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Chair

Mr. Mark Warawa

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (1555)

[English]

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

I want to welcome everyone to the 50th meeting of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development as we continue our study on urban conservation practices in Canada.

I want to thank the witnesses for taking time to be here today on this very important study. We have five witness groups. Each will have up to ten minutes.

When you reach nine minutes, I will give you the one-minute warning.

We have a lot to cover in a short period of time. We've started late because of votes in the House.

We'll begin with the Friends of the Rouge Watershed.

Mr. Robb, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Jim Robb (General Manager, Friends of the Rouge Watershed): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

There are two main documents that I would refer you to. One is a table that gives an existing Rouge Park context and then some weaknesses that we think are in the draft national park proposal. There is also a one-pager that has a "whereas" prologue and then a request to the committee. There are five requests that we're going to make to you. I'll lead you through the slide show as quickly as I can and will hopefully be able to sketch out our concerns and the great opportunities.

The first thing I'd like to do is thank the federal government and the Prime Minister for the amazing work that has been done in creating new parks and expanding existing parks, and for the initiative to create a Rouge national park. It's a great and visionary step in building our nation's green infrastructure.

Second, I want to thank the committee for inviting us to provide input on urban conservation initiatives.

Third, I'd like to commend programs such as EcoAction and the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, which really contribute to urban conservation initiatives across Canada.

Let me show you a picture of the beautiful Finch Meander. It's one of the highlights of the park. The Rouge really is a special place. It's nationally endangered. It contains two of our great Carolinian

mixed-wood ecozones, and it's a wonderful place right next to the city of Toronto.

I have here slide showing the Rouge beach. It's part of the Toronto area of concern. It has occasional water quality problems that reduce swimming opportunities on some days, but it's still a wonderful place, and if we can restore the park, we will bring back the water quality at Lake Ontario, and people will be able to swim. They fish here now, they kayak, and they canoe. This is right at Lake Ontario.

The Rouge Park has had wonderful and long-standing all-party support. The pictures I am showing you in the slide are from way back in the 1980s. One shows the Honourable Tom McMillan and the Honourable Pauline Browes visiting the Rouge under the Mulroney government. It was the Mulroney government that got the ball rolling with an offer to help fund the park. There's also a picture of the Honourable Lucien Bouchard, who was the minister of the environment. The other picture, of course, shows Ed Broadbent, who also visited the Rouge. It's an all-party support type of thing.

Today I have some wonderful colleagues here with me. Lois James, who is an Order of Canada recipient, is here, as is Kevin O'Connor, the volunteer president of Friends of the Rouge. He has been involved for 25 years with the Rouge. Also, Gloria Reszler is another 25-year veteran. Lois is a veteran of the Rouge issues, having been involved for more than 37 years. The next slide displays a picture showing Lois with Minister Peter Kent and one showing the Honourable Pauline Browes and MP Michael Chong at the Carolinian Canada sign in Rouge Park.

The Rouge is nationally significant in terms of first nations. It's one of the richest areas of settlement in Canada. There are literally dozens of first nation village sites, from the Huron-Wendat, to the Mississauga, to the Iroquois. It's just a wonderful area. When we create the park, the first nations should have an important role to play.

The Rouge also has two historic sites, including Carrying Place, a portage route that went up from Lake Ontario over the Oak Ridges Moraine towards Lake Simcoe; it shows up on early explorer maps.

It is in biological diversity that the Rouge really shines. I have had the pleasure in my life of visiting parks such as Haida Gwaii on the west coast, the Bay of Fundy in the east, Riding Mountain in the central area of Canada, and many others. I came back to Toronto, where I grew up, and while I had hiked in the Rouge, I didn't realize until I had grown up that it was one of the most biologically diverse areas in all of Canada, with more than 23 federally designated species at risk, 800 plants, and 55 fish species, including trout. We still have trout—brook trout in the headwaters, rainbow trout, and brown trout—and a lot of opportunity.

The next slide shows a sign from the river adjacent to the Rouge, which we'd like to see as part of the park. As well, people are working to bring back Atlantic salmon. There's a wonderful multi-million dollar recreational fishery along Lake Ontario, and we could have a wonderful fishery in Rouge Park.

The following slide shows Parks Canada's mandate. The key thing here is that Parks Canada ensures the ecological and commemorative integrity of these places for the present and future. In my table here, I have some concerns about the existing draft park concept, and some suggestions to improve it, to make sure that we follow this mandate of Parks Canada.

The opportunity here is almost miraculous. Back in the 1970s, the Trudeau government federally and the Progressive Conservative Bill Davis provincial government together acquired about 150 to 160 square kilometres of public land in anticipation of a second international airport. The airport plan didn't go ahead at that time. There are still plans for a smaller airport, but essentially, more than 100 square kilometres of that land is now designated as greenbelt within the provincial plan, and as a natural heritage system.

• (1600)

This is the land in the endangered Carolinian and mixed-wood life zone, the most endangered in Canada. This is the largest remaining area of public land left in southern Ontario, and it's nationally significant. Why do we need a 100-square-kilometre study area? For one thing, this area is home to almost one third of Canada's population—more than 10 million people. Second, it's home to one third of Canada's endangered species. Third, if you look at national and provincial parks, you'll see that this is one of the most underserved and underrepresented areas in all of Canada; less than 1% of provincial and national parks are protected in this area. It's at about 0.26% of national parks. You can compare that to Manitoba or Nova Scotia. They're at about 2.5%. Alberta is at 9.5%.

This slide shows the greenbelt context. The government of Premier Mike Harris created the Oak Ridges Moraine, shown as a light green area in the centre, and then the government of Dalton McGuinty added a greenbelt around it. Now, it's very impressive, but it's mostly private land. If you look at the corner here, you'll see a little green area that widens out. That's the area between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine, most of which is in public land ownership and which could be and should be the study area for a national park.

I have a more detailed map here. I won't go into too much detail except to say that the light pink area is the current Rouge Park, primarily owned by the provincial and municipal governments. The dark purple area shows over 55 square kilometres of public land that

is federally owned and is outside of the airport study area, so it's not part of the airport plans. It could be studied and it should be part of Rouge Park.

If you look at this next slide, you'll see that the current study area is in red and the blue is what we think the expansion of the study area should be. One of the reasons we need to expand into the blue area is that if you see the line that goes up between the blue and red, that's the town line between Pickering on the right and Markham on the left. If you look at the picture below that, if you go up that road that you can see in the picture, when you go up through the Markham part, there's an urban blockade called Stouffville. You can't really get to the heart of the moraine. You get to the very toe of the moraine, but you don't get to the heart.

You need the lands to the right in Pickering, which are federally and publicly owned lands in the greenbelt, to actually complete a strong ecological link up to the moraine. In fact, those lands were declared a federal green space preserve in 2002 by David Collenette. Those lands should be part of the study area. They're not right now.

Minister Peter Kent made some comments that we agree with. He basically said that the ideal configuration would be to include much of the federal lands in Pickering. Then he said that it might not be the ultimate configuration. We agree with that, because the study areas should be larger, and ultimately after a rational, scientific public and stakeholder process. There may be a good reason to not include all those lands, but we shouldn't kick them out at the beginning. We should have the full study area and then move forward in a rational scientific process.

Next I show you our five recommendations and the summary of the five; you have one page with the whereases. These are our request to you and five recommendations that we'd like you to adopt and send forward to the minister and the federal government.

First, let's look at a 100-square-kilometre study area. This is an area with millions of people and nationally endangered ecosystems. Let's not start by shrinking it down to something that won't be sustainable in the long term. Let's look at the full opportunity.

Second, there are 20 years of public planning, a great investment in public resources and community work, and we shouldn't undo that or reinvent the wheel. We should take that foundation and move forward to strengthen it.

Third, because these are endangered ecosystems and this is the last chance on public land to do something really good for them, the priority should be the protection and restoration of these two endangered ecozones: the Carolinian and mixed forests.

Fourth, we'd like you to include first nations and groups like Friends of the Rouge on the advisory committee. We've worked on these issues for over a quarter of a century in a non-partisan way. We've worked with all politicians. We've worked with the community groups. We live in the surrounding community. We really know this issue backward and forward.

Fifth, I think that we want to get this right and we know you want to get this right, so Parks Canada should have more time and maybe more resources to make sure, before we finish the park concept and before we do the legislation, that we get it right. We hope you give Parks Canada some resources.

• (1605)

Lastly, this is a beautiful quote from the Honourable Tom McMillan, who was the minister of the environment in 1988. He said:

I view "The Rouge" as one of the most important things we did as a government, not only in the natural heritage field but in our whole public policy agenda. Now, the work to protect the Rouge, and to make its splendours accessible both to Canadians and to all humanity, must find its logical completion through full national park status for this incomparable place. Nothing less will do justice to the natural heritage values so important to our national identity.

I fully and heartily agree. We have a community here with great diversity, with many new and young Canadians. This park should be worthy of a national park. It should invite people in to experience our wonderful national parks under the leadership of Parks Canada and then entice people to go to the rest of Canada. Our parks system is world renowned.

Thank you.

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

Next we'll hear from the David Suzuki Foundation, with Mr. Moola and Ms. Kulendiren.

You have 10 minutes.

Dr. Faisal Moola (Director General, Ontario and the North, David Suzuki Foundation): Thank you, Committee Chair Mark Warawa and members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

My name is Dr. Faisal Moola. I am director general for the David Suzuki Foundation. I'm also an adjunct professor of forestry at the University of Toronto.

Through science and education, the David Suzuki Foundation's vision is that, within a generation, Canadians will act on the understanding that we are all interconnected and interdependent on nature.

I welcome the opportunity to address the committee on conserving and providing access to nature in urbanized regions and the positive role that the federal government can play, as in the establishment of new federally protected areas like the proposed Rouge national park in Ontario's "Golden Horseshoe", one of the fastest-growing urban regions in all of North America.

Despite being a vast nation of forest, mountains, and ice, Canada has quickly become an urbanized country. According to statistics published in 2011 by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 81% of Canadians now live in urbanized

communities. We rank 41st out of 231 nations in the relative proportion of our population now residing in cities. We are ahead of the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and many other western European countries in the dominance of our urban communities. As a result, opportunities to experience nature are becoming increasingly limited for tens of millions of Canadians, as the growth and spread of our urban communities continues to consume some of the best of the natural world closest to home.

For example, recent analyses by Ducks Unlimited Canada have found that over 72% of the original wetlands of southern Ontario have now been developed and, as a result, the region is now home to approximately one third of all Ontario's species at risk. The same holds true for other urbanized regions of the country, such as British Columbia's Lower Mainland and the greater Montreal area.

For example, according to the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre, over 100 plants and animals that are at risk in the province are now found within the borders of the metro Vancouver region. Protecting remaining natural areas in urbanized regions of Canada is vitally important. Remnant wetlands, forests, grasslands, and other ecosystems provide critical habitat for Canadian wildlife, such as threatened songbirds and rare plants, while helping to sustain the health and well-being of Canadian families and communities.

We often take for granted the astonishing array of natural benefits that green space and farmland provide for all of us.

Trees produce oxygen and improve urban air quality, absorbing pollution and airborne particles like nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, and carbon monoxide. Wetlands act as green living infrastructure by filtering and regulating our drinking water. Forests and rich agricultural soils remove and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, thereby acting as a hedge against rising greenhouse gas emissions. Green urban spaces cool our communities and protect us from dangerous storms by providing protection against flooding and erosion and ensuring the stability of steep slopes.

This doesn't even account for the physical, psychological, and social benefits that Canadians enjoy from proximity to and time spent in nature. Think of the stress relief from a walk in a local park over lunch break, going for a family hike, or going camping on the weekend.

The ecosystems that provide these benefits are often referred to by scientists as natural capital. This includes the fields, forests, farms, wetlands, estuaries, and other natural and managed ecosystems within and surrounding our communities.

Natural capital and ecosystem benefits are typically undervalued in our market economies, despite being worth trillions of dollars annually and contributing tens of millions in non-market benefits to communities. Unfortunately, the economic and societal benefits we receive from nature are often taken for granted by policy-makers. This is partly due to a lack of knowledge regarding what they are and what they're truly worth.

Published science by the David Suzuki Foundation, university researchers such as Dr. Nancy Olewiler at Simon Fraser University, Dr. Ray Tomalty at McGill University, and others has shown that the ecological benefits we get from urban nature are extremely valuable in monetary terms and in some cases truly priceless. For example, the David Suzuki Foundation recently released a study that for the first time estimates the non-market benefits provided by farmland and green space within the proposed Rouge national park and the surrounding watersheds in Scarborough, Markham, and Pickering.

You have been provided with copies of the study's executive summary and you can access the full version online. The report documents that the Rouge region provides essential ecosystem benefits that, conservatively, benefit residents of the greater Toronto area to the tune of more than \$115 million each year in direct benefits that clean our air, filter our water, and provide important habitat for agricultural pollinators and other wildlife. The proposed Rouge national park is the ecological engine of the region, providing, conservatively, more than \$12 million annually in critical ecological benefits to communities in the region.

● (1610)

By establishing Rouge national park, the Government of Canada will protect a critical bank of natural capital that will provide benefits for generations to come. While protecting, restoring, and managing this wild gem will not come cheaply, these costs should be weighed against the huge dividends that this investment in creating Canada's first urban national park will reap for millions of Canadians. Furthermore, this innovative step will create a model for connecting Canadians with nature in their own backyards for other urban regions of the country.

We welcome the fact that the federal government has committed \$144 million in funding the creation of Rouge national park over the next 10 years and has launched a planning process for the creation of the park. We hope that the planning process will result in well-defined stand-alone legislation and management plans for the park that ensure the protection of its ecological health in the face of growing urbanization and other pressures, such as infrastructure, that put the park's sensitive biodiversity at risk—such as expanding energy transport through the park.

The David Suzuki Foundation would like to make the following recommendations to the committee to consider in the creation and management of Rouge national park, as well as future candidate near-urban federal protected areas, such as the proposed Bowen Island national park, close to the city of Vancouver.

Given the significant economic and ecological values of the Rouge and its surrounding watersheds, we urge the Government of Canada to quickly establish Rouge national park under stand-alone legislation.

The legislation and management plans governing Rouge national park must give priority to the protection and restoration of ecological health and water quality. They must ensure that existing and new development activities that impact nature—such as infrastructure—are minimized and managed to the highest standards of sustainability and public safety. It must mandate the achievement of a net gain in nature as a result of any activities that degrade the ecological health

of the park, and it must ensure that resource extraction in the park is prohibited.

Given the close interrelationships between Canada's first peoples and the lands and waters of Rouge national park, they must be recognized and first nations engaged as keepers of traditional ecological knowledge, including in public education and interpretive programming. First nations must be fully involved in the establishment and management of the new national park.

Parks Canada should work collaboratively with the Government of Ontario, first nations, local municipalities, and regional conservation authorities to protect nature outside of the proposed national park boundaries with the establishment of special management zones such as protected buffers and connected corridors that are contiguous to the park, expanding and surrounding the protection of nature and valuable farmland, and identifying and protecting sensitive hydrological and natural heritage features within the surrounding Rouge River, Petticoat and Duffins Creek watersheds.

Programs and incentives that support farm and land stewardship should be made available to farmers to support local food production and promote sustainable agricultural practices that restore and enhance the ecological benefits that nature and farmland provide in the Rouge national park, such as carbon storage and habitat for pollinators. Examples of innovative programs to engage the farming community and sustainability are throughout Canada.

The establishment of Canada's first urban national park in the Rouge is precedent setting and we hope will be indicative of a new interest on the part of federal politicians and agencies, such as Parks Canada, of the critical need to help reconnect Canadians with our natural heritage and provide opportunities for "green time" over "screen time".

The data suggest that individuals, particularly our children, who spend time in nature have improved memory, problem-solving, and creativity—and they're physically healthier, too. Yet research by the David Suzuki Foundation has shown that an astonishing 70% of Canadian children spend less than an hour outside each day. In comparison, a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that young people spend an average of seven and a half hours each day on entertainment media.

Thus, we believe that the federal programs that support getting kids out in nature can complement the creation of Canada's first urban national park as well as other urban efforts across the country.

To conclude, Canadians have always celebrated the spectacular natural beauty that makes ours one of the most bountiful and prosperous nations on earth, from oceans and coastlines to mountains and foothills and the proposed Rouge national park. Conserving our lands and waters is a gift to the planet. If we continue to work together, we can ensure that we and our children and grandchildren will have much to celebrate long into the future.

•(1615)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The next witness from Parks Canada, Mr. Campbell, will also be speaking to the Rouge River watershed, and then we're going to be switching over to a slightly different topic that is also related to urban conservation.

Mr. Campbell, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, Parks Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members, for this additional opportunity to participate in the standing committee's study of urban conservation practices in Canada. My remarks today will focus on a true Canadian first: the Rouge national urban park.

The Rouge Park owes its current existence as one of North America's largest urban parks to the foresight, dedication, and engagement of a diversity of local visionaries and stewards who, for over more than 30 years, have supported the park.

Recognizing this legacy of conservation and rich cultural history will be key to celebrating and protecting this special place as it becomes Canada's first national urban park.

A 2010 review of the park's governance, organization, and financial structure concluded that a new model was required to give the park stronger leadership and accountability. A public opinion poll revealed that an overwhelming 88% of respondents supported the concept of establishing Rouge national park under the leadership of Parks Canada. In the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Canada announced its commitment to work towards the creation of a national urban park in the Rouge Valley.

[*Translation*]

The opportunity to establish Rouge Park as Canada's first national urban park, a new concept for Canada, is well-aligned with Parks Canada's mandate of protection, education and visitor experience, as well as the agency's current priority to meaningfully reach Canada's increasingly diverse urban population.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada announced in budget 2012 its commitment to preserving Canada's natural beauty and taking action on the creation of Canada's first national urban park in the Rouge Valley in Ontario. Accordingly, \$143.7 million was provided over 10 years for park development and interim operations, and \$7.6 million per year thereafter was provided for its continuing operations.

Since the summer of 2011, Parks Canada has held a series of meetings and workshops in the greater Toronto area and worked with first nations and more than a hundred communities and organizations, including the youth of the area. All are passionate and knowledgeable about the Rouge Valley and are committed to its future.

With their help, we were able to develop a series of nine principles that guided the development of the Rouge national urban park concept. Aligned with Parks Canada's mandate, the proposed

concept includes conservation of natural and cultural resources, opportunities for learning, a range of visitor experience possibilities, and the integration and promotion of sustainable agriculture.

[*Translation*]

Public involvement is a cornerstone of Parks Canada's policy, planning and management practices to ensure sound decision-making, build public understanding, and provide opportunities for Canadians to contribute their expertise and suggestions.

•(1620)

[*English*]

During the summer of 2012, Parks Canada took the Rouge national urban park concept to the public through a program that allowed us to connect with thousands of Canadians. Over the past four months alone, 2,600 people completed our online survey, hundreds more individuals have sent letters and e-mails, and several organizations have submitted formal submissions to us. An information piece was dropped into the mailboxes of 26,000 residents living in and around the proposed park area, and more than 4,500 citizens talked to us at the dozens of community events that we have attended in and around the Rouge.

The multi-faceted engagement program for the Rouge allowed us to successfully gather the input and perspectives of a broad spectrum of the urban population. The comments and ideas received are very important in validating the park concept and in shaping the proposed national urban park.

Although we are in the early stages of reviewing the input received, I can confirm that the overall objectives presented in the Rouge national urban park concept resonated with urban residents and Canadians throughout our nation. They want this place to be protected and accessible. They are passionate about conservation and restoration. They want to connect with nature. They want to learn about the cultural heritage character of the park and they are supportive of a vibrant farming community.

Very importantly, those who have had the opportunity to experience the beauty of the Rouge Valley, as well as those who have not yet had that chance, want to be involved in the park's future as stewards, volunteers, and regular visitors.

While I'm before you today, I would also like to address how Parks Canada's mandate is well suited for the management of Canada's first national urban park. In particular, I would like to share why the integration of conservation, education, and connection is the best way forward for the Rouge national urban park.

Earlier this year at the IUCN, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the world's oldest and largest global environmental network, new guidelines were released on ecological restoration for protected areas. These guidelines were led by Parks Canada and modelled on Canada's own national approach to ecological restoration and natural resource conservation. Parks Canada's approach recognizes the importance of integrating actions such as restoring natural habitat while also providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy themselves and learn about restoration activities.

The Parks Canada approach has been adopted by many countries. In fact, the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity is endorsing the application of the Parks Canada approach globally to help restore biodiversity and increase public awareness around the world. Parks Canada now has the opportunity to implement this philosophy in the Rouge national urban park. This park will be a tangible representation of successful urban conservation in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Over the next few months, Parks Canada will continue to work with public landholders on an agreement on park boundaries and the assembly of lands that will be transferred to Parks Canada.

[*English*]

Parks Canada will then be in a position to put forward a recommendation to government on a legislative process. A strategic plan will be developed and will be presented to Canadians for input.

I hope that what I have provided today gives committee members an update on the progress being made toward the establishment of the Rouge national urban park.

Thank you. I will do my best to answer any questions later on, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now switch our focus on urban conservation to Surrey, British Columbia, where the sun always shines, sometimes behind clouds, of course.

From the City of Surrey, we have Ms. Carrie Baron.

You have up to 10 minutes. Welcome back.

Ms. Carrie Baron (Manager, Drainage and Environment, Engineering Department, City of Surrey): Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, honourable members, and thank you for allowing me to talk to you on urban conservation and how it relates to Bear Creek Park in Surrey.

I gave you some figures in my package. In figure 1, for those who don't know, we have the Fraser River to our north, the State of Washington to the south, Delta and Boundary Bay over to the west, and the Township of Langley to our east. There are over 1,500 open watercourses in Surrey, of which about 700 either support a fishery or have the potential to support a fishery. The three major river systems in Surrey are the Little Campbell, Serpentine, and Nicomekl Rivers.

Bear Creek Park is located in the middle of Surrey, as you can see in figure 2. It's in the northwest quadrant of Surrey in a highly urbanized area. The three major creeks going through Bear Creek are King Creek, Bear Creek, and Quibble Creek. All three support an active salmon run, mainly chum and coho.

It should be noted that Bear Creek Park was used as a landfill in the fifties and sixties, so it's a highly modified park. It's not in a natural state, but through the years, people have brought a lot of the resources back to make it more of a natural amenity in Surrey.

Within the park—figure 3—there are recreation facilities, including athletic tracks, a playground, and swimming pools. Plus,

you have a significant natural area around and adjacent to the creeks, with walking trails, etc., at a good distance so we don't have too much intrusion.

In order to understand urban conservation and how we can protect Bear Creek, you have to understand what we're doing as a city as a whole, including some of the more significant ways through which the city is trying to preserve urban conservation.

We have a sustainability charter that looks at the social, economic, and environmental aspects of creating our sustainable city.

We have a natural drainage policy that was developed in the seventies: council decided to leave creeks open. We did not follow the philosophy of enclosing creeks as urbanization occurred in Surrey. We kept creeks as an integral part of our drainage system, but we left them open.

We've since also come up with the ecological management plan for Surrey. We're looking at using the concept of a green infrastructure network, the same as one would have a pipe network, but having it in the green community and looking at the hubs, nodes, and links. In the city, how do we link them together to preserve a green city and urban conservation?

A biodiversity plan is currently under way to try to expand our green infrastructure network even further to make sure that by linking all our significant environmental areas, we can maximize the biodiversity that we can keep in our urban setting.

We also have neighbourhood concept plans. We do quite a bit of this in Surrey. We have all the different departments and stakeholders, etc., get together to do the community planning in a holistic way to meet the various needs of the different things.

Then again, we have integrated stormwater management planning. Again, we bring land use planning, recreation, and transportation into our watershed planning concepts.

Where we do have our natural areas set aside, and city ownership, we have a whole strategy of how our park staff manage those natural areas within Surrey. For there to be fish and wildlife and urban conservation in Bear Creek, we have to look beyond the boundaries. We have to make sure that we have the proper city framework for all of this to work.

The city has a lot of initiatives to bring our citizens into the conservation aspect throughout all levels. We're not just educating the young. We're trying to educate the different population types—industries, developers, and everyone—on the value of having the natural environment in Surrey.

All of the stormwater in our drainage systems—off the roads and everywhere—leads to one of the creeks in Surrey. It leads to a fisheries creek in Surrey. As such, it's very important for us to communicate with the public about the importance of preserving that and about what they dump down the drains or what runs off the road into the community.

We have some key initiatives. One is a salmon habitat restoration program, and there's also the Surrey natural areas program—SHaRP and SNAP. Both actually have had federal funding and federal sponsorship in the past. We've had these programs going for 17 years now. We bring in post-secondary students and, with high school students from Surrey, we have them doing work in the creeks and education in the community. They take that back to the community and to their schools. We're trying to get them involved in the community because then they'll preserve the community.

We have huge community-based volunteer programs for everything: from Releaf, Coho Crew, Salmon Tracks—where we have storm-drain markings—and Eco Rangers, who are looking at our beachfronts, to Friends of the Forest, who are more involved in our urban forestry. We have the Tree Team, which goes around and does more tree education, and we have Salmon Savers for the Day.

● (1625)

We have various programs with various names covering different things in the environment to try to pique people's interest. We also have various community groups of different ethnicities involved from different parts, who we're also working with.

We have a nature centre that we've developed just within the last three to five years in Green Timbers Park, which is quite close to Bear Creek Park, again, to try to bring in urban conservation practices and a place for people to go to learn more, whether it's about composting or organic gardening, etc.

As for community events, we have an environmental extravaganza every year that lasts for about a month. It has everything from an environmental filmfest to nature walks and birding talks, which involves a lot of our community groups hosting in some of these talks, but also a significant amount of the city. Again, we're trying to get into various sectors, not just a single stream. We're partnering with schools, and we have community events, such as our big one, which is Party for the Planet. That's our big Earth Day event, where we're not just looking at the green environment, at the natural environment, but also at what we can do for our energy, etc. when we talk about these earth days.

On working with other levels of government, I find that local governments often don't have the tools or the resources to effectively manage conservation. We work with staff from higher levels of government in determining the best direction, especially when competing interests are present.

We have a very strong working relationship with Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the Minister of Environment. We've developed tools such as our stream classification system. It's a very simple classification, but it helps citizens, industries, and developers identify immediately which streams have more environmental significance than others. Then they know which activities they have to be more cautious with when working around different streams.

We've also had a regular monthly meeting with Fisheries and Oceans Canada to go over environmental aspects of different projects coming up in the city, whether it's a developer project or whether it's one of our own infrastructure projects, to try to help us with solutions, to try to work on things.

They also do the teaching. A lot of the federal staff help to do the urban conservation education to teach our students who are working in the streams as a base, so that they can take it further, or through other means. They also obviously participate in fish releases. They work with the hatcheries. They bring out the equipment. We do fish releases quite often in the different parks around Surrey. Bear Creek is one of the main hubs we do fish releases in, usually for chum salmon released in the fall.

As for where the federal government can assist more in urban conservation in a city like Surrey, we don't have the expertise when we're developing and implementing various plans and initiatives. We typically don't have the expertise that's at the federal level in terms of fisheries and also in terms of species at risk. We also don't have the legislation. We don't have the same legislative tools available. That's at other levels of government. When we have bad pollution offenders, we don't have the ability to go after them the same way that other levels of government do, so continuing to have those kinds of supports is welcomed. We need that for the serious breaches. I'm not talking about the small ones; I'm talking about the serious breaches we have.

At the present time, whether we're looking at our green infrastructure network or at Bear Creek or beyond the boundaries of Bear Creek, all the conservation in Surrey is done primarily through public ownership. Public ownership is typically what the city can buy. Typically, we don't get any outside funding for any of this. In urban settings, the cost of this outside ownership is massive, especially in the Vancouver area, which limits how much we can conserve.

People actually enjoy having the federal government's presence at community events such as the fish releases and stuff. People really look forward to seeing that the higher levels of government are attentive and are active in their communities.

The other thing that's unique to Surrey is that we actually have a cross-border initiative. The Bear Creek drains into the Serpentine River, which drains into Boundary Bay, which is actually shared with the State of Washington. Many of us have informal communications right now with Washington state and the City of Blaine, and to have that with the first nations.... Communication is very important to us. It also helps with the overall conservation of the bay.

● (1630)

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss some of the urban conservation initiatives within the city. I hope this sets the stage for how we can approach the topic from a city perspective in order to ensure conservation from a more defined perspective such as Bear Creek Park. I know that my colleague Ken Bennett will be expanding more on the Bear Creek initiatives.

Without good water quality in the Serpentine watershed or community involvement in environmental values and preservation, we could not preserve or enhance Bear Creek Park.

Thank you.

•(1635)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Baron.

Finally, we'll hear from Mr. Kenneth Bennett as an individual.

Mr. Bennett.

Mr. Kenneth Bennett (Former Environmental Manager, Environmental Planning and Protection, City of Surrey, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Honourable Mr. Chair and members of Parliament. Thank you for inviting me to speak to your committee on urban conservation as it relates to Bear Creek Park in particular.

My name is Ken Bennett. I have lived in the Lower Mainland all my life. I've worked for three different municipalities across the Lower Mainland, spanning 35 years as a professional biologist. I live next to Bear Creek Park. I visit that park daily in the summer time and very frequently all year long.

I will address the committee's terms of reference, specifically, the issues and challenges of urban conservation as well as the economic, health, and biodiversity benefits of urban conservation.

I will give you just a little background on the park. In 1938, Bear Creek Park was a field of stumps and mud. It had been logged over the decades, as most of the Lower Mainland was, from the late 1800s through the 1920s. However, the citizens at the time had a vision. In a letter written to the Reeve of Surrey in June of 1938, they said:

This park has wonderful possibilities, being a natural beauty spot, and possessing two fine creeks which traverse its whole length. It is ideally located to accommodate the people of the North end of the municipality. ...Let us build a community park worthy of Surrey and second to none in the lower mainland. It can be done.

With that vision and determination, Bear Creek Park was created and has indeed become one of the finest parks in an urban setting in the Lower Mainland.

Urban conservation is an attempt to retain natural areas and associated habitats in urbanized, developed communities in order to maintain the last remnants of ecological systems for the benefit of people and nature in an urban setting, but there are issues and challenges.

Local governments have very limited ability and powers to protect and acquire natural areas in an urban setting. As most land in the urban setting is privately owned and therefore subject to senior and local government regulations that might apply, mostly this can be done only through voluntary stewardship. Acquisition during the development process is possible, but usually results only in small parcels, as Ms. Baron has explained. It's very expensive.

Councils unfortunately look upon city land as "development in waiting", will cash in on sales to increase the tax base, and, in turn, often devalue the natural attributes. Protection of the upland areas beyond the minimal setbacks required for riparian areas due to the Fisheries Act, for example, is very difficult and often not possible. Federal and provincial regulations are silent on this issue. Upland protection is almost non-existent.

Fragmentation of habitat in the urban setting and the lack of connectivity across the urban landscape are very significant impediments to urban conservation. In the urban setting, transportation corridors often circle or bisect parks. Indeed, we have our own

controversial issue in Bear Creek Park given the city's repeated proposal to extend 84th Avenue through the south end

Local governments do not have the resources or expertise to map and evaluate their communities for conservation opportunities in a strategic way. As a result, conservation is often piecemeal, fragmented, and not coordinated into an overall strategic plan. Municipalities and cities such as Surrey—the big ones—often have that capability, but many municipalities throughout Canada do not.

One of the areas I want to talk about is the health benefits. This is an area that has a tremendous lack of understanding with regard to health. This is an overlooked component in the urban setting. Dr. Faisal Moola mentioned this in his previous dissertation.

Since 80% of Canadians live in or near urban centres and 95% of their time is spent indoors, the urban environment—the built environment—is pretty much their only experience. However, there is a direct relationship between improved human health and preserving, protecting, and accessing natural areas, and science is proving this.

•(1640)

In the scientific literature, physicians, psychologists, and medical researchers from around the world have documented numerous health benefits from simply being in a natural setting, and this is an often overlooked component. I'm going to run through a few of these. I have a list here of some of the research that I have done.

Nature moderates the effects of stress hormones and reduces the production of these hormones.

Children near parks, versus those who live without access to parks, showed a weight differential of five kilograms in boys and six kilograms in girls, respectively, at the age of 16. Obesity and diabetes are reduced in people with access to parks and natural areas.

Physical activity is as effective as drugs in treating depression. Attention deficit disorders are reduced, and calming effects are enhanced while in a natural setting.

Children have better learning outcomes.

Studies show that there's an improved immune function that lasts for 30 days after just a three-day weekend in the forest.

After just 10 minutes' exposure in a natural setting, mood, learning, emotions, blood pressure, and heart rates are all improved. Japan uses a technique called "shinrin-yoku" or "forest bathing" in their medical treatments.

It has been stated that declining ecological health and biodiversity is the greatest threat to human health. The role of natural areas in urban conservation should be promoted in the national conservation plan, and in national and provincial health programs. This is a missing component.

On the economic value and the ecological services, as I will call them, Dr. Faisal Moola has much documentation through the David Suzuki Foundation. I'll quickly relate this specifically to Bear Creek Park.

Referencing the natural capital in B.C.'s Lower Mainland, the top three benefits provided were: climate regulation from carbon storage, valued at \$1.7 billion; water supply due to water filtration, valued at \$1.6 billion; flood protection and water regulation provided by forest land cover, valued at \$1.2 billion per year. Relating this to the urban setting, that equates to about \$4,000 per hectare. Therefore, using this figure as a guide, it's estimated that the 46 hectares of the natural areas alone in Bear Creek Park are providing \$184,000 of free ecological services every year.

Urban conservation for protection of biodiversity is critical. Habitat loss, disturbance, alteration, and fragmentation are the primary causes for severe decline in biodiversity across the globe and, indeed, in the urban setting. Preservation of biodiversity is best achieved when an area is as big as you can get. Bigger is better applies, and there's certainly a very good example with the Rouge national urban park initiative, but now we're talking at the very local community urban park level. It nonetheless has the same extreme value to the community.

Bear Creek Park is a very good example of this. It has mixed deciduous-coniferous forests, riparian corridors, old field habitat, and a wet meadow, all connected in one area. By the way, I'll report that, as of yesterday, the coho and chum salmon have returned to Bear Creek Park and its tributaries and are now spawning in the spawning beds.

I'll jump ahead now, as I'd like to talk a little about the federal role.

The national conservation plan should ensure that the stated principles and actions are scaled to the local urban level. Support is needed to secure and protect natural areas at our urban scale. Programs are needed that educate and connect residents with nature. This will provide a greater understanding and appreciation of the benefits of nature that will engage residents in—with a commitment to—urban conservation.

Under the national biodiversity strategy, it would be helpful for the federal government to provide support to local governments with expertise and funding to conduct ecological mapping to facilitate the identification of key habitats for protection, connectivity, and acquisition in a strategic way. There's concern with the Fisheries Act, which has now been amended to include only streams of commercial importance.

•(1645)

I will conclude there, Mr. Chair. I will take gladly take any questions on the remainder of my program. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the seven-minute round of questioning, colleagues. I'm going to keep it very tight because I want to give as many people as possible an opportunity to ask questions. We'll begin with Ms. Ambler.

You have seven minutes.

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Thanks to all of you for coming in today.

Rouge Park is obviously near and dear to my heart and to my riding of Mississauga South. I'm very pleased that the Government of Canada considers this a priority and is working toward a national park in the Rouge.

Dr. Moola, you were part of producing a report from the Suzuki Foundation entitled "Natural Capital in Rouge National Park". In that report, you noted that agriculture has been an integral part of the region's cultural and economic history for over 200 years. If I'm not mistaken, the report included a monetary value of benefits provided by the farmland. I'm curious to know how you and your organization feel about sustainable agriculture in the Rouge.

Dr. Faisal Moola: Thank you very much for the question.

Agriculture is a very key component to the heritage and the future of the new national park. About 60% of the national park is made up of agriculture.

We would like to see agriculture shift to a more sustainable model so that the farming community can continue to produce agricultural commodities and working farm families can continue to thrive, and so we can produce local food for one of Canada's largest urban areas but also provide many of these ecological benefits. These are not two solitudes.

There are examples right across the country in terms of innovation and creativity by our farming community in protecting and restoring biodiversity and continuing to produce agricultural commodities.

Thank you.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you.

Along those same lines, Mr. Campbell, in your presentation, you also talked about the proposed concept and the integration and promotion of sustainable agriculture. Dr. Moola just mentioned the 60% figure, so obviously a large portion of the land base included in the study will be farmlands. This is obviously something unique to this park. Can you please explain why integrating and promoting sustainable agriculture is a critical component of the concept for the urban park?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I would be glad to. Thank you for the question.

I couldn't agree more with what Dr. Moola had said on the long history and on the benefit that has come from sustainable agriculture in the area. The other thing is that we have a heritage of sustainable agriculture; for 200 years, agricultural practices have gone on within the boundaries of the proposed study area. Within that, there's obviously a great ability with sustainable agriculture to have this area—I don't want to necessarily say laboratory—where we can certainly look at sustainable agriculture next to a great conservation area, to have a great area where we have that real integration.

Finally, I think something that was mentioned last time when I was here before the committee is that the rural and urban dynamic in Canada has changed, and this certainly gives a great opportunity for the rural and urban groups to come together and see the commonalities and support of agriculture both from an urban perspective and a rural perspective. I think a number of things would agree with a number of the points made by Dr. Moola.

Mrs. Stella Ambler: Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Robb, at a recent meeting in Pickering about the Rouge national park, you stated that the Friends of the Rouge believe that the intensive farming in the Rouge was done by a few farm families and that the reason Parks Canada was consulting on sustainable agriculture in the Rouge was to placate a dozen or so farmers. But as we've heard, agriculture has been an integral part of the cultural and economic makeup of the area for centuries. Do you not believe that sustainable agriculture can contribute to an urban national park?

•(1650)

Mr. Jim Robb: Yes, I believe there is room for local food production and sustainable agriculture in Rouge Park, but the current model of 60%.... Basically, industrial farming is below market value, so it's subsidized right now. I could give you an example. In Toronto there's a farm of 496 acres, with two nice houses and four buildings, for \$1,800 a month. Where could you get 496 acres, two houses, and four barns for that? It's totally subsidized.

The second point is that we need to be fair to the heritage families. I was at the 60th wedding anniversary of Russ and Faye Reesor. I really respect the families there. If there were problems with the original expropriation and land acquisition, we need to make sure they are properly redressed.

There are about four dozen tenants on the farmland right now. Many people who farm it don't live near there. They have farms at quite a distance. There are a number of farmers who have sold their land, have become millionaires, and who continue to lease public land at highly subsidized rates. So there is going to be a public balancing issue: do the needs of four dozen tenants overwhelm the needs of several million people? Do the needs of the last ecological opportunity to protect two endangered zones of Canada...? There will be a balancing to be done here.

We think that through a rational and scientific process, with reasonable people at the table, those issues can be addressed. But the current balance isn't in the broad public interest; it's in the local vested interests, and I think.... So those issues will have to be addressed through the planning process. So far in the park concept, we're very concerned, because a 600-metre wooded ecological corridor has been put in the plans for over 20 years, and that isn't evident in the current Rouge national park concept.

The Chair: Thank you. Your time has expired.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan, you have approximately seven minutes.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Thank you to everybody who is here.

It's good to hear the move toward local sustainable agriculture rather than what I've heard about a lot of the cash cropping that's happening in the park study areas.

With respect to the study area, within my riding I have the largest piece of the current Rouge Park, which includes the Morningside tributary and the Rouge valley lands that are now currently excluded from the national parks study area. Once again, with respect to the study area, I believe that the Morningside tributary and the Rouge valley lands should be included, because a lot of endangered species live in those areas.

Mr. Robb is the only one who has suggested study areas—I mean the size of it. Would a larger study area make more sense—the 100 square kilometres—right now and then it could be decided afterward as to what the actual size of the park would be in the future...?

Anybody can answer.

Go ahead. You look like you want to answer.

Mr. Jim Robb: It's actually not only Friends of the Rouge watershed asking for it. There are over a dozen national and provincial groups, such as Nature Canada, the World Wildlife Fund and Monte Hummel, and Great Lakes United. They are all asking for the larger study area. It's crucial to balancing those needs.

For instance, if you look at the Pickering lands that are included, they're already 37% forest covered; that meets Environment Canada's scientific criteria for a healthier watershed. If you go to the lands that are in the park right now in Markham, less than 5% of Markham is forest covered, so there's some work to be done to bring the park up.

A larger study will allow us to more fairly balance those issues of local food production and of a robust natural heritage system that will allow the millions of people who want to use the park to be spread over a large enough area, that will have enough places for wildlife, such that we will have improving biological diversity over time and we won't trample the park to death. If you think about it in the long term, it's crucial—

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off, but I only have seven minutes.

Andrew, do you want to add anything?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: When you look at the study area, one of the pieces that you also have to look at is what the land assembly process would be. The land assembly process also has a certain amount of...give-and-take. I'm sorry: I realize that you want to get this quickly.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Yes, I have four questions.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, sorry.

It has a lot of give-and-take. You need both parties to be in agreement on what would be in that land assembly agreement.

What we have tried to do within the study areas is look at the highest likelihood areas that have no encumbrances that we could create in a land assembly agreement. It is really in order to be able to establish the park as quickly as we can and to meet the goal that we were asked to come to the table to meet, when the federal government was asked to come to the table, which was to look from Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine. You clearly see, through any of the models that are being put forward in the study area, that this in fact has happened.

● (1655)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: I'm not sure if that was how the map looked in the picture that we saw earlier.

I'm going to ask about the plans that have been pursued in the Rouge Park over the last little while. We know that there have been multiple Rouge Park plans: in 1994, in 2001, the provincial green belt plan in 2005, the Rouge watershed strategy in 2007, the Rouge natural heritage action plan in 2008, and then the Toronto remedial action plan for Lake Ontario.

To your knowledge, are these plans being used? Anybody who knows the answers can answer.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Absolutely: as we're the ones who are in the process of putting those plans together, we've studied each of those plans as they've gone through—

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: So you're looking at them now to put them into action?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: We have looked at each of those plans for what we would do as we go forward. We have looked at each of the plans very carefully. As we look towards the future, we're building on the best practices of the past and looking at how that sits within the federal framework.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: So are they being used today? That's my question.

Do Friends of the Rouge or the David Suzuki Foundation know?

Mr. Jim Robb: I'd be happy to answer that. I have participated in almost all of these processes.

The current Rouge Park concept deviates significantly from the existing plans. For example, in the new vision of the Rouge national park concept, there's no mention of the words "ecology" or "ecosystem". That's the primary vision of the existing Rouge Park, which has been approved multiple times over two decades. Another thing is the 600-metre wooded corridor. That's enshrined in provincial legislation through the green belt. It's in Rouge Park plans consistently. There's no mention of that 600-metre wooded ecological corridor within the Rouge Park concept.

I could give you more examples.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: But Mr. Campbell just said that's all being included in the plans going forward.

Mr. Jim Robb: It's not in the concept.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: It's not in the concept, but maybe it's being included in the plans going forward, so it's good to have that commitment.

I think it was you, Mr. Campbell, who said that when you did the consultation, the public was saying that they wanted the park to be protected and accessible for farming and conservation as well as public use. I know that my constituents and people who live further away.... For me, the park is in my backyard, but people who live further away in Toronto or in the greater Toronto area also want to use the park, this gem that is right near this urban community or these near-urban communities. What is being done to increase public use of the park? Is there anything being done to increase public access through public transit or bike trails?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: On that front, we have been working with everybody from Metrolinx on being able to bring different types of public transport into the park and looking for access points for metro for GO trains—for those who aren't as familiar with Metrolinx and everything they own.... We've looked at that.

We've looked at what trails could go in there. We've met with the Waterfront Regeneration Trust to look at how their trail would join up. We've met with the Trans Canada Trail and looked at how that would match up. We've looked at many different areas. In fact, one of our nine guiding principles is access.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Mr. Woodworth.

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

My thanks to all the witnesses for your attendance here today. It's always a feast for the mind to listen to such good ideas.

Mr. Campbell, we've heard that the previous Rouge River plans have been studied in coming up with the current concept, but we have also heard that this concept doesn't include those plans. I'm having trouble integrating that. Can you explain for me why that would be, or if that's even true, or whether this concept is subject to further development as you go along? That's what I'd like to know.

● (1700)

Mr. Andrew Campbell: The concept was created as the consultation document. We organized many of the people who had been involved in all of those plans over the years, and together we came up with a concept paper that we could go out and consult on.

It's very difficult when you're out with a concept paper to get into tight specifics. As we start to move down into other areas, to look at what legislative process we may take, to look at what regulatory process we may take, and how the management plan for that area will be put together, many of these details will come to light and we'll be building on our work from the past.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I assume that the land assembly process is going to have an impact too. I'll come back to that in just a moment. You're nodding your head yes—

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: I want to put that on the record.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Okay.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: For example, this 600-metre forested corridor that we've heard about, that's not written out of the concept, is it?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Absolutely not.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay. That's what I thought.

Getting back to the question of land assembly, you've just told me that the land assembly will have an impact on how the details of the concept unfold. I'm having a little difficulty, but am I right that the land assembly also has an impact on the proposed study area? Can you just illuminate that relationship for me?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, that's correct.

There are certain areas within what was considered—within the 100 square kilometres—that in the land assembly become difficult in terms of encumbrances on those lands that would make it difficult for us to assemble them, or in current legislative processes that we have between, let's say, the city, where one of the areas in the middle of the park is a former landfill site that still has leaching ponds in it.

It's very difficult for the federal government and the municipal government to come to an exchange on these types of lands at nominal value when the remediation would end up on the federal side, so some of those are excluded.

There are areas in the Pickering lands that still are part of the study area for the airport in the east end of Toronto. That's under the jurisdiction of Transport Canada, so we excluded those as well.

So some of it is because of the encumbrances on the current land....

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If I could paraphrase it in more informal language, you're telling me that the Government of Canada cannot order the Government of Ontario to turn over some of those parcels. Is that correct? Some dumbing down of that...?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: That would be correct, and there would be some that we just would not do that for, because of the way we would move through who would end up with the liability, but we can come up with an associated land type of agreement with different levels of government.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: The word "liability" brings me to the next question. I want you to just expand a little on what you mean by "encumbrances", which might prevent certain areas from being incorporated into the land assembly?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: For instance, on the study area with the Transport Canada lands, there is a regulation that says what that area is, and the only area that we have included of the former airport lands would be the area that doesn't have that encumbrance or that regulatory framework on it today.

But there are also some along...that either the Toronto regional conservation area.... For instance, it's often been said of the zoo lands, "Why have we not put those in?" They're used for a totally different use, so from our perspective, it would not make sense in the legislative framework.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: What I think I heard you say earlier was that the desire is to go forward in as expeditious a manner as possible with what is accessible now. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: That is correct.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: In terms of some of these areas where there may be encumbrances, may I say that it's perhaps a possibility

that somewhere down the road, with enough time, some of the regulations that impact that land or some of the usages or other encumbrances might be dealt with, but that you just want to do this expeditiously and get as far as you can first. Is that a good summation?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes. Certainly with the direction that we would receive from the government, Parks Canada would be happy to do the work that would be required if additional lands did become available.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay. Very good.

How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

• (1705)

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Regarding consultation, as I understand it, in 2012 there was a pretty extensive consultation process. There was, for example, an information piece dropped off to 26,000 residents in and around the park area. Can you tell me what the input has been? How many people have you heard from regarding the concept that you're developing?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: That number is interesting. During the Toronto International Film Festival, they closed down Yonge Street, and we put out information booths there. We talked to very many Canadians, to Torontonians. In terms of direct input, over 2,500 have filled out the online survey. We've had about 4,600 who have come to different events. We've run 120 different community consultations where we've had participation from 10 to 40 people to over 100 people. We have met with very many people, in the tens of thousands.

The Chair: Thank you so much. Your time has expired

Ms. Duncan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for coming.

I notice a difference in language. Mr. Robb, you're very careful to talk about a national park, and Mr. Campbell talks about a national urban park. I don't have time to get into this, but I would ask, Mr. Robb, if you could table with the committee why you think it should be a national park.

Also, could Mr. Campbell table with the committee why it should be a national urban park?

Dr. Moola, did you have comments on that as well?

Could I ask the three of you to provide that, please?

I'm also concerned when I hear from Parks Canada that this national urban park is well aligned with Parks Canada's mandate of protection, education, and visitor experience, as well as the agency's current priority to meaningfully reach an increasingly diverse urban population.

Why I'm concerned, as a former scientist, is that I don't see the words "ecosystem" or "ecological health" there. If I look back at the pre-June 2012 plans, there was mention of protection and appreciation of the park ecosystem. If I look at it post-June 2012, again, there is no mention of the words "ecosystem" or "ecological health".

Mr. Robb, could you address that, please?

Mr. Jim Robb: Yes. The public vision that has been developed—actually, of hundreds of thousands of people participating in processes over the last 22 years—has been always to protect and appreciate the park ecosystem. The public really appreciates that.

I've worked with over 50,000 people just in the last 12 years in bringing them out to the park, in taking them on nature walks. We had record-setting community meetings in Scarborough in the eighties, when we had over 1,000 people out to three consecutive municipal meetings about this.

It was always "protect and appreciate" the park ecosystem. Those words are not there in the national park vision—

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So what would be your specific recommendation to this committee for its report?

Mr. Jim Robb: Well, basically, we've asked you to make five recommendations to the minister. We think that priority should be given to....The vision should basically be the one that's been there and adopted by the public for the last 22 years. It's a vision that's broad enough to allow you flexibility, but it's direct enough to represent a long-term vision for the park.

We'd ask you to recommend that Parks Canada adopt this vision that's been there in plans over the last 22 years.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

In 2009, I believe, the Rouge Park study area was 160 square kilometres of public lands. Post-May 2012, the study area was reduced to 57 square kilometres. It excludes important and existing areas of Rouge Park. It excludes the Rouge Valley and Milne Park in Markham. It excludes 36 square kilometres of federal lands within the greenbelt. I could go on.

Mr. Robb, could you address that, please? Can you identify to this group all the groups that want the larger study area? If you don't have a comprehensive list, could you table it later with the committee?

Mr. Jim Robb: Yes, I'd be happy to. I've mentioned a few: the World Wildlife Fund, Nature Canada, Ontario Nature, Great Lakes United, Environmental Defence Canada, and the Canadian Environmental Law Association. The list goes on.

We understand, as we said, that the study area should be big. There are rational reasons why the study area and the actual park might be smaller, but we don't think you should take it out of the study area. Yes, there has been some consultation, but that study area was defined before anything was taken out to the public, and we think you need to go through a fair, rational, and scientific process before you eliminate.

Let me give you an example: the Toronto Zoo lands. You have a facility there that's dedicated to biological diversity and enjoyment of

nature. The valley lands next to it are some of the most sensitive in the whole Rouge. They have an environmentally sensitive area, an area of natural and scientific interest, to the north. To the south, they actually have a Carolinian Canada site—the most endangered habitat in Canada. Their lands are also endangered, but because Toronto is thinking of selling the zoo, they're not in the study area. That doesn't make sense. They should be in the study area, and there will be debate back and forth about it. Can we include them? What should happen?

The public would totally abhor the fact that next to the Toronto Zoo we're taking out the heart of the Rouge Valley lands that are in the park now. So there are lands that are in the park now that aren't in the draft park study area. It makes no sense to us.

• (1710)

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: So the direct recommendation to the committee here is...?

Mr. Jim Robb: We make it the 100-square-kilometre study area and then we use a rational scientific public process to look at which sites. If there's a Transport Canada regulation that's too much of a problem on the airport lands, maybe that comes forward and they can't be included, but let's study them.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: I was concerned when I heard you say, Mr. Campbell, that you want to move as quickly as possible. I understand that—you have a mandate—but we want it done right too. This is for the next generations. We want the scientific process and we want the public process.

If we look back to the provincial greenbelt plan, there is identified a 600-metre wide corridor for the Rouge. There is no mention of this main ecological corridor, which could be considered the ecological backbone of the park. I'm wondering if Mr. Robb and Dr. Moola might want to address that.

Mr. Jim Robb: I'd be happy to address it, and I'd like to put it in context too. In southern Ontario, 59% of southern Ontario is in agricultural use, and less than 0.26% of southern Ontario is in national parks. Only another 0.5%—about—is in provincial parks, so less than 1% of southern Ontario is in national and provincial parks.

We have this one little block of 100 square kilometres of public land left, so that ecological corridor is in an endangered life zone. It's crucial that it be part of the park. The actual omission of it from the park concept really makes us worry, because it's there in the greenbelt plan. It's provincial legislation. It's there in successive plans. It should be in the park concept.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Thank you.

Dr. Moola, please.

Dr. Faisal Moola: Last year Canada passed a very auspicious milestone, which was the 100-year anniversary of Parks Canada and our internationally renowned parks system. We've had many decades of science to look at the creation of our national parks system and at how to most effectively protect biodiversity. There's no question that we cannot create a national park that's an island in a sea of intensive development.

The David Suzuki Foundation actually supports a larger study area and, in fact, maintaining those intact areas like this ecological corridor.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll now begin our five-minute questioning.

We have a member of Parliament visiting us today from Surrey, British Columbia.

Welcome, Ms. Sims. You have five minutes.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Thank you very much.

I want to say that it really is a pleasure to be here today to be talking about something as wonderful as our parks.

I'll address my remarks especially to my two colleagues, my friends from Surrey.

I'm sorry, Carrie. I missed your presentation, but I have had time to read it.

Ken, I heard yours as you were making it.

What Bear Creek Park represents to me is what can be achieved when all levels of government work together to realize the dreams and aspirations of citizens. That's what Bear Creek Park exemplifies today. As you said, it is an oasis right in the centre of the fastest-growing area in B.C., yet it is a wonderful oasis that is well used by its citizens in a variety of ways. It provides people with a lot of pleasure, both in organized activities and in walking through the trails.

I have a question for you, Ken. I have a very short time. Five minutes just fly by, and I could just spend all this time praising the City of Surrey and the citizens of Surrey for being so committed to our parkland.

When you look at Bear Creek Park, you see that it's one example of urban salmon-bearing streams that lack adequate protection in the context of the Lower Mainland. Can you talk about the challenges facing urban creeks, rivers, and tributaries?

• (1715)

Mr. Kenneth Bennett: Yes. Thank you for the question. I could talk for a very long time about that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: You have a very short time.

Mr. Kenneth Bennett: In the urban setting, water quantity and quality is a big issue from the drainage from heavily urbanized impervious areas that feed the park in particular, and all urban areas, for that matter. Protecting the upland forested areas that connect to the protected riparian areas, as I said in my presentation, is lacking. Consequently, when you move out of the park system—Bear Creek Park being a bit of an exception, because it is a big large park in a urban section—the connectivity is fragmented beyond that.

Bear Creek, for instance, has a fairly good corridor, but once you move on, there's fragmentation all across the municipality. The City of Surrey is doing a biological diversity strategy to try to connect those dots again, but therein lies the problem, because we don't have

the resources to start working through a connection on urban and private land.

When we come down to the very localized urban setting, unlike our Rouge Park counterparts who are talking about 100 square kilometres of national urban park, we're talking urban park settings in heavily urbanized areas. For that reason, and for all the same reasons, but on a smaller scale, I think we need to have those kinds of strategies in place to help protect those parks. The federal department can certainly help with that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you.

As you know, there has been a significant reduction of environmental protection in both our recent monster budget bills; “monster” fits in with Halloween today. In the context of protection for urban waterways, are you concerned about the recent changes to the environmental assessment process and the Fisheries Act, for example?

Mr. Kenneth Bennett: Yes, I am, particularly with the Fisheries Act. Historically, the Fisheries Act was the main piece of legislation that allowed us to protect the riparian area. When I say the riparian area, I'm talking about the immediate creek area and the vegetation that supports the ecological functions of the creek. Historically, that has been protected through the Fisheries Act.

Now the amendment only applies to streams with fish of commercial value. By the way, the fish that are coming to Bear Creek Park are supported because of a hatchery. I suspect that if we didn't have the hatchery influence, those chum and coho I referred to would eventually fade away, in which case we would no longer have fish of commercial value, and indeed, most of the urban streams in Canada and in Surrey probably wouldn't be afforded that protection any longer.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: With the shift over recent years from federal and provincial to local governments when it comes to protection of rivers and streams, I can imagine that this could be a recipe for disaster, because there is a lot of fragmentation as rivers and streams flow through different municipalities. Do you see major challenges in coordinating?

The Chair: Ms. Sims, your time has expired. I'm sorry.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: My time expired? How could that happen so quickly? Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Sopuck, you have the next five minutes.

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

Mr. Bennett, I want to set your mind at ease regarding the Fisheries Act. I am on the fisheries committee and was very engaged in the changes to the Fisheries Act. Just to correct something in your brief, the act applies to fisheries of recreational, commercial, and aboriginal significance. To just say that it is of commercial importance is not quite inclusive enough; it is much more than that.

It could easily be argued that because the Fisheries Act has a strong emphasis on fish populations themselves, there will be a strengthening of protection of fish populations and fish habitat. I would urge you to have a look at the amended Fisheries Act to understand what it says. Quite frankly, this act will allow for expanded protection of fish and fish habitat. I would be happy to have a lengthy discussion about that with you offline at some point.

Ms. Baron, I was very interested in your presentation. I think it's neat that the city of Surrey has a drainage and environmental manager. This tells me that the waterways are very important to the community of Surrey. I was especially interested in your salmon habitat restoration program and all the students that you have working there.

What exactly are you doing in those streams in riparian areas that is providing better habitat for salmon and trout?

• (1720)

Ms. Carrie Baron: Some of the things we are doing in the creeks involve building better riffle pool areas where they may have been disturbed in the past, doing minor erosion repairs, and doing additional planting. Sometimes we will do wetland planting on aquatic benches and do some more in the riparian areas where they have been disturbed.

We have rules about what they can do with their hand tools, whether it's complexing a stream with woody debris or complexing it with boulder clusters to enhance the salmon, whether it's through migratory or they're spawning. One of the things we have also been doing is stone augmentation in spawning areas.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Are the fish responding to those habitat improvement measures of yours?

Ms. Carrie Baron: One of the prime examples where we have been putting in a lot is down in the Campbell system in the Campbell Heights industrial area. It was an old gravel pit. We've been revegetating it, building riffle pools, and doing the wetlands, and we now have the salmon returning up the system into the gravel pit again.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: That sounds like a wonderful good news success story. I congratulate you for that. As a salmon and trout person myself, what you are doing is very near and dear to my heart.

In terms of rivers, creeks, and waterways in cities, how important are they vis-à-vis the other natural areas? Do these areas become focal points in cities?

Ms. Carrie Baron: For us, a lot of our walkways, our nature paths, and our greenways are around these things. They're not in the riparian area, but they're just outside of it. Also, they're one of the most important wildlife corridors connecting different aspects of the city, whether it's through the agricultural lands or out to the ocean, to the rivers, etc.

They do become a hub. A lot of people go. We have a blueways plan also. People like to canoe up some of the rivers. It's integral to the whole network.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Given that siltation can be so problematic for spawning fish, what are you doing to keep silt out of the rivers?

Ms. Carrie Baron: Well, with the new land development practices, we're applying low impact development. Any time a road widens, say, they have to address water quality before the discharge goes into creeks. Any new development has to address water quality before it goes into the creeks. On our debris-flow creeks, we have defined sediment basins so that we can clean it, so it doesn't disturb other parts. We also have a robust erosion and sediment control bylaw that limits construction practices, and you have to do sediment control during your construction activities.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have three minutes for Mr. Harris.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): It's going to be quick.

First, Mr. Campbell and Mr. Robb, about the Toronto Zoo, for instance, I think it should be certainly part of the consideration. One aspect is that if you look at the creeks in the zoo, you see that the zoo has actually constructed fish ladders or fishways in order to help with the repopulation of Atlantic salmon and others, which will be integral to the wildlife and habitat in the eventual park. I think it should certainly be included in the considerations.

Now, with only three minutes, I'm glad my colleague spoke about transit access, because for the rest of Scarborough that's the only way to get there.

I'm going to ask two questions.

Mr. Campbell, was the Scarborough Bluffs area put into consideration at some point for inclusion into the park? That's a question that constituents in my riding have asked time and time again.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: In this particular case, the Scarborough Bluffs were not.

Mr. Dan Harris: Is there a reason for that?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: When we were looking at areas, we were trying to look at contiguous areas from an ecological perspective, so that you have contiguous areas between where the park would be and where other areas would be. The bluffs would be further away than a contiguous area.

Mr. Dan Harris: Okay.

Mr. Robb, you mentioned that the zoo should be in. Do you have an opinion about whether the bluffs should be included or not?

Mr. Jim Robb: I certainly love the waterfront. I lived in the Guildwood community at one point and loved the bluffs. They are this nationally beautiful area. I think gradually over time expanding it... Right now, the Rouge Beach, I believe, is in it. There's a trail that comes along the waterfront that hooks up with Rouge Park, and eventually that trail can go up Rouge Park, and up to the moraine and the Trans Canada Trail. I'm definitely supportive of these kinds of long-term linkages and opportunities.

• (1725)

Mr. Dan Harris: We certainly hope that the City of Toronto and Waterfront Toronto eventually build that along the way.

My last question is about the Line 9 pipeline, because there are some serious environmental concerns regarding that pipeline and its integrity. I just want to ask Mr. Campbell about it and then perhaps go across....

Has that been taken into consideration? Are there plans to work with Enbridge to ensure that the pipeline eventually doesn't rupture and destroy this wonderful park that we're building?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It is one of the reasons that we started to look at three different and distinct areas within the park that we would need, one of those areas being an infrastructure area. With infrastructure, obviously, when we're transferring lands or looking at not transferring lands because of current infrastructure or future infrastructure going through, one of the considerations is what our control and regulatory framework is about.

The Chair: Your time has expired.

Ms. Rempel, you have the last three minutes.

Mr. Dan Harris: You can always submit it to the committee later

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): First of all, Mr. Campbell, I have to give you a little bit of a reproach for something. Ms. Pam Vano, your superintendent, is sitting in the back of the room here. You stole her from Banff National Park, so on behalf of the residents of Alberta, "Tsk tsk."

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Anyway, she will do a great job, and I'm very excited to see her here. Her expertise of managing one of our great park systems will lend itself well to this. Congratulations on your hire.

I'm still mad at you, Pam.

Anyway, I just wanted to finish by giving you the chance to expand a little bit more on the consultation process that Parks Canada undertook to get it right. I think that's a theme we've been hearing. Everyone who was here today said, "Get it right." That's what we've been hearing.

Can you just very briefly talk about the level of consultation that was undertaken—I think it has been unprecedented—and perhaps about some of the principles that resulted and that you've published from those consultations?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Certainly we are still at the early stages of being able to analyze, because of how broad the consultation was. We started from the day we were invited in by the alliance. We began a consultation process to see all the different community groups. As I said, we've been out to 120 different organizations. We've met with them. We've sat down and had discussions. We work very closely with the groups that are here today. We've had many meetings with the groups that are here with us today.

Whether it was the York Federation of Agriculture, the anglers of Ontario, or groups that have had a long preservation process and were some of the initial people who started the process, what we heard from all of them was that we should continue to build the park, continue to move forward, and continue to give people access to it. One of the things we've been especially proud of during the process has been a truly unprecedented relationship we've begun to build with all of the first nations.

I'm sure that most people are aware of Parks Canada's extremely proud history and heritage of first nations relationships across the country. There are probably few other federal government agencies that have the level of first nations cooperation we have across the country. We've been able to bring together almost all of the traditional groups that have been in the park, from the first nations perspective. They've come around the table. They've given us input. We've been able to look at the 500-year-old Seneca Village and see how the first nations want to speak about that as the carrying place where they did portaging, using the traditional knowledge of the area to really help us build toward the future.

We've been to Yonge Street, Rogers Centre, Pickering City Hall, and Scarborough Town Centre. We've been to every farmers' market you can think of. It has truly been an unprecedented period for us to consult.

The Chair: Good.

Thank you so much to the witnesses. We appreciate your sharing your valuable time with us on this very important study.

I have one last outstanding issue, colleagues. We have a colleague here who is celebrating her 21st birthday. That is Ms. Duncan. I want to wish her a happy birthday.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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