

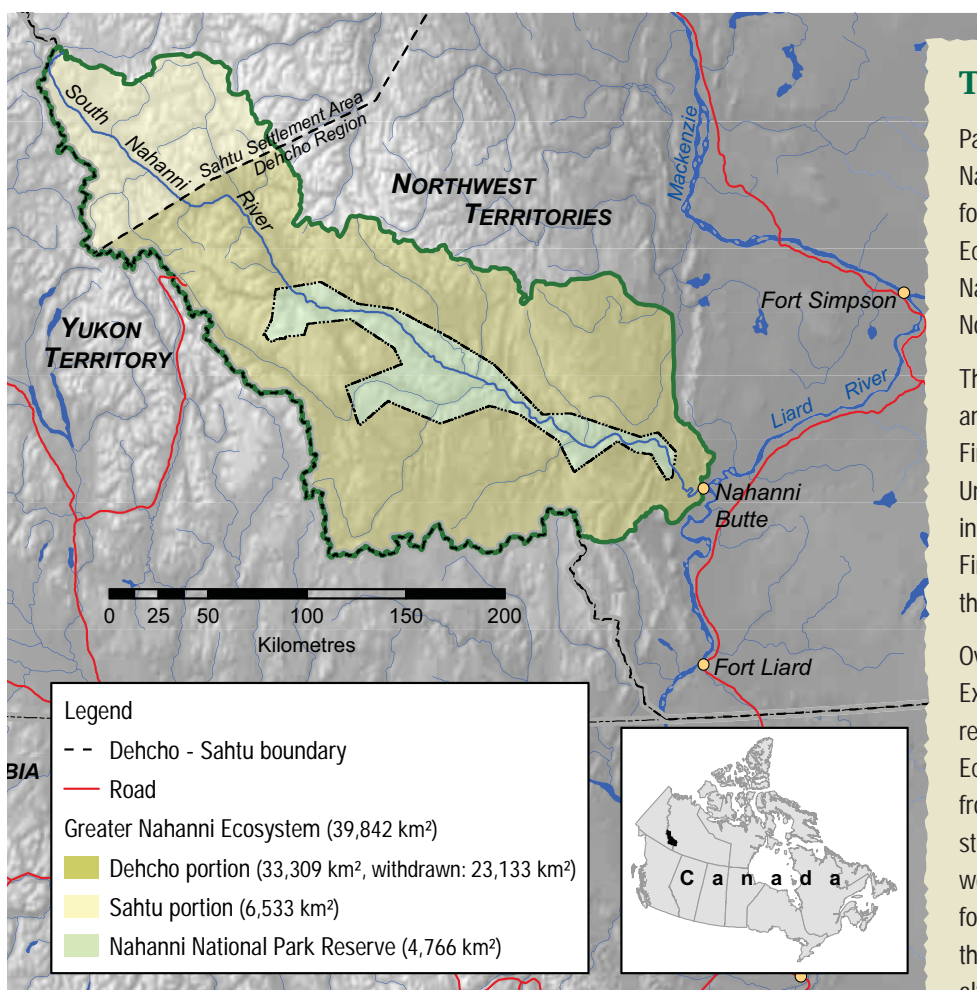


PROPOSED EXPANSION OF NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

Dehcho Community Update #2

January 2007

TAKING CARE OF NAH?A DEHÉ AND EXPANDING NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE



THE STORY SO FAR...

Parks Canada is working to expand Nahanni National Park Reserve. The area of interest for this project is the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem, which is made up of the South Nahanni River watershed and the Nahanni North Karst.

The Minister responsible for Parks Canada and the Grand Chief of the Dehcho First Nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding Respecting Park Expansion in 2003. In 2004, Parks Canada and Dehcho First Nations each appointed two people to the Nahanni Expansion Working Group.

Over the past two years, the Nahanni Expansion Working Group has overseen research studies within the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem. These studies, along with input from Dehcho First Nations, third-party stakeholders and the public will help the working group recommend a new boundary for Nahanni National Park Reserve within the Dehcho. All studies are now complete, although some project reports are still being reviewed before release.

WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

In late June and early July 2006, the Nahanni Expansion Working Group travelled to several Dehcho communities and Yellowknife to share what has been learned from the research studies and to start the public consultation process. We attended the Dehcho Annual Assembly in Kakisa and

then visited Nahanni Butte, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard and Yellowknife for public open houses. This community update reports some of the things we've heard so far—and tells you how and when you can give us your input.



Jonas Antoine presents research study results to Elders and community members in Nahanni Butte. Photo: Danny Wright, 2006.

I am relieved that traditional hunting rights will be protected and very concerned about the mines. I would like the whole watershed protected.
Dehcho First Nations member, Fort Simpson

WHAT YOU TOLD US

At the Dehcho Annual Assembly, Jonas Antoine and Steve Catto presented an update to the leadership and members present, then listened as leaders and delegates around the table gave their opinions and voiced concerns.

During the open houses, members of the Nahanni Expansion Working Group and a geologist from Natural Resources Canada gave presentations about some of the research projects, including:

- wildlife studies (Woodland caribou, grizzly bears, Dall’s sheep and bull trout);
- glacier, land cover, earthquake and landslide mapping; and
- information about the Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment.

After the presentations, community members asked questions and told us what they thought, either in person or on comment cards.

Parks Canada, DFN, GNWT and INAC must be very careful in assessing current and future land use potential of this area and strive to find a balance that is healthy to both environment and the people.
Member of the public, Yellowknife

Here is a sample of comments and questions we heard.

About Aboriginal people and rights on the land:

- What are the implications to First Nations’ traditional rights on the land?
- There is support for protection of the whole watershed only if traditional hunting rights are protected.

About the area of interest and potential boundary proposals:

- Dehcho First Nations leaders and elders are in favour of protecting whole watersheds in any protected area proposal.
- Expanding the park seven times its current size is excessive. Two or even three times the current size is more than enough. People only come to see Virginia Falls and go down the river and that is what Nahanni will always be.
- There is strong concern about the potential for pollution of waters downstream from industrial sites.
- This is a unique and fragile natural environment that is increasingly at risk.
- Water quality is a concern for the people in Nahanni Butte. There is fear that the water quality of the South Nahanni River isn’t pure. How do people know if the water they are drinking is safe?

About local jobs and a sustainable economy for the Dehcho:

- There is concern that a larger national park would take away chances for future jobs in resource extraction industries.
- There are questions about fairness, and how current third-party interests would be compensated if their land holdings or lease rights were to change or finish.
- Some feel that a larger national park would enhance local economies and increase jobs.

About changes to management of land and the national park reserve:

- Parks Canada must continue to manage the park cooperatively with First Nations. More jobs and training opportunities for local youth should be a priority.
- Current park staffing is not enough to run the park reserve now. How will Parks Canada address this in an expanded park?

DID WE HEAR YOU CORRECTLY?

It's important for us to make sure we hear your comments correctly and understand your concerns. If we didn't get it quite right, or you'd like to share your opinion, please contact us at the addresses below. We will listen and respond.

If the Nahanni Park Reserve is expanded to encompass the entire S. Nahanni Drainage and becomes a national park, the "warehouse" referred to will be closed forever. No development of any kind will be allowed in the park. This indeed will allow the peoples of the Dehcho to "continue to engage in cultural traditions and subsistence harvest as they have for time immemorial". In essence, the Dehcho people will be trapped in an environment of their own making and will continue to be unable to support their children and future generations with a viable economy.

Promotion of this area as a park accessible only by those wealthy enough to afford to visit it does very little for the local economy, nor does it benefit the average Canadian who hears a lot about "protecting our last wilderness" but cannot afford to actually experience it.

Member of the public, Yellowknife



Open houses in Dehcho communities and Yellowknife were attended by many interested community members. photo: David Murray, Parks Canada, 2006.

HOW WE PLAN TO ADDRESS YOUR CONCERNS

This community update is intended simply to share what we've heard and make sure we got it right. We are planning more community updates to answer as many questions as possible and keep you informed. We are also planning more public open houses where we can answer questions and concerns in person.

I fully support protecting the entire Greater Nahanni Ecosystem as an expanded National Park Reserve. This park reserve is an example of shared management with First Nations that should be celebrated and emulated.

Member of the public, Yellowknife

Bologna Creek watershed, in the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem, September 2002. Photo: Douglas Tate, 2002.



Dall's sheep at Prairie Creek mineral lick, June 2001. Photo: Douglas Tate, 2001

Local people and business owners need real information on what might be gained or lost economically before they can make informed decisions about whether or not they support an expansion.
Member of the public, Fort Simpson

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW

All studies are now complete, although some project reports, including an economic impact assessment study and the Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment, are still being reviewed before release. Results of these studies will be made available as soon as possible.

The Nahanni Expansion Working Group has examined all the study results and incorporated them into several proposed boundary options. We are now preparing to bring these proposed options forward for public consultation.

A look at the work ahead:

- Prepare for regional and national public consultations to fully inform people of research, issues and boundary options.
- Hold public open house consultations in the Dehcho and nationally as well.
- Consider comments from public open houses and present a final boundary recommendation to Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada.
- Dehcho First Nations and Canada begin to negotiate an agreement respecting the expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve within the Dehcho.

The current eastern park boundary should stay approximately where it is. Park expansion is important for protecting water quality, but there are few threats close to the community. The park should expand only upstream of the current boundaries.
Elders, Nahanni Butte

PLEASE STAY INVOLVED

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

For more information, please contact:

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Nahanni Expansion Working Group members (left to right): Steve Catto (Parks Canada), Jonas Antoine and Petr Cizek (Dehcho First Nations), David Murray (Parks Canada).