

INFORMATION SHEET: Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve



Photo 1: Nááts'ihch'oh – Mount Wilson and moose ponds (Adam Smith), Photo 2: Grizzly bear (Craig Scott), Photo 3: Woodland Caribou (Stefan Goodman).

In 2012, the Government of Canada announced the creation of Nááts'ihch'oh (pronounced Nah-tseen-cho) National Park Reserve (NPR). The creation of Nááts'ihch'oh NPR was highly anticipated to complete protection of over 90% of the entire South Nahanni watershed. Abutting Nahanni National Park Reserve, it has the potential to help protect wide-ranging species like grizzlies and key breeding and calving grounds for mountain woodland caribou and Dall's sheep.

Nááts'ihch'oh: Protecting the South Nahanni Headwaters

Protecting the South Nahanni Watershed is scientifically supported locally, across Canada, and internationally. In 2006, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee recommended that Canada protect the entire South Nahanni Watershed in recognition of the area's globally significant values.

Headwaters are the area where a river begins. The Moose Ponds, located at the foot of Mt. Wilson at the northern end of Nááts'ihch'oh NPR (photo 1), is where the South Nahanni River begins. The health of the entire river is dependent on the health of its headwaters and the ecosystems it flows through, such as the surrounding mountains and forest plains. In addition to its ecological values and role in completing protection of the South Nahanni Watershed, Nááts'ihch'oh holds key cultural and spiritual significance for the Shutagot'ine (Sahtu Mountain Dene), as well as the Sahtu Métis.

In 2011, after years of scientific research and planning, three different-sized options were proposed for the boundaries of Nááts'ihch'oh NPR. Each outlined the benefits and possible outcomes of protecting portions of the area. Ultimately, a fourth boundary was developed and chosen by the federal government. This boundary takes full advantage of potential industrial development within the area; as a result, critical habitat for grizzlies and mountain woodland caribou will likely be fragmented and degraded over time, and important headwater tributaries, such as a portion of the Little Nahanni River, have been removed from the park reserve.

A land withdrawal currently protects the entire area of the proposed Nááts'ihch'oh NPR until March 31, 2015. As the boundary is currently drawn, there is a real risk that the ecological integrity of the entire South Nahanni Watershed will be compromised. It is possible that an alternate final park reserve boundary or other conservation measures can be enacted to better protect critical wildlife habitat and watershed tributaries before the withdrawal expires.

Site History

Date	Event
2014	Interim land withdrawal (surface and subsurface) currently protecting Nááts'ihch'oh while awaiting formal finalizing of NPR status, is extended until March 31, 2015.
2013	The Sahtu Land Use Plan comes into effect in August 2013. Nááts'ihch'oh is designated under the Land Use Plan as a Proposed Conservation Initiative and is therefore protected from development until the final boundaries for the National Park Reserve are legally in place.
2012	The establishment of Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve is announced. ('Reserve' status conferred until completion of the Dehcho Process). The final boundary includes only 4,850 km ² : 70% of the original study area, with significant areas of critical wildlife habitat omitted. Boundary status remains outstanding until federally formalized.
2010	Parks Canada consults the public, Aboriginal communities and third party stakeholders on boundary options for Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve: the remainder of the South Nahanni Watershed, in the Sahtu Settlement Area.
2009	Nahanni NPR is expanded to six times its original size (30,000km ²), including most of the Dehcho portion of the South Nahanni Watershed (see map on facing page).
2008	Study released ("Conserving Caribou Landscapes in the Nahanni trans-border Region", J. Weaver, 2008) discussing the importance of keeping the undeveloped land within the South Nahanni Watershed protected to conserve unique populations of caribou. The study shows strong site fidelity to calving and summer sites located in the proposed expansion area, adding scientific credibility to the argument for protecting the entire watershed.
2007	Feasibility studies are completed by the NEWG, looking at conservation values and mineral and energy potential in the area – it is recommended that the Nahanni NPR expansion area be much larger than originally planned.
2006	Study done by Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada ("Big Animals & Small Parks", J. Weaver, 2006) shows that the survival of large mammal species (grizzly bear, Dall's sheep, and woodland caribou) depends on the size of their natural range, including calving/breeding grounds, and migration routes. The study helps map local population ranges in and around the existing Nahanni boundaries and shows the importance of protecting the entire South Nahanni Watershed.
2004	Nahanni Expansion Working Group (NEWG) forms – Parks Canada and the DFN (through the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding) conclude that the expansion should include the entire South Nahanni River watershed. An interim land withdrawal is created to set aside land (including the future Nááts'ihch'oh) for the anticipated expansion.
2003	The Nahʔá Dehé Consensus Team complete an Ecological Integrity Statement for Nahanni, prepare an Interim Park Management Arrangement, review the Park Management Plan, and create a Memorandum of Understanding (with Parks Canada) Respecting Park Expansion of Nahanni NPR.
2002	Government of Canada's Action Plan to Protect Canada's Natural Heritage includes the goal of expanding Nahanni NPR.
2000	The DFN and the Government of Canada establish the Nahʔá Dehé Consensus Team to create a Management Plan and vision for Nahanni NPR.
1987	Parks Canada and the Dehcho First Nations (DFN) begin discussing plans for expansion of Nahanni NPR.
1972	Nahanni is set aside as a National Park Reserve (original size: 4,766 km ²).



CPAWS-NWT's mission is to conserve the land, water, and wildlife in the NWT for current and future generations, by working with NWT residents, Aboriginal and public governments, communities, and organizations.

CPAWS continues to advocate for protection of the entire South Nahanni Watershed and is thrilled to have played an important role in the 2009 Nahanni Park Reserve Expansion.

For more information, to volunteer or to become a member visit www.cpaawnsnw.org.