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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I would like to call meeting number 67 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to order. We welcome our witnesses today, Mr. Bob McLean and Mr. Rob Prosper from the environment department and Parks Canada.

I just want to take one minute to remind the committee of the scope of the study we're embarking on today on habitat conservation. These are the questions that had been posed earlier: What types of stakeholders are involved in habitat conservation, and how much does this account for total efforts in Canada? Does Canada have publicly available knowledge and expertise on habitat conservation? What are the sources of this information, and how is it disseminated? What are the most effective habitat conservation groups or organizations, and what actions do they take? How is "conserved land" defined and accounted for in Canada, and is that definition different from other countries? When it comes to recovering a species, how do best management practices and stewardship initiatives compare to prescriptive government-mandated measures? Finally, how can the federal government improve habitat conservation efforts in Canada?

With those opening remarks to remind us of the scope of the study we're embarking on, I want to welcome Mr. Bob McLean. He has prepared opening statements and they're printed before you.

Thank you, Mr. McLean, for having them printed; that's very helpful. We welcome you now to give your opening remarks.

Mr. Robert McLean (Executive Director, Wildlife Program Policy, Department of the Environment): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I very much appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about habitat conservation. I've been engaged in this area for many years, much of my 35-year career in the public service, and it's interesting to see how our understanding of effective habitat conservation has evolved over the last few decades.

It is also interesting to note the growing range of organizations and approaches involved.

[Translation]

The 2010 *Global Biodiversity Outlook* identifies habitat loss and degradation as the biggest drivers of global biodiversity loss. In a recent NANOS poll, more respondents identified conserving natural habitat as the top priority for fish and wild life conservation in Canada over any other action.

[English]

Healthy, biologically diverse natural areas also provide many natural benefits to people. Commonly referred to as ecosystem services, they provide critical support and underpin Canada's economy and quality of life. Examples include mitigating flood and drought, filtering our air and water, and offering opportunities for education, recreation, and inspiration.

•(0850)

When Canadians think about habitat conservation, they often think first of protected areas. The core of Canada's conserved lands consists of protected areas such as our Environment Canada national wildlife areas and migratory bird sanctuaries, national parks, provincial parks, ecological reserves, and other such areas. These are established and managed by governments, in some cases through co-management agreements with aboriginal communities, or in cooperation with local communities, such as Community Pastures in the Prairies.

In addition to formal protected areas, there are a number of other area-based conservation measures in place in Canada that effectively conserve habitat. Conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and other organizations acquire and manage lands for conservation. Efforts are under way to begin to integrate these private protected areas into Canada's national reporting.

While this is expected to increase the extent of Canada's conservation landscape accounted for, perhaps by 1% or 2%, both the national and international communities agree on the importance of reflecting and recognizing the broader range of contributions by others to conservation.

Effective conservation means much more than just protected areas. The vast majority of species depend on the other 90% of the landscape, so it is essential to recognize the value of what is sometimes called the working landscape. For example, natural areas remain within agricultural areas and managed forests, whether on public or private lands, and are important for Canada's biodiversity. Sound stewardship of these areas will make a significant contribution to the conservation of wild species and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems.

Canada is the first country to have initiated a dialogue on how we will define other effective area-based conservation measures. The Canadian Council on Ecological Areas is undertaking further work to define this term.

Typically, when we think of sound stewardship of habitat on prairie or public lands, we think of environmental organizations. But we also need to think about and recognize the contribution of aboriginal communities, municipalities, farmers, ranchers, private land owners, business leaders, and many others who can and are making a difference. These people are managing habitat by adopting best practices, developing environmental farm plans, restoring wetlands, and taking other actions in support of habitat conservation. Often, these successes are rooted in partnerships.

Where has habitat stewardship, the responsible planning, and management of resources worked well? I'll give you two examples. [Translation]

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan is a continental effort to conserve sufficient wetland and associated uplands habitats to sustain healthy populations of waterfowl shared by Canada, the United States and Mexico. While the program is continental in scope, implementation is regional and a large part of the success is due to the local partners, especially private landowners.

In Canada, partnerships called "habitat joint ventures" set priorities and guide investments. Governments provide project-based support. Since the establishment of the plan in 1986, over 8 million hectares of wetland and associated uplands have been permanently secured in Canada, while an additional 41 million hectares have been directly influenced through stewardship activities. Stewardship is a first step that can often lead to more permanent means of habitat conservation.

Another example of effectively bringing together diverse interests is the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement—a partnership between member companies of the Canadian Forest Products Association and leading environmental groups. Under the agreement, forest companies commit to upholding the highest environmental standards of forest management and conservation, while environmental organizations commit to global recognition and support for FPAC members' efforts.

The agreement applies to 72 million hectares of public forests licensed to FPAC member companies across Canada.

• (0855)

[English]

The federal government supports habitat conservation in several ways.

First, we take action directly through, for example, establishing and managing federal protected areas and being a good steward of federal lands. The federal government continues to play a role, an important catalytic role, for habitat conservation and stewardship through programs and initiatives that are generally well known.

My remarks include three programs that we're very proud of at Environment Canada and that are very well received. I won't go through the details of some statistics on the natural areas

conservation program, the habitat stewardship program, and the ecological gifts program, which is a program under the Income Tax Act that provides a tax incentive for the conservation of lands. The federal role in these programs is more than the provision of funding or a financial incentive for habitat conservation. Projects are often based on information or conservation plans from Environment Canada, other federal departments, and even conservation organizations.

It is clear that habitat conservation is ultimately a local issue. The most effective groups, in my experience, are those that forge partnerships at the community or landscape level. These organizations, which have first-hand knowledge of the issues and pressures, can bring together all the affected parties, leverage the skills and strengths of various stakeholders, and work with them to develop conservation and sustainable development plans in support of shared outcomes.

It is important to find opportunities to support and enable voluntary community-driven stewardship initiatives, which can be so effective in designing long-lasting solutions. Sometimes, the key is simply a dedicated stewardship coordinator to bring interests together. Other times key information or technical assistance is required. Often catalytic or project-based funding may be what is needed.

Existing data, knowledge, and expertise on overall habitat conservation in Canada is widely available. The challenges are in collecting and making information accessible on a scale and in a form that's practical for conservation planning and implementation at the working landscape level. There have been some promising developments in new programs and online geospatial tools that will help.

Efforts to develop and apply a working landscape approach to habitat conservation planning and implementation are important. Such an approach helps to manage and buffer protected areas, identify and conserve other habitats, and inform land use plans and environmental assessments. A landscape approach brings government, non-governmental, and private organizations sharing data and resources and working together to achieve results and measure and report on progress on habitat conservation efforts in Canada.

Environment Canada and other federal natural resource departments have a key role to play in supporting habitat conservation within working landscapes. The federal government can help to ensure information is available and develop and promote best management practices in a range of sectors, including forestry, agriculture, mining, and energy.

The Government of Canada has committed to developing a national conservation plan to advance Canada's conservation objectives and better connect Canadians with nature. The previous studies that this committee has undertaken on conservation have been helpful in shaping the government's thinking to date on the plan. This current study on habitat conservation will no doubt further inform the ways in which a habitat conservation plan could complement and enhance current habitat conservation efforts.

In closing, habitat conservation is really about the whole landscape, not just formally protected areas. Success will depend on partnerships, finding a balance between conserved lands and stewardship, and through planning, identifying, and taking priority conservation actions. Governments at all levels have a role to play but can't make progress alone. The longest lasting results are usually the ones that directly engage those working on the ground in organizations and communities across Canada, and, I would also add, with those who are actually working on the land.

Thank you very much.

● (0900)

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

I just want to highlight again for the committee's purposes the written report that is here. Mr. McLean didn't have time to get to all of it, but there are some great points on pages 2 and 3 that he needed to omit.

Thank you very much for being considerate of our time, Mr. McLean.

I think we'll go directly to the other opening statement by Mr. Rob Prosper.

Mr. Rob Prosper (Vice-President, Protected Area Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting Parks Canada to speak to you about the development of a national conservation plan.

[*English*]

The stakeholders who appeared before you last year generally supported the idea of developing a national conservation plan and supported the proposed overarching purpose of protect, connect, restore, and engage.

As highlighted in your report and in the government's response, protected areas are instrumental to conservation achievements in Canada. In this context, I will immediately reiterate two commitments made by Parks Canada officials last year, which are that the agency will actively support the development of the plan, and through our conservation and public engagement programs we will

support achieving the desired conservation outcomes under such a plan.

[*Translation*]

The report on your study regarding the development of a national conservation plan repeatedly highlights the importance of engaging a diversity of actors and stakeholders to achieve lasting conservation gains. We are pleased to now provide input to your committee's study to identify ways in which a national conservation plan can complement and enhance current habitat conservation efforts for terrestrial ecosystems in Canada.

[*English*]

I will leave for you a number of copies of the booklet. It provides numerous examples of recent important conservation achievements of the agency that nicely illustrate the value of the diverse partnerships we have built and have nurtured to make these conservation achievements possible. This booklet was produced in the context of Parks Canada being awarded the World Wildlife Fund Gift to the Earth award in 2011. In the words of the fund:

A Gift to the Earth award is WWF-International's highest accolade for conservation work of outstanding global merit. It is a recognition of inspiring leadership and conservation achievement that contributes to protecting the living planet.

I would now like to take a few moments to provide more details about one of the conservation achievements highlighted in the booklet to illustrate the type and diversity of partnerships involved. This is the story of the reintroduction of the black-footed ferret in Canada.

[*Translation*]

You have most likely heard before about the story of that small predator that was thought to be extinct for several decades. The discovery of a small remnant population in the United States captured the imagination of conservationists and the American population in general. Soon a captive breeding program was set up, followed by reintroductions first in the United States, then in Mexico, and in Canada. In Canada, it is in Grasslands National Park, in southern Saskatchewan, that conditions were thought to be best for its reintroduction. Captive-bred animals were first released in 2009 and we obtained proof of successful reproduction in the wild the following year. And now the population is growing.

[*English*]

From a factual, biological point of view, the bottom line is that this is a great success, but there are very few examples of successful reintroductions of species in Canada.

There are other important dimensions to this story. Thousands of children hear this story yearly and are left with a message of hope for the future. Thousands of adult Canadians get involved yearly, giving money, others giving their time, and all find it gratifying and inspiring to contribute to building a better Canada for future generations.

In this story, what is relevant to your study is the instrumental role played by all members of a very large team of partners who came together to work on a common goal. Let me emphasize, as we have done over the years, that this accomplishment would never have been possible without the active involvement of many.

This is not a simple issue of sharing financial resources. Money can't buy many things. Success required that a range of partners with unique and diverse expertise come together. Some of them are the zoos. In this case, it was the Toronto zoo and the Calgary zoo, who bred the animals before their release in the wild, who studied their diet and behaviour and adapted their rearing protocols to enhance the survival of released animals, and who have used this great story to educate thousands of children and their parents.

● (0905)

Veterinary colleges throughout Canada shared their expertise in identifying and controlling threatening diseases and parasites.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shared their vast experience in rearing, releasing, and monitoring reintroduced populations.

Foundations and numerous individual Canadians donated money.

Canadian and foreign scientists studied various aspects of ferret biology that facilitated their reintroduction.

And individual Canadians volunteered time at various stages of the initiative. That includes, most recently, those who spend night after night in the darkness of the prairies monitoring this elusive nocturnal predator.

This is not an exhaustive list, but it illustrates the diversity of partners who got engaged even within the confines of a national park. There is no single organization that possesses that range of expertise. This is one fundamental value of partnerships that the national conservation plan can facilitate by providing an engaging framework where groups with diverse expertise will find a natural fit.

At this stage, please allow me to reiterate the importance of well-designed and well-managed protected areas in Canada's conservation agenda. Black-footed ferrets were reintroduced in a national park for good reason. National parks, like most other forms of protected areas, provide safe and sufficient habitat for wildlife populations over the long term.

This was necessary for the establishment of a self-sustaining population of black-footed ferret, as most of its natural habitat outside the park has been lost. What is true for the ferret is also true for many other species, be they large charismatic species like grizzly bears or little-known cryptic species like the Banff Springs snail, or the Bolander's quillwort, a rare aquatic plant found in Canada only in Waterton Lakes National Park.

As this committee has heard in various contexts over time, it is important for Canada to maintain systems of protected areas that represent the diversity of environments found on our lands and in our waters. We offer that Parks Canada's efforts to complete the representation of Canadian natural regions through its network of national parks are a key contribution to the national conservation effort.

I will add here that Parks Canada's work to establish new national parks always depends on strong partnerships. Close cooperation with the Province of Saskatchewan was necessary to establish Grasslands National Park, and it is still essential today to complete land acquisitions for the park.

Strong positive relationships with the ranching community are also essential, leading to ranching families willingly selling their lands to the crown to consolidate the park, and, as importantly, to adopt ranch management techniques that are sympathetic to conserving the ecological integrity of the park. To use the proposed terminology of the national conservation plan, the engagement of the ranching community supports protection, connection, and restoration efforts of the Government of Canada and its many partners.

The story of reintroducing the black-footed ferret through partnership is not an exception. The *Gift to the Earth* booklet, which I will leave with you, represents several other such stories. They involve new park establishment, maintaining healthy habitat, recovering species at risk, and awareness-building and environmental education initiatives.

Partners include aboriginal communities, provincial agencies, local governments, extractive industries such as the Bowater Mersey Paper Company, industries involved in the "recreo-touristic" domain, universities, research institutes, and non-governmental organizations.

Your report on the development of a national conservation plan, tabled last year, states: "To be successful, an NCP will need to involve as many Canadians as possible in its scope and mandate."

● (0910)

[*Translation*]

I hope the examples I just provided give you a good indication of the range and types of partners presently involved in conservation efforts in Canada.

In closing, I will simply repeat that Parks Canada supports the idea of developing a national conservation plan that will engage those already involved and broadens it. We are committed to help in developing such a plan.

Thank you.

[*English*]

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

I will now move to our opening round of questions, beginning with the government side.

Mr. Sopuck, you have seven minutes, please.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): I just have a comment. I appreciated both reports. I'd just like to make sure that the conservation efforts of the sustainable use community are emphasized and re-emphasized.

Mr. Prosper, you talked about the ranchers in the Grasslands National Park area, a place that I've been to. Let's never forget that those conservation values were maintained by the ranching community from day one, which actually allowed that national park to be formed in the first place.

Mr. McLean, you talked about the North American waterfowl plan, which I really appreciated. Again, the role of North America's waterfowl hunters needs to be emphasized strongly, given that this group digs deep into its pockets all the time for conservation and made a strong push for what has now become the largest conservation program in North American history. I think that needed to be pointed out.

My comments and questions will focus on the privately owned agricultural landscape, as you can probably guess, Mr. McLean. Mr. McLean, could you speculate on the conservation challenges on the privately owned agricultural landscape?

Mr. Robert McLean: I'm just thinking about the questions and the concerns I hear as we attempt to do habitat conservation. A range of issues are cited. Sometimes it's simply good information on what to do and how to manage the lands in the natural areas that already exist on private lands. Other times it's some additional technical assistance, perhaps managing a wetland, so bringing some expertise to help the landowner really make some good decisions about how to manage the wetland. There are other times when some financial assistance is quite helpful—if, for example, there's some fencing needed to protect a natural area, or perhaps to implement rotational grazing so that appropriate grazing intensity maintains native prairie, the natural native prairie, while sustaining that use.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: What effect and what role does agricultural policy have on habitat conservation on the privately owned agricultural landscape, and what effect are recent global agricultural markets and high prices having on habitat on the privately owned agricultural landscape?

Mr. Robert McLean: I haven't studied recent changes in the global agricultural marketplace and how that might affect decisions that individual landowners are making, but as to how they use their land, perhaps a witness could be invited who could speak more to that.

I definitely think agriculture policy can have an important impact on habitat conservation in those sectors. I mentioned that during my remarks—the importance of those sectors. I do hear discussion, for example, around environmental farm planning and the role it can play, and the best management practices that might be described in those plans.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Prosper, you talked about managing habitats, or words to that effect, and I think the question has to be asked: managing for what? I think we all have a good idea, but there are two schools of thought. One is the “leave it alone and it'll be okay” approach, but that really doesn't work on the working landscape. Or do we actively manage landscapes for specific ecological services? Those two require very different policy directions.

• (0915)

Mr. Rob Prosper: You're absolutely right. Even Parks Canada is not in the “leave it alone” camp. I think establishing national parks

of an appropriate size is a key factor. It factors in the climate change aspect. It factors in ranges of species that are required to protect viable populations. By the same token, there is an enormous amount of effort that is undertaken to maintain and restore protected areas so that they provide those ecosystem services and so that they maintain ecological integrity, which is their key purpose. In fact, we do undertake a large degree of effort in prescribed fire restoration work and so on in order to do that. Simply creating the parks and leaving them alone is not how we operate.

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I could go on for hours

An hon. member: We know.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert Sopuck: And Mr. McLean does as well.

I would like to focus in on the definition of biodiversity. We talk a lot about biodiversity targets, but if you spend enough time on the landscape, you realize there are native species and there are introduced species. There are native species that actually cause difficulties for human beings. There are introduced species that people like; there are introduced species that people don't like. So I think the term “biodiversity targets” is much too loosely used, and nobody has really drilled down to exactly what we mean by that.

Mr. McLean and Mr. Prosper, can you comment on that?

Mr. Robert McLean: I think there are two levels to the response I would provide. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity, there is a globally recognized definition for biodiversity that includes ecosystems, species, genetic diversity, and, importantly, sustainable use of biodiversity. That's at one level.

I very much agree with what I think is at the heart of your question and what really does drive people to be interested in biodiversity conservation. I think we need to think at scales that are more local or regional.

On species, people do identify with species in their backyard, if I can put it that way. In prairie Canada, farmers might relate to pronghorn antelope as a species they value. It's understanding at a regional scale how to manage habitat and sustainable development to deliver to people the outcomes they're looking for within their areas. If they value pronghorn antelope as well as the sustainable development around agriculture, how do you define that on a regional scale?

My short answer would be that I think the definition of biodiversity changes depending upon where you are, and it's really driven by personal values around the biodiversity that people have, if you will, grown up with.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean and Mr. Sopuck.

We'll move now to Madame Quach for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

I will ask my questions in French. I will let you put on your earpieces.

My first question is for Mr. McLean.

Canada is part of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Within this framework, it committed to preserving 17% of land by 2020. However, we know that our country only has 9.9% today and that it ranks 13th in this respect in the OECD. It is therefore under the 12.6% average. Behind the United States, New Zealand and France.

I would like to know why Canada is so far behind on the plan to protect land and its habitats. Do you think it will really manage to keep its 17% commitments by 2020? If so, how does it plan to do so?

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: I would begin by noting that we are still in the process of consulting and developing a set of national goals, targets, and indicators for biodiversity. The 17% that's referenced relates to a decision taken in 2010. There are targets called the Aichi targets, under the Convention on Biological Diversity, that are aspirational. We are now in the process of translating those Aichi targets into domestic targets. We have a consultation process.

With respect to why Canada is at, say, 10%, and not closer to a higher percent, I think our country is being blessed by the fact that much of our territory is actually not accessible. It is, in some ways, de facto protected already. I believe that much land in Canada, even more than the 10%, enjoys protection, but perhaps not in the formal sense.

The second comment is that both provincially as well as federally we continue to make progress on identifying and designating additional protected areas. We have a number of national parks in development. We're working on our national wildlife areas. We've seen provincial jurisdictions such as British Columbia in the north and central coast designate much of that landscape as protected areas. So there is tremendous progress.

My final comment would be the point I made during my remarks about the importance of private land conservation. The 10% that we have now doesn't actually capture private land conservation, which would add perhaps as much as another 2% to the national total of land that's protected.

• (0920)

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: In your opinion, could the 17% rate be reached over the next seven years?

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: I'm not going to speculate on how quickly the country can move to achieve the 17%. There are a number of partners working together to add additional protected areas to what's protected in Canada already.

[Translation]

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

I have a second question for you, Mr. McLean.

The Species at Risk Act also fosters responsible stewardship of land by giving the federal government the power to reach conservation agreements with a provincial government, an organization or an individual. However, the committee learned, thanks to the 2009-2010 act implementation review process, that no agreement had been reached under these powers for a number of years. Can you explain to us why Canada has not reached any agreements?

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: The legislation to which you refer mentions a number of different kinds of agreements that can be concluded. I spoke about stewardship. I think the more important agreements that aren't necessarily directly referenced in the legislation relate to the habitat stewardship program I mentioned. These are cooperative agreements with environmental organizations and at times individual landowners for cooperative approaches to habitat conservation.

The habitat stewardship program is a funding program of about \$13 million to support stewardship on the ground by those landowners and managers. It's those contribution agreements that I think are very relevant and that demonstrate progress in implementing the legislation.

Over and above that, though, we have other programs, such as the natural areas conservation program that provides habitat for 146 species at risk. Those are formal agreements. So too with the ecological gifts program: more than a thousand gifts under that program provide habitat for at risk species.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you.

My last question is for Mr. Prosper.

The Quebec national wildlife areas budget has decreased significantly since 2011. In fact, in my riding's wildlife area, which is called the Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area, funding was reduced by 60% in 2011. It is very difficult for the Friends of the Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area to continue to conserve habitat while at the same time conducting mobilization activities with people. This park has won several prizes from the Grands Prix du tourisme de la Montérégie for its activities with people, but also in partnership with the Mohawk community of Akwesasne. Yet their funding is still frozen. Why have there been so many cuts? What are the effects, in your opinion, on habitat conservation?

[English]

Mr. Rob Prosper: I believe the park you're referring to is not under the jurisdiction of Parks Canada. It's not a national park. That being said, I couldn't answer why those funds have been cut.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: In fact, I could put the question to Mr. McLean. I think it is actually a wildlife service that is managed by Environment Canada.

•(0925)

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: With our national wildlife areas in the province of Quebec, we definitely have several “friends of” the national wildlife areas. We operate the agreements to which you refer on a cost-recovery basis, so the funding is aligned with the level of activity that's happening within the national wildlife areas.

The Chair: Your time is up. Thank you, Madame Quach.

We'll move on to Mr. Woodworth for seven minutes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for attending.

If I may, I'll just try to pick up on that very last point you mentioned, Mr. McLean. Funding is aligned with the level of activity going on. May I take from that that if there happens to be a period of less activity, the funding will be reduced accordingly? Is that what you were getting at?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes, it is.

The additional comment that perhaps I should have made is that we have a different management objective with our protected areas system. Parks Canada is very much focused on the public aspect. We certainly have our national wildlife areas open to the public, but we manage for the conservation outcome. We're not, except in two or three of our national wildlife areas, actively promoting visitation, so the funding is appropriate to the management needs of the protected area.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: If I could put that in my own words once again, may I take it from what you're saying that if a management goal is achieved, then the funding directed toward that would dissipate and you'd go on to other things? Is that the idea?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I was very intrigued by your remarks about the challenge “in collecting and making information about habitat accessible on a scale and in a form that's practical for conservation planning and implementation at the 'working landscape' level”, and that there were “promising developments in new programs and online geospatial tools that will help”.

It reminded me of conversations I had with witnesses in a former study at this committee, particularly from Nova Scotia, about the fact that there are a lot of local partners and groups across the country that have a lot of good information about habitat and critical habitat, but it's all in private hands and there isn't a single place to access it.

I remember one idea that was particularly striking to me that a witness had, that perhaps the government could promote and sponsor a kind of habitat Wikipedia, where you could have people inputting this information, subject to government verification.

Anyway, I'm not sure that's what you're talking about when you refer to online geospatial tools, but I'd be grateful if you could expand a little bit on what it is you are referring to there.

Mr. Robert McLean: I'm alluding to several things. The first step in making information available to people is actually putting into a database information on where the species are and the kind of habitat

a species might be using. We need more sophisticated systems, and technology is going to help us achieve that so that people can search the information. I don't think it's one data source; rather, it's a system that's able to mine the data wherever it is in the Internet. Then if you were a farmer, with the right GIS coordinates—geographic information system coordinates—you'd be able to search information that relates to your farm and understand what species you have on that.

The one initiative I would mention federally is the federal geospatial platform initiative. There's also work around earth observation and geomatics as that work continues to progress. Again, I think the technically inclined would refer to them as the appropriate data layers that then can be accessed by people. People are actively working on these systems. Other departments, Natural Resources Canada in particular, would have the lead on that.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: That's the geospatial platform initiative. That would be Natural Resources Canada?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

•(0930)

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Thank you.

I was also just wanting to get a few more details about some of the players involved in the programs you mentioned. In particular, you mentioned the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas. Is that a federal government sponsored council or a completely private council? Who composes it? Could you tell me a little bit more about it?

Mr. Robert McLean: The council is made up of federal, provincial, and territorial agencies responsible for the management of protected areas. It includes both representatives from national parks and provincial parks, but also other systems, such as ecological reserves in the province of British Columbia, our own national wildlife areas. There are about 15 or 16 government agencies, federally and provincially, that participate in that, plus key non-government organizations such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Nature Canada, and a couple of others that I'm not recalling off the top of my head.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: May I assume that group would have a website that would tell me who is chairing it and what their current projects are?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

Mr. Stephen Woodworth: Okay. Thank you.

I also noticed in your remarks reference to local partners regarding the North American waterfowl management plan. I come from southern Ontario. I'd be interested in knowing whether or not that management plan has been active in southern Ontario and who the local partners might be. I don't know if that's something you would have at your fingertips. Is it? If not, where might I find that information?

Mr. Robert McLean: The plan is very active in Ontario. There's something we call the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture that covers from Ontario east. Within Ontario there is the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee of federal, provincial, and non-government organizations. Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Nature Conservancy of Canada are active in that forum. There will be other, more local organizations as well. I don't have the full list of conservation organizations that would be involved, but it's active. It's alive and well and accomplishing good things.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Woodworth. We're just at the end of your time. You had about 10 seconds, but we're going to move on to Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Let me start with Mr. McLean, if I may.

One of the things you talked about in your opening comments was the protection of landscape and the protection of species. You used the phrase "natural areas...within agricultural areas and managed forests".

What do you define as "natural areas"? I'm thinking that often with forest management and replanting, tree planting and so forth, you have a lot of uniformity in what's planted, although there can be mixes sometimes, obviously. In that sense, what does the department define as a natural area?

Mr. Robert McLean: In the forest sector, companies now are planning over long time horizons—100 or 200 years—so they're managing for a diversity of habitat or forest stages. Those will change over time. Those areas might be natural and not cut. There might be other areas that are coming back online, if you will, as habitat areas. So I see it as a more dynamic system within forest ecosystems.

In agricultural landscapes, some land is turned and cropped annually, but there's much other land within agricultural landscapes, from wetlands to some forested areas, such as the Carolinian forests in southern Canada. Those are the natural areas I'm thinking about.

If I move to the Canadian prairies, there's much native prairie, as I mentioned in my remarks, that landowners are actively protecting and conserving and using. They have controlled grazing to maintain the native prairie, but also to maintain the economic activity on their lands.

Hon. Geoff Regan: How long would an area have to be undisturbed to be considered a "natural area" in this sense? What I'm thinking of again is that if there's been engineering to determine what gets planted and so forth, that's not the same as what I think of as a natural area. Obviously the fact that forestry companies are doing more engineering with different species is positive, but it still isn't the same as natural. So how do you define that?

• (0935)

Mr. Robert McLean: For me it would include both. I think about the outcome people want from the habitat. So whether it's natural and untouched or it has been through a process of development, perhaps, with permanent cover put back on the land, what is that

land producing? Is it sustaining the species people want to sustain within their area, within their backyard, so to speak? Both undisturbed habitat and habitat that was developed and has been restored can count as a natural area. What is important is what it produces.

Hon. Geoff Regan: If people want to preserve local species, should I be concerned that those would not include some other species that might be important as well? I guess a better way to put it is, why shouldn't I be concerned?

Mr. Robert McLean: Habitat doesn't provide for only one species. For example, if I take the pronghorn antelope, it might be the species one would speak about with a rancher with respect to conservation activity on the land. If that rancher conserves the native prairie, there are many outcomes from the native prairie, from water quality to bird outcomes for the Canadian Wildlife Service and Environment Canada and so on.

So there can be multiple outcomes from using a focal species that really give an incentive to people to conserve habitat.

Hon. Geoff Regan: When you talked about the North American waterfowl management plan, you said that partnerships called habitat joint ventures set priorities and guide investments. Can you give some examples in Canada of those kinds of joint ventures and how they've been successful, or not?

Mr. Robert McLean: They're very successful. At the largest scale, we have the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture, with individual habitat joint ventures within that umbrella. The largest habitat joint venture we have is the Prairie Habitat Joint Venture in the three prairie provinces. We have the Canadian Intermountain Joint Venture, and the Pacific Coast Joint Venture is a joint initiative with our colleagues in the United States. Those are the four joint ventures we have.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I know you will agree me that water plays an extremely important role in habitat and the working of water on land. It goes into streams and rivers and so forth. It's integrated. When you're dealing with a habitat stewardship program or other programs, to what degree do you coordinate with other departments in stewardship work that relates to water and rivers?

Mr. Robert McLean: The habitat stewardship program is a federal one. It's implemented jointly with the Parks Canada agency and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Regionally, we also bring in our provincial colleagues. It's very closely coordinated with provincial programming.

As to your previous question about the success of the North American waterfowl management plan, I have some numbers. The overall investment since 1986 is \$1.9 billion, 49% of which has come from the United States, with 51% from Canadian sources, including the federal government.

Money is one thing, but what's the conservation result on the ground in terms of millions of acres? I am switching to acres because a key audience for us is the United States. They have sent nearly \$1 billion to Canada since 1990, and we like to communicate with them in terms they understand. We've secured 19.8 million acres of wetland in associated upland habitat under the North American waterfowl management plan, and we've influenced an additional 103.7 million acres of wetland and associated upland habitats. That's a very significant outcome. I think the North American waterfowl management plan is viewed as the best of the best. And not only in North America: I've had the opportunity to travel internationally and I know that others are jealous of what we've done in North America with that plan.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regan. Your time is up.

I noted, Mr. McLean, that the 49% to 51% didn't include anything from Mexico, though you've identified it as one of the partners. That's just a side comment.

Mr. Choquette.

• (0940)

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here to enlighten us on these questions.

I have a question on the people or groups who participate in the national conservation plan. I would like to know who these groups are. Can you tell me if there are NGOs or first nations, like the Métis or Inuit?

In your consultations on habitat protection, are there some that focused specifically on climate change? It could be on the mitigation of climate change or the fight against climate change in relation with changes in the ecosystem. What do you expect from those groups? What are their positions on the impact of climate change?

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: With respect to your first question around the non-government organizations that are involved, I've mentioned a couple of the national ones. There are many. There are dozens and hundreds at that community scale that really make a difference in terms of delivering habitat conservation. I don't have that full list of organizations, but they would be well known in Quebec and in the other jurisdictions.

With respect to aboriginal people, I didn't mention in my remarks another program we have: the aboriginal fund for species at risk. We work very closely. It's a contribution program of about \$3.3 million that's focused specifically on habitats that are important for species on aboriginal lands. I should add that aboriginal organizations also receive funding from the habitat stewardship program, so it's not limited to the \$3.3 million.

With respect to climate change, it needs to be thought about and factored into the conservation planning that is happening. There are some examples, I think, where provincial jurisdictions.... I should have mentioned much earlier that habitat conservation really is going to be more in the domain of provincial and territorial jurisdictions,

which are responsible for land use and land management much more than the federal government is.

The Province of Saskatchewan has a wonderful initiative under way on connectivity and biodiversity within Saskatchewan and is attempting to develop a plan that would identify, I believe, more than 3,000 hectares of habitat. It's designing connectivity on the landscape so that the ecosystems there can adapt, self-adapt, to a changing climate. I think that's one of the important aspects of habitat conservation: beginning to build resiliency, which is the term people use, into ecosystems, so that Canadian ecosystems can adapt and respond to changing conditions.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. McLean, if I understand what you are saying correctly, you have a very reduced, if not non-existent, role in the fight against climate change. The provinces and the territories are fighting climate change or working on what you call resiliency. Have I understood correctly?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I appreciate my colleague's line of questioning. I just think it needs to be contextualized within the scope of the study. I feel the way that last question was phrased was perhaps out of scope and could be focused a bit more specifically around the scope of the study.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

I would draw attention to the scope of the study. We're discussing habitat conservation, not climate change.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Of course, I will therefore ask a question related to habitat conservation and stakeholders. I think it is the first or second point of the study.

Do those stakeholders communicate with you about climate change? You talked about the provinces, but you represent Environment Canada and Parks Canada. How do those stakeholders communicate with you about climate change and the role you should play?

[English]

Mr. Rob Prosper: Perhaps I could provide some input here. I'm sure the committee has heard that Parks Canada has made pretty significant gains in terms of park establishments since 2006 and has taken actions to lead to the protection of almost 150,000 square kilometres. I can tell you, without any hesitation, that those gains would not have happened without an excellent relationship with aboriginal communities.

We are in very close contact with the first nations and aboriginal people of Canada in developing those national parks. They simply would not be there without having that involvement. We communicate on a regular basis, to a degree that we have cooperative management arrangements for those parks. That cooperation is on a daily basis.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Prosper.

Mr. Choquette, your time is up.

Mr. McLean, do you want to add to that at all, for just 30 seconds?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes, very quickly, just on habitat, groups don't come to us and speak specifically about climate change. I think people working locally recognize that habitat conservation is one of the key strategies to adapt. The federal government has other programs, which I'm not familiar with, that are addressing climate change more generally. My comment was very specific on habitat conservation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean.

Ms. Rempel, for five minutes, please.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, and thank you again to the witnesses for coming today.

I wanted to pick up on some of the comments that were made around Mr. Regan's line of questioning. Part of what we're looking at in this study is best practices. Mr. McLean, you made a comment, and I'm paraphrasing, that habitat doesn't provide for only one species. I know we've talked before at this committee about a whole ecosystem approach to looking at species management, recovery strategies, and whatnot. I was wondering if you could speak a little first to some of the principles that would be used to develop best practices in looking at recovering a species or a set of species and ecosystems, some of what Mr. Regan was saying, and adding to that. In your notes, you were talking about:

The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) is a continental effort to conserve sufficient wetland and associated uplands habitats to sustain healthy populations....

Could you talk a bit about some of those best practices you use in determining how habitat stewardship is used to recover a species?

Mr. Robert McLean: With respect to the first part of your question, I can respond with an example. We at Environment Canada have been working with our colleagues in the province of Saskatchewan, as well as with industry sectors, cattlemen's associations, and so on, in southwestern Saskatchewan, to develop a multi-species initiative that's called South of the Divide. What's key there is taking the time to work with landowners to identify the habitats that are important for a species, and then the agricultural producers can see where the lands are that they will be using. The point I've made already is that sometimes those are the same lands: ranching is using native prairie.

I forgot the second part of your question, and I apologize.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: That's okay.

To follow up on that, when you're talking with groups, they're the land users of affected lands, and you're looking at species recovery. Are you also looking at the integrity of the working landscape, socio-economic principles, those sorts of things? How do you integrate that whole land usage component into a species recovery strategy?

Mr. Robert McLean: I was going to integrate it more and use the North American waterfowl management plan as an example, because that human dimension is at its heart. That plan, incidentally, was updated last year to address the hugely important human dimension part of conservation. How does that human dimension get

translated on the landscape? Again, it's working with landowners and coming to some of those practical techniques.

If you want more waterfowl, there's something called dense nesting cover. If predators are taking the eggs of those ground-nesting birds, then you don't get the outcomes. The plan would increase dense nesting cover to protect waterfowl from predation. I already mentioned rotational grazing; that's working positively and constructively with the landowner to maintain the economic outcome while achieving conservation outcomes.

Zero-tillage grazing was initiated by the North American waterfowl management plan and others; it's a key tool. There's something called a flushing bar if a farmer is haying. That's a bar that you put in front of the machine that's cutting the hay that scares any wildlife, not just birds, but fawns, and so on, so there are a number of tools, all of which are developed and used cooperatively with the landowner.

● (0950)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: One of the other principles you mentioned in response to Mr. Regan's question was looking at the outcomes of the habitat. Could you expand on that a little more and talk about some of the outcomes you would consider, both in terms of species management as well as in habitat conservation?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes. I will go back to the South of the Divide initiative. That's a multi-species approach, and I think as the habitat conservation plan is finalized and we see implementation, we'll see multiple species benefiting, because the plan is designed to maintain the full suite of habitats, if you will, to keep species populations at that designed level. Really important in the concept is monitoring over time, because perhaps the plan doesn't deliver the outcomes, whether economic or conservation. Then that partnership can come together to figure out what needs to change to improve the outcomes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great.

I'll close off. Mr. Prosper, you spoke about the need to ensure that we have adequate consultation whenever we're developing habitat management plans, etc. I live close to Banff National Park, where I know we've got a bunch of species reintroduction programs under way. I'm intimately familiar with them, but could you give the committee some examples of the consultation processes with local land users and whatnot on developing the management plan.

The Chair: In the interest of time, could you give us one example? Thank you.

Mr. Rob Prosper: Perhaps it's not directly related to a reintroduction or a wildlife species, but the management planning process is the key document that guides the management of these protected areas for a period of ten years. All of these management plans in national parks are developed through a very vigorous public consultation process, so this document is at the heart of our management.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Prosper.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

We'll move to Ms. Leslie for five minutes, please.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for your testimony and your availability to answer questions at the outset of this study.

I only have two questions. My first goes back to the scope of our study. One question we're trying to answer is whether Canada has publicly available knowledge and expertise on habitat conservation. What are the sources of this information? How is it disseminated?

In seeking an answer to that question, I want to ask whether or not the department is making public the need to adapt and to mitigate climate change, specifically with respect to habitat and conservation. There are some general references on the website about climate and about its being an important feature of habitat conservation. What kind of information are you trying to make available to the public in their role around climate change and habitat conservation?

Mr. Rob Prosper: I would probably turn to the work we're doing, both domestically and internationally, in working with the U.S. and Mexico, in using large protected areas as natural solutions for adaptation to climate change. It's a big part of our communications activities to let people know the role parks can play.

I know this committee has heard other evidence about how important protected areas and natural areas can be for climate change adaptation. It's a new line of engagement for us, both domestically and internationally.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Is there a flip side of this too, in terms of your communications? You're communicating how parks can help, but are you focusing on also getting out information about climate change generally and about the potential impact on existing conserved lands or existing ecosystems?

Mr. Rob Prosper: Probably the best example I could provide is that we have an ecological integrity monitoring program in Parks Canada. Although not specifically designed to target the effects of climate change, it is designed to give us a sense of the state of ecological integrity and the state of the park. This monitoring program and the guidelines we provide are implemented in every national park.

• (0955)

The Chair: Ms. Leslie, do you want Mr. McLean to respond?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Sure.

Mr. Robert McLean: For the other important part of thinking about climate change and adapting to it, I would use the word "planning".

What information do people really need? I think they need access to a really good plan to help them understand how best to use land. Parks, national wildlife areas, national parks are important, but climate change needs to be thought about for 100% of the landscape.

I mentioned that I've been around conservation for a long time. One of the big shifts that's beginning to happen in the country is that there are provincially led landscape planning processes. I mentioned the landscape connectivity project of the Province of Saskatchewan. I think it's just the first of what we will see in the coming decades by way of more concerted efforts to plan for adapting to climate change, and habitat conservation will have to be an important part of those plans.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks.

I also want to ask a specific question falling under our study concerning best management practices. I look at what's happening in Saskatchewan with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration and the decision that the federal government will no longer manage the grasslands. It is provincial crown land—I understand that—but with the federal decision to no longer manage those lands, what we're seeing is a selling off of those lands, so effectively a privatization.

You've both raised the issue of integrity of species at risk in particular around grasslands. I'm wondering how decisions like this one fit into best practices. It seems to be the opposite of a best practice here: that we're downloading this and then privatizing the land.

How do best practices fit into decision-making like that?

Mr. Robert McLean: That's a decision made in Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, so I'm very hesitant to speculate on the decision-making. Conservation organizations know that some of those lands are important for conservation, and I understand that actively looking at the lands would be valuable from a conservation perspective. But I'm not in a position to state—

Ms. Megan Leslie: That's fair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean. Thank you, Ms. Leslie.

We'll move now to Mr. Toet.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to our witnesses.

I want to start on the basis of our study here. It's important, at least from Environment Canada's perspective, to have a definition of conserved land. I'm assuming you have standards that must be met for land to be considered a conserved area. It would be good to hear a Parks Canada perspective of the definition you use in determining what is conserved land.

Mr. Robert McLean: The best definition from a protected areas perspective—and there's much more to habitat conservation than protected areas. There is an international classification system adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. I'm not going to go into the details. There are six different categories for protected areas. The tracking that we do in Environment Canada is something called the conservation areas reporting and tracking system. Working with our provincial colleagues, we use that categorization scheme.

I mentioned in my remarks that the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas is doing more work on how to define other area-based conservation measures, but there will be conserved lands and conserved habitat beyond those definitions that will be important. There isn't a definition for those lands beyond the categories that were just talked about, but that shouldn't diminish in anyone's mind the importance of those lands for biodiversity and the other outcomes we've talked about.

Mr. Rob Prosper: I don't have an awful lot to add. I was going to mention exactly the same thing. There are standards under the IUCN for different types of conserved lands and different categories and requirements to meet them.

The one thing I would add—and I think your committee has heard this—is that connectivity is a big component in maintaining species and maintaining appropriate habitats. A wide variety of types of conserved lands can provide that connectivity. We see national parks and the completion of the system of national parks as one of the cornerstones of a conservation plan. But how habitats and species can connect can be looked at in a wide variety of conserved lands.

• (1000)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. McLean, you mentioned in your presentation the involvement of various sectors in supporting habitat conservation. You mentioned forestry, agriculture, mining, and energy as examples. I was wondering if you could expand on that and talk a little bit about the involvement of those sectors. One of the things I hope you could touch on is whether involvement is strictly based on regulatory requirements, or whether you're seeing a movement on the part of these sectors to become much more proactive in adapting to best practices of habitat conservation in their particular sector. The main thrust of my question is whether this is strictly regulation-driven, or whether there is a desire on the part of these sectors to be involved in this work.

Mr. Robert McLean: It's the latter. There is definitely a desire to be involved in this work. There is a council called the Canadian Business and Biodiversity Council. This is a compendium of case studies, so it's not regulation-driven. It's companies wanting to do the right thing. I had a chance to speak to that council in early December, and I was absolutely amazed at the companies building and integrating biodiversity into their annual business planning. Ontario Power Generation and Hydro-Québec have done some very good things. There are a number of other case studies in this publication that provide examples, and we're very happy to leave this with the clerk of the committee. You will see that these companies are motivated to do the right thing. They realize they have an impact, but they also want to do the socially responsible thing and address environmental issues.

The Chair: You have half a minute.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Just to expand on that quickly, I think it is important to note that we must see them as a stakeholder in this process, and we must work with them as we go forward in this habitat conservation plan to be able to talk to these different sectors and find out what they are doing as part of their best practices.

You have the study where you're showing some of these best practices. How are you sharing that with these sectors as best practices? Are you working with Environment Canada to share that knowledge, so that all of these sectors can see what the best practices are and be able to adapt those in their business practices?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes, the council to which I referred maintains its own website, but then there are best management practices led by our federal government colleagues, as well as provincial-territorial ministries. They would have best management practices in their sectors. So the agriculture sector would have best management practices, the forest sector would, and definitely the

mining sector as well. A Google search would bring you to any number of those best management practices.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. McLean. Thank you, Mr. Toet.

We're going to move to our last questioner, Madame Quach, and then we're going to move into our in camera session to complete our urban conservation report.

Madame Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. McLean, I'll come back to a question I asked you about the Convention on Biological Diversity, under which Canada wanted to preserve 17% of its land areas. I am not sure I understood your explanation. You said that Canada had about 10% in protected areas because some areas were inaccessible. However, France, New Zealand and the United States probably also have inaccessible areas and those countries have managed to reach higher goals in land preservation.

I also asked you if, in your opinion, we would be able to reach the rate of 17% by 2020. You didn't know if you could answer, but when the Commissioner of the Environment appeared before us, he told us that it was not at all the case given the slow pace at which Canada sets targets and applies preservation techniques.

Regarding inaccessible land, do you have an explanation?

• (1005)

[*English*]

Mr. Robert McLean: I think what we're seeing is the beginning of a process to protect areas that previously haven't been accessible. An example I would mention is the protected area strategy in the Northwest Territories, where development is beginning to happen, but in concert with development is an interest in designating an additional protected area. Parks Canada has initiatives there and so does Environment Canada. That will add to the total.

I think as we see areas that now aren't developed—and you can see them on any map of Canada, particularly in the boreal forest. As development happens, there will be interest in protecting those areas.

There are two really key examples of what I'm talking about. One is Plan Nord in Quebec, where the provincial government has committed to protect 50% of the northern boreal by 2035. If that's accomplished, that's a very significant contribution to achieving a 17% objective. Ontario has a similar plan with respect to northern Ontario to conserve larger portions of its boreal forest.

My last comment would be that, as mentioned previously, Canada hasn't adopted that 17%. We're still in the process of consulting on goals, targets, and indicators for biodiversity.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: If I understand correctly, in this area, we are still consulting and not acting. We are still behind.

I will now go to another question.

Let's talk about the national wildlife areas whose funding was reduced. You say there are targets for cuts. On the other hand, you say that other parks are being created. I find that a bit inconsistent. Other parks are being created, but at the same time there are cuts to national reserves and certain parks. The Lac Saint-François National Wildlife Area, for example, is home to over 200 plant and animal species, some of which are not found elsewhere in Quebec.

How can you explain the fact that there are such drastic 60% reductions when other parks are being created elsewhere? Don't you try to conserve before creating something else?

[English]

Mr. Robert McLean: The investment Environment Canada makes in its protected areas system is larger now than it was, say, 10 years ago, in my career. The funding to which you refer is driven by the level of service that we need to provide to people in the protected areas you're talking about. It is important that we have the right investment for the desired level of service. That doesn't preclude Environment Canada from advancing other protected areas initiatives.

With respect to those new areas, additional funding was provided, but expressly for those protected areas, such as the protected areas in the Northwest Territories. We've developing something called Scott Islands on our Pacific coast.

So there's funding to assist us with developing those areas, but my response to the main part of your question is that we're just trying to have the right investment for the level of service we have to provide.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Quach.

Thank you, Mr. McLean.

We do have a few more minutes till 10:15. I'm going to give Ms. Rempel one last round, and then we have to move into our in camera session. The committee had agreed to meet for the first hour and a half in public and then move in camera.

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

To both of the witnesses, would you characterize Canada's land mass as significantly larger than that of France?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: It's a trick question. Be careful.

Mr. Robert McLean: I have to get my calculator out.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Would you also characterize that the protection of an additional 50% of our parks space under our government's tenure as action in protecting spaces in this country?

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Excellent.

Year over year we've heard in the estimates from Parks Canada that it's actually been our government that has seen a substantive increase in funding to Parks Canada. Would you also characterize that statement as correct?

Mr. Rob Prosper: In terms of direct funding, yes. Towards things like action on the ground, we're investing at the highest level ever in our history.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great.

Mr. McLean, in terms of the programs you mentioned, like the eco gifts program, the natural areas conservation program, I believe in the first budgets we invested over a quarter of a billion dollars. In Budget 2013, we announced more money for this. Would you also characterize that as action for protecting spaces in Canada?

• (1010)

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Excellent.

With regard to our biodiversity targets...you mentioned some of the uniqueness of Canada's geography, in that we do have a very large land mass, one that, as you've confirmed, is larger than France, substantively. With the combined efforts of programs like the eco gifts program, the natural areas conservation plan, the increase in protected parklands, the work we do with non-governmental organizations, with farming groups, and all the other groups that you mentioned in here, to protect spaces, whether or not they're defined specifically for the Aichi targets...would you characterize that as well as action towards protecting habitat under this government's tenure...?

Mr. Robert McLean: Characterize that as contributing to...?

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Action in protecting....

Mr. Robert McLean: Yes, it's action in protecting.

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Great.

I've done my round.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing today, and thanks to members for the good questions.

I'm going to suspend for three minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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