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• (1300)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. This is meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

I would like to welcome Mr. Bob Benzen, Mr. Brian Masse and Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos, who are substituting for, respectively, Robert Kitchen, Laurel Collins and Terry Duguid.

Today we are hearing witnesses on Mr. Masse's bill, Bill C-248, to create an Ojibway national urban park in Canada.

We don't do sound tests with the committee members who are on Zoom, so I'm going to assume that everyone has a headset that is up to the standard set by the House of Commons.

As for the witnesses, our witnesses for the first hour are here, so they are not wearing headsets. We will do the tests for the witnesses coming on for the second hour.

We have with us, from Parks Canada, Mr. Andrew Campbell, senior vice-president for operations, and Darlene Upton, vice-president for protected area establishment and conservation.

You have, in total, five minutes. I don't know whether you'll be splitting your time or not, but we'll do five minutes and then go into a couple of rounds of questions.

If it is Ms. Upton who is speaking, go ahead, please.

Ms. Darlene Upton (Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you and good day.

I'm pleased to be here today on behalf of Parks Canada. Let me begin by acknowledging that I'm on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people and that the lands covered by Bill C-248 are in the traditional territories of the Anishinabe people of the Three Fires Confederacy, comprising the Ojibwa, the Odawa and the Potawatomi.

I want to affirm that Parks Canada shares the same goal as the bill, the creation of the Ojibway national urban park; however, I would like to be clear that the Parks Canada-led work is separate from the process being proposed under the private member's bill, Bill C-248, and that Parks Canada's input was not sought in the development of the bill, so there are some practical difficulties for Parks Canada that will be difficult to resolve.

I want to begin by sharing a few key facts. The bill seeks to create a national urban park by amending the Canada National Parks Act, which is legislation that was never intended for that purpose. Unique legislation was created for the Rouge National Urban Park in Toronto for this very reason.

The study area under discussion in the Parks Canada-led process is considerably larger than the boundaries outlined in this bill, and that is yet to be reconciled. If the bill is passed, on day one, we will have no choice but to enforce the Canada National Parks Act. As such, any provincial or city infrastructure in the park will immediately become subject to our regulations. This will include everything from sewer lines to roadway allowances, which will create jurisdictional, liability and legal issues that would normally be worked out through the Parks Canada-led work currently under way, which this legislation does not take into account in its current form.

Parks Canada is creating new national urban parks across the country, and in fact has been exploring the potential of an urban park in Windsor since the spring of 2021, before this bill was tabled in the House. The proposed park is found in the traditional territory of both Caldwell and Walpole Island first nations. Walpole Island first nation is not represented by Caldwell First Nation, to the best of our knowledge, and has not been engaged in the development of the bill, to our knowledge.

The duty to consult is a constitutional requirement and needs to begin before decisions are made. Parks Canada engaged both first nations at the beginning of our work, and our process includes both nations at the partnership table. We recognize and respect the rights of indigenous peoples and are committed to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including free, prior and informed consent.

This bill will essentially create an instant park by shortcutting around some important steps, leaving details to be worked out after the fact. It assumes a particular governance model by automatically transferring the administration, management and control of the park to the federal government. Under our national urban park program, we have the flexibility to consider partnership-based models, but the bill will not allow for that possibility in Windsor.

The private member's bill is a new and unknown territory. No national park or national urban park today has been created this way. Under normal processes, land transfers would be negotiated in advance. Complete and meaningful consultations would occur with indigenous peoples, stakeholders and the public, and the funding to operate the park would be secured. In the case of Windsor, none of those steps have been completed yet, and they are ongoing in our process.

This means that the path to implementing the bill is uncertain and that many important questions remain unanswered. For example, who would be responsible for existing liabilities on lands? Who would be responsible for maintaining public infrastructure in the park? These questions are not dealt with through a management plan. They relate to the rights and legal obligations that, if not respected, can result in significant liability to the government.

Parks Canada is committed to creating a national urban park in Windsor, and we're making rapid and significant progress, already working closely with other jurisdictions and indigenous partners. Through our process, we will work with partners to add value to the existing parks and natural areas in Windsor, building on Parks Canada's successful record of accomplishment in creating parks from coast to coast to coast that Canadians hold dear.

Thank you very much.

• (1305)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Upton.

We will move on to the first round of questions.

Mr. Deltell, you have six minutes.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

Welcome to your House of Commons.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't know for sure if the translation is coming through.

[Translation]

The Chair: Are you hearing the English interpretation when I speak in French?

Okay. Go on.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Campbell and Ms. Upton, welcome to your House of Commons. Thank you for your commitment to the Canadian public within Parks Canada.

First, I would like to know more about the process that led to the recommendation or support for a project like this. Did you conduct a financial and ecological analysis of the spinoffs of creating such a park?

Ms. Darlene Upton: We have a process that begins with all the partners around the table. We apply three steps for exploring every topic from boundaries, to governance and many other things.

The first step is a feasibility study. We consult all the interested parties and determine whether they want the project to move forward.

After getting agreement from all the parties, we move on to studies and researching information to establish the park. This could include the ecology, boundaries, leases and occupation permits. We try to settle all those types of things.

After completing that step, we create the park and make the necessary announcements.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Let me begin by congratulating you on the quality of your French and thanking you for speaking in our language. We greatly appreciate it.

When creating a park like this, are these the steps that you want to take or do you launch a consultation and contact all those who want to be consulted?

My real question is whether the indigenous community that is directly affected—obviously we heard from the community—is at the root of this step or if you initiated it.

Ms. Darlene Upton: We met with the indigenous communities at the start of the project and asked them whether they were interested in this. We now have agreements and we also support their participation in this process from a financial perspective.

My colleagues may be able to speak to other relationships we have with respect to this project in connection to other activities.

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Senior Vice-President, Operations, Parks Canada Agency): The two first nations that are next to the park and who have land in the park are the Walpole Island First Nation and the Caldwell First Nation. We already have relationships with these two first nations in connection to the Point Pelee National Park. These two nations have rights to this land. That is why it is necessary to consult the two groups.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That is what I was getting at. In my riding, there is the Huron-Wendat Nation of Wendake, which I have had the great privilege of representing for the past seven years and four days. We know that land claims are a very sensitive topic for every Canadian nation. There is a specific case in my riding, but I will not get into that here because it is not about a park.

It is clear that the first nations have differing points of view. Within Parks Canada, how do you manage the situation if, by chance—I am not talking about this specific case—a nation or an indigenous community complains about the creation of a park, but two other first nations look at the same part of the country, the same land and say that it belongs to them? What do you do?

• (1310)

Mr. Andrew Campbell: That is the case across the country.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I wondered.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It is an interesting question.

For example, in the Rouge National Urban Park, there are seven distinct groups who have land there. The Huron-Wendat Nation is part of it as well because it has history in that region. That is why it is better to bring the groups together and establish a park management system or a business or management plan for each park. We have noticed some competition between the groups. Sometimes there are disputes between them, but usually it is possible to create good relations between every group and the Government of Canada.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That is very good.

Ms. Darlene Upton: The process for creating protected areas takes time. It calls for creating relationships and waiting.

Although it takes time, it is worth it. At the end of the process, we have a place that will often be co-managed, which is good for everyone.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: In closing, I would like to make two observations.

Obviously, these are always sensitive situations. However, it is neither entirely for the federal authority to decide nor for the first nations to find common ground for everyone to win. I think many projects, if not all, deserve the contribution of indigenous peoples. They need to be viewed as partners in prosperity.

Thank you very much for speaking in French, Mr. Campbell and Ms. Upton.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deltell.

Ms. Thompson, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to Parks Canada as the witness.

Perhaps I could begin by referencing the legislation. This bill is using legislation for the creation of national parks or a national park reserve in order to establish a national urban park.

Does Parks Canada have any concerns about creating a national urban park using this legislation?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I will speak just on a couple of fronts. Unequivocally, Parks Canada supports the creation of a national urban park in the Windsor area, so I don't want to mix those two things together. I will just deal with the land perspective and then maybe turn to Darlene to touch on a couple of other pieces.

From the land perspective, under the current act and how it is coming forward, the Government of Canada and Parks Canada must hold clear title to the land—in fact, be able to have clear title on both surface and subsurface land. No title work to date has been done, as far as we know, on the lands that are being put forward. That would be something the committee would want to look at. One thing that comes with that is all of the liabilities of that land.

On the second piece around that, when you look at the borders—and Darlene did mention this—for anything that is subsurface and is already pre-existing, under this bill you would be moving that into the control of the national park. If there was a sewer line that the City of Windsor had going through that area, it would now come under the care and control of Parks Canada; and all of the existing

federal legislation would come into effect on that piece of infrastructure.

On the third piece, because there are some major streets and a parkway that go through that area of Windsor, if both the city and the province wanted to do any changes to them, there is no buffer zone allowed. To take land out of a national park would create an order in council, and you would have to show net ecological benefit for being able to do that, which is not a bad thing. It's just a very difficult thing to do in an urban park and it's why we moved forward with separate legislation with the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park.

• (1315)

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Ms. Upton, did you have something you wanted to add to that? If not, I'm pleased to go to the next question.

Ms. Darlene Upton: No. That's fine.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

Again, to either of you, Parks Canada has the authority to create national urban parks without using legislation. Can you explain this approach to the committee, please?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Thanks for the question.

We have the authority to create national urban parks just with our existing authorities under the Parks Canada Agency Act. We can receive land. We can administer land. The option in the way in which we've been looking at the national urban parks program is innovative, in that we're looking at the potential for a multi-jurisdictional ownership and partnerships and a path forward that wouldn't necessarily require Parks Canada to own the land.

As such, we've been considering using a non-legislative approach, a policy approach, to designate national urban parks, and protections would be conferred on them through a variety of means, including federal legislation. We could still use provincial and municipal bylaws, etc. That would all be worked out in the development.

There are lots of benefits to doing it that way, at least initially. We are running a national program, so we're learning a lot as we're negotiating in discussions with several cities across Canada about their interest.

That is not to say there could not eventually be legislation that's developed specifically for national urban parks, similar to what was done in the Rouge, but at this point we would like more time in order to further the program and to understand what the other parks will look like so we can make the best decisions around potential future urban parks legislation.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Ms. Upton, if I could go back to a comment that you made in your opening remarks around Parks Canada's duty to consult, what more is required from Parks Canada in order to discharge the Crown's duty to consult?

Ms. Darlene Upton: The national urban parks program has three goals. One is for the conservation, to protect important ecological areas in Canada. There is a lot of biodiversity in southern Canada in these urban areas, so that is very important.

The second one is to connect Canadians to nature and bring nature to where Canadians live. Eighty-two per cent of Canadians are urban.

Our third goal is to support reconciliation, and that will be defined by our partners. We have a partnership committee. We have our partners at the table now, and we are starting to work through the process to understand what their vision for reconciliation could be in this context. It could be co-management. It could be ceremonial space. It could be opportunities for businesses. It could be opportunities to share their culture with the public. For us to meaningfully consult, we require the time to have those conversations to understand that vision and for those decisions to be made co-operatively.

The Chair: Thank you. We'll have to stop there.

Madame Pauzé is next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Thank you very much, Chair.

Like my colleague Gérard Deltell, I would like to congratulate you for the quality of your French.

Parks Canada is focusing on the importance of ecological connectivity since roads will be crossing through the park. This speaks to me because the Montreal region has already had to deal with this problem. Perhaps your expertise will help me to understand what happened in my region.

How can we improve ecological connectivity between the parcels that are separated by roads?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Parks Canada is a global expert in this area because we often use overpasses and underpasses to create connectivity.

Normally we have access to studies on the most used nature trails. We have to use two types of structure to ensure connectivity. One of the fundamental purposes of our mandate is to facilitate this movement.

• (1320)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

My last question is the following: what are the advantages of having a national park rather than a provincial or municipal park?

We would be more inclined to have a provincial or municipal park over a federal park. I am sure you are not surprised to hear that.

Ms. Darlene Upton: In my opinion, there are several advantages to that.

Canada is very proud of Parks Canada. We have the numbers to prove the economic benefits for our parks.

I think our urban park systems add a lot to the local economy, while protecting biodiversity, which is very important. Often urban park mandates have one or two objectives. The three objectives of national parks are the following: protection, connection and reconciliation. It is a bit different from urban parks and other types of parks.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: We have heard an indigenous partner mention several times that it is very important to have a nation to nation partnership. That relationship is at the foundation of every park that has been created over the past 20 years.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Your responses bring another question to mind.

If I understood correctly, the bill contains new elements. If those are adopted, can that snowball and be used for other provincial parks, in Quebec for instance? Could certain arguments be made to have this adopted in Quebec as well?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: In some cases in Quebec, such as for the creation of the Saguenay-St. Lawrence Marine Park, for example, we established a structure for enacting mirror legislation by the province and Canada. In those cases, this will create a very close partnership, including with indigenous communities. The small villages throughout this region will also have partners.

However, this type of structure is from another time and special legislation was required to do this.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I will cede the rest of my time to Mr. Masse.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you to my colleague. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for being here, and for your wonderful work across Canada and in our area as well.

I want to assure you, just so you know, after hearing that you weren't consulted on the bill, that it's not the normal process to formally go to a department to do that. We use the Library of Parliament and its lawyers, who are experts. I can assure you that I did talk to many Parks Canada staff, some in Windsor and some in other places, who gave me a lot of advice, especially in learning about the ecological hot spot that we have here. That's actually what caused us to bring the bill to the Library of Parliament. It wasn't out of spite that we didn't contact management or whatever. We talked to many Parks Canada staff, including those in Point Pelee and other areas, to get their professional opinions.

I also want to assure you regarding the bill.... You were working on some type of a plan, and I understand your plan is still a draft plan right now. Is that correct? Is the plan that's on your website still a draft plan?

Ms. Darlene Upton: That's correct. We're consulting on it now.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. You have a draft plan right now.

Would you not agree, though, that before this bill there was a large movement in the Windsor-Essex county area to have a national urban park even before your efforts?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Yes, of course, and we do commend all the work you have done. We share the same goal. This is a different process, and ultimately we will implement the direction of the government.

• (1325)

Mr. Brian Masse: However, you mentioned in your last statement that in your process you might actually end up with legislation, so we would have to then put this in hiatus for a long time.

I guess what I want to make sure is clear is that none of this takes place until the Prime Minister acts and the deal is finished and done. There is lots of time to do some of these things that need to be done in the time being, because you might end up with legislation, just as I have right here. Is that correct? You said that earlier.

Ms. Darlene Upton: We would be looking at.... The bill proposes to establish this park under the Canada National Parks Act. Our consideration of legislation may be specific national urban parks legislation. That's the difference.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes, but in the meantime, we have over 200.... You didn't mention the species at risk there. You were talking about other parks. In this park here, this one only proposes public lands that are actually parks themselves in its geography, except for the only federal land, which is unprotected right now. Did you secure the protection of the Ojibway Shores land? Is Ojibway Shores permanently protected now?

Ms. Darlene Upton: We've signed an MOU. We hope to have that permanently protected, probably in the spring of 2023. We're working through the deal for that right now.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's been several years in the making. That has 200 endangered species on it. Are you saying that an MOU is binding and will happen no matter what?

Ms. Darlene Upton: That is the intention, yes.

Mr. Brian Masse: You're saying that is the intention, so the answer is no, then.

With the MOU, we're guaranteed, no matter what, flat-out right now, that we're going to protect Ojibway Shores. Is that correct?

Ms. Darlene Upton: That commitment has been made, yes.

Mr. Brian Masse: That's a commitment, so it's guaranteed. Are you saying it's guaranteed?

Ms. Darlene Upton: We are in the process.... There are some land swaps that have to occur to make that happen. We are on track. We are hoping to have that completed and that land protected by March of 2023. That's what we're targeting.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, so it's still not completed, I guess is the thing. This bill will do that. That's for sure.

With regard to the infrastructure and the other types of issues that have been raised here, is it not true that in the parks management agreements, those things are worked out with the municipalities, the provinces, and so forth?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: No, that is not correct, in fact.

Mr. Brian Masse: Can you explain that?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: The management planning process, first of all, is not a binding process. Management plans are directional documents that we must, for every park and site in the country, have in place on a 10-year rotational basis. Those set out the direction, but they are non-binding. There is nothing binding within management plans.

The other piece is that for all of those, we would actually need agreements. One of the pieces on those agreements is that in many cases, you as parliamentarians will need the agreements in place in order to say you have free and clear title so that you can gazette those lands. Until that is done, you have that issue before you as parliamentarians.

Mr. Brian Masse: Right, but the parks management agreement, though, actually creates the structure for those discussions. When you have, for example, the City of Windsor, say, the Province of Ontario—

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I'm sorry. No. That is not correct with management plans. They do not set that up.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, so it might be that somehow we can amend that through the bill and work on this if that's the case. We've been told differently, but I'll trust what you're saying here, obviously.

If the municipalities have agreements and the province has an agreement, similar to, for example, the Rouge, isn't it going to be a lot easier when there's agreement? Let's say, for example, that in these situations the City of Windsor is saying that they want to have the federal government assume these lands. The province is going in that direction as well. Doesn't that make all that co-operation a lot easier?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Yes. That's why we have the partnership table, with those partners at the table, in order to work through some of these issues.

As my colleague has stated, liabilities in these types of things tend to get worked out in the negotiation time ahead of the formal establishment, so that the management plan then becomes about how we're going to collectively operate and manage the park and the goals and the visions for it.

Mr. Brian Masse: What management plan, though? Let's be clear.

Ms. Darlene Upton: In the establishment of protected areas, we start normally with the feasibility process, where everybody is invited to the table and given the opportunity to examine whether they're interested in it.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

Ms. Darlene Upton: If everybody agrees to that, we move to the planning and the negotiations part. That's where we resolve. There could be licences or title issues, or we may need to do surveys, etc. We set the boundary in that stage. Once we have all agreed to that and we have all the proper agreements in place, the park is established and the management plan is done.

• (1330)

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay. That's great. That's actually good news. The City of Windsor wants to do this, so it's a just a matter of agreeing to those negotiations and those elements.

That's actually good news. I want to make sure that's not going to be a problem with the bill. The City of Windsor has to agree to, for example, transfer property. All those things will then be discussed during that time process.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Well, that would be one of the things that you will need to look at, I think, as the committee, and as the committee brings the report forward. It's that process, in fact, around the timing.

If I can just use an example, if today there is any issue around title on the lands that the city holds—we don't know, as nobody has done that title work—as it goes forward, then in fact you would have to amend what is in front of the committee today in order to take those title pieces into effect.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have to end on that point. That's a good point.

We'll go to the second round now. We're starting with Mr. McLean for five minutes.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, witnesses.

It's informative, in that nothing is simple, it seems, when we're getting things done through the government.

I do note in your brief—and it's the first question that I would like to ask—that the Rouge national park is the only one that has been set up under its own legislation so far. Is that the only national urban park in Canada?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: It is the only national urban park in Canada administered by Parks Canada, yes.

Mr. Greg McLean: It is set up through legislation by itself alone.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Separately—

Mr. Greg McLean: There's no legislation that already exists that says this is how national urban parks will be set up. Each of these is going to have different legislation, a different footprint.

Ms. Darlene Upton: Right now, it's just the Rouge, and that is why we're moving forward with a policy approach. It's in order to determine the way to do this. It's not normal to legislate each park individually, so at some point, if we want to consider legislation.... Again, it's not required to name a national urban park, but if we wanted to do legislation, we would want to be considering how that legislation relates to the other national urban parks we're setting up. Presumably, we would like to have one bill, potentially, and not legislation for each unique park.

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes, and that's what I'm asking. There is one piece of legislation right now for one park. You just can't mirror that with every other park that you're going to do here. It should be a fairly simple overlay for a park such as the one proposed in this bill.

Ms. Darlene Upton: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Greg McLean: On the principles of a national urban park here that you're looking at setting up—

Ms. Darlene Upton: Yes.

Mr. Greg McLean: —shouldn't this principle be the same?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, you can set up a principled approach, if that's what you're saying, to setting up legislation that in fact could exist for many urban national parks across the country and would be based on some of the principles that needed to be set up for the Rouge. The Rouge had some very specific elements to it that wouldn't necessarily go forward. In that case, it was around ownership and federal ownership of the land.

Mr. Greg McLean: They're all going to have some specific trait.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Some portion of it will have some ownership. That's correct.

Mr. Greg McLean: You mentioned earlier that “any provincial or city infrastructure in the park will immediately become subject to our regulations.” Why is that a problem?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I'm going to try to use an example, because it's probably the easiest way.

Under our regulations, ecological integrity is the number one priority of national parks in the country. As we start to look at, for instance, municipal infrastructure that would go through the park or be abutting the park, that would be the overarching goal we have. In that, for the lands that would actually be transferred, the regulations—I'll use the sewer line, a hydro line or any type of utilities corridor that would go through that park—have not excluded it in the current set of lands that you would transfer.

There is no provision in the national parks act to do that. We added that into the Rouge National Urban Park Act so that if we sat down with the province and it said that for this highway interchange, we need to move the boundary back this much, it was possible to—

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay, I've got it. I have only a little bit of time here and I want to ask just a couple more questions.

Is Meewasin Park in Saskatchewan under consideration as a national urban park?

Ms. Darlene Upton: That's correct.

• (1335)

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

There's another one I want to talk about here. You talked about clear title to surface and subsurface that you had to look at, including the liabilities associated therewith.

Clear title should be pretty easy to get, including in subsurface, don't you think? I mean, it's land that's existed for a long time. With title, it's clearly established who owns it, and it's on record. That's not really going to hold you up, is it?

Ms. Darlene Upton: For any of the lands, we require surveys that are led by Natural Resources Canada. It would do all that work. It's ensuring that all that proper due diligence is done beforehand. It's a timing issue.

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes, but that due diligence is part of your job. For anybody who's acquiring land, it's their job. If this legislation moved you to do that job, it would just be a step in the process.

Ms. Darlene Upton: That happens ahead of the legislation coming into effect, though. We would do all of that ahead of legislation coming into effect.

Mr. Greg McLean: The way I'm used to seeing it here, legislation from Parliament will direct the bureaucracy to take action. I'm hearing you say that you'd rather have the department take action on its own without direction from a bill that's passed by Parliament.

We know there are steps between A and Z. There is a bill in front of Parliament that is moving towards having Parks Canada create a new park. Are you saying that process is stopping us there?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: No—

The Chair: We're going to have stop there. Maybe you can elaborate on that in an answer to someone else. It's an interesting point.

We will go to Ms. Lambropoulos for five minutes, please.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Parks Canada for being our witness today to answer some of our questions.

This is my first time on the committee, so my apologies for not necessarily knowing the full length of the bill we're discussing. I did read briefly on Bill C-248 and I listened to your testimony.

Based on what you were saying, steps had already been undertaken prior to this legislation being introduced to the House to create a national urban park in Windsor. Therefore, I'm looking for a confirmation on this: Whether or not this legislation gets passed, will there be a park created in Windsor, in your opinion as representatives from Parks Canada?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Again, we commend MP Masse on his work and his dedication to establishing a park. We do want to do that too.

Our process will take a little bit longer than this bill, but will achieve the same result in the end. However, as noted, there are a lot of challenges with a bill that creates a park without having done some due diligence on—

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Perfect. Thank you very much.

Also, I come from a riding that is looking to have a national park created close by. Considering that approach, I was also wondering what the potential consequences could be of this bill going forward. I'm talking about from a budget stance.

You've mentioned having the goal of creating several national urban parks across the country. If this bill were to move forward, would that be to the detriment of other parks that you have in your planning?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Thank you very much for the question.

Obviously, as public servants we do take our direction from the government. The Speaker has ruled that this in fact does not create the necessity to have a royal recommendation. Therefore, we wouldn't be in a good position to comment on that.

That being said, obviously what the feeling must be is that we would be able to reallocate funds within our existing budget to be able to do this, or that Parliament would appropriate new funds.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Technically, it wouldn't necessarily affect the creation of these other parks. That's what I'm hearing.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Again, it's a difficult question to answer. Right now we would need to find funding to do this and other parks if there were no appropriation. The only way to do that would be to not do something else.

I don't want to say what that "not do something else" would be, but it would be to not do something else or to have every one of our national parks across the country have a reduction in the amount of service and the amount of protection that we would provide.

• (1340)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you. Then it would affect other areas. I appreciate the response you gave and the way you were able to give it.

Next, as other members have mentioned, Rouge national park in Toronto was created. It's a great example to look at as well. An act was created. Of course, that's why you're looking to have a broader scope and to create more parks without necessarily creating an act each time, but if this bill were to go through, what are some changes that could be made if we looked specifically toward the Rouge national park act? Is there anything we should be taking from there that was done properly and that could be added to this bill?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I think there are a couple of things that would be good to look at. Certainly, when we were doing the negotiations....

I will say that I was responsible for those negotiations of land transfer with the Rouge National Urban Park. One thing we did do at the end of that, between the municipalities, the regional government, and the Province of Ontario, was to say that a certain percentage of the park could in fact be utilized in the future for urban infrastructure.

That, I think, is a positive, and I think there were positives around the fact that there was an established indigenous circle for the leadership within that park. There was an established provincial, municipal and regional governing body. There was an advisory committee to the minister.

I think those are all very positive elements of the Rouge National Urban Park that should perhaps be considered as you move forward.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Madam Paupé.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: The more I listen, the more I am concerned.

I understood that you already had an initiative similar to the one in this bill. I also understood that you are wanting to create federal municipal parks elsewhere.

Could you tell me where in Quebec? The purpose of the question I asked earlier was to raise this concern, to know where the federal government is planning to appropriate places or land in Quebec to make federal municipal parks.

That is my concern.

Ms. Darlene Upton: As far as urban national parks are concerned, our goal is to discuss and create a park with partners, which is possible to do without appropriating their land. In fact, this is part of our mandate. We are currently in talks with the cities of Montreal and Saskatoon, as well as the Cardwell community and others across the country.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I have another more specific question.

When you are meeting with representatives from the City of Montreal, do you talk about what is referred to as “le Champ des monarques”? It is in the shadow of the Dorval airport, on federal land that has been leased to the Montreal airports authority, which is currently destroying the land.

What are your thoughts on that zone?

Ms. Darlene Upton: There are several places. We are having conversations with our partners to determine whether there is a better place. That being said, there are many possibilities in Montreal.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: In other words, several places in Montreal would become national urban parks and not be part of the municipality or Quebec.

Ms. Darlene Upton: It is truly too early to determine that. The discussions have not gone far enough yet. We are aware that agreement needs to be negotiated between Quebec and the federal government. We are exploring the possibilities.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: That is all for me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes. That question really spoke to me as a member from Montreal. Indeed, it is just on the other side of the boundary of my riding.

Mr. Masse, you have two and a half minutes.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's what makes this project very special. We have the municipality that requested Parks Canada not take over that property; that's one of the reasons it has consensus. It's the same with the Province of Ontario.

I want to go to an issue that I have concern about, though. You're suggesting that if the legislation goes through, it would affect other parks. If we save the species here in Windsor, then are there going to be compromises somewhere else? Wouldn't the government come up with resources or a plan? That doesn't sound appropriate, in terms of a response. If this is held off even longer....

I'll give you a good example. Ojibway Shores is the last national spot there under the port authority. We've stopped it from being bulldozed. It has 200 endangered species. You mentioned about a memo of understanding. That's why I'm worried about this, because it still happens.

Perhaps you can tell us what's happening with your department now. They have shoreline erosion right now on that last piece of property on the Detroit River international boundary. We have shoreline erosion taking place daily on that. Are you doing anything about that right now, or do we have to wait until...? When will this draft become public in terms of what the real policy is? That's my concern. As we wait around and wait around, we're going to lose more species at risk here.

• (1345)

Ms. Darlene Upton: At this time, Parks Canada is not administering that Ojibway Shores property at all.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, so we have shoreline erosion taking place and we're losing significant parts of it. In fact, the port got money to actually scope the climate change along there.

With regard to the draft national urban parks policy that you're undertaking? right now, do you have public meetings? Do you have minutes that you can provide to the public of all the meetings and people you had there?

We've had public meetings. We've taped them. We've put them on social media. We've engaged in lots of communications, petitions and so forth. What can you provide to the committee in terms of minutes and meetings, and with whom, that you've had over the last number of months?

Ms. Darlene Upton: The first public meetings associated with the draft policy were when the minister did the minister's round table in 2020. We've been working with select partners and expert groups and getting feedback on the draft. We'll be going to public consultation shortly. We have to consult on all policy.

Mr. Brian Masse: Under the Parks Canada Agency Act right now, there is a duty to consult, and also to consult repeatedly at I think two years, five years and 10 years, and to report back to Parliament, to all of us here. Is that not true?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Well, we report to Parliament—

Mr. Andrew Campbell: There is a two-year requirement under the act for the minister to hold their round table and for the CEO to report every two years. Every 10 years, a management plan is required for every park.

Mr. Brian Masse: Great.

What's the comparable under your plan right now?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Sorry, under...?

Mr. Brian Masse: Well, with your draft plan, what's the comparable? That's what's going to take place if we pass the bill.

The Chair: We're out of time, unfortunately.

Mr. Brian Masse: We don't know what your plan is.

The Chair: We're out of time. I gave you more time than—

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know you've been generous.

The Chair: Mr. Benzen, you are next. You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm going to cede my time to Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Great. Thank you.

Maybe we can follow up on that.

Comparing what we know is law and what we have from the Library of Parliament and from the act, which we have in front of us as well, how does your draft plan compare with that in terms of public consultation and accountability and reporting back to Parliament?

Ms. Darlene Upton: The development of the plan is under way. It will follow the normal policy development process, which will include extensive public consultation.

As I mentioned, we've had several meetings with expert groups to inform the initial draft of the policy. We'll be moving to full public consultation on that, and a record of what was heard will be produced.

In terms of the—

Mr. Brian Masse: Then there is none right now. If you can't—

Mr. Andrew Campbell: There was—sorry—and there is, under—

Mr. Brian Masse: What can you release to us publicly about the draft plan's provisions to consult with Parliament on a regular basis, compared to the current process for national urban parks or urban parks in general? I know what we have in law and what has to happen and what has to come back to us in this building, but what I'm looking for is how your contemplated plan compares. Can you share any of that? Nobody knows that right now.

Ms. Darlene Upton: This is a new program, and we're operating under a draft policy. However, we envision, similar to all our programs, that there will be management plans that will be tabled in Parliament. As the national urban parks program will be under the agency, we'll be doing our normal reports to Parliament—our corporate priorities and our reports.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'm sorry, but I'm pretty passionate about this because I'm worried about Ojibway Shores right now and the entire continuity that's at risk. Taking a longer time to do that and not even knowing whether it's going to be accountable is a worrisome thing to me.

With regard to what's been taking place in Windsor and Essex County, can you table any minutes or information about whom you've been meeting with and when? I've been open in terms of having public meetings. We've done a lot of petitions. We've done a lot of lines of communication. We've had all kinds of different schools involved. We've had a whole series of things. That's why

the city supports us. Caldwell First Nation will come. We've had discussions even informally with others.

I'm kind of wondering what you can share with this committee what you've been doing under your plan.

• (1350)

Ms. Darlene Upton: We maintain a record of the consultations we have. In fact, in our work with the partnership committee, it will be Windsor that will be taking the lead on the public consultation, and we're supporting them to do so, so there will be a public record of all the public consultations that happen.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay, but you have a process that you're saying is in place right now. Can we have those minutes, and can we have those identified meetings that took place?

Ms. Darlene Upton: I would have to verify. Those are partnership meetings, and I'm not sure of the rules of the table on those.

Mr. Brian Masse: Okay.

I had to go with what's in front of us in terms of the law, using the National Parks Act. I want to go to the idea of increasing boundaries later on. Do any national parks ever get expanded at any point in time, and how is that done?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Yes. We do expand parks from time to time. Normally, a bill is tabled in Parliament to expand the boundaries.

Mr. Brian Masse: Right, so if this bill is passed and if, for example, another spot was located later on or we had a great...

I was a vice-chair of the conservation authority. If we had philanthropists who came and gave land to the municipality or something else, it would just be amending those pieces of geography in the act. Is that not the process?

Ms. Darlene Upton: Correct. I would just note that the current study area that's being contemplated by the partnership group is larger, so it would negate some of that later work if we were able to use the larger boundaries currently being—

Mr. Andrew Campbell: If I could, on that...?

Mr. Brian Masse: Of course.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I think that comes back to a little bit of what MP McLean was asking about. Absolutely, that could be done. Normally the process is that you look and you have a study area. You then look, from a parliamentary perspective, and do all of the—

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes. I'm sorry. I have limited time.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: —title work on that in order to make sure that it actually lives up to the requirements of the act.

Mr. Brian Masse: Sure. Absolutely.

I'm sorry that I have to cut you off. I'll be really quick.

That is the normal process to amend. Have almost all of Canada's national parks been amended to increase their size with new lands? My understanding is that it's a yes.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: A great number of them have.

Ms. Darlene Upton: A number of them have.

Mr. Brian Masse: Yes.

I understand what you're saying, but what we were starting with in this bill was the lands that we wanted to compel people to give towards. We have to find a solution to try to improve the bill to allow greater flexibility to include those lands earlier on, but if we can't at the moment, then we could always change the schedule later on, similar to what's been done for many parks across Canada. Is that not correct?

Ms. Darlene Upton: That's correct.

The Chair: We're unfortunately out of time now.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Weiler is next.

Mr. Patrick Weiler (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Parks Canada witnesses, for your testimony already. It's been very interesting learning about all the details of this process.

We've talked a little about the process that's currently under way to create a national urban park in Windsor. I am hoping you could give us a timeline of when you're expecting that process to be completed and to have that established as a national urban park.

Ms. Darlene Upton: Thanks.

As mentioned, we started this project over a year ago. We have a partnership committee with the City of Windsor, Caldwell First Nation and Walpole Island First Nation, and the Ontario government is at the table. We're in what we call a pre-feasibility stage, where everybody's tabling their interests and tabling the things they may want to have studied further in the next phase.

We expect to move into the planning phase and the negotiation phase this winter, and we are on track to establish the park by 2025—sooner, if partners are willing and able and we're able to resolve all the issues and agree on co-management and these types of things.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you for that.

You mentioned some concerns about the due diligence that has been gone through to this point with this bill we're talking about. In particular, you highlighted—and a number of MPs around this table had questions about—the process for consulting and, if necessary, accommodating the first nations in the area. Of course, the duty to consult and accommodate rests with the government, not with individual MPs.

What level of risk do you see for the government if we move ahead with this bill before consulting one of the indigenous groups affected by this decision?

Ms. Darlene Upton: I think that's a difficult question for us to answer. I don't want to speak on behalf of any nations.

I would say that our process is to consult both first nations. To our knowledge, Walpole Island has not been consulted on this bill,

so it will obviously be dependent on their reaction to it, I guess. That's all I can say.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Is it not the process for Parks Canada to consult a nation that might be impacted by the development of a park in other contexts in Canada?

• (1355)

Ms. Darlene Upton: We consult with all first nations. I can tell you that I'm involved in some consultations that involve 19 first nations. They may self-organize and decide how they want to be represented at the table, but that is their choice, not ours. We don't assume one or the other. We invite everybody to the table, and they'll organize however they would like to organize.

At this point, we have both first nations at the partnership table.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Can I just make one slight amendment to what Darlene said? It's "indigenous peoples". It's not just first nations, but obviously Métis and Inuit as well.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Absolutely.

Were this bill to pass, do you have any recommendations for this committee about a timeline for implementation such that we would be able to include some of the due diligence talked about today, as well as have time to engage indigenous groups that might be implicated?

Ms. Darlene Upton: I think there are three things to consider.

One is the timing. Allow for a bit more work, particularly on the boundaries. Our understanding is that the boundaries currently in the bill don't necessarily cover full parcels of land that perhaps want to be included. As I said, surveys need to be done to clarify this in order for us to take administration of the land.

Certainly allow time for a meaningful consultation, in particular to determine or ensure there is a reflection of indigenous interests in co-management, which I think is not currently specifically referenced in the bill.

I think, again, that boundaries would be the big one, so allow some time to look at the boundaries.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: We haven't mentioned it yet, but the one thing that is excellent—and which the partners already out there doing the work today should take a lot of pride in—is the work on the ecology in the area. It has been well documented what a jewel the ecology is in the area.

That, in fact, would speed things along in our process. We haven't looked at whether the ground has contamination from a contaminated site in order to know what the liability would be, for instance. That is the type of due diligence.... Coming back again to that point, we would fully do that work under the direction of Parliament. We fully understand where our role falls in that regard.

Mr. Patrick Weiler: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Weiler.

This has been a very informative and enlightening discussion.

This ends the first panel in the first hour of our meeting. Thank you to the witnesses for their time and explanations. We're going to pause now and bring the next panel online.

Thank you very much.

- (1355) _____ (Pause) _____
- (1400)

The Chair: I see that everyone has passed the sound test and is wearing the appropriate equipment specified by the House of Commons.

We have four witnesses and witness groups.

We have Chief Mary Duckworth from the Caldwell First Nation and Fred Francis, councillor for ward 1 in the city of Windsor. From Friends of Ojibway Prairie, we have the president, Bill Roessel, and a board member, Mike Fisher. From Wildlands League, we have Janet Sumner.

Each witness or group of witnesses will have three minutes for opening statements, then we'll go right into questions.

We'll start with Chief Duckworth for three minutes.

Chief Mary Duckworth (Caldwell First Nation): [*Member spoke in Anishinaabemowin*]

[*English*]

I am very pleased to be here to present today. My name is Mary Duckworth. My spirit name is "The Spirits Are All Around Me". I am the selected chief of Caldwell First Nation.

I have come today to speak to you about the national urban park. I look forward to being able to speak today and discuss how important this park is to southwestern Ontario. I feel that as we all know with climate change, everything in the southwest is on fire. It is a couple of degrees warmer, and we know that we are losing, through erosion, our shorelines on Lake Eerie.

I would like to explain that Caldwell First Nation is located in Leamington, where the band office is; however, our traditional territory extends from Windsor to Long Point. This was well documented. We are descendants of ancestors who fought in the War of 1812 with Tecumseh, Pontiac and the Crown, and so I am happy to sit here to speak about Caldwell First Nation and how important this park is.

We know that we need a legislative framework in order to make this national park happen, and I am here to support the hard work that's been done and the hard work going forward.

I would like to say that we have been consulted by Parks Canada. We were consulted on August 24, 2022. At that time, we were told that Parks Canada had consulted Walpole Island, so I said to Parks Canada that instead of splitting up the nations, let's bring the first nations and the partners to the table and let's consult in a manner that's meaningful. It will reduce the time of travelling between two first nations.

To add to that, we have a good relationship with Point Pelee National Park. The superintendent met with the Caldwell First Nation

chief and council on October 6 to talk about co-management of that park. I do know that the co-management question is out there. The park has assured us that they are creating six national parks, and one of ours in Windsor is just one of the parks.

I'm here today as I was reassured by the parks that this is going to happen. I would not be here today speaking if it's not going to happen, because then I'm wasting your time and my time, so I respectfully say that I look forward to being able to protect the over 200 species at risk and the last natural shoreline of the Detroit River, and I look forward to working with our partners.

I just want to make one thing clear to the committee. I understand that the stakeholders have done a lot of work and that they care and have a lot to be proud of, but I just want to make it clear that Caldwell First Nation and the first nations are the rights holders through section 35 of the Charter of Rights in Canada, so it's—

The Chair: Thank you.

Chief Mary Duckworth: It's been defined. We know who we are, and I say thank you to the chair.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Chief Duckworth.

We'll go now to Councillor Francis from the City of Windsor for three minutes please.

Mr. Fred Francis (City Councillor, Ward 1, City of Windsor): Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before this committee today to help move forward with Bill C-248 and the cause of Ojibway Park.

My name is Fred Francis, and on Monday I was re-elected to Windsor City Council. I am now entering my third term on council, and Ojibway Park falls within the boundaries of my ward.

Many don't realize that when the City of Windsor first took ownership of this unique parcel of land, it was outside of our city limits. The nature preserve was acquired by the City of Windsor from the Canadian Salt Company in 1957, when this land was in the town of Ojibway, and we've been maintaining stewardship of this property ever since. Today, while the municipal boundaries may have changed, our intention remains the same: preserving as much of this pristine, environmentally sensitive land as possible for the enjoyment of future generations.

Residents in Windsor—Essex know that Ojibway Park is a fantastic local feature. The trails at Ojibway Park are an excellent family getaway, just minutes from our downtown core. Just as important, the unique microclimate of southwestern Ontario makes Ojibway Park a unique butterfly sanctuary, with species that can't be found anywhere else in Canada.

Over the past few years, Windsor City Council has passed several resolutions in support of efforts to create a national urban park to link up the municipal, provincial and federal lands in Windsor's west end to create a contiguous parcel as part of a new national urban park.

Our council has also unanimously endorsed the legislation that this committee is considering today. Simply put, Windsor deserves a national urban park managed and operated by Parks Canada, the same that exists in other parts of our great country. The example often cited is Rouge National Urban Park in east Toronto, but in southwestern Ontario, we know very well the benefits of Parks Canada ownership through the fantastic local resource at Point Pelee National Park.

The Parks Canada Agency was created to be a steward and operating entity for unique habitats across our nation and to create and run the programming associated with safe and ecologically sensitive recreation and tourism activities.

The City of Windsor has been doing our best to maintain this environmentally sensitive plant and animal habitat for several decades, and we operate the interpretive centre on site for student visits and teaching experiences. Earlier this fall, the City of Windsor hosted our formal Truth and Reconciliation Day events on September 30 at Ojibway Park.

Many Windsor residents will tell you that Ojibway Park is a special place, but we know that it could be so much more. Only through Parks Canada's ownership and operations can these separate federal, provincial and municipal lands be assembled and maintained to their fullest potential. Many in Windsor are concerned that the ongoing consultation activity is moving too slowly and is meant to distract from the core objective of Parks Canada's land ownership.

Taxpayers in Windsor are concerned that without Parks Canada's taking formal ownership and stewardship of these lands, any national urban park designation will be just another example of down-loading onto our municipality. Simply put, either the federal government creates a national park at Ojibway or it doesn't.

● (1405)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We'll have to stop there, but I'll take the opportunity to congratulate you on your re-election earlier this week.

Mr. Fred Francis: Thank you. Thank you very much.

The Chair: For the Friends of Ojibway Prairie, I imagine it is Mr. Roesel who will speak for three minutes, or will you be splitting your time with Mr. Fisher?

Mr. Bill Roesel (President, The Friends of Ojibway Prairie): We're splitting our time.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Mr. Bill Roesel: Good afternoon.

My name is Bill Roesel, and I'm the president of The Friends of Ojibway Prairie. I'm here today with my colleague, Mike Fisher, from our board of directors.

The Friends of Ojibway Prairie is a volunteer registered charitable organization dedicated to promoting public awareness of the Ojibway Prairie complex and its unique biological, cultural and historical importance.

We would like to thank the committee for providing us with the opportunity to talk to you about why the Ojibway Prairie complex

is so important to our community and why it is imperative to ensure that the complex and surrounding natural areas are protected to the highest degree as a national urban park.

We also recognize its particular importance to indigenous communities, with the Ojibway Prairie complex sitting on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of first nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa and the Potawatomi.

The Ojibway Prairie complex and surrounding lands are a special place, well worthy of the highest level of protection. The key features of the Ojibway Prairie complex are its tall grass prairie and oak savanna ecosystems. The tall grass prairie and oak savanna ecosystems are some of the most endangered ecosystems in Canada. Despite this, the Ojibway Prairie complex is the most concentrated site for rare species in Ontario.

Mr. Mike Fisher (Board Member, The Friends of Ojibway Prairie): A joint written brief has been submitted on behalf of The Friends of Ojibway Prairie, Essex County Field Naturalists' Club, Wildlife Preservation Canada and the Citizens Environment Alliance. The submission also has the support of the Public Advisory Council of the Detroit River Canadian Cleanup locally, as well as Ontario Nature provincially.

The purpose of our submission was to provide four key areas of comment that we feel are essential to the creation of an Ojibway national urban park. These four key areas are legislation that makes ecological integrity the top priority; maximizing park boundaries for increased ecological preservation and habitat; meaningful consultation and partnerships with indigenous communities; and robust community consultation.

While we won't be able to fully cover all of these areas in these introductory statements, we welcome you to review our written brief for any questions you may have.

We would like to touch on the importance of strong legislation that prioritizes ecological integrity to establish Ojibway national urban park. In reviewing the legislation and discussion of Bill C-40 and Bill C-18 relating to the Rouge National Urban Park, we noted significant debate over the high standard set by the Canada National Parks Act for maintaining ecological integrity as the first priority for all aspects of park management. This led to amendments being required and a delay of the transfer of provincial lands to the federal government.

While urban settings can present unique challenges, we would suggest that this is precisely why it is crucial to have strong legislation that makes the first priority of ecological integrity clear. Our community is eager to have such legislation, as evidenced by the City of Windsor expressing its full support that an Ojibway national urban park be created by the Canada National Parks Act.

We thank the committee for the opportunity to appear and will gladly take any questions at the appropriate time.

● (1410)

The Chair: Thank you.

Last but not least, we have Ms. Sumner from the Wildlands League.

Ms. Janet Sumner (Executive Director, Wildlands League): Good afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to speak.

My name is Janet Sumner. I am the executive director for Wildlands League. Wildlands is a not-for-profit charity that has been working in the public interest to protect public lands and resources since 1968.

At Wildlands, we have extensive knowledge of land use in Ontario and across Canada. We have a long history of working with governments—provincial, federal, indigenous and municipal—scientists, the public and resource industries on progressive conservation. We've published on a variety of issues, including the recent Hill Times article on the role of nature networks in urban areas and how they can play a key role in a federal plan to preserve biodiversity.

You may also have seen the results of our work in helping amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act to include ecological integrity as the management priority by law, thereby meeting the IUCN standard as a protected area. We celebrated this achievement with a community paddle of the Rouge, where we had 200 paddlers out for a Sunday paddle with the Prime Minister.

Wildlands thanks the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development for its attention to Bill C-248. Wildlands is a strong supporter of the need to create Ojibway national urban park, and I'll explain why.

For the past few weeks in Ontario we have been witness to the most glorious displays of autumn splendour in recent memory. It's times like these when the beauty of nature is inescapable, even in the midst of our cities. We are fortunate that our work at Wildlands League routinely asks us to go out into nature, shake off the city and get inspired. We also get to see the threats and what is happening to nature first-hand.

I was raised in London, Ontario. As a family, we spent time on the shores of Lake Erie, and as a teenager, I visited Windsor, Chatham, Sarnia, Dorchester, St. Marys, Tillsonburg and back again every baseball season and hockey and soccer year. I know the back roads and the beauty of southern Ontario.

Today there are two main existential threats. These are the increasing climate chaos and the grave loss of biodiversity. In southern Ontario, there is both an incredible species diversity and Canada's fastest-growing and largest urban population, yet barely 3% of the landscape is safeguarded by permanent legislated protection. It's no surprise that the majority of Canada's at-risk species are clinging to existence.

I'm actually going to jump ahead in my remarks so that I get this last point in.

What we hope to see is a nature network in Windsor, but we need to create it in the right way. We need to make sure that the legislation includes and prioritizes ecological integrity. Right now, moving forward with policy, we don't have that guarantee.

Further, the transfer of provincial lands, which are actually governed by the Ontario Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, does include ecological integrity as the management priority.

If those lands are transferred, there is a risk that the transfer will actually downgrade protection in law.

That's why we fully support Bill C-248, as do the City of Windsor and the chief of Caldwell First Nation. We would like to see protection of ecological integrity in law.

We also support the opportunity for co-management of the Ojibway national urban park and defer to the first nations on how they may want to move this forward.

Finally, I'll just—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Janet Sumner: Thank you.

The Chair: There will be time to explore these issues through questions.

Mr. Kurek, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Damien Kurek (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Thank you very much. Thank you to the witnesses for joining us here today.

I've found over the course of debate—this being a private member's bill—that it seems as though there is significant support for the creation of this park. It remains interesting that all but two members of the government voted against the private member's bill, but the unique dynamic of a minority Parliament saw that it passed. It is now before this committee. It certainly provides some interesting opportunity for collaboration.

I listened with great interest—and I hope that the witnesses had a chance to listen—to the Parks Canada representatives earlier.

My question is for Chief Duckworth and Councillor Francis.

There seems to be a hang-up with the process. The government and Parks Canada have said that the process through a private member's bill is problematic, yet we've heard significant support for Bill C-248 moving forward. I'd like to open it up to both of you to provide some comments, particularly about the process question. We understand the support. On the process question, why do you support or not support Bill C-248 as the mechanism to create this park?

We'll start with Chief Duckworth.

• (1415)

Chief Mary Duckworth: *Meegwetch.*

The mechanism is a legislative framework. That's the mechanism that's been used to create the Rouge. Being able to create a new legislative framework, we can create a really strong document to work from to ensure that the first nations are being consulted, that we all have a voice and that we're able to protect the land.

I work in first nations government and I don't understand what the holdup is. I know that for me and the Caldwell citizens, this is important, as I'm sure it is for Walpole. Walpole is not here, maybe because they just had an election. They are just getting oriented. I'll speak to that. I'm not sure.

Maybe Mr. Francis could answer that better.

Mr. Fred Francis: We support the legislation in Bill C-248 because it's a tried and true process. When we're talking about policy negotiation, we don't know what that entails. With legislation, there are firm parameters as to what that entails, to the point where the City of Windsor has offered its parcel to Parks Canada at no cost.

Not only that, but we know how significant it is to have a park run and established by Parks Canada—sooner rather than later—with Point Pelee. We've seen it. That allows us to protect this significant portion of land throughout our city forever. Future generations of Windsorites and, quite frankly, everyone in Essex County will be forever grateful to the federal government if we are able to move faster.

That's why we support this legislation that we're considering today. We know what that entails. It's concrete and it allows us to move forward sooner rather than later.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I appreciate that.

It's interesting that often the conversation is around the requirement for government to do something, when it's actually Parliament. Government is a function of Parliament. I think in a minority Parliament there are certainly some unique opportunities to forward these conversations.

To both the chief and the councillor, concerns have been raised about the challenges in consultations and some of the technicalities around boundaries and whatnot. Are you confident, given your experiences with Parks Canada and different levels of government, that if Bill C-248 passed, some of those challenges that have been highlighted could be overcome?

I'll go to the chief first.

Chief Mary Duckworth: I'd like to say that absolutely they can be overcome.

Of the issues brought up by Andrew Campbell, the one thing I think will be an issue is consulting indigenous people. I refer to the rights holders. The rights holders are the Three Fires Confederacy, which are the five nations within southwestern Ontario, which now have a deal with Hydro. We are co-owners in the lines that are being run through all five nations' territories.

I did hear Mr. Campbell mention the Métis. The Métis are indigenous, but they are not rights holders and they are not from southwestern Ontario. As you'll see, the federal government and provincial government—

Mr. Damien Kurek: I—

Chief Mary Duckworth: —are very cautious in who they consult with.

Mr. Damien Kurek: I really hate to do this, but Councillor, do you just have a quick comment? I'm almost out of time. I just wanted to make sure that you both get a chance to comment on this.

• (1420)

Mr. Fred Francis: Yes, I'm confident that we're able to move forward. Yes.

Mr. Damien Kurek: Chief, you have a few more seconds. If there is anything you wanted to add, I'll go back to you.

Chief Mary Duckworth: No, I just feel that all the support is here. The support has been there. I just feel we wouldn't be here today if we did not table this bill. I made it clear with Parks Canada to please move through the process in a meaningful way so that we don't finish this park in five years.

I think I'll end on that comment. *Meegwetch.*

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Longfield, go ahead for six minutes, please.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for helping us with this study that we're doing. When I voted in the House for this bill to come to committee, it's exactly for the reason that we can dive into what's been happening in terms of consultations.

Chief Duckworth, in particular I was interested in the relationship that you've had so far and also the relationship with Walpole. This summer I was up in the Chippewas of Nawash Nation and also the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, and in terms of the relationship between those two nations, I wonder about any kinds of parallels in the relationship that you've had with Walpole and whether what was said in the previous testimony about having an agreement... Now you're mentioning that five nations possibly could be involved with the discussion around this park. Is there some type of an agreement with you and Walpole?

Chief Mary Duckworth: To be clear, we always say as first nations people, let us worry about our relationships—

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Sure.

Chief Mary Duckworth: —and you worry about yours. I think that was important to say to the park when they were consulting the two of us, so to put it to you in a way with the five nations, we understand our territory and we understand we work within that territory. There are five nations within that territory; two need to be consulted.

You have the Pinery provincial park. They are consulted by Kettle Point. There are other parks.

Now I forget the question.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: You're answering the question by showing the complexity, and that's what I really wanted to see on the record.

I feel like we haven't heard from Walpole, and that's a concern I have.

Chief Mary Duckworth: I think that you have to look at it. You can't force people to the table. I have a close relationship with Walpole Island. I worked on their territory for 17 years. I know the people and I know the chief. There's no way we would hurt our sister nation. We don't do that to each other. There are never any fights in the paper; I don't know if you noticed. We always take care of business collectively within the Three Fires Confederacy.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Great, super. We're learning, as settlers. It's very similar to what I found in Chippewa, which is that people worked in each other's areas and family relations are even tighter.

I know that Parks Canada is consulting with Walpole about making sure that if people can be at the table, they're invited to the table.

To go over to Councillor Francis, congratulations as well on election to office, and thank you for your service. I'm not saying that lightly but I do have limited time.

I know that in the initial stages when we did the Rouge as a first run of a national urban park, we had to learn how to work within the levels of government as well as with the citizens we're all serving, but each of us has our jurisdictional responsibilities.

My understanding is that the goal is to create 15 new urban national parks, and that 20 submissions came forward to Parks Canada for consideration. Edmonton, Saskatoon and Windsor have now actively engaged. I know Montreal is looking and Victoria is also looking at becoming engaged in the process. In trying to get a framework for national urban parks in Canada, we're still fairly early, but some of the complexities are about having subsurface liabilities. For example, who's responsible if the sewer breaks, and does that fall under city council or does that fall under Parks Canada, and how do we know the difference between the two?

Have you been involved personally with the consultations or with the competition, first of all, to get from 20 down to a smaller number?

• (1425)

Mr. Fred Francis: With the competition itself, no. I would assume that would be up to city administration and their committee with Parks Canada. As I said before, the Windsor City Council has passed unanimous support for this legislation. You'd have a willing partner in the City of Windsor. I don't foresee that to be an issue at all.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Part of the reason for my question is that there is a group in Guelph that wants to come forward and be considered as a candidate for one of the future parks. However, Guelph City Council hasn't discussed it yet. We haven't gone any further than a group saying there's a part of Guelph that could be a national park, and what do we do to get the interest of the federal government? I get phone calls on that.

Unanimously, I think we would all love to see a national park in our areas, but there is a process, and now we have two processes.

Are you working with the Bill C-248 process or with the Parks Canada process, or are you doing both at the same time?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Fred Francis: It's both at the same time.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, that's pretty clear.

Madame Pausé is next.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé: Thank you very much.

I thank the witnesses for being here with us.

If I understood correctly, you are all in favour of Bill C-248. However, Parks Canada is already working on this and, as Mr. Francis was saying, you are working on two projects.

Earlier we were wondering about the use of Bill C-248 when there is already a process under way. We were talking about time as a factor and saying that we could speed things up through Bill C-248. We talked about protecting biodiversity.

My question is simple. Do we really need to go through the federal government? Would it not be faster to go through the provincial or municipal government?

The Chair: Who is that question addressed to?

Ms. Monique Pausé: Anyone can answer it.

The Chair: Are there any volunteers?

[*English*]

Mr. Fred Francis: I'll just jump in, then, and answer it very quickly.

I respect the question, and you're right. However, from the City of Windsor perspective, the more rapid approach is more favourable, more concrete. It allows us to move forward quickly and to know what we are getting into.

For us anyway, the more rapid approach would be more favourable, and that is why we're here to speak positively about Bill C-248.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé: If I understand correctly, this will go faster if we opt for Bill C-248 instead of a provincial or municipal process.

The Chair: Mr. Francis is nodding his head.

Ms. Monique Pausé: Mr. Francis nodded his head.

The Chair: Yes.

Do you have any other questions?

Ms. Monique Pausé: I will cede the rest of my time to my colleague, Mr. Masse.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Thanks to my colleagues who have been so generous. This has been a long journey, and I really do appreciate that and the questions being asked.

My first question is for Chief Duckworth.

The Caldwell First Nation is an interesting story. You did your part for our country, and you had to go through a long period of time to establish the footprint you have right now.

I remember when we crashed the Gordie Howe bridge community benefits when you were left out of that process. Would doing this properly be part of reconciliation for that most recent mistake? Next to this project, we have Canada's number one infrastructure project, and you were left out of community benefits, despite being basically the section 35 landowners.

Chief Mary Duckworth: That's a great question, Brian.

In truth and reconciliation, we talk about that, and the truth is that we're trying to create a national park through a legislative framework so that it is solid and it will be there.

The reconciliation part comes with action. There can be no truth and reconciliation without actions from the governments that sit over top of the nations. We like to see ourselves as equals to you; however, we are not treated as equals, as you know.

We've come a long way. Caldwell First Nation was guaranteed Point Pelee and the lands around it, which was our traditional territory, after the War of 1812. However, the settlers pushed us off. We then needed to go into a specific land claim process, which was granted. We won, and there's long documentation to speak of our history.

Being able to have truth and reconciliation means exactly what we're doing. Look at us all working together at different levels of government, as well as non-government, special interests and people who care about the environment. We're all at the table.

We're all waiting. I just feel like we're waiting for Parks Canada to say that they're going to do it or they're not going to do it. I'm a little confused. I understood it was going to be done, that they were mandated to do it, and there were six parks. That's the issue I have.

Also, we know Canada has aligned itself with the rights of indigenous people. Where is Canada at with that? Now that Canada has adopted that, it's a piece that we need to look at when we're developing these parks and respecting what is happening.

Meegwetch.

• (1430)

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, and thank you for your leadership on this.

To Councillor Francis, I'm not sure everybody understands the significance of the Gordie Howe bridge that's going up. In the areas that we represent, we have 40,000 vehicles per day that go through, and 10,000 trucks. This new border crossing is actually going to assume much of that traffic.

I have concerns about an unregulated draft policy that we have with the government's plan right now. I'm not saying it's wrong for other spots, but it is for this spot, and it might even end up with legislation. My concern is how long it takes.

The Gordie Howe bridge is going to come in a couple of years. There are going to be tens of thousands of vehicles right next to this place and running along the entire ecosystem alongside it.

What are your concerns about how long this takes and the supports necessary to support this fragile ecosystem? It's going to get an inundation of traffic that's new, right next to it. I'm really worried. We've seen how the memorandum of understanding for the port land for Ojibway Shores has taken forever, for lots of reasons.

Do you share any of those concerns?

Mr. Fred Francis: I do, and that's a great point. As you all know, Windsor hosts the busiest border crossing in all of North America. With the Gordie Howe International Bridge set to come online, that traffic and that intensity is going to increase.

The city supports Bill C-248 because it allows us to move quickly, because we really have an opportunity, and time is not on our side when we're talking about vehicular traffic increasing. We have an opportunity to move fast now and really safeguard this gem, and increase this gem and grow this gem now, and grow it for decades to come.

We know that the border traffic is not going to decrease. It's only going to increase, so the opportunity is now, in our opinion.

Mr. Brian Masse: Your organization does a lot of work with ecotourism. The Gordie Howe bridge is going to have a free bike and pedestrian access lane. We're going to connect into this Ontario ecosystem. Slow Roll Detroit, for example, has 4,000 people who go out on Monday just to bicycle and so forth, and we actually have some of the "Great Trail of Canada" into the United States there.

Do you have any concerns about the stress on the ecosystem if we don't have the proper supports to do ecotourism correctly?

Mr. Fred Francis: Absolutely. Obviously, protecting the environment is a concern for all of us. Hosting that busiest border crossing in all of North America does provide stress on our ecosystem. Anything we can do to safeguard against that and put the resources in place to battle it is something we're interested in.

Quite frankly, the City of Windsor cannot do that alone. That's yet another reason that we're calling on Parks Canada to essentially take stewardship and provide maintenance for Ojibway Park. The City of Windsor is looking for that, as we just don't have the resources to do that alone.

Mr. Brian Masse: Ms. Sumner, could you respond to this, too?

Ms. Janet Sumner: I'm sorry, MP Masse. What was that question again, just so I get—

Mr. Brian Masse: It was the stress on the ecosystem that might take place with regard to increased traffic and ecotourism that might take place down there. Point Pelee has been under stress from that as well. My concern is the length of time it will take to get a full operation and plan—

Ms. Janet Sumner: Yes, I think Bill C-248 allows us to move forward quickly, but also you have the consultation that happens around the park management plan. That's an ongoing process [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in Rouge National Urban Park and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] situation here, where it will be an ongoing process to manage that park management plan.

It also allows Parks Canada to engage in the broader ecosystem and be speaking to some of these issues that would be happening because of the increase in traffic.

Mr. Brian Masse: I'll go back to Ms. Sumner.

How do we increase spaces in parks like the Rouge? Can you give a quick analysis of the Rouge and Windsor, and why Windsor is a little bit different?

• (1435)

Ms. Janet Sumner: Rouge National Urban Park has been growing ever since its creation, and I'm the chair of its advisory committee, so that's how I know that it's an ongoing process. I think it shares more similarities than differences, because it too is made up of unconnected or separate parcels of land. When they brought those together, you could manage them as one park ecosystem and start to think of it that way and grow greater ecological integrity.

I'm hoping that a similar approach is taken with Windsor and that it still enshrines ecological integrity as part of the management plan and in its legislative authority.

Mr. Brian Masse: Has that structure been really helpful when it comes to roads and other infrastructure that's there? I know the Rouge has lots of complex uses, having been there myself. Is that the way to go, having that type of a system in place?

Ms. Janet Sumner: Yes, I think it's a matter of the conversations.

Some of it was excised from the park. For example, Highway 401 is not actually inside the park, but just adjacent to it, and it's been excised from it. That's part of the conversation that you have in the park management plan and its creation, while other pieces—like agriculture, for example—are part of Rouge National Urban Park, where you can do things in a way that are actually moving you in a more positive direction on ecological integrity. It allows you to do all kinds of stewardship programs, as with farmers who own land there.

Mr. Brian Masse: There are concerns over the ecosystem right now, and the stresses of climate change, and I mentioned the intensification that's going to take place with the new transportation corridor that's coming online and climate change and other factors.

Ms. Janet Sumner: Yes. We call this Canada's ecological hot spot, because it is where biodiversity loss is at its peak. It's also where climate change is being felt. You have the microclimates there. The city of Windsor is routinely suffering from flooding and heat events. Preserving these areas will actually be your buffer against climate change.

What we've seen in the past with Rouge is that once you start to move forward with a national urban park, people start to find parcels of land in their couch cushions. They can start putting

things forward: What about adding this? What about adding that? It actually improves and makes the ecological integrity greater.

The experience of Windsor so far seems to be proving that point. We're finding people in adjacent towns who are saying, "Hang on a second; I have a parcel of land that I think would work well here." My expectation with the park is that there won't be just one expansion but many expansions. That's what I'm hoping for.

Mr. Brian Masse: Does anyone from Friends of Ojibway Prairie have any opinion on that?

The Chair: There are 15 seconds left.

Mr. Mike Fisher: Go ahead, Mr. Roesel.

The Chair: Be brief, please.

Mr. Bill Roesel: Certainly there's a lot of opportunity to increase what we have down here, with lots of areas to make this park bigger and to help ensure the survival of this very rare ecosystem.

The Chair: That's perfect.

We'll go to the second round. I'll try to keep the minutes to four, four, two, two, four and four instead of five minutes. It's a 20% decrease, but I'll be flexible if you're onto something really interesting.

Go ahead, Mr. Benzen.

Mr. Bob Benzen: Thank you, witnesses, for being here today. It's been an interesting discussion. It looks like everybody wants this to happen. It's just a matter of getting the right process in place.

Parks Canada today said they would have a park in place by the end of 2025. In their notes, they say it will be a bigger park. We can get Bill C-248 passed sooner, but it will be a smaller park.

I'm curious to know how all of you feel about what the trade-off is there on having a slightly longer time frame but a bigger park in the long run for the ecology, and preserving the ecology, or having a park sooner but a smaller park. What are your thoughts on that?

That's to all the witnesses.

Mr. Mike Fisher: I'll say on behalf of Friends of Ojibway Prairie that it's an excellent question and something that we all weigh, because we're looking at two processes and are trying to find synergies between the two to make this happen the way we all want.

We're certainly acknowledging the work Parks Canada is doing with the City of Windsor to identify those lands, and the work that is being done through Bill C-248 to make it happen and happen quickly. We're hopeful that through the amendment process there may be ways to create some sort of collaboration there so that it's not two independent processes working on these things. There might be some collaboration so that we can make this happen quickly and also maximize the footprint for the park.

• (1440)

Mr. Bob Benzen: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Fred Francis: Yes. The City of Windsor supports Bill C-248 because we understand what that entails, and we believe it's more concrete. Our fear and our concern is that the City of Windsor will receive a national urban park in name and name only, and nothing much will change. You'll still have federal, municipal and provincial ownership of the separate pieces of land. With legislation, we know we don't get that. We know it will be taken on by the stewardship of Parks Canada.

That's why we're advocating Bill C-248. Our fear is that otherwise we will get a national park in the form of a media release and a media release only.

Mr. Bob Benzen: Okay.

Chief Duckworth, Caldwell nation has expressed support. It's reported that you're going to be co-managing this park. I'm not sure if that's exactly true, so perhaps you could first confirm that. Will it be a first in Canada that a first nation will be co-managing a park with Parks Canada? Can you give us some background in terms of how much of an influence you will have, what the structure will be, and what your role will be in terms of that co-management of the park?

Chief Mary Duckworth: Yes, I can speak to that.

We're early in discussions, and we had spoken to Parks Canada about a co-management model which has been done before. I'll leave it to Janet to give you that background.

What does co-management look like? Co-management has a first nations lens which would be.... If Walpole was interested, great; we would co-manage together. What does it mean? It means walking in lockstep with the park to ensure we are taking care of everything that we committed to take care of.

What does that mean? It means the people, the water, the plants, the animals—all of that, in a comprehensive plan and manner, so that we know exactly what our duties are and what our responsibilities are to each other. Co-management to me means partnerships and working together. I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Ms. Taylor Roy.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

It sounds like everyone is in favour of establishing this Ojibway national park and it sounds like it will be absolutely amazing.

The major question is, how do we establish it? Do we proceed with Bill C-248, and then do due diligence and work out management plans, and so on, or do we wait and have that due diligence and some of the other work done first, and then establish it?

One of the things about Bill C-248 that concerns me is that it's adding this under the Canada National Parks Act, and in that act there are currently no urban parks. The Rouge National Urban Park has a separate act, the Rouge National Urban Park Act. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on the flexibility or the ability to make changes and to deal with some of these issues.

There are really two things I'd like you to comment on. Since the park is going to be established by Parks Canada either way, why would we not work out the co-management plan as happened with the Rouge National Urban Park and look at some of these due diligence issues prior to.... It's almost like putting the cart before the horse. Why would we want to do it this way as opposed to the other way, when there's clearly been a commitment to establish six new urban parks, and we have the example of the Rouge National Urban Park that was established?

Perhaps you can comment on that.

Mr. Francis, I know the City of Windsor has been working with Parks Canada already on the process that was set in place by Parks Canada. Why is that not a good process? Why do you want to do it through Bill C-248, instead of following through on the process that you're working on currently?

Mr. Fred Francis: It's because we don't know what the process is and what it entails. We can say, "Put the cart before the horse", but our fear is that we're going to get a cart and no horse, or a horse and no cart.

As I said, our fear, from the City of Windsor's perspective, is that it's going to be declared a national urban park via media release, and nothing really changes.

• (1445)

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Can I just do a quick follow-up on that?

Mr. Fred Francis: Sure.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Why do you fear that, given the example of the Rouge National Urban Park that was established? Legislation was set, and all of the things that were pledged to happen did happen.

Mr. Fred Francis: It's because everything has opened up to a policy that's based on negotiation, and there's no concrete—

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: It was in that case too.

Mr. Fred Francis: But there's also legislation involved. If we allow legislation to be involved, it eliminates all that ambiguity. It eliminates all that potential negotiation, not knowing the process, and what it would look like moving forward.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Couldn't you look back to the process that we used for the Rouge National Urban Park? There was a process that took place by Parks Canada.

Mr. Fred Francis: But that also included legislation, right? Moving forward with Bill C-248 removes all that ambiguity, and it moves us forward to where we all want to go without any ambiguity. Everyone knows what's going on, how it's going to play out and what it will look like for decades to come.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: But this bill just outlines the parameters of the boundaries of the park, and it becomes part of the Canada National Parks Act. How does that address your concerns about the process?

Mr. Fred Francis: Once it moves under Parks Canada, everyone knows that emblem and everyone knows that logo. We know what that entails moving forward. We know it locally with Point Pelee. Our fear is, again, that having essentially the status quo, it would just be called a national urban park. Moving it under Parks Canada rapidly through legislation removes all those concerns and allows us to move forward relatively quickly.

The Chair: Ms. Taylor Roy, you have 15 seconds.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Parks Canada spoke earlier in this hearing today, so you'd be working with the same people in Parks Canada on the same process, but you're basically saying you don't trust that it would happen unless this legislation is in place. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Fred Francis: I don't know what that process entails. I don't know what the end outcome could be. With legislation, I do.

The Chair: We'll have to go to Madame Pausé—with pleasure, of course.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pausé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we lost the connection and it came back, I will ask the same question. However, in listening to Chief Duckworth, I wondered whether the choice to go to the federal side would allow this co-management with Chief Duckworth and her representatives. Would this not go faster—I get the sense that people want to proceed quickly to protect and expand this park—on the provincial or municipal side of things?

[English]

Chief Mary Duckworth: Thank you for that question.

As you know, first nations are federally governed. We fall under the federal government. We do not fall under the provincial government or a municipality.

Federally, we have a great relationship with Point Pelee. We do a lot of work with Point Pelee. So does Walpole, our sister nation. We meet together. I feel that we need this bill. I feel that if we don't get the framework—get the bill legislatively done—it will just sit there, and then it's nothing.

I heard you say that it would be great to let a longer time go by for consultation. Then you leave it up to the park, to their schedule and how busy they are. Are they motivated, knowing this park could eat up some funds? That's what I've heard.

I hope the federal government can allow these parks to happen. They will be funded in the manner they need to be. This isn't the first co-managed park. I wish I had all the time in the world to talk to you about it, along with my friend Ms. Sumner, but I don't. She's a great ally, if you ever need information.

Meegwetch.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Masse.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to bring Ms. Sumner in on this.

Those have been excellent questions, and I'd like your opinion because of your experience with setting up the Rouge and other parks, and with your work going on now.

Ms. Janet Sumner: Rouge National Urban Park was established by legislation, which guaranteed ecological integrity. It starts from that point; then you do your management plan.

That's what Windsor is asking for. They're asking for legislation that guarantees ecological integrity. While it is an amendment to the geography, it would be added to the Canada National Parks Act, which guarantees ecological integrity. That's the starting point. Then you do your management plan.

The two processes are not the same. Right now, what Parks Canada is promising is policy. There's no guarantee. As the city councillor from Windsor referenced, we don't know what comes out of that process. Right now, what we do know is that if you get an amendment to the Canada National Parks Act, you get ecological integrity. Then your management plan is written with that as its governing principle, just like Rouge's was. They want a similar process to that of Rouge. They're just not asking to create a separate body of legislation.

I can tell you all the reasons that had to be done. It was a very complex landscape, where there wasn't this unanimity of agreement; there was actually great division. Separate legislation was the only way to create that unanimity.

• (1450)

Mr. Brian Masse: What makes this opportunity unique is that we have so many partners: the City of Windsor, Caldwell First Nation, Friends of Ojibway Prairie and the amazing work they've done, you, and many others. There's the Unifor environment committee. I could go on and on. We have that kind of consensus.

The Rouge is very special, but the drafters of the bill, when they looked at it, told us that this was the best way to go for everything.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Mr. McLean, you have four minutes.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to all the witnesses.

I'm going to cede my time, because I think Mr. Masse knows more about this than all of us. I'm going to let him have the floor.

Mr. Brian Masse: Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity, especially because I want to go back to Chief Duckworth.

With regard to the other projects you're doing with Caldwell First Nation, can you highlight them and why this fits into the other projects you're doing? You haven't been rebranding for long in terms of getting back into the area. I've represented there for about 20 years, and having you emerge has been an exciting chapter.

Can you highlight some of the other things, and how this fits into those other things taking place?

Chief Mary Duckworth: Yes, I would love to.

We have a very strong relationship with Point Pelee and the superintendent there and all the staff. We're the only first nation that participates with them in a deer herd reduction, also known as a cull. Caldwell First Nation hunters go in and remove the overpopulation of deer in order to keep the park safe. That meat is harvested by us and given out to our first nation members, where we represent 400 citizens.

There is a re-emergence, as you said, because we have the land base now. Before, we were scattered. I think it's important to note that the park has done a lot of work with us in renaming some of the streets from settler names to our first nation names. The park has done murals with Walpole Island and us with regard to the art, as with the Gordie Howe bridge and those two big pieces of art on the Gordie Howe bridge. One is from a Caldwell citizen and one is from a Walpole citizen. We know our boundaries and we respectfully work with each other. Walpole sits with us at the table at Parks Canada when we talk about the development of their 10-year plan, which we just went through.

I think it's important to have the bill go through with parks because we already have a relationship established with Point Pelee, Walpole and Caldwell. I think it fits under their mandate. I believe it's important.

I know that we're talking about adding pieces, but at this time I would just love to be able to have that legislation go through to protect that piece of land and to create something wonderful in southwestern Ontario, knowing what we're going through with climate change.

We're doing the same in Point Pelee. We're looking at bringing back the wild rice. It was one of our discussions. We've talked about how we're going to manage that and about how we are going to have other people come into the park, like the schools. We're really big on working with the schools and the teachers to educate them on Point Pelee and its history and its biodiversity and its partnerships.

We have a partnership now with Hydro. We just signed with them, so we're working there. We're also working with the City of Windsor and with Doug Ford to ensure that we're allowing big projects to come through the Three Fires Confederacy territory, as we have a special table set with Doug Ford and seven ministers.

As you know, we have a lot of Hydro battery storage. Windsor's going to be doing battery vehicles. A lot of energy is going to have to come through our territory, and if we can't save that one little piece, knowing everything that we're about to do to shift from climate change, then shame on us for not being able to do that.

Meegwetch.

• (1455)

Mr. Brian Masse: Really quickly, for the Friends of the Ojibway, are the volunteers prepared like you are to help move this quickly in terms of the hours you put in?

Mr. Bill Roesel: Absolutely: I think we will certainly put all the effort we can into it.

The Chair: That's good.

Go ahead, Ms. Thompson.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

This is probably going to be the end of the session, and I would like to allow the four groups to answer this question. Understanding that time is limited at the end, could you keep each of your answers to probably just under a minute?

The question is for each group: What is your vision for this national urban park and how would this bill support the vision?

If I could, I'll start with you, Chief Duckworth, and then go to Mr. Francis, The Friends of Ojibway Prairie and Ms. Sumner.

Chief Mary Duckworth: *Meegwetch.*

The vision—and we've talked about the vision for Caldwell First Nation through our indigenous lens—is to be able to protect the land. It's to be able to ensure biodiversity. It's really important for us, knowing that the bridge is there too, and ongoing, and that we are exploding with housing. The vision is to have that green space so that when you come off that bridge and it's really hot outside, you can come down and go into the national park and you'll feel it and see it and the water.

I see it as I explain it to you, but the vision is for all of us, not just for Caldwell, so I say *meegwetch*.

Mr. Fred Francis: Thank you for the question.

The vision really is to connect Ojibway to the last piece that's missing right now onto the Detroit River. From our perspective, from the city's perspective, we have an opportunity to create something that's going to make not only Windsorites but all Canadians proud, and for decades to come, and not only for now, but to continue to improve it throughout the decades. It really would be something 50 years from now if future generations of Canadians would look back and say, "They really did something good here." That's our vision.

Mr. Mike Fisher: From the Friends of Ojibway perspective, we'd really love to see a solution that represents our community and that is very collaborative, with all parties working together on something that we as a community can be proud of. Ultimately there would be legislation for protecting endangered species in the ecosystems and something as expansive as possible to provide a large footprint to protect corridors and allow for the protection of species. To reinforce what's been said, we'd really love to see something that the community can be proud of, something that's legislated and ensures optimal protection for ecological integrity and provides as wide a footprint as possible, because we want to protect as many lands as we can.

Thank you very much for the question.

Ms. Janet Sumner: Thank you very much for the question. I'm actually going to quote a young person I know. When he was eight or nine, sitting in Rouge National Urban Park with the meadow around him, he said, "It's so quiet here."

He didn't have a screen in front of him. He didn't have anything that he was playing with. He just had the ability to absorb the quiet and appreciate the species that are there. That park is surrounded by development. It has Highway 401 running through it.

My vision and my hope is that Windsor will have this great a jewel. I think my experience with the Windsor process is that everybody starts to stand up and come to the table and wants to make this the gem that it can be. It's just an incredible parcel of land. I've walked various parcels, and that shoreline is amazing.

We also have American friends who have come to see it, and they are looking with great hope for Rouge National Urban Park to be created. They see it as a sanctuary for birds.

That's my vision and that's my hope for Windsor.

The Chair: Thank you. That takes us right up to four minutes. That was a nice wrap-up.

Thank you, Ms. Thompson. Thanks to all the witnesses who shared their perspective on this project. Thank you, Mr. Masse.

We'll be doing clause-by-clause study on November 15. On November 1 we will dive into Bill C-226 on environmental racism. We'll go on with that and then come back to this bill on November 15

Thank you, everyone, for participating. Have a wonderful weekend.

The meeting is adjourned.

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