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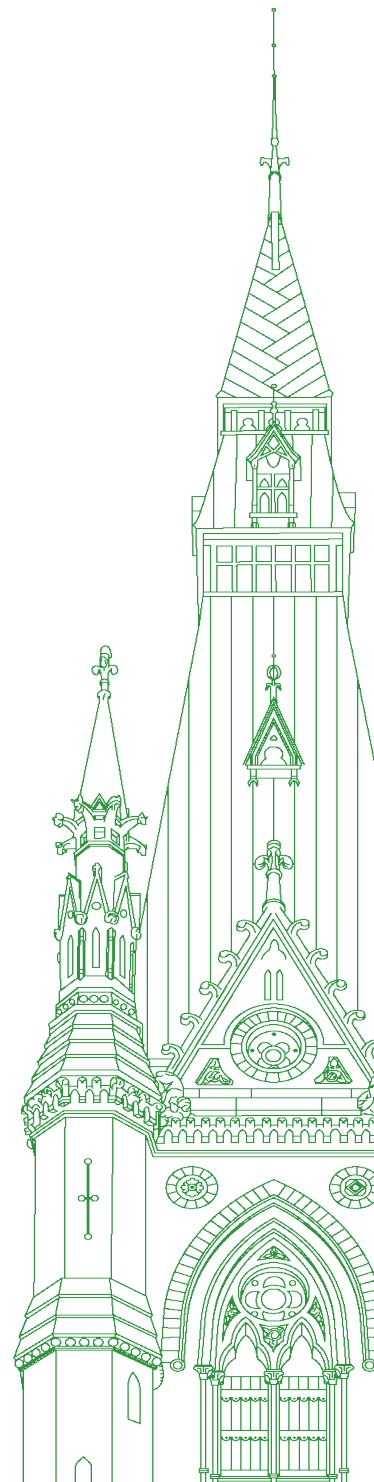
Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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Chair: Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1835)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 23 of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

For the first half of the meeting, we have the following Parks Canada Agency officials joining us: Andrew Campbell, Catherine Blanchard, Christine Loth-Bown, Michael Nadler and Darlene Upton.

We will spend the next 60 minutes examining supplementary estimates (A), but first, Mr. Nadler will give his opening statement.

The floor is yours, Mr. Nadler. You have three minutes.

Mr. Michael Nadler (Vice-President, External Relations and Visitor Experience, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be with you this evening.

As you know, my name is Michael Nadler, and I am the vice-president of external relations and visitor experience at the Parks Canada Agency. With me are four members of the agency's senior management team.

Next to me is Catherine Blanchard, vice-president of finance and chief financial officer of the Parks Canada Agency.

Joining us by video conference are Andrew Campbell, senior vice-president of operations, Christine Loth-Bown, vice-president of indigenous affairs and cultural heritage, and Darlene Upton, vice-president of protected areas establishment and conservation.

Once again, thank you for inviting us today to discuss the Parks Canada Agency's supplementary estimates (A) for 2022-23.

[English]

I'd like to take a moment before discussing the supplementary estimates to recognize that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

June is Indigenous History Month, and this hearing offers an opportunity to briefly share with the committee Parks Canada's abiding commitment to working in partnership with indigenous peoples. Our agency is dedicated to working with indigenous partners to foster a system of national heritage places that recognizes and honours the contributions of indigenous peoples, both past and present.

Parks Canada works closely and collaboratively with hundreds of indigenous communities across the country in the management of national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas. This work includes sharing the stories, traditions and rich histories and cultures of indigenous peoples with Canadians and with visitors from around the world. It also includes acknowledging the deep relationships that indigenous peoples have with ancestral lands, waters and ice across Canada, and works to restore these connections in the spirit of reconciliation.

Turning to the 2022-23 supplementary estimates (A), in these estimates Parks Canada is seeking to increase its reference levels by \$33.6 million, which will bring the agency's total authorities for 2022-23 to over \$1 billion. The \$33.6 million is composed of \$20.7 million in vote 1a, operating expenditures, grants and contributions; \$6.1 million in vote 5a, capital expenditures; and \$6.8 million in statutory expenditures.

The largest item in these supplementary estimates, colleagues, is \$25.5 million to maintain the agency's capacity to manage our capital assets.

[Translation]

Parks Canada is the administrator of one of the largest asset portfolios in the federal government. The agency is responsible for more than 18,500 built assets across the country, with a portfolio that includes heritage buildings, visitor facilities, trails, highways, historic waterways, and even dams and bridges in, or adjacent to, major metropolitan centres.

Between 2015 and 2023, the Government of Canada provided approximately \$4.2 billion to address the deterioration of many built assets managed by Parks Canada. This funding has allowed Parks Canada to improve the condition of over 5,000 assets in national parks and national historic sites.

[English]

Many of these projects have restored aging visitor infrastructure, such as the investment of \$80 million to renew campgrounds at Watterton Lakes, Jasper and Kejimikujik national parks.

Other projects have supported the restoration and improvement of heritage buildings and experiences, such as the \$5.6 million spent for a major restoration of the heritage buildings at Manoir Papineau and the \$5 million spent on a signature interpretive exhibit at the Halifax Citadel National Historic Site.

[Translation]

Still others have resulted in strengthened dams and waterways infrastructure, as well as improvements to roads and highways, facilitating transportation through protected places and strengthening national and regional transportation systems.

[English]

This current \$25-million investment provided by budget 2021 is an interim measure while Parks Canada completes its work on long-term asset investment, maintenance and management strategies. Parks Canada's long-term capital investment plan will address its current and future asset requirements and ensure the effective and efficient management and ongoing sustainability of the agency's asset portfolio into the future.

[Translation]

Of note, Parks Canada is also seeking \$1 million for the learn-to-camp program. Since 2011, the celebrated learn-to camp program has helped people who dream of going on a camping adventure to take the first step by learning the practical skills needed to safely enjoy activities in the outdoors.

Research suggests that many Canadians face barriers to camping in Canada's outdoors, including a lack of access, equipment and knowledge. The learn-to-camp program aims to help thousands of Canadians by breaking down these barriers and encouraging more people to connect with nature.

The Chair: It's been at least five minutes, so we'll have to end it on that note, camping. We will now begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Dreeshen, you have six minutes.

[English]

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here. As someone from Alberta, I always enjoy the wonderful parks we have. Last year I spent some time at Waterton, Banff and Jasper. I ended up buying a couple of passes, but that's because I took two different vehicles at times. Nevertheless, it's a great experience and it's something we should be so proud of, as I know that especially people in your department are.

What I want to ask, Mr. Nadler, goes directly to the estimates. In your remarks, you mentioned that Parks Canada's total authorities for 2022-23 will be over \$1 billion. You further suggested that Canadians "face barriers to visiting and camping" in our outdoors, which of course there are a lot of different reasons for.

My colleague Mr. Mazier submitted an Order Paper question in which he asked for the breakdown of money spent by each park towards promotion in 2022. One of the areas that you're saying the sector money will go towards is promoting awareness for things like the learn to camp program. Your department signed off on the response to this Order Paper question, saying that they don't track metrics like that.

We hear about the number of visitors or the projections of spending on this program or that program. My question to you is this. If your department tells Parliament that it doesn't track how much money each park spends on promotion, how are we to know that this extra funding is going to be used to adequately promote awareness of programs like learn to camp?

• (1840)

Mr. Michael Nadler: That's an excellent question. I recall that parliamentary question, so I'm grateful for the query.

In fact, much of our promotional work and advertising is managed centrally and is not delivered necessarily park by park or historic site by historic site across the country. For 2022, in fact, we resumed advertising. Many of you are probably aware that there was a pause in much of the federal advertising during the pandemic period. We were able to resume an advertising campaign that began in February and concludes toward the end of this month.

Those investments in advertising are \$4 million over two fiscal years—\$1 million in the last fiscal year and \$3 million in the current fiscal year—both for placements and for some content development.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I'd like to ask another question. In the metrics, as you're trying to think about how many people are going to come to the parks and enjoy them, many people, especially in our area.... I mean, it's a three- or four-hour drive to get to parks from where I live. If you're taking a motorhome or something of that nature, what used to cost \$250 or \$300 to fill up your tank is now over \$1,000.

These are the types of things that are going to restrict people. If you happen to live close, maybe you're going to deal with this, but what if you're having problems with budgets, as people are? Has anyone looked at that metric to see what we can anticipate in this time of extra-special costs that people are facing?

Mr. Michael Nadler: For our projections for visitation this year, it's going to be an interesting year for Parks Canada. If it's of any help, we can advise that the year is starting pretty well. The tourism industry broadly across Canada is experiencing below 2019 levels but certainly above last year's expenditures by tourists in Canada. The cost of travel, the cost of inflation and certain uncertainties just on the return of international travel to Canada all present some challenges for us in predicting what will happen over the summer months this year.

You're absolutely right that much of our visitation comes from a two- to four-hour catchment area near a destination. That was certainly the story of last year. So far we're seeing pretty strong domestic local visitation for our places. It's spring, so it's still early in the season, but the signals are fairly positive for visitation.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: There's another thing I'd just like to ask about, because I've read it here and I understand what you're dealing with as far as the learn to camp program is concerned. I grew up camping, so I don't think I need a primer on that, but maybe you could mention to the people who are listening just what that program entails.

Mr. Michael Nadler: It's one of our favourite initiatives at Parks Canada. We take a lot of joy in introducing people to nature and to the experience of cultural and natural heritage places. The learn to camp program offers a fairly broad range of activities. There are roughly 40 overnight events conducted every year. In fact, this year we will be going back to largely in-person delivery. Then also we offer experiences of varied duration, from a couple of hours to a half a day to a full day. We're delivering the program out of six hubs across the country, so basically in every region of the country. We now, in fact, deliver more in communities. We bring parks to people with that program more than we actually bring people to our places.

• (1845)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Who are the target audiences you have identified?

Mr. Michael Nadler: It's a mix of—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have about 10 seconds.

Mr. Michael Nadler: Sorry, did you want me to stop?

The Chair: If you could name three, that would be good.

Mr. Michael Nadler: Yes, that's no problem.

[*English*]

It's urban families and new Canadians, people who may be new to Canada and who haven't experienced our national parks and historic sites. We also target low-income families, low-income Canadians, and Canadians who might face accessibility challenges.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I was remiss earlier in not welcoming Gérard Deltell, who is standing in for Mr. Mazier this evening.

Now over to you, Ms. Taylor Roy.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you also to Parks Canada for being here and participating.

This is a great organization, and I think supplemental requests are not out of line.

I have a couple of questions. One is about the 2020-21 departmental results report. It had an initial aim to have at least 23.7 million people experience Parks Canada during 2021. Of course, we know that COVID limited people's travel and resulted in reduced and modified visitor programming, but there were 17 million visitors in 2020-21. I'm just curious as to how Parks Canada balances the goal of welcoming growing numbers of visitors to the parks and preventing or alleviating damage to natural areas due to high numbers of visitors.

Also, along the same lines, did lower numbers of visitors during the pandemic have any positive impacts on regeneration projects or other Parks Canada initiatives? Did you notice anything or were you able to do anything given that temporary period in which there were lower visitor numbers at the parks?

Mr. Michael Nadler: It's an excellent question.

You're absolutely right that our visitation in the first year of the pandemic, 2020-21, was 17 million. We reached 21.6 million in the last fiscal year. What's important, actually, about that number for Parks Canada is that we had very low international visitation, of course. That meant our domestic visitation among Canadians actually increased by roughly 20%. That meant that a number of Canadians who had never before visited a setting like this were coming. We absolutely had to adapt and strengthen our outreach, our communication and our social media work just to educate Canadians about how to safely and constructively enjoy these settings.

We also worked very collaboratively with the news media, and you might even have seen some of the proactive news media coverage on how to be safe and how to ensure not to impact the environment or the cultural integrity of our places.

We manage the potential impact of visitation on protected places through a number of means, everything from zoning to fairly elaborate visitor use management strategies, and we are able at very high levels of visitation, including the visitation levels that we experienced in 2017 with free admission, to effectively mitigate the impacts of visitation on ecology.

In the first year of the pandemic, it is true that we did not see high levels of visitation, and absolutely we saw some changes in the patterns of wildlife use of our places, but I don't know that I would say that we saw a significant ecological change or benefit from the decline in visitation.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Very good, and thank you so much for that. I'm glad to hear that you have those visitor use management strategies to ensure the parks are protected, as well as the public education campaigns, obviously.

I have a question about electric vehicle charging stations at national parks as we're moving towards more electric vehicles and trying to promote that and combat some of the fuel cost concerns that were raised.

I just wondered how many have been installed. Are they well used? As well, are there any other accomplishments that Parks Canada has had in sustainability goals?

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Nadler: Thank you for your question.

I'm going to ask Mr. Campbell to answer that, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Andrew Campbell (Senior Vice-President, Operations, Parks Canada Agency): To answer the first part of your question, we had and we have a partnership that we have put in place with Tesla to put in charging stations, and passive charging stations, across the country. At present, we have more than 230 charging stations that are universal charging stations, so you can use them on Tesla and non-Tesla vehicles, at 43 different Parks Canada places across the country. We are seeing good visitor use.

On the charging stations, we continue to work with other partners across the country. We have done a couple of projects where we had lot space that we have now given in a business relationship to some private charging types of stations. You can see that in Jasper as a success, and we are seeing visitors giving us excellent feedback on the use of those chargers.

At Parks Canada, we're also aiming to really do a large greenhouse gas reduction in all of our operations, both in facilities and in fleet. By 2030.... We are well on the way to being 40% below our 2005 levels, but we will probably make that 40% below by 2025. That's how far on track we are.

The Chair: We have to go Madame Pauzé now, please, for six minutes.

[Translation]

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

My question has to do with some rather staggering expenditures. Parks Canada's spending hit a high of \$1.3 billion in 2019-20, with infrastructure funding worth approximately \$4.2 billion over eight years coming to an end. That funding was intended to "support infrastructure work in Parks Canada places and to ensure safe, high-quality experiences for visitors by improving heritage" and other assets.

That's a lot of money. Can you tell us in more detail what you spent that \$4.2 billion on?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Yes, just one moment, please.

[English]

I just want to check my notes.

Do you want to jump in?

[Translation]

Ms. Catherine Blanchard (Vice-President, Finance Directorate, Parks Canada Agency): Thank you for your question.

You're right, \$4.2 billion is certainly a staggering amount of money. It was used to fund 1,000 projects across the country over the past seven or eight years. Since then, nearly 80% of the projects have been completed. It is true that the funding program will end when the fiscal year ends. We are currently developing a long-term plan to continue investing in the program.

I should point out that the funding allowed us to improve the condition of assets. In the beginning, 50% of our assets were in poor condition, and now, 79% of those assets have been restored.

• (1855)

Ms. Monique Pauzé: You are telling me that you used the funding to take care of assets. Did you consider identifying areas in na-

tional parks for tree planting? I'm not talking about improving infrastructure. I'm talking about planting trees.

I'm running out of time. Could you please answer quickly?

Mr. Michael Nadler: We did plant trees, but we also undertook ecological restoration in some places. For instance, at Fundy National Park, we made improvements to a number of assets. We restored a significant part of the campgrounds for users, but we also made ecological enhancements.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I see.

I want to follow up on something Ms. Taylor Roy mentioned, damage caused by visitors to natural areas.

You talked about visitor outreach to protect natural areas. What I worry about is the damage caused by global warming. Forty years ago, I visited the Athabasca glacier, the largest and most-visited glacier. It's a very popular tourist destination for visitors from all over the world. We took a snow coach, which dropped us off close to the glacier. It recedes more than five metres a year because of the warming climate. That illustrates the damage done by global warming. The glacier is one example, but there must be countless such examples in the parks.

Are you planning for the impacts of the climate crisis?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask Ms. Upton to answer that, if I may.

The Chair: Of course.

[English]

Ms. Darlene Upton (Vice-President, Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation, Parks Canada Agency): We do a number of different works and studies. Parks Canada is currently developing a carbon atlas series that looks at mapping carbon stores across our places. That will help us in the management moving forward.

We also have a climate adaptation framework. That's been done in collaboration with other partners. With that, we're looking at the data we have in order to predict future impacts of climate. Then we're considering where we need to put ecological corridors, and what types of restoration activities we need to use. In tree planting, for example, we're looking at what types of species we should be planting considering climate change impacts.

We have a national ecological monitoring program with a number of indicators that we can look at to see how climate might be impacting ecological integrity in parks. Of course, it's very complex and sometimes hard to draw direct parallels, but we have a wealth of data we're working with to try to inform our decision-making.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Thank you for that information.

I imagine you allocate funding to that. I don't know whether it's clear in the estimates, but can you give us an idea of how much you spend on education and restoration?

[*English*]

Ms. Darlene Upton: In terms of restoration, I can share that we're investing over \$10 million a year in ecological restoration projects. The priority of those projects is informed by the monitoring program. Where we know ecosystems are under particular stress, that is where we prioritize projects. Those could be habitat restorations. They could be focused on species at risk, prescribed burns to restore habitat, etc.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Collins now for six minutes.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to say thank you to the witnesses, both for being here at our committee today but also for all the work you do with Parks Canada. I really appreciated the questions and comments from my colleagues, especially from Madame Pauzé. When talking about infrastructure, I think we need to think about our forests as green infrastructure and protect them for the long term.

This week the government introduced Bill C-23, the historic places in Canada act, to replace the Historic Sites and Monuments Act. In 2017 the environment committee did a study on protecting Canada's heritage. That included a number of recommendations, some of which are addressed in the new bill. However, some other recommendations, notably ones addressing the need for adequate funding to protect Canada's historic places, were not addressed. The report found that many places of historic significance no longer exist or are in danger of disappearing, often because they have been neglected, and that there is an urgent need to take action to protect and preserve Canada's heritage sites and buildings.

The question is, generally, does Parks Canada currently have adequate funding to ensure the preservation of Canada's existing heritage places?

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Nadler: Mr. Chair, I'm going to turn the question over to Ms. Loth-Bown, if I may.

[*English*]

Ms. Christine Loth-Bown (Vice-President, Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage, Parks Canada Agency): With respect to funding for our heritage assets, as part of the broader funding allocated to the organization for asset maintenance and rehabilitation, we focus on our heritage assets. The legislation that you noted will further seek to protect and conserve. It puts in place the legal requirement for all federally owned assets to follow the standards and guidelines.

The bill that the minister tabled earlier this week—Bill C-23, the historic places act—will apply to federal historic places. It will also make changes to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board and add three additional members.

Ms. Laurel Collins: The committee's recommendation from 2017 recommended that the national cost-sharing program for her-

itage places be restored to \$10 million per year. The current amount available for 2022-23 is \$2 million.

What are the implications of the funding gap for Canada's heritage places?

Ms. Christine Loth-Bown: Yes, the funding right now is \$2 million. Over the past five years, we have had \$20 million, with 177 projects. With the \$2 million now, we had an oversubscribed program. We could have funded 10 times the number of projects than we currently do with the \$2 million.

It is a key tool for us to be able to build partnerships with municipal heritage organizations. With federal, provincial and territorial heritage organizations, it is a 50% cost-share program. With increased resources, we would be able to use that tool to build greater partnerships and have greater examples of protected heritage across Canada.

Ms. Laurel Collins: The departmental results report shows that Parks Canada's target for the number of natural and cultural places managed co-operatively with indigenous peoples hasn't been met.

If Bill C-23 is passed, how would it impact how the agency works with indigenous peoples to co-operatively manage culturally or historically significant places?

Ms. Christine Loth-Bown: Specifically, Bill C-23 responds to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79(i), adding three distinctions-based indigenous members to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board—one Inuit, one Métis and one first nation. It would prescribe in legislation that when looking at nationally designated historic people, places or events, all indigenous perspectives are brought to bear and indigenous knowledge is brought into consideration with these historic designations.

In addition to that, Parks Canada continues to have cultural practices whereby we look at opportunities to work with first nations communities. For example, recently Parks Canada worked with the Poundmaker family and the Poundmaker first nation to repatriate Poundmaker's staff back to the family.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you.

You mentioned that Bill C-23 would address the piece around representatives for first nations, Inuit and Métis on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. The committee report actually recommended a number of pieces to put the government in line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79.

Can you or anyone else give an update on the progress towards achieving the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action 79?

Ms. Christine Loth-Bown: I can.

There were three components to call to action 79. Section (i) was the legislative changes that are proposed in Bill C-23.

The second component was around working with first nations to tell stories at our sites and places and to ensure that our cultural heritage is reflective of the heritage of all indigenous history, including difficult histories. We have been working closely, since 2018, with budget resources to be able to support over 30 projects across the country to have indigenous voices and perspectives at our sites and places.

The third component is to update our cultural resource management policy, which guides how we maintain our cultural resource assets to ensure that indigenous perspectives are brought throughout that. We are working through that policy framework. We have also established an indigenous cultural heritage advisory committee that works closely with Parks Canada on that.

As part of that cultural policy review and the legislation, we held engagement sessions across the country to get the perspectives of first nations communities on cultural resource management.

• (1905)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have time for one more round. I'll just have to shave a bit off of each question. We'll do four, four, two and a half, two and a half, four and four.

We'll start with Mr. Carrie.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a lot to talk about today.

First of all, I really appreciate all the work you do at Parks Canada. I really enjoyed my time working with you. I was curious to see if we could get a little update on some of the projects I was working on way back when.

I want to ask you about the Rouge National Urban Park, the first urban national park, and how that's coming along and setting a precedent for future urban national parks; the canal system and the infrastructure deficit, and how things are going with those; the hours of operation; the Trans-Canada Highway upgrades for safe passages and ecological corridors; and, of course, the workforce at Parks Canada. I'm wondering how the seasonal workers and temporary workers are doing and the effects of COVID.

That's kind of where I was going, and let's see how far we get.

Maybe I could ask you a bit about the Rouge National Urban Park. I think some of the friendly faces around worked pretty hard on that. I remember Alan worked hard, and I think, Andrew, you might have worked pretty hard on that one, too.

I know the goal was to move it towards ecological integrity, and that was one of the stumbling blocks with the province. I'm wondering how the investments are going at the Rouge. I know there was a dump in there, some real estate, some roads, hydro lines, pipelines and highways. I was wondering how things are going with the Rouge National Urban Park. Do you have the funds to do what you need to do down there?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Mr. Chair, I'm going to turn that one to Andrew. He'd probably be the best suited to respond and could probably even touch on some of the other items the member raised.

Mr. Colin Carrie: All right. We have four minutes, Andrew.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Yes, I'm going to have to go very quickly.

The Chair: It's much less than that, Colin.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: There are lots of excellent accomplishments going on at the Rouge, everything from the Rouge beach to restoration projects throughout. The beach underwent significant erosion this spring, in fact. We have a project going on as we speak around the restoration of the beach and the river mouth area in there.

We have been building a trail network that now is going to be linking up to many of the other trail networks.

Our work with the farming community, which, Mr. Carrie, I'm sure you will remember, was a big piece of our work there, continues to improve. We've set one of first long-term leases for people to do sustainable agriculture within the park, which was one of our goals at the inception of the park and certainly for its growth.

As we're moving towards more and more ecological measures, we are seeing more and more improvement in the ecology within the park. At the same time, it is becoming one of those places that Torontonians and GTAers are visiting in high numbers, so it's great on all the fronts.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Durham Region....

Mr. Andrew Campbell: I'm sorry. Durham Region is one of our favourite regions in the country.

I will talk about other pieces that you touched on. Certainly the canal and investment in the canal infrastructure continues to go on. We just had another rain event along the Trent-Severn, and we have teams out there doing dam inspections and making sure that everything continues to function as we head into the tourist season.

Your last question was about seasonal employees, students and youth employment. I'm going to say that one of the things we're most proud of is that during the pandemic, Parks Canada set a goal of having equity-seeking employees to increase our number, and we said, with our youth, that we would have 35%—

• (1910)

The Chair: I'll have to stop you there, Mr. Campbell. I'm sorry.

Go ahead, Ms. Thompson.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That was a good try.

Ms. Joanne Thompson (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to Parks Canada. I have to start by saying, going back to the charging stations for electric vehicles, that there is a station at Signal Hill, the most easterly point in Canada, and it is universal, so well done. It is coast to coast to coast or certainly coast to coast.

I want to begin with the \$35 million provided through budget 2021. Will it be sufficient to protect Parks Canada's assets for future generations?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Catherine will take that one, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Catherine Blanchard: Thank you very much.

The \$35 million that you see in the supplementary estimates is really just an interim measure to protect our workforce. We are working on a long-term capital plan, so looking at what funding we require in the short and long term and developing options.

Right now we are on a path to renewal. The \$35 million is not going to do it, but we're looking at our long-term requirements.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: To circle back to a question from the previous member, Parks Canada is requesting \$19.4 million for operating expenditures, grants and contributions, and \$6 million for capital expenditures, for funding to maintain the agency's capacity to manage capital assets. The measures announced in budget 2021, with the value of \$35 million attributed to 2022-23, would primarily support Parks Canada's workforce, of which currently 48.8% are women and 7.7% are indigenous people. The link is, obviously, seasonal employment, youth employment, and wanting to have a diverse workforce.

What kinds of employment, specifically, will the fund support? Basically, can you give any input in terms of how you're building your workforce and having it reflect Canada?

Ms. Catherine Blanchard: As you can imagine, with an asset base of 18,000 assets across the country and a portfolio worth \$26 billion, it's a very complex portfolio in terms of the types of assets we have. As you know, we have bridges, dams, fortifications, national historic sites and visitor centres. The portfolio requires a very highly skilled and sometimes very specialized workforce. These funds are going to go to retaining our project managers, engineers, architects, archeologists and finance procurement professionals. That's how we're going to be investing the funds, in retaining that kind of diverse workforce.

As was mentioned by Andrew and others, we prioritize equity-seeking groups in terms of our staffing and our hiring. For women, we're over the workforce availability. For indigenous we are at just below the workforce availability. We have some work to do on the other groups, but it is a priority for Parks Canada in terms of our staffing.

Ms. Joanne Thompson: Thank you.

If I could circle back to learn to camp—I'll see if I can get this in quickly before my time is up—I think it's a fabulous program. I'm only learning about it this evening. Will Parks Canada continue to

build on the virtual programming initiated, obviously, during the pandemic, and the learn to camp program? As we return to fully in-person programming, how do you see that initiative expanding?

Mr. Michael Nadler: It's an excellent question. In fact, that is one of the outcomes, and a positive one, from the pandemic period. We were able to adapt some aspects of learn to camp's delivery to the digital format.

We'll continue with some digital delivery, but this year's focus will absolutely be on in-person experiences across the country. We anticipate 40 overnight experiences and around 600 half-day and full-day experiences across the country. We are hoping to hit about 100,000 participants this year. So far we're on track for that target.

The digital will always be present. In fact, all of our contingency planning around possible changes in the pandemic's circumstances allow us to move back to digital delivery if we have to.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Pauzé, you have two and a half minutes. Go ahead.

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

I'm going to pick up where the previous member left off.

According to our briefing note, Parks Canada found ways for people to connect virtually with places that were closed because of the pandemic. A learn-to-camp program was delivered virtually to 75,000 elementary school students in Quebec. As a former elementary school teacher, I am especially interested in that.

Can you tell us what the results of the program were?

Did the learn-to-camp virtual program produce any tangible benefits?

• (1915)

Mr. Michael Nadler: That's an excellent question.

As far as camping and other outdoor activities are concerned, some skills can be learned only through hands-on experience, in the outdoors. Other skills, however, can be learned by watching videos and participating in virtual workshops.

The learn-to-camp program was well received. We have a number of outreach programs that are designed for youth, including schoolchildren.

The idea is to introduce them to nature, culture and history. We partner with a number of organizations including Canadian Geographic. The learn-to-camp program is one of our youth outreach programs.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: The program was delivered in 2020-21. Is it too soon to talk about the tangible benefits of the program?

Mr. Michael Nadler: Are you referring to the skills that were learned or the number of participants?

Ms. Monique Pauzé: I'm referring to both.

Mr. Michael Nadler: All right.

The learn-to-camp program was above all designed to connect young people with nature. In that respect, it was a success.

This year, we want to improve the experience for young people by teaching them even more skills. Youth participation matters, but the program's target audience is families. Kids are usually the ones who convince the parents to go camping for the first time, so the program reaches families as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Ms. Collins.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins: Continuing with call to action 79, I really appreciate the update on some of the actions that have been taken. What do you see as the work still needing to be done on that call to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Ms. Christine Loth-Bown: We are continuing to work in co-operation with indigenous communities, particularly with respect to recognizing the residential school event and moving forward with communities on forms of commemoration for that. In this most recent budget, we received additional funding to continue that important work.

Through the heritage funding in 2018 and with additional funding in this last budget to continue that work, we have, under the national Historic Sites and Monuments Board, designated the residential schools event - four residential schools to date. We are working currently with a number of different communities to commemorate other residential schools, as well working with community members and survivors on the forms of commemoration that they would like to see to acknowledge the event.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Thank you so much.

On a different topic, for Parks Canada overall, voted expenditures have been declining in recent years. On infrastructure funding, approximately \$4.2 billion over eight years comes to an end.

I'm particularly curious about accessibility needs, how the infrastructure funding is currently being used to increase accessibility, and if any of these funding gaps or declining funding will have an impact on ensuring that our parks are accessible.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Michael Nadler: I'll answer quickly. If there are further questions, Andrew might chime in as well.

Absolutely, accessibility is a priority in all of our improvements and restorations of infrastructure across the country. In our long-term planning, in fact, Catherine mentioned that we are presently working on long-term strategies through the management of and reinvestment in our asset base, and accessibility is absolutely a priority in that work as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go back to Mr. Carrie for four minutes.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I can continue with Andrew. I liked your answers.

Again, I was curious about the Rouge and the goal to reach ecological integrity. I was just wondering, do you have enough funds to reach that goal? What do you think?

● (1920)

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Certainly, as we are moving along on the Rouge, we are seeing lots of actions and activities that we can do, and we're looking at some of the restoration funding. Of course, through a lot of the restoration funding—Darlene may want to jump in and talk about that—there are projects that we are undertaking in the Rouge.

As we look towards the measures of ecological integrity and what came out of the first management plan and the work towards the goals that are established there, we will continue to make, I think, significant strides towards improvement in ecology, while at the same time respecting the three areas that we had always looked at, which are the culture of the area, ecological integrity and, again, the farming and sustainable farming community in the area. We'll see all of that move forward.

Mr. Colin Carrie: I think it's great. The first one is always the hardest, but if we can get a few more of these and get Canadians involved....

Maybe I could dig in a little deeper on the canals system. Again, it's a great opportunity, I think, for tourism. I am wondering: How do you feel the hours of operation are going to be this year as the tourists come back? Are there proper funds for that? Is there a number you could give me on the infrastructure deficit for the canals? What else do we need to do to bring them up to where they need to be?

Mr. Andrew Campbell: From a canals standpoint, as we have talked about in several responses, they are part of the long-term asset sustainability approach we are undertaking as we move forward right now. Certainly the canals will be a big part of what we are looking at in terms of asset sustainability. They make up a large percentage of Parks Canada infrastructure and our infrastructure value.

In terms of hours of operation, we seem to be meeting the demand. We aren't getting a lot of questions around that at this point. It does appear from the boating public and those who are traversing the Trent-Severn, the Rideau, Lachine, Chambly and all of the canal systems that we are responsible for that people are getting the offer they are looking for.

Mr. Colin Carrie: That's excellent.

I wonder if you could touch quickly on the upgrades to the Trans-Canada Highway. I know there was concern, and a big priority for me is these car-animal interactions. I got to see some of the ecological corridors, the tunnels and the bridges you guys put together. We need more. Have you been able to complete some of these ecological corridors around the Trans-Canada Highway in the last few years? How are those projects coming along?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: Michael, do you want me to continue on that?

Mr. Michael Nadler: I would. Just keep going, Andrew, absolutely.

Mr. Andrew Campbell: In terms of twinning the Trans-Canada Highway, certainly, as we are doing the work, as Mr. Carrie mentioned, we look at making animal underpasses and overpasses to continue to have those corridors of biodiversity and ecology. That work continues. We are part of Canada's transportation network and continue to work on making sure that areas through national parks are part of that system.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Duguid, you get the last question.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the Parks Canada officials for being with us tonight, and of course for the great work they do, week-in, week-out and month-in, month-out. Canadians are very proud of our national parks system.

There's a lot of excitement around urban national parks, with Rouge being the first, of course. I'm just wondering where we are in the process of meeting that target of 10 new urban parks over five years. Are we on track? I'm particularly interested in Winnipeg and where we are in the process there. As you know, as a result of today's vote, Bill C-248 is coming our way. I wonder if you would have a short comment on the consultations on the urban park proposed for Windsor. My understanding is that consultations have been going on for two years. This is not a new thing that just came about today. Maybe comment on the importance of carrying on those consultations in the right way, so that we all get the result we want.

• (1925)

Ms. Darlene Upton: As you are aware, we received funding in budget 2021 for up to six new national parks, and there is a commitment for more to come. We have seven projects under way, right now, coast to coast. In several of those places, we have established partner committees that are now actively working on studying the potential of having a national urban park in their location.

I will highlight a couple of new things.

First, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Transport for the transfer of the Ojibway Shores lands. The eventual transfer of those lands will be a very important part of the Windsor national urban park, once established. That was a significant step forward for us.

Second, we've now held a series of engagement sessions focused on two main areas. One series was focused on the contribution of urban parks to biodiversity and climate resilience, while another focused on looking at accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion in national urban parks.

In terms of where we are in our process, we are engaging all the multi-jurisdictional partners. This involves consultation and discussion. It is our process to take the time required with our indigenous and other jurisdictional partners to ensure the vision for national urban parks is strong, so we can get as many benefits out of the creation of these places as possible.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Consultations continue. That's great. Thank you very much.

I have a very quick question.

Do we have a global figure for the deficit for Parks Canada infrastructure, coast to coast to coast? I wonder, in your next year's estimates and requests for budget, are you planning for climate impacts, and will you be participating in the process to develop a national adaptation strategy?

As you know, this is a government commitment. It would seem to me that we need to start preparing for the future, because those climate impacts are upon us.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds to answer those two questions as succinctly as possible.

Ms. Darlene Upton: We are working with partners on the national adaptation strategy. Parks Canada signed an international joint statement, which was presented at COP26. It acknowledges protected areas as nature-based solutions to climate adaptation. We've done analysis within Parks Canada, and we know that the lands we administer are worth about \$300 billion a year in ecosystem services, so protected areas are a very important part of the climate adaptation solution.

The Chair: We're going to have to stop there, unfortunately.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for some very interesting answers around some very interesting issues. I know I learned a lot from the discussion. I'm sure the same goes for other members.

We're going to have to break now, because we go in camera.

This is to the members: The link to the in camera Zoom meeting is in the original Zoom email. I imagine that's clear enough. We'll disconnect now, then reconnect. We'll see you all again in a couple of minutes.

Thanks again to our witnesses. We appreciated having you tonight. [Proceedings continue in camera]

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