



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

ENVI • NUMBER 046 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, October 17, 2012

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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to move my motion in public, as follows:

That, because the Experimental Lakes Area (ELA) has been providing public policy makers both within Canada and around the world with exceptional and unique research for over 40 years in areas such as freshwater ecosystems, and given the impending timeline in which the government will decide whether to remediate, shutter, or transfer the ELA to a third party, the committee immediately study the ELA, the research done onsite, its impacts on public policy, and the potential consequences of closing, remediating, or transferring the ELA to a third party.

I would like to vote on it in public, please.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): I move that the meeting go in camera.

The Chair: We have a motion, which is a dilatory motion, that we go in camera.

(Motion agreed to)

[Proceedings continue in camera]

[Public proceedings resume]

• (1540)

The Chair: I'll call the meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome our witnesses from the Department of the Environment and Parks Canada to this, the 46th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

Each witness has up to 10 minutes, and then we will have some questions for them. Welcome, and we'll begin with Ms. Poter from Environment Canada.

Ms. Virginia Poter (Director General, Canadian Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment): Mr. Chair, and members, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here.

My name is Virginia Poter and I am the director general of the Canadian Wildlife Service within Environment Canada.

The topic is urban conservation, so I've tried to give a perspective on that. Urban conservation means protecting and managing the valuable ecological spaces and species in and around cities, as well as the ecosystem services that they provide. As Nature Conservancy

defines it, urban conservation activities can either protect biodiversity within urban areas, or maintain or enhance the well-being of urban residences.

Biodiversity, the variety of life on earth, provides important benefits for urban centres and citizens. For example, the quality and quantity of water reaching rivers and available to urban populations is affected by landscape management in the watershed. Wetlands hold back water during heavy rain and runoff, and cleanse the water before releasing it to groundwater systems that ultimately feed the river.

Severe loss of wetlands leads to increased runoff and a subsequent decrease in water quality in the river. We don't necessarily think about what it means to lose these things until we experience the consequences. For example, experts agree that the Asian tsunami and hurricane Katrina would have been much less destructive if coastline vegetation and wetlands had not been destroyed.

The actions of individuals can have significant impact on biodiversity, positive or negative. There is declining interest in conservation and the environment among city dwellers. Connecting urban Canadians with conservation is important for fostering stronger community and stakeholder involvement in stewardship activities. Helping urban Canadians experience and recognize the value of nature and feel connected to it also builds support for conservation policies and programs at all levels of government.

Urban conservation contributes to a population that is physically and mentally healthier and more productive at work and in the community. At the same time, Canada's urban areas have a significant impact on biodiversity. The primary driver of biodiversity loss in Canada is the destruction and fragmentation of habitat. Along with increasing industrial development and conversion of agricultural land, urbanization is recognized as a major contributor to habitat loss and fragmentation.

The total area of urban land in Canada almost doubled between 1971 and 2001. Approximately 80% of the Canadian population lives in urban areas, and that number is expected to increase to 90% by the year 2050. Over 60% of Canadians live in cities of more than 100,000 people.

Although urban areas occupy barely a quarter of a per cent of the Canadian landscape, they are often situated in places that are particularly rich in biodiversity, such as coastal areas and river valleys, and where the impact of loss of habitat may be disproportionate to the size of the loss. For example, 90% of Canadians live along the southern border with the United States, which is also home to vulnerable biodiversity and ecosystems. Urban expansion can also alter watersheds, degrading water quality for aquatic biodiversity and increasing vulnerability to flooding. Historically, some ecosystems, such as wetlands and forests, have been particularly impacted by urban development.

Cities and local authorities are uniquely positioned to develop biodiversity solutions tailored to local needs and priorities. Biodiversity conservation has been traditionally viewed as the domain and responsibility of national, provincial, and territorial governments. However, municipal governments have started to recognize that their role is increasingly relevant, especially in light of increasing urbanization. This connection has been officially acknowledged in the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, the CBD, and reflected in the new Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity.

Cities can support biodiversity conservation in many ways through land use and urban planning, leadership and community service delivery. Best practices include green roofs, planting native species, green infrastructure, protection of pollinators, protection and restoration of species, wetlands, and forests, brownfield restorations, trees to combat heat islands, water conservation, and naturalizing schoolyards.

In 2010, Environment Canada, in partnership with ICLEI Canada, published *Cities and Biodiversity Case Studies Series* showcasing best practices in urban biodiversity management and protection. It highlights some of the internationally recognized leaders among Canadian cities such as Edmonton, Montreal, and Calgary, but also smaller cities that are committed to consider biodiversity in their plans and programs, such as Guelph, Wolfville, and Trois-Rivières.

• (1545)

For example, the City of Guelph is working towards completing a pollination park to provide habitat and protection for such pollinating species as bees and hummingbirds, and to act as a model upon which future parks can be based.

The City of Edmonton has made education on the importance of biodiversity a major local effort. The city has mainstreamed biodiversity and recognized the roles different stakeholders and community groups can play.

Through extensive re-greening programs to restore fragile and damaged landscapes, the City of Greater Sudbury is an example of what is possible through reintroducing nature to the city.

The City of Montreal is active in local and international networks working to share knowledge, lessons learned, and innovative approaches to protection of urban biodiversity.

The City of Toronto has implemented bird-friendly development guidelines and a green roof bylaw with the help of community groups, stakeholders, and academics.

Federal, provincial, and territorial governments can contribute to local efforts in a variety of ways. Their role may include setting national goals and targets, providing scientific and technical support, education and outreach, stewardship funding, building dialogues and partnerships, and developing place-based eco-regional approaches.

They can also support local action by sharing knowledge and information. Reports such as the Ecosystem Status and Trends report *Caring for Canada's Biodiversity* and *State of the Environment Report* in the Northwest Territories are good examples. The Province of Quebec also published a guide on biodiversity and urbanization in 2010.

In response to the Convention on Biological Diversity's new strategic plan, Canada is developing domestic biodiversity goals and targets for 2020. Recognizing the important role of local governments, one of the targets proposed by a federal-provincial-territorial working group focuses on integrating biodiversity conservation into municipal plans and strategies.

Environment Canada also has a variety of programs and partnerships that support urban conservation. They include: BioKits developed by the Biosphère to encourage Canadians to go outdoors and discover biodiversity in their neighbourhoods, parks, and urban spaces; the EcoAction community funding program; the ecological gifts program; the natural areas conservation program; and the habitat stewardship program.

Environment Canada is also engaged in many place-based initiatives that touch cities and communities, for example, ecosystem initiatives in the Great Lakes Basin and along the St. Lawrence.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada committed to developing a national conservation plan, NCP. The government has been engaging a broad range of partners and stakeholders to explore how we can build on our successes and find new ways to work together to advance Canada's conservation objectives.

In the spring of 2012 this committee undertook a study on the development of a national conservation plan. The study recommended that connecting urban Canadians to nature and urban conservation should be an important part of the NCP.

Today, the government tabled its response to the committee's study on the NCP, and in it we agreed with that finding. Urban conservation would be a key part of an NCP, working with provinces and territories, municipalities, and other partners and stakeholders. As we continue our efforts to develop the plan, there is no doubt that the testimony and findings of this study on urban conservation will provide additional helpful input.

As Canada's urban areas continue to grow in both population size and geographic area, it will be increasingly important to focus on long-term conservation programs and initiatives that maximize urban biodiversity and the benefit it provides.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Next we will hear from Mr. Campbell.

You have up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, Parks Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members, for this opportunity to speak with the standing committee today regarding the study of urban conservation practices in Canada.

My remarks today will focus on Parks Canada's contribution to and role in urban conservation. This contribution extends from Parks Canada's mandate, which is as follows:

On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity...for present and future generations.

The mandate inspires the work that we as Parks Canada undertake across the country in urban, rural, and wilderness areas. We welcome visitors to a network of 44 national parks, 167 national historic sites, and four national marine conservation areas which we protect and manage.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Parks Canada was established in 1911, creating the first national parks service in the world. The early visionaries of our parks system recognized that connecting with the natural world can be a deeply meaningful and moving experience and that it can bring enormous benefits to the natural world and systems, as well as the economy. This remains true today.

[English]

Parks Canada is also the largest provider of natural and historic tourism products in Canada. We protect ecosystems with a total land area the size of Germany. These destinations, of incredible accomplishments in nature and conservation, form the cornerstones of the Canadian tourism industry. A recent report reveals that the economic contributions made by Parks Canada and the millions of visitors to Canada's national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas are widespread within the Canadian economy. They create jobs and provide revenues generated for local businesses all across the country. In 2008-09 these benefits contributed more than \$3.3 billion to the Canadian economy.

Beyond this contribution, Parks Canada also provides to Canadians clean air and clean water, as Virginia said, through the conservation of large treasured places, be they rural or urban. For example, the protected watershed of Banff National Park supplies life-giving drinking water, provides recreational opportunities, and supports farmers and industries well beyond its borders.

Parks Canada places also provide sustainable ecosystems that are home to, or migratory areas for, many species, such as warblers and monarch butterflies in Point Pelee National Park. These species are in turn a key link in the ecological chain that ends in urban areas.

You could reasonably look at the provision of clean air and water and the economic benefits of natural areas as an incredible contribution, but in fact these make up only a fraction of what Parks Canada provides to Canadians in terms of urban conservation. One could argue that Parks Canada's largest role in urban conservation is to provide, through the opportunities of experiencing nature first-hand, an increased public awareness of sustainable development and natural heritage and an inspiring sense of pride in taking conservation action. This is a cornerstone of what it is to be Canadian.

[Translation]

There is a large body of research that demonstrates that exposure to natural environments helps people cope with stress, illness and injury, and improves concentration and productivity.

[English]

Notwithstanding these benefits, the reality is that the percentage of Canadians who have direct connections with their natural and cultural heritage is shrinking. The trend reflects some of the larger changes under way in Canada, such as an increasing urban society. For instance, more than 80% of all Canadians now live in metropolitan areas. Our demographics are also changing significantly. We are more ethnically diverse than ever before, particularly in the large cities. We are more technology dependent. Trends and leisure time have significantly shifted. Also, city residents are on average much younger than rural residents.

Parks Canada is thus in a unique position in providing Canadians with a genuine understanding of the importance of preserving and experiencing Canada's natural treasures. Several national surveys reveal significant differences in attitude between visitors and non-visitors regarding the value of protecting natural areas. For example, if you have visited a protected area, you will be more likely to readily support the continued protection and enjoyment of natural areas. There's a direct link between awareness, experience, and conservation.

The agency is continuing to establish new national parks. In fact, in recent years the number of protected areas has increased by over 50%. These include iconic areas such as Sable Island, Nahanni, the Gulf Islands, and Naats'ihch'oh. These places inspire Canadians by fostering an awareness of conservation in urban Canadians.

At the same time, the government has directed Parks Canada right now to undertake the process to establish Rouge national urban park, which is a unique concept. It includes the conservation of natural and cultural assets, sustainable agriculture, opportunities for learning, and a wide range of recreational activities.

• (1555)

[Translation]

No other country has come close to Canada in recent years to increasing the amount of protected areas and Parks Canada has every intention to build on this record. In providing new Canadians with a sense of urban conservation, national parks and historic sites, such as Banff National Park and George-Étienne Cartier National Historic Site, now host citizenship ceremonies. We work with the Institute for Canadian Citizenship to provide opportunities for new Canadian citizens to experience and connect with Canada's natural heritage through the cultural access pass.

[English]

Working with young Canadians is also important in raising the awareness, as we have seen through the My Parks Pass program, which offers free admission to Parks Canada places to hundreds of thousands of grade 8 students or students in *deuxième secondaire* each year across the country.

Volunteering is also a sought-after activity in Parks Canada places. Whether it be removing invasive species in the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, assisting with a variety of research projects with the citizen scientists in Banff National Park, or assisting in bullfrog studies in the St. Lawrence Islands National Park, urban Canadians are having the opportunity to participate and take action.

Another important role is that Parks Canada establishes partnerships with a wide range of organizations, such as NGOs, private companies, and community groups, to enable a greater number of Canadians to experience the richness of national parks and historic sites directly from within our special places or in urban areas where our partners are present.

For example, the learn to camp program organized in more than 100 places across Canada for the past two years, including at the Halifax Citadel and Fort Langley, has engaged thousands of young people, many of them new Canadians, in their first camping and outdoor experience. This was accomplished thanks to partnerships we have with Mountain Equipment Co-op and the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

Parks Canada also works collaboratively with urban institutions such as the Calgary Zoo, the Vancouver Aquarium, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Canadian Museum of Nature to focus on conservation, with a call to action for experiencing the habitat of magnificent animals first-hand. By visiting a national park and taking action in their own homes, Canadians can help these species to thrive in the wild.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that understanding the links among awareness, experience, and engagement are crucial to the committee's study of urban conservation. Canada remains a country of wide open spaces, but our population tends to cluster in cities. Television and the Internet have become the primary links to nature and history

for a growing number of Canadians. While these media are certainly powerful, they are no match for personal experience.

The key to urban conservation lies in encouraging Canadians to experience their heritage in person. National parks and other protected areas serve as the cornerstone of this approach to conservation. The general public, along with many of our partners and stakeholders, supports Parks Canada's efforts to connect with Canadians using innovative methods. These results are encouraging, and they're precisely why the government has directed Parks Canada to continue to introduce new opportunities for Canadians to connect with their natural cultural heritage.

The creation of the Rouge national urban park, as I have said, is a case in point. We hope that the Rouge national urban park will be for the residents of the greater Toronto area and beyond a window into Parks Canada and our natural world and all that Canada has to offer. I will be pleased to tell you more about the Rouge national urban park in coming weeks.

I hope that what I have provided today demonstrates how Parks Canada fulfills several key roles in urban conservation. Parks Canada provides clean air and water through large protected areas, as well as the necessary corridors to connect nature to both urban and rural areas. Finally, we play a crucial role in presenting places to urban Canadians that foster within them the desire to conserve the environment and take pride in doing so within this great country.

Thank you. I look forward to any questions members may have.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We will begin our seven-minute round with Ms. Ambler.

I want to remind each of us that there is a scope. I'd ask that your questions be guided by that scope, as follows. One, what is urban conservation? Two, what could be the goals of connecting urban Canadians with conservation? Three, what are the best practices in Canada for urban conservation? Four, what urban conservation initiatives are currently in use, and what are the best practices and challenges for the same? Five, what are the economic, health, biodiversity, and social benefits associated with urban conservation? Six, how do we define a protected space? Seven, what's the role of the federal government in urban conservation?

If you would keep these in mind in your questions, that is what the witnesses are prepared to answer.

Ms. Ambler.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you to both of you for coming today and kicking off our study on urban conservation. I think we're all very excited about this topic, no more so than I am. I represent an urban riding, but it's situated on Lake Ontario and the Credit River runs through it. I'm sure my colleagues are tired of hearing that. That's how I preface every question. I'm very proud of it, and it's a beautiful place to live. I'm very interested in this topic.

Also, the chair mentioned the scope of this study, that we are talking about best practices, and I was wondering if you could provide specific examples.

One of my questions is going to be about brownfield remediation in particular. The reason I ask is that a particular project is beginning in south Mississauga, and brownfield remediation is going to be a big part of it. We're looking at new ways of doing it. Perhaps you know of an old way that works well and something which you could tell us about. I'm assuming Ms. Poter is the better person to ask, but I could be wrong.

Please answer as you see fit.

Ms. Virginia Poter: I confess I don't have a lot of background on brownfield remediation.

I am aware that Sudbury has undertaken a great deal of work. I can remember being quite a young child a number of years ago, going through Sudbury and seeing, I would say, almost a bleak landscape. When you go to Sudbury today, it is quite beautiful, quite green, with lots of open spaces, natural areas, which speak to a healthy community and a lot of very clever city planning.

I am aware that they put a lot of effort into that. I'm not in a position to advise how Sudbury went about doing it. All I can speak to is the result that seemed to be quite good. It might be useful to get somebody from Sudbury to provide a bit of background on that.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you. That's a good starting point. I appreciate that.

Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I will add one thing. Certainly along the Lachine Canal, which is a Parks Canada site, we have had to work on remediating a number of brownfield sites with the City of Montreal and others. Certainly, there is a series of best practices used by different cities in other areas in cleaning them up. I don't have them in front of me today, but we could send you the work we've done along the Lachine.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thanks. I'd appreciate that.

I remember hearing at one point that the project at Waterfront Toronto used some very sophisticated on-site remediation techniques and the latest research. I believe it was first done in the Netherlands, and we imported the technology and used it here.

Thank you. I will be looking into that more myself.

I'll move on to a more practical question. In many cases, as is the case with the project in south Mississauga, there are what we might call unsightly landmarks that we have to work around when we're promoting or creating urban conservation areas. They're a fact of life, like the Lakeview water treatment plant, for example. It's 67 acres,

and it's not going anywhere any time soon because it cleans the water and supplies water for all of Mississauga, Brampton, parts of Caledon, and recently we've made a deal to supply clean water to York region as well.

We need to work around these types of things. Do you think it's possible? Do you think this in any way compromises our goal of urban conservation? What advice would you give us on how to promote urban conservation and connect city people with nature while still being realistic about what kinds of things need to be done in cities?

•(1605)

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'll start, but when it gets hard I'm going to toss it that way.

I think it is possible to design a city, and in most instances you are not going to start from scratch. People are already living in cities, and cities are growing. I think the cities that are most successful are the ones that think ahead to where they want to be in 20, 30, 40, years. Features like waste treatment plants and roads are necessary infrastructure for us to be able to live in places like cities. Successful urban planning has to incorporate the needs for these things.

I am not an urban planner, but when you are considering it, I think you might have a plan that focuses a bit more on, say, open spaces, green spaces, and on how to connect those. Maybe if there's an unsightly area, you'd think about having a bit of a green space around it to try to mask it or to provide a break between it and where the people are actually living. Those are some of the issues I think city planners would want to think about.

A city like Edmonton is very well thought out. They have conservation corridors. They've put a lot of thought up front into how to create a city that is very liveable but which still provides a conservation outcome and the services that all of us as city dwellers need and want.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Great. Planning is the key.

Ms. Virginia Poter: I think so.

The Chair: Time has expired, unfortunately.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Leslie, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thanks to you both. I have some questions coming out of your testimony.

Ms. Poter, you spoke about fragmentation. You talked about the doubling of urban land in that time period. That's a very interesting, and I think alarming, fact when we're considering how to go about conserving space in urban areas, because what is urban? It might be rural today, but in a couple of years it might not be.

How do we plan for the protection of urban spaces that aren't yet urban? Do we earmark land that we think might be enveloped by urban sprawl? How do we actually plan for that?

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'll take a stab at this. It's a hard question.

I would preface my comments by saying that most land use planning is within the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. I think what we can do as federal officials and a federal government is provide information that can inform how provinces and territories might wish to think about planning the land we are going to be living on in a city or maintaining it as rural.

Certainly from an Environment Canada perspective, within the Wildlife Service, we could look at areas that are important for birds, for example. For example, we've been producing bird conservation region plans and have been working to develop which areas we want to focus on for conservation outcomes, as opposed to other areas that are perhaps still important, but are perhaps of a lower quality habitat for birds.

I think a role that federal governments can play is to provide information. I'm speaking about one type of information. Other parts of government would also have information that would be helpful to provinces and territories as they're planning where urban expansion will be and so on.

At a federal level, we can also facilitate that dialogue about best practices. I've spoken quite a bit about Edmonton. Montreal has a very good reputation for having thought through how to build conservation and biodiversity into the city.

How do we connect a city that might not be as far along in its thinking in that regard? That's a role I think governments can play, to facilitate that type of dialogue.

Another thing that can sometimes help is to provide tools and best practices. In some cases we've done that through the habitat stewardship program. We provided some funding to help develop a green bylaws tool kit, some model laws. Certainly that's not how you should do it, but if you are thinking about doing it, that's how you might go about it.

•(1610)

Ms. Megan Leslie: I'd like to pick up on that. Clearly we have jurisdictional issues about all kinds of things in Canada because of it being a federal state. I think about something like the stewardship program. I think about how we can show leadership through access to resources. For example, we could say that there's a pot of funding that's accessible if they do urban planning in a certain way. There are those kinds of carrots versus sticks.

The stewardship program is an example, but are you aware of other programs that work in that way to encourage urban conservation?

Ms. Virginia Poter: Within Environment Canada, one program we have is the EcoAction program. It's not just for cities; it's for Canadians looking to promote eco-friendly practices and whatnot. People can come in and apply for the program, and, depending on what their proposal is, they can be funded. I don't know that we would tell them which projects are most likely to be funded. We would probably discuss the outcomes we're looking for, and how

these outcomes might be achieved by the players who are close to the issue. But I don't think we'd be wanting to be in the reverse situation. We would ask how we could help them to achieve certain outcomes.

Ms. Megan Leslie: I'm not sure if either of you will be able to answer this because you have very specific roles within the department, but what are the department's expected challenges to conservation efforts due to climate change? Is that something within your niche that you're able to answer?

Ms. Virginia Poter: The way in which I think about climate change is really driven by my mandate. For the Wildlife Service, we're concerned about species at risk. We have some protected areas and migratory birds. When we're thinking about climate change, we're thinking about the way in which the landscape is likely to change because of climate change, and how we can help wildlife to adapt to those changes. We look for a working landscape that allows species to move within corridors. We try to have protected areas that make sense, areas that allow the wildlife to find a path along which to move. When we're looking at important bird areas, we ask ourselves what we know about our current areas and what we think might happen in the future. That would be our take on it.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Does the Wildlife Service also consider mitigation, or is it simply adaptation at this point?

Ms. Virginia Poter: We're pretty much focused on adaptation.

Ms. Megan Leslie: That's because of your directive. Okay.

It would be interesting to chat with some other folks from the department to figure out the bigger picture.

•(1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Both of you alluded to a rural-urban dichotomy in this country. I don't think the population figures for rural Canada are as bleak as you said they were; it depends on how you define it, but I'm not going to quibble about it. I will agree with you that there's a fairly significant imbalance between populations in urban and rural areas.

How can we foster urban conservation in a manner that bridges the gap between urban and rural Canada?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: We're starting to see some excellent movement in that. I'll mention a few of the things we have looked at. One of them, announced about a year ago, was the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge Parks Canada youth ambassadors. Those youth ambassadors have gone out with a number of other youth colleagues and looked at how we can bridge some of that gap, how we can get the youth that are in both the rural environment and the urban environment. The ways in which they communicate today are much greater than in the past. They've looked at a number of ways to find out what the people who are living more in nature can share with those who are in a more urban environment, and vice versa.

In addition, last year the Minister of the Environment had the minister's round table on Parks Canada, which had a big focus on the question of youth. Certainly, when we start to look at this, there's that feeling of conservation. If you look at the average age of Parks Canada's visitors, which is 51, you see that we need to bring the youth along. Some of the initiatives, such as the announced My Parks Pass, have been great for bringing those two groups together.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Great.

Mr. Campbell, I picked up on some of the words you used. You used the words "sustainable development" and you talked about "sustainable agriculture" in Rouge Park.

To me the terms "sustainable development" and "sustainable agriculture" imply stewardship and use, which I think urban Canadians, even though they live and consume the products of the land every single day, are perhaps somewhat separated from. Could you expand on what you're going to do in Rouge park in terms of showcasing agriculture? I find that very interesting.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Rouge park right now is in the concept stage as we're out talking to Canadians about it. It will have three areas. There will be an infrastructure area and an area of sustainable agriculture. One of the key parts in this that we've been talking to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. We've been talking to the local York region federation, and the Mennonite group that's been there for generations and generations. In fact, we've been talking to all of them about how we can start to build longer tenure for the people who right now are leasing on shorter tenures. As you start to allow leases of a longer tenure, as opposed to year-over-year type leases, you can actually do some more sustainable agriculture.

We've been looking at tenure. We've been looking at the types of sustainable agricultural products. We've been looking at how the farm community can engage the seven million people living in the greater Toronto area to participate in the growing of agricultural crops.

It's been very exciting. The agricultural community has embraced this wholeheartedly. It's been great.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I would assume you would have interpretive programs around agriculture and sustainable use.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Absolutely.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That's very exciting. You are to be commended for that, because the biggest split in this country is not cultural, nor is it linguistic. In my view it's a rural-urban split, and what you're doing there is very exciting. I would like to be kept informed as things move along.

I'd like to focus now on rivers in urban areas because they are focal points. Most of our cities are on waterways. In Regina, which isn't on a waterway, they built one. Water is very important in urban areas.

Can you talk about river, riverbank, and riparian conservation programming in urban areas?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Certainly I can talk about some of the examples that we have. This is one of those areas, especially in the riverkeepers concept that is out there now. Canadians have said they very much want to participate with government in protecting

shorelines and species. We have examples everywhere, from the Friends of the Rouge Watershed and the Rouge that we'll be dealing with to the Friends of the Trent-Severn Waterway. There are groups that have just started, whether they be the Scouts or the Guides, that have certainly come along in areas like the Lachine Canal in Montreal. I think in a lot of these areas you actually build that culture of conservation by people becoming engaged in it.

• (1620)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Excellent.

My time is running short and I want to get one more point in. That's about urban angling programs. You used the right phrase "engaged". Angling is one of the most important activities to engage people in conservation. For example, there are about five million people in this country who angle. You talked about new citizens. Many of them come from fish-eating cultures and have immediately taken up angling as an activity. Many of them live in urban areas. You only have to walk along riverbanks in urban areas to see folks having a really good time fishing.

I would strongly recommend that any urban conservation program have an urban angling component to it. Would either of you care to comment on that?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Certainly in a number of national parks and along the shorelines of a number of national historic sites and canals we're seeing anglers. In fact, in some of the consultations that we've done in urban areas in recent years, we're finding that is a major connection that people immediately have from an urban environment. It's one we're trying to look at to see how it plays together with people's love of nature.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Having Parks Canada become an advocate for angling would be a very welcome development. Can you comment on that?

The Chair: Very quickly as the time has expired.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Certainly as part of our role within the Canadian Tourism Commission and working with organizations like the Tourism Industry Association of Canada we have been trying to work towards some of those goals.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses. We're grateful for your testimony.

I am going to begin with very specific questions, then I'll go to broader ones.

First is best practices. Can you tell me for how long, from what year to what year, ecological integrity was the premier management principle for Parks Canada?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: The founding statement, and as I said the mandate that we still work on today, was developed in the 1930s by an Ottawa resident, in fact, who lived not far from here. We've had ecological integrity as an important element within our mandate for the past 80 years.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I'll ask a very specific question. It was the premier management principle. Do we still have the management principles?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes. Under the act, ecological integrity is the first priority in decision-making within national parks, and that exists today.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Is it the premier one or has it become one among many? There's concern from the stakeholders that there's been some slippage.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Absolutely in everything we do, as the act says, it is the first priority of our decision-making. I can't comment more than that.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Okay, I appreciate that. That will be going forward, so when we're talking about urban conservation, ecological integrity should be the premier management principle. Is that correct?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It will continue to be the first priority, as long as that's our legislative base.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, I appreciate that.

I will continue with this. How can we protect ecological integrity when scientists are being cut at Parks Canada?

•(1625)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: On a point of order, I'm not sure this is relevant to the topic we are addressing today, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Can I address that?

The Chair: You can speak to that, Ms. Duncan.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I think it is relevant, because if we're saying the premier principle is ecological integrity, we have to ensure that's the best practice. If we're talking about best practices in urban conservation, we have to make sure we have the monitoring to do that.

The Chair: Ms. Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I would agree with Ms. Duncan. I do think it's relevant, especially when you consider the aspect of our mandate to consider the role of the federal government. These are federal government jobs and their roles are ever changing, what with constant cutting, so it would be important to figure out how the goals of the department will change based on those cuts.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette.

[*Translation*]

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

I completely agree with my two colleagues who have just had the floor. Since you really like to reread the guidelines for the studies, I am going to give you a chance to do so. You will be able to do so as many times as you wish. Those studies clearly show the role that the federal government may play, as my colleagues said. Furthermore, science is an absolute must if we want to set up conservation practices, particularly in urban centres.

In fact, it has already been said that science is essential under the national conservation plan. As a result, cuts like those affecting the experimental lake areas and the ecotoxicity in the St. Lawrence River prevent us from developing good plans, good practices, and good strategies, as well as from using the appropriate knowledge to

implement a biodiversity conservation program, whether in urban or national areas.

That is why I think Kirsty Duncan's question is completely relevant and I express my support to that effect.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I do appreciate my colleague's questions. I think ecological integrity in Parks Canada is a very important part of its mandate. In fact, our government has, I believe, increased the funding for Parks Canada significantly since we came to office. We've also increased funding to ensure ecological integrity across the country in a variety of areas, including the natural areas conservation program and the ecological gifts program. I could go on and on today about all of the things we've done to promote ecological integrity, not to mention the billions of dollars in research funding we've increased since we've been in government to academic research, through funding to non-governmental organizations.

The bottom line is that we can certainly have a debate about what has been done to support ecological integrity and conservation by this government. I believe my colleague is asking how ecological integrity in Parks Canada will be maintained. I would suggest it would be a more productive line of questioning and more within the scope if that were somehow brought back to urban conservation principles.

I have not heard rationale on how that lines up, but I would ask you to consider that evidence when you make your decision.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Woodworth, you are next, on the point of order.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): In considering this point of order, I would ask the chair to also take into account that we shouldn't be asking witnesses to speculate about things.

For example, when Mr. Choquette mentions the Experimental Lakes Area, I don't know whether that's a national park the witness would know anything about or whether, in fact, it has to do with the Canadian Wildlife Service, which this witness is familiar with.

I know that we're not proceeding here the way I would in a courtroom, and we're not necessarily required to lay a foundation, but certainly, I point out that there hasn't been any foundation with this witness to demonstrate that this witness would even say there have been cuts to scientific contributions to the Canadian Wildlife Service, which he is here to talk about. I just have a feeling that the question is asking the witness to speculate on things far beyond the scope of his own area of experience and responsibility. In making your ruling, I hope you will take into account that it might not be appropriate to do so.

•(1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Ms. Duncan speaking to the point of order.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to recognize that the parliamentary secretary said that monitoring is very important. The way to ensure monitoring is through science.

Criticism has been levelled at Parks Canada that cuts are undermining the health and integrity of Canada's renowned parks, risking some of our world heritage sites, significantly reducing the number of scientists, hurting the relationships with aboriginal peoples, and attacking rural communities. If we are saying that ecological integrity is the premier management principle, we have to ensure that the science is there.

I would like to keep my question on the record as to how we protect ecological integrity, and this is about best practices, when scientists are being cut.

The Chair: Mr. Lunney, you are speaking to the point of order.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): With all due respect, I appreciate my colleague's enthusiasm for science. We're talking about understanding complex ecological systems. There will always be a need for more science.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So let's leave it.

Mr. James Lunney: Today we are talking about urban conservation. We're talking about something that is at a far more basic level. We're talking about ecosystems that have been disturbed. We're talking about helping young people engage with ecological systems. The best practices in this area are not rocket science. We actually have some good examples out there that I would like to flesh out in my question period. The two subjects are quite different, actually.

The Chair: Okay, I think we have had adequate discussion on the point of order. I want to thank my colleagues for that.

I am going to rule that the questioning is outside the scope. The way the question on cuts to Environment Canada was put is outside the scope. Do I need to read the scope to the members of the committee?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

The Chair: Okay. I heard a yes.

What is urban conservation? That is point one. What could be the goals of connecting urban Canadians with conservation? That is point two. Third is about best practices in Canada for urban conservation. What urban conservation initiatives are currently in use? What are the best practices and challenges for the same? What are the economic, health, biodiversity, and social benefits associated with urban conservation? How do we define a protected space? Finally, what is the role of the federal government in urban conservation?

Keeping that in mind, I would encourage Ms. Duncan to stay within that scope.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to come back to ecological integrity.

Mr. Campbell, it's exciting. You said that you think we're going to hear more in the next while about Rouge park. Is that correct?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: That is correct.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: We heard from stakeholders last week. There is great concern about ecological integrity. Can you speak to how ecological integrity is going to be protected in Rouge park?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, I'm certainly happy to talk about that.

Ecological integrity is a concept which in the urban environment in a national park like the Rouge national urban park in fact will not be the foundation principle that we will have there. It will be ecological health. We're looking at the International Union for Conservation of Nature for different ways that "ecology" is defined.

When you look at ecological integrity in an urban environment, ecological integrity would actually mean the bringing back of natural processes. I believe that many people within Markham, Toronto, and other areas aren't very keen on our allowing full flooding of the Rouge watershed. In fact they have told us that. They are not very keen on our not suppressing wildfires. They aren't very keen on our not having any connection back and forth toward the movement of certain species in and out and how we would deal with invasive species.

While there is a small group who believe it should be ecological integrity, there is a wide range of individuals, a much larger group who, through all of the consultations that we've done, have said that ecological health, in fact, makes far greater sense in that area.

• (1635)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I'm struggling here because you said that from the legislation it's ecological integrity.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Now we hear it's ecological health. I come back to the stakeholders who are concerned that there is some slippage. Is this going to be strictly for the Rouge? Is this for urban parks? Will this be for all urban conservation?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: An overwhelming—and I will stress overwhelming—number of environmental non-governmental organizations are very concerned that we would bring ecological integrity as a principle into the Rouge national urban park, which is I feel—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: No, we understand we're not going to suppress wildfires.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I'm in a position where I have difficulty at this point answering. Maybe when I come back I'll be more prepared to respond to that, merely because I don't have everything in front of me. I didn't realize we'd go into the Rouge in this depth today.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: That's fair.

Perhaps I could broaden it out, then. For parks, if we're talking about urban conservation, the legislation, as you've said, says it's ecological integrity. Going forward, as we're thinking about urban conservation, what is your recommendation to the committee?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: On the national park, in the Canada National Parks Act, I have heard nothing that would make me believe there will be any change to ecological integrity being a first priority. On the Rouge national urban park, ecological health seems to be the thing that makes the most sense, so there may need to be some sort of different legislative framework around that.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Going forward, because this is about urban conservation, what is your recommendation to this committee for best practices?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: At this point it would be that a definition of ecological health be put in legislation and in fact be the way forward with the Rouge national urban park.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

I'll ask you both, what areas of urban conservation require more attention in Canada?

Ms. Poter, could you give us your comprehensive list? The more ideas you can give us, the stronger we can make the study.

Could you each do that?

The Chair: Unfortunately, time has expired so I'm going to ask for a quick answer from Ms. Poter.

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'll come back to the statement. Municipalities are the ones that are going to be setting the laws and the by-laws in their particular local area. I think what is helpful is that the people who are responsible for planning are factoring in the need for conservation in an urban setting. With all respect to my colleague from Parks Canada, it's not just about parks. It's about corridors. It's about green roofs. It's about planting trees. It's about a lot of things in addition to parks, which are a very important element.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madam Quach, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank our two witnesses for joining us today.

My first question is for Ms. Poter.

You talked about the Environment Canada programs that help groups with their work on urban conservation. You talked about the habitat stewardship program in particular. I was wondering if you knew whether the criteria had been changed or if any changes had been made. In fact, all the groups from Quebec that applied to this program have not received a response. They usually receive an answer in April. Representatives from Ambioterra and Nature Québec, among others, have contacted us. Do you have any news about that?

[English]

Ms. Virginia Poter: The approvals for the habitat stewardship program have gone out. Letters have gone to proponents of various projects, so I can't speak to why there is a sense that no projects in Quebec were approved.

I would have to confirm this. I believe there are a fair number of projects in Quebec. About a fifth of the projects are from Quebec, but again, I would have to confirm the facts. As far as I know, they have been approved.

• (1640)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Do you think that the criteria have changed?

[English]

Ms. Virginia Poter: There are a variety of programs, and these are national programs. They're not just targeting urban centres. For the habitat stewardship program, that's about promoting actions to support species at risk that are focused on habitat.

As we know, the major issue for most species at risk, but not all, relates to habitat. We have a fund that we're able to put out there to incent the stewardship type of actions that are so helpful to species at risk.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you very much.

I have other questions for Mr. Campbell.

You said that Parks Canada creates a lot of jobs. You also talked about Parks Canada's major role in giving Canadians from urban centres an opportunity to be in contact with nature and to develop a sense of pride in conservation efforts. You also talked about the Lachine Canal National Historic Site, which was being restored this summer.

But, as you must know, there have been cuts or early closures of those national historic sites this summer. There was one in my riding. Actually, there was an early closure of the Bataille-de-la-Châteauguay national historic site. Furthermore, the guides have been replaced by signs. So visitors no longer have contact with real guides. The guides used to answer questions, give advice and organize interactive activities, thereby allowing visitors to increase their knowledge through educational activities.

In addition, the educational activities at Montreal's Biosphere have been completely scrapped by the government. How do you see all those cuts, given that the government says it is creating jobs and trying to promote this type of experience? What can you tell us about the work of the guides and their importance on those sites?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, on a point of order.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: I do agree with my colleague that Parks Canada does play an important role in urban conservation. First of all, I have to refute the premise of her question in that she's making the assumption that the capacity and the ability to deliver these programs have been somehow damaged. That has been the premise of her question. I fully disagree with that point. I believe that we have a very strong case to show that our government has not only increased funding and capacity for science, for educational activities, and for conservation activities within Parks Canada, but has also protected park land across this country.

I think our government has increased protected park space by over 50% from when we took office. This is a very, very important step.

First, the premise of the question is completely wrong, and it's false. I don't think that we should be accepting that within this, and certainly it does disrespect to our witnesses here who work hard to maintain that capacity.

Second, I heard nothing in her line of questioning that would relate to the scope with regard to urban conservation principles.

I think it's very misleading, not only for our witnesses to have to answer these questions, but also to anyone listening to these proceedings, especially given the very positive track record that our government has with Parks Canada. We've just received two major awards, in fact. I believe it was the World Wildlife Federation, and there was another association as well that gave us an award for the ecological integrity, I believe it was, that Parks Canada maintained.

Again, the premise of the question is completely off. I completely disagree with it, and I would also point to scope relevancy.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My colleague Ms. Quach's question was clearly for Mr. Campbell and had to do with Parks Canada. So I think that Mr. Campbell is really the right person to answer that question.

In addition, we are trying to work on urban conservation. My colleague Mr. Lunney mentioned earlier that he wanted people to be able to go to the parks and visit our attractions and natural sites. I don't see why my honourable colleague's question, simply asking whether guides and human interaction can improve our relationship with nature, has to be perceived as being beyond the scope of our study.

On the contrary, I think that it is very relevant. I will not expand on Ms. Rempel's comments about all the good things the Conservatives are doing for the environment and conservation. We know there have recently been service cuts in a number of Canadian parks. The season has also been shortened. So, if we shorten the season during which we have access to our parks and services, I do not see how we can say that we are improving access to urban and national parks.

In fact, if we want to do a study on urban conservation and if we want to provide access to those parks, I think we are entitled to ask ourselves what the best way to provide access to those parks is. Is it signs or is it someone who greets visitors to talk about the history and the environmental features of the park?

For example, we were talking about the habitat stewardship program earlier. I am happy we talked about it because that is also a problem in Drummondville. City officials have been applying for funding for years now. They have always received the funding, but all of a sudden they are not receiving it anymore. The regional environmental council in central Quebec is doing an outstanding job. This is a non-profit organization. However, the organization has not received funding this year either.

So, if we want to have an urban conservation program, those are the types of questions we need to ask. As you mentioned, Ms. Poter, we have programs that support urban conservation. As a result, it is normal for us to ask you questions about that. So I don't see why we would be constantly interrupted when we ask questions about science and programs. Ms. Poter talked about that in her presentation.

I don't think that you are offended, Mr. Chair, or that the Conservatives are offended because she named the EcoAction community funding program, the ecological gifts program, the

natural areas conservation program and the habitat stewardship program. So I think it makes sense to ask questions about that.

I am sorry for taking up a lot of time, but I felt strongly about this and it was starting to get on my nerves a bit.

● (1645)

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Duncan, is this on the point of order?

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Yes, it is, Mr. Chair.

I think it's really important that we have a fair and balanced approach, and that's always based on evidence. This is national science and technology week, and yet there's the ELA, Kluane, and we've already lost PEARL. It appears that we are losing our research stations. This is important.

When there is good work, we recognize it. For example, we recognize the creation of Nááts'ihch'oh as important, but we should also recognize that the borders are not as broad as stakeholders would have liked and that grizzlies and caribou are not protected.

In coming back to evidence, the reality is that there is a cut of \$29 million to Parks Canada. Throughout the summer there was criticism that was levelled about health and integrity of our renowned parks and about reducing the number of scientists.

I think it's important when we're talking about best practices to recognize this. We want a stellar study. We want to make good recommendations, but there are management realities. I think it's important that we recognize them.

I think my colleague's question is very much on point, and I hope she gets an answer.

The Chair: Next, Madam Leslie.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll leave it to Madam Quach to speak to the relevance of the question.

I just want to point out that it's not the role of government members, parliamentary secretaries notwithstanding, to refute the premise of the question. We have perfectly capable witnesses here who could correct Ms. Quach if she is actually pointing out things that don't happen to be true. I don't see that as the role for government members.

● (1650)

The Chair: Madam Quach, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I would simply like to add that there have been cuts this summer and there are facts to back this up. The government wants to cut educational and awareness activities at Montreal's Biosphere. Yet that is the only museum in North America that offers urban conservation awareness activities and activities that promote that natural heritage. It also has to do with culture and pride in our Canadian identity. Those really are the facts. I am not making any of this up. You can check it in the newspapers and probably even on the Parks Canada website.

I really care about this issue because it has to do with urban conservation, job creation, contribution to the economy and the establishment of new parks as part of Parks Canada. But, at the same time, jobs are being cut and those jobs are crucial to the development of urban conservation for the public.

My question was about whether guides play a key role in urban conservation. That was my question to Mr. Campbell.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel, we'll have you close by speaking to this point of order.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Certainly. On my colleague's point about the role of government or non-government members, I think as legislators and as people in this place who were brought here to discuss the validity of policy, to discuss what policy should be going forward, and certainly when we're undertaking a study of this gravity, when statements are made, it is also our prerogative to make comments on those that are factually inaccurate.

For example, on the statement about scientists being cut, in fact, we've increased funding to the tri-council to record levels. We've increased the number of Canada research chairs that come to this country so that we have a greater science capacity across academia. We've increased funding to the Canada Foundation for Innovation so that we have research infrastructure. The point about science capacity being cut could be argued as simply wrong.

Therefore, I disagree. I think one of our jobs as legislators is to push back slightly when these factual inaccuracies are pushed forward. I certainly hope you will consider that as well, Mr. Chair, in making your ruling.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think we've had adequate discussion on the point of order. Ms. Duncan brought up the issue of cuts to Environment Canada. I did rule that was out of order as being outside the scope. During the time that members in this committee have, they can talk about multiple things. Hopefully, they are within the scope, but the questions to a witness need to be within the scope. If members want to use their time creatively and talk outside the scope, that's their right.

Madam Quach, you talked about a national historic site. You shared your opinion that there were cuts, early closures, guides being replaced by signs, and biospheres being scrapped. When you ask whether these cuts were appropriate, and should there be signs or guides, that is outside the scope, as it was for Ms. Duncan.

You have a minute and 15 seconds left in your time. While your statements can be outside the scope, I would ask that your questions to the witnesses be within the scope.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Mr. Campbell, could you explain how the guides contribute to promoting the Parks Canada sites?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Interpretative guides and non-personal interpretation have had a role in Parks Canada sites for a long period. When people think of personal guides and non-personal interpreta-

tion, they also have to think of some of the new technologies that are available and not think that, as in the past, it can only be panels or people. There are other things.

Guides obviously have the role of personal contact with individuals, but there are other means of interpretation. Many people go to the Louvre every year, or go to the National Gallery of Canada, and use third person interpretation. They guide themselves through the museums with the help of technology. Parks Canada will be looking at a mix.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, your time has expired.

Mr. Woodworth, you have five minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to welcome the witnesses and thank them for joining us today.

[English]

I don't want you to feel neglected, Mr. Campbell, but in the five minutes I have I'm going to discuss things with Ms. Poter.

I was very interested, in relation to best practices for urban conservation, in the comments you made about a federal-provincial-territorial working group focusing on integrating biodiversity conservation into municipal plans and strategies. Could you tell me when that was established? Do you know who took the lead in establishing it?

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'm sorry I don't know the answer to the question about when it was established.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay.

Can you tell me anything about the scope or work plan of that particular working group?

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'm not familiar with the working groups, so I apologize for that.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's all right.

Can you give us any further details about the targets you mentioned? I'm sorry to put you on the spot like that, but it was quite interesting to me. If you have the information I'd be happy to receive it.

Ms. Virginia Poter: I'm sorry, I misunderstood your question. I thought it was about urban working groups, so my apologies. We do have a federal-provincial-territorial working group that is looking at developing targets for domestic implementation of the CBD.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's precisely the working group you mentioned and the one I'm trying to ask about.

Ms. Virginia Poter: My apologies, I didn't understand. I can't say when the group was established. It's a group that has just come to me over the summer. I'm a little less familiar with its history, but I do know that it has been very active in its engagement with the provinces and territories. We're going to be hearing the results of some of their deliberations around the targets next week at an ADM level call with our colleagues from across the country. They've been looking at stepping down the CBD targets that were laid out as aspirational in the 2010 conference of the parties, COP, of the CBD.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: CBD? You'll have to remind me.

Ms. Virginia Poter: It's the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

Ms. Virginia Poter: We've been developing a series of targets on a variety of aspects around biodiversity, including protected areas, species at risk, but also the degree to which urban centres in Canada have been able to incorporate biodiversity into their planning and so on. We'll be hearing the results of the deliberation of the working group next week. Ultimately we'll be going forward for approval with this target as well as the other targets related to the Convention on Biological Diversity in the next number of months.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: All right.

In the course of that, one of the things that interests me is how we establish priorities in urban conservation. There was mention of the fact that 90% of the population lives within 100 miles of the southern border. That's where I come from. Does your department have any way of assisting me as a legislator in understanding where the most valuable unprotected ecosystems are likely to come into contact with the most expanding urban areas? Does that question make sense to you?

• (1700)

Ms. Virginia Poter: We do a variety of analyses. One program that I think is most beneficial is funded by the Government of Canada. The natural areas conservation program is with the Nature Conservancy of Canada, NCC, and with Ducks Unlimited. The NCC has done a very good job in what they call developing blueprints. Their focus for that program is south of the 60th parallel, so southern Canada.

They look at priority areas from a conservation perspective and they develop a plan to target specific areas and properties for acquisition, for conservation lands to be included within the program. It's done on a match basis, it's at least 2:1, but in some cases it's even more. To date through that program there've been 3,000 square kilometres, and again because it's focused quite a bit on southern Canada it does have an overlap close to the border, which is where most of our population is concentrated.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I might ask them about how they target, I presume.

Ms. Virginia Poter: Yes, and we certainly provide information to that program.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Monsieur Choquette, vous avez cinq minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sir, madam, thank you for joining us today.

I would like to briefly talk about my riding of Drummond and the City of Drummondville.

We have to make a lot of effort in terms of urban conservation. Despite the goodwill of municipal officials, we are facing significant challenges in this area. Given that the city is growing at an exponential rate, residential, industrial and commercial areas are expanding. Of course, that comes with a lot of consequences, the first being the disappearance of our forests and wetlands. For instance, efforts are being made to turn a forest, specifically the Boisé de la Marconi, into an urban natural area that people can visit.

However, as I said earlier, there are still some problems. As the city is growing, natural environments are dying off. That is why we are creating more and more artificial parks. As you probably know, conservation strategies are not as effective there. The biodiversity of urban parks is not as rich as that of natural parks.

My question is quite simple and has to do with the habitat stewardship program, of course.

The regional environment council of central Quebec is a non-profit organization that works very hard. Concretely, it seeks to conserve urban biodiversity and to increase access to information about endangered species or species at risk, such as a type of turtle in our region.

Could you tell me whether the habitat stewardship program is very effective?

[English]

Ms. Virginia Poter: Maybe I'll come at it from this way. The habitat stewardship program is a national program. It targets not just urban centres, although urban centres may have projects that meet the criteria. The purpose of that program is to support restoration, protection, and identification of important habitat for species at risk, with a priority for listed species under the Species at Risk Act, SARA, and within that those species that are endangered or threatened. That's the focus of the program. It's not designed specifically to support an urban conservation regime, but I think it does contribute to it.

If I might, I'll just talk about one very successful collaboration among NGOs, the City of Montreal, and the Province of Quebec. It's the 180 hectare site—my apologies for the French pronunciation—the Rivière à l'Orme Ecoforest Corridor. It involves 180 hectares that are along riverbanks. It provides for a variety of habitats for birds, birds of prey, even the map turtle, as I think you mentioned, beaver, and so on. There are agricultural sections. There are also wetlands, streams, and forests. It's right within the urban boundaries of Montreal.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: I would like to know whether it is normal that the regional council has not received any news about the habitat stewardship program yet.

[English]

Ms. Virginia Poter: I will be clear. At times we have been slow at getting notification back to our project proponents. We are trying to speed up the process by which we can get the notification out to project proponents.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: So it might still get some news soon, right?

[English]

Ms. Virginia Poter: Yes, I believe so, but I'm not sure which ones have not heard yet. I'm a bit concerned that somebody hasn't heard yet.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you.

Do I still have some time?

[English]

The Chair: I think you do have a little bit of time.

Mr. François Choquette: What does a little bit mean?

The Chair: Another 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Thirty seconds is not a lot.

I would like to thank you for being here. I would also like to reiterate the importance of research for urban or national biodiversity. We need research and we need to support people like those from the regional environment council of central Quebec, who do the work on the ground. They know which places we have to protect. I can't think of anything better than supporting groups like that, non-profit groups that do an outstanding job and that are familiar with the various regions and places that we have to protect.

Let me say this again. Quebec is faced with a serious problem. The same thing is probably true for the rest of Canada. I am talking about deforestation and the loss of wetlands. It really is a very serious problem. Earlier you mentioned the problem of fragmentation, which is a serious problem that we have to address. I hope that we will find solutions to that because, in Drummondville, that is a very serious issue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Choquette.

Ms. Virginia Poter: If I may, we do have one partnership that is the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. We have joint ventures. Quebec is part of the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture. That's a collaboration where there's federal, provincial, and NGO funds, and money coming up from the United States to acquire wetlands, because they are so important for waterfowl and also for people and for conservation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lunney, you have five minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for their contributions to the beginning of our study here.

I want to pick up on the work of Parks Canada. You mentioned something interesting regarding the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge youth ambassadors engaging youth and reaching out to other youth, which is a very interesting concept.

In my riding of Nanaimo—Alberni we have Pacific Rim National Park, which is a great park. We have an interpretive centre there, the Kwisisits interpretive centre. I want to say how great the programs are that are going on there day by day. I had a chance a few months ago to participate in one.

You mentioned in your remarks about removing invasive species from Pacific Rim National Park. We joined a group from Vancouver Island University on one of their outings and helped to remove some invasive grass species from the sand dunes that are on recovery out there. It's a fascinating program, with young people being very much engaged. They were studying an ecological program there.

The interactive displays at the Kwisisits centre do not require personnel. They're automated. People can learn all kinds of stuff. On rainy days on the coast, where we get 10 feet of rainfall annually, it's great to have the kinds of events that keep families busy, and they're learning.

Down the road from the park we have another program that has just started in Ucluelet, with the opening of an aquarium. They use a lot of local students to engage people's interest in the intertidal animals. They learn about all kinds of life that's below the surface in the intertidal zone, as by and large, landlubbers will drive by and miss it all.

Many of these young people are going on to study science at university, which is certainly what we're hoping to accomplish. It's the same thing across Barkley Sound at the Bamfield Marine Science Centre. They engage the local students to come in to the science programs. We want to see more of this.

Coming back to Parks Canada, you mentioned in your presentation the grade 8 My Parks Pass. Can you tell us something about that program, the number of students who participate, where the uptake is across the country, about its success and how many years it has been running, and so on?

• (1710)

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It's a program that came out of the previous minister's round table, so under Minister Prentice, and was launched, in fact, by the Prime Minister a little over two years ago. It's a joint venture between Parks Canada, Nature Canada, The Royal Canadian Geographical Society, and the Historica-Dominion Institute.

Together we reach 400,000 students a year through that program. We invite them to come to our places. We give the teachers contacts through which to come to our places. The students, in fact, have it when they're in grade 8, and it continues when they are in grade 9 as well. It's one of those programs where we're seeing youth who want to come back a number of times, hopefully once with their class and several times with their families. It's really starting to pay dividends in terms of the number of people who are able to come and enjoy national parks and national historic sites through that pass program.

Mr. James Lunney: Are there lessons to be learned from where the uptake is and how this program might be expanded?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes. I think the largest learning that we've had—and in fact we have begun to reorient our education toward this—is by using partners who are already in and who have a big reach within the classroom. We've started to move with other types of programs, with the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, and we've started with the World Wildlife Fund. As I said, we're doing a learn to camp program with the International Mountain Biking Association.

All of these have been big learning experiences for us. We as government can help create, in Parks Canada terms, the big tent in which others and ourselves can get together and really make a huge difference to kids. We offer a great place for people to have that experiential learning.

Mr. James Lunney: That's super.

Now, I want to pay a compliment to one of your employees, Silva Johansson, on the Valencia program. I had never heard that name, but this woman did a fantastic job with a few props, taking people into the Valencia shipwreck off the coast and bringing it all alive as though we had lived through the whole experience.

You anticipated my next question, which is the Mountain Equipment Co-op and the International Mountain Biking Association partnerships. Can you tell us something about where the uptake was in these programs? You mentioned Fort Langley and so on. Can you tell us the number of students that participated, and what age groups they're targeting?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It's actually a family-based program. I would like to say that in a number of these programs, for example, the learn to camp program that we have done in Calgary, about 90% of the people who participated were new Canadians. We're seeing a huge uptake in new Canadians, because this is one of the ways that new urban Canadians are seeing that they can overcome a barrier. One of the biggest barriers that people have being in the outdoors, which was revealed through surveying we've done, is the apparent lack of knowledge. If you think that it's scary and you don't know anything about it, it's a very difficult barrier to overcome.

Parks Canada isn't in the world of buying tents, so Mountain Equipment Co-op provides the tents. The International Mountain Biking Association does some teaching on trails and how to mountain bike. We have had many local groups across the country, from Trans Canada Trail to local trail groups actually take people on guided hikes. The campfires at night are quite spectacular. I've participated in a number of them, and to see 100 new families actually out there enjoying the outdoors for the first time is pretty phenomenal.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Time has expired.

Ms. Liu, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): I would like to thank the witnesses for coming to meet with us today.

Ms. Poter, I particularly liked hearing you say that Montreal was a model to follow. I am myself from Montreal. I grew up there. I am pleased to hear that. Montreal has recently adopted the metropolitan land use and development plan. That is a step in the right direction.

Municipalities often have to get the job done with very tight budgets. Their revenue is limited. My question has to do with infrastructures, including treatment plants.

Do you think that the cost of building those plants is putting a strain on municipal budgets? Does the federal government have a role to play in funding those infrastructures?

Water purification means water quality. My riding is bounded on the north by the Mille Îles River. This directly affects the quality of life of residents.

Do you have any comments about that?

• (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair: Point of order, Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I think a question relating to the importance of water quality in urban areas is appropriate, but it very much puts our witnesses on the spot to ask them to venture an opinion on federal budgetary matters, so I think the question is out of order.

The Chair: I would agree on that point of order, Ms. Liu.

You could ask that question of other witnesses, but these witnesses are department officials. Asking them whether the federal government should fund a project or generally fund programs like this would be a policy question.

I ask that you keep that in mind in your questioning.

Thank you.

Ms. Laurin Liu: I don't know if we're still speaking to the same point of order. If we could just speak to the challenges, I think water quality is a challenge when we're talking about urban areas. Water purification is a particular challenge for municipalities.

The Chair: You're not speaking to the point of order.

Ms. Laurin Liu: I'm not? Okay.

The Chair: I've already ruled on the point of order. You're now using your time.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Okay.

Do you think that the construction of this infrastructure puts stress on cities and their budgets?

Ms. Virginia Poter: I might have a personal opinion, but I don't bring that expertise to bear on this question. I'm not in the regulation of waste water or water provision in a city. I don't have the expertise to give you valuable advice on that.

Ms. Laurin Liu: That's fair. Thank you.

Recently, something that was a concern to the residents of the region of Montreal was the fact that there was a beluga found in the port of Montreal. It had wandered off. It was a very unusual event. About 15 belugas were found dead, and unfortunately, we don't know the reason they died and whether it was from bacterial infection, a pollutant in the water, or chemical pollutants in the water.

What would be your recommendation in terms of the federal government's role in research funding, especially around ecotoxicology?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

This has nothing to do with urban conservation.

The Chair: On the same point of order, Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: This is also a budgetary question.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on this point of order?

Okay. Mr. Liu, I would ask you to again stay within the scope. I don't think I need to read the scope again. That was outside the scope.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Considering the role the federal government should play in urban conservation, what would be the role of the federal government in terms of research and research tools concerning ecotoxicology?

Ms. Virginia Poter: Again, this is not my expertise. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans would be the department that would have insight into the reason for the death of the belugas.

There is a fair bit of work done inside Environment Canada on water quality, but that's not my part of the department. I don't have a good insight into what they're focused on and what their priorities are and how they approach the work.

• (1720)

Ms. Laurin Liu: Would you have a perspective on the state of freshwater research in Canada? You mentioned the importance of freshwater research in terms of urban conservation.

Ms. Virginia Poter: Again, at the Wildlife Service, we are focused on protected areas, migratory birds, and species at risk. I don't have a lot of insight on freshwater other than acknowledging that it's very important to cities. There is a role wetlands can play in providing filtration services for water that is in and around urban areas.

Ms. Laurin Liu: Great, thank you.

You also mentioned youth engagement. I was wondering if you could talk about the Biosphère in terms of providing basic scientific literacy to young people.

What were the strengths of the Biosphère, and what kind of mission did it accomplish in Montreal?

Ms. Virginia Poter: I hate to sound like a broken record, but this isn't really my area. It reports to a different group. But the Biosphère is continuing to operate. It is continuing to offer the environmental education and outreach activities it has been offering since 1995. I think consideration is being given to how it needs to evolve, given that there are different channels available to get information out to people.

There's work under way in that regard.

The Chair: Time has expired. Thank you so much.

Next we have Mr. Toet. You have five minutes.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses.

I'll probably take a slightly different tack on this. My background is in business, and in my business background, research was

incredibly important to us. We did a lot of work on research, but ultimately we had to get results. We had to get things done.

That's the way I tend to look at it. The research has to be done, and I agree with that 100%, but along with that we have to be getting results, have to be driving forward, have to be getting projects actually done and completed.

I tie that in because, Ms. Poter, you noted in your presentation that natural areas such as forests and wetlands provide a service for local communities, such as cleansing water and diverting or absorbing heavy rainfalls, holding those for a period of time, and releasing them in a way that doesn't create a flood situation. That would also help curb costs for local governments, as far as I can see. That only makes sense from a business standpoint. Nature is doing some of the work for you, and that's going to save you costs, obviously.

I just wondered if you could share with us any other examples of where forests, wetlands, or other natural areas, other than in those areas that I talked about, could actually have a strong economic benefit.

Ms. Virginia Poter: I guess it's a bit tough at times to actually provide a dollar amount against what an ecological service is, but there has been some interesting work done.

Again, I keep picking on the City of Edmonton, but they have generated quite a bit of information.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: They probably don't mind you picking on them.

Ms. Virginia Poter: They did some work around the question of the value that a tree planted in a city provides. It was quite interesting, because it was in the order of maybe \$80 a tree per year. Then they looked at the cost of actually planting the tree, and maintaining the tree and whatnot, and it was in the order of \$10 or \$20.

There is a real net benefit to having a tree in a city. The benefit it provides is in helping to clean the air, to provide shade, to help manage local climates.

The City of Toronto has put in place a couple of interesting requirements. One is that for all new buildings that are over a certain size—I can't tell you what that is, but it's reasonably large—there's a requirement to use green roofs. It's to help regulate the local temperature, provide some habitat for some species, and so on.

I think the people who are living in those buildings are receiving a clear benefit from it as well, such as lowered cooling costs, for sure, in the summer. As well, quite often you can access these roof gardens. I don't know if you'd call it a recreational benefit or just a well-being benefit for the dwellers who are in an urban environment with perhaps less green space. We know that green space is an environment that oftentimes encourages a feeling of well-being, and this provides access for the people who live in an area that doesn't give them as much ready access to it.

Those are a couple of areas of real cost savings. The more green space you have, the more chance you have for some improvements to air quality. There has been a fair bit of work done around that as well. If you have better air quality, of course you have fewer respiratory diseases and impacts on people, so it reduces health care costs.

I could see real benefits to incorporating the notion of conservation into urban planning. It's not the only thing you have to consider. There are many other things to consider, because running a city is a complex business. However, there is certainly benefit to the dwellers of cities to have conservation built into the city design.

• (1725)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: I'm glad you took that angle, because it works out very nicely. A large part of my riding has been given the nickname "Park City". It's not because there are a lot of parks in it, which there are, but because the whole area was designed to have a park atmosphere with a lot of trees, a lot of open space, a lot of green space. Those things have contributed very much to the well-being of the neighbourhood. I'm glad that I can now go back to my riding and say that we're going down the right path, that we're doing some of the things we should be doing in an exemplary way. That's really good to hear.

I also want to touch on something on which, Mr. Campbell, you've been asked a few questions. It's regarding the youth. That is a very important aspect of this. You talked about some of your programs. Mr. Lunney asked you about the camping experiences and things like that. Mr. Sopuck touched on it as well.

I wonder if you have any programs that bring rural youth and urban youth together. That would have a great impact.

Perhaps you could talk about programs that you have or would envision that would do that.

The Chair: The time has expired, so please make your answer short.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, certainly.

We run a number of those programs out of different national parks across the country. Most notable is the one out of the Palisades. We've brought at-risk aboriginal youth together with rural youth and city youth from Vancouver in a number of different fora. We've brought them out of Edmonton. There's lots of that type of experience.

Point Pelee National Park has had a number of initiatives to bring together rural youth from in and around the area south of London, Kitchener, the Cambridge area, and Toronto.

There are some real successes in bringing those groups together.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we go to the last four minutes, Mr. Lunney, you had a point of order, I believe.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I made a remark a few moments ago related to repeated points of order, which caused some offence to Ms. Liu and her colleagues.

I would like to apologize to Ms. Liu and to her colleagues for that remark.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Rempel, you have the last four minutes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As the youngest member of the government caucus, I want to thank my colleague for his apology as well.

That said, my first question is for Mr. Campbell.

In my role as parliamentary secretary, one of the first events I had the opportunity to take part in was the launch of the learn to camp program. What struck me was the number of new Canadians who were engaged in that program. I think the partnership was with the Catholic immigration Society. This was in Banff National Park.

It had a real impact. One of the things I heard from people was their appreciation for Canada's wilderness. Something all Canadians share is that sense of closeness to nature, the value of our wilderness.

Could you talk about the thought behind the development of the learn to camp program? Specific to our study today, even in the short time it's been up and running, how has it worked towards giving new Canadians and urban Canadians a sense of the importance of conservation?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: The development of it came from our needing to look at who the main groups are who aren't connected to nature. We came up with three. It's youth in Canada, urban Canadians, and new Canadians. From the groups who are most disconnected to nature, those would be the three largest groups.

We looked at the barriers we needed to overcome. We did a barrier study. One of the major barriers, much to our surprise, was people feeling they didn't have the skills to be out in nature. From that we developed the learn to camp program.

It doesn't just affect the families who go; it affects the school groups. We have kids writing to us, saying that they were able to talk about it at school. It gives them a real sense of pride to pass the message of conservation not only among themselves, but also the people they come in contact with.

• (1730)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: That's great. I find it interesting that you brought up that barrier analysis. I think it's material to what we're looking at.

What were some of the other barriers you identified as part of that work?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: One of the ones that also surprised us was people's general knowledge around geography. That's why we've partnered a lot with the Royal Canadian Geographical Society.

In the Jane-Finch corridor in Toronto, about 80% of the kids didn't know their city is on a lake. You start to look at that and how it just leads back... Some of that, I think, is quite an affront to us as Canadians, so we wondered how we could act on that. That was one.

They felt that the distance to nature was a barrier. Another major barrier was that with the distance, people thought there was a large cost involved.

We've been working to overcome some of those barriers. We now have a bus that takes people from downtown Toronto to the Bruce Peninsula National Park. It sells out within minutes. It's for people who otherwise wouldn't think they could afford to get there. It's a private company that does it, and it's been highly successful, for them and for us.

The Chair: Unfortunately, time has expired.

I want to thank our witnesses, Ms. Poter and Mr. Campbell, for being with us today. It was very interesting testimony.

I want to thank my colleagues for their questions, and I would accept a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: It is so moved.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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