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Chair

Mr. Rodney Weston

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC)): I'll call this meeting to order.

Thank you very much, Mr. Crabbe, for joining us by video conference. I assume that our clerk has advised you that we generally allow about 10 minutes for a presentations from our guests, and then we'll move into questions and answers from our members.

Mr. Crabbe, whenever you're ready, if you want to proceed with your presentation, please do so. The floor is yours.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe (Executive Director, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the significance of recreational fishing in Canada. I've reviewed much of the very comprehensive information that you have been presented with by a number of sources on recreational angling from a national perspective. In the interests of not duplicating this information, I'd like to focus on the impact of angling from a provincial point of view.

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation was established in 1929 and proudly represents more than 33,000 members in 121 branches across our province. Ours is considered to be, per capita, the largest wildlife conservation organization of its kind in the world.

In opening, I'd like to address the benefits of recreational angling from an economic, conservation, and quality-of-life basis.

The economic impact of the heritage activities—hunting, angling, and trapping—are estimated to be approximately \$15 billion annually across Canada. In Saskatchewan, a 2006 provincial government study confirmed that more than \$500 million in economic activity was generated in Saskatchewan annually through these activities. This did not include first nation activities. A 2012 update on that information suggests that the number is closer to \$600 million today, with \$400 million of it derived from angling.

In Saskatchewan, more than 25% of our provincial population participates in fishing every year. Angling provides more than 1,500 full-time equivalents of employment in Saskatchewan. This was prior to Cabela's opening two stores in our province over the past three years and aggressive expansions into hunting and angling retailing by a number of other retailers, such as Canadian Tire and cooperatives.

This FTE total also does not include the employees of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, or Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment staff, who number approximately 200.

In most jurisdictions, millions of dollars generated by licence and permit sales support conservation programs and projects.

In 1980, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation convinced the provincial government to increase licence costs to create our fish and wildlife development fund or FWDF. Today, 30% of all licensed sales are dedicated to the FWDF and are used to provide habitat and fisheries enhancement and securement, to operate our provincial hatchery, and to provide funding for education, research, and program development in our province. Most of the \$4.5 million generated by the fund is matched by NGOs.

From a conservation standpoint, in 2006 the SWF entered into a fisheries enhancement agreement with the provincial government to take on smaller enhancement projects that, although numerous, were considered difficult to manage. To date, we have completed more than 70 projects, many of which have turned out to be major enhancement works, well into the millions of dollars.

The SWF now oversees or partners in all fisheries work in the province. Effective October 2014, we have also taken on the administration role for the fisheries component of the FWDF and we administer and manage the provincial fish hatchery and culture station. We will be celebrating that facility's 100th anniversary this year.

In addition, millions of dollars are raised each year by wildlife federations to protect and enhance fisheries habitat and to provide funding for research, outdoor education, and management. We also actively finance and provide thousands of volunteer man hours towards invasive species programs and species at risk research and initiatives.

From a financial, volunteerism, and advocacy point of view, anglers and hunters are the backbone of today's modern conservation movement.

The quality of life benefits provided by these heritage activities are very difficult to quantify. In a recent survey in Saskatchewan, more than 50% of Saskatchewan residents stated that their proximity to and available access to nature were paramount in their decision as to where they would live. Another recent poll concluded that of the one quarter of a million Saskatchewan residents who annually fish, 79% considered the activity to be a major part of their personal culture, lifestyle, or tradition.

I personally grew up in a family whose social and family lives revolved around these activities and time spent in the outdoors. Over the years, I've come to realize that we share this way of life with millions of others in Canada from all walks of life, and its pervasive influence on our lives would escape most attempts to describe it. I can only suggest that participating in heritage activities with family and friends and individually is the essential component of the Canadian quality-of-life fabric that makes the hunting, angling, and trapping community who, why, and what we are.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Crabbe. We certainly do appreciate your presentation.

Now we'll move into questions and answers, and we'll start off with Monsieur Lapointe.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Crabbe, I hope you can hear the interpretation into English.

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: According to Lorne Fitch, who spent a number of years as a biologist within the Alberta Fish and Wildlife Division, the province is experiencing a fishing crisis. In an article published on April 23, 2015, he said that the crisis was not caused by the overfishing attributable to recreational fishers, but rather by the cumulative effect of the exploitation of resources. That leads to fish habitat destruction, especially the destruction of certain spawning habitats in the headwaters.

Do you think the earlier stages of a crisis or a full-blown crisis affects some sectors in terms of resource availability for recreational fishers and, if so, what specific sectors of the province are affected? In fact, could you tell us what can cause this problem and give us some suggestions to improve the situation?

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I would say that that is not the case in Saskatchewan. There is not overuse by any anglers, whether commercial fishing or recreational angling. I would agree that one of our biggest issues in Saskatchewan remains access for fish to spawning areas. In Saskatchewan our road system is very elaborate. We probably have more roads in Saskatchewan than most of the other provinces combined. Of course, that has created difficulties for fish spawning in historical spawning areas. One of the major proposals we have here is rebuilding those road structures to allow for fish passage.

It certainly is an impact that might not be that important with one single roadway, but a lot of times we have several roadways and many miles of historic spawning grounds to re-access.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Based on your expertise, would you say that we have to implement technical solutions to ensure that the

construction and reconstruction of those roads and highways are not harming the development of spawning grounds? How could the federal partner help adopt solutions?

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely, we do them all the time. I mentioned the 70 projects we have undertaken. Probably 50 of them were exactly that, reconstructing roadways to allow for fish passage.

I would comment that we have not used any federal money to do any of those projects, because of the requirement not to have any other level of government funding available or used within the program. We have now moved the fish and wildlife development fund away from provincial government control to an NGO, which we manage, and we're hopeful that we'll be able to access some of the federal fishery dollars to help us continue the work we're doing here in the province.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Now that the framework gives you access to federal support, could you determine with some accuracy what assistance from the federal partner you would need?

• (1115)

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I would say that our biggest issue when we look at the fishery dollars as they're being allocated or accessed is that they don't really seem to identify the opportunity at the community level. We find in Saskatchewan that the vast majority of opportunities we have are in small-town Saskatchewan, or are in the proximity to small-town Saskatchewan. Again, we haven't accessed any federal dollars yet. We certainly hope to in the future, but our first take on it is that many of those dollars seem to be directed toward large national NGOs rather than smaller NGOs like the SWF, where we can bring things down to the community level.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: What you just said is interesting. In other words, even if a small NPO has a highly relevant mandate and is supported by the community, the fact that it is small makes its access to federal funding more difficult.

Have you noted that kind of a dynamic on more than one occasion?

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely. Just recently, the vast majority of the moneys that were provided for habitat securement went to Ducks Unlimited and Nature Conservancy, and it becomes so onerous on smaller NGOs to access those dollars that, to be quite blunt with you, we don't see the value in even trying to access those dollars, so we don't try.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: In brief, small organizations are even thinking about giving up on the idea of asking the federal government for assistance because access to that assistance is so difficult.

You have extensive expertise. I am sure that, in the past, if you were refused access to government support, you would not simply be told that your organization was too small. They must have given you another argument. Why would the federal government not support the smaller NPOs?

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Oh, I wouldn't say that they're not supporting them.

First of all, the basis with the federal fisheries opportunities had a requirement in there that said that you couldn't utilize other levels of government money to leverage the federal program, and in Saskatchewan, all of our fisheries work is conducted by NGOs, utilizing our fish and wildlife development fund, which is considered by the federal government to be a level of government funding, so we were denied our first few. Of course we still have to move on and make sure those jobs get completed, so we're glad to hear that they are looking at changing those requirements within that, and that now that we've moved our fund to an NGO, we won't be experiencing that difficulty.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have four—sorry, three minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: I have another note from our research I would like you to comment on.

In 1985, there were 343,300 licensed anglers in Alberta. In 2010, they were only 252,000, a drop of more than 26%. What factors would explain that drop in participation? The data goes from 1985 to 2010. Has the trend been successfully reversed between 2010 and 2015?

You previously said that you increased the license price. What kind of an increase are we talking about? Was it part of the necessary resources to invest in initiatives in order to reverse the trend and bring people back to recreational fishing in your province, Saskatchewan?

• (1120)

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: We didn't experience the same types of issues. I believe you were referring to Alberta.

In some lakes in Alberta, you actually go through a draw system to be able to access the opportunities to angle on them. If I remember, if my figures are correct, Alberta has about 800 fishable lakes in their province. We have just over 80,000, so we have a lot of Albertans who fish in Saskatchewan. We're not within that area.

The only time we've had a decrease in our number of anglers, which was very short-lived, was when there was a major increase in the cost of licences a number of years ago. We had a decrease for one year in Saskatchewan, but that was quickly brought back up, and I would think that over a 10- or 15-year period, you'll see Saskatchewan licence sales continue to increase every year. We

only have 1.1 million people in Saskatchewan and we have over a quarter of a million anglers.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: You have constructive and positive experience in maintaining the recreational fishing participation rate. What good decisions have you made at the provincial level to be so successful?

[English]

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Both from a government standpoint and with the NGOs, we promote free fishing weekends. There's a lot of participation by NGOs. Again, we have 121 branches, and probably over 80% of them are involved in maintaining an existing fishery around their area, or spawning grounds, or whatever it might be. So again, it goes back down to the community level. Our branches, through their communities, are heavily involved and heavily invested in the angling opportunities around their communities.

The Chair: Mr. Leef.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Crabbe, thank you, and welcome to committee today.

I appreciate your observations on the recreational fisheries conservation partnership fund. Initially it was a little more of a challenge to access it, largely because, as you mentioned, the stacking of the partner dollars from any other level of government would exclude you from taking advantage of that. Of course, members of the Conservative Hunting and Angling Caucus and members coming from the Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel heard the comment about that being a limitation to the recreational fisheries fund, and that has been changed now. So groups like yours can share provincial dollars as well as that federal funding and can stack it in order to maximize your use of that program.

Of course, you did say you made those changes to the way you've aligned it. But just so you know, those changes have been made, and indeed you can stack those provincial dollars with the recreational fisheries program now.

As I mentioned, in part it did come from the Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel, and I'm just wondering whether Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation has representation on the Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, I'm the representative.

Mr. Ryan Leef: How has that been so far in terms of representing angling interests and recreational fishing? Obviously there are going to be some learning curves along the way, but as a starting point, how beneficial has that been to exposing your federation's concerns?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I think it's been instrumental in a number of different avenues, but I would comment that, like any other newly established advisory panel or specific stakeholder group, we took a while to get a little bit of traction, though not that long considering all the Type A personalities you might have on a committee like that. I would say that we are now very much starting to recognize some of the benefits, and realize some real gains in that area.

The areas we're looking at right now are so diverse and there are so many different opportunities there that I think it's a matter of picking the low-hanging fruit to begin with and then moving down the path.

But I think as far as the venue or the vehicle to make those things move ahead goes, it's been wonderful.

● (1125)

Mr. Ryan Leef: In your opening remarks you mentioned a little bit about what recreational fishing brings to Canadian quality of life. We often talk about its contribution to conservation, and we try our best to celebrate the great work that people in the outdoors, particularly with angling and hunting pursuits, do for conservation.

The one thing that does get overlooked a little bit, I think—and I'll invite you to comment—is its contribution to the community, and what recreational angling opportunities provide for community growth, family growth, and positive and healthy engagement for youth in the community. Do you have any specific examples of how you engage youth? Also, what is your own personal position on the value of outdoor pursuits to healthy and prosperous communities?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: In Saskatchewan 15 years ago, I was fortunate enough to be on a small committee [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a new strategy here in the province called “Classrooms On Ice”. Of course, Saskatchewan has a fairly lengthy winter—7 months, I think, is the average length—so we spent a great deal of time ice fishing. We decided we would utilize that opportunity by actually placing three large buildings on several lakes across Saskatchewan and having a grade 4-to-6 curriculum, grade 7-to-9 curriculum, and grade 9-to-12 curriculum. Students would come out and spend the day doing benthic water-quality sampling and studying fish physiology and, of course, also spend some time angling. That program has put thousands of youth through that educational process. I was an instructor for the first couple of years in there. It started 15 years ago, and I can tell you that I still occasionally meet young people walking down the street somewhere who recognize me and say that was a turning point in their lives.

The conservation officers in Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation have another program called “Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs” that's designed primarily to be promoted within our two major areas, Saskatoon and Regina. It's the same type of thing. It's an opportunity to take different youth, different classrooms, out to learn how to fish and to have fishing in the outdoors as a very viable option for them in their lives and their futures.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you for that. It's an interesting program and an interesting program name.

There is a focus on outdoor pursuits now, when you consider the hunting and angling advisory panel, the recreational fisheries partnership fund that's now going to total \$50 million in just a handful of years, this study on recreational fishing by the parliamentary committee, the one going on currently in the environment committee on the value of hunting to conservation, and MP Norlock successfully introducing a private member's bill enacting a national day respecting hunting and trapping and heritage culture. I've been involved in hunting, angling, trapping, and outdoor pursuits my entire life as well, and I don't ever recall a time when a government has focused so much on outdoor pursuits.

I have a twofold question. Do you recall a time when the federal government has been as actively involved in celebrating and promoting and supporting hunting, angling, trapping, and outdoor

pursuits in the past? Two, largely because we align these things as provincial responsibilities—most often wildlife management, wildlife laws, wildlife investment, conservation investment come at the provincial level—do you think it's just nice to have the federal government paying attention to this? Is it something we need to have, or do you believe it's essential that the federal government be involved in the way it is in this kind of discussion now?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: It's absolutely essential. You know, the natural resources transfer agreements of Saskatchewan from 1929, I believe, moved those natural resources under the umbrella of the province, but we still have a great deal of regulation. There are so many areas where the federal government is still heavily involved, and certainly supporting fisheries and wildlife habitat programs is essential in Saskatchewan. Again, we only have a tax base of 1.1 million people, so being able to access federal dollars is going to really have a huge impact on us over the next decade for protecting some of those areas.

● (1130)

Mr. Ryan Leef: In your licence sale program, which is probably much like some of the other provinces I have experience with, you have 250,000 anglers, including all licences, not just licence sales. I guess what I'm driving at is that you offer free licences for children under a particular age and for seniors over another age, but this 250,000 encapsulates all of them as well.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, it does.

Mr. Ryan Leef: So the percentage of anglers in the population is fairly significant.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely.

Mr. Ryan Leef: In terms of your local communities, I know you mentioned about \$400 million in economic growth in Saskatchewan from angling pursuits, if I've got the number right. Does that number include direct and indirect economic return?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes.

Mr. Ryan Leef: So that includes hotels and fuel purchases and weekend stays in communities and meals and travel.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, Mr. Leef, we found another interesting byproduct in the process of doing our study with the provincial government. Normally in most economic activities the vast majority of the moneys run from the rural areas back towards the urban areas, but with hunting and angling the pipeline is actually reversed, if you like, moving dollars from urban centres out to the rural areas. So it certainly is a great equalizer when it comes to economic activity.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Excellent. You mentioned you've got a lot of lakes in Saskatchewan and that you've got a couple of neighbouring provinces that have equal opportunities in terms of outdoor pursuits. Does your federation get involved much in promoting or marketing Saskatchewan as a destination point for recreational fishing opportunities?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Of course, the majority of our members in the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation are residents of Saskatchewan, so most of our pursuits are developed with them in mind, but of course, there's an immediate byproduct to enhancing any fishing opportunities. We also own 67,000 acres of land and manage another 100,000, so even though our focus might be on the opportunities for our residents and members, the byproduct is other Canadian residents and a lot of American folks who come and visit us. So it plays out well for everybody.

Mr. Ryan Leef: Thank you for your time.

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

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, sir.

Could you comment on the mortality rate with the catch-and-release in the recreational fishery in your province and advise if there is enough data? What species would the high mortality be a problem with, and how could that be improved?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: We're actually helping U of R, the University of Regina. We've just adopted some research with them on barometric trauma, which is a nice term for releasing fish that are caught, to see within a water column.... I don't want to get into the science of it too much.

A lot of tournaments are held in Saskatchewan for walleye, and we see people catching walleye and releasing them. Bringing them from deep water into shallow water and then trying to release them causes a lot of mortality. One of the avenues we're going to look at is on trying to get some definitive answer on catch-and-release and what kind of mortality is created by it.

All of our research that we've helped fund to this date would support that catch-and-release boils down to how a fish is handled when it's brought into a boat or on a shore and how quickly it can be placed back in the water.

There's a lot of research that we're trying to help fund right now, and hopefully we can come to some definitive answers.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

In our province, one of the biggest catch-and-release is the bluefin tuna, which of course is of great interest where I come from. I understand the mortality rate is quite low in that fishery.

What other species in your province are highly used for recreational fishery? Do you see any other emergent species coming on? Basically, do you see the expansion of the recreational fishery in your province?

• (1135)

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I absolutely do.

Saskatchewan has all of the normal species for prairie provinces. Our three major fish would be walleye, pike, and perch. We also have lake trout as our only native trout species, but within our fish culture station we also produce 10 other varieties of fish that are populated throughout our province.

Carp is an invasive species in Saskatchewan, but it has suddenly become very attractive for people from Europe to fly over to Saskatchewan to fish for our carp. We're in somewhat of a dilemma. It's a great economic opportunity, but it's also an invasive species that's causing some damage.

There are always changes in the aquatic world.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much. It's interesting indeed. At first you were fighting it, and now it could possibly become an asset to your economy.

Could you comment on DFO's capacity in science and enforcement? Is there enough science, research, and enforcement in the recreational fishery? You mentioned that some fish were taken into certain areas and released, and probably areas that they should not have been released in. Is there a way that you plan to deal with this issue? You certainly do not want the fish to die after they're released.

I wonder if you could expand on that.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: On DFO's role in our province?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Yes, and would DFO have a role in...?

You're indicating that carp or a certain species are taken into shallow water and let go, and probably do not survive.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I mentioned that our fish hatchery is a hundred years old this year. It was first held and controlled by the federal government. It put whitefish into several lakes where they had never existed before. We were fortunate that they all eventually died off because they shouldn't have been there to begin with. A century of experimentation has created a lot of issues. Some have become very positive, and some we're still dealing with.

I would think that DFO's role in our province is that they only have access to enforce on habitat, not on fish itself. Our one DFO office that we have in Saskatchewan doesn't deal with linear development. If we have issues with DFO and need their assistance, we have to go to Ontario, to Burlington, to try to get some assistance.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Very interesting.

I was a little late getting here, and perhaps the question was asked, but could you summarize what the economic impact is now from the recreational fishery, and basically where do you see it going?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: In Saskatchewan it's estimated that over \$400 million is generated every year by angling itself. We made a comment about Alberta. We get a lot of Alberta visitors who spend a lot of time fishing in Saskatchewan throughout the summer, and even in the winter. A lot of Americans come up to Saskatchewan. We still have what's classified as pristine waters in the north of Saskatchewan. Economic activity is going to just increase, and then the pressures that are on our fisheries will obviously increase also.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: I suspect you have a lot of advertising. Also, do you spend much money on educational programs, such as dealing with the mortality rate and how fish should be handled, so that on the catch and release program the mortality rate is kept down? Do you have much in the line of educational programs to help you do your best to keep the mortality rate low? Would you have any examples?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, absolutely. It's an educational process, so we do everything from television PSAs, radio announcements. We have signs at the vast majority of our lakes. For anybody who comes to fish in Saskatchewan, we make sure they're well aware of our requests for methods for release, especially for people from outside Saskatchewan, because on average they practise catch and release more than Saskatchewan residents do. We want to make sure that everyone's playing whatever role they can in making sure that mortality is kept to a minimum.

• (1140)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Has your educational program been a long-running program? Also, when boats are put in the water or shifted from one water to the other, sometimes we have invasive species that can be taken from one area to another or can harm the waters the boat is put into. What protection do you have, or what measures are taken to make sure that if I put my boat in the water in a certain area and it came from another area, it does not bring in something it shouldn't or could cause harm in your water?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Given some of the invasive mussel species that are being experienced now in Manitoba, we've really ramped up our educational component about it in Saskatchewan. Actually, on Thursday, the Minister of Environment in Saskatchewan and the SWF are unveiling some, and I would hesitate to call them high-pressure wash systems because they get quite insulted if you do that, portable units that we'll be taking around the province to various fishing events. Of course, on the access issue from Alberta or from Saskatchewan, highways, etc., are very, very numerous, so it's very difficult to try to police all of those. Our only opportunity is perhaps to police them at the U.S. border crossings. I don't think those border guards have the training or special equipment necessary to determine those types of things, so we're relying on the larger community, and any individuals who are coming to our province to make sure they're taking the right steps to ensure those invasive species opportunities are very, very limited, if any.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Basically what you're saying is it's an educational program that is voluntary, really. There's no way you can actually say that you're monitoring the situation. You probably are monitoring it as well as you can, but it's an issue that's pretty nearly impossible to monitor. Is that correct?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I would say it's pretty nearly impossible to police. We're just unfolding a provincial program where we're going to be providing monitoring at all of the major lakes, rivers, access

points, with testing equipment to see if mussels are present. Once you find them, you've probably let the genie out of the bottle already, but at least we have some form of recognition that the problem exists.

There's some good news with another good Saskatchewan product: potash seems to control mussels quite well.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much. Good luck with what you're at, for sure.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacAulay.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Crabbe, thanks very much for being with us today.

Certainly, we've heard a lot of interesting information from you. It's interesting to hear that yours is the largest wildlife federation in the world, if I heard you correctly. I think that's quite impressive.

Certainly, we've also heard about the economic contribution of recreational fisheries in Saskatchewan. I think the \$400 million from angling alone speaks volumes. The fact that you talked a bit about retail expansion and the value to community is also something we have to keep in mind when we're talking about recreational fisheries. I think these all play a huge part.

Part of our mandate in this committee is to figure out who's participating in recreational fisheries. You talked a bit about some of your educational programs in trying to get young people involved. Is there a specific demographic that is more prevalent than others when it comes to recreational fisheries or is it spread across the spectrum? Whatever your answer may be, is this a long-standing historical trend or are you seeing something different emerging?

• (1145)

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: No.

I might mention that our claim to be the largest in the world is on a per capita basis. With Saskatchewan having a population of only 1.1 million, the people from the OFAH might take it personally if we said we were the largest.

We recently started a new electronic data platform for angling and hunting licences in Saskatchewan. It's only three years old, so we only have true data based on that. Of course, any children in Saskatchewan under the age of 16 don't require a licence and never have, so our information is based only on our own research.

I have a three-year-old grandson who caught his first fish at two years old. It's probably one of the few activities in the world that is somewhat accessible from two or three years old right through to 80 or 90 years old. It's a lifetime opportunity that I think people who fish understand. For people who don't fish, I would imagine it's difficult to describe it to them.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I would agree with that. My two-year-old grand-daughter loved it last summer and I hope she continues to love it. It's a great opportunity for all ages as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: You talked about walleye, pike, and perch being the main species for recreational fisheries. Has that been the long-standing case or has the species list changed?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: No, that's been the case pretty much since they started keeping records. Our federation started tracking fish records back in the fifties and it seems the primary focus of all angling was those three species.

The introduction of different trout species has certainly given opportunities to other anglers to look at those other species in a lot of areas that normally may not have experienced anything outside of those three main species.

Largemouth bass and smallmouth bass have been introduced in Saskatchewan in the last 15 years, and there are a couple of other fisheries that are doing very well.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Has your organization has been involved in the introduction of different species?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely, yes. We operate three hatcheries of our own and now we manage the provincial hatchery.

Of course, as with most other governments there's been cost-cutting, especially of conservation officers, over the last decade I would say. We kind of jumped into the role of providing things like transportation of fry or fingerlings to lakes throughout the province and we assume that role at all levels now with fisheries.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I think one of the things we've heard from several people who have been before this committee is the fact that there is really no good way to obtain accurate data when it comes to recreational fishing. I think you've referred to that in some of your comments here this morning, saying you're doing the best you can to obtain it through those who do purchase licences, and then estimating for others.

Are there any plans to change that so that we can get a better handle on numbers and how many fish are being caught in Saskatchewan?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, as I mentioned, we have the new electronic licensing system, which provides a really terrific opportunity for them to do surveys, to actually engage anglers at the onset when they buy their licence to perhaps keep a log of the number of fish they caught or released, whatever it was, and how many times they were fishing.

One of our stumbling blocks right now, of course, is that licensing is controlled by the Province of Saskatchewan. Being politicians, I'm sure you'll understand that with the provincial government going into an election year, they don't require seniors to have licences in Saskatchewan, which is something we vehemently disapprove of. We think they can have a free licence, but they should have a licence. But as I said, being politicians, I'm sure you recognize that the provincial government doesn't really want to do something like imposing that on seniors in Saskatchewan just before an election. We're hoping that right after the election they'll let the boom fall, but we'll see how that goes.

● (1150)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Here in Ontario seniors don't have to have a licence either, so maybe that'll change as well.

What about the numbers of fish that are harvested? Other than people just reporting the numbers allowed under their licence, is there any other way that you can keep track of how many fish are actually harvested?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, we use different systems within the lakes we have concerns about. As an example, on Lac La Ronge, which is a heavily fished lake with trophy-sized lake trout in it, people have to have a log there. We do that in several lakes where, if there's an issue with a population or we think there is, we would introduce the requirement to have a log and you would have to track each fish you catch, if you keep it, what size it was, when you caught it, so we're able to get somewhat of a picture of, if nothing else, the class structure of those fish and, certainly, how many are being kept.

In a lot of cases we have what we call CR lakes, which have restrictions that are placed based on where we see the population going. So you might be able to keep 10 perch in one lake, 15 in another, 25 in the third one. It's very population-based on how many fish you can keep. Some, of course, we have completely closed off. You can fish in them, but you can't retain any fish.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: What would you say the top issues of concern are for recreational fishers in your province?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I think, like most other locations across Canada, it's about fish habitat. In Saskatchewan we're experiencing some economic boom, which is terrific to see, but with that also come cumulative effects that occur when we're starting to develop areas around lakes and rivers. Much is done through the rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, which determine what the environmental impact might be on their portion of the lake or river, when in fact there might be five RMs that share that same watershed. That's one of the issues we're dealing with right now. Again, there's the issue of fish access as we work through the process of rebuilding a lot of those grid roads and highways that have been built around lakes and streams in Saskatchewan.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: How are you addressing those issues? You say you're dealing with them now, but is it through collaboration and through sitting on different boards within different organizations? How is your group dealing with this?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: We're very active. We have watershed associations in Saskatchewan that have cropped up over the last 10 years and are very active and have a great deal of responsibility within our province, so we're very active on those boards. They also provide us most of our identification for fish projects, so it's collaborative in effect. On those types of boards we have a very broad number of stakeholders, which provides us a lot of support from the provincial government, recognizing the support we have from all different avenues there. It's actually working very well.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thank you very much, Mr. Crabbe.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Davidson.

Mr. Crabbe, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for appearing before our committee today on behalf of the entire committee. We certainly do appreciate the input that you've provided to this committee. Once again, thank you on behalf of the entire committee.

We'll take a brief recess while we set up for our next witnesses.

Thank you very much.

• (1150) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1155)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We have guests from Winnipeg and Swan River, Manitoba, so I'd like to thank you, gentlemen, for joining us here today.

We generally allow about 10 minutes for presentations or statements, and then we proceed to questions and answers.

I'm not sure if Mr. Connolly or Mr. Borowski is doing the comments for the Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement, but we'll start with Mr. Olson with your introductory comments and then we'll move on.

Mr. Olson, whenever you're ready, the floor is yours.

Mr. Rob Olson (Managing Director, Manitoba Wildlife Federation): I want to thank you all very much for giving us a chance to speak to you today. It's quite exciting to be here to talk about fishing, one of my big passions and one of the great passions of the organization I run at the moment.

I represent a group called the Manitoba Wildlife Federation. We have about 14,000 members in Manitoba, so we're quite a large group. We are organized.

The most powerful thing about our group, and I think the neatest thing and the reason the group is so special, is that it's organized in clubs. Right now we have 95 clubs spread across Manitoba. Just about every part of Manitoba has a Manitoba Wildlife Federation club. What's great about that is that it's driven completely by volunteers, and they are really great, passionate people.

When I got the invitation to speak I tried to think about the most important thing to say today. In talking to the clubs and people I think the most important thing is to point out the importance of recreational fisheries and why they are important.

An incredible connection happens when you go out and fish. It's not that endangered species or endangered fish are not important; they are, they're very important. We all have an obligation to conserve our biodiversity across Canada, but there is something about the act of doing, of catching a fish, of being out there, and actively participating in the stream or lake and catching that fish and maybe eating some as well and connecting to the food aspect of it. It's a special, deep connection that motivates people in more than any other way you could connect them to water, in my view.

You can talk about clean water, you can talk about endangered sculpin, but when you get someone out there fishing in the lake or stream, they develop a passion and a connection and a reason to volunteer and a reason to care. It's that emotional connection to those

waterways and to those fish that drives people to do incredible things.

I won't bog you down with the hundreds of projects our clubs have done. I'll just provide a couple of examples.

Because of that connection to the fish and fishing, they'll spend hundreds of hours rehabilitating and cleaning streams. We have a lot of examples of that in and around towns and cities where the streams often get clogged or polluted or plugged up with garbage, and the clubs will organize and go out there to clean up those streams and free up those spawning areas for the fish. That is incredibly valuable and important, not just to the pike and the walleye, but also to all the invertebrates and the entire ecosystem that's thriving in that stream.

Our clubs often do spawning enhancement work, so they'll rehabilitate spawning areas in the creeks and streams. We just did a project in Winnipeg on Sturgeon Creek, where we put in spawning structures. We're still working on it.

The reason we all volunteered is that we grew up fishing in that creek and I still fish in that creek today. When the season opens here in a few weeks, on a given night there will be anywhere between 40 and 50, and as many as maybe 74, people fishing that creek in one evening—city people, kids, men, women, old, young, all engaged in the creek. They're connected to the creek, they care about the creek, and they clean it up. Again, it's that connection to the fishing that drives them. It's why they're there and it's why they volunteer.

The recreational fishing passion connection creates stewardship. It creates a sense of ownership so the clubs feel as if they own the lakes and streams, in a positive way. They feel responsible for it.

I think that's a powerful notion for government because there is not enough money in government to be able to pay for everything all the time. We have to mobilize communities. You have to get people to do the work. You need the volunteers. We can't afford to pay people to do all this stuff, so it's that stewardship and that ownership that is the magic that comes from the fishing. Without the fishing it just isn't going to be there at the same level.

There is definitely an economic impact. I'm sure the folks in Swan River will talk a lot about that. They have incredible things going on up there, obviously.

There are lots of parts of Manitoba where trout has been stocked by local groups who want to see economic diversification, and it does it ever drive it. People are showing up from all over the world now to fish in these trout ponds and trout lakes.

We have a little club in Lac du Bonnet that just raised about \$200,000, mostly local dollars in grants and from local businesses, to establish trout in a bunch of ponds called the Blueberry Ponds right here in Lac du Bonnet. People are now coming to Lac du Bonnet to fish, or they're going there for other reasons and then they add the fishing. The fishing seems to be a reason for them to go there, so it's a way to get people to go to rural areas and support small towns. That is really, really important at a time when there are not so many options to get people to go to small towns and rural areas to recreate and spend money out in those places. It's really important from an economic perspective.

• (1200)

The last thing I'll say is that one of the things I'm most passionate about is seeing young people fishing. One of the neat things about that is how it connects them to streams, rivers, and water quality—things that we want to do that you can't do in the classroom. You can't do it by telling them. You can't reproduce or replicate the excitement of a fishing rod bending over and the thrill of something pulling on the other end. It has to be primeval. It has to be something hard-wired into our brains. I've never seen a child or new person do it and not get excited.

That excitement is so special and so unique, we can leverage that. Then we can say, "Hey, do you know what? We're doing a stream cleanup here in two weeks. You enjoyed catching that fish? For that fish to thrive in here, we have to put back. We have to do things to make sure that they're healthy."

In closing, if I could say one thing about the importance of recreational fishing, it would be that a magical connection occurs there with people that turns into all kinds of amazing things at the local level in terms of conservation, not only of recreational fish species but all the other species that live in those areas, and of course the water quality that we rely on as humans as well.

I think that's enough from me for now. Thank you for this opportunity.

• (1205)

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

Mr. Connolly or Mr. Borowski, the floor is yours.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly (President, Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement Inc.): Thank you for the invitation to participate in this; I was quite surprised last week.

We have just had our 29th annual sport fishing banquet. Our group was one of the first original volunteer sport fishery groups in the province of Manitoba. Privately, we've raised close to half a million dollars over the last 29 years. All of that has gone back into the area around here through research, through enhancement, through education in our school systems.

We feel that things have really changed in this province in the last 10 years. Unfortunately, there's been a loss of investment from our provincial government on the importance of our fisheries. We have taken it upon ourselves to step in and continue where we feel the province left off.

The Province of Manitoba has created a fish and wildlife enhancement fund. From that fund, we have probably accessed close to \$70,000 in the last six years. From that, we have stocked lakes, we've done research, we've done management decisions on the water bodies, and we've improved fishing. We've also felt in the last two years that the young people—they're the next generation who come along—are more important than a lot of other issues.

We spend a lot of time in the schools. We do a fish camp for children. Right now, Don Lamont, a known outdoors person, is here for the last two days. I believe he's going to six different schools. He's doing education on fisheries and the importance of getting out, and fishing, just to be outside.

Fishing is a big industry here—it's approximately \$400 million in Manitoba—and it's a fact that you don't have to have a \$30,000 boat. All you have to be able to do is drive to a lake, or drive to a shoreline, and you can catch a fish. Sometimes it's not even about catching fish, it's just to be outside and enjoy the day, whether it's summer or winter, whatever the weather it is. It's hard to explain. If you enjoy fishing it's in your blood.

I've fished in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Alberta. I can honestly say that the Swan Valley, about five hours from Winnipeg, has some of the best sport fishing I've seen. We have a massive range of different species of fish.

There are people coming here from the United States. It's a big economic and social business. We have first nations. We have Métis people. Everyone takes a portion of the fish. It's a big social and economic thing in the rural area and even in the cities. It's not specifically based on race, or based on income, or based on anything. Anyone can do it. Other than that, I don't have a whole lot to say.

The only concern I wanted to bring up in our discussion is invasive species. Invasive species is a Canadian-wide issue. It's getting worse. There are Asian carp just south of our border. We now have zebra mussels in Manitoba, which we never had before. An example that we see of an issue is at our border crossing, which is our front line of defence on things coming into Canada.

A friend of ours, last April, went to Michigan and bought a boat. He's an outdoor guy. He bought a boat in a zebra mussel hot spot in the United States. He crossed the border crossing east of Emerson. He specifically asked if they were interested in checking his boat for invasive species. He was told by the Canadian border crossing they have nothing in place to prevent invasive species from coming into this country.

We have rusty crayfish now. We have zebra mussel now. We need to all work together. We're trying to do our part. Unfortunately if the border isn't doing its part, we're going to have some big issues. It's not just Manitoba, it's Canadian-wide. That's pretty much what I have to say in closing.

I'm not sure if Pete has anything to say.

• (1210)

Mr. Peter Borowski (Vice-President, Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement Inc.): Mr. Connolly, you just about said everything.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: Other than that, I'd like to turn it back over, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Peter Borowski: If I might, I would like to say a few words. I think Mr. Connolly has said almost everything.

I'm Pete Borowski of Swan Valley Sport Fishing Enhancement. I was involved with the sport fishing enhancement group in Dauphin, where I lived about 17 years ago, and then I got transferred up to Swan River. I went from a very good sport fishing enhancement group to the best, or anyway the first, and in fact back in 2000 or 2001—I forget the exact year because my memory is getting poor in my old age—a couple of members of our group were able to go to Ottawa and receive the recreational sport fishing award from the Governor General. I was lucky enough to be one of them. It was quite an honour.

This group does a lot in the area and in lobbying the governments and trying to get them to do a better job. We're feeling that the governments are dropping the ball. In fact, they've lost the ball. We have people in the province who have knowledge and are willing to work, but when you have no budget and you can't leave the office, that doesn't make for management. That makes for analysis of problems and analysis of data, but you have to be out on the landscape.

As Mr. Connolly has said, we are accessing this provincial fisheries fund and are able to utilize that. I won't say what is the percentage of work we're doing that the province should be doing, but it's becoming higher every year, which is a sad comment on fisheries management in Manitoba. Over my years, I worked in resources in the forestry end of things, but continually seeing people outside....

People enjoy the outside. I ran across a situation one time down in Spruce Woods, an area about 80 miles west of Winnipeg, where there were problem kids from a high school who could never get along and who were criminalized and into vandalism and all kinds of difficulties. Put into a common building to look after themselves for three or four days, everybody got along. They fought halfway out to the field but they got there. Everybody calmed down, enjoyed themselves, and had a wonderful outdoor experience. There was no fishing involved, but it just shows you the things that can happen when people are outdoors and recreating. It's good for everybody.

I don't want to go on forever so I'll cut it off there, but thank you for having us here.

The Chair: Thank you very much, gentlemen.

We're going to go into our question and answer period now. We'll start with Mr. Chisholm.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Gentlemen, thank you very much for your presentation.

The passion you have for the outdoors in general and certainly for recreational fishing comes through loud and clear. I'm from Nova Scotia. Mr. Connolly said that he's been there fishing. I certainly grew up on lakes and rivers in different parts of Nova Scotia. It is an important opportunity that some of us certainly have and that we take advantage of.

I'm curious about the role of DFO in the province through legislation. The mandate is, to some extent, the inland waters and is more with respect to fish habitat and protecting fish habitat. I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about your experience and how much of a presence DFO has in relation to the work that you and your organizations do.

•(1215)

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: I'll start.

Probably five or six years ago in Dauphin, DFO rebuilt the train station. They had 30 employees. Their presence was unbelievable. They were everywhere. Now that building is empty of DFO staff. Any information that we have to deal with DFO on is based out of Ottawa now, including all of our permits, all of our applications, and anything involved since then.

We have accessed two projects through the RFCPP. One was for spawning shoal improvement, where we went into a lake and built spawning shoals. The second one was to remove beaver dams in order to have our walleye swim upstream and spawn. We've been doing that for probably six years, and this is the first time that we were able to partner with the federal government. Both of these projects are a huge success.

We really don't see DFO inland anymore. At one time they were there, and now they really don't exist.

By the way, Mr. Chisholm, I'm actually from Liverpool. I grew up there and moved away when I was 21.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: There you go.

Did you do some fishing in the Mersey?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: I fished in the Mersey and the Medway River, yes.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: The Mersey and the Medway, yes; that's good stuff.

We just lost a big experimental biodiversity facility there on the Mersey. The big facility ended up getting bulldozed. It was doing great experimental work not only on Atlantic salmon but also on whitefish.

Mr. Olson, can you comment on DFO's presence in the province?

Mr. Rob Olson: In terms of DFO's presence in the province, I can't remember which years it was when they had staffed up and had a lot of enforcement of people on the ground out here. I do remember at that time I was working with farm groups, and it wasn't seen in a positive light. To me, and from our organization's perspective, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' role in experimentation is outstanding. I think it's not positive that the research facilities have been abandoned. I think that was an important role for DFO.

In terms of the other side, as a landscape-level enforcement agency I don't think it worked. Predictably, it had no chance of working in an agricultural landscape. Maybe regulating point source polluters and pulp mills would be a possibility, but the rural communities push back very hard. They called them fish cops. Any time you have enforcement people going on to farms and telling farmers what they can and can't do, it just doesn't work well. There's a need for rules and there's a need for regulations. I think what we've learned in the last 15 years is that how you approach rural communities is the key.

In terms of how DFO relates to us here, I think those recreational grants are outstanding because they create partnership and stewardship. It gets the local groups like us and others working with the federal fisheries department. I think getting back to some of that experimentation that they were doing is also really important.

On the regulatory role, our group would urge caution. In the future, if DFO was thinking about enforcing the Fisheries Act on the landscape, we'd like to talk about doing that in a different way.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Okay.

Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Connolly, that was an interesting story you told about the boat from the United States that was a hotbed for zebra mussels, the invasive species.

I'm from Newfoundland and Labrador. My riding is in the easternmost part of the province. My advice to you, sir, is just wrap a little bit of seal fur in those zebra mussels and they'll confiscate it every time.

• (1220)

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: We try eating it but, you know, you don't get a lot.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: On a serious note—well, a half-serious note—both of you gentlemen offhandedly mentioned stocking of ponds and lakes. I'm interested in hatcheries and stocking. In Newfoundland and Labrador we don't do that. We don't stock ponds. We don't have hatcheries. A hundred years ago we had hatcheries for cod. We have had hatcheries for some rainbow trout over the years, but none in decades.

How does the stocking of ponds work? Are there hatcheries, and who funds that? How successful is it?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: I sit on the fisheries wildlife enhancement fund subcommittee for the province of Manitoba. Through that I've been privy to some information regarding our hatcheries in Manitoba. Our hatcheries in Manitoba in the Whiteshell park, specifically for trout, almost closed. There were some people in the provincial government who saw no value in that hatchery. Sport fishing groups like mine, and Brad's, we fought very hard to get this hatchery rebuilt. It's basically almost in the final stages of being rebuilt and fully operational again. We raise tiger trout, triploid rainbows, brook trout, rainbow trout, and we have splake. If this hatchery did not exist, we would not have this sport fishing ability in this province, because most of these fish are not native to this province but they are a highly sought-after sport fish.

As I said, there's a trout called tiger trout. They're only in two lakes in our area, and the only reason we have them is that the provincial hatchery has produced them. We have people from Montana and throughout the states coming here. We're having our national fly-fishing championship in lakes in the surrounding area. We have lakes that have to be aerated for these fish to survive. We have fish weighing over 10 pounds. It's a huge sport-fishing industry. The dollar spent on the hatchery has a \$40 return in this province.

We struggled when the province actually wanted that hatchery to close.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Connolly, who funds the hatchery? Who pays for that? Are they provincial government dollars? Are there any federal government dollars in there?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: Up until last year it was a provincially funded hatchery. The province has now turned everything over to our sport fishers. On our sport fishing licence, there's a \$10 enhancement stamp. It went up from \$5 to \$10. So all the sport fishers in this province now contribute directly to the financial running of that facility.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Are there any estimates on the number of fish that it produces, the number of trout?

Mr. Rob Olson: Hundreds of thousands.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: Millions. It's big. Today actually, as we speak, there's brood stock, there's brown trout brood stock being brought from the Whiteshell to be released in one of our lakes in this area because they've exceeded their use in the hatcheries. They're actually bringing the brood stock here. These are big, mature trout.

Don Lamont is a sport fishing kind of person. He's been staying with us. In the last two days he's been out fishing. He and a couple of friends have caught over 10 master angler brown trout. You could go in a 12-foot boat, drive an hour from our house, and catch these fish. I mean these are 22-inch to 26-inch trout, and it's only because of the hatchery.

Mr. Peter Borowski: We have people talking about that tiger trout situation. It's in a lake called Twin Lakes, which is on the.... We are on the west side of Manitoba here about 10 miles from Saskatchewan, so we get a lot of Saskatchewan people coming here. I've personally met a guy who lives in Alberta, has the whole river, lives right in Calgary, packs up the Bow River fishing boat, and comes here annually to spend two weeks with friends. They all gather up and go chasing our tiger trout and our triploid rainbow trout.

I don't know how well you gentlemen know the lay of Manitoba. We have what we call mountains here, the Porcupine—they're really hills—the Duck Mountain, and the Riding Mountain, which is a federal park. But in these two hills or mountains, which are about 1,500 feet elevation above the surrounding area, we have 100- to 200-foot deep lakes that are 1,000 acres, 200 acres. Sometimes there are 20- 30-acre lakes that still have 60 feet of water in them.

This is where these cold-water species go, and they are extremely successful. It's been like that since I've been fishing in the 1970s in this area. It's not unusual to go see through the ice when you're ice fishing—because we have lakes where you can see the bottom—sitting on top of the ice in 25-foot water, and see 30-pound lake trout go by, which is more a rarity because they get caught before they get to that age. So we have a tremendous diversity from the walleye in Lake Manitoba. Lake Winnipegosis is commercially fished and sport fished all the way to these trout, which add a tremendous balance of fishing activity in this area.

• (1225)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: And it's all because of the hatchery.

Mr. Peter Borowski: Yes, sir, the trout, and there is walleye because of the hatchery also.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sopuck.

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

I want to have on the record that both Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski are constituents of mine. I'm very proud to represent them in Ottawa. I attended their fisheries dinner last weekend in Swan River, and it was a marvellous success. I've experienced firsthand the passion and dedication that all of our witnesses spoke about.

I'd like to ask Mr. Olson a question.

This is the first time that the fisheries and oceans standing committee has conducted a study on recreational fishing. So, simply put, why is this study important?

Mr. Rob Olson: In our view it's really important because, if you want to engage people in conserving water and lakes, if you want to engage the citizens in water quality, if you want to get people caring about endangered species that live in those waterways, the best way to get people engaged is through fishing. It just creates this immediate connection, love, and passion for the waterway, and once you hook them through fishing, you've got them. You've got their attention and you've got their minds and hearts. You can have conversations about endangered species. You can talk about water quality. You can talk about the need for wetland conservation to deal with flood mitigation.

You want to try to engage citizens in Canada on all of those issues citizens in Canada. In our view maybe the best way to do it is through a strike on a hook on a rod, with the bending of the rod, and the excitement. There's just something about it; it's magic. You can't take human beings fishing, get them hooked up on a fish, and not see them get excited. They're always fired up about it, then it always leads to great thing. So for me, it's a way in.

The gentleman from Swan River talked about how government can't pay for everything anymore. You know, they talked about how the hatchery is now on the backs of the fishers, and we don't mind that because we have a passion. We realize that government is not going to save us from all these things and can't pay for everything. So, if you as a government are going to try to engage the citizens and you're going to try to get all these things done on the landscape, how will you do that? I think those recreational fishing grounds are awesome. Anything you can do to get people fishing is going to pay off in spades economically and environmentally.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Mr. Olson, given that you are the head of a province-wide group, can you very succinctly answer this question: What is the quality of recreational fishing in Manitoba right now?

Mr. Rob Olson: I think it's incredible. I am not sure what Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski would say, but I think it's amazing. Thanks to groups like those gents in Swan River, I don't think it has ever been better.

I'm going fishing this weekend in Ontario, and I was talking to a fellow out there who is 87 and has been living out there and fishing. He says it has never been better. With modern slot limits and modern management, in spite of declining government revenue, there has been so much done to enhance fisheries. To me, the good old days are now, and I think it can even get better.

Now we have to leverage the excitement and the quality of the fishing into more. How do we use that to get more people into fishing? How do we then engage these people who are fishing into enhancing water further and dealing with water quality, and get their attention on flood mitigation? How do we make the link and say "You love the fishing. It's as good as it has ever been. Well, we need your help right now"? We have other issues on the waterways too, such as invasive species, as the gents were talking about in Swan River as well.

The good old days are now.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Olsen, I'll follow up on your points regarding DFO and the enforcement approach to conservation. If I heard correctly, you said that it clearly didn't work. Can we safely say the enforcement effort that DFO made on the agricultural landscape and other areas basically had no effect on improving the quality of sport fishing in Manitoba?

• (1230)

Mr. Rob Olson: Our view is that it had no effect. I knew a lot of people who took those jobs. We were all graduating about that time. One of the few groups that were hiring at the time was DFO, and so a lot of my friends and different people I know took those jobs. The approach didn't work. It did not enhance fisheries, in our view. That is not to say that regulation is not important. There need to be rules; there needs to be enforcement. But copping up and hitting the landscape with staff like that does not engage humans. It alienates people. It doesn't work. It alienates rural communities, and it's unfortunate because we could do it differently. There is a different way to engage those communities and get better results, not just for recreational fishing, but for water quality and flood mitigation as well.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I couldn't agree with you more. We did get criticized for changes we made to DFO, and to have an expert like you say on the record that that money and that staff were basically wasted on the enforcement effort is very important. I strongly agree with you on the importance of the recreational fisheries fund, simply because we made the choice to change the Fisheries Act, change that enforcement mentality, and put \$55 million into incentive-based programming to help local angling groups enhance fisheries, and all three of the witnesses are basically saying that the fishing quality in Manitoba is second to none.

I guess I'll ask Mr. Connolly this. Spending government dollars directly in partnership with local angling conservation groups is an approach that clearly works, isn't it?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: That works with huge success. Any sport fishing group, as basically Brad has shown passion for, is volunteering not for recognition but because we see there is a need. We see that things have to be done, and anywhere we can access money to improve.... We have massive lists of projects to improve fishing for everybody. We don't do this just so that Pete and I can go fishing. We do it so that Pete and I, and every kid, grandparent, or whoever else in this community, can go fishing and can still go fishing in 10 years and have fish to catch. So any dollars that are available are greatly appreciated. We have huge projects. If there is no money, we can't raise that much money for what needs to be done to maintain high-quality sport fishing in this province.

I can honestly say, Mr. Chisholm, you being from Nova Scotia, that if you came to Swan River, you probably wouldn't go back to Nova Scotia and would never take your rod out again.

Mr. Robert Chisholm: There is no salt in the air—

Mr. Peter Borowski: I am not sure of the procedure here. If I want to put in a few words, should I raise my hand? How should I interject here? I would like to make a comment going back to DFO

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Go ahead, Pete.

Mr. Peter Borowski: Going back to the DFO scenario, when they geared up and came in with bullet-proof vests and guns on their hips, I was still currently employed with the Province of Manitoba in conservation and forestry.

We have a large company that produces OSB here to the tune of more than a million cords of wood a year, basically using hardwoods—poplar and birch—and to a lesser extent some softwoods. And wow, did things become difficult—extremely difficult. They pointed out some good things, such as better small stream management scenarios in places such as Duck Mountain and the Porcupine Mountains. That was good, but they made operations extremely difficult and added a lot of expense.

The Province of Manitoba has initiated, over the last 30 years, groups called water conservation districts, which look at major rivers in this province that have water-quality issues, drainage issues, and issues involving conflicts with agriculture in which fields are flooded and put under water. I think that if DFO is looking for something to work and to get farmers to do a better job, you work with those conservation districts. They are local people; they have context on the land base, because the municipalities are on their boards of directors. They do an excellent job of talking and working with farmers, grassing waterways, improving stream crossings—ford crossings—making them fish-positive. They are a tremendous group to access and to work with.

Thank you.

• (1235)

The Chair: You have about a minute left.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Okay.

Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski, given the passion for conservation that you and your group have clearly displayed, is it safe to say that the angler's role in conservation has been adequately recognized by governments and society?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: By governments, no, it has not been. Our provincial government has once again cut our budget. It blows me away that right now our provincial fisheries manager looks after all of sport fishing and all of commercial fishing in the western part of the province of Manitoba. His office is based in Swan River. The province does not even give him a vehicle to drive. The man is a manager of a provincial fishery and he can't even drive a work vehicle. That's pretty much the only thing you have to explain, because the list goes on further.

It's so frustrating to see a \$400 million industry and not be sure what the provincial government is even doing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Peter Borowski: And going back—

The Chair: I'm sorry; I apologize, but I have to move on to the next questioner.

Mr. MacAulay.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

If you wish to continue your thought, go ahead, and then I'll ask you a question.

Mr. Peter Borowski: As I said, I've been involved in conservation since the 1970s. Going back, there were four fisheries employees in this region, which runs from the American border all the way up to Township 51 in this province. Those were field people.

They went out on Lake Dauphin. They created spawning ripple structures on the major streams that go into Lake Dauphin, which is a major walleye sport fishery in this province. They were engaged in getting stocking trout and trying different fish and doing a tremendous amount of work.

That has basically ground to a halt because, as Mr. Connolly said, when you can't go to the field to do the job, you aren't doing much of a job. The knowledge and the expertise are there, but without money to operate, nothing happens. It's a very sad comment to go from the 1970s to now. Luckily, we sport fishing people are here with access to funds, so that we can try to do some of this.

The majority of us—I don't include myself in it, obviously—are still working people who have jobs, who have to earn a living. We're all doing this after hours or even by taking days off. Mr. Connolly could be hitting his thumb with a hammer right now, but he's sitting here and pleading our case for better fisheries and better fisheries management.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

Basically, what you're telling me is that you need more dollars, wherever they come from, in order to make sure that you protect the fishery. That's where you're coming from.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: To protect the fishery and to ensure that money is being spent in this province, that tourism is a huge factor in the economy. That's the key.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

I would like you to elaborate a bit on what is a real problem in any fishery. You spoke about invasive species with your example of the boat at the border and so on. What needs to be done?

I certainly agree that education promotes exactly what wrongs people are doing. The gentleman you're talking about who came across the border with the boat understood what the problems were, but most of society would not realize the harm they commit by taking certain species into different areas.

I'd like you to expand on what needs to be done more at borders because if we do not do it then we're going to have these invasive species, and also elaborate on what more you would like to do in the education and promotion of what harm they cause when, let's say, people bring a boat from one area to another and don't have it sprayed properly or cleaned.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: I believe in North Dakota—and Brad, you might be able to back me up—if you move a boat from one lake to another lake, you must have a document that says you washed it down in a wash station. They have a lot of invasive species.

But basically at the border, it's pretty cut and dried. It's pretty basic. You have to check the lightbulbs. All this information is out there. It's nothing new. There are rules and regulations that exist all across this country. They just have to be put into place.

Rob, you might be able to explain this a little bit more.

• (1240)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: To be able to make sure when the boat comes across the border at least that it's sprayed, that would be essential.

Mr. Rob Olson: Yes.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Olson, if I were to hire somebody to promote any fishery, I'd hire you. I thought you were going to come right through the screen. Talk about a man who's emotionally connected, you certainly are, and it's certainly quite obvious you love the job you do. I want to say that's a credit to you and a great asset to the fishery.

Mr. Rob Olson: Thank you.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: We've never had quite that many witnesses who seem to be so emotionally connected to what they do.

You're talking about the 95 group clubs you have and what they do. Is that all done voluntarily? Do you raise all the funds to do that?

Also, you talk about people coming from all over the world to fish in different areas in your province. What type of promotion do you have in order to make sure that continues or expands?

Mr. Rob Olson: On the first question, the funds for our clubs, they get the odd provincial grant but very few. The money is 90% private. It's membership dues. They put on local fundraisers as Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski were just talking about in Swan River. Our clubs do the same things. They put on local fundraisers. They have raffles. They work their butts off to raise the dollars privately, and then they spend it locally. They appreciate what they do. They value their money because it's hard to raise.

There's one big part to this. What the provincial government has been getting in Manitoba it has been getting out of the fish and

wildlife business steadily for a decade. We understand health care is expensive, and we have an aging population, and crime. There are big issues. We know that; we get that. But the thing we don't get is we are such a cheap date as a recreational fishing community. We're talking about small dollars and we're talking about massive leverage.

If you put a little bit of money into these communities, you're going to get back tenfold in private fundraising. You get leverage. Those recreational grants kick-start things. You can't afford to pay it all. You have all these other big needs as a federal-provincial government, but you can kick-start stuff.

Those little grants are so important now more than ever because the province is getting out of that business. We cannot afford to hire a whole bunch of people to enforce fishery regulations anymore. You can't afford to pay us for all these spawning structures, but you have us. We'll do it. We can be your fish cops. We care about those streams. We're not going to let people hurt those streams. No one cares about those streams like us because we live in them.

So yes, it's private money, and yes, we'll continue to do it because we have to, because we can't help ourselves. We have that passion for it.

What was the second question?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: You attract a lot of fishery people from around the world. What type of promotion do you use to make sure that continues or expands?

Mr. Rob Olson: I'll keep it really short and pass this one to the Swan River guys because I think they know a little bit more about this than I do. One thing I will say the province has worked really hard at is Tourism Manitoba. They have done a really great job of promoting our fishing in other countries around the world. I've seen their ads as I've travelled globally. I've seen the ads and I think they've done a great job of that. So I will say hats off to the province for doing that.

I will note they just cut their budget, though, in this recent budget. They cut Tourism Manitoba's budget again. I think a lot of the credit goes to them, but I'll let Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski speak about promotion.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: It's pretty much a world of technology that we live in. We produced a website. For example, I just travelled to Costa Rica. When you do, you go online and you google "fishing Costa Rica". So you go online and you google "fishing Manitoba" and you see what pops up. That's the world we live in, so the more information we can get out there, whether it's provincial, whether it's private sport fishing groups like mine and Mr. Olson's, the better.

You can go to the big sport shows, but realistically it is the world of technology. Everyone has a phone. You can google the world. As long as you have any way to advertise yourself out there.... Tourism Manitoba does a really good job and, as Mr. Olson said, they have been cut pretty heavily.

In the north of Manitoba there are a lot of sport fishing lodges. They do well. The dollar is a huge factor as everybody in government knows. When the dollar is down it's a benefit to us in tourism. When the dollar goes strong, unfortunately it's not. But realistically, I think people look for themselves now so you have to be able to have that access in the media, in the electronic media.

• (1245)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Thank you very much.

You talk about lodges. In your recreational fishery, do you have catch and release? Do you have data on the mortality rate, and what do you do to educate people to make sure that the mortality rate is going down instead of up?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: For example, for catch and release we have Mr. Lamont. He's been at the schools, where that was one of the things we discussed; we showed kids how to actually hold a fish, how to do catch and release. Also there's the point that we're not just catch and release; we also like to eat fish. But we encourage people to try to put the females back. They're the ones that are producing.

So it's all about education. The more we can get out to access funds to give them to schools, however we can educate people, the better. It's important. Mortality on catch and release, it's all according to how a fisherman handles the fish.

Mr. Rob Olson: There are lots of good studies about fish mortality with fishing, and we've come a long way, through local groups, like the one these gentlemen from Swan River represent. In the province, we communicate continually about how to handle fish properly and we've been doing that for 20 years.

So I see it now. When you're out on the lakes, you see people handling fish far better than they used to. We've gone barbless in Manitoba. I think we've come a long way in reducing fish mortality in general, and catch and release now is just part of our culture. People just know that now. So from when I was a child to today, it's night and day, the difference in how we treat the fish now. There's so much more respect and it's so much better. We just keep working at that and just keep trying to get better.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: Back to the catch and release, yes, as Mr. Olson said, I can remember as a kid you would go out and catch your limit as much as you could. Now you'll catch as many fish as you can, and you might bring one home just because you'll maybe have one fresh fish, but sometimes you go home and you let them all go. It's the attitude of the fisherman now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Weston.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My good friend and colleague Mr. MacAulay just said a minute ago that we don't often get witnesses who are as passionate as you are about what you're doing. It's really been a pleasure to hear you.

I want to say that Mr. Sopuck probably really stuck his neck out bringing people whom he represents and cares about right into the room with his colleagues, who know him well.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Weston: You know, you really like to see an elected official who draws on his extensive experience, who works in a wheelhouse of relevance for the people he represents, and then takes those gifts not only for the people he represents but also spreads them around the country. I've had the pleasure of having him in my riding, as have my colleagues. He's taken your passion and translated it right around Canada. It's been a real pleasure to be at his shoulder as he's led our charge into this recreational fisheries partnership program. This is an exciting day for all of us to hear how it's rolling out where you are.

I was really intrigued to hear you wax so eloquently about the importance of recreational fisheries.

I'll ask you first, Mr. Olson, to elaborate on what you said about how it energizes people, and on what you think has been the involvement of people in this specific program that has put \$55 million into angling. How has it been specifically borne out in your community?

Mr. Rob Olson: I think the way it's been borne out is that, from what I've seen in Manitoba, it creates partnerships.

There are two things here. First, there's this fishing passion. To my mind, this is an intelligent, targeted grant. It's targeting a bunch of us passionate kooks who spend too much of our own time and money on this. The thing about fishing is this passion, which I'll come back to. The thing about the grant is that it leverages the passion. That's a lot of money across Canada. It's not a lot of money in the big picture of the federal budget, I would argue, but it's a lot of money to us. It's a lot of money from a leverage perspective. When you put that money in, you'll get way more than that back from us in our own money.

Those grants are never enough to pay for the whole project, which I think is brilliant. One time I had a donor, when I used to work for another organization, who said, "Don't give an organization too much money, because it will take away their drive for fundraising." There's a magic about a grant size, right? The right size of grant is significant enough to get a project moving, but it's not so much that it takes away the need to raise other moneys. You want provincial money in there. We want the local community to fundraise and raise dollars too. There's a magic about that. The big thing it does, though, is it creates partnerships in stewardship. It makes the local community feel supported by the federal government. It makes them feel energized.

So there's a real good thing there, but it's the recreational passion thing that drives it. You're tapping into that with that grant, and that is brilliant. That's a brilliant thing to do. I would say, "Where else can you do that?"

It's an incredible strategy, in my mind, for a government to take. I think it's smart.

• (1250)

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Connolly and Mr. Borowski, let's take off from where Mr. Olson just ended when he asked, where else can you do that? Do you see this as a model for other programs that you'd like to see from your government? Remember, we all like to think that we're stewards of precious taxpayer dollars. We like to hear that the dollars are being used, leveraged, and really benefiting the community.

In the world of fisheries, do you see this as a model?

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: It's definitely unique, and it is definitely a model, whatever party you are from, that politically affects a lot of people who fish. They all benefit from it. Nobody that I know of can say bad things about this program because it does get people outside. What's the biggest problem with a lot of people today? They're not going outside. The more money the government can assist us with in projects that are promoting outdoor fisheries is healthy for the country. It's healthy for our communities, it's healthy for our kids, and it's healthy for our waters to improve issues. We all work for a living. We can only volunteer so much. We need to have that extra helping hand. Our logo for Swan Valley Sport Fishing is "Giving Fish a Helping Hand". That's our mandate. That's what we're trying to do.

This fund is very interesting. I sat with Mr. Sopuck on the original fisheries enhancement fund, at its start. Bob saw that fund work and the benefits of it. Even though it was created by the NDP, he still couldn't argue about the quality of it. He was at our banquet a few years ago, and Rosanne had presented us with a \$100,000 cheque for some fisheries research enhancement work. As we were leaving the stage, I patted Bob on the back and said, "Bob, do you ever think that one day the feds will step up and do something to help us?" He looked at me and said, "Don't you worry, this will happen and we will help everybody in this country". I must commend Bob. He did an outstanding job. I was amazed that not only has it worked for one year, but it has also continued for a couple of years. It just wasn't as case of, "Here's a bunch of money. We're going to flash it and then it's going to go away". This has big implications for future planning of work. We know that we can look at projects that require money, say projects three years down the road, and can say, "You know what? The federal grant can help us. We can stay on track with our improvements".

Mr. John Weston: I hate to interrupt such an eloquent soliloquy, but I'm wondering if you can speak to any specific projects. I don't want to put you on the spot, but are there any specific ones that you can refer to in your respective communities that have been funded by the—

Mr. Jeffrey Connolly: Oh, yes. There's a lake that is 30 minutes north of our area. The provincial government will not let us stock it with fish. They say it can produce enough natural stocking. The two main inflows are overpopulated with beavers and it's not politically correct to go in and kill all the beavers. What we do is to go in before the ice comes off and we physically remove the dams with explosives. There are no fish in the creeks at this time because the water's low. The beavers aren't near this. In the springtime there's a four-week opportunity for the walleye to swim up, spawn, and for

the walleye fry to swim back to the lake. This year that money was provided, with our funds, by the federal government. Without that, we wouldn't have done that. From the beaver dam blasting, over the last six years we have seen a massive increase in the amount sport fishing on that lake and the quality of sport fishing.

Yes, the money is working very well here. We've applied to the fund again for the same lake because it's a high use, very public, and high visibility lake. There is another application in the process right now to improve some shore fishing access that's been filling in. Like Mr. Olson, all of our ideas are good ideas. We're not just strictly into studying the plankton in the lake to see what it looks like. We're here to get fish in the lake.

• (1255)

Mr. John Weston: All right.

Mr. Olson, you said that formerly, DFO enforcement was not effective, that it did not engage humans, and that it alienated people, especially rural communities. Do you want to elaborate on that and say anything more about how things have changed favourably?

Mr. Rob Olson: Yes.

I would start by saying that our organization has talked about that a lot and I don't want to create an impression that we're not fans of DFO. We see the need for DFO. We don't know all the details, but our perception is that DFO has been a staunch and stalwart defender of sealing, for example, off the coast of Newfoundland and in the north. We appreciate that. We appreciate their science.

If I could just go back to the border issue, as I didn't get a chance to comment on it. But on invasive species, the border situation here is dire. I don't know if that's a DFO thing or if DFO could take a role in that. However, just to put it into perspective, when our season opens here in just about a week and a half or so, there will be hundreds and hundreds of boats coming from America to fish because the fishing is so good. Those boats often come from Great Lakes states where there are zebra mussels and other things like spiny water flea—you name it. Right now it's an open [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

My buddies come up to fish from the States, and they're not getting checked at the border, so that is a disaster waiting to happen for us here. We think that would be a good role for DFO. I don't know if that is what they do or if that's something that makes sense for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

On the fish police era, to me that strikes at the heart of a really big issue that we have to deal with in landscape conservation. Most of our landscape in prairie Canada is farmed. If you're going to do something good for water, fish, wetlands, animals, or wildlife, and you want to sequester carbon, whatever you want to do on that landscape is going to be about farmers.

In dealing with farmers in rural communities, if you want to club them with a stick, you're going to turn them into enemies. The same person who will stop at two in the morning and help you change your tire is an amazing person. They're lovely, and they're giving, until you go on their land and threaten their land rights. The moment you go and club them with that stick, you better know what you're doing—there had better be a bloody good reason for it—and you'd better have exhausted every other opportunity first. Carrots get you a lot further with rural communities.

There have to be rules and there needs to be enforcement, so there's a balancing act there. It's a fine line. Reasonable rural communities know that there need to be rules. They get that, but the initial approach can't be to cop-up and get on the landscape. You can't police the landscape. Are you going to have a fish cop on every section of land looking for infractions? We have to engage those communities and get them doing it with us and for us. We have to get the people, the citizens, involved in policing, because you can't pay enough people to do it. If you alienate them, then you create

enemies. You get resistance. You get hard feelings, and you get fractured relationships.

Going forward, this grant is only one small example. There have to be lots of other ways that a group like DFO can engage rural communities to get them buying into the Fisheries Act, understanding the Fisheries Act—

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Olson. I have to interrupt you there. I appreciate your comments.

I want to say thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing today before our committee and taking the time to make presentations and answer questions from members. We certainly do appreciate your time.

On behalf of the entire committee, I want to thank you.

There being no further business, this committee now stands adjourned.

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