

COMMON GROUND

By Phil Morlock



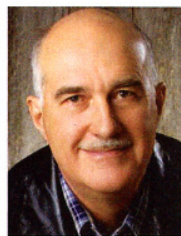
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What would it take to have over 90 Members of Federal Parliament from all four political parties working together? It takes one dedicated MP with a vision and colleagues with a shared common interest in fishing, hunting, trapping and recreational shooting.

Garry Breitkreuz represents the rural Saskatchewan riding of Yorkton – Melville and his passion for the outdoors provided the incentive for him to establish the Parliamentary Outdoors Caucus two years ago. Garry is assisted by his capable staff of Dennis Young, Sandy Campeau and more recently, Brant Scott. This non – partisan caucus is open to any member of the House of Commons or the Senate and Garry and MP Larry Bagnell (representing the Yukon), were elected by their colleagues to serve as Conservative and Liberal co-chairs respec-

tively. The first MP to join the caucus was the enthusiastic Peter Stoffer (NDP) from Nova Scotia.

Commenting on the rationale behind the caucus, Garry Breitkreuz said, “The introduction of the Outdoors Caucus in March 2006 has helped to provide a conduit into the heart of Parliament for this important outdoors constituency. I was pleased to rally the support of other MPs and Senators to promote hunting, fishing, sport shooting and trapping. These activities are an important part of our Canadian heritage and these traditional activities should be represented in Ottawa.”



The Mission Statement makes the Outdoor Caucus priorities clear;

Our mission is to entrench in law fishing, hunting, trapping and shooting sports as acceptable, traditional, environmentally-sustainable outdoor heritage activities with a safety credo and a conservation ethic as our highest priorities, and:

(a) To ensure that Canadians continue to have reasonable access to federally man-

aged public lands and waters to enjoy traditional outdoor heritage activities;

(b) To increase awareness of the economic importance of outdoor heritage activities to Canada’s economy, and to support the growth of outdoor activities, heritage businesses and jobs;

(c) To preserve and promote the traditional Canadian outdoor heritage activities and the environmental stewardship ethic upon which they are based; and

(d) To support multiple sustainable uses and management of public lands, waters, fish, wildlife and habitat, based on sound science and professional natural resource tenets, for the benefit of all Canadians.

In order to provide input and identify priority issues of importance to the Canadian outdoor community, the caucus has appointed an advisory committee comprised of members from a wide range of fishing, hunting, trapping and shooting organizations and related businesses from across the country. The caucus has also established a science advisory committee of professionals to review and make recommendations on policy and legislative issues which have a significant scientific component.



Eldon Hawton is a trapper, the President of Friends of Fur and a member of the Outdoor Caucus Advisory Committee. He believes North America's 'founding industry' remains relevant in the 21st century as trapping still provides additional income for thousands of people in urban and rural areas. The PR campaigns against hunting, recreational shooting and now fishing have their roots in organized efforts against trapping.

Eldon explains, "For too many years, animal rights groups have spread emotionally charged misinformation on trapping with the sole self-serving purpose of raising millions of dollars at the expense of destroying the livelihoods of our people who depend on this important industry". He continues, "The Outdoor Caucus is welcomed as an unprecedented opportunity for trappers to provide Parliamentarians with important factual information, to counter misinformation, dispel the myths and promote the many valuable social, economic and wildlife management benefits due to trapping".

A successful example of elected representatives working together on behalf of outdoor heritage issues exists in the United States with the bi-partisan Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus. After 15-years, this has become the largest and most active caucus in Washington, D.C. and now 33 states have joined the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses for a similar effort with state legislatures.

Over 8-million Canadians of all ages and abilities enjoy fishing as a recreational activity. The Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association (CSIA) represents the manufacturers, retailers and related businesses who serve these anglers. Tom Brooke is CSIA Chairman Emeritus and Vice President of Operations at Shimano Canada. CSIA and Shimano have been strong supporters of the

Outdoor Caucus from the beginning and this is reflected in Tom's viewpoint.

"I see the establishment of the Outdoor Caucus as one of the most significant Parliamentary events to occur in my lifetime", he said. "The simple act of having a group of parliamentarians, representing all parties, all regions, and both the House and Senate, in significant numbers, shows the strength and broad based acceptance of Canada's Outdoor Heritage Activities of hunting, fishing and trapping. I have never felt that, as an active hunter and fisherman, my views were represented in Ottawa. Now I know they are."

Barry Turner, Director for Government Relations, Ottawa at Ducks Unlimited has a similar view. "Hunting, sport fishing, trapping and shooting sports contribute billions of dollars annually to our economy and to local, provincial and federal tax coffers. The Outdoors Caucus will be able to research and advise Canadian decision makers, politi-



Tom Brooke of Shimano Canada

cians and public servants, with factual information that will lead to better informed management decisions about our renewable natural resources."

One important area for the Outdoor Caucus is dealing with legislation which may have serious implications for fishing, hunting and trapping. Since 1998 there has been a sustained and coordinated effort by a coalition of animal rights groups to support federal criminal code 'animal cruelty' legislation with the potential to make it a federal crime to kill a fish or a duck. Portrayed by the Massachusetts based International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Humane Societies as posing no threat to hunting or fishing, this legislation has come close to passing in Parliament on several occasions. The hidden trap door for anglers and hunters is in the legal detail of the legislation. With support from Shimano Canada, CSIA obtained an extensive review of this legislation from the national law firm of Lang Michener. The legal opinion makes it clear that traditional fishing, hunting, trapping, medical research and even agricultural practices using animals for food are at risk of prosecution under the legislation endorsed by IFAW.

Senator John Bryden has introduced an alternative Bill which significantly increases fines and penalties for intentional animal abuse while protecting traditional animal uses, like fishing and hunting. Mr. Bryden is from the Liberal side of the aisle, but the Conservative Harper government has endorsed his Bill. Although the fines and penalties are identical in the two different Bills, not surprisingly the animal rights groups aggressively oppose Senator Bryden's legislation - thereby revealing their true intent to attempt to use changes to the criminal code to attack fishing and hunting. After reviewing the background to the two pieces of legislation, the Outdoor Caucus voted unanimously to support Senator Bryden's legislation.

The positive comments in Parliament about our outdoor heritage activities are also worth noting.

Addressing the House of Commons in January, Larry Bagnell said, "Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure, as co-chair along with the member for Yorkton—Melville, to congratulate the more than 50 senators and members of the House of Commons from all parties who attended December's Outdoor Caucus breakfast. This is one of the largest caucuses in Parliament and for good reason."

Shimano Canada's Angela Darragh and Phil Morlock stand by while Bob Izumi tries out the Speaker's chair.



“Over 8-million Canadians from coast to coast to coast, urban and rural, of all ages, backgrounds and abilities, and of both sexes, enjoy our parks, boating, canoeing, camping, hunting, fishing and trapping. Canadians over the age of 15 who fish outnumber those who play golf and hockey combined. Canadians spend as much on fishing each year as they do on beer. Their outdoor activity represents a \$10-billion boost to the Canadian economy, yet so much that we do could negatively affect the activities of these millions of Canadians. That is why I commend the over 90 parliamentarians who make up our outdoor caucus for their hard work to ensure that all

Canadians can continue to enjoy our national heritage, the great outdoors.”

Bob Izumi was the guest speaker at the December Outdoor Caucus breakfast, held in the Parliamentary dining room on Parliament Hill. Speaking from his lifelong passion for hunting and fishing, Bob explained why he believes the caucus is so vital to the future of our outdoor heritage.

“It is totally unprecedented to have members from all four political parties come together to support fishing and hunting through their membership in the Outdoor Caucus. I am absolutely thrilled to see such a monumental level of support for our industry and it certainly brightens the future for fishing and hunting in Canada.”

Following this meeting, an additional 17 members of Parliament joined the Outdoor Caucus, making it now the largest caucus in the nation's capital.

Garry Brietkreuz remarked, “We are indebted to Bob Izumi for appearing as our guest speaker on Parliament Hill. He attracted the best attendance of any meeting we have ever had, and his support indicates we are on the right path.”

Commenting from his own quiet passion for the outdoors, Mr. Brietkreuz said, “I believe there is a real need in Canada for the Outdoors Caucus because Canadians who enjoy these activities need a voice on Parliament Hill. Some groups in society would like to get rid of hunting, fishing, trapping and sport shooting. Getting this

caucus organized has been a challenge, but the more people learn about it, the more they share our goal and see its value. Generating the political will to sew the Outdoors Caucus into Canada's fabric will be a legacy to us all.”

Yukon MP Larry Bagnell

