

April 7, 2008

## Backgrounder

### Nááts'ihch'oh – the Headwaters of the South Nahanni River

#### **Where is Nááts'ihch'oh?**

Nááts'ihch'oh is a 7,600 sq km area of the Mackenzie Mountains in the western part of the Northwest Territories (NWT). It covers the upper 20% of the South Nahanni Watershed that is located in the Sahtu region of the NWT. The other 80% of the South Nahanni Watershed lies in the Dehcho region of the NWT, to the south.

#### **What does Nááts'ihch'oh mean?**

Nááts'ihch'oh is a Slavey name that refers to Mount Wilson, a major landmark in the area, and means “pointed like a porcupine quill.”

#### **Why is this region important?**

- Nááts'ihch'oh contains critical habitat (calving and post-calving) for mountain woodland caribou which are listed as a species of Special Concern under the federal Species at Risk Act.
- It also includes important grizzly bear and Dall's sheep habitat;
- It is important culturally and spiritually to the Shutagot'ine (Sahtu Dene and Métis), and was identified for protection through the land use planning process in the Sahtu region.
- It includes an area known as the Moose Ponds on the uppermost reaches of the South Nahanni River, which is used as a launching point by some advanced canoeists who are able to tackle the challenging whitewater of the upper South Nahanni River.
- In addition to the upper part of the South Nahanni River, Nááts'ihch'oh also includes the Broken Skull River and the Little Nahanni River, which are also significant canoe routes.

#### **How does Nááts'ihch'oh relate to the Nahanni?**

- Nááts'ihch'oh covers the uppermost 20% (or 7,600 sq km) of the South Nahanni Watershed
- In total the South Nahanni Watershed includes 40,000 sq km of land that drains into the South Nahanni River. Eighty percent of the watershed is located in the Dehcho Region, while the upper 20% is Nááts'ihch'oh, in the Sahtu region.

#### **Why have two separate national parks to protect the watershed?**

The South Nahanni Watershed covers two regions of the NWT, and the traditional territories of two Aboriginal groups. Eighty percent of the watershed lies in the Dehcho Region, where Nahanni National Park Reserve is located. In that region there is an

agreement between Parks Canada and the Dehcho First Nations to work together to expand the existing Nahanni National Park Reserve to protect the South Nahanni Watershed.

The uppermost 20%, or the headwaters of the South Nahanni Watershed, is in the Sahtu region. Here the Sahtu Dene and Métis, represented by the Tulita District Land Corporation have signed an agreement to protect Nááts'ihch'oh in a new national park.

### **What is CPAWS' involvement in Nahanni?**

The Nahanni region has a long history of conservation efforts. The original Nahanni National Park Reserve was established in 1972 after CPAWS (then known as the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada) led a public outcry against damming Virginia Falls on the Nahanni River. The park, which was designated a World Heritage Site in 1978, was too narrow and too small to protect enough habitat for wide-ranging wildlife like woodland caribou and grizzly bears. More recently, mining interests have been encroaching into the Nahanni Watershed, putting the ecological health and pristine waters of this world famous wilderness at risk.

For the past five years, CPAWS has been leading a public campaign, in collaboration with local First Nations, to protect Nahanni Forever. Protecting the entire South Nahanni Watershed within national parks will permanently protect the habitat needed by woodland caribou, grizzly bears and Dall's sheep, and protect the pristine waters and wilderness values of the South Nahanni River – one of the world's most famous wilderness canoeing destinations.

The next decision CPAWS is seeking is for the federal government to announce the final boundaries for the expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve.

### **What other work is CPAWS doing in the NWT?**

For more than a decade, CPAWS has been working to establish a network of protected areas in the Boreal forest of the NWT. This work has been proceeding through the NWT Protected Areas Strategy – a partnership between Aboriginal organizations, conservation organizations including CPAWS, territorial and federal governments, and industry – as well as through national park proposals and regional land use planning initiatives in the Dehcho and Sahtu regions.

Today's conservation announcement is the fourth in the past year by the federal government and the Government of the Northwest Territories. These include next steps towards protecting Sahoyúé - ʒehdacho National Historic Site on Great Bear Lake; establishing a national park on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake (Thaydene Nene), and establishing a national wildlife area in the Ramparts River and Wetlands area of the Mackenzie Valley (Ts'udeniline Tu'eyeta), as well as setting aside conservation lands in the Akaitcho region as part of self governance negotiations. In all, over 135,000 sq km of land have been set aside in the NWT for conservation in the past year.

### **For more information contact:**

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