

**June 9, 2009**

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Nahanni National Park Reserve Expansion**

The announcement today by the federal government of permanent protection for a vast region that comprises almost the entire South Nahanni Watershed of the Northwest Territories is an achievement of grand proportions.

It means that the Nahanni National Park Reserve expands sevenfold to an area the size of Vancouver Island, or, for an international comparison, to an area two-thirds the size of Switzerland. This assures protection forever for an irreplaceable wilderness region of over 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

The area of Nahanni is immense: The Rocky Mountain Parks of Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay together protect 20,235 km<sup>2</sup>, while Yellowstone National Park in the United States protects 8,983 km<sup>2</sup>.

The Nahanni lies within Canada's Boreal region, home to the world's largest remaining wilderness forest, and a prime source of oxygen and freshwater. The Nahanni is also an integral part of a wildlife corridor known as "[Yellowstone to Yukon](#)" that stretches from Yellowstone Park, in Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, through Alberta and B.C. to the Yukon Territory.

Not only is the Nahanni a place of importance to First Nations and a landscape of spectacular beauty, its protection will contribute to the world's environmental health.

The original Nahanni National Park Reserve was set aside in 1972 to protect the river from possible hydro-electric development. The river at its heart – the South Nahanni -- has since developed a reputation as one of the top paddling rivers in the world, and in 1978 UNESCO named the park the first natural World Heritage Site.

But the original park area, just 8 km wide in some places, was too small to protect large [animals](#) such as grizzly bears and woodland caribou, which roam far beyond the original boundaries. With only a small portion of the watershed protected, the pristine quality of the river could not be guaranteed in the face of growing industrial development pressures. And some of the region's most remarkable features – such as rare limestone formations known as [karst](#) - lay outside the 1972 boundaries.

## Assuring the future of an ecological treasure

In 2003, the Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada signed an agreement that they would collaborate on recommendations for expanded boundaries for Nahanni National Park Reserve. In 2007, the federal government temporarily set aside the part of the Nahanni watershed that lies within the Dehcho First Nations traditional territory for this purpose.

The announcement of final boundaries ensures that over 90% of the Dehcho area of the Nahanni watershed will be permanently protected.

## One watershed, two traditional territories, two national parks

The South Nahanni Watershed straddles traditional territories of *two* Dene First Nations. Roughly 80 percent of the watershed lies within the traditional territory of the Dehcho. The upper 20 percent of the watershed is within traditional territory of the Sahtu Dene and Métis.

The Nahanni (Nahꞏa Dehé in the local Dene language) is of great cultural significance to the both regions. Nahanni forms a key part of many stories and legends. The Dehcho and Sahtu Dene and Métis share a sacred duty to protect the South Nahanni Watershed.

In April, 2008, Environment Minister John Baird, in collaboration with the Sahtu Dene and Métis, announced temporary protection of the 7,600 sq. km. headwaters in the Sahtu region for the creation of [Nááts'ihch'oh National Park](#). When the new park is finalized, this will result in permanent protection for almost the entire South Nahanni Watershed.

## By the Numbers

Total size of full South Nahanni Watershed and limestone karstlands	40,000 km <sup>2</sup>
Original Nahanni National Park Reserve (established 1972)	4,766 km <sup>2</sup>
Area of upper Nahanni Watershed under temporary protection for creation of Nááts'ihch'oh National Park (Sahtu region), announced April 2008	7,600 km <sup>2</sup>
Area permanently protected in expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve (Dehcho region), announce June 2009	over 30,000 km <sup>2</sup>
Expected area of two adjacent national parks (Nahanni and Nááts'ihch'oh)	Over 38,000 km <sup>2</sup>

## About the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS)

[CPAWS](#) promotes the kind of large-scale landscape conservation which the expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve exemplifies. CPAWS believes this approach of “thinking big” is necessary to safeguard healthy ecosystems far into the future.

In every province and territory, CPAWS is working with communities, Aboriginal organizations, governments, and other partners to create more protected areas to conserve our extraordinary wilderness heritage.

In 2008, CPAWS and Mountain Equipment Co-op founded The Big Wild, an initiative that enables people to show their support for a shared vision: that Canada will keep at least half of its public lands and waters forever wild. Add your voice at [www.bigwild.org](http://www.bigwild.org).

For more information about Nahanni  
[www.cpaws.org/nahanni](http://www.cpaws.org/nahanni)

Also available: News Release, photos and B Roll

Contact: Ellen Adelberg (613) 569-7226 x 234, cell (613)292-2875  
In NWT: Lani Cooke (867) 873-9893 x26