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# Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia





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• (1030)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone.

I was going to welcome—

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Excuse me, Mr. Chair, but I would like a clarification.

Will the minister be here on Wednesday?

**The Chair:** Yes, he will.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Is his attendance confirmed?

**The Chair:** Yes, it's confirmed. He will definitely be here, unless he's unable to attend.

I was going to welcome you all after a long summer break, but since we saw each other recently, I've already had the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Godin is here today replacing Mr. Leslie, I assume, and Mr. Martel is replacing Mr. Deltell. Mr. Boulerice, who is participating in the meeting by video conference, is replacing Ms. Collins. Mr. Drouin is replacing Mr. van Koeverden. Finally, Mr. Simard is accompanying Ms. Paupé.

Obviously, you are aware of the measures put in place to prevent acoustic incidents. For example, when you're not using your earpiece, please place it on the sticker on your desk as indicated.

Today's meeting is a long one, ending at 1:30, with three panels.

First, we have Dr. Justina Ray, who is president and senior scientist of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada. We also have Mr. Martin Bouchard, director of the Association québécoise des entrepreneurs forestiers. We also have three representatives from the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, Yvan Duceppe, treasurer of the CSN, as well as political advisor Julien Laflamme and union advisor Isabelle Ménard. Finally, we have two representatives of the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec, Mr. Denis Bolduc, who is the general secretary of the FTQ, and Mr. Patrick Rondeau, who is a union advisor, Environment and Just Transition.

You each have five minutes for your opening remarks.

We'll start with you, Ms. Ray. You have five minutes.

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray (President and Senior Scientist, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, As an Individual):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for the invitation to speak to you today. My name is Justina Ray. I am president and senior scientist of Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, but I'm also an adjunct professor at the University of Toronto and Trent University. I'm a wildlife biologist by training. I've worked on caribou one way or the other for almost 20 years, conducting field research in Ontario; leading evaluations on caribou status for the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, or COSEWIC; and advising both provincial and federal governments on caribou recovery and critical habitat.

My remarks today will directly address the first point of the committee's study—the threats facing caribou and the measures that can be taken to protect them. Here I will outline why this proposed emergency order is not a radical intervention; why the available scientific evidence is sufficient to act; and why this intervention, while necessary for the goals of caribou recovery, is merely a stopgap measure.

The first point is that based on my review of the available evidence, the emergency order is not only justified but could also have been extended even further when looking at the point of view of caribou. It targets three boreal caribou populations in Quebec at exceptionally high risk of extinction, but our evidence shows that the order could have been applied to additional populations in Quebec that are also in poor shape. As well, the scope of the order is conservative, with limited areas of interest within each area or each range, and the prohibitions don't restrict everything. For example, they don't restrict mining activities. Overall, this proposed intervention, from the point of view of caribou recovery, is a restrained response to a well-documented emergency situation.

My second point is that it's a common tactic for those uncomfortable with the outcomes of scientific assessments to call for additional studies to be sure. I would strongly advise not to capitulate to this narrative. Boreal caribou are among the most well-studied wildlife species in Canada. Research consistently shows that habitat disturbance leads to population declines. This relationship has been documented repeatedly across multiple jurisdictions across Canada and acknowledged by governments, including that of Quebec.

For one thing, the population surveys that form the basis of this assessment were diligently conducted by Quebec government biologists to the highest of standards, yielding high-quality data that provide a clear picture of the status of boreal caribou populations in the province. Similarly, habitat loss and degradation in these areas have been thoroughly documented. For these three populations in the proposed emergency order, habitat loss has been continuously increasing to such an extent that more precise estimates of this would not change the overall diagnosis of the situation. There is very little habitat of any kind left in these three ranges, so more sophisticated or detailed habitat analyses are unnecessary. In this vein, delaying intervention under the guise of seeking more data only increases the risk of irreversible losses and makes future recovery efforts more costly and complex if your goal is to recover caribou.

My third point is that the proposed emergency order is fundamentally an emergency stopgap measure designed to address an immediate crisis. This is a critical and urgent step to prevent further declines while more permanent systemic solutions are developed and implemented. It's important to emphasize that neither Canada nor Quebec has stated that preventing extinction alone is sufficient, nor have they said that other factors should justify the loss of these populations. They still maintain that they want to have self-sustaining populations, but there's been no meaningful action beyond the monitoring program initiated in 2017. A lot of experience tells us that these kinds of continued delays reduce the likelihood of success and will lead to higher costs in the long term.

In conclusion, the scientific evidence supporting the need for emergency intervention is clear and compelling. Accordingly, the proposed emergency order is not an overreaction but rather a necessary and proportionate response to a crisis that has been brewing for years—if, again, the goal is to recover caribou to self-sustaining populations. The situation is not unique to Quebec. Similar challenges exist across Canada where boreal caribou populations are declining and have reached or are reaching emergency status.

That's it. Thank you so much.

• (1035)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ray.

We'll go now to Martin Bouchard from the Association québécoise des entrepreneurs forestiers.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Bouchard (Director, Association québécoise des entrepreneurs forestiers):** Thank you.

Dear committee members, participants, the Association québécoise des entrepreneurs forestiers, or AQEF, thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the emergency order for the protection of boreal caribou.

The AQEF was born out of a desire by the forestry industry to be recognized, consulted and heard, because it is the first link in the supply chain for the sustainable and responsible management of our forests. Founded in June 2021, our association has, if we include 30 or so associate members, more than 150 active entrepreneur members, whereas it is estimated that 500 members now make up this group in Quebec. They are all very hard-working people who are

passionate about this beautiful and great resource with its many functions, and whose approach is integrated, open and respectful.

By appearing before you today, we wish to highlight significant concerns related to the proposed emergency order to protect caribou, whose potential implications could have a considerable, even disastrous, impact on our industry and on the dozens of communities that depend on it.

We understand and share the general concern for wildlife conservation and the preservation of our natural environment. Caribou are indeed an iconic species, and taking appropriate measures to protect them is justifiable. However, it is essential that decisions relating to their protection be balanced and take into account the broader economic, social, environmental, and even cultural impacts.

According to available and reported information, the proposed order to create enhanced protection zones for caribou in certain forestry regions of Quebec, Val-d'Or, Charlevoix and Pipmuacan could severely hamper forestry activities, including by suspending operations in key areas designated as critical habitat for caribou.

You've no doubt heard this from other stakeholders in the course of your study, but I repeat that the federal government and Quebec's chief forester both estimate annual losses of allowable cuts, or volumes of wood harvested, at 4%. This amounts to 1.4 million fewer cubic metres per year. These estimated losses are greater than those caused by last year's terrible forest fires.

The results of an impact analysis produced by Environment and Climate Change Canada and Natural Resources Canada last August were widely reported in the media. According to the study, such a decline in allowable cuts would represent a loss of \$670 million to \$895 million over 10 years for the Quebec economy, would have repercussions in at least 28 communities and would affect 1,400 workers.

As reported by Radio-Canada, in particular, this analysis produced by the federal government lists 35 sawmills that could be directly affected by the emergency order, as well as 10 wood product manufacturers, three pulp and paper mills, two cogeneration and energy product facilities, and three other co-op-type businesses. That's a total of 53 companies.

However, this seems to exclude a major player that operates from the forest bed right up to the mill, that is to say the forest artisans, the forest contractors. For generations, these true small businesses have partnered with people who are passionate about forest management and who make their living from it in the broadest sense. Depriving them of 1.4 million cubic metres of wood threatens all these businesses with closure and bankruptcy.

In harvesting alone, if you consider that a typical business has an average annual volume of 60,000 cubic metres, has invested \$2 million or more in modern equipment consisting of a feller, a transporter, three pickup trucks and a truck, and has a team of five to six employees, including the owner, that's at least 25 harvesting businesses that, if deprived of more than \$49 million in revenue per year, will be in grave danger of closure or bankruptcy or will be forced to pivot.

That's not counting all the people who work on the roads or loading and transporting this renewable resource, who will suffer just as much, without a doubt.

By extrapolation, it is easy to estimate double the direct consequences for our forestry entrepreneurs if we maintain the sealed cocoon approach. We are convinced that these restrictions will compromise the viability of many businesses. They will result in the loss of quality jobs, a significant decrease in cash flow between businesses and, inevitably, a form of devitalization of a number of communities that depend heavily on forestry, which will at the same time reduce their quality of life and their ability to support local infrastructure and services.

Above all, we must not forget that forestry contractors live, invest and get involved in their communities. They are a vector for vitality and momentum at the local level. They pay taxes, make purchases, give sponsorships and provide people with quality work, allowing them to support their families and in turn spend money in their own communities and live comfortably in a place of active belonging.

● (1040)

In a nutshell, the point we want to make here is that everything is interconnected, as you no doubt know, and that we must avoid the exodus and impoverishment of Quebec and the regions in their niches of excellence—

**The Chair:** Mr. Bouchard, your time is up, unfortunately, but you will have the opportunity to answer questions and raise all the points you wished to emphasize.

We'll now go to the CSN.

Mr. Duceppe, you have the floor.

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe (Treasurer, Confédération des syndicats nationaux):** First of all, thank you very much for having us here today.

As you may know, the CSN represents more than 330,000 members in all sectors across Canada. I'd like to mention that we represent many workers in the forestry sector.

Let's talk about why we're here today.

Of course, let's acknowledge that the Government of Quebec did not react as it should have. We've been waiting for some years now for it to table a plan to protect the caribou. Unfortunately, that keeps being postponed. We're not here to oppose the emergency order, because we think there is a real urgency. That said, ideally, we would still like to see agreements negotiated with the provinces, as far as possible. I understand that did not transpire in this case.

If we are participating in this committee's study today, it's because we're aware that the implementation of this order will have repercussions. To protect the caribou, obviously, you have to cut down fewer trees. That's been proven by scientists. It is essential. Beyond that, what we have before us is above all a clear illustration of the need for a just transition. That is fundamental. The federal government itself signed an agreement at COP27 in favour of a just transition. We understand that it is often related to oil, coal, and so on, but it goes beyond those sectors. It also affects forestry, which we are discussing at the moment, and it can also have an impact on other sectors, such as recreational tourism and fisheries. We believe that a just transition plan is fundamental to maintaining social protection and mitigating consequences for both workers and communities.

We therefore say yes to an emergency order, but we must plan for that sort of thing.

For example, if workers are affected, why not provide them with training so that they can diversify and pivot? We could provide a transitional measure for workers who have difficulty pivoting.

We recognize that this order could lead to a decline in allowable cuts. For example, I heard Quebec's chief forester present data and talk about significant losses. There is some evidence, though, that it might be somewhat less severe. I don't deny that there will be consequences, but perhaps there should be a more neutral space to concretely measure potential losses.

In our opinion, to find solutions, there will have to be interdepartmental and intergovernmental co-operation, because that will involve a number of projects. We will have to move forward, and that includes the forest industry itself. Could it focus more on value-added products, for example? We have been trying to achieve that for many years, and we must continue along that path.

Ultimately, we are saying that we need measures to support people properly during the transition, whether that be through employment insurance or training programs. We have to find ways to provide targeted assistance to those who will be affected.

For us, a transition is required. Earlier, we talked about forest fires. We are aware of that, but climate change bears some of the blame. So a transition is needed in the short, medium and long term, but we want it to be fair and to take into account both workers and communities.

Thank you.

● (1045)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Duceppe.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bolduc, from the FTQ.

**Mr. Denis Bolduc (General Secretary, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec):** Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting the FTQ to speak on the emergency order to protect boreal caribou under the Species at Risk Act, as well as on the consequences for forestry workers.

For the FTQ, the forestry sector accounts for 15,000 members, mainly with Unifor and the Syndicat des métallos.

We are grateful to the committee for inviting us here today, of course, even though we don't have any praise for the current government's management of the file. Since 2017, the FTQ has been trying to convince the Canadian government that it is urgent to implement a just transition policy, an internationally accepted concept that is endorsed by Canada under the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

By limiting the debate on the just transition to only the fossil fuel sector and creating a toxic landscape around the term, the Canadian government has foregone all the tools at its disposal to deal with a crisis such as the one we are experiencing with the caribou and to ensure the survival of the forestry industry.

For years, the FTQ has been urging the various levels of government to look at the challenges of the green transition and to plan it with those who will be affected by it, in the various economic sectors. The current urgent need to protect boreal caribou with no plan other than to identify protected areas exemplifies this situation perfectly.

From the outset, the FTQ has supported the need to protect boreal caribou. The central labour organization attended COP15 on biodiversity, held in Montreal in 2022, and supported the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal agreement, which aims to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030. It is imperative that these supports be accompanied by just transition measures, and we have reminded the federal government of this on many occasions. The FTQ is consistent about the imperatives of the climate crisis and the collapse of biodiversity, but it is also pragmatic about the needs of its members and their community. One crisis must not lead to another.

The FTQ also welcomed the passing of the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act, but it criticized the fact that the act did not really include just transition elements. The act looks forward, but it leaves workers behind. It does not help prepare the workforce for a transition and a transformation. The caribou issue is a prime example of that.

We fully understand Ottawa's decision to act, since Quebec is not taking this seriously. The situation is urgent, and the biodiversity crisis must be taken seriously. It is not simply a matter of saving a species, but an entire ecosystem, which is an essential ingredient for the survival of life. If the climate crisis were a disease, saving biodiversity would be one of the cures.

We could have supported this order, but the ministers should not have been left with no solutions for workers. For two years now, we have been asking for a joint meeting with Environment and Climate Change Canada and Natural Resources Canada. We appreciate that the Department of the Environment has met with us on this a few times, but we're still waiting for a joint meeting with the two ministers concerned. We have presented a number of potential solutions

and received a number of encouraging signals, but no concrete steps have been taken.

We are aware that the federal government's basket of response measures in Quebec is limited. The FTQ has always called for provincial jurisdictions to be respected. We understand that it is up to the provincial government to take action, which it is not doing. The parameters of the just transition are clear and known to the federal government. The idea is to establish a social dialogue that includes all the parties, including the departments and governments concerned, unions, employers and indigenous peoples. It also means providing a social safety net that is tailored to the situation. In the case of the order, it means rethinking employment insurance—for example, creating a dedicated fund and adapting the measures to the current situation.

● (1050)

The caribou situation is not just about determining how many square kilometres are needed to protect it. It also involves rethinking the forest and the forestry industry.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bolduc.

We will now move on to questions and answers.

We'll start the first round with Mr. Martel.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for making themselves available for this meeting.

My first question is for Ms. Ray.

Last Friday, I met again with the Boisaco forestry workers. If the order comes into force, the lives of these workers and their families will be shattered—that is guaranteed.

Even if we were to prevent the forestry industry from operating in those areas, we would not be able to reach a disturbance rate below 35%.

Ms. Ray, can you assure us that boreal caribou will be self-sustaining under these circumstances?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** In a word, no. I cannot, because my role here is to look specifically at.... Given the goal stated by the province and Canada of self-sustaining caribou populations, I'm just giving a scientific opinion about what that might take.

It is useful to have it be by itself, because if it is decided later that other—

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** I'm sorry, Ms. Ray, but I have to interrupt you. Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Bouchard.

I want to begin by telling you that I had young forestry entrepreneurs visit my office last summer after the big forest fires. We're all aware of the situation. The young entrepreneurs were already very worried about the consequences, given the significant investments they had made.

Can you tell me about those entrepreneurs and their investments?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** Yes, of course.

The business environment in which they operate has changed a great deal. They are having to make major investments in their equipment, not to mention operating costs. Every year, we carry out comparative analyses to monitor changes in costs, and we are noting that it is costing them more and more to do business.

As we know, these are people who have been living off the forest from generation to generation, who work in this industry out of passion and who want to take action in their community. These people were hit by the forest fires. They're seeing a decrease in allowable cuts. They're dealing with the spruce budworm epidemic, as you know. In addition, there are blockades on forestry roads and lumber prices are collapsing. In short, they are sort of caught between a rock and a hard place. So they end up suffering just about every possible consequence.

• (1055)

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Bouchard, am I wrong in saying that, if the forestry sector were to collapse, forestry entrepreneurs would not be the only ones affected? I imagine there would also be consequences for merchants who have sold machines, for mechanics who maintain those machines, and so on.

Am I right?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** Yes, absolutely.

When we talk about cash flow among companies, that's what we're referring to. A forestry entrepreneur buys and consumes local products, invests in their community and even supports it. As far as we're concerned, most of them are small businesses with five or six employees. These are family businesses. Children live in their communities and are themselves local consumers who contribute to the vitality of their community. It is certain that forest-dependent regions will be destroyed if this approach is adopted.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** It is being said that people have to sit down and talk. Were you involved in any consultations?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** Yes, indeed. We also found out—

**Mr. Richard Martel:** I would like to hear your comments on the consultations you took part in.

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** There is a difference between being consulted and being heard. Although we are currently in an emergency debate, we sort of feel that the solutions chosen are ultimately coming from elsewhere and that the solutions proposed by the people in the community and the players on the ground are not really being incorporated. We believe it is important to do that. We feel that putting a glass dome on these territories goes somewhat against the objectives of decarbonization and the fight against greenhouse gases. If our forests are properly logged, managed and used, we will still have added value.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** I wonder whether human beings are considered in all of this. Where do we fit in this?

**The Chair:** Please give a short answer, Mr. Bouchard.

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** We feel that the human aspect is not being considered. We understand the situation, and we don't want to pit humans against other living species, but we think that humans are totally forgotten in the whole equation.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Mr. Bouchard.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mrs. Chatel, the floor is yours.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, we cannot separate humans from the environment. The Conservatives have such a poor understanding of science. I would invite them to read the scientists' report on caribou. I think everyone here, except perhaps the Conservatives, would agree that we cannot have a healthy economy without the infrastructure that supports it being healthy as well, and that includes green infrastructure.

As Mr. Bolduc said earlier, the solution for the caribou includes rethinking the forest and the forestry industry. In fact, a number of the forestry companies in my riding are already at that point. The Conservatives definitely have a somewhat archaic approach, especially when it comes to science. At the end of the day, I think the industry and the workers are already there. There was also a lot of talk about the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act. I think we all have the desire to move together, to move forward, not backwards. The voice of workers is often the voice of wisdom.

Mr. Duceppe, you were talking earlier about the fact that the Government of Quebec has not responded despite the commitments to find solutions made by both Quebec and Canada at COP15.

In your opinion, what concrete changes would be necessary to protect not only the sustainability of the jobs of the Canadians and Quebecers you represent, but also our natural infrastructure, including caribou habitat? What do you think the solutions are?

• (1100)

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** I will yield the floor to my colleagues, but first I want to clarify one thing. Yes, we need healthy biodiversity. The caribou issue, in our view, is a symptom of a much bigger problem rather than a simple problem with the caribou. I'm not saying that the caribou situation is not serious. I'm just saying that our forestry workers are seeing that the forest is changing, and we have to do something.

Our industry is currently very involved in the issue and is thinking in the short term. We know that caribou are affected, but I still want to mention one last point. As we move forward, it is important for workers, entrepreneurs, communities and everyone who lives on the land to define the solutions to be applied. If we can't do that, we'll be in trouble.

I don't know whether Ms. Ménard or Mr. Laflamme, who is with me, can add anything to the answer to the question I was asked.

**Ms. Isabelle Ménard (Union Advisor, Confédération des syndicats nationaux):** I can answer first.

Good morning, everyone.

Good morning, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to add one thing to what Mr. Duceppe said. I would remind you that, in Quebec, there was a very important commission, the Coulombe commission, which—

**The Chair:** Just a moment, Ms. Ménard. Mr. Longfield seems to want to say something.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.):** I can't understand.

**The Chair:** I was just speaking to the clerk about that. I don't believe the sound quality is sufficient.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, Ms. Ménard, the sound quality is not good enough for the interpreters to hear your comments and interpret them. I don't know if it's a microphone issue. Apparently not. Unfortunately, we're going to have to move on. I don't know if Mr. Laflamme wants to answer for you.

**Mr. Julien Laflamme (Policy Advisor, Confédération des syndicats nationaux):** Is the sound from my microphone okay? Perhaps my colleague has time to adjust her audio settings while I answer the question.

**The Chair:** Actually, time is running out.

Could someone answer the question quickly?

**Mr. Julien Laflamme:** I can answer it, Mr. Chair.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Actually, Mr. Chair, I would like to follow up with Mr. Duceppe.

Mr. Duceppe, you said earlier that workers wanted a job in the forestry industry not only today, but also tomorrow. You said something very important: If we don't rethink the forest and the forestry industry, there may no longer be any jobs in forestry tomorrow. That's what we have to think about.

We're all part of the same biodiversity. You said that the caribou problem was a symptom of a larger problem. It also affects us as human beings. Our existence and our environment are at stake.

What concrete solutions are available? What are you saying to the forestry industry to encourage it to change?

I would like to know what Mr. Duceppe and Mr. Bolduc think about this.

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** I will be brief, and then I will yield the floor to Mr. Bolduc, since he has not yet had a chance to answer you.

The important thing for us is long-term planning for the use of the resource, which is fibre. For fibre to be used properly, its value must be maximized.

Historically, plants in Quebec produced two-by-fours. However, we can use the same fibre to create added value, so as to ensure the sustainability of the wood industry over the longer term.

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** If I may, I will also answer the question.

We completely agree with the statement that the importance of maintaining biodiversity cannot be denied. That seems obvious to me. However, in the current situation this emergency order is to apply to, we get the impression that workers are being forgotten. Basically—

**The Chair:** Thank you. Unfortunately, I have to cut you off there.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Bolduc, I'll let you finish your answer, because I'm very interested in it, but first I want to commend the union representatives on the presentation they made. It is always said that unions only look after their members, but I think their presence here and their comments on biodiversity show that unions also have a social mission, and I wanted to acknowledge that.

Mr. Bolduc, my colleague Mrs. Chatel's question was very interesting. You started answering it, and I'll let you continue along the same lines.

● (1105)

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** I was going to say that, fundamentally, we're advocating for a dialogue for a sustainable forest.

Over the past few years, the forestry sector has experienced a number of crises, including the caribou protection crisis, as well as last year's forest fires. There are also ad hoc crises related to softwood lumber. The strategy cannot simply be to redirect people to employment insurance if they lose their jobs. These people need to be supported.

We are calling for the federal government to do everything it can to foster a dialogue for a sustainable forestry industry.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Thank you for the answer.

I think the first nations representatives also advocated for a round table or a partnership, as did the Quebec Forest Industry Council. The Bloc Québécois leader also spoke about this idea at a press conference held exactly a week ago.



If memory serves, it was Mr. Duceppe who said that there was a difference between consulting people and listening to them. The idea of social dialogue, which you and other partners have put forward, consists in a real dialogue taking place after such a meeting.

I'll make a comparison. During the deliberations to elect a new pope, everyone is locked in seclusion and we have to wait for the white smoke to come out. I think the same thing should be done with the various stakeholders—in other words, bring them together, lock the door and wait until the white smoke comes out.

That said, I would like you to tell us about sustainable jobs. Mr. Bolduc, you are right to say that people can't simply be given employment insurance benefits. I can't remember if it was you or Mr. Duceppe who talked about the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act. I would like to digress for a moment to say that it should be called the just transition act, since that is the term recognized by the UN. In Canada, the choice was made to obfuscate things a bit by choosing the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act as the title.

In what way does this act not respond to a just transition situation in the forestry sector?

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** If I understand correctly, the question is for me, right, Ms. Pauzé?

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** I'll let you answer the question, but I'd like Mr. Duceppe to answer it, as well.

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** Okay.

One of our criticisms concerning the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act was that it did not address the just transition issue head-on. We spoke out against it when the bill was passed. Now that it has been passed, it could be used as a tool to establish what we are asking for, which is a dialogue that includes all the parties.

I think the newly established advisory committee, the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council, could take us in that direction. In a social dialogue, we could provide the minister responsible with advice and recommendations aimed at promoting sustainable jobs.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Thank you.

Mr. Duceppe, do you want to add anything?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** I won't add much, aside from the fact that it should indeed be a just transition act, as you so aptly mentioned, Ms. Pauzé. That's the first thing.

Second, we believe in working together. In our opinion, all stakeholders must be included, including those who will lose their jobs. For those people, this is their livelihood, as everyone has mentioned. It is vital to have a long-term vision for them. As we said, the government can't enforce laws that are going to scrap jobs—pardon the expression—without identifying a course of action. Everyone has to work together.

• (1110)

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Pauzé.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** In that case, I will give the rest of my speaking time to someone else.

**The Chair:** That's kind of you, Ms. Pauzé, since our schedule is quite tight today.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Ray.

Ms. Ray, in recent meetings, we have often heard first nations representatives say that healthy boreal caribou are proof of a healthy forest.

How important is the protection of the boreal caribou species for the vitality of our forests?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** It is very important, because caribou are rather sensitive to a lot of human disturbances, including the combined effects of increased fire and human disturbances like roads and so forth, so when caribou populations begin to decline—they're at the leading edge because of their sensitivities—it's usually a very good indicator of other less prominent properties of the ecosystem that are also starting to decline.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Ms. Ray.

I would like to ask you another question. It's about the importance of the type of land that needs to be protected for caribou.

Shouldn't we be working on two things—not only the interconnectivity of the land where the caribou can travel, but also old-growth forests being available for the caribou—instead of sending them to random areas filled with saplings?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** Caribou are very sensitive to increasing amounts of disturbance and habitat loss, as I previously said, so the biggest service to them is to actually limit disturbance over larger areas. Certainly older-growth, contiguous areas of forest are most important for them, because once those start to degrade, then the system changes to one that allows in more predators and early successional species like moose, deer and so forth, and that can then lead to unsustainable levels of predation.

That's why the habitat becomes very important, because the larger the areas you have of these older, mature forests that also produce food for these animals, the better the habitat is in the long run.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Ms. Ray.

We find ourselves in an extremely interesting situation. Many ministers, from both the Government of Quebec and the federal government, have taken part in international conferences where they have made grand speeches on climate change and the protection of biodiversity. However, when it's time to talk about concrete measures, we sense a bit of hesitation and more difficulty.

I have a question for the FTQ representatives. I'm sorry, Mr. Bolduc, but I'll put my question to Mr. Rondeau.

We, in the NDP, were quite pleased to see the proposed Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act, which could have been called the just transition act, but it did not go as far as we would have liked. We were pleased to see that unions' place at the table would be preserved as part of the conversation on the energy transition and sustainable jobs. However, the Liberals did half the job, so that today, the federal government is coming in empty-handed in terms of solutions for the workers whose jobs are at stake in the current situation, when the goal is to protect the boreal caribou.

What would you like us to do to go further in the energy transition, in the just transition, in protecting workers?

**Mr. Patrick Rondeau (Union Advisor, Environment and Just Transition, Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec):** Thank you very much, Mr. Boulerice.

You're absolutely right in saying that this is a piece of legislation on sustainable jobs that resembles a statute on just transition, but it is not one. It's not like what we are seeing, for example, in the European Union, South Africa or New Zealand. It lacks rigour. In addition, it is only looking forward. In other words, it gives consideration only to sustainable jobs that are defined as jobs that can contribute to the net-zero road map, and leaves out jobs that do not contribute to it. Those jobs are not on the radar. The word "transition" also doesn't appear anywhere in the bill. That says a lot.

To demonstrate rigour, a study on the impact of climate change on the socio-economic and environmental aspects of the forest industry related to the protection of caribou should have been done a long time ago. Based on that impact study, adaptation scenarios for the species and decarbonization scenarios would then have to be developed. Afterwards, it would have been necessary to conduct studies on those scenarios' impact on jobs, to make the necessary corrections, as well as to introduce corrective measures for the territory. That is what is being done elsewhere. It's nothing new. We see it quite often with the European Union. In short, that rigour is lacking.

To demonstrate such rigour, all the stakeholders must also be involved. It's not just a matter of getting people around the table and seeing who is thinking about what. Rather, the process involves conducting the necessary studies and bringing people to the table to find solutions that suit everyone. That's what's missing.

We should have learned from what happened in the coal industry. In 2017, Catherine McKenna, who was then Minister of Environment and Climate Change, announced the closure of coal plants by 2030. A year later, thousands of jobs were lost in Alberta. That happened because, once again, an environmental measure was announced without any plan and without including those who would be affected. Those things didn't come until later. Even then, al-

though the report of the task force on just transition for Canadian coal power workers and communities talked about setting up local or regional centres to have that discussion and plan the transition, it still hasn't happened.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have only 10 seconds of speaking time left, Mr. Boulerice. So we will move on to the second round of questions.

Since we have three witness panels today, our schedule is very tight and we don't have much wiggle room. As a result, I have to cut the time allotted to each member by 40%. So each member will have three minutes. The Bloc Québécois and NDP members will have a minute and a half.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for participating in this exercise. I will be very brief.

Ms. Ray, my first question is for you, and I would like you to keep you answer very short.

In your presentation, you said that the intervention provided for under the order was not radical. How likely is the proposed order to be successful?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** It's not radical, from the point of view of the emergency that is facing caribou, when we look at the evidence. As I said, at the end—

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm sorry, Ms. Ray, but my question is simple: What is the likelihood of this order succeeding in saving boreal caribou?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** As I indicated in my remarks, this is a stopgap measure. It is enough to tread water for a very brief period of time and will require systemic changes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Ms. Ray. I would have liked to get a more specific answer, but I'll move on.

My next question is for Mr. Bouchard, from the Association québécoise des entrepreneurs forestiers.

Mr. Bouchard, you said that many businesses would be directly impacted. In terms of the economic impact on the regions of Quebec, how many people and villages do you estimate will be affected, and how much money will be lost?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** In the impact analysis that the federal government itself published, it talked about 1,400 workers and 28 communities. We estimate that about 100 small businesses will definitely suffer economic repercussions from this order. In our view, the cure is worse than the disease.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** My next question is for Mr. Duceppe, from the CSN.

In your opening remarks, you said that the CSN was in favour of the emergency order. Is that true?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** Yes, it's true, but—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Duceppe. That's good. I have another question for you.

How many CSN members are involved in the forest industry?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** Are you talking about the union members impacted by the order?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** How many CSN unionized employees will be directly or indirectly affected by the emergency protection order for boreal caribou?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** Few will be directly impacted, but many may be impacted in the long term.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay. I understand why you approve of this order. Thank you very much, Mr. Duceppe.

Now I have a question for Mr. Bolduc.

Mr. Bolduc, it was music to my ears when you said that you had no praise for the Liberal Party of Canada.

I would like you to tell me about the just transition policy.

What can the FTQ suggest to us to help us improve and work to protect both boreal caribou and the forestry industry?

• (1120)

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, the answer will have to wait, as it is now Mr. Drouin's turn for three minutes.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ray, when answering the question asked by the previous speaker, Mr. Godin, about the likelihood of this order's success, you said that it was a stopgap measure. What do you mean by that?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** I used that in my remarks as well. It is a stopgap measure that's really intended to do enough to keep things in place but is not sufficient in the long term, so other measures will have to be put in place that are more systemic.

[Translation]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Of course, as everyone has mentioned, this is not about eliminating jobs, but about ensuring a balance between the possibility of making a living from one's job and that job being sustainable in the medium and long terms, so that future generations can benefit from the ecosystem as much as my generation and the previous generation could.

How do you think this balance can be created for the forest industry, especially keeping the protection of caribou in mind?

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** The more that time elapses and the less action happens, the more and more difficult it is to achieve a balance, because the measures necessary for recovering caribou from a very diminished state become more and more costly. That is the very difficult situation we're in at present.

The value of having a scientific perspective on this is that it allows one to evaluate what it will take to recover caribou according to the goals of the province and the federal government. If it's considered that only half measures will be possible, then you can see whether or not the caribou will be able to sustain themselves under those circumstances.

[Translation]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Okay, thank you very much.

I now have a question for the representatives of the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec.

You talked about the just transition. You alluded to the fact that the current government had introduced a bill mainly related to CO2 emissions, not to biodiversity. The recommendation you would make to this committee would be to have a similar bill, but one that also concerns the protection of biodiversity, in a context where the government is required to act and take measures. We know that the longer we wait, the worse it will be. I wish we could bury our heads in the sand, but that strategy does not work. We would just be passing the problems on to the next generation.

In your opinion, we should recommend that the government pass a similar bill, but for the protection of biodiversity. Did I understand you correctly?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds to answer the question.

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** My goodness, I would have passed the question on to Mr. Rondeau, but with only 15 seconds left, I think we'll run out of time.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Pauzé for a minute and a half.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** I have a minute and a half.

Earlier, Mr. Rondeau said that perhaps an impact study should have been done and solutions found based on studies. Unfortunately, we are not there. A lot of time has been wasted.

My question may be for Mr. Rondeau, Mr. Duceppe or Mr. Bolduc, for example.

What can we do now? What are your expectations?

**Mr. Patrick Rondeau:** As we said earlier, various departments are involved in this issue. At a minimum, an interdepartmental meeting should be held with the players involved—the forest industry, the unions and indigenous nations. That would be a good start.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Mr. Duceppe, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** I will yield the floor to Mr. Laflamme.

**Mr. Julien Laflamme:** I think proactive action must be taken more quickly in terms of workforce training. There are few programs for recognizing prior learning and skills for people who are already employed, who already have some knowledge in their trade and who would like to train for a diploma in another field. Implementing such programs requires an increase in transfers to the provinces for training.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now go to Mr. Boulerice.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Ray, you talked about how urgent the situation is in terms of the risk of boreal caribou becoming extirpated.

How would you rate the measures and decisions made by the Government of Quebec in this regard?

• (1125)

[English]

**Dr. Justina Ray:** Overall they have promised quite a bit of meaningful action—remember that the goal is self-sustaining populations—but really the only significant measure they've put in is the monitoring program, which has been very robust. Otherwise they've promised a plan and a strategy for a number of years, which hasn't materialized, so overall it has been less than adequate.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Ms. Ray.

Mr. Duceppe, you talked about maximizing the value of the fibre. What could be done to move in that direction and increase the economic value of wood as an important natural resource in decarbonization?

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** Take a look at what has been done historically in Scandinavia, where forest management has been done more intelligently, particularly through a large production of engineered wood. We could do the same thing with our wood fibre. We can make beams. We're already doing that—I'm not saying we aren't—but we need to do even more to move forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for three minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. Bolduc, as you probably guessed.

Mr. Bolduc, can you tell us more about your understanding of the just transition policy?

**Mr. Denis Bolduc:** I will let Patrick Rondeau, an advisor at the FTQ, answer you, since he is an expert on this issue.

**Mr. Patrick Rondeau:** Thank you very much, Mr. Bolduc.

Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Godin.

It is a matter of replicating what is being done abroad. The European Union has the just transition fund, which has mechanisms and

commissions attached to it. With a view to funding the industrial transition, essentially, and the decarbonization of the economy, everything is based on criteria that are considered to be fair and that focus on social dialogue, social protection—in Canada's case, this involves reviewing employment insurance—decent work, as well as labour law.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Rondeau.

Mr. Bouchard, the order states that private forests would be excluded. Wouldn't it be better to say that they will be excluded? With the conditional being used, there is some doubt. However, the lack of predictability makes things difficult for entrepreneurs.

What are your thoughts on that?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** We agree with you. A bit more assertiveness is needed in the desired direction of the order.

There is a lot of talk about global warming and climate change. The top scientists at Ouranos tell us that various species are migrating north. This is an ongoing phenomenon that must be weighed in the overall analysis that must be conducted to have a better overview of the situation. As to whether there has really been a decline, it's a bit unclear. In some situations, at least for the affected areas, and especially for Pipmuacan, we don't really have very strong comparative data.

In short, we are not experts in the area, but I just want to say that, at home, people are also asking questions about these considerations.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you.

Mr. Bouchard, can you confirm that the three groups identified—those in Val-d'Or, Charlevoix and the other region that I forget—are Canada's southernmost?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** I am not a geographer, but we know that, in those regions, there is a lot to say. In Pipmuacan, among other places, it is—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** My question is simple: Compared to other groups of boreal caribou, are the three groups identified southernmost in Canada?

**Mr. Martin Bouchard:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Ms. Taylor Roy, go ahead.

[English]

**Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here.

My question is for Yvan Duceppe.

In your opening statement you mentioned that to protect the caribou, fewer trees must be cut. I think we all know that, given the number of agreements we've signed on biodiversity and the fact that we have not just a transition but a Sustainable Jobs Act now, and despite the Conservatives' putting forward 20,000 motions to try to stall that, we are trying to transition.

The Quebec government has several programs in place, including some of their retraining programs and their workforce development funds, and then there are community-based diversification programs. I'm wondering whether you think these programs have had any impact in actually helping to transition the workforce and whether the forestry companies in Quebec have also been participating in this transition that we all know is necessary.

● (1130)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** Thank you for your question. I would like to ask my colleague, Julien Laflamme, to answer it.

**Mr. Julien Laflamme:** These programs have led to some positive experiences. In sawmills, for example, people managed to obtain recognition of prior learning for an attestation of college studies diploma in production equipment operation.

These are significant components, but I would say that they're just a few examples—

**The Chair:** Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Laflamme, but the sound quality isn't good enough for the interpretation.

You have a minute and a half left, Ms. Taylor Roy. Would you like to ask someone else to answer your question?

[English]

**Ms. Leah Taylor Roy:** Mr. Duceppe, perhaps you or Mr. Bolduc have a response regarding the kinds of efforts that have been made by the Quebec government and the forestry companies to retrain workers.

We know this has been an issue since 2003, when the caribou were first put under the Species at Risk Act, and we've been signing biodiversity frameworks and agreements since the 1990s. I'm just wondering what work has been done and whether you think it's sufficient to help these workers transition to other areas in which they are going to be in long-term, sustainable jobs.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvan Duceppe:** As Mr. Laflamme said, tangible examples have produced results. On our end, when the Petit Paris sawmill faced threats of closure, people received training. That's all very well, and we support that. However, it isn't enough. More funding is needed to meet all needs.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I want to thank the panel for this valuable discussion. We'll take a short break to welcome the second panel before continuing the meeting.

I want to thank the witnesses again. We would like to wish them a good day.

● (1130)

(Pause)

● (1135)

**The Chair:** Now that the sound tests have been completed, we're ready to hear from our second panel.

Committee members, please take your seats.

We're joined by Martin-Hugues St-Laurent, full professor of animal ecology at the Université du Québec à Rimouski, who is appearing as an individual; Luc Vachon, president of the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques; Benjamin Dufour, president of Ripco Inc.; and Daniel Cloutier, Quebec director of Unifor Québec.

Mr. St-Laurent, we'll start with you. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent (Full Professor of Animal Ecology, Université du Québec à Rimouski, As an Individual):** Good morning.

Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you for inviting me to answer your questions. I'm a full professor of animal ecology. For the past 16 years, I've run a research program that focuses on caribou, their predators and their competitors. I'm a recognized caribou expert in Canada.

An emergency order under the Species at Risk Act constitutes a test of our ability to manage our natural resources soundly and effectively; to protect our biodiversity; to comply with legislation and regulations; and to uphold our moral and ethical commitments on the international stage.

Between 1989 and 2024, 881 scientific articles regarding the woodland caribou subspecies were published in international scientific journals. Of these articles, 454 addressed different aspects of boreal caribou populations. In addition, many master's theses, doctoral dissertations and government reports have been published. This body of scientific work has made the caribou one of the most studied species in the country. On the basis of this work, the experts from the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada—of which I was a member—could assess variations in abundance, survival and recruitment rates and population demographic trajectories. It also helped them to synthesize their knowledge of the threats facing the caribou and, in May 2002, to recommend a threatened species status. This designation remains valid to this day.

Despite the wealth of widely accepted evidence in the scientific community, a number of players in the field are working hard to spread misinformation and scientific denial in the media. This contributes to the social polarization observed in relation to this challenge. Some of these individuals actually appeared before the committee to relay incomplete or incorrect information or even lies about the situation of boreal caribou populations in Quebec, the causes of the decline and possible solutions.

As an expert, I want to warn you about this misinformation campaign. Science knows more than what your committee is being told. Establishing a negotiated way out that benefits caribou and minimizes the socio-economic impact on forestry communities requires acknowledging the scientific evidence and avoiding shortcuts.

In managed boreal forests, caribou are declining mainly as a result of predation exacerbated by human disturbances. Logging opens up and rejuvenates forests and provides accessible, abundant, rich and digestible food resources. This supports the population growth of alternative prey, such as moose and deer, and, in turn, of caribou predators, such as bears, coyotes and wolves. This response goes hand in hand with an increase in the predators' ability to patrol the area and hunt caribou, as a result of the dense network of logging roads. Forest management plays a key role in the decline. It triggers a series of events that result in high predation pressure. This finding is recognized by the Quebec government in the literature review of the factors involved in the decline of woodland caribou populations in Quebec and mountain caribou in Gaspésie, published in 2021.

For a number of years, various teams of researchers have been documenting the significance of other drivers of decline, including the impact of past and future climate change. Their findings are solid and widely accepted. The impact of logging and logging roads far outweighs the effects of other drivers of decline, including climate change, both in explaining past declines and in modelling future changes. Moreover, science shows that climate change will have a significant impact on forestry employment, even without protection for caribou.

It's important to note the high quality of the data obtained from the monitoring of caribou populations in Quebec. This data supports the arguments of the emergency order by providing a crystal clear picture of habitat conditions and the state of populations. I want to remind you that the experts aren't just in the universities, but also in a number of federal and provincial departments that we work with. I trust the expertise of these biologists and wildlife technicians.

In light of the available knowledge, clearly the measures implemented by the Quebec government for over a decade aren't enough to ensure caribou recovery in the province. I have sat on enough committees to assess these methods. The emergency order is amply justified. The federal government is simply implementing the legislation given the absence of a provincial strategy deemed effective enough to contribute to the species' recovery.

In my opinion, the proposed order could be more ambitious, since it already amounts to a compromise. Only three ranges are targeted, even though an assessment of imminent threats could show the urgency to take action for other populations. The area covered by the order remains limited in relation to the size of the populations' ranges. Certain types of disturbances may be excluded from the order, including critical mineral exploration and mining projects, despite scientific evidence of the mining industry's negative impact. As a result, the order is more of a compromise than a radical protection strategy under a glass dome.

Major changes to caribou habitat management policies are needed. It's necessary to think about how to truly strike a balance be-

tween caribou and habitat conservation and sustainable forestry that respects all the roles, species and values of this ecosystem. However, this goal is impossible to achieve without affecting the forestry potential and, by extension, jobs and economic benefits.

● (1140)

I completely understand the concerns of a number of interest groups regarding the implementation of the order. It's important to consider this impact without losing sight of the legal obligation to effectively protect caribou and their habitat.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. St-Laurent.

We'll now turn to Mr. Vachon.

**Mr. Luc Vachon (President, Centrale des syndicats démocratiques):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

My name is Luc Vachon. I'm the president of the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques, or CSD. I want to thank you for this opportunity to convey a message from our organization.

The CSD represents almost 2,000 employees working directly or indirectly in the forestry industry. These include about 400 workers at Groupe Rémabec's Parent mill in the Mauricie region and its L'Ascension mill in the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region.

Since the announcement of the order, employees in the forestry industry have been deeply concerned. We can neither support nor accept the proposed order in its current form. Media attention has focused on the boreal caribou issue. However, no pun intended, focusing solely and specifically on the caribou is—if I may—like failing to see the forest for the trees.

The Quebec forestry industry has been going through a series of crises for a number of years. So this isn't the first. Consider, for example, the fires of 2023, the ever-increasing cost and loss of quality of wood supplies and the United States' ongoing implementation of countervailing tariffs on softwood lumber. I would say that the Quebec forestry industry is on the brink of another wave of mill closures and consolidations. It won't be the first time. A number of workers are facing a high risk of losing their jobs. These job losses would also have a disastrous impact on the employees' communities.

The federal government's impact analysis confirms this by estimating that approximately 1,400 jobs will be lost. In our opinion, this falls far short of the real impact on communities. In this environment, the order regarding the boreal caribou could make the situation much worse or sound the death knell for the already weakened industry. It's hard not to feel cynical about the order's actual effectiveness when we hear, for example, that Hydro-Québec projects or the proposed gold mine in Abitibi may not be subject to the order.

Should people in the industry feel that they matter less? This raises questions. It's crucial to protect the boreal caribou. Forestry industry workers are ready, with the right guidance and support, to help with the effort. The caribou is considered an iconic animal for Quebec. I can say that the people whom we represent and who live in the regions are well aware of this.

However, these people's concerns must also be taken into account. No government, provincial or federal, has really done this to date. We deplore both Quebec's inaction and Ottawa's heavy-handed approach. We know that Ottawa doesn't mean to punish the workers in the sector. However, the fact remains that this order, in its current form, could do just that.

We don't want forestry industry employees to bear the brunt of a political tug-of-war between Ottawa and Quebec. We believe that yet another dispute over jurisdiction between the two levels of government is pointless and that it will harm both the industry and environmental protection. We urge Ottawa and Quebec to work together to protect the caribou and put an end to the insecurity faced by forestry industry employees, so that promising long-term solutions can finally be developed.

The \$650 million that the federal government is prepared to give to British Columbia for its own environmental protection efforts attests to this. The same applies to the economic diversification fund provided by Ottawa and Quebec following the closure of the Gentilly-2 nuclear power plant.

You can work together, and when you do, you get good results. In particular, we're calling for a collaborative approach guided by the principles of a fair transition. This means transforming Quebec's forestry industry into a modern, innovative and resilient industry that causes less damage to the environment. Rather than being a barrier, the caribou crisis must become an opportunity. In any case, the employees' concerns and needs must play a key role in this plan, in order to limit the impact and provide proper compensation. Rather than seeing workers as resources and thinking that they can simply change jobs, as if it were that straightforward in the regions, we believe that the focus should be on people and providing proper support during these changes.

How much is the federal government prepared to invest to encourage the modernization of the forestry industry—

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Mr. Vachon, you'll need to provide this information to the committee during the question and answer period.

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Dufour, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Benjamin Dufour (President, Ripco Inc.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Committee members, thank you for this opportunity to speak today on behalf of Ripco. As president of Ripco, I want to share my serious concerns about the federal government's plan to pass an order to protect boreal caribou. The steps taken by the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, in June sparked fear among our workers and residents. This type of order would have a devastating and irreversible impact on our company and our community.

Founded in 2001, Ripco Inc. is an affiliate of Groupe Boisaco. It operates on the Sacré-Coeur industrial site. It works in partnership with Litière Royal, based in Quebec City. Your committee also heard from representatives of that company. We specialize in manufacturing and marketing equestrian litter, which comes from the shavings generated by Boisaco's plants. The plant is now state-of-the-art after our major investments over the past three years. Ripco brings together eight workers and their families, who depend on its survival to make a decent living. Like all Groupe Boisaco companies, Ripco is based on a unique co-operative model. This model is recognized in our industry and throughout Quebec. It was also born of Groupe Boisaco's desire to diversify its activities by using waste from sawmills and planing mills to create new products. As a result, Ripco supplies exceptional products across Canada and the United States, generating significant direct benefits in our community. However, our activities depend on Boisaco's ability to supply our raw material, which is wood shavings.

You must understand that, if Mr. Guilbeault's order were implemented, it wouldn't just affect Boisaco, but all the companies that depend on the waste produced by Boisaco's sawmills and planing mills. This includes include Ripco. Regarding the proposed federal order, the militant actions of the environment minister are driving us ever closer to a dead end. These actions create polarization and escalate a debate that must be cooled down in order to find fair and equitable solutions. They also conflict with the Quebec government's efforts to promote a phased approach adapted to the realities of each region concerned.

Since I started out as a forestry worker, in 1998, I've seen the development of the various measures put in place to protect the caribou. To date, thousands of hectares of forest have been left untouched to protect the caribou. Some stakeholders feel that these still-standing forests seem invisible. However, they still exist, even though some of them have been heavily affected by the spruce budworm epidemic and are also highly vulnerable to the all-too-common forest fires.

As a resident of Sacré-Coeur, I take its vitality to heart. Like a number of my friends and colleagues, I volunteer with various non-profit organizations dedicated to providing quality services to our community. For over 11 years, I've been the president of the ZEC Chauvin, a controlled harvesting zone just outside Sacré-Coeur. I can assure you that, without the forestry operations carried out in our ZEC, we wouldn't be able to provide the quality of experience enjoyed by over 500 members from across Quebec. In our ZEC, as in the other ZECs of the Haute-Côte-Nord and Saguenay regions, Boisaco's forestry operations have greatly helped to maintain and improve the road networks that play a vital role in forest activities and firefighting. The organizations are fortunate to be able to benefit from these major investments and to ensure that their members can continue to access their services at an affordable price.

I'll close with this thought. What type of society do we want in Canada? Do we want a society where we agree to sacrifice 2,000 families, thereby violating their basic right to a dignified life, or a society where decisions take into account the social, economic and environmental spheres—the three pillars of sustainable development? I dare to hope that the second option will lead us to fair and enlightened decisions that ensure the development of biodiversity and human communities.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dufour.

We'll now turn to Mr. Cloutier from Unifor Québec.

**Mr. Daniel Cloutier (Quebec Director, Unifor Québec):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

Unifor represents 320,000 members across Canada. With members in almost every major industrial sector, it's the country's largest private-sector union. In Quebec, Unifor has nearly 15,000 members in the forestry industry. They work in every region, from Abitibi-Témiscamingue to Gaspésie.

The workers whom we represent take part in all levels of processing and activity areas in the sector. These include forestry, logging, firefighting, transportation, lumber, engineered wood, panels, wake equipment, pulp, paper, cardboard, cellulose, pellets, packaging, flooring, furniture, kitchen cabinets, doors, windows or printing, and the list goes on.

For a number of years, Unifor has been closely monitoring the development of public initiatives aimed at restoring boreal and mountain caribou populations in Quebec. The current and upcoming initiatives designed to achieve this goal pose a major challenge for the forestry industry. Moreover, they could have major repercussions for our members.

To date, this proposed order constitutes the most significant conservation measure in terms of its potential impact on the province's forestry activities and, indirectly, on the economic activity generated by the forestry industry.

In 2022, Quebec's chief forester's analysis of the most restrictive management scenario assessed by the independent commission on boreal and mountain caribou estimated losses at around

824,300 gross cubic metres per year for all seven regions within the range.

This time, Quebec's chief forester calculates a loss of 1.393 million gross cubic metres per year for the four regions affected, not the seven, and specifically the three zones established under the agreement for the current emergency order. For reference purposes, the average volume of a sawmill is around 300,000 cubic metres.

Unifor recognizes that the situation is alarming for a number of the boreal and mountain caribou herds found in Quebec. Their long-acknowledged vulnerability is a major source of concern. Unifor acknowledges that the increase in the cumulative disturbance rate across the range of both ecosystems is lowering the probability of population survival.

The disturbances affecting caribou vary, and a number of them stem from natural or climate-related events. However, it has been established that certain human-related disturbances, including industrial forestry, can contribute to their decline.

Unifor recognizes that the Quebec government has implemented a range of measures, recovery plans and habitat management plans. These include predator management, logging road closures and the creation of protected areas and biodiversity reserves. In short, a series of measures seeks to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, these measures have failed to bring the situation under control.

However, the forestry sector is in crisis. The federal government's proposed emergency order comes at a pivotal time for Quebec's forestry industry. The industry is currently facing an unprecedented crisis on a number of levels. The 2023 forest fire season was catastrophic. It alone resulted in a loss of forest potential estimated by Quebec's chief forester at over 849,000 gross cubic metres per year.

According to Quebec's chief forester, over 920,000 hectares earmarked for forest management have been affected. Plant closures are continuing in various production sectors, such as paper, cellulose and lumber. The current market weakness, high timber auction prices and uncertain access to the resource are driving companies to develop consolidation strategies that will result in further closures and job losses.

The trade dispute with the United States continues. The latest review of the final combined duty rates set by the United States Department of Commerce was marked by a sharp increase from 8% to 15%.

All these measures are currently hampering and seriously affecting the forestry industry. The socio-economic impact of the measures associated with this emergency order will be exacerbated by an already difficult situation. This situation calls for a comprehensive response involving the various public authorities, based on their respective responsibilities.



Unifor strongly deplores the fact that our current situation runs in stark contrast to this reality. The politicization of the crisis doesn't serve the interests of the public, the workers or the caribou. Only the politicians benefit. The current dynamic of conflict harms all the parties concerned. It's a waste of precious time and resources and takes us further away from meaningful solutions.

If the federal government really wants to help, it should do so through a comprehensive transition support framework, not by launching a new debate. Solutions do exist. It's necessary to create a number of response frameworks that also take into account the socio-economic impact on workers and the people affected.

● (1155)

The departments responsible for natural resources, labour—

**The Chair:** Mr. Cloutier, unfortunately, we must stop here.

Mr. Martel, you have the floor.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for making themselves available for this meeting.

Mr. St-Laurent, you directly associate the recovery of caribou populations—meaning their self-sufficiency—with the habitat disturbance rate. To ensure this recovery, I gather that the level of disturbance must be lowered to less than 35%. This means that 65% of the habitat should be devoid of roads and of forest stands under 50 years old.

Is that right?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Yes.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Okay.

If we take into account permanent disturbances, such as main roads, power lines, buildings, cottages, hunting camps, mines, dams, wind turbines, railroads and pipelines, and the buffer zone of about 500 metres around this infrastructure, is the critical threshold of a 35% disturbance rate still achievable?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Depending on the herd, yes. My research shows that a co-ordinated effort involving active and passive restoration, along with interim measures, makes this possible.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** How can this be achieved in Val-d'Or, Charlevoix and the Pimpuacan reservoir?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** This can be achieved by creating protected areas or by consolidating existing ones; by active habitat restoration efforts on the periphery to reconnect certain beneficial areas; and then by taking a forestry approach that involves less canopy opening than the approach used for cutting with protection of regeneration and soils. My published work shows this, Mr. Martel.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Quebec's chief forester has done disturbance rate projections far into the future. In the Charlevoix range, for example, even in non-harvest scenarios, if we closed off access to roads and never took into account potential new natural disturbances like forest fires and spruce budworm infestations, in 50 years' time, at best we would achieve a 50% disturbance rate.

What solution do you suggest for this?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I haven't looked at the document you're referring to, but the studies I've done on a number of sectors, such as Eeyou Istchee and the Pimpuacan reservoir, show that we can achieve a lower disturbance rate than that through a relatively ambitious approach to road closure.

If I can consult the study by Quebec's chief forester, I can consider his methods, but I can't comment if I haven't read it.

● (1200)

**Mr. Richard Martel:** You say there's been a decline. In my opinion, at least two measures need to show a negative gap to reach that conclusion. I imagine you have the same definition.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** We will specify our definition, but to conclude that a caribou population is in decline, if we exclude emigration and immigration, which is the reality for a number of isolated herds like those in Val-d'Or and Charlevoix, the birth rate has to be lower than the mortality rate. It's as simple as that.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** How many inventories in the Pimpuacan region do you have comparative data for?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I think we have two or three inventories at the most for Pimpuacan that show counts. Right now, everyone, especially the media, is fixated on counts and they're forgetting vital rates. If we compare the survival and recruitment rates of these inventories, we see that, mathematically, the figures do not add up to a stable or growing population. So unless we parachute caribou into the study area, I feel that discussing counts is not germane to your question.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Can you assure us that if caribou habitat is not disturbed, it will not be damaged by climate change and forest fires?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Our studies indicate that climate change will have an impact on the quality of caribou habitat starting in 2070 in many of the areas we studied, but until then, the effect of human disturbance on land use generates the trophic cascade I mentioned.

I will finish my answer, if I may.

Since 1850—this was published in a serious scientific journal—the southern line of the caribou range has receded northward by 620 kilometres, of which 105 kilometres is due to climate change, and the rest is due to changes in land use patterns.

That means that if we engage in active restoration efforts, we can even extend caribou ranges to the south into climate-friendly habitats. This is important, and it's often ignored in the public debate on this issue. So it's not true that caribou are moving north 40 kilometres a decade, as we hear from some people, who don't do caribou research, by the way.

However, our work shows that we could have caribou populations in a favourable climate space, south of the line where we currently find them. In 1850, we had boreal caribou in the Maritimes, in New England and south of the St. Lawrence, all over the place. They hunted it behind Rimouski, where I'm located.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Ali, you have the floor.

[*English*]

**Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here before the committee.

My question is for Mr. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent.

You just said that climate change will have an impact on habitats. What are the risks of climate change in Quebec forests? Is there a risk of worsening our problem if we do not adapt our forests to climate change?

[*Translation*]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** You've asked a very legitimate question.

In all honesty, I would say that one of the problems right now is that the reference scenario is based on jobs and economic revenue from the recent past that's then pitted against protecting caribou. However, according to my research colleagues at the Centre for Forest Research, or CFR, at Natural Resources Canada, forests will clearly experience more intense fire regimes, decreased stem growth and drought episodes that will compromise growth in volume. When projections are done with that, the most recent studies on the issue show that the forest industry should be much more concerned about the impact of climate change on future forest volume and supply than the impact of protecting caribou habitat. Forests are going to change. My colleagues have made that very clear in numerous studies.

• (1205)

[*English*]

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Can we reconcile the adaptation of the forests and the health of the caribou and its sustainable exploitation?

That is for Mr. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent.

[*Translation*]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** My research leads me to believe so, and that's why we suggested that the governments of Quebec and Canada bring together experts from various backgrounds in a research consortium consisting of sociologists, economists, as well as indigenous nations, caribou, forest engineering and timber supply experts to try to come up with science-based solutions to the problem.

The federal government has shown that it's open to that, as has the Quebec government's wildlife sector. The Quebec government's forestry sector has refused to support such an initiative, when it's wanted so badly and would allow us to reconcile both missions.

It must be understood that the Quebec regions differ in terms of the caribou realities, the forestry realities and the socio-economic realities of the forests. You can't have a one-size-fits-all solution. It's important to find regionally tailored solutions. You can't do that if you ignore the science. That would be very counterproductive. If we had dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic by ignoring the science, we would still be squarely in the thick of it.

[*English*]

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** What proposal would you make to the Quebec government for the future of the forests?

[*Translation*]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** It would be to include the upstream impact of climate change in timber supply calculations, and to create some leeway, that is to say a reserve margin we can draw from to address increased "stochasticity" and uncertain timber supply. In addition, forest management should of course be integrated with the many other forest functions, such as carbon capture and storage and air and water purification. In addition to all that, we'll maintain wealth and wealth creation if we can, but in the meantime, we need to be concerned for the future of people who make their living from the forest.

I'm very sensitive to this reality for communities, which are often single-industry communities, but we can't do it if we deny the science available to us.

[*English*]

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Can you tell us about your research and the state of caribou in Quebec, as well as the state of our forests?

[*Translation*]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** As I told you, caribou is one of the most studied species in Canada. It is in Quebec as well. Over the past few decades, a number of research teams made up of researchers from various institutions have made phenomenal progress. We understand the link, the cascade of events between forest harvesting, caribou decision-making and increased predation. For several years now, we've also understood the solutions that are within our grasp. Connectivity and the effect of protected areas have been studied. We also looked at how we could even identify caribou that are more able to live in disturbed areas. We're continuing in that direction. We have a great deal of knowledge on the subject, as do other research teams. I myself have published nearly 100 scientific articles throughout my career. Quebec is rich in forests and in knowledge of its forests.

The Centre d'étude de la forêt is a group of scientists from various organizations in Quebec. It has the highest number of invested forest scientists in the Americas. It would be important to consult them in situations like this, both to inform the public and elected officials and to find solutions together.

The current polarization and science denial are not a solution.

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds left.

[English]

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** If you want to add anything more, there are 15 seconds left.

[Translation]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I want us all to work together to find the solution. I am very sensitive to what Mr. Vachon, Mr. Cloutier, Mr. Dufour and the speakers before us have said. We can find the solution together.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Pauzé, you have the floor.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Thank you to all the witnesses.

I love what Mr. Saint-Laurent just said. That was the purpose of this presentation and these meetings, to find solutions together. Before getting back to the just transition, I want to make one point.

Earlier, Mr. Vachon talked about the mine. There was an extremely interesting article in *Le Devoir* last Friday. Rodrigue Turgeon of the Coalition pour que le Québec ait meilleure mine, said the following: "If the federal order is adopted as is, Val-d'Or's caribou population will see its critical habitat continue to be disrupted at levels exceeding the desired conservation objectives as a result of mining operations that will be allowed to continue".

Mr. Vachon, since you raised the issue of mines, doesn't the order have a narrower vision? Is there anything else we need to do? We're still looking for solutions.

• (1210)

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** When I talked about the mine, I was referring to the situation, the lack of clarity and insecurity that are hanging in the air and lingering right now.

When people see this happening, they have no consistent understanding of what's coming in the forestry sector, which is a whole industry. We're wondering what will happen when it appears that some projects will get preferential treatment, and we're right to wonder.

In a number of regions, people have been making a living in the forest industry for hundreds of years. We tell ourselves that we'll no longer be able to use the resource. However, a mine could have the same or even greater impact, and it would be entitled to a waiver. There's an inconsistency in that position.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** I'm going to stop you there, Mr. Vachon. Thank you.

You're addressing the impact on the forestry sector, and that's where we're going to talk about a just transition. We talked about it a lot with the other panel, but I think it's important to come back to it.

Moving forward, I will give the floor to my colleague Mario Simard.

**Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ):** Thank you.

Mr. Cloutier, you may have seen the results of the socio-economic analysis that was submitted to the committee and released by the journalist Thomas Gerbet.

The document refers to the possible closure of 53 businesses connected to the forestry sector. As we know, the forestry sector is a chain. A cut link produces a domino effect: The impact is felt by the entire chain.

Do you have any data on the impact this could have on Unifor workers?

**Mr. Daniel Cloutier:** When it comes to Unifor workers, it will affect nearly 1,000 workers in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, 800 workers in Quebec City, just over 1,000 workers in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and about 800 workers on the north shore. To be clear, I'm only talking about direct jobs; I'm not talking about indirect jobs related to plant operations. I should also point out that these figures apply only to Unifor workers.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Witnesses have told us that the order was in fact far from the ideal solution. Like everyone else, they want to protect the species, but they feel there should be a concerted effort with Quebec. According to them, the order should be set aside for a time so consultations can be held with Quebec and all the stakeholders.

Mr. Vachon and Mr. Cloutier, would the labour federations see any value in that?

**Mr. Daniel Cloutier:** Absolutely.

Although we regret the measures taken by the Government of Quebec and its recent lack of vision, particularly since the latest work was done, we feel that the federal government acted much too quickly in drafting an emergency order, especially since the major flaw in the order is that it does not see the big picture, that is to say all the socio-economic repercussions, and it provides no support in that regard.

At the federal level, the departments responsible for employment, investment, employment insurance and education should be involved and should support Quebec in its areas of jurisdiction, particularly through strong financial assistance.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Vachon, would you like to comment?

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** Right now it feels like it's all or nothing. The question seems to be "Who's going to make the first move?" That can give the impression that the one who makes the first move will lose out. However, politically speaking, there are no winners or losers in this situation.

We're grappling with this order, which is an ultimatum. I think we need to leave it be and eliminate that threat. We need to bring everyone to the table and reopen the debates and discussions, not to determine whether we're going to win or lose, but to see how we can successfully meet the challenges together.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vachon.

Mr. Boulerice, you now have the floor.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My first questions are for Mr. St-Laurent.

Mr. St-Laurent, I really liked what you said about the key role of science in decision-making. For everyone's benefit, I'd like you to explain the causal link between deforestation, the increase in roadways and the risk of extinction for the boreal caribou.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I mentioned it in my opening remarks, but I can summarize.

If the forest is rejuvenated, abundant and physically accessible food resources will suddenly become available to all herbivores, since they will be at a height that's easy to access. These resources are easily digestible because they are low in tannins and lignins. Individuals are therefore able to be in better physical condition and to invest more in reproduction and survival.

White-tailed deer can produce up to three offspring a year, moose can produce up to two offspring a year, and, due to biological constraints, caribou can produce zero to one offspring a year. Population growth therefore won't be the same. Population growth will also lead to an increase in predator abundance, because they also have more food available. Those predators, which are more abundant as a result of logging, will also be more efficient because of the forest roads. My work and that of several other researchers in Canada show that they use low-grade forest roads to more effectively patrol the territory. It's easier for them and us both to walk on a forest road than in the forest. They're going to harvest more caribou, because they are a more vulnerable prey than moose. For that reason, they will cause the adult population to decline, but there will also be fewer young caribou, since the black bear, which is very abundant on young harvest blocks, will be able to feed on caribou more easily. The Government of Quebec has documented this. In areas where caribou are forced to relocate from their home range, caribou become less loyal to their home range, thus increasing the risk of predation for young caribou.

It's as if we were asking someone to quickly find the refrigerator in someone else's house or apartment. That's quite normal. We know the environment, the resources and the risks. This entire cascade of events is amplified in a territory that is subject to highly sustained development or a high regime of natural disturbances.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

We've heard a lot from members of the official opposition that much of the solution lies in controlling boreal caribou predators, particularly the wolf.

What do you think of that suggestion or proposal?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I admit that it's an interesting interim measure, but it's important to understand the cascade of events.

Let me put it another way that's easy to understand. Imagine you and I are fishing in a small boat. The boat takes on some water. I hand you a bailer. You bail the water out of the boat, and imagine that in doing so, you are removing predators. If I plug the hole at the bottom of the boat, I'll keep predators from getting in. If I en-

large the hole or make new holes, I'm creating the conditions for more predators to get in.

Therefore, if we don't slow the pace of forest rejuvenation and forest road deployment, it's like we're trying to solve the problem in the boat before it happens by enlarging the hole. You will keep on bailing. You will be bailing for the rest of your life.

We have a good example of this in Canada. A predator control measure has been in place for 30 years around Gaspésie National Park. It only worked for the first five years. Since then, 60% of the old forest around the park has been harvested.

So predator control is an effective interim measure, but it has to be very intensive; it has to remove over 80% of predators, which raises some ethical questions.

Be that as it may, growth in predator numbers is fuelled by forest rejuvenation and the road network.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

The Government of Quebec introduced measures a few years ago. In your opinion, have those measures been effective, insufficient, or both?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** It's actually very simple. In the recovery plans that have been published since 2013, there have been changes to governance structures and excellent caribou inventories that are among the best in Canada. They have set up a large number of committees, looked at the literature on the subject and monitored the situation, among other things. During that time, however, there was a drastic increase in logging in some caribou-friendly areas as well as an increase in the proportion of disturbances in the environment.

To give you a quick idea, the brief I submitted concerning the order states that the level of disturbance increased by 49% in the Pipmuacan region, 64% in Val-d'Or and 80% in Charlevoix between 1995 and 2020. Meanwhile, in the same period, all kinds of committees, rounds of mediation and so on were rolled out.

The Government of Quebec recently promised to establish some protected areas. That's excellent. It's a good start. They are looking at habitat restoration projects that, by the way, can employ people in the regions. That is important, because people in the regions who have forest expertise can also get involved in the process. All that can be consolidated.

To go back to my comparison, Mr. Boulerice, if I continue putting holes in the bottom of the boat, we will definitely sink, no matter how fast you can bail out the water.

• (1220)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

I have one last question for you, Mr. St-Laurent.

I find the work around habitat change and arrangement and the new jobs that could be created to be very interesting. I would like you to take the remaining 30 seconds to talk about that.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I'm not a forestry economist, but I can tell you that, by setting up a caribou research consortium made up of economists, engineers, technicians and other people, we would be able to create a habitat repair economy. We could get people working on decompacting some roads, reforesting others and guiding the composition of the forest to make it more favourable to caribou than to predators. For that, we need people who live in the regions and who have the expertise to do so. It's not the same monetary route, but—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We are moving on to the second round and, once again, I'm going to have to reduce speaking time by 40%. Each member will have three minutes.

Mr. Godin, I know that you wanted to share your time with Mr. Leslie, but I have time for a second question from the Conservatives. Mr. Leslie could have the floor at that point.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Do you want to talk about the third round of questions?

**The Chair:** No. There are two Conservative members, but I don't have the name of the second one.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I will take the first part.

**The Chair:** He will take the second part.

You have the floor for three minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. St-Laurent.

I find this debate interesting, and I think science is a big part of it. I also think that you, Mr. St-Laurent, are an authority in the field.

My question may seem simplistic to you. In Charlevoix, an experiment was conducted to save the caribou that were reintegrated in the 1970s by creating enclosures.

Could expanding, even doubling, the size of the enclosures be a solution?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Yes, until there are too many caribou in them.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Now, if we take a gradual approach, should that solution be considered in the short or medium term? I understand that it is not long term, but it would help rebuild the species.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** It is an interim measure to be put in place until the enclosures become too small again and we have to release the animals into the wild. At that point, we want to release them into an environment where we won't have to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars per animal to ensure their survival. Habitat is protected and repaired, while new forestry methods are found to foster wealth. We have to look at predator control, captive custody, total custody as in Val-d'Or, and maternity penning, as we see elsewhere for other species. Ultimately, a genotype could be selected that is better able to live in a disturbed environment. These

are all things that scientists know and have been recommending to the government since 2014.

In 2014, there was a whole thinking process about how to go about it. We know how to do it.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** From what I understand, this is a temporary solution, but a solution like this can be extended over a period of time. When you talk about significant investments and costs to recreate a larger area, that's a societal choice.

Do we want to invest in fences or do we want to protect a forestry economy that is very important to Quebec and the regions?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** If I may, I will answer that.

Logging operations experts will tell you that right now the social cost of all the forest functions being compromised is being pushed down the road by not maintaining mature forests in sufficient quantity. This goes far beyond what we are currently seeing with the caribou. In the forest, air is filtered, water is filtered, carbon is—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** We've understood that, Mr. St-Laurent. Thank you. Unfortunately, my time is limited.

I have a question for Mr. Vachon from the CSD.

Mr. Vachon, in your opening remarks, you used the metaphor of not seeing the forest for the trees. Are you claiming that we are creating another problem with this order?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds, Mr. Vachon.

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** Actually, I meant that we are diverting our attention from all the problems in the forestry sector by focusing specifically on caribou. Obviously, they have to be taken into account as well.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Longfield.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I'd like to start off with Mr. Cloutier. You've made a couple of comments. Our colleague, Mr. Simard from the Bloc, had some excellent questions about the role of labour in these discussions. I'd like to build on that.

In Ontario, when I was first elected in 2015, we worked with your Ontario Unifor colleagues to recover the automotive industry, which was struggling after years of neglect by the Conservative federal government. The role that labour played in recovering Ontario's automotive sector was absolutely critical.

You've mentioned sustainability. You've also mentioned the rights of caribou, something that might be surprising to people who don't know labour as well. Could you comment on how critical it is for labour to work with the federal government on safety, on sustainability and on working on protecting the caribou herd at the same time as protecting jobs?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Cloutier:** Yes, we recognize that there are disturbances that affect caribou. Our members feel that we should not bury our heads in the sand and pretend that doesn't exist.

Finding appropriate solutions requires concerted efforts among workers, entrepreneurs, first nations, environmental groups and, of course, scientists. It is a matter of land use and economic survival. It's also a matter of maintaining the regular activities of communities that have traditionally been established for hundreds of years in these regions. We have to find that balance. We have presented a number of concrete solutions and proposals to both the federal and provincial governments to achieve this.

[English]

**Mr. Lloyd Longfield:** Thank you, and thank you to your union brothers and sisters in Quebec for the great work that you're doing and will continue to do.

I'd like to go over to Mr. St-Laurent on the sustainable development goals that were introduced in 2015. There was progress up until the pandemic, and I've read just over the weekend that we've been sliding backwards as a world.

Where 193 countries have agreed to these sustainable development goals, and given that SDG 15 is about life on land being critical to this discussion, could you talk about the importance of restimulating the SDG discussions globally?

[Translation]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** That's a great question.

That's very important as well. Our view is currently somewhat distorted by a three-pronged conception of sustainable development: the environment, the economy and society.

The original version of this way of thinking—it's important for people to know this—is based on concentric circles. We live on only one planet, Earth, which can provide us with resources. We need to make people and societies prosper.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Simard has the floor.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. St-Laurent, I really liked your analogy of the hole in a boat.

In your opinion, can forest fires and insect infestations also play a role in caribou survival and the state of their territory?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Yes, of course, but you have to remember that, since the last ice age a few thousand years ago, caribou have evolved alongside forest fires and insect outbreaks. We are currently seeing an increase in disturbances at a rate never seen before. That's called the Anthropocene. Human beings are changing the surface of the earth in ways we have never seen in the past.

The primary beneficiary of the forest in Quebec, the primary entity to harvest the forest, is fire, followed by insect infestations. As I said in my earlier answer, if we consider natural disturbances before we calculate forestry potential and harvest allocation, the result will be a bit less dissonant. Of course, in order to do that, you have

to take fire regimes into consideration. That's why I talked about regional plans, caribou habitat assessments and restoration—

**Mr. Mario Simard:** However, forest management has an important role to play as well.

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** Yes. In fact, it has a major role, since fires have little effect on caribou until we build a road to recover the wood.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** That is indeed a major role.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Vachon, you rightly talked about the insecurity of a number of communities, union members and workers, but when Mr. Saint-Laurent talked about job creation related to restoring or protecting forest habitat, I saw you shaking your head a little.

Can you tell us a little more about your view of a just transition for workers and the creation of new jobs in the forestry sector?

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** There are indeed opportunities, because we know that the forestry industry is bound to be transformed one way or another. We have to get away from the narrow focus on two-by-fours and two-by-sixes. Even businesses know that and are saying it. They are now looking at integrated complexes. They are diversifying their operations to reduce their dependence on all that so that they need a smaller harvest volume.

Taking that into account, the point Mr. St-Laurent is raising is that there will probably be new jobs in reforestation or a shift of jobs toward that. As was mentioned, there needs to be more emphasis on reforestation. I'm saying that now, but I'm not the one who decided on it. Regarding the transition and the support that will be needed, it is important to show people an overall perspective so that they know where we stand and where we are going. It reduces insecurity.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. Leslie for three minutes.

**Mr. Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start with Mr. St-Laurent.

I appreciate your fairly common-sense understanding of what the realities are here. Forestry changes the forest; the logging roads change dynamics. Therefore, we have new prey. Moose and deer come in. Predation follows, and they don't care what they're eating.

My question is this: You mentioned the hundreds of studies that you've reviewed on this topic. Is there a consensus from them, or, in your view, what is the timeline that would be expected for the forest to recover to a state in which moose and/or deer no longer find it appealing—from this particular edict from the federal government and/or adding remediation efforts as well?

[Translation]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** That's a great question.

In fact, it depends on where you are in Canada and the rate at which the forest comes back in each region. Currently, the general rule is 50 years. After 50 years, the forests become favourable to caribou because they are less favourable to predators and other prey.

[English]

**Mr. Branden Leslie:** What happens in the meantime?

[Translation]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** In the meantime, there is a cascade of species that become very abundant, highly favoured or somewhat less favoured. For example, if a forest is logged, it will favour bears for the first 10 years. Then it will favour moose. Hunters will tell you that. Then wolves will move in. Meanwhile, the caribou that live in the area suffer from predation every year. As a result, it takes between 15 and 20 years between the logging and the time the caribou are extirpated locally.

[English]

**Mr. Branden Leslie:** Okay. Thank you.

It seems reasonable to me to consider that we must.... You mentioned that, in a park nearby but in a different area, there were different remedies used. I note from Ecological Applications' 2024 article entitled "Effectiveness of population-based recovery actions for threatened southern mountain caribou"—which is the same species, just in B.C.—that their study concluded that penning and wolf reduction were the two most important recovery actions with the annual instantaneous rate of increase.

My question is this: Why would we not take immediate action such as that, which we know works, in the meantime and allow the industry to work with researchers, with the Quebec government and/or with the federal government, if needed, to find solutions in the longer term?

[Translation]

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** I'm very familiar with that study. I was one of the experts who reviewed it before it was published.

Those are two measures we can put in place that could potentially work. In fact, the Government of Quebec is already doing it in the Val-d'Or, Charlevoix and Gaspé regions. They have enclosures and do occasional predator control.

Now, if we keep allowing new-growth forests, we will stray from the finish line. We cannot do that, since it will force us to take these interim measures for a longer time. We absolutely need to work in tandem with—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. St-Laurent.

Mrs. Chatel, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I'd like to go to Mr. Vachon.

We've talked a lot about jobs, sustainable jobs, the responsibility of governments to invest in sustainable jobs in the forestry sector, but also the responsibility of forestry companies to create these sustainable jobs. We are asking the government, the employees, of course, but also the industry, to develop a long-term vision in order to have a sustainable industry.

Do you feel that the Government of Quebec has a clear vision of the future for the forestry sector that is rooted in sustainable development?

• (1235)

**Mr. Luc Vachon:** You are asking me whether I feel that Quebec has a clear vision. If, in fact, it has one, it is bad at sharing it. It doesn't communicate it. It's still a closely guarded secret.

From the discussions I've had with business leaders, you're absolutely right that people in the industry know that they're going to have to be involved in the transformation and the transition. They're willing to do that. If anyone could come up with a long-term vision and plan, they are prepared to commit. They're ready. They know they have to do their homework.

For the moment, we are capable of having public discussions with a variety of stakeholders to pool ideas. That said, I haven't seen a lot of that.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vachon.

I would now like to turn to Mr. St-Laurent.

In all the public debates we have, one of the important things is not to bury our heads in the sand.

I was listening to our Conservative colleagues, whose rhetoric was very focused on short-term measures. However, that does not take into account the greater impact on our biodiversity and, in fact, our country's economic future.

You used a metaphor, that we have one planet and there is a circle around it. At the centre is our planet and its health, and from that we can build an economy. You can't build an economy without the centre.

Can you elaborate on that analogy?

**Prof. Martin-Hugues St-Laurent:** This analogy is simply the framework for sustainable development.

As conceived, sustainable development is an environmental circle. Inside the circle, we want societies to prosper so that people can live their lives with dignity; and inside this circle, there's the economic circle. As we ensure that we have societies that live with dignity in a healthy environment, we can create wealth. By placing this in a triangle, conversely, we always have to find a compromise for jobs, for the economy relative to the environment.

Does this lead us to a win-win situation? The answer is that it leads us to the erosion of biodiversity that we're seeing now.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll conclude the second hour on that.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for agreeing to be with us to contribute to this debate. It's been very interesting, I must say.

We'll take a short break to welcome the final panel of the day.

Again, I want to thank the witnesses.

• (1235) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1240)

[English]

**The Chair:** We're back for our third and last panel.

Thank you to the panellists for agreeing to be with us today.

[Translation]

We have with us, as an individual, Mr. Louis Bélanger, who is a retired professor of sustainable forest management, faculty of forestry, Université Laval.

We also welcome Mr. Luis Calzado, general manager of the Association québécoise de la production d'énergie renouvelable.

[English]

From the David Suzuki Foundation we have Rachel Plotkin, boreal project manager.

You each have five minutes to make your opening statements.

We start right away with Monsieur Bélanger.

[Translation]

**Mr. Louis Bélanger (Professor (Retired), Sustainable Forest Management, Faculty of forestry, Laval University, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the committee, I'd like to say hello, and thank you for this opportunity to meet with you.

I am a biologist and forest engineer, and also a professor of integrated forest management at Université Laval. I'm a member of the Équipe de rétablissement du caribou forestier du Québec, where I represent Nature Québec. I was also a member of the now-defunct Table nationale des partenaires, whose mandate was to implement Quebec's action plan for boreal caribou.

It is in this capacity that I would like to make two recommendations. One concerns the Charlevoix caribou herd, the other the Pipmuacan herd. Both are herds I know well.

In the case of the Charlevoix caribou, I ardently recommend that the Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Mr. Guilbault, not include the Charlevoix caribou in his emergency order. I make this recommendation because Quebec has just tabled a project that fully addresses the minister's concerns about imminent threats to the survival of this population.

Because of the particular history of the Charlevoix caribou, a strategy to restore its habitat has been implemented for 15 years. This has been done in consultation with all stakeholders in the region, including the Huron-Wendat Nation and the forestry industry. In 2008, major economic repercussions were felt by the region. Charlevoix's forestry potential was cut by 35%. I repeat, 35%. In 2022, this strategy was improved and presented again by the Independent Commission on Woodland and Mountain Caribou. Once again, it received the unanimous support of the region's stakeholders. The pilot project, tabled last May by the Quebec Ministry of the Environment, the Fight against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks, along with a draft regulation, finalizes this long regional process.

Unfortunately, the Canadian government's emergency order completely disregards these 15 years of efforts in Charlevoix. The order shifts conservation efforts completely westward, to the regional county municipality of Portneuf. In its present form, the order will impose a second wave of forestry cutbacks on the region, for unclear and questionable gains for the caribou.

On this basis, the wisest decision would be to let the Quebec pilot project come to fruition. Such a decision would demonstrate that Minister Guilbault is sincere when he says he intends to collaborate with the Quebec government.

The case of the Pipmuacan caribou is quite different. We know that, since 2021, certain high-ranking authorities at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests of Quebec have been blocking any transparent dialogue aimed at finding measures to mitigate the economic impact of the Pipmuacan caribou plan. In fact, in 2021, they let the national table of partners die. What's more, contrary to what was set out in the government's 2016 action plan, optimization measures to establish a balanced conservation plan were not presented to the public. For example, the systematic examination of alternative wood supply sources for the affected mills has not been done. Yet forestry workers' unions have been calling for some time for a form of impact mutualization through the introduction of a compensation system between mills.

Unfortunately, the population of Sacré-Coeur, the Innu communities and the Pipmuacan caribou are being held hostage by Quebec's refusal to seek economic impact mitigation measures. The Quebec government has not made efforts to find a balanced solution, and there is no indication that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests intends to do so. Some may be hoping that, in the face of Sacré-Coeur's predicted economic tragedy, all efforts to conserve the Pipmuacan caribou habitat will be abandoned.

So, what can be done? One solution would be to set up an independent technical commission with a mandate to conduct a detailed analysis of all alternative options for mitigating the drop in supply to the affected mills, and to report back to the public. To this end, I appeal to the governments of Quebec and Canada.



Thank you.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Bélanger.

It's now Mr. Calzado's turn, from the Association québécoise de la production d'énergie renouvelable.

**Mr. Luis Calzado (Chief Executive Officer, Association québécoise de la production d'énergie renouvelable):** Good morning, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for its invitation.

For 30 years, the Association québécoise de la production d'énergie renouvelable, AQPER, has brought together all stakeholders in the renewable energy sector, including those in the wind power and bioenergy sectors.

Our members have demonstrated their commitment to protecting biodiversity by adopting practices that minimize the environmental impact of their projects. At the same time, meeting our climate objectives and the transition to carbon neutrality will require a considerable increase in our production capacity, particularly in the wind and bioenergy sectors. Some of the areas affected by the order have strong wind power potential, and the proposed restrictions could block future developments. This could hinder Quebec's energy transition and compromise our climate objectives.

Think of the Pipmucan area, identified as requiring increased intervention for caribou protection. It also has great wind power potential. The restrictions imposed by the order could jeopardize future development opportunities. In addition, certain provisional zones could enclose territories with high wind energy potential outside them, making it difficult to develop new projects.

The AQPER is particularly concerned about the lack of corridors allowing the passage of power lines for future wind projects located on the north shore. The accessibility of several sites with good wind power potential would be compromised if new power lines, from Micoua and Les Outardes to substations to the south, cannot be developed.

We propose an impact reduction approach focused on avoidance, minimization and, ultimately, compensation. In the case of the 735-kilovolt Micoua-Saguenay line, for example, Hydro-Québec installed specially adapted towers to allow caribou to pass under the lines, demonstrating the feasibility of concrete measures to reconcile energy development and wildlife protection. Sustainably managed forest biomass is a key player in the fight against climate change, and the proposed restrictions could hamper efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In fact, a forest harvested in accordance with sustainable management principles has a high carbon sequestration capacity.

AQPER therefore recommends excluding wind power projects and bioenergy projects using residual forest biomass from the list of activities potentially prohibited by the order.

AQPER considers that flexibility should be introduced into the emergency order and the application of its restrictions, in order to take into account the specificities of each project. The territories covered by the potential emergency order are vast and do not

present a uniform level of disturbance. Some areas are already highly disturbed and could offer prime locations for wind project development.

AQPER recommends integrated solutions for boreal caribou conservation and renewable energy project development. These projects can include specific conservation measures, such as habitat restoration and the establishment of ecological corridors, to reduce the fragmentation of caribou habitat.

Finally, we want the restrictions imposed by the order to be flexible and to take future projects into account, while ensuring that they are carried out in consultation with indigenous and local communities. A flexible, collaborative approach would not only protect the boreal caribou, but also enable us to continue developing renewable energy projects that will benefit everyone today and, above all, future generations.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Calzado.

The next speaker is Ms. Rachel Plotkin, director of the David Suzuki Foundation's boreal project.

Ms. Plotkin, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin (Boreal Project Manager, David Suzuki Foundation):** Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. My name is Rachel Plotkin. I'm the boreal program manager for the David Suzuki Foundation. I've been working to protect at-risk species for over 20 years, with a focus on boreal caribou for almost 20 years.

I actually spent a lot of time here on Parliament Hill when the Species at Risk Act, SARA, was being developed, and I appeared before the environment committee for the five-year review of the act—I'm not sure whether the chair remembers me. When the SARA was being drafted and debated, I witnessed a sincere belief across parties that it was an important tool in the tool box to protect biodiversity. A significant amount of time was spent debating the emergency order, but there was recognition that, while provinces make the majority of decisions about lands and wildlife under normal circumstances, the extirpation of a species is an issue of national importance. I was also part of the petition to invoke the emergency order for sage grouse in Alberta and Saskatchewan in 2011, an emergency habitat protection order that was ultimately passed by a Conservative government, even though there were economic impacts, and which resulted in pivoting the sage grouse towards recovery.

I have to say that working to protect boreal caribou and their habitat for the last 20 years has been pretty depressing. As the federal recovery strategy progress assessments illustrate, caribou habitat has continued to be degraded year after year, and caribou populations have continued to decline.

I listened to the other committee hearings and frequently heard the word “balance” mentioned as a framework for solutions. Since you guys like metaphors, this is my analogy of how “balance” can be problematic. Imagine it's the year 2000. You have 100 hectares of caribou habitat, and there's also industrial pressure, so the government of the day says, “Okay, we're going to balance these interests. We'll give 50 hectares to caribou and 50 to industry.” Then, five years later, there's another government and there are still industrial pressures. There are 50 hectares of caribou habitat. The government of the day says, “Okay, let's balance this,” so then there are 25 hectares for caribou and 25 for industry. That continues to play out, and that's why we end up where we are now, that the Charlevoix herd has less than 17% of its habitat that's undisturbed, and the province continues to approve industrial resource extraction in their range. We know that caribou need a minimum of 65% of their habitat to be undisturbed in order for them to have a 60% probability of persistence.

Many are positioning the protection order as a jobs vs. caribou narrative. If the emergency order is implemented, it will affect some jobs, at least in the short term, but really, this conversation is about unsustainable forest management and how to better manage forests in Quebec for both wildlife and people's livelihoods. As was mentioned by others in this hearing, in the long term these two things go hand in hand. If forests are to be relied upon to provide employment security and not be subject to boom-and-bust cycles, they must be managed sustainably.

At heart, the fact that logging is driving caribou towards extinction in Quebec is glaring evidence that logging, at present, is not sustainable. Forest mismanagement is not unique to Quebec. In B.C. the forestry industry is running out of trees to log because the bigger, older trees near mills have already been logged, and replanted trees haven't matured to take their place. The push to keep mills open in the short term has resulted in serious long-term impacts. Studies show that logging in Quebec is also significantly diminishing the natural levels of old-growth forests. At present, caribou aren't even really taken into consideration in forest management planning.

As it happens, the drive for change to the status quo is shared beyond conservation organizations. Listen to these quotes from a press release put out by forest industry unions in Quebec last week, which joined forces to denounce the Quebec government's inaction. They state that Quebec's “inaction and attitude are exacerbating the situation and turning workers into an instrument of political discord”, and they implore the Quebec government “to take the issue seriously and implement an organized, smart plan, to protect woodland caribou, ensure a sustainable future for the forestry industry and adequately support the workers who make it prosper”. In plain words, only forests managed for ecological resilience can provide resilience to forest-dependent workers.

Healthy forests also support indigenous people. Indigenous rights, cultures and ways of life are at stake if caribou become extirpated. I want to share a message from my Innu colleague Melissa Mollen-Dupuis, from Ekuanitshit. She wonders where all the jobs are going to be when they cut down the forest. These arguments have always been used, she says. Jobs were used to justify putting indigenous people in reservations and caribou in enclosures. She al-

so says that one thing is certain: In their lifetime, her kids will never know the taste of caribou or the smell of smoked leather.

I echo my colleagues who already came before you and articulated that band-aid solutions—like killing wolves, which co-evolved with caribou for thousands of years, or putting caribou in fences that essentially turn them into zoo animals—are not real solutions to the current biodiversity crisis and fly in the face of the global biodiversity framework agreed to in Montreal in 2022.

• (1255)

The good news on this depressing file is that you've heard from all sectors and first nations that a reset for forest management is necessary, and there are solutions at hand. If there's—

**The Chair:** Thank you. The time is up. I'm sorry. There will be time to share your ideas in responses to questions.

[*Translation*]

Before we start the first round, I'd like to tell you that, in order to finish on time, we're going to proceed with five-minute turns during the first round and with three-minute turns during the second round, as we did with the previous two panels.

Mr. Martel, you have the floor.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I thank the witnesses for making themselves available today.

Mr. Calzado, to access the territories that are coveted to produce renewable energy, do you use the infrastructures put in place by the forest industry?

**Mr. Luis Calzado:** Good afternoon. Thank you very much for your question.

Our goal is to use the roads that are already built, to cohabit with endangered species and to promote the energy transition without disturbing the current ecosystem. So, we're trying to use the existing roads and cohabit with the boreal caribou while installing the wind turbines.

• (1300)

**Mr. Richard Martel:** If roads were closed, would the absence of the forest industry put your projects at risk?

**Mr. Luis Calzado:** As I mentioned earlier, we give priority to areas that are already disturbed. Then we carry out analyses and studies to determine the best way of carrying out the projects while cohabiting with the endangered species. Indeed, if we can't access the places where the wind turbines are to be installed, we run the risk of not being able to achieve the energy transition.

That said, we obviously carry out analyses and studies before launching projects, to make sure, on the one hand, that there is already enough wind and, on the other, that there will be no repercussions on the ecosystem.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** A question immediately comes to mind.

How can biomass be excluded from the order without the input of the forest industry?

**Mr. Luis Calzado:** As an association, AQPER promotes various channels. Firstly, if forest residues were not collected, this would have consequences in terms of greenhouse gas capture. Secondly, it could contribute to forest fires, which would have consequences for caribou in the long term.

For our part, we're looking to put these forest residues to good use, for example to produce biofuels that can be used in the energy transition. As we all know, the energy transition cannot be based on electrons alone. Bioenergy will also be needed for sectors that cannot be decarbonized using electricity.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** So, how do you see your industry developing under the threat of this order?

**Mr. Luis Calzado:** It's going to have an impact. For example, the biofuel, biogas and biomass sectors could be affected because they could not contribute to this energy transition. Here again, our goal is to be part of the compromises that the government has made. If we want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, all sectors need to be involved. I'm not just talking about sectors that work with electrons, namely, wind and solar, but also the bioenergy sectors, which also contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Mr. Bélanger, can you guarantee me that, if caribou habitat isn't disturbed, it won't be harmed by climate change, forest fires or the spruce budworm?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** You're right, the caribou issue is one of disturbance, and that includes natural disturbances. The challenge is that the level of disturbance associated with the logging, in addition to natural disturbances, exceeds the tolerable threshold for caribou.

General forest rejuvenation is the big challenge, and it's also an economic one, by the way. As the union said, the economic value of Quebec's forest is declining because too much is being logged. When you add the fires to all of that, it really becomes a difficult issue.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger, I have to stop you there, thank you.

Mr. van Koeverden.

[English]

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses who have come to committee today for this first day of Parliament.

My questions will be for Ms. Plotkin from the David Suzuki Foundation.

First, over the course of the last couple of weeks, we've heard a lot of conflicting rhetoric around the state of caribou populations, primarily in Quebec. Could you provide us with your take and with what the science tells us about caribou population numbers and

how they've changed over the last 10 or 20 years or whatever time frame you have available?

• (1305)

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** The discussion paper for this committee shows the population trajectories of the three herds that are in question, and these three herds are just holding on. They face imminent extirpation unless measures are taken to restore their habitat and protect remaining viable habitat. At present the Quebec government lacks the political will to take these measures and put them into place.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** Thanks, Ms. Plotkin.

I often reflect on how many of the obligations we have as elected people don't have much to do with getting elected, in the sense that caribou don't vote. People who care about caribou vote, but caribou can't themselves. Neither do polar bears, and neither do clean and fresh air, water and land, but these are considerations we need to take under advisement when making decisions that are going to affect people, jobs, the economy and the environment.

If you were in our shoes and were part of the government, and you had to make a decision that was inevitably going to affect people's bottom lines at a time like this, when things are expensive and we need to build homes, and homes are often built out of wood... We have a lot of wood in Canada, but we also have a lot of caribou and a lot of things and places and species to take care of. I won't use the word "balance", because I know it's not one that you appreciate, but we do need to take into consideration all of these variables.

I have a follow-up question there, and I think I've probably overdone it already, but what would you do?

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** You need healthy forest ecosystems to maintain healthy employment opportunities. It's the idea of whether it's three legs of a table or whether it's concentric circles; the foundation for healthy jobs is healthy forest ecosystems. As Mr. Bélanger said, what we need are plans, and they need to be SARA-equivalent. That means it's not about mitigating our impacts and just reducing them. It's not about saying we'll protect some caribou habitat.

Caribou is one of the most studied species in Canada. Because of the recovery strategy and the scientific committee that was struck to identify critical habitat, we know what caribou need to survive, and I would take a pause in Quebec to reconfigure forest management so that we're looking first at what it looks like to truly, sustainably manage our forests and then at how we can reconfigure the industry so that it maintains viable wildlife habitat.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** Thank you.

Is sustainable logging and sustainable forestry an oxymoron?

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** No. The David Suzuki Foundation believes that you can have sustainable forestry, but it has to have limits. It can't be continually expanding its footprint into primary forests that have not yet been logged. It has to take into consideration cumulative impacts like hydro, and it has to factor wildlife habitat needs into forest management planning.

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden:** Thanks.

Given that both the federal government and the Quebec government are signatories to the global biodiversity framework and that this was ratified and worked on in Montreal, are you surprised by a lack of willingness from the provincial government to take it seriously?

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** I wish I could say I was surprised, but I've been working on this file for a long time, and I've seen a lot of provincial inaction and not just in Quebec. I think there needs to be a system change. We have to change. We have to recognize that we're in the middle of a biodiversity crisis, and we have to recognize that changes to the status quo are needed. In my line of work, everyone says that changes to the status quo are impossible until they're mandated, and then people find a way to make them happen, so I do believe the changes are possible.

**Mr. Adam van Koevorden:** Great.

I got to spend some time outside this summer, and it's always really amazing when you see a large, charismatic mega-species out there, and it'd be a real shame if in 25 years or so that was more and more rare.

Is there a province in Canada or a jurisdiction elsewhere, perhaps in another country that has a lot of trees and does a lot of forestry, that is a gold standard that Quebec and Canada could look to for insight and inspiration?

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** Again, I wish, but a lot of places that are doing the best sustainable forest management now are doing it retroactively, because they've already logged too much. They're leaning in on restoration, but there needs to be a systemic change across all provinces.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Pauzé, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** It's my turn to thank our witnesses for appearing today and helping us find solutions.

My question is for Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Bélanger, you were part of the *Équipe de rétablissement du caribou forestier du Québec*. I imagine you've had the opportunity to talk a lot about forest management. We know that, if we don't talk about management in general, there will be repercussions in terms of climate change, fires, insects and other things.

Can you tell us about your specialty, sustainable forest management?

• (1310)

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** In 2013, Quebec did pass a new act called the Sustainable Forest Development Act. In that act, consideration of biodiversity and development, which was called "ecosystemic", was at the heart of the new regime. In 2016, Quebec consistently

adopted a process to develop a strategy to conserve biodiversity, including caribou. That was part of our national sustainable forest management strategy.

The problem is that it came to a halt in 2021. The collaborative processes that were supposed to allow us to develop our solutions were blocked. Since then, the debate has become ideological, and we are unable to try to find compromise solutions. Furthermore, we knew that the Pipmuacan reservoir sector was probably the area in Quebec where the challenge was greatest. We also knew that Boisaco would probably be greatly affected and threatened, hence the idea of pooling the impact, of finding other sources of supply, so that Boisaco wouldn't have to shoulder the burden of the boreal caribou issue.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** I'll stop you there, Mr. Bélanger. I think you're right, especially since Boisaco's practices seem to be quite exemplary.

Would you agree that a partnership table, similar to the one you participated in, should be created by the federal government to try to find solutions? As I was saying earlier, you put people in a room and lock the door until they reach a consensus.

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** The federal government could set up this table, but without Quebec, it would lack the forestry data to be able to simulate these elements.

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Yes, absolutely.

I'll yield the floor to my colleague Mr. Simard.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** Mr. Calzado, you may have read the socio-economic impact assessment report that was submitted to the committee. It indicated that there were two cogeneration projects in the area of interest that would be directly affected. These projects already exist, including the cogeneration plant in Saint-Félicien.

I'm telling you this because there are residual biomass projects that don't yet exist, but that a number of companies are working on. As we know, the forest industry is a chain. If you cut one link, if you reduce the availability of the chips, the entire chain is affected.

I'd like to know whether you can submit to the committee the various projects of your association, of the members you represent, that are directly affected by a decline in forest biomass.

I'd also like to get an idea of the wind projects that are likely to be affected by the area of interest in the order.

**Mr. Luis Calzado:** Yes, of course. It's not a problem for us to provide you with that information.

Also, I agree with you that it would have an impact on this industry. The Association québécoise de la production d'énergie renouvelable, or AQPER, for example, represents members who, as you say, use chips in the energy transition, whether for heat or bioenergy. As I said, these products can be used to decarbonize high-temperature sectors, which electrification cannot do effectively. That's why it's important to ensure that these industries aren't affected. Obviously, it's important to maintain cohabitation—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We have to move on to Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. This is extremely interesting in the context of this debate, which is complex and affects thousands of people, entire communities, who are feeling very insecure.

We talked about balance. Ms. Plotkin, I found it interesting that you didn't like that word very much. It can indeed be quite problematic, because we want to protect and maintain all the jobs or create others as well so that the communities can survive. However, it is true that it's not really a balance when a species disappears, because there is no way to make it reappear afterwards. So it's a bit of a difficult balance to strike.

So I would like to ask you the following question. We've heard from many people representing first nations communities about how boreal caribou are not only part of their identity and way of life, but also that a healthy caribou is proof of a healthy forest and that there is no sustainable development without a healthy forest.

• (1315)

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** I'm sorry, but was there a direct question?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Yes. What do you think about the survival of the boreal caribou as evidence of the vitality and health of a forest?

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** I am not the only one who thinks that. Caribou are an umbrella species, and they are a bellwether of a healthy forest. They depend upon intact and mature forests in order to survive, so when caribou are in decline, again, it's a sign that the ecological health of the forest is also in decline.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

Ms. Plotkin, you've already talked about the measures put in place to date by the Quebec government. As I've asked other witnesses, could you tell me what measures you consider to be effective?

Is it woefully inadequate to stop the decline of this endangered population?

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** I think Mr. St-Laurent also addressed this by saying that when you do things like the band-aid measures, like putting up fences or killing wolves, you're basically just kicking down the road the measures that are going to be needed to actually build sustainable employment opportunities and sustainable forests. The measures that caribou need to survive and recover are the restoration of habitat that has been degraded and the maintenance of habitat that helps them to survive.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** There is always the problem of jurisdiction between Quebec City and Ottawa. It's a recurring question for serious parliamentarians and legislators.

Ms. Plotkin, in your opinion, what is the federal government's role and responsibility in maintaining and ensuring the survival of the boreal caribou species?

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** When I started my talk, I said that I was here when the federal Species at Risk Act was being debated and brought into force. The idea of the federal Species at Risk Act is that it had a safety net so that the first onus was on the provinces to take responsibility for the wildlife within their provinces. However, because wildlife is an issue of national importance, there had to be a measure, if the provinces were failing and only in rare circumstances, by which the federal government would take the leadership needed to ensure that measures are taken so that species don't become extirpated.

In all fairness, I think the way the act has been implemented by every government since it was brought into force is to use the emergency or critical habitat protection order as a threat, to say to the provinces, "We are going to do this unless you change," to try to motivate provinces to have the political will to take the steps needed to protect and recover caribou. When provinces continually fail time and again... It has been years. The first science about what caribou need to survive came out in 2008—again, under the federal government—and when provinces continue to just ignore it and stall, then I do think measures need to be taken to afford caribou habitat protection.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds left, Mr. Boulerice.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** I offer them to you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We are buying them; we need them this morning.

[English]

Mr. Kram, you have three minutes.

**Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I take this opportunity to move the following motion that was submitted to the clerk last Friday:

That the committee invite the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to appear before the committee for no less than two hours, within 14 days of the adoption of this motion, in relation to his priorities for the return of Parliament and his mandate.

I believe Minister Guilbeault will be appearing before this committee on Wednesday, but only to discuss the caribou emergency order. There are many other issues, of course, that built up over the summer that need the committee's attention—namely the \$8-billion net-zero accelerator fund, the government's unrealistic electric vehicles mandate and, of course, the carbon tax, which the government plans to raise yet again next spring—so I think it is prudent to invite Minister Guilbeault to the committee to answer questions on these and other important issues.

• (1320)

**The Chair:** I have Mr. van Koeverden.

**Mr. Adam van Koeverden:** I appreciate the eagerness on the first day back to Parliament, and I'm certainly willing to discuss the motion at hand, but out of respect for our witnesses, I think we should continue with the meeting.

I'd ask that we adjourn debate on this motion at this time.

**The Chair:** We'll have a vote on the motion to adjourn debate.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

[Translation]

The motion is accepted.

[English]

**Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC):** Chair, just for clarification, that was to adjourn debate on bringing the minister forward to talk about his fall plan.

**The Chair:** It was to adjourn debate on the motion while we have guests.

[Translation]

Let's continue the meeting.

We'll now go to Ms. Taylor Roy for three minutes.

Excuse me, it's actually Mrs. Chatel's turn. She also wanted to be on the list.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A number of jobs in my community depend on forestry.

Today we've heard the unions approach the government and the forestry industry to really rethink forestry. They want us to be able to provide children in our rural communities with jobs today and tomorrow that they can be proud of and that will allow them to prosper and fully participate in the economy of tomorrow.

The employees are making a heartfelt plea, and I hear it loud and clear in my region.

The employees have ideas, and we have to listen to them. The unions have actually proposed one of those ideas, which would be to stop producing four-by-fours and then send them to the United

States or elsewhere. We can do more with the wood we have. We can do more processing. We have extremely well-trained and highly skilled employees who work hard.

[English]

Madam Plotkin, you were at the point in your opening remarks where you were about to say the “good news”. The good news is resetting the industry so that we can all prosper, especially in rural Canada. I really wanted to hear about that.

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** It's not just me; I've heard even this morning a number of things that can be done so that the pressure is taken off caribou habitat. I think they talked this morning about systems of compensation; having companies able to trade wood supply; having, as you mentioned, more value-added products, where there's more value put on the products in Canada before they're shipped out of the country; and also reducing the amount of wood that gets turned into things that are disposable, such as paper towels, Amazon cardboard boxes and things that people just use and then discard.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Other solutions that are also being considered include rebuilding our forests and developing them more sustainably. We have expertise in rural communities, so we can do more of that as well.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Plotkin:** Yes. Again, there are so many smart people out there. There's so much at stake. If the mandate is given and the province has the political will, we can figure out how we can do forestry in a way that's truly sustainable, where we're maintaining habitat for species that need it, where we're maybe increasing our rotation ages and where we're involving indigenous people in the decision-making processes.

A rethink of forestry has to be done. Caribou are kind of the gong that's bringing it to everyone's attention.

• (1325)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** What I really like is turning a challenge into an opportunity.

[English]

Transforming a challenge into an opportunity is what you're saying. This is where we are. We have to put politics aside. We have to work together. We have to do it now, for our workers.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Is it Ms. Pauzé or Mr. Simard who will be speaking?

**Ms. Monique Pauzé:** Mr. Simard.

**Mr. Mario Simard:** I want to quickly go back to what Mrs. Chatel said.

I would simply point out to her that many people have been calling for this transformation in the forestry sector for years. Unfortunately, 75% of all government assistance to the forestry sector is in the form of loans. My region, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, contributes more to the federal government per year than all the financial support provided to the sector. So federal government support for the transition from commodities to more processing is non-existent and always has been. It seems to me that the government has some soul-searching to do.

Finally, I have a question for Mr. Bélanger, who was part of the recovery team. Perhaps Mr. Bélanger knew the late Claude Villeneuve very well, who helped us a great deal when it came to the forestry sector and caribou. Mr. Villeneuve told us that we shouldn't underestimate the impact of climate change on caribou habitat.

I know that some wildlife biologists don't necessarily agree with this argument, but I would like to hear what Mr. Bélanger thinks about it. Does he believe that climate change, particularly in Pipmucan reservoir area, will have an effect on the northward migration of certain caribou herds?

**The Chair:** You only have 15 seconds. Answer very briefly, please.

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** According to the latest research and simulations, no, the caribou will always remain in place. Climate change is coming. The caribou will have to adapt, but it's still within the climate envelope that maintains the boreal caribou.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Boulerice, you have a minute and a half.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've heard from many witnesses and understand just how important the forestry industry is to Quebec's economy. It offers good jobs that are often unionized. We want to do everything we can to protect and maintain them, while protecting an endangered species.

Mr. Bélanger, you said something earlier that didn't escape me. You said we were already logging too much. I'd like you to tell me a little more about that. What's your vision for the future of the sector and the preservation of industries and jobs in that perspective?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** I'll give you a concrete example. The Capitale-Nationale region was the subject of a pilot project to establish regional wood production strategies. An economic analysis of harvestable wood was done. For the Capitale-Nationale region, from Portneuf to Charlevoix, it was concluded that 30% of the forestry potential was not economically harvestable. Since we aren't going to harvest that part of the wood, we're putting even more pressure on quality forests. This leads to a drop in overall quality and a drop in forest diameters. Even the—

**The Chair:** I apologize for interrupting you, but it seems that the sound quality isn't up to standard. The interpreters had to stop interpreting what you were saying.

Mr. Boulerice, I'll give you 10 seconds to wrap up, summarize, say what you want.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would simply ask the witness, Mr. Bélanger, to send the rest of his answer to the committee in writing, if possible, so that we can read it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Godin is next. No.

Who's next for the Conservatives?

Mr. Martel.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** I would have liked to talk to Mr. Bélanger. Since he speaks French and since everyone here understands French, is it necessary to interpret that into English?

**The Chair:** Those are the rules of the committee. We need to have interpretation. That's the way it is. We could try, but if there's no interpretation, you'll have to move on to another witness.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** I want to go to Mr. Bélanger.

Mr. Bélanger, I recently read that reduced forest availability can be achieved without job losses, since the industry doesn't harvest all of what it's granted.

Is that also true for the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region?

• (1330)

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** Not that I'm aware of, no. The Lac-Saint-Jean region is one of the regions that cuts off virtually all the potential for softwood lumber.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you, Mr. Bélanger.

**The Chair:** That's all.

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Yes, that was my question.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Finally, I don't know if it's Mrs. Chatel or Ms. Taylor Roy.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be speaking.

My question is for Mr. Bélanger.

You're saying that one of the solutions right now would be an independent commission, right?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** Absolutely.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** This independent commission would include experts, academics such as yourselves, and representatives from the public and private sectors. Is that correct?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** That's exactly right.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** There was a commission like that in the 2000s. It was the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, or COSEWIC. So there's already been such a commission, and there's already been a report.

What exactly would you like to see?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** It would involve establishing measures to reduce the economic impact, for example, by implementing measures for the movement of wood, silvicultural investments or the harvesting of certain stands currently abandoned, to enable new sources of supply to be found for plants such as Boisaco.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Okay.

Correct me if I'm wrong. This independent commission would serve, in part, to provide a new vision for the forest sector to adopt sustainable practices in line with our commitments to protect our environment and nature, and in part to ensure that natural resources can be there for many years to come to support our economy.

So it would be more of an economic commission, focused on the forestry sector. Is that correct?

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** This commission would certainly have an economic dimension, but it would still have to produce a credible plan for the conservation of boreal caribou.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Right. I think you agree that we can't have an economy if we don't have a healthy environment.

**Mr. Louis Bélanger:** Absolutely. The caribou problem shows that too much pressure is currently being put on the forest. We have to find ways of making a temporal transition to sustainable harvesting levels.

**Mrs. Sophie Chatel:** Okay.

If I understand correctly, you agree with what the unions and Ms. Plotkin were saying. We need a concerted vision from all sectors to ensure that forestry is sustainable and creates good jobs—the jobs of the future.

We need to do more with our natural resources.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bélanger seems to agree with that.

We're at the end of our time.

I want to thank the witnesses for this enlightening exchange. We'll leave it at that.

Thank you again for being with us.

The committee will meet next on Wednesday.

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