds in the mountains goes and doing all kinds of things like that. I pick invasive species weeds in my camp that have been brought in over the years on horse feed. We have that connection to the land as hunters and fishermen. I think that's lost on a lot of people. They think we are murderers and they need to stop us.

I think stopping us would do exactly the opposite of what they would hope. I think wildlife is better off because we are there, because it is in our best interest to manage and conserve that wildlife for generations to come. I hope my kids and grandkids are able to do what I do.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's a shameful attitude, but that is one of the purposes of having this study, so people in your community can actually have a voice and bring that forward to educate Canadians about the importance of what you do.

You brought forward a point that we really haven't talked about, about government bureaucracies and stuff like that. What would you say are the obstacles to hunting and trapping in the Northwest Territories? You talked a little bit about the parkland and the rights of aboriginals versus non-aboriginals. Could you talk to us a little bit about the obstacles that you face, government and otherwise?

Mr. Harold Grinde: As an outfitting industry, one of the biggest obstacles we face is—and I see it probably as a little bit of a plan by some people in power—the restriction my clients from the United States or somewhere else in the world face in transporting wildlife home. It gets a little more difficult every year. It's almost like somebody says if we make it hard enough, they'll just quit coming.

The same with guns. In Canada, we thankfully have gotten rid of our registry. Canada is very simple. We know what the rules are and it's easy for our clients to come to Canada with guns. We just had a recent scare. The United States was not going to let any hunters export their firearms unless they did an electronic export application, which basically they had to hire a lawyer to do. That's been temporarily suspended because they really didn't have the technology in place to implement it.

We see those things all the time. CITES for instance, allows us to hunt wolves. We do a wolf hunt in the spring at our camp. We have one officer in all of the Northwest Territories who can issue a CITES permit, and unless he's in the office the day my clients go home, then the hides have to be tanned somewhere in Canada and an application filled out. It's about a three-month process and winds up being about 500 dollars' worth of fees to take a wolf hide back to the United States. It's ridiculous.

Wolves are not endangered in Canada. They're really not endangered anymore in most places in the United States where they have habitat for them, yet we have these rules that have been implemented that are so rigid that we can't bend them, and it's a problem.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks also to you for your presentation, Mr. Grinde.

Thank you for being part of our work and for providing us with your testimony. Unlike my friend Dennis Bevington, I am no expert on the Northwest Territories. So we are lucky that he is one of us, since he knows the region well, including the status of hunting and trapping in that area and in Canada. Although I am not an expert on hunting and trapping, the conversation interests me a great deal.

Earlier, you mentioned the importance that your organization attaches to conservation, both of habitat and of wildlife. You do important work in that area, in my opinion. You mentioned the conservation work of Ducks Unlimited Canada. When people from that organization came to see us, they talked about the conservation plan, specifically with regard to wetlands. They also mentioned the fact that a lot of organizations had submitted applications but that very few of them had been accepted and been able to receive funding from the government.

Do you know what is in the National Conservation Plan? It provides funding to support habitat protection.

● (0925)

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Grinde: I am not familiar with the specific program you're speaking of. I know from the HAAP meetings I've attended in the last year, there are new government programs in place where local organizations can apply for federal funding to do habitat improvement projects. I think the government, if I remember correctly from the HAAP meeting in December, has renewed that plan and project. I believe it is ongoing, but I'm not familiar with any specific details. I've not been involved in an application.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: You mentioned the importance of scientific knowledge, but also of field knowledge and traditional knowledge. Does your organization have any links or contacts with the federal government or any of its organizations involved in conservation or science, such as Environment Canada or Parks Canada?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Grinde: Not normally. I of course represent the people of the Northwest Territories on HAAP, so that is my connection to the federal government. As you're probably aware, almost all wildlife management in Canada is done at the provincial level, so I have much contact with the Government of the Northwest Territories when it comes to wildlife management policies and practices there. I have a good relationship with the co-management board. I've spoken at the management board several times and will probably continue to do so.

For someone in any jurisdiction in Canada to have much contact with the federal government when it comes to hunting and fishing.... It may be a little bit more on the migratory bird side, but not on other wildlife management because that wildlife management is delegated to the provinces and territories. There is not generally any interaction between hunters and fishermen and the federal government, but much at the provincial or territorial level.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: You highlighted some recommendations that you made to the federal government, but do you have others that you would like to make about your needs as hunters and trappers? What kind of support are you looking for from the federal government, whether it is about science or anything else?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Grinde: If I had a wish list, number one on my list would be that somehow the federal government could entrench the right for non-aboriginals to hunt and fish and trap in Canada. I really think if we could do that, so that we knew that right could never be trampled on as long as there were harvestable, sustainable populations out there, we would eliminate this polarization, with this being all the way over here and the rest all the way over there: pro-trapping and hunting, anti-hunting, animal rights.

I think then we would come to a point where we would all tend to work together for the betterment of wildlife and for the habitat. But when we don't have that security of knowing that we will be able to hunt and fish as long as we do a good job of conserving wildlife, then we will continue to have that polarization and that fighting where we're really spinning our wheels and wasting time and effort.

● (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Choquette.

Mr. Miller, welcome.

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thank you. It's good to be here, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Grinde, I really enjoyed your presentation. You obviously know what you're talking about. As somebody who's had a gun in my hand basically since I was nine or ten, I appreciate that very much. My limit of trapping was live-trapping the odd racoon or squirrel that was getting at my bird feeders, but I appreciate what trapping does in this country and its history.

We were talking about young hunters and schools and what have you. I certainly support that being available to young people who want to understand what hunting and trapping does for the country, but I just want to point out that family traditions are a big part of it as well. I know this from my own, but I also realize that not every family grows up with hunting as I did.

I want to touch on the cariboo in serious decline. Hanging our hat on climate change doesn't get it. Climate has always changed; it always will. I would like your thoughts on....

In my part of the world, rabbits, for example, have a cycle. When the coyote and fox populations are up...and if there's disease, if they get overpopulated, they look after themselves. We haven't seen many fox in our part of the world for a few years; you'd see the odd one. But because the coyote numbers are down, the fox have come back.

Would you agree that in most animal species—in Canada anyway, and maybe in the world—there is that kind of cycle where the populations go up and down?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Absolutely. There are natural biological cycles that seem to be present in every wildlife population. I couldn't agree with you more on climate change. We've had big weather events forever, and we'll probably continue to have them forever. Populations of wildlife are never stable; they are always in flux.

Little weather events in the mountains where we operate can wipe the sheep off one range, but on the next range they make it and they move over and life goes on. It's been happening forever, and I think it'll continue to happen forever, which is probably why the traditional knowledge in the territories says the caribou have come and gone before, and they will be back.

Mr. Larry Miller: Right.

We have to support aboriginal rights to hunt, fish, and trap, but I can quite agree with your comments about non-aboriginals having the same types of rights.

I'd like your opinion on something, and I'll use an example. In Ontario, the moose population is in huge decline, more so than ever in recorded history, and there's no doubt the cancellation of the spring bear hunt in Ontario has been a factor in that. But with regard to the rules for aboriginal hunters, they're wide open. There's absolutely no enforcement. I'll tell you that the population is in danger of being gone if they don't look after it.

Do you agree that while native rights need to be adhered to, rules also have to be adhered to in order to protect the species? Could you comment on that?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Yes, and I know it's hard to infringe on constitutionally granted or treaty granted or land claim granted aboriginal rights, but in the Northwest Territories, for example, ultimately, the Minister of Environment has the final say in the management of wildlife. He just stopped all caribou hunting for all aboriginals because they couldn't come to a consensus on a management plan. He said that's it; nobody hunts until we come up with a plan to recover this population.

Mr. Larry Miller: I wish we had a minister in Ontario—

Mr. Harold Grinde: I'm not familiar with Ontario, but as time goes on, especially in the north, I think public pressure and the light of the public eye will bring our aboriginal populations to the point where they start to work on doing a better job and not overharvesting when they shouldn't be. I see that day coming.

● (0935)

Mr. Larry Miller: Okay. I have one last point, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciated your comments on hunting in parks, and I couldn't agree with you more given the experience I've had. I used to hunt with a gang up on the edge of Algonquin Park. Of course, there's no hunting in the park, but since the land we hunted on was adjacent to it, the moose travelled back and forth and they were the most unhealthy moose. They were overpopulated to the point where they were full of ticks and what have you. They would have had a much better and healthier population if they had allowed some hunting.

I know that's a provincial park and it's not federal, but it's the same kind of example. I think that kind of situation backs up what you're saying, and I appreciate it.

I have one last comment, which you probably won't agree with. If I were to book a fishing trip up in Mr. Bevington's riding, I could catch all the fish I wanted and have enough for a shore lunch, but I couldn't take any home. If the same thing were to happen with big game and the Americans coming here and what have you, what kind of effect would that have on that? Would they not come or would they still come?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Well, I don't see how you can hunt an animal...unless you're going to go to darting the way they do with rhinos in Africa. If they're going to take the life of the animal, then I think, obviously, they would be able to take the trophy home. Most of them don't take the meat home anyway. My statistics show that today, in the Mackenzie Mountains, the value of the meat we give to the local communities is about $750,000.

As long as they are able to take the trophy home, most of them will come. I have an American client coming this summer who comes for the meat. He wants the meat for his company barbeque and he comes to hunt a moose for meat. He could hunt one much more cheaply somewhere else, but he also loves the wilderness and the experience. That's the best way I can answer your question.

Mr. Larry Miller: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Miller, as a chair yourself, you're very adept at getting a few extra minutes in there.

We'll move to Mrs. Ambler for five minutes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Grinde, for coming to see us today and for your very informative presentation.

I find it especially interesting. I represent a very urban riding, so I listened carefully to your comments about how hunters and trappers and anglers are our best conservationists and how they appreciate and have respect for wildlife and take the management of that very seriously. We've heard that quite a bit in our study, so I appreciate the point being made.

Would you agree with me that it's one that perhaps urban Canadians—my riding is very close to Toronto—may not understand and that there's this fundamental disconnect? You did mention the separation of people from the land. I think this is a problem. In fact, I wanted to tell you that I regularly receive a number, not very many but a sprinkling, of letters from my constituents regarding the polar bear hunt and the seal hunt. They're often form letters.

Do you think it demonstrates a kind of fundamental misunderstanding that urban Canadians have about what you do and what hunters in Canada do?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Definitely. I know parts of the urban population still hunt and fish. There isn't a complete disconnect, but I think there is a large disconnect with a big portion of that population. I think it will become more so as they become younger. I see kids walking around today with their faces in their iPads. I don't think they have much of a connect to the land for the most part. It's hard for them to have. It's hard to imagine how they could have it. They really don't understand the tie that we have to the land and to wildlife.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Is this one of the things you might discuss at some point on the HAAP? You mentioned it a few times, and we heard—

Mr. Harold Grinde: We have talked about it a little at HAAP already. I would love to see mandatory teaching of the North American conservation model, the history of what hunters have done, in our school curriculum all across Canada, just to open people's eyes a little. When kids don't know that milk comes from a cow and they think it comes from a store, I think we have a long way to go to somehow keep our kids a little connected. It would be a starting point, to teach that North American conservation model in our schools.

● (0940)

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you for mentioning that in your presentation and the fact that it's been so successful. Maybe one of the things we could teach the students is how and why, and talk to them about examples like Kenya. The average person from a city would think the solution is to ban hunting if you want to save a species, but it turns out that it could very well be the opposite.

How many women are involved in your business and in outfitting in the Northwest Territories. Of the roughly 330 visitors you have in a year, how many of them are women, and is that growing or decreasing?

Mr. Harold Grinde: Probably it is on the rise. More and more women are becoming involved in hunting. If we take 400 a year in the mountains between eight of us, I would think maybe 50 women, maybe a little less, 25 to 50. We take three or four every year, but not necessarily as hunters. Quite often they come with their husband as a non-hunter, as a companion. Maybe he hunts a sheep and they hunt a caribou or something. But we have some every year. I think it's on the increase. We have several young ladies in the guiding industry. They work as professional guides as well as cooks and rangers.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: There is a tourism opportunity there—

Mr. Harold Grinde: Absolutely, yes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: —a couples' resort.

Mr. Harold Grinde: Yes, for sure.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: We have heard it is on the increase in other parts of Canada. I think that's also a good sign and one of the reasons why we need to get women involved younger and younger.

Mr. Harold Grinde: For sure. Over the course of time I think we will see more and more women involved at all levels as hunters and guides and outfitters. We have one young lady who guides for us who is very passionate about becoming an outfitter. That's her goal in life.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: That's good to hear. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Ambler.

We'll move to our last questioner, Mr. Sopuck, for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: You used the acronym SWAAG; what does that mean? You're on a committee.

Mr. Harold Grinde: SWAAG is the stakeholders wildlife act advisory group. The Government of the Northwest Territories has been trying for 20 years to get a new Wildlife Act. It's been rejected every time they put one forward. In his wisdom, the Minister of the Environment in the Northwest Territories established this group to advise and try to make changes to the draft act to make it palatable to everybody in the territories. As a group, we didn't get all our wishes but we definitely made lots of improvements to the act and worked hand in hand with government. I think the work of SWAAG was pivotal to the NWT government getting a new Wildlife Act.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I'm sure you're familiar with the situation of the woodland caribou, especially in Alberta and B.C., and one of the things that governments are doing is grabbing the bull by the horns with active predator control, wolf control, to stabilize the population of woodland caribou there. You may be interested to know that as chair of the Conservative hunting and angling caucus, I keep myself very alert in terms of public feedback from various activities that governments do. I can assure you we've received no negative feedback on that particular program, so I think that times have definitely changed in our favour.

Just on the subject of predator control, is that the kind of program you would like to see governments institute to improve the populations of Dall sheep, caribou, and moose?

Mr. Harold Grinde: When needed. There's a danger of having large carnivores become iconic species and where public pressure would have us manage for large predators and not for all wildlife. Wildlife management conservation has to be balanced. We have to consider all the different factors.

As much as we would like to think that we will some day have this natural ecosystem where we're not interfering, it's never going to happen in the world again. There's too much commercialization. There's too much development. There's too much interference. I think we need to be prepared, as the governments have done with the woodland caribou populations, to do what needs to be done to keep all species. We cannot manage wildlife for one iconic species, for wolves, grizzly bears, or cougars. We have to look at a balanced approach. We have to manage for all wildlife.

A good friend from South Africa, named Ron Thomson, worked in the park system in Zimbabwe for for years. He said wildlife management has to start at the soil. If we don't protect the soil, we won't have the plants, and if we don't have the plants, we can't have the animals. We can't start at the top and manage wildlife for wolves and bears. We have to start by protecting the land and protecting everything down the chain.

● (0945)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's one of the things I find so striking about the experience of somebody like yourself who lives on the land, and the armchair environmentalists, who don't live on the land. The differences couldn't be more stark. Your point of view is based on reality, experience, and knowledge about what actually goes on out there. I think people like yourself need to be listened to a lot more. This is one of the reasons we were so proud to initiate this particular study.

How can our federal government help you going forward?

Mr. Harold Grinde: I think it's exactly what you're doing, listening to the people who have that hands-on experience and that knowledge, that wisdom, from years of living on the land.

I know there's a bill in Parliament—what stage it's at right now, I'm not sure—to make sure that nobody can interfere with somebody who's lawfully hunting or fishing in Canada. I'd like to see if we could find a way to go a little bit further and somehow entrench the rights of every Canadian to hunt and fish if they so chose. That would be a huge step in the right direction.

The Chair: Thank you to all our committee members for your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Grinde, for being here.

I want to point out to our committee that, generally speaking, when witnesses are coming from a distance, we try to have them by video. Mr. Grinde was here on his own dime doing some other personal business, so it was great to have him here in person.

Mr. Grinde, I want to thank you for your testimony today. All the best.

Mr. Harold Grinde: You're very welcome. Thank you for the opportunity. I really do think it's important to hear from the common folk, and that's all I am. Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're going to declare a three- or five-minute recess and we'll reconvene in camera for committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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