This is the first newsletter for the proposed expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve. Local community updates and newsletters are being distributed periodically to report on the project progress and to let you know how to get involved. We welcome your suggestions at any time.

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About this newsletter...

This is the first newsletter for the proposed expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve. Local community updates and newsletters are being distributed periodically to report on the project progress and to let you know how to get involved. We welcome your suggestions at any time.
Since Nahanni’s first Park Management Plan was approved in 1987, Parks Canada has been on record as wanting to increase the size of Nahanni National Park Reserve to better represent the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region and to enhance the ecological integrity of the park reserve.

An expanded Nahanni would better protect water quality, sustain viable populations of animals including grizzly bears, woodland caribou, Dall’s sheep and mountain goats, and help ensure the ecological health of the land.

A larger national park reserve could also protect unique Canadian landscapes such as the Ragged Range, the Tlogotsho Plateau and the Nahanni North Karst lands.

**HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

Lands were set aside in 1972 and 1974 but Nahanni National Park Reserve was not formally established until 1976, when changes were made by Parliament to the National Parks Act.

Nahanni’s protection as a national park reserve followed a major public debate over the future of the South Nahanni River as a free-flowing wilderness river.

This debate directly influenced park boundary decisions; protecting the river from a proposed hydroelectric development at Náličho (Virginia Falls) was emphasized more than protecting the entire intact watershed or important wildlife habitats.

At 4,766 km², the park reserve protects only a small part of a much larger watershed.

Since 1971, almost a dozen studies by government and private consultants have called for various additions or expansions.

Amendments to the Canada National Parks Act in 2000 directed Parks Canada to consider an ecosystem-based approach to protection. The approved park management plan for Nahanni National Park Reserve echoes this goal by emphasizing the importance of the potential park expansion.

In 2002, the federal government committed to creating ten new national parks and five national marine conservation areas, as well as expanding three national parks – including Nahanni National Park Reserve.

**Nahanni Today...**

Nahanni National Park Reserve covers the lower reaches of the South Nahanni and Flat Rivers, in the Dehcho Region of the NWT.

The area of interest for studying the proposed expansion of Nahanni is the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE), which contains the entire watershed of the South Nahanni River as well as the Nahanni North Karst. The GNE straddles the boundary between the Sahtu Settlement Area and the Dehcho Region of the NWT. Please see map, page 6.

Parks Canada is working through different processes in each region. For more information on what's happening in the Dehcho, please see page 4. For the Sahtu, please see page 12.
A SPECIAL PLACE FOR DENE AND MÉTIS PEOPLE

Since time immemorial, the South Nahanni River watershed has been an important cultural and natural area for the Aboriginal peoples of the Dehcho Region and the Sahtu Settlement Area.

Dene and Métis organizations in the Tulita District of the Sahtu have shown a strong interest in working to protect the South Nahanni River headwaters. The Preliminary Draft Sahtu Land Use Plan (2003), identified the South Nahanni River headwaters area as a Conservation Zone, and supported its protection. The current Draft Sahtu Land Use Plan, updated in February 2007, continues to support protection of the Nahanni Headwaters Conservation Zone.

In the Dehcho Region, Dehcho First Nations represents fourteen First Nations and Métis locals, including those in Nahanni Butte, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard, and Wrigley, the four communities closest to Nahanni National Park Reserve.

The leadership and members of Dehcho First Nations have demonstrated their commitment to protecting all of Nahá Dehé (the South Nahanni River watershed). Due to strong concerns about protecting the water, wildlife, habitat and special cultural sites that they have depended upon for generations, both the Nahanni Butte Dene Band and Dehcho First Nations passed Band Council and Leadership Resolutions calling for protection of the entire South Nahanni River watershed.

The Dehcho Land Use Planning Committee developed draft Dehcho Land Use Plans that were presented for public review in 2005 and 2006. In these draft plans, the Dehcho portion of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE) was identified as a Conservation Zone.

One way to help achieve the goal of protecting the South Nahanni River watershed is by expanding Nahanni National Park Reserve.

A VISION FOR TODAY, AND FOR TOMORROW

The Nahá Dehé Consensus Team is made up of representatives from Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada and is responsible for guiding the cooperative management of Nahanni National Park Reserve. The Consensus Team prepared an Ecological Vision for Nahanni that states:

“Nahá Dehé will protect a wilderness watershed in the Mackenzie Mountains where natural processes such as fires and floods will remain the dominant forces shaping the park’s ecosystem. Special features of the park, including waterfalls, hot springs, glaciers, plateaux, canyons, karst landscapes and cultural/spiritual sites will be preserved. Naturally occurring plant communities will thrive and native animal species, including woodland caribou and grizzly bears, will be sustained at viable population levels.

Dene are inseparable from the land. Traditional subsistence harvest will continue to be an integral and sustainable part of the ecosystem and will occur in accordance with Dene laws and principles. Nahá Dehé will continue to be revered as a place of mystery, spirituality and healing.

Nahá Dehé will be a model of cooperative management with First Nations of the Dehcho where ecological and cultural integrity is protected, visitor access and enjoyment is encouraged within the limits of ecological integrity and wilderness experience, and messages of natural and cultural heritage are communicated with excellence. Nahá Dehé will also serve as a national long-term ecological research and monitoring site, and will promote excellence in the conduct of science and cooperative resource protection.”

This vision is from Nahanni’s Park Management Plan, a document signed by the Grand Chief and the Minister responsible for Parks Canada, and approved by Parliament in 2004. It is a key philosophy for future cooperative management of an expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve.

The headwaters area of the South Nahanni River has areas of key caribou, grizzly and Dall’s sheep habitat. It is also a very important place for the Shuhagot’ine, or Mountain Dene, of the Sahtu Region who have strong ties to the land here. Photo: Douglas Tate, Parks Canada, 2006
WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR IN THE DEHCHO REGION?

In 1999, the beginning of the Dehcho Process prompted a new effort to determine a final expanded boundary for Nahanni. In January 2000, a delegation from Dehcho First Nations (DFN) met with Parks Canada’s Chief Executive Officer to propose that Nahanni National Park Reserve be expanded to embrace the entire South Nahanni River watershed.

Through Dehcho Process negotiations, the Government of Canada and Dehcho First Nations agreed in 2000 to create an interim cooperative management board for Nahanni National Park Reserve – Nah?à Dehé Consensus Team – consisting of DFN and Parks Canada appointees. The team’s first major role was to cooperatively oversee the preparation of four important documents to guide and manage the future of the park reserve:

- an Ecological Integrity Statement for Nahanni National Park Reserve;
- a Park Management Plan;
- an Interim Park Management Arrangement; and
- a Memorandum of Understanding Respecting Park Expansion.

Between the spring of 2000 and autumn 2003, the Nah?à Dehé Consensus Team completed these four original tasks. Now the ongoing role of the Nah?à Dehé Consensus Team is to oversee the cooperative management of Nahanni, through the Interim Park Management Arrangement.

In 2003, as part of the Dehcho Process, land withdrawals were made in the Dehcho region of the Northwest Territories. These included 23,000 km² of land within the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (see centre pages for a map of the GNE). Recently, Parks Canada has been working to achieve a land withdrawal of the entire Dehcho portion of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.

In 2003, the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and the Grand Chief of DFN signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Respecting the Expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve.

To implement the MOU, the Nahanni Expansion Working Group (NEWG) was formed, with two members appointed by the DFN and two by Parks Canada. The working group’s job was to complete a feasibility study of the proposed park expansion, and recommend a new boundary for Nahanni National Park Reserve within the Dehcho.

In late June and early July 2006, the NEWG team traveled around the Dehcho region to share early results from the research studies and answer questions from community members. They attended the Dehcho Annual Assembly in Kakisa and then visited Nahanni Butte, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard and Yellowknife for public open houses.
WHAT ARE THE FEASIBILITY STUDIES?

The Nahanni Expansion Working Group has conducted park expansion feasibility studies relating to the conservation values of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem. These have included:

- Research on woodland caribou, grizzly bears, Dall’s sheep and bull trout;
- Mapping and inventory of land cover, karst landscapes, glaciers and sub-watersheds;
- Economic impact analysis; and
- Identification of third-party interests.

The Geological Survey of Canada (part of Natural Resources Canada) has evaluated the mineral potential for the expansion area of interest through the Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment (MERA) process. This study was completed in two parts, MERA 1 and MERA 2. Copies of MERA 1 (Open File 1686) on select portions of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem are available from Natural Resources Canada, while the Open File for MERA 2 will be released in 2007.

These studies are now complete, although some project reports are still being reviewed before release. For a summary of research results, please refer to pages 8-10.

NAHANNI EXPANSION WORKING GROUP: WHO ARE THEY?

Jonas Antoine – Dehcho First Nations Representative

Jonas is a Dehcho First Nations member from Líídli ˛i ˛ Kù ˛é˛ (Fort Simpson, NWT). He is respected throughout the Dehcho and the North as a person who follows Dene traditions and works to protect the land. He represents Dehcho First Nations on a number of important protected area initiatives, Jonas spends as much time as possible out on the land he is working to protect.

Steve Catto – Parks Canada Representative

Steve began his career with Parks Canada 21 years ago, volunteering at Nahanni. He became a Park Warden in 1987 and worked at both Wood Buffalo and Aulavik National Parks before returning to Nahanni as the Resource Conservation Manager in 1997. Although currently on assignment as Park Expansion Officer for the Nahanni Expansion Project, Steve will return to his permanent position at Nahanni once final boundaries for the park have been determined.

Petr Cizek – Dehcho First Nations Representative

Petr lived and worked in the NWT for 12 years as an independent environmental consultant. He specializes in mapping aboriginal wildlife harvesting/cultural sites, protected area design, regional land use planning, and modeling the cumulative impacts of mega-projects. He works with Dehcho First Nations on the community-based Dehcho Land Use Plan and is currently working on a doctoral program at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver.

David Murray – Parks Canada Representative

Over the past three decades, David has lived and worked as researcher, geographer and planner in Nunavik, Nunavut, NWT, Yukon and Alaska. With Parks Canada for the past 17 years, he is currently working on northern national park proposals, including the proposed expansion of Nahanni. David is now based in Ottawa.
WHAT IS THE GREATER NAHANNI ECOSYSTEM?

The Greater Nahanni Ecosystem includes the entire watershed of the South Nahanni River, as well as the Nahanni North Karst lands. It straddles the Sahtu Settlement Area to the north and the Dehcho to the south.

The current boundaries of Nahanni National Park Reserve lie entirely within the Dehcho portion of the watershed. Parks Canada is working with communities in both the Dehcho and the Sahtu—through separate processes—to expand the park reserve.

In addition to Parks Canada’s publicly stated position about expanding Nahanni, Dehcho First Nations called for protection of the entire South Nahanni River watershed in 2000.

The Preliminary Draft Sahtu Land Use Plan (2003) identified the South Nahanni River headwaters area as a Conservation Zone, and supported its protection.

All of these factors contributed to the identification of the whole Greater Nahanni Ecosystem as the area of interest for park expansion.
GRIZZLY BEARS

METHODS:

A non-invasive, hair-snagging technique was used to gather grizzly hair for DNA sampling (no bears were captured during the study).

DNA analysis was conducted on hair samples to determine species, gender, individual identity, and genetic diversity.

CONCLUSIONS:

- An estimated 660 grizzly bears may live within the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE). While this population estimate represents a healthy and sustainable population, it should be noted that an area the size of the current national park reserve can only support an estimated 80 grizzlies.

- Grizzlies have enormous home ranges (averaging over 2000 km²), yet the current park reserve is so narrow that no grizzlies are likely to have their habitat needs met within existing boundaries.

- Based on habitat features such as elevation, land cover and terrain features, the best habitat, and therefore the highest predicted density of grizzly bears, occurs in the northern and eastern parts of the GNE—outside the current park boundary.

WOODLAND CARIBOU

METHODS:

Over the past 15 years, Parks Canada staff and Yukon and NWT Territorial Government biologists captured and radio-collared several adult female woodland caribou.

Collared caribou were tracked and their locations were mapped and analyzed to determine movements and herd ranges.

Researchers also looked at hundreds of caribou observations recorded by park staff between 1977 and 1989. Most of these sightings were recorded within the seasonal ranges of the radio-collared animals.
CONCLUSIONS:

- Three woodland caribou herds use the GNE. Each herd has a distinct seasonal migration pattern and different traditional calving, rutting and wintering areas.
- The current national park reserve protects some of the traditional wintering areas for two of the herds. Traditional calving and rutting areas in the GNE are not protected.
- The Redstone herd uses the South Nahanni headwaters region as a traditional calving area and the north central area of the GNE for fall rut and winter.
- Only the Upper Nahanni herd (estimated size: 940 to 1,140 animals) seems to migrate entirely within the GNE, calving and rutting in the Upper South Nahanni area and wintering in the park reserve.
- The Lower Nahanni herd migrates back and forth over the Yukon/NWT boundary, wintering in the southeastern areas of the GNE.

DALL'S SHEEP

METHODS:

Surveys of sheep and sheep habitat were carried on the Ram Plateau, Tundra Ridge, Tlogotsho Plateau and Nahanni Plateau. Hair and faecal samples were collected for DNA analysis.

Dr. John Weaver of the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada also compiled all known data from previous studies (1966 to present), particularly those done by biologist Norman Simmons. He included 567 year-round observations of sheep recorded by park staff between 1977 and 1989.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The most important Dall’s sheep habitat is located outside the park reserve.
- Key areas that support larger sheep populations include the Liard, Headless and Funeral Ranges, as well as the Tlogotsho and Nahanni Plateaux.
- Dall’s sheep and the Nahanni North Karst appear to be linked: during a 2005 karst survey of the Nahanni North Karst, Dall’s sheep were observed in the entrances to several karst caves. Sheep hair and faeces were recorded at a number of other caves. It appears that ewes and lambs use caves as shelter. This has not been documented anywhere else in North America.

NAHANNI NORTH KARST

METHODS:

Dr. Derek Ford and several other karst scientists conducted surveys of karst features north of First Canyon in Nahanni National Park Reserve and in the Ram River basin.

To determine the underground karst drainage southwards to the South Nahanni River and northwards to the Ram River, tracing tests were placed into several sinking streams and detectors were placed on two major known springs.

CONCLUSIONS:

- The Nahanni North Karst is a globally significant karst landscape featuring cave systems, underground rivers, sinkholes, rock bridges, limestone pavements, isolated rock towers, and poljes (karst corrosion plains that occasionally flood to form lakes). These are fragile and irreplaceable landforms, sensitive to disturbance and development.
- Tracer tests placed in the Nahanni North Karst have proved that groundwater from the karst lands enters the South Nahanni river at White Spray Springs. Further tests will be needed to determine the extent and direction of all groundwater flow.
- Pollution of the groundwater could affect the river and all waters downstream.

Feasibility Studies continued on Page 10
MINERAL AND ENERGY RESOURCE ASSESSMENT (MERA)

METHODS:
Geologists collected stream sediment samples, flew geophysical surveys by sensor-equipped helicopter, and sampled all known mineral springs.

They also visited and sampled major known mineral showings recorded in NORMIN – a publicly available database of mineral deposits.

CONCLUSIONS:
- The MERA indicates that there are some areas with significant mineral potential in the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE).
- Mineral showings of copper, lead, gold, zinc, uranium and tungsten were scattered around the GNE.

STUDY OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

METHODS:
The researchers studied Parks Canada spending on local infrastructure, operations, capital and wages/salaries, as well as the estimated spending by park visitors since the park reserve was created.

They also examined regional socio-economic data, park budget records, visitor data, visitor surveys and information on visitor spending levels.

CONCLUSIONS:
- The total value-added to the NWT economy between 1975 and 2005 was $41 million. The annual economic impact for the NWT is estimated at $950,000/year in value-added, $735,000/year in labour income and 20 person-years of employment.
- It was difficult to determine future economic impact because the size of the park expansion is not yet known, but researchers estimated $10 million in new spending by Parks Canada, $1.6 million by park visitors and 59 new person-years of employment.
- Mineral exploration and development, and guided big-game hunting and outfitting will likely be impacted significantly by park expansion and these impacts need to be considered carefully.

Fact sheets on some of these projects are available. For more information, please contact us. You’ll find our contact information on page 12.
Q. When the boundary options are ready for consideration, will Parks Canada consult with Aboriginal peoples and third party interests in addition to consulting with the Canadian public?

Yes.

The proposed boundary options for expanding Nahanni within the Dehcho Region are being developed in partnership with Dehcho First Nations. Chiefs and Councils within the Dehcho will be offered a full briefing, and opportunity to provide feedback, prior to public open houses.

Each third party interest has specific issues and concerns around the proposed park expansion. Parks Canada will be making sure that these are acknowledged, and wherever possible addressed, in consultation with the organizations affected.

Q: Will Parks Canada expropriate third party interests in order to expand the park?

No.

The Canada National Parks Act and Parks Canada policies do not allow Parks Canada to expropriate any existing private or commercial interest in land in order to expand a national park.

If Parks Canada were to be interested in the purchase of any existing private or commercial interest within the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem, it could only be acquired by negotiated settlement, on a mutually agreed upon “willing seller - willing buyer” basis.

Q. Will there be new opportunities for visitor experience and tourism related business when the park expands?

Yes.

Parks Canada’s mandate encourages people to come and experience our country’s special places. Parks Canada believes that park expansion will bring significant new opportunities for visitors and local businesses.

The Greater Nahanni Ecosystem has wonderful places for canoeing, rafting, backpacking, climbing, mountaineering, Aboriginal heritage interpretation, camping, flight seeing and day hikes.

There is great potential for new types of visitor experiences in new areas. Some ideas for these include: enhanced cultural heritage interpretation programs, expanded day use opportunities, expedition hiking, ski mountaineering, dogsledding, mountain-biking and new cultural tours.

Parks Canada’s integrated mandate is to provide natural and cultural resource protection, education and memorable visitor experiences. New visitor experiences and tourism business opportunities will be explored in consultation with Dehcho First Nations, communities and existing tourism operators.

Q: Will Aboriginal people, who have depended upon this land for generations, continue to be able to pursue traditional activities on the land?

Yes.

Parks Canada recognizes, affirms and celebrates Aboriginal peoples’ existing rights in legislation, policy and management plans.

The Canada National Parks Act allows for on-going traditional use by stating: “The application of this Act to a park reserve is subject to the carrying on of traditional renewable resource harvesting activities by aboriginal persons.”

The Interim Park Management Arrangement, signed in 2001 by the Grand Chief for Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada’s Minister, states: “The Parties agree to provide for the continuation of cultural activities and traditional renewable resource harvesting in Nahanni National Park Reserve...”

Nahanni’s current Management Plan vision, written by representatives of both Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada, celebrates the Dene and their relationship with the land: “Dene are inseparable from the land. Traditional subsistence harvest will continue to be an integral and sustainable part of the ecosystem and will occur in accordance with Dene laws and principles. Nah? Dehé will continue to be revered as a place of mystery, spirituality and healing.”
WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT IN THE DEHCHO PORTION OF THE GREATER NAHANNI ECOSYSTEM?

The Nahanni Expansion Working Group has used the results of all research and feasibility studies to develop boundary options that will be brought forward for consultation in 2007.

At this point, **boundary options are only being proposed for lands within the Dehcho region of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE); there is a different process to follow in the Sahtu region (described below).**

Research results and proposed boundary options will be shared with First Nations, local communities, stakeholders and the general public.

Parks Canada will seek input and opinions on the boundary options and issues related to the proposed park expansion.

After considering feedback from stakeholders and the public, the Working Group will recommend a new boundary for Nahanni National Park Reserve **within the Dehcho portion of the GNE.** This recommendation will be provided to both Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada.

With research results, public input and boundary recommendation in mind, Dehcho First Nations and Canada will negotiate an agreement to expand Nahanni National Park Reserve within the Dehcho.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE SAHTU SETTLEMENT AREA?

About 16 percent of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE) lies in the Tulita District of the Sahtu Settlement Area, where a comprehensive land claim (the Sahtu Final Agreement) was settled in 1994. The Sahtu Final Agreement delegates responsibility for managing land in the Tulita District to three land corporations. They operate under a fourth umbrella group, the Tulita District Land Corporation.

Communities, Aboriginal groups and land corporations throughout the Sahtu Settlement Area participate in drafting the Sahtu Land Use Plan. As mentioned previously, the Sahtu Land Use Plan, Draft One (2007), identifies the South Nahanni River headwaters area as a Conservation Zone.

Parks Canada is working with the land corporations to protect this important area. Because these talks are just beginning, and because the processes in the Sahtu and Dehcho are so different, Parks Canada will not include any proposals for areas within the Sahtu in the public consultations for boundary options in the Dehcho portion of the GNE.

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you would like to share your ideas or want to know more about the expansion process, we would like to hear from you. Every effort is being made to ensure that we are accurate and thorough when recording input and comments. Your input will be heard and considered. We will respond to your questions and concerns.

For more information, please contact:

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