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Chair

Mr. Harold Albrecht

Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC)): I'd like to call meeting number 52 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development to order.

We have appearing by video conference from the Yukon Fish and Game Association, Gordon Zealand, executive director; from Lethbridge, Alberta, Wayne Lowry, president of the Alberta Fish and Game Association; and from the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, Darrell Crabbe, executive director.

We're going to begin in the order that I introduced you, gentlemen, Mr. Gordon Zealand first for a 10-minute opening statement, then Mr. Lowry, and then Mr. Crabbe. Following that, our committee members will proceed with questions during a seven-minute question and answer period.

Mr. Zealand.

Mr. Gordon Zealand (Executive Director, Yukon Fish and Game Association): Good morning. I wasn't quite sure what was expected of us this morning.

The major point that I'd like to emphasize is the fact that I don't believe there's enough recognition of the value of what our outdoor resource contributes to the Canadian economy. Within Yukon, it's corroborated by the fact that we recently did an analysis on just what the bison hunting does for Yukon, which just in the last few years was open to general hunting. When I say general hunting, it used to be by permit only. That isn't the case anymore. This one individual hunt, within Yukon, is now in the order of millions of dollars within the Yukon economy.

From our point, it just further substantiates the fact that we take our outdoor resources so much for granted, including the fishing industry. When I say the fishing industry, I'm talking about the sport fishing industry and what exactly that contributes in terms of dollars to the economy.

There is so much that kids are missing out on today because of the fact that we're just not getting them out and involved in the outdoor resources. When I mention the outdoor resources, I'm not just talking about hunting and fishing, whether it's canoeing, whether it's hiking. I am talking about just enjoying the outdoors. When you have kids participating in the various activities and you're trying to find out why there is a lack, the major issue seems to be that parents or other related family members just don't seem to be taking the time to get the kids out and be involved.

Our association is one that wants to try and emphasize at least the opportunity to have these things there for kids who perhaps don't have any other way of getting out and getting involved. We're not just talking about kids. There could be families that have not had opportunities previously. We see this as an opportunity. We're not just talking about a particular group. Whether you're talking first nations, whether you're talking non-first nations, it's the same.

There seems to be a general lack where kids aren't getting the opportunity to be out and be involved. At least from conversations with counterparts across Canada, it's not dissimilar anywhere else. We certainly have noticed that here, and that is one of our pushes in the future in terms of getting people out, getting them involved, making sure the opportunity is there for them to at least experience some parts of the outdoors that may attract them.

• (0850)

Down the road, it doesn't seem to matter what level of government we're referring to. All levels seem to take for granted the amount of money that is contributed to the economy from these types of activities and I just can't emphasize that enough.

At least to my eyes, it's a pretty simple picture that we just take for granted. From our point of view, this was the one major emphasis that our association would like to leave with you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zealand.

You may have an opportunity to give direct input in terms of recommendations to the committee as to how various levels of government can address that. We'll come back to you with our questions and answers in a few moments.

We'll proceed now to Mr. Wayne Lowry from the Alberta Fish and Game Association.

Mr. Wayne Lowry (President, Alberta Fish and Game Association): Thank you.

Based on the study criteria that were presented, I decided to focus my comments primarily on the contributions of hunters and trappers to wildlife management and conservation.

First, I just wanted to share a bit of data on our organization, the Alberta Fish and Game Association. Here and after I will refer to it just as AFGA. We are a not-for-profit, volunteer organization, proud to serve Albertans in the promotion of the wise use of our fish and wildlife resources, and the conservation of their habitats. The AFGA has been active in Alberta since 1908 in working toward these goals. It has a province-wide membership of over 24,000 individuals spread among more than 100 clubs throughout the province.

As president of AFGA, I take great pride in the contributions that our membership makes and continues to make toward the betterment of Alberta's precious fish and wildlife resources and the habitat they depend on for their existence and survival. We are, first and foremost, conservationists who have a significant connection to the outdoors through a number of activities and projects. I would like to share just a few details about some of the more significant projects that we have undertaken in the province. These projects have been initiated and funded through AFGA, and they continue to be funded and operated by AFGA.

The first project I would like to talk about is our wildlife trust fund. Our wildlife trust fund was established back in 1986, when the association saw that the habitat was quickly being reallocated toward industrial, commercial, and even private interests, as well as agriculture. We saw a need to help preserve some of the more pristine habitats for wildlife. It was the first land trust fund that was set up in Alberta. It currently holds over 100 properties throughout the province, containing over 40,000 acres that we have obtained for conservation purposes. These properties are available to anyone, at any time of the year, for any type of activities, whether it be hiking, photography, hunting, fishing, or just enjoying the outdoors.

Last year alone, we added over 2,000 acres to this trust fund and continue to have a great deal of support from our members and the province as a whole. We run this program in conjunction with some of the other programs available, such as eco-gifting, and some properties end up in the trust fund from that. We also partner with other organizations in acquiring these properties. All the properties are sought for their ecological and habitat significance, so they are assessed prior to obtaining them for that purpose.

The second program is our operation grassland community program. In this program, we work with landowners in the mixed-grass prairie area of southeastern Alberta. The mixed-grass prairie region still comprises a large component of the Province of Alberta, and it is very sensitive to activities on those types of habitats. It cannot handle a whole lot of disturbance without having long-term effects on those habitats. We work with the landowners to help educate them on ways to manage the property, with the ecological value of the property in mind. We have over 300 agreements with landowners who have plans in place to help preserve the ecological value of these lands.

• (0855)

Also, given that the native prairie is very sensitive, many of the species at risk exist in this area. We also help lead landowners on how to assist in maintaining habitat that is suitable for these species at risk.

The third program, I'll just quickly mention, is the Antelope Creek Ranch. This is a partnership program we operate with Ducks Unlimited, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, and Wildlife Habitat Canada.

The Antelope Creek Ranch is a 5,500-acre ranch that we manage strictly as a demonstration ranch to help demonstrate how competing interests on the land, such as livestock, recreation, oil and gas activity and development, marshlands, and of course the wildlife that exists on those habitats can work together. We also use that ranch for educational purposes, and we have many individuals doing their

theses on the ranch through the University of Regina, the University of Alberta, and the University of Calgary.

The fourth program is an antelope corridor enhancement project whereby our members fund and provide the labour to amend fencing in areas where antelope migrate. Antelope can't or won't jump fences, so they are forced to go under fences. Many of these fences restrict their natural movements, so we assist in replacing a lot of these fences with wildlife-friendly fences and provide the material and the labour to change these fences. To date we've replaced over 900 kilometres of fencing, and we continue to run three or four projects every year to change that.

We operate our conservation camps for youth and women. It has been shown that youth and women are the fastest growing demographic in outdoor sports in the province of Alberta, and we run camps to help them develop and introduce them to different activities that can be completed in the outdoors.

Lastly, I wanted to mention that on behalf of the Alberta government, we operate the minister's special licence auction and raffle, where funds are raised that go directly back into research and habitat development for specific wildlife species. These funds are then granted to different organizations or universities that are taking on projects that will enhance knowledge of wildlife species, their habits, how they interact with the habitats they live in, and ways they can be bettered.

That will complete my opening statement. Thank you.

• (0900)

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

You did present the committee with a written statement in English only, but it is much more in-depth. I'm going to ask that each committee member receives this by translation in the future, just so that you know the extra material you wouldn't have had time to cover in your opening statement is available to our committee members.

We'll proceed to Mr. Darrell Crabbe, executive director of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation.

Mr. Crabbe.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe (Executive Director, Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation): Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the significance of licensed hunting and trapping in Canada. Many have already provided a great deal of information to you on this subject in greater depth and much more eloquently than I can, particularly the OFAH. I was able to read their presentation, and it was very much on a national-stage level. I hope only to add to their presentation, perhaps more on a provincial stage, as my two counterparts have done.

The Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation was established in 1929 and probably represents more than 33,000 members in 121 branches across our province. We're considered to be per capita the largest conservation organization of this kind in the world.

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

First from the economic standpoint, the economic impact of the heritage activities—hunting, angling, and trapping—is placed at approximately \$15 billion annually across Canada. In Saskatchewan, a 2006 provincial government study with the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation confirmed that more than \$500 million in economic activity was generated in Saskatchewan annually through those activities. This did not include first nation activities.

A 2016 update on that information suggested that the number is closer to \$600 million today. In Saskatchewan, more than 25% of our provincial population, which is 1.1 million people, participate in hunting, trapping, or angling ever year.

Saskatchewan presently trains more than 5,000 new hunters and trappers annually. Interestingly, as Mr. Lowry pointed out, that increase is being led by the female demographic, and we're very happy. In 2000, I believe about 10% of our new recruits were female, and now they're approaching one-third or about 35%, which is very exciting and very gratifying.

Again, hunting and trapping provides more than 1,000 full-time equivalents in employment in Saskatchewan every year, interestingly mostly rural. This was prior to Cabela's opening of two stores in our province over the past three years and aggressive expansion into hunting and angling retailing by a number of other retailers, such as Canadian Tire and cooperatives.

As a footnote to that comment, this does not include non-government organizations, such as the SWF, NCC, DU, or government positions, such as DFO, Canadian Wildlife Service, or the Ministry of Environment's biologists and conservation officers, which would number somewhere in the range of 400 to 500 additional FTEs every year.

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

In 1980, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation convinced the provincial government to increase licence costs to create our fish and wildlife development fund. It was suggested that this was the first time that a group asked government to levy a surcharge to promote conservation. I don't think that across the board in North America that happens very often.

Today, 30% of all licensed sales are dedicated to the fish and wildlife development fund and used to provide habitat and fisheries enhancement and securement. We also use those funds to operate our provincial hatchery and provide funding for education, research, and program development in our province. Most of the \$4.5 million generated annually is matched by NGOs.

The conservation benefits provided by hunting and trapping are numerous and multi-faceted. We only have to consider the negative effects that overpopulation of any species has on agriculture, vehicle collision numbers, and habitat degradation. Hunting and trapping are the only effective tool utilized under responsible game management to maintain healthy species population levels.

In addition, millions of dollars are raised each year by wildlife federations to protect and enhance wildlife and fisheries habitat, research, outdoor education, and responsible conservation management. We also actively finance and provide thousands of volunteer

man-hours towards invasive species programs and species at risk research and initiatives. The SWF presently holds title to more than 60,000 acres of wildlife habitat in our province and manages an additional 100,000 acres.

It's very fair to say that wildlife organizations across North America and the world are the backbone of today's modern conservation movement.

• (0905)

From a quality of life standpoint, the quality of life benefits provided by these heritage activities are difficult to quantify. In a recent survey, over 50% of Saskatchewan residents stated their proximity and available access to nature was paramount in their decision of where they decided to live.

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

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your opening statements.

I'm going to proceed to a seven-minute opening round of questions by our members.

Prior to that, Mr. Lowry, in your opening statement in the first page you mentioned the wildlife trust fund. In your verbal comments you said it was established in 1986, but your written says 1983. It's not a big deal, but if our analysts are looking for the number it might be helpful for you to clarify that.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Yes, my apologies. It is 1983.

The Chair: Okay, we're going to proceed to the first round of questions.

Mr. Sopuck, please.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you very much. All of your testimonies were very compelling.

I agree with Mr. Zealand when he made the point that there's not enough recognition of the outdoor activities that are so important in Canada. I was impressed by the conservation record of your three organizations in terms of what you do. In fact I came across a definition of a hunter. It's that a hunter is somebody who pays for all conservation, but gets no credit for it. I think that this study is an attempt to remedy that.

I'll ask Mr. Crabbe directly, why is this study important? It's the first of its kind by the environment committee. Why is it important for our committee to look at this topic?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Thanks, Mr. Sopuck.

I would think we all somewhat work on the premise that 10% of the population completely support hunting, 10% are adamantly opposed to it, and the 80% in the middle are the group that we all try to attain support from. If we have very definitive research on hunting and the benefits of hunting that we can provide to that 80%, they'll recognize the great values that those activities provide for society as a whole.

● (0910)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I came across a study by Cornell University that looked at the role of hunters in conservation. The study labelled the hunters as conservation superstars. With the metrics that you presented both from Alberta and Saskatchewan in terms of the acreage that you have secured for conservation, it's very clear that's true.

Again for Mr. Crabbe, you talk about 60,000 acres that the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation owns plus you manage another 100,000 acres for conservation. Can you elaborate on the public benefits that accrue from those landscape conservation programs of yours?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: If I could I'd break it down to quality of life opportunities, which I think Mr. Lowry also mentioned. Our lands that we manage and the ones that we own—we have about 67,000 acres right now—are open to the public for access for berry picking, hiking, photography, and all of what we would classify maybe as non-consumptive outdoor activities. They are certainly open to hunting, angling, and other activities.

The other benefits are agricultural. In Saskatchewan most of our lands are hayed or grazed. The only difference is rather than having an agricultural perspective when grazing rates are determined, ours are determined by benefits to the habitat there. Grazing is incorporated as a tool to do that.

There is also an economic benefit to our lands outside of the activities that go on through hunting, and angling, and others. Most of our lands we manage were purchased through the fish and wildlife development fund, which we all contribute to with 30% of all license fees. Those were purchased and we have just taken over management of those because they were not being actively managed, which does not do the properties.... It doesn't help the wildlife values on those properties, but it increases the agricultural opportunities within those properties.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Again, Mr. Crabbe, I know that when the long-gun registry was brought in years ago, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, the SWF, was a visceral opponent of the registry, as were many of us. Apart from the failings of the registry itself, it seemed to me that by discouraging people from owning firearms, it discouraged people from going hunting, and in my view, had some significant effects on the conservation activities that hunters undertook, because they were simply discouraged from hunting because of the registry.

Thankfully it's gone, but is my conclusion correct that any loss of hunters and hunting opportunities will have or could have a major effect on conservation programming?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Yes, absolutely. We know that we lost several thousand hunters with the long-gun registry. They decided to hang up their guns or sell off their guns rather than continue to hunt.

That was unfortunate, because just in their licence sales alone, that 30%, is a major contributing factor to our ability to continue to have quality of habitat, programming, research, and whatever we do in Saskatchewan. Also, because most of those moneys were leveraged against other NGO dollars, for every dollar they put in, we actually might generate another \$1 to \$2 over and above that. The other part we found is that those individuals, once they got out of hunting, no longer supported our federations at fundraising events and in volunteer hours, etc.

It had somewhat of a snowball effect on the whole process.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Zealand, you talk about the bison in the Yukon. That's an introduced species, but from what I gather in speaking with Mr. Leef, your MP, it seems that the bison have settled happily into the Yukon and have become an important game species there. Can you talk about the history of the bison introduction in the Yukon and elaborate on what that introduced species has done for Yukon hunters?

Mr. Gordon Zealand: Yes, by all means.

I'm guessing now at the number of years, but approximately 10 years ago the herd was at a number of around 500. Currently, the herd is approximately 1,500 and growing.

As for what it has changed for the economy, for a lot of hunters—and I'm including first nation peoples in this—participation in the bison hunt has taken away or lessened efforts in terms of moose, caribou, and other native species. The introduction of the bison has created an additional poundage of meat that's available. You take a bison and you're dressing it out at over 1,000 pounds of meat. It doesn't take many to add to the dinner tables throughout the Yukon. We started out with a limited entry, and currently we're having issues in actually trying to attain the number that biologists would like to keep things at.

In simple terms, I guess, the herd is growing and continues to grow. They don't have a lot of natural enemies. The wolves have started to move in now and have taken some of the young and what have you, and maybe over time there will be a slight decrease from natural predation, but currently the herd is not only healthy but growing and adding in huge amounts.

● (0915)

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

We'll move now to Mr. Bevington for seven minutes.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for joining us here on teleconference. It's great to see you saving the government some taxpayers' dollars by doing this, and it's a perfectly acceptable way of achieving the results we're looking for, so I salute you on that. That's part of where we have to go.

First, for the Yukon, I'm from the Northwest Territories where we have had a lot of experience with bison. I live next to Wood Buffalo National Park. I'm pretty sure that the bison went from the Northwest Territories into the Yukon. Is that correct?

Mr. Gordon Zealand: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I'd just put one proviso around that. We resettled a herd north of Great Slave Lake, and it was a very successful effort for quite a while, but there are things that happen. We had an outbreak of anthrax in that herd and spent millions of dollars cleaning that up north of the lake two summers ago. Sometimes you do have to be careful with what you do when you're dealing with moving species from one area to another. That is one of the results we had from that endeavour with bison in the Northwest Territories.

It's a great animal. It's not a sport-hunting animal. I think you'd agree with that, Mr. Zealand.

Mr. Gordon Zealand: Well, I would disagree with you now, because maybe initially the hunt was a little different, but now the animals are almost as smart as the sheep. They're up there with the sheep currently, so you have to be a very astute and good hunter to get at them these days.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay.

Moving on to Alberta with the wildlife management issues, you still allow bear-baiting in Alberta. Do you consider that to be the kind of practice you want to encourage through your organization?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Yes, we still support the bear-baiting program. The way it is managed is that the areas where the baiting is allowed are in very thickly forested areas far removed from the so-called white area of the province. It's very much backcountry.

In many respects, it is about the only way to effectively hunt and harvest black bears in those regions, so yes, we do continue to support that. There are areas that continue to get closed out each year as human activities encroach into those areas, so it is backing off somewhat.

• (0920)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's basically a trophy hunt. People are not eating that meat, are they?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Many people eat the meat. In fact, I know many people who prefer bear meat. A lot of that meat is consumed.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Do you have any numbers on that? What percentage of that activity is for consumption purposes and what percentage is for sport purposes?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: I don't have exact data on that. However, the majority of the hunting in areas where baiting is allowed is from the outfitters, so that would be from non-residents coming into Alberta to hunt black bears. Alberta is a very popular destination for that. The outfitters would have better data with regard to how much of that meat is consumed, but the majority of it is.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: In Alberta, how do you consider the importance of woodland caribou in your wildlife management work?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: The woodland caribou is vitally important. We've been supporting and endorsing all conservation activities for woodland caribou and advocating on the preservation of the habitat for the woodland caribou. They need large tracts of undisturbed land to survive and thrive, and with the oil and gas activity encroaching into their habitat areas, we provide a strong opposition to those types of activities.

However, the herds continue to decline, which is very unfortunate. We anticipate that if—

Mr. Dennis Bevington: What would it take to turn your strong opposition to effective opposition? I'm just curious.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Unfortunately the areas that these caribou inhabit are crown lands. They're all in public lands so we're unable to go in and acquire the land by purchase in order to inhibit some of these activities. I think it would take somewhat of a miracle to establish a framework that would be primarily structured around the preservation of the woodland caribou.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: In the environmental assessment process in Alberta, do you regularly intervene on oil and gas developments there? How's that been?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: There was a lease auction that came up this spring. It was for 25,000 square miles of area that was up for lease for oil and gas development. It came up at the last minute so it required some quick action as far as that goes. With a few other conservation-minded organizations we banded together to get that lease option cancelled. We were successful in that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lowry and Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Toet, please.

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. It's been very helpful.

Mr. Crabbe, I wanted to touch quickly with you on.... You talked about the pervasive influence on the lives of people involved in the hunting and trapping. I wondered if you could give us a bit of a sense of the influence that has on your own outfit, but also your fellow hunters and trappers, how this affects them and how it affects their outlook on things.

• (0925)

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I remember my father once being asked that same question, or why he hunted. His answer to the person was that it's no different than me trying to tell you what benefits religion would have in my life.

It's difficult to put into words. I couldn't say everything even though I worked for the wildlife federation as a volunteer and as an executive director for over two decades. I think with anybody that does hunt, fish, and trap it becomes so ingrained in your life that you find with all your friends, your relatives, and everybody it's the common denominator that we all seem to rally around.

When I say it's pervasive, my non-work hours are usually spent either with family and friends pursuing those types of activities or other outdoor activities. You start to find that your circle of friends are similar types of people to you. You spend your time either volunteering to do fisheries and wildlife work and if not you're fundraising or enjoying it. As I said, it becomes who you are and what you are. I don't know how to explain it any other way. It becomes ingrained.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Thank you.

You talked a little about the long-gun registry. When you talked about it you talked about the loss of income for conservation. That's obviously one aspect of it and that obviously would have an impact on it. I was wondering, what about the loss of people involved in the activities? When you talk about the number of people who didn't register and weren't going out and hunting, what kind of impact did that have on the human resource? Did it have an impact in Saskatchewan that you would see in the conservation area as far as being able to conserve areas, being actively involved in habitat restoration, and things like that? Was there an impact on that?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely. There was a recognized decrease in licence sales shortly after Bill C-68 came into effect. We did surveys to determine if that was in fact what the issue was, especially in the older demographic that found the intrusion or requirements of the registry made the decision for them on whether they wanted to continue to hunt. Unfortunately we saw those immediate decreases in licence sales and also a noticeable decrease in those types of individuals. We saw that our fundraising efforts were starting to decrease at about the same rate. We made the assumption that once they got out of hunting they decided that their moneys were better spent somewhere else or they may have taken up another activity. We're not quite sure what that might have been—hopefully not golf.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: There's a real physical impact, then, on conservation of habitat when things like that occur. It goes to underline that hunters and trappers are very actively involved, not only on a financial basis but also on a very personal basis, with conservation and habitat conservation.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely. We find that the exact same thing occurs with wildlife diseases. When a disease becomes prevalent in a certain area, our hunting activities drop off significantly.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Zealand and Mr. Lowry, would you have seen the same things happen in Alberta and the Yukon during that period of time?

Mr. Gordon Zealand: From the Yukon perspective, absolutely, and I believe it's still continuing. In fact, two weeks ago I was asked if we would like to take possession of four different families' long guns, because they had reduced opportunity with the passing of their grandparents. We were asked if we'd like their firearms for the use of our kids' camps or what have you.

I'm seeing spinoffs that I quite frankly didn't expect to see with the change in the registry. Obviously, it is still continuing.

• (0930)

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Interesting.

Mr. Lowry, did you want to add to that?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Yes. The one additional comment I'd like to make is with regard to the increased activities among women and youth, not only in hunting but in the shooting sports. Many of our clubs throughout the province that have shooting ranges are finding a really high uptake of these demographics using those facilities. Since the abolition of the gun registry, there's been a significant increase in membership, particularly in those clubs that do have gun ranges where they can go out and enjoy that activity.

Mr. Lawrence Toet: Mr. Crabbe, you spoke a little bit about the benefits that the hunting and trapping community brings to the whole population. I was wondering if you could articulate on that a little bit and give us an example of a benefit brought forward by this community that the whole population of Saskatchewan would be seeing based on the activities and the work of this particular segment.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Certainly. When we did the 2006 economic impact study of hunting, angling, and trapping in Saskatchewan, one of the major areas we wanted to try to determine was with regard to our two major cities in Saskatchewan, Regina and Saskatoon, where more than 50% of our population lives. We wanted to see if any of the moneys being generated were being generated primarily within those two large centres or moving out into the rural areas.

We found that the vast majority of those dollars were being moved from those two major centres to rural Saskatchewan, primarily because, of course, that's where the activity took place. Every aspect of that process moved dollars directly into rural Saskatchewan. I think the only difference was that large-ticket items were primarily purchased in major centres; all the activity generated was primarily outside.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Toet.

We'll move now to Mr. McKay, please.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Lowry, Alberta has a climate change fund from the large emitters. They have a series of interesting programs for mitigation, adaptation, and so on. I see that your organization is into a program of land conservation, etc.

Is the fund permitted to compensate your organization for the work you do? You essentially are involved in not only preservation of species but also carbon sequestration, etc. Are you able to interact with that fund?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Yes, we are. The way we're able to access some of that is more with regard to the penalties claimed through the courts. If those emissions have been excessive, or if there have been spills and penalties have been assessed, those funds go back directly into habitat enhancement projects. We are then able to apply to those, through the granting process, to receive those funds, which are not necessarily specific to that area but benefit the province as a whole.

Hon. John McKay: It's kind of a perverse incentive in the sense that if something bad happens, there's money generated, and the money generated goes to offset the something bad that's happened.

Give me an example of how your organization was able to access funds for a specific project.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Take our wildlife trust fund. When we raise funds to purchase deeded lands within the province, we source all the granting opportunities we can. This is one opportunity for us to access those funds so that we can set aside different properties throughout the province in perpetuity.

• (0935)

Hon. John McKay: When you're making that application, do you have to demonstrate in your application any climate benefit, such as carbon sequestration or possibly anything else you might think of?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: No, we don't, not specifically.

Hon. John McKay: All right.

Alberta, and I assume Saskatchewan as well, has been subjected to a lot of drought lately. I'm assuming that the three of you, over the course of the last few years, have made observations with respect to how that has affected species. I'd be interested in your observations as to how that has impacted what you do and the species mix, let's say over the last 10-year period. Alberta in particular has been subjected to a bit of a drought.

I'll start with you, Mr. Lowry.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Thank you.

That is correct. Species adapt to their conditions and are fairly fluid. In drought conditions, particularly with regard to the properties we look after under the wildlife trust fund and the operation grassland community program, we try to minimize the effects by managing the impact that agricultural activities can have on that land base. As Darrell Crabbe mentioned, most of our properties are managed for grazing in addition to the ecological and environmental benefits of the land base. If it dictates that there needs to be less grazing on that, given that moisture levels are low, then we adjust it accordingly.

Hon. John McKay: I want to bring in the other two witnesses. Are there any other observations with respect to how species have been changing in the last few years?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Saskatchewan has been experiencing actually very high precipitation levels for the last number of years, and if you ask our friends in Manitoba, they're asking us to stop shipping water that way.

An interesting development has occurred from that, though. We have our pothole system here in Saskatchewan, which feeds a huge percentage of the duck production in North America. Our potholes are back; they're closer to probably 1960 levels than they have been for many years. There's been an interesting byproduct from that. We have a lot more farmers in Saskatchewan farming canola now, and all of a sudden we find ourselves with a lot of what we call "farmland moose" moving down into what you'd normally classify as prairie Saskatchewan. We have a very large moose population. We've determined through research that they're following the canola.

It's made quite an impact when you look at the numbers that are there. The fact that there are no predators and that there are lots of abandoned farmyards for them to live in has created quite an opportunity—and some challenges, too, obviously.

Hon. John McKay: Those moose are smart.

What about interspecies breeding? Have you noticed anything with respect to that? I've heard that coyotes and wolves seem to like each other these days.

Well...that one's not working, is it?

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Do you want to direct it to one of them?

Hon. John McKay: I'll direct it to Mr. Zealand from the Yukon.

Mr. Gordon Zealand: I don't think we've seen any sign of that so far, thankfully.

Hon. John McKay: Really?

Mr. Gordon Zealand: There are certainly a lot of both, but no interaction that we're aware of.

• (0940)

Hon. John McKay: Thanks.

The Chair: We'll move now to Mr. Choquette and into the five-minute rounds.

Mr. Choquette.

[Translation]

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

I am going to give my speaking time to Mr. Bevington.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thanks very much.

In terms of that interbreeding, I guess the best example of that is in the Northwest Territories, where we now have what's called the "grolar bear". That's a combination of a grizzly and a polar bear.

That's caused by changing habitat for the polar bears, which are moving inland. We see massive movements. Muskox now are moving south in the Northwest Territories, and we've certainly seen impacts on our caribou herds from climate change.

Within other regions, I guess, climate change hasn't really had that impact. Does anyone want to speak to that particular issue of climate change and the impact on wildlife in your regions?

The Chair: We'll start with Mr. Crabbe.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: As we've mentioned, the climate change we're experiencing right now, with an amount of moisture that we haven't had for a number of years, is such that, as we quite often comment in our field, when it's raining, we're considering building arks, and it's helping ducks and fish. Something always seems to benefit from the climate change we're experiencing.

Again, there are also challenges that occur, but right now I would say that in Saskatchewan we're experiencing some of the most ideal climate for almost all of our species to really benefit from.

The Chair: Mr. Lowry.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: I would certainly concur with the comments that Mr. Crabbe made, in that we're seeing wildlife species expand the habitat or the territory they inhabit, especially the species that are more mobile, such as the moose and the elk. We have significant populations of elk out on the prairies now in addition to the moose. We're also finding that as they move eastward out of the mountain areas, the predators are starting to move eastward as well, so we're seeing more of a frequency of grizzly bears and wolves out in the white area, which we haven't seen in the past.

The Chair: Mr. Zealand.

Mr. Gordon Zealand: The same goes for us. As you mentioned earlier, we're seeing the muskox moving further. At least occasionally, we're seeing them move down the Dempster Highway. The caribou populations seem to be doing reasonably well.

There are other shifts, but as Darrell mentioned, we seem to be doing reasonably well in comparison to some places.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Crabbe, you made the statement that hunting and trapping was probably the best balancing opportunity for species in Saskatchewan. Where I live, what we have seen, especially with the bison when we had a problem with wolves, which eventually died off because of mange, is that the populations interact with themselves.

On what you're saying about hunting and trapping, is that because you don't have a full ecosystem available for those animals, and that when there is a lot of intrusion, such as farming and other activities, it's very difficult to have the sort of nature-balancing process that occurs in other areas?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I would definitely point out that species populations ebb and flow all the time. I've always made a comment to our biologists that we're very effective at managing ungulates and other game species, but we're not very effective at managing predators. Our predator numbers in Saskatchewan are almost always above what we would consider to be the optimum level. Right now with bears and wolves, we're at well over 30% of what would be considered a 10-year normal average.

We talked about the agricultural process. In the 1950s and 1960s there were no white-tailed deer in Saskatchewan. We didn't have racoons. We didn't have wild turkeys. We didn't have a lot of the species that are prevalent today. It was the agricultural process they followed that came here and that landscape was changing and continues to do so. As those things occur, certain species take great advantage of them and some unfortunately don't do as well.

It's an ebb and flow process. That's why we need good wildlife managers.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to Mr. Calkins, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's great to be here at the environment committee again.

I am an Alberta MP and I've been a hunter and a fisher my whole life and a former conservation officer in the province of Alberta. I'm proud to say I'm one of the 24,000 members of the Fish and Game Association in Lacombe, Alberta. I work quite a bit with Dave Powell—I'm sure, Mr. Lowry, you know Dave very well—and have a great relationship there as we work together to enhance fishing, hunting, and trapping opportunities, not only for Albertans but for all Canadians.

I would say quickly that while there might not be a direct position, I believe there are several organizations across the west on the Prime Minister's hunting and angling advisory panel.

Mr. Lowry, or Mr. Crabbe, or the gentleman from the Yukon, Mr. Zealand, I'm wondering if you have seen—from having people either directly from your organization or through other organizations that you closely work with—any benefits of that advisory panel.

I'll start with Mr. Crabbe.

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: Absolutely. I sit on the HAAP and as with most advisory panels and other types of organizations like that, it took some before we started to have some traction. I can tell you that all of the participants on there right now in our discussions before, after, and during the HAAP meetings are finding some real positive benefits starting to develop. I'm looking forward to our meeting in June. I think there are going to be some great things that are developed through that process.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Fantastic.

Mr. Lowry, do you have any comments on that particular body?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: Yes. Of course we have representation on there as well. I attended the first meeting of HAAP a few years ago.

My comments would be around wildlife being managed provincially. A lot of times we get tunnel vision with regard to our province, but we have to realize that it extends beyond that. This gives a great forum to see what others are doing and also to collectively manage the landscape outside of provincial borders.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's a fantastic point and probably an unintended consequence or benefit to an organization like that, whether they are dealing with chronic wasting disease or other kinds of issues that don't know any borders when it comes to provincial jurisdiction.

Gentlemen, you are all aware I'm assuming of the budget proposal in budget 2015 that seeks to put \$10 million a year into the recreational fisheries conservation partnerships program. I know there are a number of organizations within the province of Alberta, specifically the Alberta Conservation Association, that have had some success in applying for these funds.

I'm wondering if any of the three of you want to talk about some of the benefits of what is seemingly a small amount of money federally. This is bringing that money back to deal with inland fisheries, or what I would call freshwater fisheries, and some of the way that money can be magnified or compounded to do great local projects to the benefit of folks who are going fishing, taking their kids fishing in local trout ponds, and so on.

Can you talk a little bit about some of the opportunities that might be available due to this increased funding?

I'll start with Mr. Lowry this time.

Mr. Wayne Lowry: I'll talk about one project specifically that has benefited from this. As you know in southern Alberta we have a lot of water bodies that are created due to the irrigation that's done there. We have a lot of reservoirs down there, and there's never been any attention paid to the shorelines and the habitat around the shorelines. It's typically been used for grazing, and the cattle are coming right down to the water.

But in conjunction with Alberta Conservation Association, we are working to get those habitats fenced off and to do off-site watering off of those projects so that the habitat around those reservoirs can actually develop into really good habitat for not only the fish species but also the wildlife that uses the habitat around those bodies as well.

• (0950)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: That's fantastic. I know Cows and Fish does a great job of dealing with some of those things in the province.

I'll just leave my last comment—I'm assuming I'm just about out of time—to my friend in the Yukon, Mr. Zealand.

Mr. Zealand, as an Albertan, I have the privilege of hooking my truck onto my fifth-wheel trailer and then hooking a second trailer onto that, whether it's my quads for hunting or a boat to go to the lake and take my family fishing. I have the good fortune of being able to drive over to Mr. Crabbe's province of Saskatchewan. I can do the same thing in Montana. I can do the same thing in Idaho.

Unfortunately, the province of British Columbia does not allow this in certain areas. Now there's a good reason not to allow it in certain areas, but I've driven the Alaska Highway and I've been to the fine territory of the Yukon to do some these things. It would sure be great if we could get some pressure put on, whether it's the B.C. government or the Yukon government, to allow these double units to be towed. That would expand economic benefits from people in Alberta who do have some disposable income to spend on these kinds of things and broaden the area in which folks can do that hunting and fishing they love to do so much.

I'll just leave that with you, and I want to thank you, gentlemen, for coming to committee today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins. Your time is up. I appreciate your comments.

We'll move now to Ms. Leslie for five minutes.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Thank you very much to all of our witnesses.

I would like to start off by picking up on something Mr. Sopuck mentioned in his first line of questions, talking about hunters being the unsung heroes of conservation. I'm paraphrasing a bit. We're here as federal legislators and we're trying to figure out what we need to do as federal legislators or whether we need to do anything when it comes to hunting and trapping.

On that issue of conservation, you're not the only witnesses who have talked about the kinds of conservation work that hunters and trappers are doing across Canada. It should be celebrated, for sure. I'm wondering, though, if you can tell us about some of the barriers and some of the obstacles to the conservation work that you're doing. What is it that we need to know is really difficult about the conservation work and what role can the federal government take to make it less difficult?

I'll go through the list starting with Mr. Zealand.

Mr. Gordon Zealand: I'd say for us that when these programs becomes available, the various requirements for participation in them should be as simple as possible. Even if you look at the fisheries fund, for example, you often find that things get so complicated that various groups will bow out because the requirements to do the bookkeeping, and what have you, for a particular program are so onerous that you just don't have the time to put into it. So that would be one suggestion I would put forward.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks. Administration seems to be an issue.

Mr. Lowry, what do you think are some of the barriers to your group's ability to do conservation?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: For myself, I would say that the greatest barrier is the competing interests. When we have agriculture and oil and gas activities requiring an expanded land base to carry on and to expand their businesses per se, the dollars that support those things far outweigh the dollars that we as conservationists can raise to compete with them on a dollars-and-cents basis for a site with an ecological or environmental benefit.

● (0955)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Can I ask a quick follow-up on that point? What would be a solution that could be offered? Point-blank, is it money? Is it facilitation? Is it through consultation? What would help?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: What would help is a regulatory body that would look at particular properties and activities and assess the greatest value that the particular site or landscape could offer. There have been notable increases in ecological values, and if we could get those values brought up higher on the importance scale, then we could further conserve those types of habitats and environments.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you.

Mr. Crabbe, what are some of the barriers to conservation that you see?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I certainly agree with both of my counterparts. Red tape is a significant issue, to the point where, in Saskatchewan, when the fisheries opportunities came up with the federal government, we tried to apply, but because at that point we received much of our funding from the fish and wildlife development fund, which was considered funding by the provincial government level, we were not allowed to access any of those dollars. To this day, we haven't accessed any. We now provide governance for that fish and wildlife development fund. We presently have four applications in, but I'm very fortunate that I have someone in our office who likes to write proposals. It's a difficult process.

The other thing is that I completely agree with competition with industry. We have to balance. In Saskatchewan, we have the potash industry, oil and gas, farming, and whatever, but the environmental concerns certainly come second. I would say that we are pretty lucky here. We deal quite well with most of those industries and benefit from them, but I think there's a recognition that environmental impacts and environmental concerns, in many cases, are secondary to industrial needs.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thanks to all of you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to our last questioner, at least at this point. No one else is on the list.

Mr. Sopuck.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Thanks.

Mr. Crabbe, you talked about women being the fastest-growing segment of society at taking up hunting and the shooting sports. I have the honour of being an instructor at the Manitoba Wildlife Federation's "Becoming an Outdoors-Woman" weekend, and it's a fascinating experience. Can you speculate as to why women are taking up hunting and the shooting sports in a way that they didn't decades ago?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: It's interesting. I just hired a new education coordinator. Her first day was yesterday. In all of our interviews, she pointed out very accurately that she grew up through this whole process.

I hate to give much credit to *The Hunger Games*, but we have a program here in Saskatchewan called "National Archery in the Schools". We have over 260 schools in the program and 25,000 to 30,000 kids participating. The majority of them are young women. When we try to determine from them why they're enjoying the sport so much, they quite often point to the influence that movie had on them. They fully believe that they are every bit as capable.

I can tell you that we just had our provincials last weekend. We had over a thousand kids compete. Sixty per cent of them were females, and all the top shooters were females. I think some of the barriers have finally started to drop. We notice that a lot of those kids who are in grade 12 or whatever are starting to get into bowhunting now, so it's playing out exactly as we had hoped.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: I think that we traditionalists tend to underestimate the effect of the media. The movie *A River Runs Through It* did wonders for fly-fishing, so we cannot underestimate the importance of mass media for our activity.

Mr. Crabbe, I know that the SWF participates in many habitat programs and Saskatchewan is a major participant in the North American waterfowl management plan. Can you talk about the North American waterfowl management plan in terms of conservation activities in Saskatchewan?

• (1000)

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: A lot of people probably don't realize that our pothole system here in Saskatchewan, as I mentioned before, contributes to, if I am not mistaken, about 80% of the duck population in North America. Having the support of NAWMP, if I can refer to it as that, in Saskatchewan, and the support of all the other interests that are in there, has really turned that whole process around. You probably know better than most, Mr. Sopuck, what a turnaround has occurred in the last 30 years in Saskatchewan, and therefore, in North America with duck production because of NAWMP and its activities.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Lowry, you talked about your organization's work with agricultural producers. It's a very sticky policy wicket to deal with in terms of conservation of wildlife on a privately owned farmed landscape. What advice would you have for the federal government in terms of policy related to conservation on the privately owned farmed landscape?

Mr. Wayne Lowry: The biggest thing that always seems to come up here is that there is some kind of compensation formula for landowners for these habitat preservation values that they have on their land. When we set up agreements with the landowners, and it's large tracts of land out there, it's purely voluntary. The landowners

are often the best conservationists. They have a real connection to the land, and all we are doing is structuring that and helping direct it in favour of the habitat that's on their land.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Crabbe, you mentioned predators being somewhat out of whack in terms of numbers. How do we go about restoring the balance? Do you think the public is ready for a significant predator control program to restore the balance of nature on the farmed landscape?

Mr. Darrell Crabbe: I think we have to have some additional education. Again, I talked about that 80% of the public. If you can convince them using good science that certain things need to be done, I think they will, absolutely. We are controlling so many of the aspects, and we are the changing factors in a lot of these populations, increases and decreases. If we are prepared to influence part of the process, that's not good enough. We have to be prepared to play our role in all of the different species. I certainly believe we have to increase those opportunities.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank all of our committee members and give special thanks to our witnesses today. I don't think the average Canadian would recognize that Mr. Zealand, for example, had to be ready at his post at 5:45 a.m. For some of us from the farm background, that might...also, Mr. Lowry and Mr. Crabbe, at 6:45 a.m.

It is really great to see the sacrifices that you make for our country in your hunting and angling activities, but also in appearing early by video. We recognize we have saved a lot of dollars for the Canadian taxpayer, but we have also saved a lot of potential greenhouse gas emissions by not flying each of you here, and I want to thank you for that.

At this point, we are going to suspend for five minutes, and then we are going to reconvene. We have a couple of issues we would like to discuss in a session with the committee members.

Thank you again, all of you.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1005)

The Chair: [Inaudible—Editor]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Also, thanks for distributing this list of who is coming up on the agenda. That is great to know in advance.

I wanted to see if there is any agreement here about Thursday. Thursday is Senator Nolin's funeral. I know there are buses being organized so that parliamentarians can attend his funeral in Montreal, and that starts in the morning. It is regrettable because I see the witnesses who are on the list for Thursday and they look like great witnesses, but I wonder what the feeling of the committee is about not holding a meeting on Thursday to allow those of us who want to go to the funeral.

The Chair: I don't want to presume or speak to that issue. However, I do want to point out to the committee that we have May 7 slated for committee business. I personally don't see us taking more than 15 or 20 minutes of that time for committee business. My suggestion would be, if the committee agrees to Ms. Leslie's suggestion, that we could potentially ask our clerk to either move ahead some of the witnesses from this coming Thursday, or shift the two other groups that are still on the schedule—move the May 5 witnesses to May 7, and move the April 30 to May 5. We will leave this up to the clerk to arrange the best possible option.

That is speaking to the logistics, not to the issue. I just want to point out that there are possibilities, but I want committee members to feel free to discuss the issue.

Mr. McKay, go ahead.

Hon. John McKay: I'd so move.

That's fine. That sounds to me like a perfectly sensible suggestion.

The Chair: You move that we do not meet Thursday, and we ask our clerk to try to arrange the other committee and arrange to keep about a half an hour for committee business to give our analysts instructions for drafting our report. That's primarily the reason for the committee business.

Do I see general consensus on that one?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: I think we're all agreed. That's unanimous.

Thank you, Ms. Leslie, for raising that issue.

If there are no others, we'll declare this meeting adjourned.

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