



Nahanni

National Park Reserve of Canada

Nah?a Dehé

Management Plan

2010



June 2010

Nahanni

NATIONAL PARK RESERVE OF CANADA

Nahʔą Dehé

MANAGEMENT PLAN

Canadian
Heritage
Rivers
System



Le Réseau
des rivières
du patrimoine
canadien



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FOREWORD

Canada's national historic sites, national parks and national marine conservation areas offer Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast unique opportunities to experience and understand our wonderful country. They are places of learning, recreation and inspiration where Canadians can connect with our past and appreciate the natural, cultural and social forces that shaped Canada.

From our smallest national park to our most visited national historic site to our largest national marine conservation area, each of these places offers Canadians and visitors several experiential opportunities to enjoy Canada's historic and natural heritage. These places of beauty, wonder and learning are valued by Canadians - they are part of our past, our present and our future.

Our Government's goal is to ensure that Canadians form a lasting connection to this heritage and that our protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

We see a future in which these special places will further Canadians' appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of Canada, the economic well-being of communities, and the vitality of our society.

Our Government's vision is to build a culture of heritage conservation in Canada by offering Canadians exceptional opportunities to experience our natural and cultural heritage.

These values form the foundation of the new management plan for Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada. I offer my appreciation to the many thoughtful Canadians who helped to develop this plan, particularly to our dedicated team from Parks Canada and Dehcho First Nations, and to all those organizations and individuals who have demonstrated their good will, hard work, spirit of co-operation and extraordinary sense of stewardship.

In this same spirit of partnership and responsibility, I am pleased to approve the Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada Management Plan.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jim Prentice', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jim Prentice

Minister of the Environment

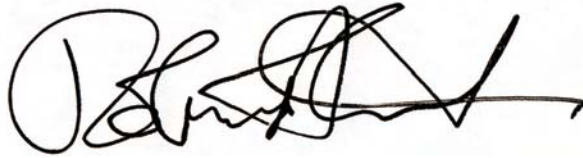
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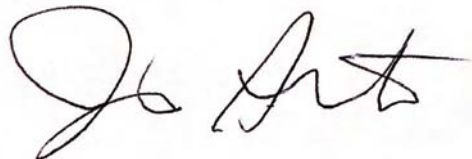
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks Canada is responsible for administering a system of world-renowned national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. These protected areas showcase our country's natural, cultural and historic treasures, and are a living legacy of our heritage. Parks Canada's goal is to ensure that Canadians have a strong sense of connection through meaningful experiences and that these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations.

Nahʔa Dehé is the traditional name for Nahanni National Park Reserve, reflecting its Dene heritage. The park was established in 1976 to protect the South Nahanni River from hydroelectric development. It was expanded in 2009, and now includes a diverse array of unique landforms and important wildlife habitat. The park protects a significant portion of the Nahʔa Dehé watershed, a traditional homeland of the Dene. As such, cooperative management is at the heart of operations for the park. Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada work together on park management issues through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team.

This management plan was developed by the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team, with community, stakeholder and public involvement. It will be the primary reference document for decision-making and accountability for the park. Building on the foundation of previous plans and amendments and the strengths and challenges presented in the 2009 *State of the Park Report*, this management plan contains twelve objectives and more than eighty-five actions designed to improve and monitor the state of the park, address needs and opportunities, and focus efforts and resources towards achieving the park vision. The plan sets the foundation to:

- Protect the Nahʔa Dehé watershed and respect the wilderness character of the park;
- Become a centre for northern mountain research;
- Encourage exploration and discovery of Nahʔa Dehé by visitors and others;
- Expand visitor experience opportunities and products;
- Build training, employment and business opportunities for Dehcho First Nations;

- Develop operational infrastructure in Fort Simpson and Nahanni Butte; and
- Create a zoning plan for the park expansion area.

The plan integrates the three elements of the Parks Canada's mandate - the protection of heritage resources, the facilitation of visitor experiences and the provision of public outreach education - into a new park vision, three key strategies and three area management approaches.

Key Strategy #1: Taking Care of Nahʔą Dehé

The Northwest Territories' highest mountains, largest glaciers and some of Canada's deepest canyons are all found in Nahʔą Dehé. The park includes a Canadian Heritage River and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nahanni National Park Reserve must work with others to help maintain the highest possible standards of quality for the waters, lands, air and wildlife of Nahʔą Dehé. Understanding this area is a big task which is best undertaken through cooperative monitoring and research. Parks Canada works in partnership with Dehcho First Nations, traditional users, academic institutions, government agencies, environmental non-governmental organizations and independent researchers to fulfill this task. The scientific work conducted in Nahʔą Dehé presents exciting opportunities to enhance management, stewardship, education and visitor programs.

Key Strategy #2: Nahʔą Dehé - A Gift to be Shared

For many, dreams of dipping a paddle in the waters of the South Nahanni River, listening to the roar of Nájljcho (Virginia Falls) or feeling the rough granite of Lotus Flower Tower in the Cirque of the Unclimbables may remain just a dream. People who come for the wilderness or the challenge of adventure, leave with fond memories of their interactions with Dehcho people and culture. With park expansion, there are many new opportunities for discovery which will be developed in conjunction with partners.

Ensuring that Nahʔą Dehé is in the hearts and minds of Canadians and people around the world is key for continued support.

Key Strategy #3: Waters for Life

The threat of hydroelectric development was the catalyst for the creation of Nahanni National Park Reserve in the 1970s. Dehcho First Nations' desire to ensure clean water for current and future generations served as the impetus for park expansion. Water is important for the people, wildlife and plants that live in and are connected to Nahʔą Dehé. Water quality continues to be of great importance, given that the primary recreational experience is travelling the South Nahanni River and that there is regional industrial development in close proximity to the park.

To support the key strategies, the management plan includes three area management approaches: Gahnjthah (Rabbitkettle), Nájljcho (Virginia Falls) and the Expansion Area.

Gahnjthah: Rabbitkettle Area

The Gahnjthah Area includes a place of great cultural and geological significance, and a nearby lake which is an overnight access and registration point for park visitors. Focussing on this area will allow the park to examine, consider and improve public safety, the visitor offer, and monitoring programs while respecting cultural values. This will ensure the continuation of a low-impact, quality overnight visitor experience, while assessing the potential for different opportunities around Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake). By 2013 an area plan will be developed to provide detailed guidance for this key visitor hub.

Nájljcho: Virginia Falls Area

The Nájljcho Area is at the heart of the visitor experience, paddlers on the South Nahanni River either start or pass through here; campers have access to several hikes; and day users fly in to see the falls. This area needs to meet

expectations of a wide variety of visitors. Infrastructure, programs and visitor opportunities will be assessed and improved.

Expansion Area

New partnerships and environmental remediation are required for the expansion area. In addition, new research and guidance needs to be developed for cultural resources, ecological integrity, public safety, environmental hazards and appropriate zoning. Over the next five years Nahanni National Park Reserve will develop a better understanding of the expansion area so detailed management direction and zoning can be included in the next management plan. In the interim, decisions will be based on the precautionary principle and adaptive management.

This management plan includes targets that will be used to measure and annually report on progress in achieving the objectives and the



Parks Canada/S. Cameron

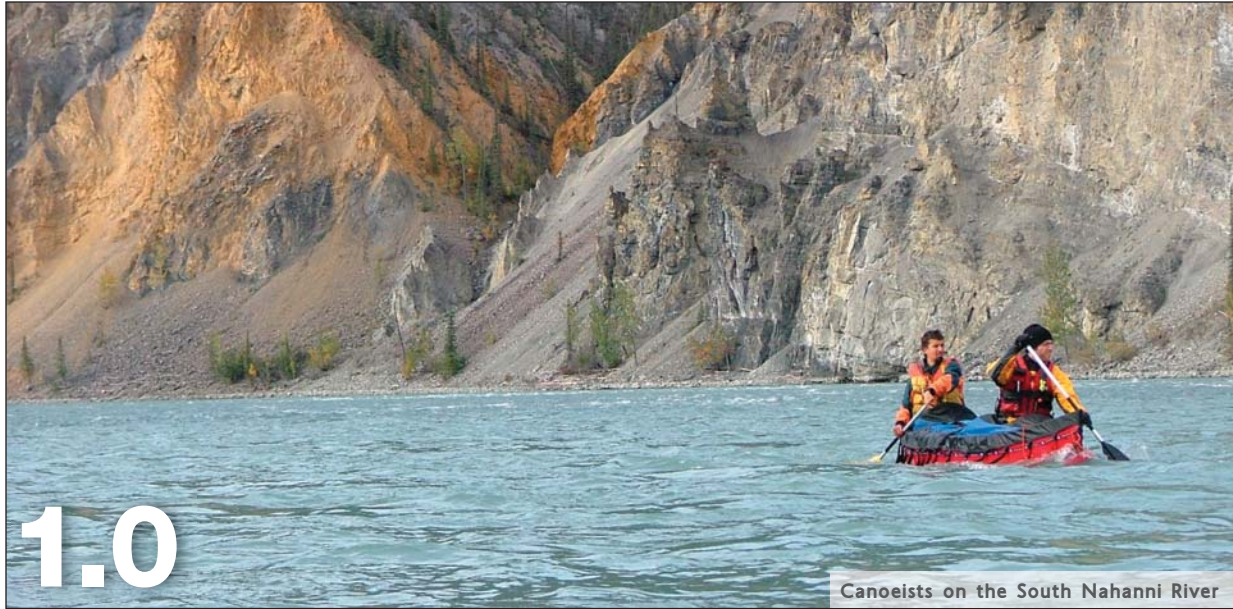
A young visitor on the boardwalk at Nájłicho (Virginia Falls)

vision. In accordance with the *Canada National Parks Act*, this plan and its implementation will be formally reviewed five years after its tabling to ensure that it remains relevant and effective for the management of Nahanni National Park Reserve.

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INTRODUCTION

Parks Canada, the oldest national park management organization in the world, is responsible for administering a system of national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas. These protected heritage areas showcase our country's natural, cultural and historic treasures. They are a living legacy of our heritage.

National parks are established to protect and present outstanding representative examples of natural landscape and phenomena that occur in Canada's 39 natural regions. The regions span the provinces and territories, representing mountains and plains, boreal forests and tundra, lakes and glaciers; landscapes that are the very essence of Canada. Parks Canada is responsible for both protecting the ecosystems of these natural areas and facilitating experiences – enabling Canadians to discover and build connections with these places.

1.1 NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

A legendary icon of Canadian wilderness, Nahanni National Park Reserve provides visitors with world renowned paddling opportunities,

one of Canada's most celebrated big wall rock climbing sites, and hiking amongst internationally significant karst features. For many, visiting Nahanni National Park Reserve is a trip of a lifetime, which results in a strong sense of attachment.

Nahanni National Park Reserve is situated in the southwest corner of the Northwest Territories (Map 1). The powerful and dynamic South Nahanni River originates in the rugged and remote Mackenzie Mountains near the border between Northwest Territories and Yukon, and terminates at its confluence with the Liard River near the small community of Nahanni Butte more than 500 km downstream. The river is the central feature of the park, and is of great importance to Dehcho First Nations. Nahʔa Dehé is the traditional name for the park, reflecting its Dene heritage. Depending on the context, Nahʔa Dehé can refer to the South Nahanni River and its watershed, the 2009 park boundary, and/or the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem. In this document, Nahʔa Dehé refers to the area encompassed by the 2009 boundary, and is used interchangeably with Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Protecting the South Nahanni River, specifically Nájiljcho (Virginia Falls) and the spectacular canyons, from hydroelectric development was the catalyst for the establishment of Nahanni National Park Reserve in 1976, with a land-base of 4,766 km². Early on it was recognized that the park was not large enough to protect all of the significant natural features of the area. In particular, the park did not have adequate habitat to ensure protection of wide-ranging species such as grizzly bears and northern mountain caribou. Alpine areas, the habitat of species such as Dall's sheep, mountain goat and hoary marmot, were only minimally represented within the original park boundaries.

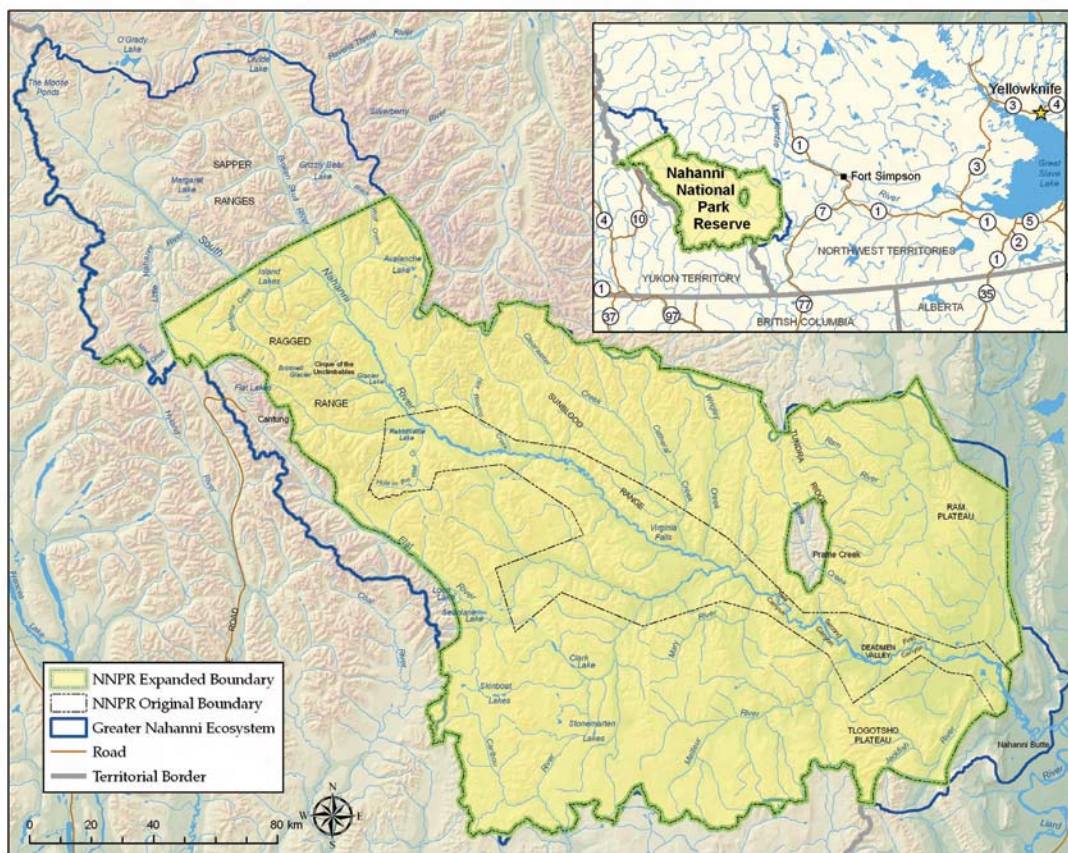
To study the feasibility of expansion and new boundary options, the Nahanni Expansion Working Group was formed in 2004. Following extensive research including natural features, wildlife values, oral history, mineral and energy potential, three boundary options were

presented for review and comment. The process culminated on June 18, 2009, when Nahanni National Park Reserve was expanded to 30,000 km², making it the third largest national park in Canada and the sixth largest in the world.

1.2 COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT

The park protects a significant portion of the Nahʔa Dehé watershed, a traditional homeland of the Dene. As such, cooperative management is at the heart of operations for Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Dehcho First Nations and the Government of Canada are negotiating self-governance, land use planning and resource management issues through the Dehcho Process. As part of the Dehcho Process Interim Measures Agreement, Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada created the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team in June 2000.



MAP 1: Regional Context

The team allows Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada to work together cooperatively on park management issues while the negotiation process continues.

The Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team is comprised of four appointees from Dehcho First Nations and three appointees designated by Parks Canada. The team was given four initial tasks:

- Review and finalize an ecological integrity statement for the park;
- Prepare a new park management plan based on a review of the 1987 plan and the 1994 plan amendments;
- Develop an *Interim Park Management Arrangement* to guide the cooperative management process until the Dehcho process concludes with a final agreement; and
- Create a memorandum of understanding respecting park expansion.

When these tasks were completed, the role of the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team shifted and this group is now dedicated to the ongoing cooperative management of the park as outlined in the *Interim Park Management Arrangement*, including management planning. The ultimate goal is to achieve a permanent management regime between Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada. This goal will be realised on completion of the Parks Chapter of the Dehcho Final Agreement, and the management plan will



Parks Canada/T. Marcellais

Elsie Marcellais, a respected elder from Nahanni Butte, works on a moosehide

be amended to reflect this. The final agreement reached through the Dehcho Process will take precedence over the direction outlined in this management plan.

1.2.1 Collaborating for the Future, Respecting our Traditions

There are several principles that speak to the philosophy and practice of cooperative management and respect for traditional use and knowledge. These principles form the foundation of the management plan and reflect the essence of the *Canada National Parks Act* (sec 40), the *Interim Park Management Arrangement* and the strategic direction outlined in the 2004 management plan.

Recognizing and respecting traditional use

Traditional use is an integral part of the ecosystem. Subsistence harvest occurs in a respectful and sustainable manner, in accordance with Dene laws, values and principles.

Sharing the stories and traditions of the Nahʔa Dene

Ensuring an appreciation of Dene culture, as well as harmony between traditional use and park visitors is key to creating connections between land and culture. Culturally appropriate programs that present First Nations and Métis history and culture will continue to be developed, acknowledging traditional use as an important element of the ecosystem.



Using traditional knowledge in park management

Traditional knowledge is an important source of information, including historic practices and current use. This knowledge is integrated in the decision making process for park management. It is important to continue working with traditional users to protect resources, by seeking their assistance in resource monitoring and reporting programs.

Supporting cultural learning

Through active participation and experiential learning, local First Nations and Métis youth can learn about their culture, building knowledge of the traditional way of life. Through cooperation with Dehcho First Nations and others, Nahanni National Park Reserve continues to support opportunities to learn about culture and traditions, through such activities as school river trips, mentoring and culture camps.

Managing in partnership, looking to the future

As part of the cooperative management philosophy, one of the key goals is to ensure gainful employment opportunities for First Nations and Métis partners. Parks Canada supports this goal through summer student work experience opportunities, specialised training, recruitment programs and providing a supportive environment for successful First Nations and Métis business opportunities in tourism.



Camping on the Ram Plateau

Parks Canada/L. Moore



Parks Canada/D. Tate

Summer student conducting research

1.3 MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

A park management plan is the key reference document that guides Parks Canada decisions and actions in managing and operating a national park. As per the *Canada National Parks Act*, management plans are a legal requirement for all national parks. They are developed with the involvement of partners, stakeholders and the Canadian public. Management plans are formally reviewed every five years to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

This plan builds on the successes of the 2004 plan and aims to fulfill Parks Canada's goal that *Canadians have a strong sense of connection through meaningful experiences, to their national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas and these protected places are enjoyed in ways that leave them unimpaired for present and future generations*. The plan does so by integrating the three elements of Parks Canada's mandate – the protection of heritage resources, the facilitation of visitor experiences and public outreach education - into a revised park vision, as well as a number of key strategies and area management approaches that will be used to guide and measure success in achieving the vision.

A park planning team consisting of the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team and park staff led the management planning process. Community and stakeholder consultation played a significant role in the development of the management plan.

The first round of community and stakeholder meetings was held in December 2009 to seek input on the draft vision, issues, key strategies and area approaches. In addition, an on-line forum was created to allow people from across the country and around the world to communicate with the planning team. Comments received helped shape the draft management plan and the second round of consultations.

In January 2010, core elements of the draft plan such as designated landing sites, infrastructure and employment opportunities were the focus of the second round of consultation in the Dehcho region communities of Fort Simpson, Nahanni Butte, Wrigley and Fort Liard. Further stakeholder meetings were held to discuss new visitor opportunities and management approaches. To conclude the consultation process, the full draft of the plan was made available for final comments in February. The on-line forum was a successful tool to reach park visitors and Canadians with an interest in Nahanni, there were 1,428 unique visitors to the forum and 110 registered users between December 1, 2009 and February 15, 2010.

The park management plan sets the foundation to:

- Protect the Nahʔa Dehé watershed and respect the wilderness character of the park;
- Encourage exploration and discovery of Nahʔa Dehé by visitors and others;
- Expand visitor experience opportunities and products;
- Become a centre for northern mountain research;
- Develop detailed management direction for the Gahn̄hthah (Rabbitkettle), Nájl̄icho (Virginia Falls) and the Expansion Area;
- Expand park infrastructure outside the park, including facilities in Fort Simpson and Nahanni Butte; and
- Develop a zoning plan for the park expansion area.



NAH?A DEHÉ: A PLACE OF IMPORTANCE

As part of the national parks system, Nahanni National Park Reserve protects and presents the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region, one of the 39 regions in the *National Park System Plan*. Among the significant features of Nah?a Dehé are antecedent river canyons, spectacular waterfalls, limestone karst and pseudokarst topography with associated cave and sinkhole formations, numerous thermal springs and the highest mountains and largest glaciers in the Northwest Territories. The park reserve also includes Canada’s largest tufa mounds, and the only known locations of a rare plant species, the Nahanni Aster.

2.1 UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Canada is a signatory to the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention. This convention recognizes parts of the world’s natural and cultural heritage that are so outstanding that their protection and preservation are considered to be of concern to the world community.

Nahanni National Park Reserve was among the first twelve sites in the world, and Canada’s first natural site given World Heritage Site status. Conferred in 1978, this status does not yet apply to the expansion area. The park was designated a World Heritage Site due to several factors including significant, on-going geological processes, the presence of outstanding examples of major stages of the earth’s evolutionary history and exceptional natural beauty.

To ensure maximum visitor exposure to the park’s world heritage status, Parks Canada maintains a World Heritage plaque at Nájliho (Virginia Falls). This plaque provides visitors with the opportunity to become aware of both the park’s global significance and the World Heritage Convention.



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2.2 CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

The portion of the South Nahanni River which flows through the original park was designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1987, as it provides outstanding recreational opportunities in a wilderness area of great scenic beauty. The Canadian Heritage Rivers System recognizes Canada's outstanding rivers to ensure their long-term protection and continued enjoyment by Canadians.

2.3 BROADER ROLE OF THE PARK RESERVE

Canada is committed to achieving a system of protected areas, on both national and worldwide scales. A key goal of international agreements, such as the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, is the creation of a global network of protected areas that will maintain and represent the planet's biodiversity. Through the strength of its own merits, the recent expansion, and as part of Canada's system of national parks, Nahanni National Park Reserve plays a significant role in these global protection efforts.

Boundary recommendations for the expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve were limited to the Dehcho region. Since early 2008, Parks Canada has also been working with land corporations in the Tulita District of the Sahtu Settlement Area to establish a national park reserve to protect the headwaters of the South Nahanni River. The South Nahanni River watershed is an important cultural and natural area for the First Nations and Métis of the Dehcho Region and the Sahtu Settlement Area, with links between the cultures. Strong

connections and relationships exist between the Dehcho and Sahtu, which are important as the proposed national park reserve would share a boundary with the newly expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve.

2.4 PARK EXPANSION AGREEMENT AND COMMITMENTS

With expansion, commitments have been made for an increased complement of staff, a new visitor centre and larger office space in Fort Simpson, as well as a new operations base in Nahanni Butte¹. The legislation which expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve provided for some non-conforming uses which are not traditionally associated with national parks: guided sport hunting (grandfathered for 10 years) and roads accessing mine operations.

2.4.1 Guided Sport Hunting

The legislation allows three sport hunting outfitters to continue operating within the expansion area for a 10-year period. Guided sport hunting is viewed as an activity not compatible with the objectives and philosophies of national parks. Although the sport hunting outfitters may continue to operate until 2019, Parks Canada will attempt, on a willing seller-willing buyer basis to purchase these business interests before the 10-year period expires.

2.4.2 Mining Operations

Two mining operations exist in the watershed, including a tungsten mine on the upper Flat River and a lead-zinc-silver advanced exploration property on Prairie Creek. The park now completely surrounds the proposed mine at Prairie Creek, and the expansion legislation allows a mine access road to cross the park. Both Tungsten and Prairie Creek mine sites draw water from and release effluent into major South Nahanni River tributaries, and both companies maintain on-site tailing ponds.

In addition, a mining road passes through the northwest portion of the park expansion area, to the north of Tungsten, providing access to a proposed mine at Howard's Pass. This mine is located on the boundary between the Yukon and Northwest Territories, and is outside of the watershed. The two mine access roads, Howard's Pass and Prairie Creek, are further discussed in section 8.2 – Road Access and Travel.



Parks Canada

Mountain goats



PLANNING CONTEXT

Nahanni National Park Reserve's established ecological monitoring, cultural resource management, visitor experience and planning programs, as well as infrastructure and zoning need to be adapted to include the expansion area. Much of the information contained in the 2009 *State of the Park Report* relates to the original park. This section contains an overview of the state of Nahanni, with additional information about the expansion area.

The period between this 2010 management plan and the next planning process will be used to gather baseline information, build relationships, develop visitor experience opportunities and extend outreach education initiatives. This groundwork will serve to build comprehensive management direction for the expansion area to be included in the next plan.

Parks Canada, Dehcho First Nations and their partners have taken a number of steps to protect and share Nahʔa Dehé. Much has happened since the 2004 management plan, including such notable achievements as:

- Expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve to over 30,000 km²,
- Creation of the traditional harvesting protocols with Dehcho First Nations;

- Enhanced cooperative park management through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team;
- Career development opportunities for Dehcho First Nations members through the summer student program, as well as other recruitment, training and mentoring initiatives;
- Career Interpretation programs and materials featuring local Dene culture;
- Groundbreaking wildlife studies on caribou, grizzly bears and bats;
- Relocation and stabilization of the old forestry cabin in Deadmen Valley; and
- Installation of secure containment facilities for fuel caches.

The immediate area around Nahʔa Dehé is sparsely populated with approximately 2,000 to 2,500 people in the closest five communities in the Dehcho region. Nahanni Butte, a small community situated about 30 km downstream of the southern boundary, is the closest to the park.

Park administration and operations are currently based out of Fort Simpson, the primary gateway to the park. Access to the park is almost exclusively by float plane. Since 1984, visitation has consistently averaged between 800 and 1,000 visitors per year², primarily as a multi-day

trip on the river or a fly-in day trip to Nájłıcho (Virginia Falls). The park expansion means there are new gateway communities, access points, user groups and activities.

Nahanni National Park Reserve offers adventure and magnificent scenery for those Canadian and international visitors who want to experience wilderness. Historically, visitors were segmented into two main groups: overnight river travellers (63.4%) and day visitors flying into Nájłıcho (37.6%). The average age of visitors surveyed in 2006 was 47 years, while 20 years prior it was 38.

With the expansion, there are new visitor groups, including climbers at the Cirque of the Unclimbables and fly-in day visitors to Glacier Lake. Park visitors can be divided into three³ main categories:

1. *Day Visitors* – Visitors who spend a portion of a day in the park as part of a scenic flight experience that may include a stop at Glacier Lake and/or Nájłıcho. Nájłıcho visitors have the opportunity to hike and view the falls and participate in a guided walk.
2. *Overnight Visitors* – Visitors who spend one or two nights in a single area, such as Nájłıcho.
3. *Multi-night Visitors* – Visitors who spend multiple nights in the park in the pursuit of activities such a climbing, paddling or hiking. For the majority of visitors seeking multi-night adventures, the wilderness character of the park is vital to their experience.



Hiking at Gahnjıthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake)

In addition, park visitors can be further divided into those who are guided by a licensed outfitter (59%) and those on private trips.

The number of people who experience Nahʔa Dehé in person is limited by the remote and rugged landscape, difficult travel conditions, the specialized skills required for many activities, as well as the cost of travel to the Northwest Territories and the park. Public outreach education is therefore particularly important for Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Interpretation of natural features, cultural history and traditions of the region is provided both through non-personal media such as the website, print materials and displays, as well as to visitors in Fort Simpson and in the park by staff. Visitor surveys have found high levels of satisfaction with personal interpretation, with 95% of respondents indicating they were satisfied, of which 79% were very satisfied with their experience.

A remote wilderness park, Nahʔa Dehé is a relatively undisturbed area. Fires and floods are the primary ecological drivers of the ecosystem, and these forces are allowed to proceed naturally in the majority of the park. There are no water retention or diversion structures within the park, and fire management consists of a let-burn policy for forest fires in the majority of Nahanni National Park Reserve. An increase in the frequency and intensity of forest fires is predicted to be one of the most significant ecological impacts related to climate change.

3.1 REGIONAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Nahanni National Park Reserve is internationally renowned as a premier wilderness river park. Spectacular Nájłıcho (Virginia Falls) is one of the most recognizable icons of Canada's north. Nahanni National Park Reserve is central to the tourism industry in the region. In 2006-7, visitors to the park represented 37% of all summer pleasure travellers to the Northwest Territories visiting for the purposes of outdoor adventure.

The park is promoted in regional tourism and commercial publications and featured in Parks Canada promotional material, such as the Agency's 2009 and 2010 national television advertisements. Nahʔa Dehé also greatly benefits from significant media interest, receiving coverage in newspapers, magazines and films from around the world. Numerous businesses, other government departments and non-governmental organizations promote Nahanni in a variety of ways. The impact and exposure for the park by these forms of promotion is significant.

3.2 TRADITIONAL USE AND SUBSISTENCE HARVESTING ACTIVITIES

Since time immemorial, Nahʔa Dehé has featured prominently in the lives of the Dene of the Dehcho and Sahtu regions. In the fall, family groups would depart the larger settlements along the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) with their teams of pack dogs and head west into the mountains by foot. Over the course of the fall and winter, families would live off the land and time would be spent trapping and hunting. Towards spring, people would move into headwater river valleys and begin to construct mooseskin boats. After spring break-up, the mooseskin boats would be loaded up with people, dogs and a winter's worth of fur and animal hides.

The dangerous trip down the turbulent South Nahanni River would bring them back to communities along the Dehcho. Furs would

be traded for supplies, the mooseskin boats would be taken apart, and the hides used for other purposes. After a period of visiting and reconnecting with other Dene, the annual cycle would begin again. Over the past half-century, these customary annual journeys have stopped, primarily due to the requirement for children to attend school and the establishment of permanent homes in the settlements and towns of the Dehcho.

Traditional hunting, trapping and fishing activities by First Nations and Métis continue in the park reserve. Motorized access in the park is permitted for First Nations and Métis people pursuing traditional subsistence harvesting activities. Most subsistence harvest is carried out by Dehcho First Nations members who live in Nahanni Butte and Fort Simpson. Today, traditional use occurs primarily along the South Nahanni River corridor, downstream from Nájljcho (Virginia Falls).

3.3 PLANNING PROCESS

The first management plan, completed in 1987, provided the initial framework for the protection of the park's natural and cultural resources and basic services for park visitors. The plan was intended to serve for a fifteen year period. A plan review was initiated in 1992 in keeping with Parks Canada's five year review requirement.

The 1992 review determined that amendments were needed to update the plan in response to national policy changes and local needs. Key amendments included the recognition of ecological integrity as a management priority, the incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge in decision making, improvements to the presentation of the park's natural and cultural resources, and recognition of pending results from the Dehcho Process in regards to land, resources and self-government. The product of the review was an official amendment to the plan, approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada in 1994.



D. Overall

Nahanni Butte culture camp

The 1987 plan and 1994 amendment were then replaced by the 2004 plan, which set the direction for cooperative management with Dehcho First Nations. The 2004 plan has a strong focus on ecological integrity, in addition to improvements to the visitor service offer and goals for boundary expansion.

The review of the 2004 management plan started in 2008, with an internal assessment of its implementation. This review process identified that the 2004 management plan was, with a few exceptions, being implemented and continued to be largely relevant, but new direction was required for the expansion area. The 2010 management plan, which addresses the original park and expansion area, replaces all previous plans and amendments.

3.4 KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The 2009 *State of the Park Report* identifies challenges to making the park meaningful to Canadians, facilitating visitor experiences and protecting and presenting cultural and natural resources and items of importance to Dehcho First Nations. The challenges and issues are:

Maintaining Water Quality

Present and future upstream industrial activity, long-range transported pollutants and climate change all have the potential to impact water quality. There is a need to work with local communities and enhance water quality monitoring systems. Clean water is of pivotal importance to Dehcho people, as well as people who choose to paddle the rivers in the park.

Declining Northern Mountain Caribou Populations

Decreasing populations of Northern Mountain Caribou is the result of several factors. Monitoring of caribou populations must be continued inside and outside the park boundaries. The park will work to develop regional management in collaboration with others, including the



Parks Canada/C. Bilyth

Artists in the park

Government of the Northwest Territories, the Yukon Government, and First Nations and Métis partners.

Incorporating Traditional Dene Names

Traditional Dene names connect culture and the land, linking local legends with places and history. There is a need to enhance on-going efforts to incorporate Dene names, foster an understanding of name changes and initiate the process to formally change names.

Maintaining and Increasing Visitation

Park expansion has brought possibilities, new day use and backcountry focal areas, and activities including hiking and big wall rock climbing. There is a need to diversify the visitor experience offer to meet Parks Canada's goals to maintain or increase visitation, while retaining the highly valued wilderness experience and not impairing ecological integrity.

Infrastructure Supporting the Visitor Experience

There is a need for improved human waste management facilities in the park, as well as an analysis of visitor infrastructure and an assessment of infrastructure requirements for the expansion area.

Bringing Nahanni to Canadians

Outreach education is very important to ensure that Canadians, especially local communities, youth, urban and new Canadians, feel a strong sense of connection with Nahʔa Dehé. There is a need to further develop local community outreach and education opportunities as well as build on distance outreach education initiatives.

Establishing Monitoring Programs

Ecological monitoring programs in Nahanni National Park Reserve have focused on forests and freshwater indicators; with the expansion, monitoring programs for alpine, wetlands and glaciers need to be enhanced or developed. There is a need for improvements in cultural resource monitoring, as well as new monitoring and reporting protocols for visitor experience, outreach education and stakeholder relations.



Caribou monitoring

Parks Canada



Parks Canada/S. Borcoman

4.0

Gahnjthah (Rabbitkettle Hot Springs)

VISION

This vision builds on the one presented in the 2004 management plan which provided direction for management, partnerships, traditional use and ecological integrity. The 2004 vision was deeply rooted in the ecology of the land. The revised vision is broader in scope, and includes the expansion area and a stronger visitor experience component. The vision is intended to paint a picture of the future state of the park.

Travelling through the land of the Nahʔa Dene, who have lived on this land since time immemorial, local legends excite the imagination. Dene culture, so intimately linked to the ecology of Nahʔa Dehé, is respected in this place of mystery, spirituality and healing. The life sustaining waters of Nahʔa Dehé flow freely, protected through the wisdom and guidance of the Dehcho elders. Traditional subsistence harvesting continues as an integral and sustainable part of the ecosystem, occurring in accordance with Dene laws, values and principles. Dene are inseparable from the land.

Nahʔa Dehé protects a wilderness watershed in the Mackenzie Mountains, where fires and floods shape the land, and naturally-occurring plant

and animal species thrive. The park is a model of cooperative management, where excellence in the conduct of science is promoted and cultural resources are treated with care. Communities, volunteers and stakeholders are involved in the stewardship of Nahʔa Dehé, ensuring respect for the land continues into future generations.

Flying into the park, range after range of rocky peaks, vast plateaux and canyons hundreds of metres deep unfold below the wings. Watchful eyes may catch a glimpse of a grizzly passing in the bush or Dall's sheep leaping nimbly on rocky hillsides. A moment of solitude feeling the thundering power of Náįlįcho brings a humbling realization of size. World-class opportunities abound to experience wilderness and the natural and cultural heritage of Nahʔa Dehé.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Nahʔa Dehé, touches and inspires people who may never dip their paddles in the waters of this Canadian Heritage River, climb the rough granite rock walls or fly into this remote watershed. Nahʔa Dehé resonates in the hearts and minds of all Canadians and people of the world.



5.0

Packing gear around Nájljcho (Virginia Falls)

KEY STRATEGIES

Key strategies describe an integrated, focussed approach of how Nahʔa Dehé will be managed in the coming years. The strategies set the path to achieve the park vision while addressing the park's challenges; and the guiding principles set the foundation for all management actions. Key strategies are meant to highlight the interconnectedness of Parks Canada's core mandate elements: resource protection, visitor experience and public outreach education.

To build on opportunities and address issues identified in the *State of the Park Report* the following key strategies set park management priorities for the next five years. The key strategies are:

1. Taking Care of Nahʔa Dehé
2. Nahʔa Dehé: A Gift to be Shared
3. Waters for Life

To assist in implementing the management plan, all key strategies contain objectives, measurable targets and actions. Some of these highlight on-going activities, while others provide new direction to undertake in the next five years.

5.1 TAKING CARE OF NAHʔA DEHÉ

The highest mountains and largest glaciers in the Northwest Territories, some of the deepest canyons in Canada, and prime habitat for grizzly bears, northern mountain caribou and Dall's sheep are all found in Nahʔa Dehé. The park includes a Canadian Heritage River and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Wildlife species such as migratory caribou do not stay within the park; likewise, fire does not respect geographic and political boundaries, thus Nahanni National Park Reserve must work with others to help maintain the highest possible standards of quality for the waters, lands, air and wildlife of Nahʔa Dehé.

Understanding this area is a big task which is best undertaken through cooperative monitoring and research. Parks Canada works in partnership with Dehcho First Nations, traditional users, academic institutions, other government agencies, environmental non-governmental organizations and independent researchers to fulfill this task. The scientific work conducted in Nahʔa Dehé presents exciting opportunities to enhance management, stewardship, education and visitor programs.

OBJECTIVE 1: A cooperative management approach is used to guide decision-making, and protect the ecological integrity of the entire Nahʔą Dehé watershed.



Parks Canada/D. Tate

Young caribou

TARGETS:

- The Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team guides all major (non-emergency) resource management decisions⁴.
- The park actively participates in regional land and resource management initiatives, which may have an impact on the management or ecological integrity of Nahʔą Dehé.

ACTIONS:

1. Meetings of Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team are held regularly (at least 8 times per year).
2. Work with Dehcho resource management authorities.
3. Ensure Parks Canada's goal of maintaining or restoring ecological integrity is met through active participation in the environmental assessment and review process for development and operational activities associated with Prairie Creek, Tungsten and any other mining or industrial proposals in the watershed.
4. Investigate the opportunity to develop a forum to discuss issues of importance to regional resource management authorities and stakeholders in regards to the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.

OBJECTIVE 2: Natural ecological processes remain the primary forces shaping the ecosystem.



Parks Canada/L. Uumila

Yellow Mountain Avens

TARGETS:

- Natural fires will be permitted to burn in the majority of the park area.

ACTIONS:

1. Prepare a fire management plan by 2014 which:
 - Recognizes the role of fire as a natural ecosystem process;
 - Maintains a fire suppression zone east of Yohin Ridge;
 - Identifies values at risk within the park which would be protected;
 - Maintains an observation zone for all remaining areas of the park; and
 - Includes a communication strategy to convey information about active fires and the approach to fire management.
2. Determine the natural fire cycle and develop methods for a fire effects monitoring program.
3. Maintain a network of climate stations to establish weather norms, aiding the understanding of climate change and local impacts in relation to fire and other ecosystem processes.

OBJECTIVE 3: Nahanni National Park Reserve is a centre for northern mountain research, where traditional knowledge and science⁵ contribute to the long-term protection of the park, and enhance visitor experience opportunities and public understanding of its ecosystems.



Parks Canada/D. Tate

Amphibian research (Wood Frog)

TARGETS:

- All research led by Parks Canada includes at least one other organization as an active partner, or in a consultation or review role.
- 100% of park visitors who participate in interpretive programming have a chance to learn about park research.

ACTIONS:

1. Seek to establish a formal partnering relationship with one or more post-secondary institutions to establish the park as a location for research and long-term monitoring.
2. Promote inter-agency cooperation between adjacent federal, territorial, First Nations and Métis organizations.
3. Research proposals will be considered by the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team to identify opportunities for incorporating traditional knowledge.
4. Develop a strategic volunteer program, including opportunities to participate in Nahanni National Park Reserve's research and visitor experience program.
5. Use the park's interpretation, public outreach education and communication programs to promote and share research, including:
 - Personal interpretation;
 - An annual newsletter, which includes information on park research;
 - Research and monitoring reports; and
 - Peer-reviewed journal articles.

OBJECTIVE 4: *The high level of biodiversity in Nahʔą Dehé is retained, including naturally occurring plant and animal species. Unique and sensitive landscape features are protected.*



D. Lepitski

Nahanni Aster

TARGETS:

- Species composition and distribution in 2014 remains representative of the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region.
- Unique and sensitive landscape features in the park are protected through park zoning proposed by 2015.

ACTIONS:

1. Ensure that Northern Mountain Caribou continue to be an integral part of Nahʔą Dehé.
 - Current cooperative research and monitoring projects on South Nahanni and Coal River Caribou herds are continued.
 - Caribou management recommendations are developed in cooperation with First Nations, Métis and research partners, and are implemented by 2014.
2. Determine species composition and distribution relative to Mackenzie Mountains historical condition as part of the 2014 *State of the Park Report*.
3. Implement the park's Ecological Integrity Monitoring Program by 2014, including appropriate biodiversity measures for each indicator.
 - Determine methods and implement vegetation monitoring in Alpine Tundra indicator.
4. Investigate and assess remote sensing methods for monitoring biodiversity, phenology and primary productivity.
5. Improve understanding and documentation of rare and endemic species and habitats.
 - Re-assess known populations of Nahanni Aster and investigate new potential sites.
 - Further investigate distribution and ecology of Bull Trout.
6. Assess and identify any unique and sensitive features in the park for consideration as Zone I - Special Preservation, or other appropriate management strategies.

OBJECTIVE 5: *The cultural heritage and values of Nahʔą Dehé are protected and management respects traditional users and interests.*



Parks Canada/A. Ronald

Shelter frame

TARGET:

- 100% of strategic documents required for cultural resource management are completed by 2015.

ACTIONS:

1. Park staff and the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team will collaborate with other partners on the documentation, protection and presentation of cultural resources in Nahʔą Dehé.
2. The Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team will document and recommend recognition of traditional place names to the Geographical Names Board of Canada.
 - Investigate and understand the appropriate process by 2012.
3. Develop a *Cultural Resource Values Statement* for the park by 2013.
4. Prepare a *Cultural Resource Management Strategy* for the park by 2015.
5. Expand the cultural resource inventory for the park to include the expansion area.

5.2 NAHʔA DEHÉ: A GIFT TO BE SHARED

For many, dreams of dipping a paddle in the waters of the South Nahanni River, listening to the roar of Nájłjcho (Virginia Falls) or feeling the rough granite of Lotus Flower Tower in the Cirque of the Unclimbables may remain just a dream. Few people get the chance to visit the park due to its remoteness and ruggedness, the harshness of travel conditions and costs to get to the park, in addition to the skill level required for most activities. Ensuring that Nahʔa Dehé is in the hearts and minds of Canadians and people around the world is key for continued support.

Cultural connections are a highlight of the trip for many visitors. People come for the wilderness or the challenge of adventure, but

leave with fond memories of their interactions with Dehcho people and culture. With park expansion, there are many new opportunities, which will be developed in conjunction with partners, allowing new experiences in Nahʔa Dehé (further discussed in the section 6.3 - Expansion Area). All current and future visitor experience opportunities will be developed so as to protect the wilderness qualities and health of the park, so integral to the desired visitor experience. To ensure an enjoyable experience, visitors will continue to receive comprehensive and reliable information in advance of their trip, so they can dream of adventures to come and plan a safe, low-impact trip.

OBJECTIVE 1: *Authentic opportunities provided by Parks Canada and its partners create meaningful connections with Nahʔa Dehé.*



Parks Canada/S. Borcoman

Community Cultural Demonstrators Program

TARGETS:

- Guidance provided by the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team will ensure that 100% of visitor programs incorporate Dene cultural heritage.
- 80% of tourism business licence holders indicate that they have meaningful opportunities to work with Nahanni National Park Reserve to develop mutually beneficial visitor services.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop guidelines and reference materials to incorporate traditional Dene place names in all public materials and programs.
2. Increase First Nations and Métis participation in commercial tourism business opportunities.
3. Review and determine the best future approach for the Community Cultural Demonstrators program by 2014.
 - Improve methods to identify and engage Dehcho community members by 2012.
4. Participate in the development of a regional Aboriginal Tourism Strategy.
5. Develop a Partnering Strategy with commercial operators, community organizations, non-profit organizations and other government agencies to achieve efficient, effective and mutually beneficial visitor services.

OBJECTIVE 2: *New, inspiring opportunities for visitors throughout the park result in enhanced experiences for visitors and increased visitation.*



Parcs Canada/S. Cameron

River guide sharing stories in camp

TARGETS:

- Offer 5 new visitor opportunities by 2015.
- Increase visitation by a minimum of 6% to 860⁶ visitors by 2012.
- Achieve or surpass visitation of 900 visitors by 2015.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop a Visitor Experience Plan, including an interpretation strategy and means to expand and augment the visitor offer⁷.
2. Visitor demographic information, motivations, interests and needs are understood and used to enhance the visitor offer. Complete a visitor market analysis, including application of the Explorer Quotient and market segmentation.
3. A thorough assessment of potential impacts of new visitor opportunities is conducted during product development, considering: public safety, visitor experience, ecological integrity and cultural resources.
4. Develop a Marketing and Promotions Strategy with the assistance of tourism organizations, stakeholders and gateway communities.
5. Develop a Social Science Strategy, which includes a refinement of tools used for measuring the achievement of visitor experience performance expectations.

OBJECTIVE 3: *Extend outreach education initiatives, touching the hearts and minds of more Canadians.*



Parks Canada/A. Ronald

Tufa mounds hike

TARGET:

- By 2014, students have had the opportunity to be inspired by Nahʔą Dehé through presentations or programs with all schools in Nahanni Butte, Fort Simpson, Jean Marie River, Wrigley, Trout Lake and Fort Liard.

ACTIONS:

1. Develop a strategy for public outreach education.
 - Focus on community-based interpretation in Nahanni Butte and Fort Simpson, delivered by park staff based in these locations.
 - Develop additional material for curriculum-based learning in elementary and secondary schools in conjunction with territorial and provincial organizations.
 - Develop and implement products (ex. documentary film, enhanced web presence and multi-media) and initiatives for Canadians, international and urban audiences.
2. Enhance support for culture camps and programs for local youth.

OBJECTIVE 4: *Enhance visitor services in the gateway communities and locations.*



Parks Canada/L. Uunila

Floatplane, Fort Simpson

TARGET:

- Park promotional material is located at 100% of the gateway locations as defined by the Marketing and Promotions Strategy by 2014.

ACTIONS:

1. In cooperation with stakeholders, develop an appropriate park presence at key gateway locations in Northwest Territories, Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta.

5.3 WATERS FOR LIFE

The threat of hydroelectric development on the South Nahanni River was the catalyst for protection of Nahanni National Park Reserve in the 1970s. Dehcho First Nations' desire to ensure clean water for current and future generations served as the impetus for park expansion. The result was the protection of the majority of the watershed as part of the expanded national park reserve in 2009.

Communities in the Dehcho rely on the life sustaining waters of Nahʔa Dehé. Water is key to culture. It is important for the people, wildlife and plants that live in and are connected to Nahʔa Dehé and for the people who visit the area.



Parks Canada

Náiljcho

Water quality will continue to be important in the future for park management, given that the primary recreational experience is travelling the South Nahanni River and that there is regional industrial development in close proximity to the park.

OBJECTIVE 1: *Local communities are involved in water quality issues and management.*



Parks Canada/L. Unnila

A small stream

TARGET:

- Through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team, local community members guide all major (non-emergency) decisions in regards to water quality⁸.

ACTIONS:

1. Opportunities for training in water quality monitoring are provided, to enable local communities to participate in monitoring programs.
2. Results of water monitoring are communicated on an annual basis with local communities.
3. Prompt notification of any significant changes to water quality within the park is made to Dehcho First Nations leadership.

OBJECTIVE 2: *The waters of Nahʔa Dehé are high quality and unimpaired by activities inside and outside park boundaries.*



Parks Canada/L. Uunila

The shores of the South Nahanni in early September

TARGETS:

- Water quality remains within site-specific guidelines.
- The condition of all water-related indicators reported in 2009 *State of the Park Report* have been maintained or improved by 2014.

ACTIONS:

1. Continue baseline water quality monitoring, in cooperation with Environment Canada, other agencies and local communities as appropriate.
2. Update site-specific water quality guidelines with current monitoring data.
3. Actively monitor water quality of potentially impacted watercourses (e.g. Flat River and Prairie Creek).
4. Complete the South Nahanni Watershed Study and implement resulting recommendations for stream monitoring.
5. Develop sub-watershed mapping for use in park management, including mitigation of industrial impacts, monitoring, visitor opportunity planning and education.
6. In cooperation with federal and territorial agencies, Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board and industry, develop a proactive strategy to enable effective multi-agency response to the potential release of industrial effluents which may pollute the park.
7. Develop a protocol for emergency response to point-source pollution (e.g. fuel spill) inside the park.
8. The park's Ecological Integrity Monitoring Program is fully implemented by 2014; ensuring monitoring measures are in place for Freshwater, Wetland and Glacier indicators.
9. Indicators and measures with low rankings in the 2009 *State of Park Report* are addressed. (E.g. glacier monitoring is further developed, in cooperation with Natural Resources Canada Glaciology).

OBJECTIVE 3: *The South Nahanni River offers an exceptional wilderness experience, and continues to be the primary multi-day recreational activity for park visitors.*



Parks Canada/L. Uunila

Canoe pulled-up on cobble, Kraus Hotsprings

TARGET:

- 85% of visitors surveyed feel they had a true wilderness experience.

ACTIONS:

1. Continue the campsite monitoring program, and take action when necessary to ensure minimal impact to the environment and experience of visitors
2. Information about low-impact backcountry practices and requirements is provided to visitors.
3. Address and resolve the management of human waste along the river corridor, and in other areas of the park, in order to reduce the risk of water contamination, as well as reducing the environmental footprint and cost of handling waste removal by 2011.
4. Re-assess the visitor carrying capacity⁹ on the South Nahanni River (approx. 2,200 visitors per year) and other activity nodes in the park; if/when park visitation reaches the previous peak of 1,200 to ensure the wilderness experience of visitors and ecological integrity are not affected.



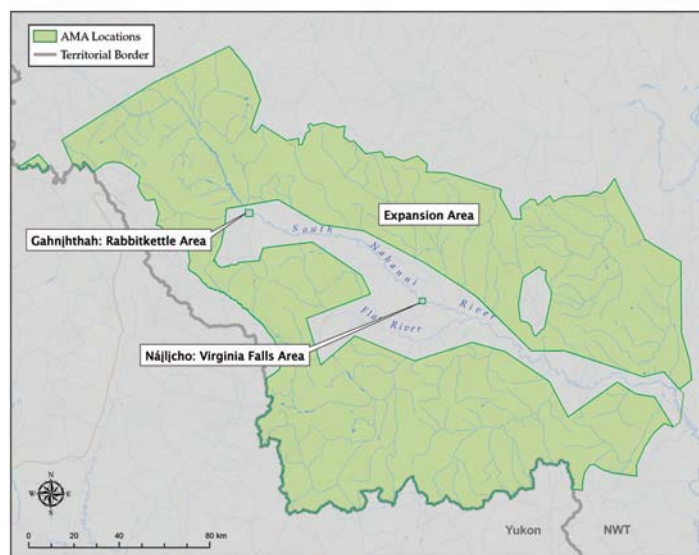
AREA MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Where groupings of resources, visitor opportunities and operational considerations lend themselves to a common management direction, area management approaches are identified. These management approaches provide direction on issues that are directly associated with only portions of the park.

This management plan has three locations identified for area management (see Map 2), two along the linear river corridor to address

unique concerns and a large area concept for the expansion area. In the future, an area management approach may possibly be applied to the Cirque of the Unclimbables, South Nahanni River, and day use areas (ex. Glacier Lake). An area management approach may also be appropriate for portions of the park near mining operations. Future management decisions will be based on understanding gained over the next five years.

MAP 2: Area management locations



6.1 GAHNĪHTHAH: RABBITKETTLE AREA

A picture perfect image of the hills and mountains reflects on the surface of Gahnĭthah Mĭe (Rabbitkettle Lake). Laughter hangs in the air as campers run and jump into the lake, seeking relief from the summer heat; ripples extend across the surface slowly blurring the reflection.



Parks Canada/D. Tate

Gahnĭthah Mĭe - Rabbitkettle Lake

Gahnĭthah Mĭe, a lake large enough to accommodate floatplane landings a short portage away from the South Nahanni River, provides a logical starting point for numerous river travellers who are embarking on their South Nahanni River adventure. During the summer, staff provide important visitor orientation, interpretation and public safety functions. Facilities include a staff cabin, dock, portage trail, camping area and food caches.

From the lake, a trail leads to Gahnĭthah (Rabbitkettle Hotsprings), a place of significant spiritual importance to Dene people. It is one of seven designated Zone I (Special Preservation) areas in the park, and the only Zone I area where public access is permitted, facilitated through a guided hike. The 3.5 km hike passes through grassy slopes, aspen stands, and spruce and pine forests, the accompanying interpretation explores geology, bears and Dene culture. Grizzly bears and black bears frequent the area as they forage for buffaloberries. Interpretive hikes may be suspended when bears are present in the area.

Once at the tufa mound, visitors can walk barefoot up the north mound, experiencing the unique texture of the calcium carbonate

and water flowing gently underfoot. The two tufa mounds at Gahnĭthah are the largest such known structures in Canada. The south mound has great cultural and spiritual significance to the Dene and no visitor access is permitted. The opportunity to experience the north mound through a guided interpretation program will continue, so long as the cultural and geological significance of this area is honoured and protected.

The Gahnĭthah Area is a place of great significance, and an overnight access and registration node for park visitors. Focussing on the Gahnĭthah Area will allow the park to examine, consider and improve public safety, the visitor offer and monitoring programs while respecting cultural values. This will ensure the continuation of a low-impact, quality overnight visitor experience, while assessing the potential for different opportunities around Gahnĭthah Mĭe. The goal, by 2013, is for an area plan to be developed to provide detailed guidance for this key visitor hub. Principle actions are included in the following table.

Building Tufa

Tufa is a soft, porous rock that is formed when calcium carbonate precipitates out of warm spring water rising from deep within the earth. The water's flow causes the formation of ridges, intricate terraces, and large bathtub-shaped pools called gours.



Parks Canada

Gours at Gahnĭthah

Key Actions for the Gahnjthah Area

1. Develop a better understanding of visitor capacity, in regards to cultural values, ecological impacts, public safety and visitor expectations for Gahnjthah Mje and the tufa hike.
2. Conduct an engineering assessment of the Rabbitkettle River ferry crossing in 2010.
3. Develop additional programs based on visitor interests that respect zoning and cultural values (ex. interpretation, new activities and volunteer opportunities).
4. Investigate methods to share the Gahnjthah experience with people unable to visit the park or take part in the interpretive offer.
5. Refine the ecological integrity monitoring program for the area.
6. Review and enhance the current tufa monitoring program, including consultation with tufa expert(s) to develop a more scientifically defensible monitoring program.
7. Develop an area plan by 2013.



Parks Canada/D. Haggarty

Photo quadrant monitoring of tufa

6.2 NÁJLJCHO: VIRGINIA FALLS AREA

Flying into Nájłjcho, the plane banks for a view of the falls, before landing on the deceptively calm river. The calmness hides the turbulent whitewater of Sluice Box rapid and the waterfall below. Walking on the trail towards the falls, the noise gradually builds, until the thunder of the falls resonates up from the ground through your bones.

As the intersection of river users and day visitors, Nájłjcho (Virginia Falls) is a very popular location. It is also one of two designated aircraft landing sites in the original park. As a result, coordinating and meeting expectations of river users, day use visitors and fly-in campers can be quite complex. Nájłjcho is also a hiking node, with access to Nájłjcho, Marengo Falls, and Sunblood Mountain which towers over the South Nahanni.

It is here at Nájłjcho that the majority of interpretation programming for the park takes place. The programs provide visitors with a connection to Nahʔą Dehé allowing visitors to understand the interconnectedness of traditional users and the ecosystem. Local Dene visitor experience staff research their family history and share stories with visitors, developing a personal connection between the past and present. Nájłjcho is the origin of the community cultural demonstrators program, allowing Elders and other Dehcho community members to share the importance and history of traditional use with visitors and staff.

To protect the fragile landscape and prevent trail braiding, several kilometres of boardwalk have been constructed for the campground and associated trails. Considerable on-going maintenance is required due to damage from frost heave and general wear and tear. There are also two staff cabins in the area, Virginia Falls and Sunblood. The Virginia Falls cabin is close to the campground and visitor infrastructure;



Nájłjcho (Virginia Falls)

Parks Canada/D. Tate

staff are stationed there throughout the summer season. Sunblood, the older of the two cabins, is unstaffed and located approximately 10 kilometres upstream.

The Nájłjcho Area requires special attention as it is at the heart of the visitor experience for the park; paddlers on the South Nahanni River either start or pass through here, and campers have access to several hikes. The area needs to meet expectations of a wide variety of visitors.

Key Actions for the Náǰlǰho Area

1. Assess and improve infrastructure, specifically: outhouse facilities¹⁰, signage, food cache(s), boardwalk, helipad and the Virginia Falls staff cabin.
 - Evaluate options for future use or decommissioning of Sunblood staff cabin.
2. Develop a preventative maintenance plan which includes a regular assessment and maintenance schedule for all site infrastructure.
3. Develop additional programs for the area based on visitor interests; consider interpretation, new activities, and cultural and volunteer opportunities.
4. Assess and improve visitor orientation and pre-trip planning information.
5. Assess opportunities for ecological integrity monitoring.
6. Review and improve risk assessment and management.
7. Develop an area plan by 2015.



Parks Canada/S. Cameron

River guides placing a canoe on the storage rack

6.3 EXPANSION AREA

The new boundaries of Nahanni National Park Reserve protect a diverse array of unique landforms and important wildlife habitat. The tallest mountain in the Northwest Territories, which has no official name, is situated within the new boundaries, as are the largest glaciers. Important habitat for wide-ranging species such as mountain caribou and grizzly bears is now protected. The globally unique North Nahanni Karst, containing caves, limestone pavements, canyons, poljes, sinkholes, and extensive underground drainage systems are included within the new park boundary which now encompasses more than 30,000 square kilometres of the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region.

Canadians and international visitors will be able to experience Nah?ą Dehé in new and exciting ways. Places with intriguing names, such as Cirque of the Unclimbables, Death Lake, Broken Skull River, Vampire Peaks and Tlogotsho Plateau, are now protected for all time. Nah?ą Dehé, already world-renowned for canoeing, now includes one of the top fifty big wall climbing locations in North America. Opportunities exist for expanded recreational opportunities, such as backpacking, paddling, camping, flight-seeing and day hikes.

The expansion brings with it the need for new partnerships and environmental remediation. In addition new research and guidance needs to



Parks Canada

Exploring the Ram Plateau

be developed for cultural resources, ecological integrity, public safety, environmental hazards and appropriate zoning. The Expansion Area management approach is envisioned to have a life span of five years. This time period will enable Nahanni National Park Reserve to develop a better understanding of the expansion area so detailed management direction and zoning can be included in the next management plan. In the interim, decisions will be based on the precautionary principle and adaptive management.

Key Actions for Research and Planning

1. Conduct baseline inventory work including: occurrence of rare or endemic species, sensitive landscape features, cultural and archaeological resources, and current use.
2. Update current park documents to include the expansion area (e.g., Public Safety Plan).
3. Develop an interim approach¹¹ for awarding tourism business licences not covered by the agreement between Parks Canada and the Nahanni River Outfitters Association by 2011.
4. Assess the need for infrastructure to support public safety, visitor experience and other park management needs by 2014.
 - Develop appropriate staff facilities and visitor infrastructure at Glacier Lake and Fairy Meadows.
5. Work with appropriate governments and organizations to expand recognition of:
 - The UNESCO World Heritage Site to include the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.
 - The Canadian Heritage River to include the length of the South Nahanni River.



South Nahanni River upstream of Island Lakes

Parks Canada/D. Tate

Key Actions for Environmental Remediation and Protection

1. Inventory and prioritize sites requiring remediation by 2012.
 - Clean-up prioritized sites by 2014.
2. Identify, assess and designate fuel caches through consultation with air charter operators and sport hunting outfitters.
 - Develop best practices for locations with only a small number of fuel containers.
 - Install secondary containment at all designated fuel caches used by Parks Canada, business licence holders and air charter companies by 2011.



Hoary marmot

S. Henry

Key Actions for Development of New Visitor Products

1. Work with stakeholders and specialists to investigate potential new visitor activities and products in the expansion area.
 - Assess and determine the need for new routes, trails and portages.
 - Determine if the informal route from the South Nahanni River to Glacier Lake should become a designated trail.
2. Complete a risk assessment of access to Fairy Meadows from Glacier Lake to determine the best management approach. Take action based on recommendations.
3. Consult with members of specialized activity communities (e.g., rock climbing, mountaineering, caving) to develop a visitor service offer which meets the needs of current and future visitors participating in a specialised activity.
 - Develop a code of practice for climbing in the Cirque of the Unclimbables and other locations in the park.
4. Develop a pre-trip planning information package for each new activity or key location to facilitate visitor planning, which identifies park services, specific safety issues and travel requirements prior to visitor products being promoted.
5. Develop processes for visitor registration by 2010.
6. Develop a means to manage different activities to ensure public safety and the maintenance of a wilderness experience.
 - Establish methods to limit interactions between guided sport hunters and other visitors in conjunction with outfitters.



Sunblood trail



Parks Canada/S. Borcoman

CONSULTATION, PARTNERING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Nahanni National Park Reserve depends on the cooperation and support of many partners, stakeholders, the non-profit sector and others to achieve the park vision. Nahanni National Park Reserve will continue to maintain rewarding relationships with these groups. In addition, staff will move forward to build relationships with new organizations and stakeholders related to the management and promotion of the park.

The 2009 expansion means that portions of the park may now overlap areas of importance to other First Nations and Métis groups, including Acho Dene Koe, Fort Liard Métis, Liard First Nation and Ross River Dena Council. Parks Canada's goal is to establish mutually agreed upon strategies and mechanisms for working together. In this context, Parks Canada will continue cooperative management with Dehcho First Nations through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team and will undertake discussions with each of the other First Nations and Métis groups to determine possible interests and potential implications for park management. Nahanni National Park Reserve borders the Sahtu Settlement Area, which includes the headwaters of the South Nahanni River, a proposed

national park. Therefore, discussions with Sahtu organizations will continue to build connections and ensure complementary park operations.

The need to develop a greater understanding of the expansion area over the next five years means that it is key for Parks Canada to continue to work with a broad range of regional interests, including federal, territorial and local governing bodies responsible for planning and managing adjacent lands.

7.1 MANAGEMENT PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

Management plans are formally reviewed every five years to ensure they remain relevant and effective. Recognizing the importance of Nahʔa Dehé to local communities, stakeholders and business operators, their input will be sought early in the management planning process, allowing them to contribute to the development of alternatives and solutions. Public input (Canadians, visitors) will be sought to gather information in regards to opinions about issues, alternatives and solutions. The Nahʔa Dehé

Consensus Team will endeavour to keep people informed, listen to their knowledge and let them know how input will be used in the planning program.

Nahanni National Park Reserve is committed to reporting annually on implementation of the management plan. These annual updates will be created by the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team and shared with partners, stakeholders and the interested public.



Open house

Parks Canada/L. Uunila

Action

1. Report on the implementation of the management plan:
 - At the annual Dehcho First Nations Assembly; and
 - To partners, stakeholders and interested Canadians.



Parks Canada/L. Ulunila

Enjoying the scenery, flight seeing tour

PARK ACCESS AND TRAVEL

Access to the park is primarily by air. Once in the park, visitors are required to use non-motorized means of travel. The motorized travel restrictions do not apply to local First Nations and Métis conducting spiritual or traditional subsistence harvesting activities.

8.1 AIRCRAFT ACCESS

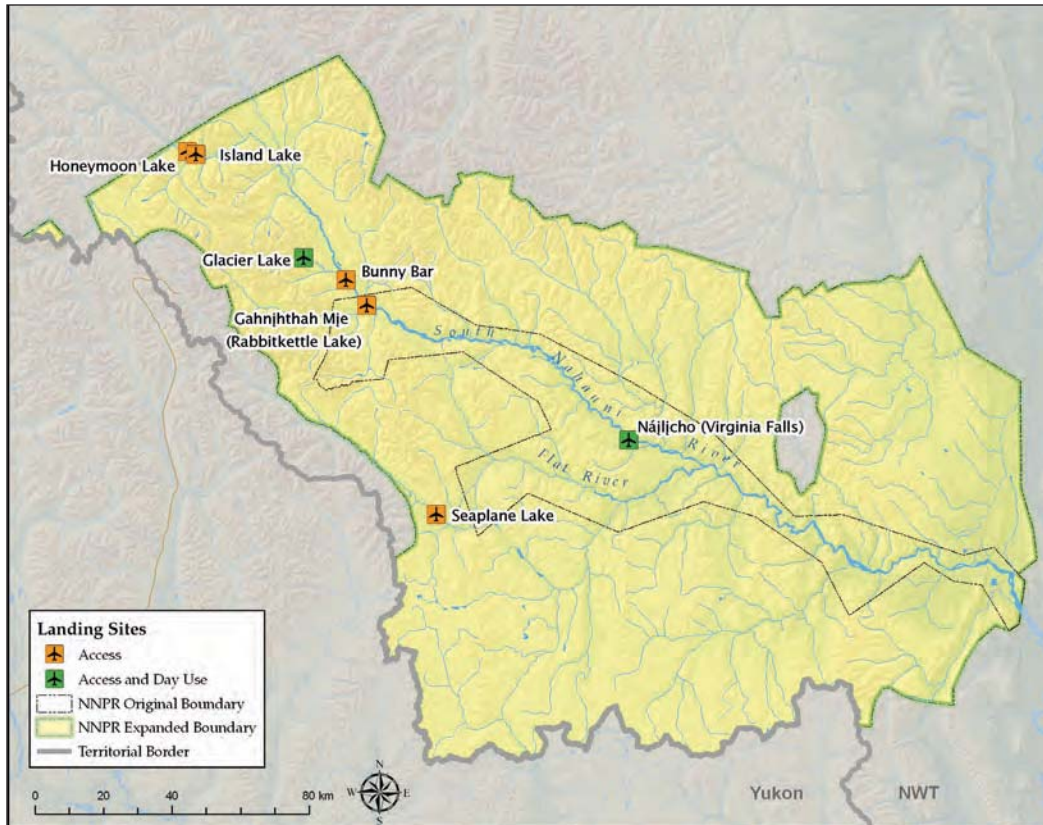
Up until 2010, there were two designated landing sites for visitors in the park: Nájljcho (Virginia Falls) and Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake). As a result of expansion, an additional five locations have been put-forward as designated aircraft access sites (Figure 1, Map 3). These new locations reflect landing areas which saw regular use prior to the expansion of the park. They are either popular feature destinations, such as Glacier Lake (also an access point for the Cirque of the Unclimbables) or areas that provide people with access to the South Nahanni River, either directly or via tributaries. Regional air charter operators are encouraged to reduce disruption to the wilderness experience of visitors, by avoiding low level flights along the river corridor.

Fairy Meadows was initially considered for inclusion as a designated helicopter access point, as it provides direct access to the Cirque of the Unclimbables and reflects existing use prior to expansion. However, given the unique nature of the alpine area, and concerns raised during consultations, ecological and visitor values will be assessed prior to any designation being made.

Aircraft access into the park, apart from the designated access points, may be permitted by the Park Superintendent on a case-by-case basis. When making the decision for permitting access, consideration will be given to other reasonable means of access, the potential for significant adverse effects to ecological integrity, cultural values, wilderness character, public safety and enjoyment of that area by other persons. Permission for aircraft access to areas not designated, such as Hole-in-the-Wall Lake (original park) and the Ram Plateau (expansion area), will be facilitated through an application submitted to the Superintendent.

FIGURE 3. Designated landing areas.

LOCATION	AIRCRAFT			ACTIVITY	
	Float plane	Wheeled plane	Helicopter	Access and Day Use	Access
Nájljcho (Virginia Falls)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake)	✓		✓		✓
Bunny Bar	✓	✓	✓		✓
Island Lake	✓		✓		✓
Honeymoon Lake	✓		✓		✓
Glacier Lake	✓		✓	✓	✓
Seaplane Lake	✓		✓		✓



MAP 3. Designated landing areas.

Aircraft Access Actions

1. Develop a process and criteria for evaluating requests for access to non-designated landing sites in 2010.
2. Monitor the effects of flights on the visitor experience as part of the overall social science strategy.
3. Monitor the effects of flights and landings on wildlife and aquatic habitats.
4. Develop a better understanding of visitor and ecological values at Fairy Meadows in regards to flights and landings by 2013.

8.2 ROAD ACCESS AND TRAVEL

With expansion, there are now two private mine access routes which pass over park lands. Signage will need to be placed on both routes to inform people about national park boundaries. The Prairie Creek Mine winter access road is not constructed; a permit exists for an industrial winter road. Motorized visitor use and access will not be permitted on this route.

The second road, Howard's Pass Road (also known as Selwyn Road), transects the northwest portion of the park. This road provides access to a mine site in the Yukon, though is not intended to be used for ore trucks. Visitor activities in the vicinity of the Howard's Pass road will be considered as part of the investigation of new visitor opportunities.

8.3 RIVER ACCESS AND TRAVEL

Non-motorized watercraft are the only acceptable means of river travel for visitors. From time to time, park operations require the use of motorized watercraft. Whenever possible, these operations will be scheduled outside of the primary park visitation period. Aboriginal traditional harvesting activities are not bound by the provision on non-motorized travel in the park.



S. Henry

Rafting



Parks Canada/D. Tate

ZONING AND WILDERNESS AREA DECLARATION

Land and water areas of national parks are classified through the management planning process according to their natural and cultural resource protection requirements and the capability and suitability of these areas to provide opportunities for visitors to experience the park. Ecosystem structure, function and sensitivity, cultural values and opportunities for visitor experience are all considered when applying the zoning system.

Local First Nations and Métis may require access to all areas of the park for spiritual reasons or for traditional subsistence harvesting activities, and as such they are not bound by the restrictions on use prescribed by the zoning plan for the park.

A zoning system is in place for the original park. The expansion area does not yet have a detailed zoning plan in place. Parks Canada has a total of five zones which can be applied:

1. Special Preservation (Zone I)

These areas contain unique, threatened or endangered natural or cultural features or are among the best examples of the features that

represent a natural region. Preservation is the key consideration. Motorized access is not permitted and visitor access is strictly controlled.

2. Wilderness (Zone II)

The majority of national parks are classified as wilderness where there are extensive areas that are good representations of a natural region and which will be conserved in a wilderness state. The perpetuation of park ecosystems with minimal interference is the key consideration. First-hand opportunities are available for visitors to experience the park's ecosystems if only rudimentary services are required. Motorized access is not permitted for visitors, except by air to access the remote backcountry. Air access outside of designated landing areas requires permission of the Superintendent.

3. Natural Environment (Zone III)

Visitors may experience a park's natural and cultural heritage values through outdoor recreation activities requiring minimal services and facilities of a rustic nature in Zone III. While motorized access may be allowed, it will be controlled.

4. Outdoor Recreation (Zone IV)

A broad range of opportunities for understanding appreciation and enjoyment of the park's heritage values occur in Zone IV. Essential services and facilities have minimal impact on the ecological integrity of the park. Direct access by motorized vehicle is permitted only to the degree that the ecological integrity is impacted to the smallest extent possible.

5. Park Services (Zone V)

Zone V applies to communities in existing national parks which contain a concentration of visitor services and support facilities. Major park operation and administrative functions may also be accommodated in this zone to maintain ecological integrity. This zone is not applicable to Nahanni.

To complement the zoning system, some sites may be classified as environmentally or culturally sensitive areas if they are worthy of special management through specific guidelines for each area. These areas are often small, and their classification as an environmentally sensitive area or culturally sensitive area can exist within any of the five zones. In addition, The *Canada National Parks Act* provides for areas of a national park to be declared, by regulation, as wilderness areas. The intent of this legislation is to enhance protection and maintain a high level of ecological integrity. In these declared wilderness areas, the legislation only permits development and activities required for essential services and resource protection. Typically, Zone I and Zone II can be included in declared wilderness areas.

9.1 ZONING IN THE ORIGINAL NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

For the original park, the zoning plan first presented in the 1987 plan remains valid (Map 4). The zoning plan outlines seven areas of Zone I (Special Preservation), and two areas of Zone III (Natural Environment), with the majority of the park being Zone II (Wilderness). In the



Parks Canada/L. Ulnifia

Kraus hot springs, a destination for river users

spring of 2009, the Zone I and II areas became a Declared Wilderness Area, a designation which encompasses over 98% of the original park.

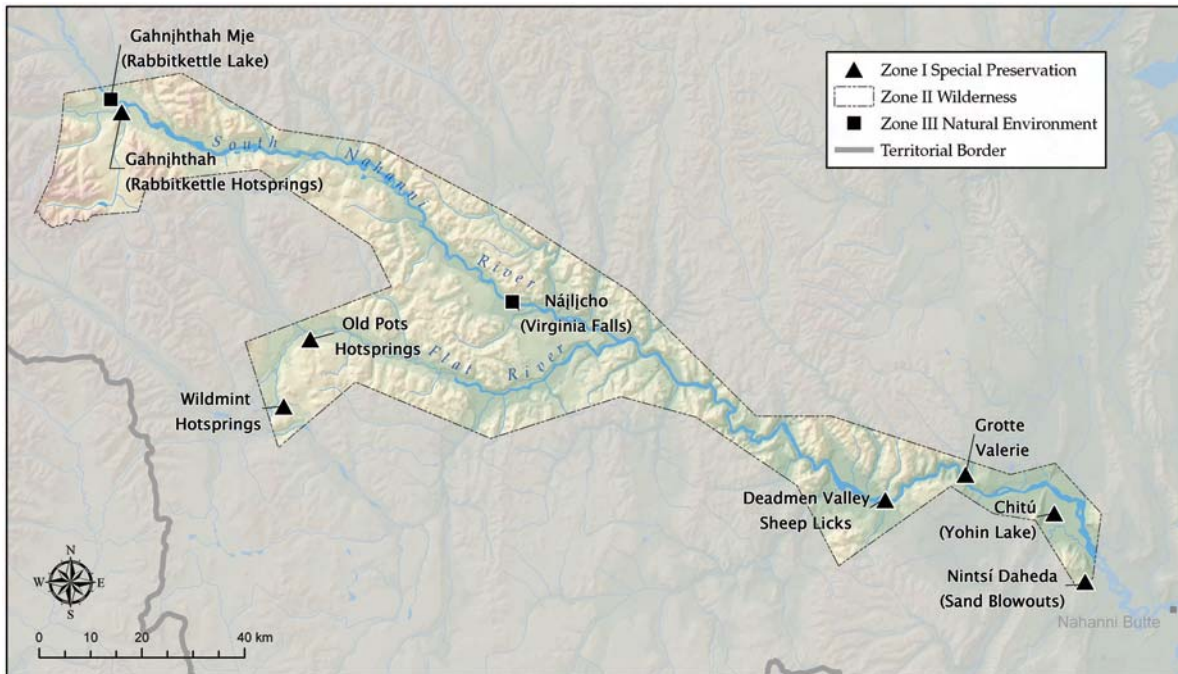
9.1.1 Zone I: Special Preservation

Gahnjthah (Rabbitkettle Hot Springs)

The two travertine mounds found at this site are the largest such structures known in Canada and possibly the largest in any sub-Arctic locality. The tops of these tufa mounds display characteristic calcite micro-dams or gours. Calcite is a relatively weak material susceptible to shattering from frost action. A more immediate danger to the structures would be the impact of uncontrolled foot traffic on the mounds. Access to Rabbitkettle Hot Springs is facilitated by a guided interpretive hike to the north mound. Due to the cultural and spiritual significance of the south mound, no visitor access is permitted.

Grotte Valerie

Grotte Valerie is a 2 km aggregate of limestone karst passages formed by water percolating from the plateau above First Canyon. Various passageways and caverns are decorated with hundreds of small, but actively growing stalagmites and stalactites. Studies have shown the cave system to be older than 350,000 years. One of Grotte



MAP 4. Zoning in the original park.

Valerie’s unique features is the presence of dozens of Dall’s sheep skeletons, some embedded in ice. These are the remains of animals that wandered into the cave system and were unable to return past an ice fall. Access to the cave is strictly controlled for reasons of public safety and protection of the fragile cave features, and is limited to park-approved scientific research.

Wildmint Hot Springs

These hot springs are located approximately 100 kilometres upstream of the South Nahanni River near the Flat River. The tufa walls are brittle and crumble easily. While there are no extensive mound formations here, such as those at Rabbitkettle, concentrations of wildlife and unusual vegetation species require protection. Access is limited to park-approved scientific research to protect the fragile tufa walls and the unique vegetation found at this site.

Old Pots Hot Springs

Old Pots Hot Springs on the Flat River is a well-developed tufa dome with several large pools or “pots” overflowing with ground water. The

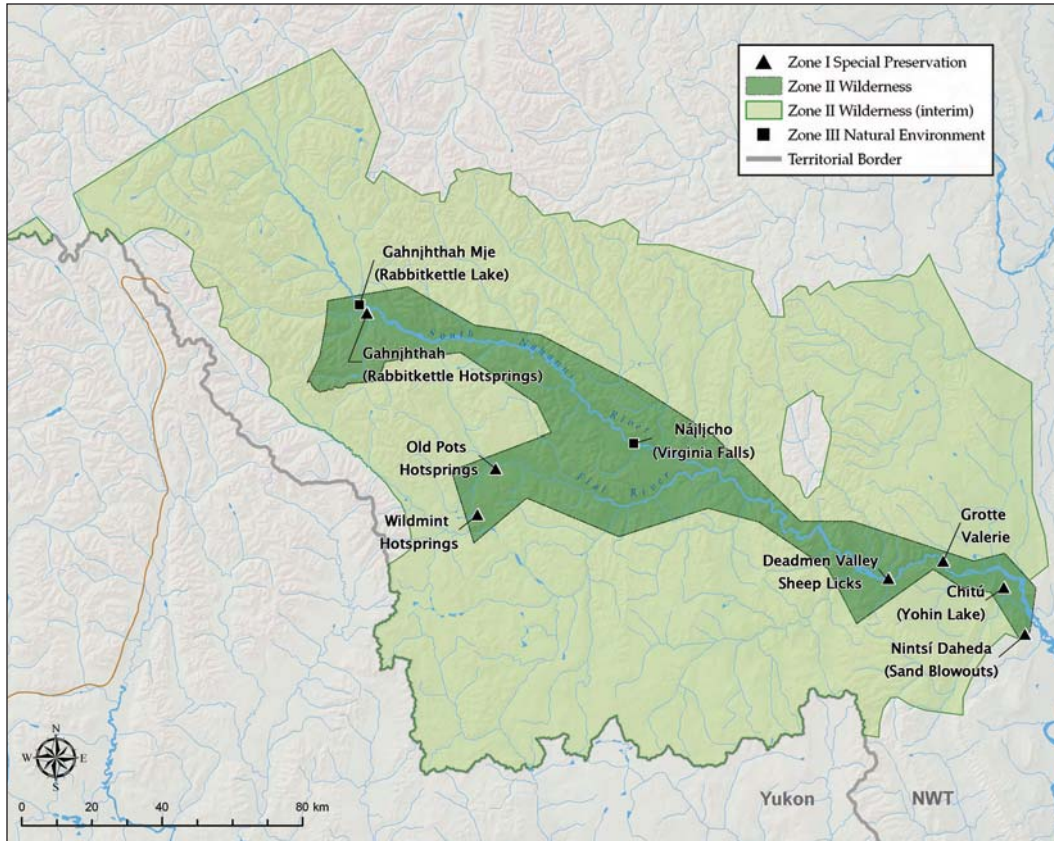
tufa formations are extremely susceptible to damage. Access to this site is controlled to protect the fragile tufa dome, and is limited to park-approved scientific research.

Deadmen Valley Sheep Licks

These mineral outcrops or “licks” are located along the South Nahanni River in the eastern part of Deadmen Valley. They are frequented by Dall’s sheep, as well as wolves and bears in search of prey. The sensitivity of mammals to disturbance at licks is unknown; consequently, access to these sites is controlled and is limited to park-approved scientific research.

Nintsí Daheda (Sand Blowouts)

Located just inside the eastern boundary of the park, the sand blowouts are made of finely-textured sandstone which has been eroded by the wind into unusual shapes. Curved arches, rounded pillars and perfect sandstone spheres are found in a small area of approximately five hectares. The sandstone features are easily eroded and susceptible to trampling; consequently, access to this site is controlled and is limited to park-approved scientific research.



MAP 5. Zoning for Nahanni National Park Reserve

Chitú (Yohin Lake)

This lake near the eastern park boundary is the largest lake in the original park and is an important nesting area for various bird species including the rare Trumpeter Swan. It is also noted for its diversity of aquatic vegetation and the abundance of nesting waterfowl and passerine birds. The sensitivity of this site requires that public access be strictly controlled and limited to park approved scientific research. The area is frequently used by residents of Nahanni Butte for subsistence harvest and cultural/educational purposes. Traditional use is not restricted by park zoning.

9.1.2 Zone II: Wilderness

The majority of Nahanni National Park Reserve is zoned as wilderness. This zone is intended to ensure the protection of park ecosystems, with minimal interference. There are no designated

landing sites in the declared wilderness area. Air access to the remote backcountry outside of designated landing areas may be granted through permission of the Superintendent.

9.1.3 Zone III: Natural Environment *Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake) and Nájłıcho (Virginia Falls)*

Both Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake) and Nájłıcho (Virginia Falls) are designated as Natural Environment. This designation recognizes controls on use and facility development at these sites, while allowing for frequent air access.

9.2 ZONING IN THE EXPANSION AREA

The Expansion Area Management Approach outlines research needed to develop zoning over the next five years. In accordance with park

policy, zoning will be developed in consultation with interested parties. It is anticipated that much of the expansion area will likely be Zone II¹² (Wilderness), as with the original park, and one or more areas will likely be designated Zone III (Natural Environment) to enhance visitor access. In addition, culturally and environmentally sensitive areas and Zone I (Special Preservation) areas will be considered. The expansion area will be managed as Zone II (Wilderness) until a permanent zoning regime is established (Map 5).



S. Henry

Cirque of the Unclimbables, one of the Top 50 big wall rock climbing areas in North America



Parks Canada/S. Cameron

10.0

Enjoying a meal at the Náíłjcho campground

ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS

Nahanni National Park Reserve is an integral part of the Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit, which also includes Wood Buffalo National Park and several national historic sites (see Map 6). The administration office for Nahanni National Park Reserve is located in Fort Simpson. The Field Unit office, from which the park receives support, is currently located in Fort Smith, 750 km east of Fort Simpson by road.

Facilities supporting administration, operations and visitor experience will be changing, now that the park has expanded. The park establishment agreement outlines specific infrastructure which will be developed over the next five years to support expanded park operations.

10.1 ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONS OUTSIDE OF THE PARK

Fort Simpson, the primary administration and operational centre for the park, will continue to function as such. In addition, an operational base will be established in Nahanni Butte. Currently,

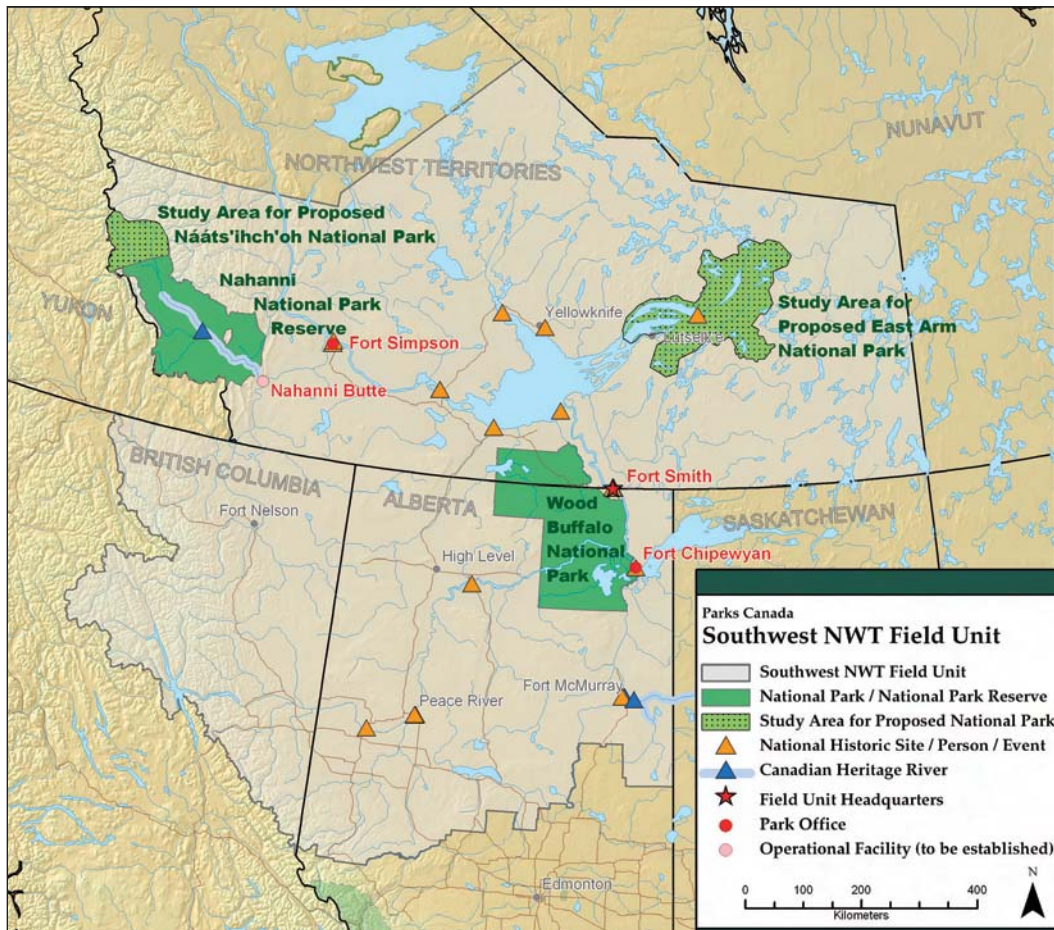
park facilities in Fort Simpson include office space in a retrofitted log building constructed in the 1960s; and a small shop with one heated storage bay, as well as a cold storage shed with four bays, built in the mid-1990s.

Historically, visitor information and registration has been provided in the park office, as the park does not have a visitor reception centre. A small, outdated interpretive display is housed at the Village of Fort Simpson Visitor Centre. With park expansion, visitor orientation and communication will need to occur at gateway locations which may see increased use as access and egress points. These communities and locations include places such as Watson Lake, Fort Nelson, Muncho Lake and Inconnu Lodge.

Park expansion commitments include the development and enhancement of administration and operational facilities. Where possible, the Nahanni National Park Reserve will partner with Dehcho First Nations to develop shared facilities. Infrastructure will be developed in efficient and environmentally responsible ways.

Administration and Operations Actions

1. Establish an operational base in Nahanni Butte.
 - Develop in cooperation with the Nahanni Butte Dene Band.
 - Start with a temporary facility and then build a permanent facility.
2. Develop a visitor reception centre and expand the park office facilities in Fort Simpson.
 - Develop in cooperation with Dehcho First Nations, Lídljì Kúé First Nation and Métis Local #52.



MAP 6. Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit

10.2 FACILITIES IN THE PARK

10.2.1 Camping

In keeping with its wilderness character, visitor facilities in the park are minimal. Other than designated campsites, park visitors are encouraged to camp at random locations of their choosing. These areas will be monitored to ensure the impacts of use do not interfere with the wilderness character sought by visitors. If an area experiences frequent and significant visitor use, management actions will be considered, such as a temporary closure, reservation system or its inclusion as a designated campsite.

A small number of designated campsites were established to protect their surrounding environments from concentrated and repeated use. The park currently has eight designated areas for camping. The original park had four designated campsites:

1. Gahnjthah Mje (Rabbitkettle Lake),
2. South Nahanni River Island (opposite the Rabbitkettle Lake portage landing),
3. Nájłjcho (Virginia Falls), and
4. Kraus Hotsprings.

Facilities provided at the original four designated campsites will be re-assessed to determine the most appropriate infrastructure as some facilities, such as the outhouses at Nájłjcho, are not meeting the needs of visitors. As a result of concentrated visitor use and findings from the campsite monitoring program, two additional camping areas have been designated along the South Nahanni River corridor:

5. The Gate, and
6. Lafferty Creek.

In addition, two camping areas which were outside the park until the boundary expansion in June 2009 are now designated camping areas:

7. Fairy Meadows¹³ and
8. Glacier Lake.



Parks Canada

Camping at Lafferty Creek

The goal for all four newly designated sites is to install minimal infrastructure to ensure proper management of human waste and minimize environmental impacts. In order to ensure the camping areas are compatible with the park's wilderness qualities, they must be primitive in nature. At most, infrastructure will include outdoor privies, food caches, cleared tenting areas or tent pads, and fires rings.

Campsite Actions

1. Determine appropriate, minimal, sustainable infrastructure for each designated campsite through an assessment and consultation with stakeholders.
 - Assess and improve infrastructure at the four original designated sites.
 - Determine appropriate minimal infrastructure for the new designated campsites.

10.2.2 Portages and Trails

In the original park there are four designated portages. These are located along the South Nahanni River at Gahn̄hthah M̄je (Rabbitkettle Lake), Náj̄l̄icho (Virginia Falls), Figure of Eight Rapids, and along the Flat River at the Cascade of Thirteen Steps. With the expansion, there are now other portage trails within the park and non-designated trails and routes, which see regular use by visitors. The Expansion Area management approach outlines the assessment process for new trails and portages.

10.2.3 Operational Facilities in the Park

Facilities in park are used to support resource conservation, visitor service, public safety and enforcement needs. In the original park, this includes five staff cabins: Rabbitkettle, Sunblood¹⁴, Virginia Falls, Flat River and Deadmen Valley.

In addition to providing accommodation for staff while on patrol, the cabins are used as staging areas during public safety, fire management, research and monitoring activities. A helicopter landing area exists at each cabin and fuel is stored on-site. Visitors can use the cabins in the event of an emergency; first aid supplies, food and radio equipment are stored in each cabin.

To permit VHF radio communications within the park, and between the field staff and the office in Fort Simpson, four mountain-top radio repeaters are situated at strategic locations. As a back-up to the radio system during periods of poor, or failed radio communications, a satellite phone is located at the Rabbitkettle Lake and Virginia Falls cabins. Emergency personal locator beacons are located at the other cabins in the park.

Initially, one operational facility will be added to the expansion area. This will be installed at Glacier Lake, following a needs assessment¹⁵. Eventually, it is intended for this base to enable staff to provide visitor services, interpretation, resource conservation, law enforcement and public safety.

All new infrastructure developed will be based on a thorough needs assessment, and developed with sustainable building practices. Infrastructure in the park will consider efficiency, cost and complement the wilderness nature of the park.

10.3 BUSINESS LICENCES

Park outfitters are extremely important to the park, as 59% of visitors choose a guided river trip. To qualify for an outfitter licence in Nahanni National Park Reserve, the commercial operator must first be licensed by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Historically, the number of park outfitter licences issued to commercial operators reflected the carrying capacity for visitor entry to the park over a summer operating season. As the original park was principally along the river corridor, these licences were for use on the South Nahanni River. There are four licences currently issued to outfitters for river trips, plus one additional licence which may be issued to a qualified local Aboriginal outfitting operation. With park expansion, a process needs to be established to consider new applicants to operate tourism businesses in the expansion area¹⁶.

Guides in Nahanni are tested and licensed by the park for their knowledge of park rules and regulations¹⁷. Guides must be employees of licensed park outfitters, and guide only those trips in the park that are operated by the licensed outfitters.

In support of these services, Parks Canada will collaborate with regional air charter services and with outfitters and their associations, such as the Nahanni River Outfitters Association, to manage commonly desired activities compatible with the park's purpose and objectives.



Parks Canada/L. Uumila

MONITORING

Effective monitoring in the remote and rugged environment of Nahanni National Park Reserve presents numerous challenges. The recent expansion, which has significantly improved the park's overall ecological integrity through greater protection of wildlife habitats and representation of natural features, has also brought the park boundaries closer to sources of potential impacts (e.g. mine sites). In addition, the increased park size, gateway locations and ability to increase visitor opportunities and numbers requires a more sophisticated understanding of current and potential visitors.

The new land base has broadened the area of responsibility for monitoring, and thereby increased some of the associated logistical implications. The many benefits vastly outweigh any of these considerations, however, and with the new financial and human resources, staff are looking forward to meeting the challenges and opportunities ahead. Monitoring is a very important component of adaptive management, providing a sound understanding and basis for decision making.

11.1 ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY MONITORING

The ecological monitoring program for Nahanni National Park Reserve is structured according to a set of five indicators used to report on the condition of the park. These indicators are the main ecosystems of the park, namely Forest, Alpine Tundra, Freshwater, Wetlands and Glaciers, and within each of these ecosystems are a set of *Measures*. Each measure falls into one of three categories, and is designed to determine the status and trend of a specific aspect of that ecosystem; it could be a *Biodiversity* measure such as the population size of caribou, or a *Process* measure such as the size and intensity of naturally-occurring forest fires, or a *Stressor* measure such as levels of certain industrial chemicals in a river or stream.

The status and trend of measures within a given indicator (ecosystem) are rolled up to provide an overall assessment of the condition of that indicator, and these are presented in a five-year cycle in the State of the Park Report. Prior to park expansion, the primary indicator was Forest, representing ~83% of park area; of

the 21 measures reported in the 2009 *State of the Park Report*, nine were in this indicator. The other indicators reported on Freshwater (5), Alpine Tundra (3), Glaciers (3) and Wetlands (1) measures respectively. Two measures, Primary Productivity and Caribou Composition, were reported in both Forest and Alpine Tundra, and one measure, River Discharge/Flow, was reported in both Freshwater and Glacier indicators.

The 2009 *State of the Park Report*, the first to be completed for Nahanni National Park Reserve, determined that Forest and Freshwater indicators were in good condition and stable; Alpine Tundra and Glaciers were in fair condition with declining trends; Wetlands were not rated, as there was insufficient information to make a proper assessment at the time of the report. Improving the number and quality of measures in the Alpine Tundra and Wetland indicators, through the framework of the park's Ecological Integrity Monitoring Plan, was identified as a major information gap to be addressed.

11.2 CULTURAL RESOURCE MONITORING

Although the inventory of cultural resources was rated as good in the 2009 *State of the Park Report*, the monitoring of cultural resources, sites and places was rated as poor; a formal monitoring program has not been developed. Efforts to visit unconfirmed and threatened cultural sites within the original park boundaries created a baseline of information and a photographic record for these sites. This information will provide a solid basis in which to make long-term monitoring and management decisions.

The *State of the Park Report* and this management plan identify two important steps to be taken: the preparation of a *Cultural Resource Values Statement* and a *Cultural Resource Management Strategy* which will outline specific priorities for the park, and ensure a multi-disciplinary approach to management of cultural resources.

11.3 VISITOR EXPERIENCE MONITORING

Nahanni National Park Reserve has been very proactive in building a greater understanding of visitors, including perceptions of the wilderness experience, support for management actions and satisfaction. The first extensive study of river users was in 1986; this survey has since been replicated and expanded to develop greater understanding of visitor needs and how they use the park. In addition, there are annual statistics which report on visitor demographics, length of stay and public safety issues.

The visitor experience monitoring program reported in the *State of the Park Report* is structured according to a set of four indicators. These indicators are personal connection, marketing and promotion, interpretation, and visitor service offer. Information on these measures is collected via the Visitor Information Program Survey. Nahanni National Park Reserve rated very highly in all of these areas in the 2009 *State of the Park Report*. In addition, social science is used to support program development. For example, in advance of new product development, an assessment of effectiveness of Aboriginal heritage presentation was commissioned.



A modern cultural resource and long running tradition: paddles hung in the Deadmen Valley Forestry Cabin

Improvements can be made in the management of social science information to ensure a single-point, accessible source. There are no significant gaps in regards to monitoring; however, the program needs to be expanded to develop a better understanding of new visitors, their desired activities and expectations. A comprehensive social science program will be developed to support monitoring and decision making.

11.4 EXTERNAL RELATIONS MONITORING

External relations includes public outreach education, stakeholder and partner engagement. Much of the monitoring for external relations occurs at the national level, and thus is not reported by individual parks.

Outreach education is very important for Nahʔa Dehé, especially youth in the Dehcho. The park would like to increase efforts in this area, and has outlined targets and actions in relation to extending the reach of the park, to inspire more local youth and Canadians to develop a strong sense of personal connection.

The park is cooperatively managed with Dehcho First Nations through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team, a successful partnering relationship which has been in place for over a decade. In addition, stakeholder engagement is key to the operation of Nahanni National Park Reserve. The river outfitters are key partners in setting the foundation for memorable experiences. In addition, the majority of park visitors use the services of air charter companies. Stakeholder and partner relationships tend to be very strong. A comprehensive strategy to measure these strengths and to identify any gaps would be beneficial, including a measure of the opportunities and degree of influence stakeholders and partners feel they have in regards to park management.

11.5 MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS MONITORING

The 2009 *State of the Park Report* summarizes some of the main management actions from the previous planning cycle, and reports on the results achieved. In terms of ongoing management actions and associated monitoring to be continued in the coming years, monitoring of the condition of campsites along the South Nahanni River will continue as this program is informative to management of the wilderness experience aspects in the park. Similarly, monitoring of the tufa mounds to detect and mitigate impacts from visitor access will be continued.

Management of fuel caches has been improved in the original park over the last planning cycle through installation of new containment systems, and monitoring at these sites will continue. A new but similar initiative in the coming years is to inventory existing fuel caches in the expansion area, determine sites for continued fuel storage, and improve the condition and monitoring of these sites. Discontinued fuel cache sites, and other contaminated sites will be identified, rehabilitated and monitored as necessary.



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12.0

Caribou photographed from the Ridge Trail overlook

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

A strategic environmental assessment was conducted for the Nahanni National Park Reserve Management Plan pursuant to the 2004 *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency/Privy Council Office 2004). Strategic environmental assessments of draft management plans provide an opportunity to identify the broad and unintended impacts of proposed management actions, and to assess the cumulative effects of multiple activities on the environment. The strategic environmental assessment also aids in the identification of future environmental requirements under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*.

Each of the actions in the plan was evaluated to determine if it might have adverse environmental effects. Many actions are not expected to cause adverse environmental effects. Other actions are expected to have positive environmental effects including: greater knowledge of ecosystems, especially through monitoring activities; expanded visitor opportunities; increased cooperative management with the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team; and greater connections with local communities, traditional resource users,

and the broader Canadian community. The expansion of the park in 2009 represents the most important change positive environmental effect. As a result of the expansion, the overall opportunity to preserve the ecological integrity of the watershed and park has been enhanced significantly.

In part due to the recent park expansion, much of the plan is focused on developing future strategies and actions, and in monitoring to contribute to knowledge of the ecology of the park reserve. Once these strategies are developed the plan or strategy may itself require a strategic environmental assessment, or where specific actions are indicated, a project-level preliminary screening may be needed.

The following sections summarize the actions that may cause adverse cumulative environmental effects on key valued components in the park, reflecting the values inherent in the ecological integrity and cultural values of Nahanni National Park Reserve and the 2009 *State of the Park Report*. The components considered are: cultural resources; visitor experience; water quality and aquatic ecosystems; vegetation and forests, and alpine regions; and wildlife. For each indicator

there is a summary of the actions identified in the plan that could affect the valued ecosystem component, the mitigation identified in the plan to reduce or eliminate adverse effects and any additional actions that need to be taken for mitigation.

12.1 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Cumulative effects could occur on cultural resources as a result of increased visitation in or near areas of cultural significance. This includes areas such as the tufa mounds in the Gahnjthah (Rabbitkettle) area, which are important culturally and which also represent a sensitive terrain. In addition to an increase in the number of visitors, the sites could be affected through incomplete understanding of the nature of use of the site. The monitoring in the area will be evaluated and enhanced, with expert input, to better understand impacts, and to better meet visitor expectations while still protecting the terrain and respecting the cultural significance to First Nations and Métis.

A cultural resource management values statement and strategy will be developed for the whole park. The strategy should identify the outcomes to be met to avoid cumulative effects and priorities for monitoring.

12.2 VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Cumulative effects to the wilderness experience of visitors to the park may occur through a variety of actions identified in the plan, including: increased encounters with other visitors; disturbance from aircraft traffic; restrictions in general access to areas of cultural or ecologically sensitive areas; and disturbance through monitoring activities. Each of these could diminish the sense of solitude and wilderness that many who travel to Nahʔa Dehé expect to experience in this northern and remote park. Mitigations include an effective registration system that will provide data for assessing visitor carrying capacity on the South Nahanni River and at key visitor points; careful licensing of aircraft companies to ensure appropriate mitigation are followed, including

in the expansion area not previously subject to national park regulations; appropriate planning of new activities; and interpretation of key visitor sites to enhance understanding of the values being protected where restrictions are in place.

12.3 AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

The *State of the Park Report* (2009) evaluates the freshwater ecosystem as good quality, with stable trends. Cumulative effects to aquatic systems are possible through increased visitation. Planned improvements in basic infrastructure at the Náǰlǰcho (Virginia Falls) area, and along the South Nahanni River for those camping, will mitigate impacts, through actions such as improved waste management and basic camping infrastructure facilities along the river.

A key stressor on water quality is the mining activity in the watersheds of the Prairie Creek and Flat Rivers. Parks Canada will continue to actively monitor water quality of these watercourses, and participate in environmental assessment and review processes, in cooperation with other expert authorities and jurisdictions.

12.4 VEGETATION AND FORESTS, AND ALPINE REGIONS

The management plan identifies a number of actions that could cause negative cumulative effects on vegetation and forests, and the alpine region of Nahanni National Park Reserve, including trail development, some new operational and camping facilities, and increased visitor access. Effects of new facilities can be mitigated during project-level assessments, and through a strategic assessment of broader activities, such as trail development and designation planning, especially in the expansion area.

12.5 WILDLIFE

The management plan identifies activities that could cause negative cumulative effects on wildlife, including: increased visitation, aircraft disturbance, increased trail development, sport-hunting in the expansion area, and increased

access through existing roads in the expansion area. Many of the changes to the park are positive, especially expanding the park to the entire south portion of the South Nahanni watershed, more likely to provide increased protection for wildlife habitat for populations throughout their life-cycles.

The plan identifies mitigation for adverse effects to wildlife, including: a strategy to phase out existing sport-hunting; controlled access for aircraft; signage to decrease access for non-traditional use of roads in the expansion area.

12.6 FOLLOW-UP

The management plan describes numerous monitoring programs that will be implemented over the course of the plan to provide information to decision-makers. The monitoring programs will also provide follow-up to the potential cumulative effects identified above. Monitoring programs are intended to identify the onset of potential adverse impacts early on, so that adaptive management measures can be identified and implemented before impacts affect desired objectives.

12.7 PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The plan was developed cooperatively through the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team. The planning team initiated public consultation beginning in December 2009 involving community and stakeholder meetings, and an on-line forum for



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Bull Moose at Oxbow Lake in the fall

receiving comments, with a final public review of the document in February 2010. Public concerns that were raised have been incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

12.8 CONCLUSION

As a result of the actions in the plan, it is expected that increased knowledge and improved planning strategies will enhance the understanding of the indicators of ecological integrity and cultural values of Nahʔa Dehé, while effectively integrating an appropriate scale of meaningful visitor experiences into the operation of the park. With additional assessment of management strategies as they are developed, and project-specific environmental assessment mitigation, negative cumulative effects are not expected to be important.

13.0 Appendices and References

13.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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13.3 GLOSSARY

Greater Nahanni Ecosystem

Broader than the Nahʔa Dehé/South Nahanni River watershed, the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem includes the entire watershed, plus the North Nahanni Karst.

Nahʔa Dehé

Can refer to the South Nahanni River and its watershed, the 2009 park boundary, and/or the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem. In this document, Nahʔa Dehé refers to the area encompassed by the 2009 boundary, and is used interchangeably with Nahanni National Park Reserve.

Explorer Quotient

A market segmentation tool, based on personal preferences. There are nine traveller types: no-hassle traveller, free spirit, cultural history buff, gentle explorer, virtual traveller, cultural explorer, authentic experiencer, rejuvenator and personal history explorer.

13.4 SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

This management plan contains more than 85 actions. This section is intended to overview some key actions to be undertaken in the next five years; it is not intended to be a comprehensive chronological list. All the actions in the plan are important, as together they set the foundation for the park to achieve the vision by addressing issues, developing better understanding of cultural, ecological and visitor values, and putting knowledge into practice.

2011. The issue of how to manage human waste will be addressed and resolved. In a few concentrated locations there are problems with human waste management, including Náǰlǰho, which has the additional complication of being a permafrost environment. Various methods to address human waste have been tried, but none successfully. A comprehensive approach needs to be taken to increase visitor satisfaction with facilities and reduce the environmental footprint,

staff time and cost of handling waste removal. This issue is addressed indirectly by actions in Waters for Life (section 5.3) and Náǰlǰho: Virginia Falls Area (section 6.2).

2013. The Gahnjthah Area (section 6.1) requires a significant amount of focus, as an area plan is will be developed by 2013. The cultural and geological significance of Gahnjthah (Rabbitkettle Hotsprings) is of particular importance to Dehcho First Nations. The actions in the Gahnjthah Area management approach set the stage to develop a comprehensive approach for visitor and volunteer opportunities, outreach education, monitoring and public safety while protecting the unique natural and cultural values of this area.

2013. Fairy Meadows, part of the expansion area, is an astoundingly beautiful location which attracts climbers from around the world, in addition to other people seeking to experience the grandeur of Cirque of the Unclimbables. A better understanding of visitor and ecological values will aid management decisions in regards to access (section 8.1).

2015. Research, monitoring, exploration and cooperation culminate in a better understanding of the expansion area and allow the park to become a centre for northern mountain research. Detailed management direction and zoning can be developed. Visitor and volunteer opportunities will be expanded and Dehcho, Canadians and international audiences will be inspired by Nahʔa Dehé, resulting in increased visitation. Core elements for understanding visitor needs and working with partners to develop new opportunities to enhance visitation and outreach are addressed throughout the plan, including in Nahʔa Dehé: A Gift to be Shared (section 5.2) and the three area management approaches – (section 6.0).

For Dehcho First Nations, building employment and business opportunities is an essential aspect of the collaborative relationship with Parks Canada. This can be achieved through mentoring, training, employment and tourism

opportunities. These goals are interrelated with the need to protect cultural values and the desire to share Dene culture with youth and visitors. The plan's guiding principles and many actions speak to the importance of opportunities, culture and learning. Throughout the plan there are actions which seek to:

- Improve the Community Cultural Demonstrators program (section 5.2); Offer authentic opportunities to park visitors, local youth and Canadians (section 5.2);
- Build a process to award tourism business licences for the expansion area (section 6.3);
- Improve cultural resource management practices (section 5.1); and
- Develop capacity to support local water quality monitoring (section 5.3); and
- Build new infrastructure outside the park in cooperation with Dehcho First Nations and its member communities in Nahanni Butte and Fort Simpson (section 10.1).



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Nájljcho (Virginia Falls) awaits the spring thaw

13.5 ENDNOTES

1. Further detailed in Section 10.0 - Park Administration and Operations.
2. In 2009, there were 759 visitors to the park; this includes known visitation figures for the expansion area.
3. Once new facilities are developed in Nahanni Butte and Fort Simpson, there will be visitors who participate in community-based interpretation programs, but do not visit the park.
4. As per the direction outlined in the *Interim Park Management Arrangement*.
5. Science includes natural and social sciences and cultural heritage research.
6. Based on 2008 visitation (n = 810).
7. Development of new visitor products is further detailed in the Expansion Area Management Approach (section 6.3).
8. As per the direction outlined in the *Interim Park Management Arrangement*.
9. Refers to both social and ecological carrying capacity.
10. Part of the comprehensive assessment of human waste management identified in the key strategy *Waters for Life* (section 5.3).
11. A final agreement reached through the Dehcho Process takes precedence over the direction outlined in this management plan.
12. Guided sport hunting will continue to occur as non-conforming use up until 2019.
13. Special care will be given to Fairy Meadows in regards to infrastructure needs, as climbers who use the area often stay in a base camp for long periods of time. In addition, other visitors hike and camp in the area.
14. The 2004 management plan had an action to evaluate options for the removal of Sunblood cabin. This plan includes an action in the Nájłjicho Area management approach to assess options in regards to the cabin – including opportunities related to cultural activities, visitor use and/or removal.
15. As outlined in the Expansion Area management approach.
16. Noted as an action in the Expansion Area management approach (section 6.3).
17. The guide testing and licensing process does not apply to sport hunting guides.
18. Representative until September 2009.
19. Representative since October 2009.