



Backgrounder

Nahanni Forever

Nahanni National Park Reserve and World Heritage Site protects a corridor along the Northwest Territories' South Nahanni River – one of Canada's most renowned wild rivers. At the heart of the park is the famous Virginia Falls, which is twice the height of Niagara, as well as canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon.

CPAWS' Nahanni Forever Campaign

The current park boundaries protect less than 15 percent (4,766 km²) of the South Nahanni Watershed, leaving its sensitive ecosystems vulnerable to the impacts of upstream industrial development – particularly mining. The park also leaves out globally significant limestone formations in the Nahanni karstlands.

In May 2005, CPAWS launched a public campaign to expand the boundaries of the Nahanni National Park Reserve in order to protect the entire South Nahanni Watershed. The campaign is supported by well-known Canadian Justin Trudeau, internationally renowned scientists Dr. Derek Ford and Dr. David Schindler as well as thousands of other Canadians. Protecting the watershed is also a goal of First Nations in the Dehcho and Sahtu regions of the Northwest Territories.

CPAWS is now hosting a Canada-wide *Nahanni Forever* tour from November 2005 to January 2006 to bring attention to the need to protect the Nahanni and to urge all Canadians to provide their support to this important cause.

To take action, visit the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society website at www.cpaws.org.

Why is the Nahanni famous?

The Nahanni is perhaps best known for the 1970 photo of Pierre Trudeau standing by the wild, free-flowing Virginia Falls. Trudeau was so moved by this spectacular wilderness river that he created Nahanni National Park Reserve to protect it from proposed hydro electric development.

Nahanni is home to wildlife such as grizzly bears, woodland caribou, wolves, lynx and Dall's sheep – species that are vulnerable to human impacts and need larger wild spaces than the current park provides.

What is Nahanni's conservation history?

1972 -- National Park Reserve

Pierre Trudeau's federal government set aside a 4,766 km² corridor along the South Nahanni River as a national park reserve.

1978 -- World Heritage Site

Nahanni National Park Reserve became the first site in the world to be officially granted World Heritage status by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), placing the spotlight on its natural international significance. As a signatory to the United Nations World Heritage Convention, Canada has an international treaty obligation to protect this special place.

1987 -- Canadian Heritage River

Part of the South Nahanni River was designated as a Canadian Heritage River in recognition of its outstanding wilderness character and recreational value.

2002 – Commitment to park expansion

The federal government committed to expanding Nahanni National Park Reserve within its "Action Plan for Parks Canada".

2003 – Interim land withdrawals, park feasibility studies

The Dehcho First Nations and the federal government signed an agreement for the interim protection of nearly 20,000 km² of land around Nahanni National Park Reserve for five years, as part of their land and self-governance negotiations. Meanwhile, Parks Canada signed an agreement with the Dehcho First Nations to work towards park expansion in the Dehcho region, with the South Nahanni Watershed and Nahanni karstlands as the area of interest. A feasibility study began to assess the best boundaries for the park expansion.

2005 – CPAWS' public campaign launch

CPAWS seeks a federal commitment to stop the proposed Prairie Creek mine and protect the entire watershed within Nahanni National Park Reserve, and launches a public outreach campaign to support its efforts.

The threat of mining

There are some places that CPAWS believes are so highly valued as wilderness that no industrial development should be allowed to occur. The Nahanni is such a place.

One third of the South Nahanni Watershed remains open to mineral staking and development, despite being identified as an "area of interest" for a major park expansion. In the unprotected areas, the federal government has continued to issue permits for mineral prospecting and advanced mineral exploration, while conducting parallel efforts to expand the park.

The most urgent mining threat is Canadian Zinc Corporation's proposed base metal mine at Prairie Creek, upstream from the current park. Although infrastructure was developed 20 years ago, this proposed mine has never been in operation.

The proposed Prairie Creek mine poses an unacceptable risk to the Nahanni for the following reasons:

- **Sensitive and unstable landscape** -- The area around Prairie Creek is prone to earthquakes and flash floods, making it a high-risk site for mine development. The proposed haul road to the mine would cross globally unique and sensitive limestone caves and other "karst" formations, including areas that drain underground into the South Nahanni River. This is an area that is particularly susceptible to groundwater contamination.
- **High heavy metal levels** -- The ores at the mine contain high levels of mercury, arsenic and antimony. With questions remaining about the possibility of acid mine drainage at Prairie Creek, these heavy metals could have significant impacts on the downstream environment.
- **Toxic chemicals** -- Cyanide, PCBs and diesel fuel have been stored on site for over 20 years. They need to be removed before they damage the environment.

CPAWS wants the federal government to stop this high-risk mine proposal, and ensure that the site is cleaned up and then protected within the expanded national park reserve.

Part of a greater effort

Protecting Nahanni is part of a national effort by CPAWS, working with allied groups committed to the Boreal Forest Conservation Framework, to conserve one of the last great forests in the world. CPAWS is working across the country to protect a network of Boreal areas before new industrial development projects get underway.

For more information, visit www.cpaws.org or www.cpawsyukon.org