HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 029 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

Chair

Mrs. Deborah Schulte

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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● (1555)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.)): If we can come to order, that would be awesome. Thank you very much.

We were waiting for a few more to join us, but we know that some people have deadlines. We're going to get started and hope the others will join us soon.

We are working today on protected spaces. I know that we sometimes jump around between CEPA and protected spaces, so I want to make sure everyone is clear about what we're working on today: protected spaces.

We have the pleasure of three groups in front of us today.

One is the Moose Cree First Nation, with Patricia Faries, who is the the chief, and Jack Rickard, the director of lands and resources.

Thanks very much to both of you for being here.

We also have with us the Grand Council of the Crees, Eeyou Istchee, with Chantal Otter Tétreault, who is the protected areas coordinator for the Cree Nation government. With her is Geoffrey Quaile. He's the senior environment adviser from the Cree Nation government.

Thank you very much to both of you for being here with us today.

We have also the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, with Janet Sumner, executive director for the Wildlands League, and we have Alain Branchaud, executive director from Quebec.

Thanks to both of you for being here with us.

We're going to start off with the Moose Cree First Nation.

We will turn the time over to you. You have 10 minutes. It's all yours. Thank you very much.

Chief Patricia Faries (Moose Cree First Nation): Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity to share with the committee our perspective on protected areas and conservation objectives. At this time, I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Algonquin people.

It is an honour to be here before you today as we share our thoughts as indigenous people. As the chair indicated, my name is Patricia Faries. I am the chief of Moose Cree First Nation. Jack Rickard is our director of lands and resources.

We are from the Moose Cree First Nation, and we recently reaffirmed our "Homelands Declaration" in September of this year. Our home community is located in Moose Factory, on the Moose River delta in the Moose River system. Our Moose Cree homeland extends from Hearst, Ontario, in the west, to just beyond the Quebec border in the east, and from south of Highway 11 to points north toward the Albany River. Our Homelands are the areas determined by the Moose Cree citizens, our *Eh-lilu-wuk*, which is inclusive generally of the historical occupancy and use of lands and watersheds in northeastern Ontario.

The Moose Cree homelands are comprised of static boundaries and covers approximately 60,000 square kilometres. As the Moose Cree have determined, the homelands area includes surface and subsurface lands, air, and water. The homelands area has been derived by using Moose Cree knowledge from our elders and is based on our continued presence of hunting, trapping, and harvesting in these grounds, prior to the Ontario government trapline system, and indeed, prior to the signing of our James Bay treaty, Treaty No. 9.

This is the land our ancestors called home, where our forefathers were born, where food was gathered, where families were raised and buried, and where the Moose Cree life and culture continue to thrive. We consider ourselves the Water People. We believe that everything on this earth is alive—*Nipi-ma-tis-i-win*, meaning "water is life"—and water is one element that can be influenced by its environment, as was proven by western science.

We, the Moose Cree people, are the original peoples of this land. The Creator has given us this land as our home. The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and this place on earth, which provides for all our needs. Our ancestors have lived on this land since time immemorial, drawing on the animals, fish, and plants for their sustenance. We are charged by the Creator with the duty of preserving and protecting the land for our future generations.

We come before you today to speak of a matter of great importance to us, to provide you information on the initiatives we are conducting within our homelands to ensure the protection and conservation of our way of life. We believe our initiatives run parallel with this study on federal protected areas and conservation objectives.

For the last 80 years, the people of Moose Cree have observed the impacts that have occurred on our lands, our water, and our wildlife. There is a broad range of resource development activities occurring in the southern portion of our homeland, including significant mineral exploration and extraction, hydroelectric development, and forestry.

We seek to work collaboratively with proponents where possible. In fact, Moose Cree is possibly the only first nation in Ontario to become a partner in a major energy infrastructure project with Ontario Power Generation. Within our homeland, we own 25% of the Lower Mattagami River project. We know, however, that economic development must be sustainable and must be pursued in a manner that protects our cultural integrity and is consistent with our cultural pursuits and the protection of our treaty and inherent rights.

The lands and resources secretariat has been mandated by the chief and council to provide for the management, protection, conservation, and preservation of the Moose Cree First Nation homeland on behalf of its citizens. One important initiative is the protection of the North French River watershed. This is shown shaded on the map you have before you. The pink area is the North French River watershed. This region is considered of great cultural significance to our first nation. We are deeply committed to preserving it and strongly oppose any resource development in this area.

● (1600)

The North French watershed is 6,660 square kilometres in size. As you can see on the map, the North French lies within the heart of the Moose Cree homelands. It is an area that remains free of any negative impacts from any resource development and is one of the last pristine freshwater sources. To this day, we can still draw water from the river and drink it directly. It is an area that has great cultural and environmental significance to the Moose Cree First Nation and is an area that must be protected for our future generations.

From discussions with our esteemed elders and other knowledge holders, it is clear that the preservation of the watershed is paramount. It is a source of clean water. It provides healthy habitat for the threatened boreal caribou and for fisheries. It is also a part of the carbon storehouse within the area. Most of all, it's a place for our people to exercise our heritage activities. That is fundamental to the continued well-being of our first nation.

While Moose Cree now considers this area to be removed from potential development, we are conscious that the issue of formal long-term protection should be addressed co-operatively. We request the federal government's support and co-operation in ensuring the removal of this area from potential development and that its protection be fully formalized and communicated with proponents, the public, and all governments.

We have asked Ontario, as an initial step, to withdraw these lands from any mineral prospecting, staking, sale, or lease. They have yet to act on this and, as such, are still encouraging mining, which is deeply troublesome to us. We are concerned that Ontario intends to introduce online staking in 2017, which may bring new threats to our territory.

We understand that both Canada and Ontario have signed on to ambitious targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity to protect 17% of lands and inland waters by 2020. We strongly encourage the committee and all governments to work with indigenous peoples to reflect and respect their protected areas in these plans.

We also look for your support to encourage Ontario to stop resource development in this watershed and to respect our indigenous-led protected area here. Right now, there is a gap, in that the provincial government has yet to respect our indigenous protected area and stop development from occurring here. This is critical to working toward reconciliation with our people. Ontario has no formal mechanism in its laws to respect our protected area. Ontario also has no formal mechanism in law to respect our ongoing management of any protected area. This needs to be fixed.

We recommend that you formally recognize our protected area and that you work with us to ensure these areas are permanently protected, as our people have said. The North French is one of several watersheds in our territory that require permanent protection. We will have more to say about other watersheds in the territory as our community members discuss them.

Indigenous peoples are leading the management and protection of their homelands in Canada. It is important that governments recognize this and work with us. Together, not only can we meet these international targets, but we can show leadership to the world.

Moose Cree have always been proactive in taking care of their homeland and their people. We have begun a land protection planning exercise, with an emphasis on protection of our resources. Over the years, we have carried out indigenous knowledge studies of the waters, the caribou, and the fish within our river systems. We have important bird areas in our homeland and have been surveying them for many years now.

We would like to say a final word about climate change and protected areas. We are deeply concerned about climate change, and our people are calling on us to take action. We see the indigenous protected areas in our territory that overlap the carbon-rich boreal forests and Hudson Bay lowlands as incredibly important tools in ensuring the resilience of ecosystems in the face of a warming climate.

● (1605)

We invite you to partner with us to build indigenous protected areas to meet international targets on biodiversity, to meet our ambitious climate change objectives, and to achieve reconciliation with indigenous peoples in Canada. We invite you to work with us.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We appreciate that. We're going to hear from all the witnesses, and then we'll get into the questions.

Next up is the Grand Council of the Crees.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault (Protected Areas Coordinator, Cree Nation Government, Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Chantal Otter Tétreault. I am a Cree from the community of Waswanipi, in Eeyou lstchee, northern Quebec. I am the protected areas coordinator for the Cree Nation Government. I am also interim chair for the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission, but today I am speaking on behalf of the Cree Nation Government. I am here with Geoff Quaile, who is the senior environment adviser for the Cree Nation Government.

First of all, thank you for the invitation to speak today. The Cree Nation Government, through its Department of Environment and Remedial Works, has taken on the task of researching, consulting on, and planning protected areas in Eeyou lstchee. The Crees have taken on this responsibility as a necessity in order to further protect and enhance our rights under section 22, on the environment, and section 24, on hunting, fishing and trapping, of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

In our territory, the Government of Quebec is primarily responsible for creating protected areas. Despite this, we have been proactive in ensuring that the candidate sites chosen for protection in our part of Quebec are in line with the Cree aspirations. We are now involved in the creation and management of protected areas in Eeyou lstchee. Examples here would be the Assinica Cree heritage park, the Albanel-Témiscamie-Otish national park, and the Muskuuchii biodiversity reserve.

In 2014, the Cree Nation Government, CNG, made its terms for selection of sites clear. Our vision is to "maintain strong ties to the Cree cultural heritage and way of life, and sustain biodiversity by creating a large, interconnected network of conservation areas in Eeyou lstchee." This strategy was born in part from the necessity for the Cree Nation to react to Quebec's "Plan Nord", which promised to develop 50% of Quebec's north while protecting the remaining 50%.

The Cree regional conservation strategy is a reminder to the future architects of the Plan Nord that the Crees possess constitutionally protected rights that mandate consideration beyond a typical profit/loss and risk/reward framework. It bears mentioning that these rights also align with those listed in various international agreements that Canada supports, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as article 8 (j) of the the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity.

Some of the goals highlighted in the Cree Nation conservation strategy are: one, to create an interconnected network of conservation areas of cultural and ecological importance for the safeguarding of biodiversity; two, to conserve wildlife populations and enhance food security for present and future generations; three, to ensure full Cree participation in conservation planning and management; four, to ensure Cree knowledge, culture, and land management systems play a central role in conservation initiatives; five, to build Cree capacity for conservation planning and management; six, to ensure Cree youth are engaged in all stages of the strategy; seven, to integrate conservation science principles and build in resilience to climate change; and eight, to ensure the strategy is adaptive and based on the best available knowledge.

As indicated, our vision for the conservation of Eeyou lstchee is not solely dependent upon protected areas, which often only lead to the creation of islands of protection. Rather, we see our strategy as a more comprehensive approach, using many different tools. An example here is the CNG's recent efforts to safeguard Eeyou lstchee from uranium mining and, more specifically, the Otish Mountains, which were under threat from a proposed mining development even though the area was already part of a park co-managed with Quebec. The Crees deemed the risk of uranium mining to be too much of a burden for Crees to carry and thus put their full political weight behind a territorial moratorium.

Similarly, the Broadback River stands as one of the last wild rivers not diverted by Hydro-Québec in Eeyou lstchee. Also, the area is increasingly under threat from the northward expansion of logging operations. Given that parts of the watershed remain as some of the last examples of intact mature spruce forests in the Quebec commercial forest zone, the Cree communities have requested that portions of the valley be spared from logging, primarily to save the habitat of woodland caribou in this area.

● (1610)

It is for these parallel reasons that the CNG has persistently asked the Quebec government to take action in implementing an effective woodland caribou plan that would put the conservation of the Broadback basin at its core. In this area, we have three known herds —the Nottaway, Assinica, and Temiscamie herds—occupying a range of approximately 100,000 square kilometres. Much of the area has been disturbed by forestry activities and the subsequent development. In fact, the disturbance level for each of these herds already meets or exceeds the limits of the 35% maximum threshold of disturbed habitat recommended by the federal woodland caribou recovery strategy. Unlike many of the dwelling herds in Canada, these herds have a chance of recovery if we can only recognize the urgent need of investing in the protection of their habitat.

Unlike Canada and Quebec, which employ a mapping system of ecoregions to identify the high value of representative ecosystem features as potential candidate sites for protection, the Cree regional conservation strategy includes our system of family hunting territories.

Eeyou lstchee is divided into about 300 family hunting territories covering approximately 450,000 square kilometres. Let me put that more in perspective. My family hunting territory, known as "Traplines", is about the size of Montreal and is considered very small compared to other hunting territories.

Each family has a person who serves as a land manager of these areas. An active “tallyman” has an intimate knowledge of their territory, which has been built up over generations. They know the best areas and the seasons to fish and to hunt game. Tradition has it that prospective land users must consult with the tallyman for permission and instructions on where, when, and how to access resources on the hunting territories. Aside from this important role, tallymen also act as auxiliary wildlife officers, meaning they have a duty to report any wrongdoing to authorities. These guardians of the land take on this responsibility to protect the land for everyone.

In terms of the Cree regional conservation strategy, our orientation for determining what areas are important to conserve is based on this family hunting territory system.

With respect to CNG's collaboration with the federal government on conservation, our focus has been mainly on marine and coast areas. The CNG worked with the previous Conservative government on the establishment of a national marine conservation area within the Eeyou Marine Region Land Claims Agreement area. Regrettably, there was little return in these efforts, and no action was taken.

The Cree Nation Government was delighted to read the mandate letter of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, which instructs the minister to increase the portion of Canada's marine and coastal areas to the international target. Great exchanges have already been made between the Cree Nation Government and Parks Canada, and we are currently drafting a memorandum of understanding to solidify a true working relationship for the development of a marine protected area.

If it were possible, we would like to protect all of our territory; however, we need to think of the needs of the future generations. A robust and diverse economy will offer the widest possible choice for our people, as long as it is situated in a healthy and protected environment.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement protects our traditional way of life, and it ensures participation in development. To support our growing population, we must embrace development that works best for us. By using the land use planning provisions of the governance agreement with Quebec, by employing a special management regime on forestry that is set up in the Cree-Quebec Paix des Braves agreement, and by using the various environmental assessment processes set out in the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, we fight to strike a balance between conservation and development.

These efforts have many moving parts, so it's important for us not to lose sight of what our elders remind us of concerning the importance of our culture, language, and way of life, and the importance of active participation in development.

Thank you.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We really appreciate all of you taking the time to come and share these requests with us. I'm looking forward to questions.

Next up is the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, with Janet Sumner and Alain Branchaud.

Over to you, Ms. Sumner.

Ms. Janet Sumner (Executive Director, Wildlands League, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to speak today.

My name is Janet Sumner. I'm the executive director of the Wildlands League, a chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

The CPAWS Wildlands League is a not-for-profit charity that has been working in the public interest to protect public lands and resources in Ontario since 1968. At the Wildlands League, we have extensive knowledge of land use in Ontario and a history of working with provincial, federal, indigenous, and municipal governments, scientists, the public, and resource industries on progressive conservation initiatives. We've published on issues such as forestry and terrestrial carbon, assessments on transmission corridor impacts on a caribou range, monitoring and reporting failures from a diamond mine in a world-class wetland, and much more.

You may have seen our Paddle the Rouge event last June, where we had 200 paddlers out for a Sunday paddle with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Madam Grégoire Trudeau in the Rouge national park.

What is probably lesser known is our work with KI, where the community of Kitchenuhmaykoosib lnninuwug created a watershed declaration making their lands largely off-limits to industrial development. We asked the province to respect this declaration and recognize and reflect it in provincial law. The province finally agreed and withdrew 2.6 million hectares from mining tenure.

If Canada is to meet the 2020 biodiversity goals and targets adopted in 2015, the Province of Ontario and, for that matter, Manitoba and Quebec, will have to consider the Hudson Bay-James Bay lowlands wetland complex as a place where a significant contribution to the networks of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures is made.

In an age where we are already experiencing significant warming from climate change, unprecedented declines in species, and a carbon cycle that frankly is drastically off-kilter, protected areas and the protection targets must also be about addressing the overlap on climate, carbon, caribou, and biodiversity. We can do this by inserting protection objectives into our climate plan. Conservation areas can be identified when we do caribou range plans, and caribou outcomes can be achieved in our protected areas planning. These mandates overlap, and opportunities that are synergistic and achieve multiple benefits will be more efficient. For example, the federal recovery strategy for woodland caribou released by Environment Canada says that range plans must have more than 65% intactness.

I have worked with progressive companies across ranges all across Canada to develop technical inputs and range approaches that, if implemented by governments, could achieve that outcome. These range plans designate areas open for industrial use, but also areas that are off limits. It would be wise to see conservation areas, therefore, as contributions from these off-limit areas.

This isn't all about caribou either. In terms of carbon, in Ontario alone there are more than 28 million hectares of bogs and fens rich in carbon. Advancing protection here will protect millions of tonnes of carbon and the breeding grounds for the hemisphere's several billion migratory birds.

As you can see, there are multiple benefits in looking for contributions to the Aichi targets from Ontario's boreal. Partnering with indigenous communities in the boreal, though, is the key to achieving conservation outcomes. Supporting and embracing these efforts in a way that respects indigenous rights and interests is a huge opportunity to advance both conservation and reconciliation. Indigenous protected areas are recognized by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and you have heard today about the Moose Cree, who are also working to achieve conservation outcomes that we are supportive of.

In the communities of the north, indigenous watershed declarations are being written right now. Ontario and Canada must find ways to honour and respect these conservation areas. We ask the federal government to encourage the provinces and territories to stop handing out permits for industrial activities in areas that have been proposed for permanent protection by indigenous peoples.

Part of the role for parks in the southern portions of Ontario is to also focus on maintaining and restoring ecological integrity as the management priority by law. That's why we were very pleased, therefore, to see this reflected in the amendments tabled by Minister McKenna for the Rouge National Urban Park. Meeting this objective, though, means reinvesting in conservation science capacity in Parks Canada. There is a need to refocus on our collective responsibility to pass along these special places unimpaired for future generations. We are committed to helping in any way we can.

In summary, if we are to achieve the commitments we have on conservation, then we need strong federal leadership, like the leadership we currently have on climate change, to bring provincial governments together in a concerted effort to meet and then exceed the 17% protection. We also need federal leadership that seeks to achieve these outcomes through synergy and opportunity in the overlap of mandates where climate and caribou outcomes dovetail with conservation objectives and are positively reinforced through EA reform.

● (1620)

Thank you.

Alain.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Branchaud (Executive Director, Quebec, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for inviting us to appear before this important committee.

SNAP Québec is the equivalent of CPAWS Ontario. The situation of protected areas in Quebec is similar to the situation in Canada. The network of protected areas in Quebec covers approximately 1% of the marine environment and a little less than 10% of the land environment.

Mining rights, oil permits and the forestry potential—in other words, the rights over the territory acquired by private interests—are the major obstacles to the fulfilment of Quebec's and Canada's international commitments to protect their territory. There are no effective legislative tools available to settle these impasses, to give real weight to the democratic will of the people and to advance the network of protected areas.

In Quebec, there are four active projects involving marine protected areas. The establishment of a protected area in the Magdalen Islands—

● (1625)

[*English*]

The Chair: Hang on a moment. You are moving really fast, and we have a translator who is unable to keep up with you.

Chief Patricia Faries: I'd like to hear him.

The Chair: We're going to start again, if you don't mind, because we want to hear what you have to say.

Chief Patricia Faries: Yes, please.

The Chair: You have five minutes. Thanks, but slow down.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Okay, Madam Chair.

The situation of protected areas in Quebec is similar to the situation in Canada. The network of protected areas in Quebec covers approximately 1% of the marine environment.

[*English*]

The Chair: Hold on—

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Should I speak English?

The Chair: Let's take it one more time from the top, please. Thank you.

Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Branchaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will start again.

The situation of protected areas in Quebec is similar to the situation in Canada. The network of protected areas in Quebec covers approximately 1% of the marine environment and a little less than 10% of the land environment.

Mining rights, oil permits and the forestry potential—in other words, the rights over the territory acquired by private interests—are the major obstacles to the fulfilment of Quebec's and Canada's international commitments to protect their territory. There are no effective legislative tools available to settle these impasses, to give real weight to the democratic will of the people and to advance the network of protected areas.

Four active projects involving marine protected areas are under way in Quebec. For us, the priority is the establishment of a protected area in the Magdalen Islands; it alone would achieve Quebec's interim marine environment goal of 10% by 2020. This is also an area in which the federal government could play a key role.

On land, several dozen projects are dormant on shelves. These are projects that have wide consensus among local communities and that would add about 34,000 square kilometres to the protected areas in Quebec and would quickly bring the province to almost 12%. A number of projects on the table provide major economic development possibilities, such as the Lake Walker national park project on the north shore, or the protection, once and for all, of the Dumoine River watershed, not far from here in the Pontiac. The Government of Quebec's Plan Nord project aims to protect 50% of the land north of the 49th parallel. There is also a great opportunity to advance the network of protected areas in Quebec and in Canada, bearing in mind that the network should be representative of the ecosystems, both in the north and the south.

A number of solutions exist. The work of federal and provincial departments responsible for establishing protected areas is marked by a lack of transparency. Things are generally done behind closed doors. The doors and the windows must be opened. There must be room for NGO representatives in order to facilitate discussions with the local communities and to do away with what often seem like unproductive little turf wars between departments and levels of government.

Since 2015, Quebec no longer has a strategic position on the establishment of protected areas. We feel that holding an extraordinary summit on biodiversity would allow the road to success to be defined together. Indigenous leadership in establishing protected areas across Canada must be promoted, encouraged and maintained.

There must also be openness and originality as the next protected areas are established. For example, creating a network of institutions for traditional teaching, with campuses made up of protected areas of more than 10,000 square kilometres, would, in one stroke, allow traditional knowledge to flourish and be protected. They could eventually become places of interaction and reconciliation between the nations of the country.

As one final idea for a solution, we invite you all to take the 150.ca challenge that we will be launching next January. As a part of the celebrations for Canada's 150th birthday, it will give governments, the public and business the opportunity to give Canadians a present for the future in the form of protected areas. You are welcome to participate.

Here is a specific example to show how the challenge could work.

The Government of Canada has unused land adjacent to Quebec's Parc national des Îles-de-Boucherville. That unused federal land could be made available to expand the park. We also challenge the Government of Quebec to make available land of an equivalent area to expand Gatineau Park in the Outaouais. We need new ideas and a dynamic approach if together we are going to meet the huge challenge of attaining the interim objective of 17% in 2020.

Thank you.

● (1630)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was excellent.

We have an order of questions here. We'll start with John Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Thanks.

Thank you, witnesses, and welcome to our committee today. It is always a real pleasure to hear what our indigenous communities are doing across the country.

Let me go back for just a second. I've been on a national tour with another committee. We've been to all ends of the country, including spending eight hours in Iqaluit yesterday. I left there this morning in snow. As we travelled, we met with many indigenous groups across the country. It's always great hearing about the connections to land and the stewardship of land from the beginning of time.

To the witnesses who spoke this afternoon, you continue to reinforce that willingness and desire to work with other levels of government for the protection of these lands.

CPAWS, it's always a pleasure to hear about the work you're doing. Hopefully I'll get to you with my line of questioning, but I'm going to start with the other panellists.

Because I've been away with my other committee, I'm just getting up to speed on what we've been covering over the last three weeks in protected area discussions. In the work you're doing in Ontario and Quebec, I'm curious about the types of mechanisms that have been looked at and if you're into the mechanics of protected areas and what's going to work in your specific situations.

With this group, we're looking at a number of tools and mechanisms, so it could be things such as Environment Canada and wildlife refuges. Also, under Parks Canada there are national parks with various levels of co-management that are possible. There are marine conservation areas. There are perhaps other mechanisms to provide protections, such as this idea of indigenous protected areas, and we're really trying to figure out what that could look like.

I'd like to turn it over to you, perhaps, to our four panellists from the Moose Cree First Nation and the Grand Council of the Crees, for your about thoughts on what the ideal would be, or on where you're at in discussions about protecting your traditional lands, your homelands, and what we should be looking at in terms of tools and instruments to collaborate with you to achieve these objectives for long-term conservation. I hope that's clear.

Ms. Tétreault, would you like to start?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Yes, I'll answer that.

At the Cree Nation Government, we work very closely with Quebec. We have a very good relationship with Quebec because they also see the need to incorporate indigenous involvement in creating protected areas in the north. We have been using a bit of both traditional knowledge and western science. I've travelled up north—I'm from the north, so it's nice to go up there and see family—but I work from Montreal. I've been going up there and really trying to get into areas that are used. Not surprisingly, when I come back with my map everything is marked: where their camps are, where they hunt, and where their migratory patterns are in terms of caribou.

In using the science part of that, we're basing a lot of our work on watersheds, so we're using catchment areas and trying to get at areas that have no impacts right now and trying to use those areas of Quebec and safeguard these areas from future development, or maybe even mining claims at this moment. We just try to ask, can you not claim these areas, because they show an interest of certain communities? That's the approach we're taking.

In terms of what kinds of protected areas, in Quebec we mainly go toward the biodiversity reserves. That protects everything we want in terms of the wildlife, and it also doesn't.... With regard to national parks, Quebec has their own type of national parks. They are different from Canada's. They like to increase tourism, which is great for us, as it's more economic development. But that's a bit of a long shot, as they already have quite a few national parks in Quebec right now, so we're doing more work with Quebec on biodiversity reserves and aquatic reserves.

● (1635)

Mr. John Aldag: I have a question on the idea of the biodiversity reserves. Is there a model you're looking at in terms of land title or stewardship or management? Are there other models that you're basing this on that we could look at as examples? Or is it something you would see created for your needs?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Well, biodiversity reserves are already an existing—

Mr. John Aldag: The international kind of—

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: On the IUCN level, I'm not sure, maybe it's two or three. It's wildlife protected. There's no mining. There's no development.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: What we're trying to do is create some sort of tourism in that area, but obviously to contain the environment as is. We're trying not to add too much disturbance to the area.

Those are mostly the areas that we try to protect. They're areas that are used for cultural reasons and cultural significance, and obviously that means there is some wildlife habitat in the area too.

Mr. John Aldag: Perhaps Chief Faries and Mr. Rickard could speak to what's happening.

The Chair: John, I hate to do this—

Mr. John Aldag: Is that the six minutes?

The Chair: It's six minutes.

Mr. John Aldag: Boy, it goes fast.

The Chair: It goes really fast. Somebody can pick that up for you, hopefully, and carry on.

I apologize for having to cut people off. We have only so much time for each person, and we have to be fair.

Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): I have a question for Janet Sumner.

You mentioned wetlands and the capacity that wetlands have to act as a carbon sink. I think that's what you were referring to. Has CPAWS done any work on determining (a) what Canada's current capacity to absorb CO2 might be and (b) whether we have the ability to improve that capacity over time through the protection and expansion of parkland, wetlands, and boreal forests, and through forest management practices?

Ms. Janet Sumner: We haven't done any work on looking at them as sinks to capture carbon, but rather are looking at these areas as vast storehouses of carbon that we don't want to see released. If you almost reverse that.... I had to cut sections of my remarks, but some of those sections talked about how 15 years ago when we looked at carbon reserves we thought they were maybe one to two metres deep. They're now looking at those estimates and saying that they could be upwards of 10 metres deep in the boreal.

When it was at one or two metres deep, it was 1,300 tonnes per hectare. You can imagine, now that we're revising those estimates, that there are literally billions of tonnes of carbon in the wetland complex that goes from Manitoba to Quebec. It would be ill-advised to be making incursions into those areas even through such things that are seen as minimally invasive, like exploration, which does in fact in that landscape does start to change the hydrology and release carbon.

The reason for that is that we actually need to be counting it. If you're going to do a mining project, for example, we need to be figuring out what the carbon exchange is. Right now, we don't really know. Also, there are many who look at this boreal carbon, but we won't know whether or not we'll get more releases or less releases from it. I think the most precautionary approach would be to look at ways in which we can protect and maintain as much of it as possible.

Hon. Ed Fast: Would it be correct to say that those wetlands you've referred to can also act to sequester carbon?

Ms. Janet Sumner: They can under the right circumstances. They can also act as a source under the wrong circumstances.

Hon. Ed Fast: That I understand fully. I'm assuming you don't have a whole lot of additional information as to how we improve the capacity of the wetlands to increase their absorption of CO2.

● (1640)

Ms. Janet Sumner: I do know that there are things you can avoid that would prevent them from going in the other direction, yes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay.

In my second question, I want to refer you to a press release that you and 11 other environmental NGOs released recently. It's entitled "CEOs of Canada's largest environmental groups issue statement on national park management". There's a statement in there that should give all of us concern, but I want to get clarity on it so I don't misinterpret it.

It says in I think the sixth paragraph that "since 2012, Parks Canada's conservation capacity has been cut by almost one third". What do you mean by conservation capacity being cut by one third? Are you talking about the science, investments, funding, and resources that are available? Or is it conservation writ large? For me, that was a little confusing.

Ms. Janet Sumner: My understanding is that when they wrote this—Alison Woodley, and Alison is right over there—it was very specifically about the conservation staff at Parks Canada, that the investments in that had reduced the capacity of Parks Canada to do conservation work.

Hon. Ed Fast: Okay. That's a little different than what it implies. It raised alarm bells when I saw it.

When you say that "conservation capacity" within Parks Canada has been reduced, are you talking about the staffing element of it?

Ms. Janet Sumner: Yes, but that means there's less money for the science and less money for achieving goals on ecological integrity. It basically means that there's an imbalance between the tourism objectives and the science objectives in making sure that we maintain ecological integrity in parks.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm glad you mentioned the tourism objectives. I won't read out the specific provisions of the minister's mandate letter. You'll notice a number of headings that mandate the minister to expand Canadians' access to our national parks, and yet there's also a heading that talks about "limiting development"—not prohibiting but limiting—within our national parks.

That's a sort of creative tension that exists within that mandate letter. We want to get more Canadians seeing our natural spaces, but in order to do that, it's going to require some development, and I know that your organization has been quite outspoken about the existing efforts to develop some of our national parks.

Ms. Janet Sumner: Right, and there's also the overriding legislation, which says that we need to pass these parks down unimpaired to future generations. While there is a mandate letter that says we need to increase visitors and have this creative tension, it still is superseded by the legislation, which is about ecological integrity.

Hon. Ed Fast: If I could get back to the issue of—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'll leave it for the next person.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm being tough because we started late.

Hon. Ed Fast: You are a hardliner.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No. We started late and I want to make sure that we get in as many questions as we can.

Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Thank you.

It's wonderful to have you here with us.

I have a question, and I guess I'll start with our friends from the Cree Nation. In terms of ocean protection and marine areas, what kinds of activities do you think would be appropriate in marine protected areas?

Perhaps we could start with Ms. Tétreault.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Development activities or...?

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I mean just in general when you think of a marine protected area near Moose Factory, for example, or anywhere in that area.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: I'm thinking about having to develop a land use plan, because I'm interim chair of the Eeyou Marine Region Planning Commission. In terms of activities, there's not much in terms of development like you would see in the Northwest Passage. There's not that type of development that is threatening the James Bay and Hudson Bay area.

If anything, the Crees of Eeyou Istchee in northern Quebec would like to see some active tourism in the future. We're working closely with Parks Canada right now to develop a protected area. That's one thing that has been in the works for quite a long time. We're just trying to see what's out there. We're not closing the door to any other types of development. There's some talk of fibre optics marine cable to be brought into the marine area.

● (1645)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: So you would like to see some marine protected areas in that part as well?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Yes.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: For Moose Factory?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: I'll let Jack take that.

Mr. Jack Rickard (Director of Lands and Resources, Moose Cree First Nation): Thanks.

Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Wayne Stetski: One of the things we're looking at, of course, is support for developing marine protected areas in trying to reach the 10% marine as well as the 17% land. I'm interested in areas that you would like to see protected and also in what kinds of activities you think are appropriate within a marine protected area once it's established.

Mr. Jack Rickard: I think one of the things we're striving for is to identify key areas that are important for fish and the local fisheries and also to monitor any impacts coming into the area, such as invasive species, and try to deal with those issues when they become known to the community.

The main focus, as I said, is to monitor the local fisheries and to ensure they are still plentiful for the people who are active out on the land.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: One of the things we've heard from a number of first nations is that the agreement to create some protected areas, whether they be land or water, can be considered part of reconciliation. I'm wondering whether you see that in the same way.

Mr. Jack Rickard: That would be a step forward with regard to addressing reconciliation. In the past, some actions were taken against the younger people, but with regard to reconciliation, I think it's very important to bring our way of life back to the younger generation, as well as to those who have endured the effects of that era.

I think there is a strong emphasis, from a first nation perspective, that we need to revive our culture with regard to activities on the land.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have about a minute and a half.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Earlier on, you also mentioned the impacts of climate change. I'm just curious as to what you're seeing on the land around climate change and how you think protected areas can help mitigate that.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: To speak about the coast, we've seen evidence of climate change in ice patterns and in ice changes in terms of transportation. A lot of accidents have happened along the bays. It's too early to say whether these protected areas could help that or how that could happen. I'm sure programs that could be set up within these marine protected areas for safe travel would help.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: How about in the Moose Factory area? What sorts of changes have you seen happening?

Mr. Jack Rickard: The main thing is the importance of the winter roads that link the communities. We see later seasons; it's January when you're able to take heavy equipment out on the road to prepare the construction. The other issue we see is thaw...what's the word I'm looking for?

A voice: Permafrost?

Mr. Jack Rickard: Yes, permafrost. It is thawing out near the river systems and causes landslides into the rivers.

I'm not too sure how to address those issues, such as the permafrost thawing out. I think it's more that we have to adapt with regard to how we proceed in preparing these winter roads throughout the winter.

● (1650)

The Chair: I have to cut that off there. Thank you very much.

We are now going over to Mr. Bossio.

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today and, once again, for an insightful and great discussion.

I am very fortunate to have visited Mistissini twice, once in 1986 and then again in 2005. There's been an incredible difference in that time period in the village of Mistissini itself. It's wonderful to see the changes that have occurred over that 20-year period.

In your presentation, you mentioned the guardians of the land having knowledge of conservation.

Do you have the guardians program as part of your communities? Are you familiar with the guardians program?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: That's a word that we like to embrace, but we don't use it in terms of.... Maybe there is a program, but it's a nice way of saying that we're stewards of the land but we also see ourselves as guardians. No, I'm not aware of that program.

Do you know, Geoff?

Mr. Geoffrey Quaile (Senior Environment Advisor, Cree Nation Government, Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)): Yes, if you're referring to the Innu guardians program.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Yes.

Mr. Geoffrey Quaile: That's what I thought.

What Chantal was using is just a term. It's not an active program. The Cree land managers, or tallymen, which is actually what the Crees go by, is more of a cultural tradition that's grown from hundreds of years of appointing somebody. It's not like an institutional thing created in modern time. It's just how the Crees have deployed themselves to use the land over time.

Mr. Mike Bossio: It's very similar to what has happened with the Watchmen or the Canadian Rangers and the guardians among the Inuit. As far as establishing this type of program to be the watchmen of the lands is concerned, to be the protectors of the lands, the monitors of the lands, do you think it's possible for development to occur if it is co-managed and monitored under a program like what the Haida have established with the Watchmen or the Northwest Territories with the Rangers?

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: We have something called the Cree Trappers Association. This is where each tallyman is registered, in a sense, and is provided income to live on the land, but in terms of being within a protected area we haven't really established that yet. We haven't had a real management that's been set up for protected areas.

Mr. Mike Bossio: That's what I'm asking. Is that something you would see? If you had the ability to co-manage and to monitor, would that be an ideal scenario to you from a developmental standpoint of establishing what happens on your lands?

I'm asking both the Moose Cree and you.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: There is a park that's being created. It's called the Assinica park, which is near Mistissini. It's actually part of Mistissini. It will be co-managed with Quebec and with the community of Oujé-Bougoumou. With that, they will be incorporating the actual tallymen whose traplines or hunting territories are found within this protected area within this national park, and they will have a role there in terms of keeping an eye on the territory when there is tourism happening or any type of illegal activities in terms of illegal hunting. There will be—

Mr. Mike Bossio: Do you see that, though, as integral to establishing that kind of agreement on protected lands?

I apologize. I cut you off.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: I think it's a plus for sure, but there are areas, as I mentioned before, such as the biodiversity reserve, where there's no funding put in to have any type of management for those areas. It's definitely something that we'd enjoy having in terms of having to be more involved in how to manage our protected area.

Mr. Mike Bossio: Go ahead, Jack.

Mr. Jack Rickard: In the opening comments that the chief brought forth in regard to the Lower Mattagami extension project, we engaged our elders. We needed that expertise from the land users, or that perspective, with regard to moving forward with initiatives that would benefit the first nation economically. The one thing that was emphasized was that the two had to balance each other. There would be no new impacts happening to the land with the structure as it is right now.

We've always engaged our elders to seek that direction in regard to any proposed activity happening out on the land. Our elders are our knowledge holders of what transpired in the past. We look to the youth as well to ensure that they also have a voice, because we have to look at the future too.

● (1655)

Mr. Mike Bossio: Finally, then, what do you see as the roadblocks to reaching agreements on these protected lands with the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec and the federal government?

Mr. Jack Rickard: I think it has to go back to the protection of the animals. A majority of our people still are out on the land carrying out our annual pursuits in gathering our food, medicine, and water. Any development that may have an impact on that would be frowned upon, I believe, by our elders.

The Chair: You have two seconds, Chief Faries. Go ahead.

Chief Patricia Faries: Very quickly, I think it's the legislation. It's a fundamental problem, obviously, that Ontario's legislation is designed to continuously stake and continuously erode. That's my answer. Sorry, but I had to say that.

The Chair: That was good for clarification. This is what we're looking for, so this is important.

Next up is Mr. Eglinski.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you.

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses who are here tonight. I was very interested to learn a little about your culture as you were speaking.

I have spent most of my working career with aboriginal communities in northern British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. You mentioned going back on the land, and I remember when the Dene from Liard decided to move out of the community every summer. When I'd go to visit them, I'd have to extend my visit by about 65 miles to visit different people because they were scattered every few miles. It was so rewarding to talk to the elders and learn from them.

There were a couple of points that you folks brought up. I think the first one was from Patricia Faries.

You were talking about building a Cree conservation program. I am wondering if you could elaborate on that a bit and tell me what you envision you can do in this protected area. After you finish that, I have a second question.

Chief Patricia Faries: Yes, I think it's a concept that's not new to us, that we conserve, because we've always had that in our systems and in our culture, and in the way we've used the land. The occupancy and historical use has always been done with a conservation approach. We've always made sure that there was game left, that fish were allowed to reproduce, and that we moved around the territory.

My uncle, Eddie Trapper, who has passed now, he was a trapper his entire life—from my grandfather—and he used to think about his traditional territory as "rooms"—that's what he called it—that he would have to move around from each winter, and every four years, he would come back to a specific room. Those are ingrained in our systems. Those are ingrained in our hunters and trappers and families who use the land. I think that has to be acknowledged. That has to be recognized when we talk about protected areas. We already are doing it. I think it's more of an awareness and a communication and a network between our peoples.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I've not heard this perspective of "rooms", but I've heard of protecting the areas and moving from one area to the other. It shows that the land can be protected but can also be used at the same time.

Going from there, I noticed when you spoke—both groups—you talked about a robust, diverse economy for the future. One area there is approximately 66,000 square kilometres, which is a little smaller than my riding, but it's pretty close, so I know exactly what you're looking at in terms of distance.

When you were talking about the 450,000 square kilometres, what type of economy drivers do you see there for the future? That means some type of industry participating with you and you looking after the land. I think you both said that you see a need for industry to keep the economy going. I wonder if you can give me a vision of where you see that.

● (1700)

Mr. Geoffrey Quaile: What Chantal's presentation was trying to balance a little towards the end is the recognition that there need to be opportunities as well. You can't protect everything, even though that would probably be the best for everybody, but we can't live that way.

Some of those opportunities right now are that the Cree Nation Government has entered into several impact and benefit agreements with mines, which are currently starting or have been under way for some time and provide jobs and further economic growth for the communities in the areas that are affected. Crees have been able to utilize some of the benefits of hydro development in northern Quebec to their benefit to create better communities. You mentioned the growth of Mistissini. Part of that is largely from the benefits that have been derived from hydroelectric development.

It's a diverse culture, so it's like anywhere where there are people who have different ideas of how the future would look. Some Crees see the coasts in the north as a possibility for shipping ports. If we unfortunately have continued global change and the passages are open for a longer period of time, it's actually closer to ship goods to Europe, or even across to Asia, through the north. If that's the scenario, some Crees see opening deepwater ports, as an example.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I'm curious. It's quite a large area that you're talking about. I imagine there are a number of communities involved in this. How do you resolve the differences of opinions? As you were saying, somebody might be looking at a deep-sea port, but another person may say they want to protect that coastal water. Do you get together? Do you find a way of resolving situations like that?

I go back to my own riding, which is roughly the size of your map there. I have five aboriginal groups, and they're all saying they want the same area. They're having some difficulty. I'm wondering how you folks are getting around it.

Chief Patricia Faries: If you're talking about the map in front of us, that's the Moose Cree First Nation homeland, and that's one nation.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Okay. That's only one nation.

Chief Patricia Faries: That's one nation. That's the Moose Cree people. That's our area.

When you talk about development or any areas like that, right now it's the responsibility of the chief and council, basically, and we have processes that we're continuously developing that recognize the uses, the families, and development. Various processes like that are always ongoing.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Chantal, do you want to add a bit? I think your area is a bit bigger.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Yes. I'm staring at the map, and I can see a bit our community of Waskaganish. We're more on the.... Obviously, that's Ontario or Quebec.

At the Cree Nation Government, we represent 10 communities. They each have their own pressures. In the south, it's more about forestry, obviously. More to the north, it's hydro or mining. We need to look at it globally, yet we need to keep their priorities at the front, you know.

The Chair: Front and centre.

Ms. Chantal Otter Tétreault: Exactly. When it comes to the south, we have to take into consideration that there's more development potential, so we need to find a balance there. They want to also have some protection, yet they face more development.

The Chair: We're kind of out of time. Do you want to do one more...? Will is up next. We'll go six minutes, but we won't finish the round. We said we would go until 5 o'clock. Then we have a second panel, so I'm very mindful of the second panel and their time as well.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): If you want to share, Will, I could use a minute.

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): I'll try to be quick.

Meegwetch. We appreciate your presence here on Algonquin territory. Pontiac, the riding I represent, has a big piece of that.

[*Translation*]

I appreciate your reference to the watershed in the Pontiac.

Mr. Branchaud, could you take a minute or a minute and a half to describe the collaboration that you would like to see between provincial, federal and Algonquin governments in terms of that part of western Quebec?

● (1705)

Mr. Alain Branchaud: The first thing to do would be to bring together officials from the various parties who are interested in a transparent process. At the moment, most of the processes in place are not transparent and do not include the various NGOs and parties. Transparency would prevent the often unproductive little turf wars that stop things from moving forward. That would be a first step.

There are various possible avenues of collaboration with NGOs, which work more with the private stewards of the areas to ensure corridors there. For example, in terms of nature conservation, it could be possible to link Gatineau Park with other protected areas. That is one aspect.

There would have to be discussions with the provincial government to see how a provincial national park could be established in either part or all of the watershed. That could be one option. Establishing mirror legislation could also be considered, as is done in other sectors, in order to create co-managed national parks, either with the First Nations or with the two levels of government. That is one of the possibilities.

So there are a number of options to consider. This is all about leadership and about making sure that civil society participates in the process. As long as officials and departments keep working behind closed doors, we will continue to be in the same situation where things do not move forward quickly.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you for those comments.

[*English*]

For the representatives from the Cree nation, what do you think the federal government could specifically do better to engage directly with your nation and with the Quebec government towards greater conservation achievements, either marine or terrestrial?

At the end of the day, what I'm seeing from my vantage point is not enough collaboration, and not enough willingness to put skin in the game and to commit to process, which does take time. Can you suggest what could be done, including budgetary allocations?

Mr. Quaile.

Mr. Geoffrey Quaile: I'll try.

First of all, I think, the big picture—and that's in play right now—is broad national targets on various things that everybody commits to equally and then works on together on to try to meet those targets, whether it's on climate change or whatever. More specifically, with the federal government, as Chantal mentioned, we do have an opportunity to work in collaboration on these coastal protected areas and marine protected areas, so that's something.

It gets a little bit trickier inland because of the various provincial jurisdictions. I couldn't hazard a guess on the best way to do that other than broad funding everywhere, particularly to the first nations people everywhere in Canada, because of the ability to have the funds to be able to research this kind of thing. It takes a lot of time, effort, and money to develop plans for your own areas and traditional areas, and you need resources for that. I would say that probably assisting first nations first and then allowing them to work with both levels of government would be the best solution.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Patricia, in your submission and your comments, which we received in advance—and thank you for that—you said:

> ...economic development must be sustainable and must be pursued in a manner that protects our cultural integrity and is consistent with our cultural pursuits and protection of our treaty and inherent rights.

I'm wondering if you can explain the process for determining when those principles have not been adhered to. How do you do that? Is it in an ad hoc fashion? Do you have a set process that you use to determine that? How is that handled?

Chief Patricia Faries: It's an interesting and great question, and I know I don't have that much time to answer it.

Our reserve is on the southern tip of James Bay, and recent development really just came in 2005. Our systems to have the capacity to deal with the influx of development are really evolving as we speak, to be honest. De Beers came up into our territory in 2005, and also OPG. We had to deal with Ontario Power Generation. We're also dealing with Detour Gold and with various companies that have stakes, with young junior mining companies that continuously come in. Our systems are not designed to deal with that, so our first nation has really had to reallocate or allocate our energies to deal with these people.

● (1710)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It sounds like currently it's done in an ad hoc fashion, as something—

Chief Patricia Faries: It really is.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes. Is your objective to move to a more process-driven approach so that you can assess those principles?

Chief Patricia Faries: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It is your objective to do that.

Chief Patricia Faries: Yes, it is. I think it really has to be largely community driven. We've done a lot of the research now. We've set up the lands and resources secretariat, and that has all our family groupings, where the animals are, where the burial sites are, and where people are going for what time of season. Our map is really alive. It's a living entity. It continuously evolves as young people come in. We're very active up there. We're the only people up there in that territory, right, so I think it's critical—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much.

Chief Patricia Faries: —that we evolve that way.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Amos, for sharing your time.

Chief Patricia Faries: Thank you for the question.

The Chair: I am sure that we could spend many more hours with you. There's a lot more you could share with us that would be important.

As you're driving back, if anything comes to mind that you wish you had said, please feel free to send it in. We are in the final stages, but we still have another week to go before we start thinking about drafting instructions. We are very thankful for your time today in helping us refine those recommendations. Thank you.

We're going to suspend the meeting for just a few minutes and then go to our next group of witnesses.

● (1710)

(Pause)

● (1715)

The Chair: We'll start the second panel.

I would like to welcome the Canada Parks Agency, with Kevin McNamee, director of the protected areas establishment branch, and Robin Lessard, field unit superintendent for Northern Ontario. I appreciate both of you being here today.

We also have with us Trout Unlimited Canada, with Silvia D'Amelio, the chief executive officer.

Thank you very much for being here.

Go ahead, Robin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robin Lessard (Field Unit Superintendent, Northern Ontario, Parks Canada Agency): Good afternoon, Madam Chair, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today.

Parks Canada is recognized as a world leader in conservation. My remarks will provide you with details on Parks Canada's work to protect and present our protected places in northern Ontario where we manage a number of land- and water-based natural and cultural sites along the north shore of Lake Superior. They are situated in this rugged part of Canada along the Trans-Canada Highway.

My presentation will speak to my management experiences in support of ecological integrity including monitoring, restoration and providing meaningful experiences to our visitors. You will see through my examples that relationships with local communities, other government departments and indigenous communities are at the heart of how we operate and how we collectively enrich the experience of our visitors.

Established in 1978, Pukaskwa National Park is located on the north shore of Lake Superior, protecting 1,878 square kilometres of ecosystems, including boreal forest and rugged Canadian Shield.

An ecological integrity monitoring program has been implemented to monitor the long-term trends and health of Lake Superior ecosystems, both terrestrial and aquatic. Data is collected by park staff but also as part of an innovative collaboration with Lakehead University.

Since 2013, Lakehead University has held a field course in the park for its environmental science students. The course contributes to the work we do while providing students the opportunity to engage, experience, and learn about conservation and protection in our national heritage places.

Another example is the citizen scientists who are engaged in annual monitoring of the threatened peregrine falcon along Pukaskwa's coast. Each spring, Parks Canada staff and members of Project Peregrine survey known peregrine falcon territories within the park. In 2016, the highest number of active territories to date, five, were recorded in the park.

In addition to ecological monitoring, Pukaskwa is also actively restoring natural ecosystems through the reintroduction of fire on the landscape. Since 1998, the park has burned over 1,400 hectares of boreal forest, helping to restore key habitat. This program represents an opportunity for the agency to share our knowledge of the role of fire in ecosystems with park visitors who can take a walk through a prescribed burn area that includes interpretive panels explaining the role of fire in a healthy ecosystem.

Collaborations with other departments are ongoing and contribute to our focus on ecological integrity. The Pukaskwa National Park and Fathom Five National Marine Park are collaborating on a multi-year study with Environment and Climate Change Canada to assess impacts of diet on fish-eating birds and its relation to declining populations of herring gull.

Another example is a partnership with Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and with Fisheries and Oceans Canada, to ensure that Lake Superior's ecosystems remain healthy and viable for fish species such as lake sturgeon, lake trout and brook trout.

Parks Canada is also an important partner to the Great Lakes water quality agreement. The Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area makes a significant contribution to the objectives in that agreement, through the protection of one third of the Canadian waters of Lake Superior.

Parks Canada also participated in the Lake Superior partnership working group, which produced the newly released Lake Superior lakewide action and management plan.

● (1720)

Parks Canada works with more than 300 indigenous communities across Canada in conserving, restoring and presenting Canada's natural and cultural heritage. Northern Ontario is no exception. Examples of this include a program where Anishnaabe teachings are brought to life with guided hikes along part of our trail networks.

Recently, the redevelopment of the traditional Anishnaabe camp immediately in the park's main visitor reception area engage the local community to build traditional birchbark structures including a tipi, cook tent and wigwam. Visitors passing by or participating in our guided hikes were able to witness traditional building methods in action and to speak with local knowledge-holders.

The Lake Superior national marine conservation area, once formally established under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act, will protect almost 13% of the lake, including 10,880 square kilometres of lakebed, over 600 islands, the water column and all living things in it.

The completion of the interim management plan released earlier this year reconfirmed the vision established in 2002 and is an example of Parks Canada's collaboration with partner indigenous organizations, the Province of Ontario, other federal agencies, and coastal communities. As the national marine conservation area becomes operational, local indigenous communities are helping to define all aspects of its operation.

Canada's national parks and marine conservation areas are gateways to nature, adventure, and discovery, and Parks Canada will continue to connect Canadians with their heritage.

As we near the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, we are inviting Canadians to experience and learn more about our environment and our heritage. For example, the Pukaskwa National Park currently welcomes approximately 9,500 visitors per year and looks forward to welcoming more visitors for this special year.

Next year, a new trail will open at Pukaskwa, which, while linked to the iconic coastal hiking trail, will offer a more accessible hiking experience for visitors. The trail has been designed in collaboration with indigenous partners to include a focus on indigenous culture through the presence of interpretive panels and learning opportunities.

Canada's two national marine conservation areas in the Great Lakes region provide incredible living laboratories for freshwater research. As protected areas, they provide a baseline for understanding lake ecosystem health.

As part of our operations, we ensure that ecological integrity is the first consideration in the management of our national parks. Ecological integrity and visitor experience are not mutually exclusive; both are essential to ensuring that visitors will create lasting connections to our places. Within our marine conservation areas, ecological sustainable use is the management goal.

Parks Canada is strongly committed to working in partnership and collaboration with indigenous peoples, communities, municipalities and other stakeholders to ensure that Canada's heritage areas are protected for future generations.

Through planning initiatives, partnering opportunities, public outreach and education, Parks Canada is informing Canadians about the importance of protecting these special places and encouraging stewardship of our natural and cultural resources for present and future generations.

Thank you.

● (1725)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lessard. We appreciate that.

We'll listen to all the witnesses and then start the questioning.

Ms. D'Amelio.

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio (Chief Executive Officer, Trout Unlimited Canada): I'd like to thank everyone here for the opportunity to speak before the standing committee. The organization really does appreciate your time and your interest in what we have to say.

Trout Unlimited Canada, or TUC, is a national not-for-profit conservation organization founded in 1971. We're an on-the-ground conservation organization that's focused on conserving, protecting, and restoring Canada's freshwater ecosystems and their cold water resources for current and future generations. We're a science-based but volunteer-driven organization with volunteer chapters across Canada that adopt and work to conserve their local waterways, not only for the fish that inhabit them and the fisheries they support, but also to ensure clean water for the communities that depend on them.

TUC's science, policies, and program direction come from our national conservation agenda created by input from our chapters, our members, and our supporters, and from a national resource advisory council made up of academics, professionals, and policy-makers from across the country. Canada's landscape of lands interconnected by rivers and lakes constitutes the natural infrastructure of Canada, providing enormous ecological and economic benefits to all Canadians. Our organization recognizes that proper management of Canada's natural areas and biodiversity includes the continuum from protection, to conservation, to restoring damaged environments as part of ensuring the sustainability of the natural system that ensures our own health and prosperity.

Ensuring the protection of critical areas and their ecological functions, natural biodiversity, and habitats for wildlife, migratory birds, and species at risk is one component of an integrated environmental management strategy. Restoration of endangered aquatic species also requires the protection and restoration of their endangered habitats. TUC believes that the maintenance and acquisition of protected areas is one critical major step in better protecting Canada's natural biodiversity and the health of its natural systems.

The ongoing maintenance and establishment of new protected areas, whether as part of the national parks strategy, national wildlife areas, migratory bird sanctuaries, national marine conservation areas, or national marine protection areas, will require significant resources to maintain existing areas and also to strategically acquire new areas. Funds need to be ensured for the medium and the long term to manage and to acquire these protected areas into the future.

There is a strong need for a national strategy—not just an agency one—for the management and identification of future protected areas. This requires collaborative strategic planning and the linking of various protected area initiatives by Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada into a cohesive integrated planning initiative that would direct a longer-term protection program. The program would include critical terrestrial and aquatic habitats for both species at risk and threatened species, as well as examples of sensitive ecosystems and environments essential for the survival of all Canadian biodiversity.

This form of collaborative planning would increase the justification for the acquisition of specific protected areas, reduce duplication of effort, and demonstrate a more cohesive rationale for why specific areas are protected. Expansion of collaborative management to other organizations, nations, and private landowners will help ensure a broader strategic planning approach to better protect critical ecosystems beyond the capability of the federal government alone.

An ecological network needs connectivity. To increase the capacity for resiliency, especially with more climate variability and adjacent human activity, we need to actively create a set of connections to link protected areas to create a true ecologically active network of land- and waterscapes. We suggest that protected areas, whether freshwater, marine, terrestrial, or wetland, should be linked to corridors of connectivity where possible to ensure that they act as ecological networks, not just administrative or physical ones. In addition, there is a need for a stewardship strategy which ensures that the remaining landscape, whether working or not, is as functional as possible, especially in those areas near, connected to, or adjacent to protected areas. Some of these discussions date back to wildlife policy in the 1990s.

● (1730)

Stream and river corridors are one type of network system. One of the major elements lacking in Canada's legislation currently is legislation such as the wild and scenic rivers legislation in the U.S., which not only protects critical aquatic habitats in riverine systems, but also ensures connectivity through their linear corridors to protect landscapes. This is a major component in resiliency on the landscape, and it is currently lacking in Canadian legislation. While not the direct focus of this standing committee, this form of legislation would help to better link federal mandates and responsibilities for protecting both terrestrial and aquatic environments and could be considered another tool in achieving an effective protected area strategy.

Protected areas will not remain viable in the long term without ensuring that surrounding lands and waters have better management to ensure critical physical, chemical, and biological functions are maintained and that, where degraded, they are restored to some sense of ecological function. Trout Unlimited Canada focuses on working with others to ensure that Canadian landscapes that are not directly protected and are mostly private are managed to ensure critical functions where possible and restored to some level of ecological function. The roles of provinces, first nations, and private landowners are critical to ensuring these functions are maintained while these lands and waters are used for other purposes.

All lands and waters need some level of management and support to ensure various levels of stability, especially those lands in private ownership. Where acquisition is not possible or appropriate, incentives and support for complementary land use practices on private lands would extend the protection in and around protected areas. This is not a regulatory approach, but more of a co-operative approach.

There should be a federal strategic planning exercise for protected areas in Canada that is a collaboration among the three federal agencies and jointly implemented. The plan, reflecting the success of Parks Canada's approach, should focus on simplicity and clarity of message for why we create and manage protected areas. It should have clear objectives that are measurable and realistic timelines to ensure ongoing implementation. The exercise should be linked to strategic collaborative planning with provincial, territorial, and indigenous organizations that also wish to act proactively to better manage and protect critical environments.

People and monetary resources need to be made available to manage protected areas and maintain them so that the ecological and biophysical functions are maintained. Nation-to-nation collaborations and co-management opportunities should be explored and established to extend the range of these protected areas.

With that, I'd like to thank the standing committee again for the opportunity to speak.

● (1735)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I know that we didn't give you much time to get ready to come here and present, so we really appreciate the detail you've put forward.

We'll move right into questions.

Mr. Amos.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you to our witnesses. I appreciate the preparation on the short timeline.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Lessard, as I read your brief on Pukaskwa, I was reminded of the two weeks I spent on the White River. I then hiked the trail. It is amazing and I recommend it to everyone.

Pukaskwa is

[*English*]

a “must hit”, as far as I'm concerned, but I will leave Pukaskwa for now and direct my questions towards our trout friend.

I'm particularly excited to hear about the priority that you place on connectivity, because we've been hearing a lot about that. When your organization is advocating for conservation, are you focusing on specific rivers and tributaries or are you focused on the broader landscape-scale and sort of holistic tributary and watershed protection?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: The goal is watershed protection. That's not always in the cards, so we like to at least have the end goal that the projects we're putting in place, the advocacy we're doing, and the protections we're trying to put in place protect ecological function at the watershed level. That's done through on-the-ground projects, through advocacy, protection, and all of those sorts of things.

We take a watershed-wide view, and I'll be honest: sometimes it's a hard sell. It's a hard sell to explain to someone that to fix the problem in their backyard, we have to go 100 kilometres upstream and work on someone else's property, but that's the reality.

Mr. William Amos: I'm not sure if your organization has done any projects in rural western Quebec. I think it's broadly acknowledged, at least in this committee room, that Pontiac is the greatest riding for trout fishing—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. William Amos: Okay, maybe we haven't had the discussion. I'll acknowledge that we haven't had that discussion.

If a given region has a conservation project that could involve elements of trout conservation, how would they engage with your organization? What is the criteria that you apply as you're evaluating opportunities for your organization to engage?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: Our criterion is simple: people who care. That's how it starts. It starts with a phone call. It doesn't get simpler than that, and it doesn't get more complicated than that.

We have a team of professionals who go out and assess and who support tens of thousands of volunteers across the country. We work in areas where there's interest, because the gains that will be realized will be realized in areas where people care, where people can steward these projects through, and where they can take care of them and make sure they're maintained in the longer term.

We are misnamed. We don't just work on trout. We work on all fresh water. It's not just cold water and it's not just trout. Many of our projects have nothing to do with fish at all. It's about clean water. We'll work on that part.

As for Quebec, we just got our first chapter in Quebec about a year and a half ago. They're probably our most active chapter, and we have interest for three more chapters, so I expect to be seeing you soon.

● (1740)

Mr. William Amos: If the good people of CPAWS, who were testifying just previously and speaking about the Pontiac region, could be in touch with you, I think that would be fabulous.

I think my six minutes are close to done.

The Chair: No, you're only at four, but if you want to give them up—

Mr. William Amos: Out of respect for my colleagues, I'll give up space.

The Chair: Okay.

Do you want to take the other two, Mark? Off you go.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Yes. Otherwise Ed will take them.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Don't waste them, though. Go.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

Robin, the question is for you. In your notes and your presentation, you talked about ecological integrity, including monitoring, restoration, and the provision of meaningful experiences to visitors. Later, you went on to address that point again by saying that they're not mutually exclusive.

My question is, what's the balance? You obviously can't have too much visitation; otherwise, it jeopardizes the ecological integrity of it. I'm curious. I'm wondering if you could comment a little on what the balance is, other than what you have said, which is that they're not mutually exclusive. That doesn't really say much about where you see that balance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robin Lessard: First, I would like to thank you for coming to visit Pukaskwa Park.

[*English*]

I like to paddle and enjoy the outdoors, so thank you for visiting. I'll make sure I talk to the team over there about it.

[*Translation*]

If I may, I will talk about the two areas in which I have worked. First, in Quebec, I worked on the north shore, specifically on the Mingan Archipelago. Then I went to Pukaskwa Park in Ontario. When the ecological integrity monitoring program is applied, those two parks—actually, the first is a park reserve and the second is a park—are in good health according to what we have been able to observe. At Pukaskwa, our program has three indicators, for which we use five measures as a minimum. Observing those measures allows us to say that the park is in good health.

With that as a starting point, we have to look at the infrastructures and experiences that we can offer to our visitors. At Mingan, as we were developing the visitor experience, for example, we installed oTENTik tents. We made sure to conduct sound environmental assessments so that those oTENTik tents were set up in places where rare plants would not be threatened. So we make sure to conduct good environmental assessments and examine the park's state of health.

It is important to try to provide an experience for the visitors because, at the end of the day, it is they who will be helping us to better protect our parks by talking about the experiences they had there.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Is that environmental assessment still ongoing?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robin Lessard: That depends. It's based on the environments. We do it constantly based on our projects. We have internal processes that enable us to do assessments based on the nature of the projects under way.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, I hate to do it, but I have to cut it off. Thank you very much.

Mr. Shields.

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate what you say about Trout Unlimited. The organization I'm familiar with in Alberta, Cows and Fish, has the same problem with identification and gets asked, “What are you?”

I could look it up, but what is your membership base?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: I honestly couldn't tell you, because we just about did away with memberships this past year.

Mr. Martin Shields: Oh. I used to have one.

You have many chapters.

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: We have supporters. We have volunteers. We're at 10,000 to 20,000 and growing every day. It's constantly ebbing and flowing.

Mr. Martin Shields: Right.

You talked about different organizations, some of them government, in the sense of Parks Canada, the fisheries department, and the rest of it, and then you talked about NGOs. How is your relationship with the government agencies you work with?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: It's good, actually.

Mr. Martin Shields: Can you give me an example?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: We have a lot of partnerships with different provincial agencies and even with federal agencies.

● (1745)

Mr. Martin Shields: The federal ones are the ones I'm thinking of.

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: We've been active in advising on changes to the federal Fisheries Act over the last five years, and that's ongoing. We've been active in the comments and revisions to the RFCPP, the funding program.

Currently we're working with a number of NGOs. We just came out of two days of meetings on the potential establishment of a fish habitat strategy or national plan. Along with a lot of not-for-profit organizations, we are lucky to be able to interact with the federal government in a variety of different ways.

Mr. Martin Shields: Do you do joint projects, let's say with Ducks Unlimited, which I'm very familiar with? Do you do joint projects with NGOs?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: With other NGOs, absolutely, including Ducks Unlimited.

Mr. Martin Shields: Can you give me an example?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: There's Cows and Fish. We probably have about 15 or 20 projects on the ground with them.

I know of a couple of projects with Ducks Unlimited in Ontario, where it has done the wetland work and we've done the adjoining stream work, mostly on private lands in that case.

We have a number of them. With OFAH, actually, we were the lead before it took the lead on the Atlantic salmon restoration or repatriation program.

Mr. Martin Shields: You mentioned invasive species. Quagga mussels and zebra mussels have been a huge issue that is coming west. What's your role in that?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: That's a really tough one. We've just launched a new campaign and fund. It's called “Stop the Spread”, and it is raising money to increase education and stop the spread of not only invasives but pathogens as well, in looking at things like VHS and whirling disease.

Mr. Martin Shields: How are you dealing with whirling disease?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: How do you deal with whirling disease? You can't get rid of it, but you can attempt to stop the spread. The reality with whirling disease is that it's likely in a lot more places than we've looked.

Whirling disease requires a very specific set of conditions to express itself. Amazingly enough, those conditions are high water temperature, poor water quality, and low water oxygen. In theory, then, if we clean up our water, whether whirling disease is there or not, it should not be expressed. Keeping our watersheds healthy is important.

Mr. Martin Shields: Let's go back to the mussels for a minute. What exact activities are you doing, other than education. Is it just education?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: The invasive species issue has not been a priority for TUC in the past. It has just come to the forefront for us in, I would say, the last three months. We're starting with education. We're going to be developing cleaning kits for boats and anglers and a variety of other tools.

We are active right now with the provincial government in Alberta in dealing with whirling disease. We're going to be helping with some of the monitoring and assessment. We're getting involved where we can, but we don't want to step on other people's toes.

OFAH has a great program on invasive species in Ontario. We're likely to partner with it instead of starting something new.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is there any ask that you would have at the federal level in sitting here and listening to this? What's something that you would say would help you?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: Do you mean with regard to invasive species or generally?

Mr. Martin Shields: Anything generally.

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: I'm going to say right now that the increased communication and willingness to hear what the not-for-profits are doing is a massive step, but I think the biggest thing we can do in this country is to recognize that not only is the health of our watersheds paramount in our own health and the health of our fishes and animals, but it's actually an economic benefit. We're starting to see that if we can clean up our waters upstream, it's cheaper to treat water in municipalities.

When we start actually bringing that into the economics of how we run our country, our provinces, and our municipalities, they don't have to conflict. I think that if we start accounting for that, we'll see major gains in this country.

Mr. Martin Shields: You said “conflict”. Where's the conflict?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: There's a general belief that being environmentally friendly is costly, but it's actually not if you run the numbers in the long term. It can be quite beneficial.

Mr. Martin Shields: I'll go back to parks. You talked about staffing. When we talk about some ideas in parks, it's usually about indigenous species. What about staffing?

Mr. Robin Lessard: Can you say that again?

Mr. Martin Shields: Staffing: are there indigenous staff in the parks that you're talking about?

Mr. Robin Lessard: Yes. Well, Pukaskwa has a special agreement.

[*Translation*]

Right now,

[*English*]

I believe 50% of our staff are indigenous.

Mr. Martin Shields: Is that a target or is that just where you're at?

Mr. Robin Lessard: That's where we are. That was a target that was established, but it's really specific to Pukaskwa. In this case, that's something we've been able to maintain for quite a while, I understand.

● (1750)

Mr. Martin Shields: Okay.

The Chair: That's awesome. That was the question I wanted to ask. Well done.

Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Thank you. I have a question for each of you, if I may.

Mr. McNamee, it's been a while since you've been with us. I'm interested in hearing what sort of progress has been made from your perspective in reaching the targets and whether any new challenges have come up.

Mr. Lessard, I'm interested in terms of your region or area of responsibility. You may need to look to Mr. McNamee for assistance, but which ecosystems, whether they're water based or land based, are currently under-represented in your area and perhaps should be added through the process?

Ms. D'Amelio, my riding is in southeastern British Columbia, home of the westslope cutthroat trout, bull trout, and the world's largest rainbow trout, the Gerrard.

A voice: It even has a name.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I'm interested in whether your group has actually identified areas that you'd like to see protected. By the way, I really like your concept of wild and scenic rivers as a mechanism to help us meet our targets.

Maybe we could start with Mr. McNamee.

Mr. Kevin McNamee (Director, Protected Areas Establishment Branch, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you for the question, Mr. Stetski.

The committee has been previously briefed in terms of the work that we are co-leading with the Government of Alberta in working with other governments, indigenous governments and others. If I may, let me suggest that in a number of weeks it might be worthwhile to ask representatives of Parks Canada to return, because I think we'd be in a better position at that time to speak to plans, or further plans, in terms of the 17%.

In terms of new national parks and national marine conservation areas, we continue to pursue, as per the announcement in budget 2016, Thaidene Nene, the proposed national park reserve that this committee has heard about. We've been making progress there. We've completed the public consultation. We have firmed up and are pretty close to completing our agreements with the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation and the N.W.T. Métis Nation. The Government of the Northwest Territories has informed us that they have now appointed a senior negotiator for the land transfer agreement, so we're going to be making some solid progress to try to complete that one in 2017.

Certainly since I've had the chance with the committee, in terms of Lancaster Sound, the steering committee leading that one is close to completing its work. As you're well aware, Shell Canada relinquished some of their leases to that area. You also heard from the Cree Nation government of our interest in pursuing a national marine conservation area within their territory, and we are currently working with them, as they informed you, on an MOU to formally launch a feasibility assessment.

I'll leave it at that.

Mr. Robin Lessard: I take note of the targets, but what I would like to say about northern Ontario is in terms of how we represent the different realities of the sites that Parks Canada manages.

In northern Ontario, I'm really proud to say that we manage one national marine conservation area, which is the Lake Superior NMCA. This is fairly wide, as I mentioned in my presentation, and it's going to be one of the largest freshwater protected areas in the world. We also have a fairly wide national park, which is Pukaskwa. We have one national historic site, which is Fort St. Joseph. We also have a national historic site, a canal, in Sault Ste. Marie.

What I want to tell you in my answer is that in northern Ontario I feel very privileged to be working with the different varieties of parks offered. In the area we cover, two of these areas are fairly significant.

In terms of under-representation and targets, I think I'd rather get back to you. Probably Kevin is better placed to come back to you at a later stage.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: We'd better move on before I get cut off here.

Go ahead.

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: As far as areas go, sure, I could give you a list.

I think the underlying factor for all the areas that Trout Unlimited would identify is the value and the ecological function of the spaces. Those spaces tend to be what our national biologists refer to as “endangered spaces”, and those are headwaters.

Think of the foothills of Alberta. Once those waters are actually utilized and taken up, for whatever reason, or once land use practices actually change the hydro-geography of that area, everything downstream, which is basically all of southern Alberta, is realizing some significant impact in water quality, flooding, and all those sorts of things.

These headwater areas across the country, not just in the foothills, are extremely important. We were thrilled to hear about the first-ever habitat protection order for cutthroat trout. That was absolutely amazing. As a result, I think the province there put some protection through the Castle wilderness area there.

Unfortunately, actions and land use practices are still such that the habitat is being degraded, so we need to talk about what these protected areas look like. Is it okay to run ATVs through these rivers non-stop and disrupt spawning? Is it okay to disrupt groundwater upwelling? I think my answer would be that headwaters are where we need to start.

● (1755)

The Chair: That's awesome. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Mr. Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm going to get six minutes, right? I'm going to try to save a minute for Mr. Amos.

I want to go back to Parks Canada. With Canada being 150 years old next year, you're fully aware that the government is going to open parks up to visitation for free. The whole idea behind it is to get people more engaged in the amazing assets that we have, to celebrate them, and, I think, to inform people about why they're so important and what they mean to us as Canadians. I'm wondering if you can comment on the value of having individuals visit our parks and whether you see value in that in terms of our ability to establish more and maintain what we have.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robin Lessard: I am pleased to answer that question.

To protect our places and show what we are doing, it is absolutely essential that we form connections with Canadians and visitors. Canada's 150th anniversary is an absolutely extraordinary opportunity for this.

[*English*]

We want to win the hearts and minds of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

We are taking good, concrete measures to protect our parks. However, the people who visit us don't see them.

Once people visit our locations, and we introduce them to these places, they will come back. They will become ambassadors, which will bring more people to our places.

We know that there are demographic changes in society. More and more people live in cities. These people don't always know about Parks Canada sites since most of our parks aren't located in cities. But we're lucky because some of them are in cities. However, some of our sites are very far away from large urban centres.

So it is important to take the opportunity of Canada's 150th anniversary to make connections with Canadians, to introduce them to the beauty of our sites and to share with them what we do to protect our natural and cultural resources.

I hope I have answered your question satisfactorily.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I like your strategy of giving the first one for free and then getting them to come back and start paying for them.

Do you have something to add, Mr. McNamee?

Mr. Kevin McNamee: Yes.

I just want to remind the committee of what I think is an important point, because I think people quote various pieces of section 4 of the Canada National Parks Act. Since 1930, when Parliament first affirmed the purpose of parks, section 4 has never changed. It reads as follows:

> The national parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment...and the parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

That is a mandate we take seriously, and the ecological integrity element was added to it, but I think it's important to quote that entire clause and to realize that it has stood the test of time and many Parliaments since 1930.

● (1800)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you for that.

The other things I want to touch on before I turn it over to Mr. Amos are demographics and trends on visitation. Do you have some of that information that you can share with us? If not right now, could you provide it to us later on? I'm curious to know the demographics of who is visiting. Do you keep data on that? Do you use it in order to help attract more people?

Mr. Robin Lessard: The simple answer is yes. We look at this to make sure that we use it appropriately. We would have to come back with the data.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Could you provide that as a follow-up submission?

Mr. Kevin McNamee: Yes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Thank you.

I'll turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Amos. I believe I have two more minutes.

Mr. William Amos: Thank you. This is like a good kindergarten class.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. William Amos: I appreciate the interventions of Mr. McNamee. I want to seize the opportunity to ask about the nature of intergovernmental collaboration, in particular in Quebec, with Parks Canada.

It's my understanding that because of the politics of sovereignty there have been challenges between the federal government, in particular the national parks administration, and the Government of Quebec since the 1970s, when La Mauricie and Forillon were established. We have that success in the Saguenay-St. Lawrence, of course, which I think is a recent standout, but it's in the marine area.

Can you speak to the future of terrestrial collaboration with Quebec, particularly in areas where there's potential for aboriginal collaboration?

Mr. Kevin McNamee: Thanks for the question, Mr. Amos.

We have three national parks in Quebec. We acquired one by outright purchase from an oil company. The second one is on a 99-year lease, and the third one was the result of land exchange.

Saguenay-St. Lawrence exists because there is both federal and provincial jurisdiction. Parks Canada protects the federal jurisdiction in the waters and Quebec has terrestrial parks adjacent. The Government of Quebec has had a policy, which I believe it enshrined in legislation, that it will not transfer land to the Government of Canada for a range of purposes, and that includes national parks.

Under the Canada National Parks Act, in order to establish a national park in a provincial jurisdiction, we require the transfer of the surface and the subsurface. In terms of making any meaningful progress—and there have been a number of attempts to move forward but they did not come to fruition—we focused elsewhere, where we have had some good federal-provincial co-operation in terms of establishing new national parks, for example in Newfoundland and Labrador, where there was tremendous co-operation, and more recently with the Government of the Northwest Territories.

To go to collaboration, what is interesting is to look at the national parks of Quebec that have been created by the Government of Quebec. What they have done is that they've used our studies, focused on the areas that we identified as of national significance, and established them as national parks, in some places co-operatively managed with indigenous organizations.

You can look at it and say that, well, from a really tight federal perspective, we didn't make any gains, or you could take a more sort of national perspective and say they focused on the areas that we identified as of national importance and protected them. That's why we have continued for now to focus on the other areas where we have collaboration and to make progress there, and maybe through the indigenous model there might be something we can do in Quebec, but I think that's to be determined.

Mr. William Amos: While the chair is distracted, I'd like to take advantage and—

The Chair: Okay, no. You know what? I am distracted.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We are over time.

Mr. Fast, you're up.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thanks so much, Kevin. It's good to have you back at the table.

Robin and Silvia, thank you for your contributions.

I did want to follow up on a question that Mr. Gerretsen asked. Again, it has to do with the tension between our national parks and our protected areas serving Canadians and yet being left for future generations unimpaired. I'm sure there are different ways of interpreting what “unimpaired” means.

We've certainly heard from Alan Latourelle that over the last 15 years we've made unprecedented efforts to set aside natural spaces parkland. He was focusing on the fact that Canada can be proud of its record in moving forward with protecting natural spaces.

On the other hand, CPAWS made it very clear that they feel that there's been a dramatic decline in our national parks. In fact, I want to quote something out of a press release that they and a number of other NGOs released recently. They say:

> Yet, since 2012, Parks Canada's conservation capacity has been cut by almost one third, public consultations have been dramatically curtailed, and development proposals have been allowed to go ahead within parks, even though they contravene policies specifically designed to limit development....

They go on to say:

> As leaders of Canada's environmental movement, we are deeply concerned that the Government of Canada's management of our national parks has shifted dramatically in the wrong direction, putting our most treasured protected places at risk.

Their assessment is not what I'm hearing from Parks Canada and from others who are actually lauding what the governments—past as well as present—are doing on the conservation front. Can you help me reconcile these different messages we're hearing?

● (1805)

Mr. Kevin McNamee: First of all, I think it's important to acknowledge at this moment that part of the reason the country has achieved so much in terms of conservation is because of the leadership of a gentleman we just lost, Mr. Jim Prentice. He brought to his portfolio tremendous leadership, which resulted in things like the sixfold expansion of Nahanni and the protection of Gwaii Haanas in the marine environment. In fact, Madam Chair, he exhibited a focus on exactly what this committee is looking at, and that is the involvement of indigenous people, and he accomplished much because of that. Our condolences to all parliamentarians on his passing.

I will not pretend to speak for CPAWS, but I think what you're hearing in part is a focus on a number of developments in the mountain parks. The mountain parks, throughout the history of national parks, have been a focus for a range of controversies, but I think you need to stand back and look at the entire system. I think we're quite proud of what we have accomplished in terms of what we've done with indigenous people, be it in the Torngat Mountains, the Mealy Mountains, and across the country. The number of advisory boards and management boards is growing tremendously.

In terms of our programs, when we looked at them, we had ramped up in the early 2000s. In 2012, it was time to move from a development phase on species at risk and ecological integrity into an implementation phase. The number of natural science professionals did drop by 30%. However, to compare it to now, as a result of a number of targeted investments and initiatives where we have hired staff to deal with a number of things, such as impact assessment of infrastructure projects, ecological restoration of ecosystems, climate change science, and management of human-wildlife conflicts, which you've heard about in the media, our staff in the natural sciences portfolio has grown by approximately 20% since 2013.

I think that if you look at a number of our publications, which we can share with you, you can see that there is a range of successes that we have brought to bear in terms of dealing with visitors, in terms of our ecosystems, in terms of working with indigenous people across our mandate, and in terms of securing new marine and terrestrial areas.

I apologize for the length of my response, but I think you raise an important point that we would want to speak to.

● (1810)

Hon. Ed Fast: Let me drill down a little more.

The Chair: Mr. Fast, you have 20 seconds.

Hon. Ed Fast: CPAWS has essentially suggested that there should be no more development within our national parks except to refurbish infrastructure. In other words, that means no expansion within the parks to accommodate additional visitors and just taking old infrastructure and replacing it with new. Is that something that Parks Canada is considering? Or would you respond with a challenge to that assertion?

Mr. Kevin McNamee: I would respond simply in terms of the mandate letter, as you quoted, the mandate that has been given to the minister.

The second thing is that with respect to specific parks, in part it depends on the management plan. We have a management planning process that we work on with indigenous people to put in place and that we consult the public on. Those plans will determine that.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It is a good question. I'm sorry to have to cut that off.

We have a bit more time for one more questioner.

Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks, folks. I'll try to be quick on this. I know that we're running out of time.

I'd like to give Kevin a bit more time to talk about something that Mr. Fast went with. Earlier, in the first panel, Mr. Fast brought up a press release from some of the leading environmentalists that spoke to conservation capacity being reduced by 30%. You just touched on it again.

I was intrigued by that press release, and I looked it up and read it. I'm wondering about what has suffered since 2012 with the reduction in conservation capacity in our parks. Is it as easy as just ramping up those people? You spoke to an area where staff has increased since 2013. Can you elaborate a little?

First of all, I guess, my question would be, what has suffered since 2012 with that reduction in capacity for conservation? Second, is it just as easy as ramping up, going out, hiring those people, and getting the money in the budget?

Mr. Kevin McNamee: To go back to 2012, when the reductions were made, we did have within every field unit across Canada the professional capacity to assist each one of our parks and sites with the science they required for management planning and things like as that. We still had a national office, and in the key disciplines, the necessary staff.

Since 2012, there have been places where we have received through budgets reinvestments in areas in terms of ecological restoration and that. As I mentioned, we have hired staff or enhanced our capacity by 20% for 2015, compared to 2013, to deal with things like growing challenges, such as the impact assessment of infrastructure projects. We've received funding to deal with that.

We have a whole range of ecological restoration projects. Maybe Robin can speak to some that are going on, just to illustrate from a field unit perspective what we've been doing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robin Lessard: Actually, I was going to answer by mentioning the following.

[*English*]

Kevin, please don't hesitate to prompt me.

[*Translation*]

We are currently working in the parks with the resources available to us. We have some people on site, we have a certain annual budget, and we are making it all work.

As I mentioned previously, in Pukaskwa, for instance, we established the ecological integrity monitoring program in 2008. Currently, according to the three indicators, which are the aquatic ecosystem, the coastal ecosystem and the forest ecosystem, we consider the health to be good, with “good” being the best possible rating. We are able to do this with the resources we have. That is the answer I wanted to give you about this.

If I may, I would have also liked to add something about a previous question on—

● (1815)

[*English*]

Mr. Darren Fisher: Can you save me one minute?

The Chair: Sure. How many more questions do you have?

Mr. Darren Fisher: I just need one more.

The Chair: Please carry on. You have two minutes to go.

Mr. Robin Lessard: I was just going to say that on investing in our infrastructure, if I understood you correctly, you're asking what we should be doing about it. What I understand from the critics is that we should be only investing in the current infrastructure we have.

To follow on what Kevin was saying, yes, it's important to make sure that the infrastructure we get is adequate in answer to the visitors and the Canadians who visit our places, but we need also to think about what's going to drive these Canadians to our places. As I was saying earlier, we need to win their hearts and minds, and sometimes we need to innovate and we need to bring new projects into a park to stay relevant to Canadians.

Mr. Darren Fisher: There's one minute left?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Darren Fisher: I'm going to give it to Will.

Mr. William Amos: Mr. McNamee, we visited Banff and Jasper and heard from a number of advocacy organizations. We spoke with the superintendents in both parks about the bike path that was funded in the recent budget. From the superintendents' perspective, it wasn't an infrastructure investment that they had pushed forward, according to them.

I'm curious to know how a project like that, which was not assessed, got into the mix in the budget.

Mr. Kevin McNamee: The budget that comes down is a government budget, Mr. Amos, and as a civil servant, I can't speak to it any more than that. That's what was announced in the budget.

Mr. William Amos: That's it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. I feel really bad about having this tension of the time. We started late and had two panels, which means that I pushed everybody to half an hour later, and we have 15 minutes of work that we still have to do within the committee.

I want to thank the three of you for being here and for answering our questions. Again, there were some questions for some further information. We would love to have that sooner rather than later, because we are going to start drafting instructions at the very beginning of November. We would like to have that in our hands before we do that, and I know that sometimes there's translation. If you could get that to us, that would be fantastic.

Again, thank you.

Mr. Eglinski.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I was just wondering if we could ask them to come back at the end of our study. I think it might be quite valuable to hear from them.

An hon. member: The subcommittee should discuss that.

The Chair: We'll talk about that.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Is it possible to ask for some information?

The Chair: Yes. Let's do that quickly.

Does anybody else have any specific questions you'd like them to answer?

Mr. Jim Eglinski: I have one.

The Chair: No, not here, but to have it written. We need to hurry, guys, because they have to go.

Hon. Ed Fast: It's for information.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Ms. D'Amelio, you talked about the national strategy for rivers in the United States. Could you send us a copy of that?

Ms. Silvia D'Amelio: I can.

Mr. Jim Eglinski: Thank you.

The Chair: That would be fantastic.

Thank you so much. I'm sorry to have to rush us on to the next section.

We'll take one minute and then get started again in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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