

2020

# Nahanni National Park Reserve

National Park of Canada

Management Plan

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**NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE OF CANADA MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2020.**

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## Recommendations

*Recommended by:*

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Michael Nadler  
*Acting Chief Executive Officer*  
*Parks Canada*

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Gladys Norwegian  
*Grand Chief*  
*Dehcho First Nations*

---

Trevor Swerdfager  
*Senior Vice-President, Operations*  
*Parks Canada*

---

Jonah Mitchell  
*Field Unit Superintendent*  
*Southwest Northwest Territories Field Unit*  
*Parks Canada*

---

**Insert name**  
Nah?ą Dehé Consensus Team  
*Nahanni National Park Reserve*



## Executive Summary

Nahanni National Park Reserve (Nahanni) was established in 1976 with the original boundary containing an area of 4,766 square kilometers. In 2009, with support from the Dehcho First Nations and Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band, the park reserve was expanded to an area of approximately 30,000 square kilometers, making it the third largest national park in Canada. The expansion area included protection of the unique features of the Ram Plateau and North Nahanni Karst, the Northwest Territories' only glaciers, and important habitat for species at risk such as grizzly bears and the Northern Mountain population of the woodland caribou. In 1978, the original park reserve boundary received World Heritage Site status, one of the first in the world, by the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention. In 1987, a portion of the South Nahanni River within the original boundary was designated a Canadian Heritage River by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Society.

Under the Nahʔą Dehé Interim Park Management Arrangement (2001), the park reserve is cooperatively managed by the Dehcho First Nations, Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band and Parks Canada through the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team. This management plan was developed with the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team. **[insert public consultation activities once completed]**

This management plan sets a vision for the future of Nahanni, with strategies and objectives aimed at reaching that vision. As such, this plan is the main guide for the management of Nahanni, and an important accountability document for Indigenous peoples and Canadians as to how the park will be managed.

Four key strategies are identified in the plan to guide the work of managing the park for the foreseeable future. Key strategy 1 focuses on sharing the stories, history and culture of the Dene as a central aspect of the visitor experience within a pristine wilderness setting. Key strategy 2 focuses on fostering traditional and contemporary Dene knowledge in management decisions, as well as engaging the next generation in stewardship of the park reserve. Key strategy 3 focuses on the emerging environmental challenges facing Nahanni and active maintenance of the ecological integrity within the park. Key strategy 4 focuses on protection of water resources for the future and working with partners and communities to maintain water quality.

This management plan will be reviewed in ten years' time with the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team and with Indigenous and public consultation.

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## 1.0 Introduction

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and historic places in the world. The Agency's mandate is to protect and present these places for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations. Future-oriented, strategic management of each national park, national marine conservation area, heritage canal and those national historic sites administered by Parks Canada supports the Agency's vision:

*Canada's treasured natural and historic places will be a living legacy, connecting hearts and minds to a stronger, deeper understanding of the very essence of Canada.*

The *Canada National Parks Act* and the *Parks Canada Agency Act* require Parks Canada to prepare a management plan for each national park. The *Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada Management Plan*, once approved by the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and tabled in Parliament, ensures Parks Canada's accountability to Canadians, outlining how park management will achieve measurable results in support of the Agency's mandate.

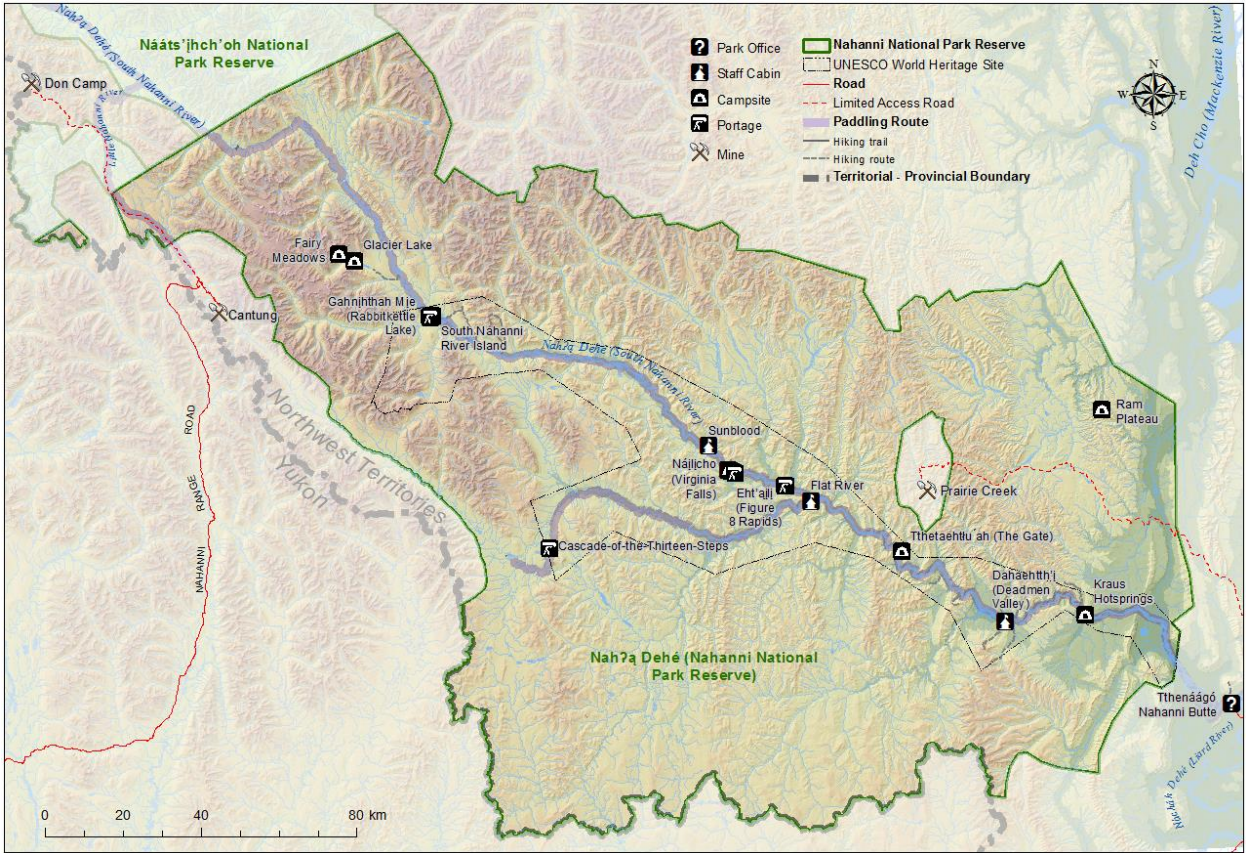
The potential for hydroelectric development was the catalyst for the creation of Nahanni in the 1970s. The Dehcho First Nations' and the Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band's desire to ensure clean water for current and future generations served as the impetus for park expansion. Under the Nahʔą Dehé Interim Park Management Arrangement (2001), the park reserve is cooperatively managed by the Dehcho First Nations, Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band and Parks Canada through the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team. This management plan was developed with the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team.

Canadians, including our Indigenous cooperative management partners, were involved in the preparation of the management plan, helping to shape the future direction of the national park reserve. The plan sets clear, strategic direction for the management and operation of Nahʔą Dehé by articulating a vision, key strategies and objectives. Parks Canada will report annually on progress toward achieving the plan objectives and will review the plan every ten years or sooner if required.

This plan is not an end in and of itself. Parks Canada will maintain an open dialogue on the implementation of the management plan, to ensure that it remains relevant and meaningful. The plan will serve as the focus for ongoing engagement on the management of Nahanni National Park Reserve in years to come.



Map 1: Regional Setting



Map 2: Nahanni National Park Reserve



## 2.0 Significance of Nahanni National Park Reserve

**Nah?ą Dehé is the traditional name for Nahanni**, the homeland of the Dehcho Dene whose ancestors have called Nah?ą Dehé home since time immemorial. Depending on the context, Nah?ą Dehé can refer to the South Nahanni River and its watershed, the 2009 boundary of the park reserve, and/or the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem. In this document, Nah?ą Dehé refers to the entire park reserve, and is used interchangeably with Nahanni and park reserve.

The park reserve was established in 1976 with the original boundary containing an area of 4,766 square kilometers. In 2009, with support from the Dehcho First Nations and Nah?ą Dehé Dene Band, the park reserve was expanded to an area of approximately 30,000 square kilometers, making it the third largest national park in Canada. The Dehcho Elders and leadership supported expansion to achieve their desire to protect water quality for the seventh generation. The expansion area also included protection of the unique features of the Ram Plateau and North Nahanni Karst, the Northwest Territories' only glaciers, and important habitat for species at risk such as grizzly bears and the Northern Mountain population of the woodland caribou.

In 1978, the original park reserve boundary received World Heritage Site status, one of the first in the world, by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention. The park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site as it is a place that exhibits outstanding examples of major stages in the earth's evolutionary history, significant ongoing geological processes and superlative natural phenomena, formations and features of exceptional natural beauty. In 1987, a portion of the South Nahanni River within the original boundary was designated a Canadian Heritage River by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Society for its outstanding recreational opportunities in a wilderness area of great scenic beauty.

Situated in the Dehcho Region in the southwest corner of the Northwest Territories (Map 1), Nah?ą Dehé shares a boundary with Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserve (Nááts'ihch'oh). The South Nahanni River is the central feature of the Nah?ą Dehé and also of great importance to the Dene. It originates in the rugged and remote Mackenzie Mountains near the border between the Northwest Territories and Yukon, and terminates at its confluence with the Liard River near the community of Tthenáágó (also known as Nahanni Butte) more than 500 kilometers downstream (Map 2). Significant features within the park reserve include Náǰǰicho (also known as Virginia Falls), deep antecedent river canyons, limestone karst and pseudo karst topography, numerous thermal springs, the highest mountains and largest glaciers in the Northwest Territories. The park reserve also includes Canada's largest tufa mounds, and the only known location of a rare and an endemic plant species: the Nahanni Aster. The diversity of vegetation in Nah?ą Dehé is far greater than any other area of comparable size in the Northwest Territories. The vegetation community is predominantly boreal forest, with a transition from lowland wet areas to alpine tundra. Over 230 genera and 700 species of vascular plants have been documented within the park, which provides important habitat for 42 different species of mammals including species at risk. Further, the park reserve includes a diversity of birds with a mixture of cordilleran, boreal and great plain species. Sixteen fish species have been recorded within the South Nahanni watershed including three species that are unique to the region: spoonhead sculpin, trout-perch, and spottail shiner. The Dene continue to harvest in and adjacent to the park reserve using traditional land routes and waterways to access hunting and fishing areas.

Cooperative management is at the heart of operations for the park. Indigenous traditional and contemporary cultural perspectives are integrated into park operations and projects which is valued by visitors, pilots, and guides. The Dehcho First Nations and the Government of Canada are currently negotiating self-governance, lands, resources and land management through the Dehcho Process. The Nah?ą Dehé Interim Park Management Arrangement (2001) provides the framework for cooperative management of the park reserve until a final land claim agreement takes precedence. As part of the Dehcho Process, the Dehcho First Nations, Nah?ą Dehé Dene Band and Parks Canada created the Nah?ą Dehé Consensus Team which allows the parties to cooperatively manage Nah?ą Dehé while the negotiation process continues. The Nah?ą Dehé Consensus Team is comprised of representatives appointed from the Dehcho First Nations, Nah?ą Dehé Dene Band and Parks Canada. Through careful

preparation with the Dehcho Elders and Parks Canada 20 years ago, the relationship for cooperative management was set on a strong path towards mutual respect, trust and integrity. Put into practice, this relationship has served the Dehcho First Nations and Parks Canada well to the benefit of all Canadians by demonstrating a common ground approach to achieve shared objectives.

The immediate area around Nahʔa Dehé is sparsely populated with approximately 2,500 people in the closest five communities to the park: Tthenáágó, Fort Liard, Łı́ı́dlı́ Kúé́ (also known as Fort Simpson), Trout Lake, and Wrigley. The administrative office for the park reserve is located in Łı́ı́dlı́ Kúé́ which is the primary gateway community for visitors and park staff. There is also a seasonal Parks Canada office in Tthenáágó, the closest community to the park reserve. Access to Nahʔa Dehé is primarily by chartered aircraft from gateway locations in the Northwest Territories. There are a few business operators in the Yukon and northern British Columbia that offer chartered flight services into the park reserve.

### 3.0 Planning Context

**The Dene:** In the early 1900s, Government policies to establish settlements at fur-trading posts discouraged Dene from living on the land. Assimilation programs such as residential schools had profound and lasting impacts on the Dene and their way of life. As a result, Dene Zhatie (the Dene language) faces risk of extinction in the next 30 to 50 years. There is a growing resurgence amongst the Dene to reverse the impacts of colonization by revitalizing their language and culture through community-based initiatives. This has not come without its challenges as cultural revitalization efforts are competing with disruptions stemming from a modern wage economy, reduced time on the land and immersion in the digital information age. For these reasons, a key priority for the Nahʔa Dehé Consensus Team over the next ten years is to work with community organizations to support ongoing and new cultural revitalization activities and to reconnect local Dehcho youth and Elders to Nahʔa Dehé.

**Ecological integrity and asset sustainability:** A vast majority of the park reserve is considered to be undisturbed wilderness. Fire and floods are the primary natural disturbances that drive ecological processes. Fires are allowed to proceed naturally in the majority of the park unless they threaten human safety or park reserve infrastructure. Data gathered through research and monitoring is showing that climate change is influencing fluctuations in water and fire cycles. The impacts of climate change are a concern for the park reserve and difficult to mitigate at the park level. Over the next ten years it will be important to consider the remote nature of the park reserve and effects from climate change (e.g., receding glaciers, deteriorating permafrost and fluctuations in weather patterns) which can result in inherent logistical, financial, and engineering challenges related to long-term management of Nahʔa Dehé.

**Visitation:** Nahʔa Dehé is internationally renowned as a premier wilderness river park reserve with its main visitor locations being Náı̄lı̄cho, Gahnı̄thah Mı̄e (also known as Rabbitkettle Lake), Glacier Lake and Cirque of the Unclimbables. The park reserve is central to the tourism industry in the region and as a result collaborates with partners and stakeholders at community, regional and territorial levels. Visitation in Nahʔa Dehé is made possible by eco-tourism partners who play an important role in the visitor experience and stewardship. In 2018, Nahanni had 899 visitors slightly below the 10-year average of 920 visitors per year. Approximately 66 percent of visitors paddle the South Nahanni River and 59 percent of those visitors use a licensed outfitter. The historical visitation trends are modest and stable which is impressive considering its remote fly-in location. Visitors who experience the park reserve receive a true wilderness experience that integrates traditional and contemporary Dene knowledge. Incremental growth to visitation without careful management has the potential to impact park resources, infrastructure, and wilderness quality values. This may influence the quality of the interactions with both the natural and cultural resources in high use or sensitive areas. Over the next ten years, it will be important to balance potential for growth in visitation and management of infrastructure to ensure the authentic wilderness park experience is not compromised.

**Resource development and prohibited access:** Three mining sites exist in the region outside the park boundaries (Map 2); the Tungsten mine, a tungsten producer; the Prairie Creek mine; and the

Selwyn Chihong Mining Limited (Selwyn) exploration properties at Don Camp. Tungsten is an end-of-life project with associated water and water quality management issues. The Prairie Creek mine and winter road were established in the early 1980s, but the mine never reached full production and is currently in care and maintenance. The Selwyn Chihong exploration properties and road were developed in the late 1970s and the all-season access road through Nahanni and Nááts'ihch'oh was rehabilitated in 2014. These projects are currently in various stages of reactivation.

The *Canada National Parks Act* was amended to expand the park reserve boundaries and provided special provisions for Parks Canada to issue permits to Prairie Creek and the Selwyn Project for the use of existing access roads passing through the two park reserves. Upstream industrial activities, as well as existing and proposed industrial roads passing through Nahanni, have the potential to impact the ecological integrity and cultural resources (including archaeological sites) in the park reserve.

Furthermore, hunting activities along the existing Selwyn road continue to be a concern for Indigenous cooperative management partners in Nahanni and Nááts'ihch'oh. The development of the Prairie Creek access road may further exacerbate unauthorized access and/or the potential for illegal poaching. Over the next ten years, the two mine access roads and associated activities will require careful management in cooperation with Indigenous communities, and through consultation with mining companies and their contractors.

## 4.0 Vision

The vision presented in this management plan expresses the desired state of Nahanni in ten years. The key elements are built upon the 2010 management plan vision and input from the Nah?á Dehé Consensus Team.

Travelling through the land of the Dene, who have lived on this land since time immemorial, local legends excite the imagination. Nah?á Dehé is an iconic place globally renowned for its geologic landforms, sheer granite spires, vast alpine plateaux and, its heart, the South Nahanni River, a Canadian Heritage River. As a UNESCO World Heritage site, Nah?á Dehé remains a rich cultural landscape that tells the stories of its diverse ecology whether at the thundering waters of Nááłı̄cho or the largest Canadian tufa mounds at the sacred Gahnı̄thah Mje or at the spectacular granite peaks of the Cirque of the Unclimbables. Nah?á Dehé is committed to protecting a largely undisturbed wilderness, where fires and floods share the land, and naturally-occurring plant and diverse animal species, including the woodland caribou, moose and arctic grayling persist.

The Dene and their culture are strongly connected to their lands and waters. The life sustaining lands and waters of Nah?á Dehé offer a special place for the Dene to pursue cultural revitalization, renewal and reconnection. Nah?á Dehé will be protected through the wisdom and guidance of the Dehcho Elders who have said 'being on the land protects the land'. Traditional subsistence harvesting continues as an integral and sustainable part of the ecosystem. Dene laws, values and principles are rooted in Nah?á Dehé connecting the next generation to the land and their ancestors. The park reserve continues to be a model of cooperative management, where communities, partners and stakeholders are involved in the stewardship of Nah?á Dehé, ensuring appreciation and respect for the land and water continues into future generations.

Visitors are welcomed to this spectacular wilderness by the Dene, who share the stories of their ancestors. Climbers, hikers, paddlers and visitors of all kinds find personal inspiration and connection to this immense land and the Dene. Visitors who make the financial and time investments for this journey are rewarded with a depth of adventure and cultural experiences that is life changing.

## 5.0 Key Strategies

Four key strategies frame the management direction for Nah?á Dehé for the next ten years. The strategies and corresponding objectives and targets focus on achieving the vision for the park reserve through an integrated approach to park management. Unless otherwise specified, all targets are meant to be achieved

within the ten year period of the plan. Yearly implementation updates will be provided to engage the Dehcho First Nations, Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band partners, stakeholders and Canadians.

**Key Strategy 1: Nahʔą Kué/Our Home – Sharing the Heart of the Dehcho**

Sharing the stories, history and culture of the Dene in a pristine wilderness setting is vital to the visitor experience for Nahʔą Dehé. A journey into Nahʔą Dehé will be the potential to be transformative for visitors who will leave with a greater understanding and appreciation for Dene culture. To that end, Nahʔą Dehé continues to rely on strategic partnering to support a strong and sustainable tourism economy. This is central to providing high quality, authentic cultural and wilderness experiences and achieving long-term asset sustainability.

**Objective 1.1:** Nahanni targets and attracts visitors seeking high-quality wilderness experiences, while balancing protection and presentation.

**Targets**

- Over the next 10 years, visitation on the South Nahanni River during peak visitor season is maintained within 2 percent of average visitation from 2014 to 2018<sup>1</sup>.
- Over the next 10 years, visitation on the South Nahanni River during the spring and fall shoulder seasons grows 10 percent from average visitation in 2014 to 2018.
- Targeted visitors will include two key travel segments: 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 year olds.
- Develop a strategy to ensure management practices can be responsive to the needs and usage of mountaineers by 2025.
- Strategic partnerships with tourism businesses are maintained or expanded to continue to support sustainable visitation by 2030.

**Objective 1.2:** Management of park infrastructure takes into account climate change and the interest and views of the Dehcho, Nahʔą Dehé partners and stakeholders.

**Targets**

- Develop a strategic asset management plan by 2025.

**Objective 1.3:** Visitors continue to report high quality wilderness recreation and cultural experiences.

**Targets**

- Pre-trip planning information will continue to improve and keep pace with emergent innovation and technology by 2025.
- Visitor satisfaction and pre-trip planning ratings meet performance targets in the next State of Park Assessment.
- Participation in visitor feedback surveys is increased 15 percent by 2030.

**Objective 1.4:** Enhance local Indigenous eco-tourism partnerships.

**Targets**

- A licence for river outfitting is reserved for a Dehcho, owned and operated, eco-tourism business.
- Partner with other levels of government to provide tourism business training and information for local Indigenous entrepreneurs.
- Engage with other government partners with mandates to assist in economic development to leverage new tourism initiatives, partnerships or opportunities over the next ten years.
- Parks Canada works with local communities and partners to support the development of two new Dene tourism products for park visitors by 2030 based on interest.

**Objective 1.5:** Nahʔą Dehé remains internationally renowned as a premier wilderness destination.

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<sup>1</sup> Considers changes and modern stabilization to visitation following park expansion.

**Targets**

- Nahanni will conduct 3 to 5 promotional activities per year for the next ten years targeting populations via new media who may not visit, but can appreciate and support Nahanni's place as a premier wilderness park.
- Establish two new promotional and marketing products by leveraging current and/or new partnerships by 2030.
- Establish one new visitor experience offer that is different than the air chartered day flight seeing tours, rock climbing (Cirque of the Unclimbables), and whitewater paddling (the South Nahanni River and its tributaries) by 2030.

**Key Strategy 2: Dene Náothę - The Dene Worldview**

Parks Canada, the Dehcho First Nations and the Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band continue to strengthen their relationship in a way that incorporates Dene values and principles. Engaging Dene youth in stewardship of the park reserve is of primary importance to keep their ancestors' legacy alive, and to foster traditional and contemporary Dene knowledge in management decisions. Over the next ten years Canadians will have a greater understanding and appreciation for the importance of a thriving Dene culture in Nahʔą Dehé.

**Objective 2.1:** Dene Zhatie, the Dene language and culture of Nahʔą Dehé, is integrated into visitor experiences.

**Targets**

- Parks Canada, Dehcho First Nations and Nahʔą Dehé Dene Band collaborate to facilitate a biennial Dene Zhatie cultural learning experience in the park reserve for community members and visitors.
- Dene Zhatie is promoted and celebrated, including replacing non-Dene place names in all new non-personal media products by 2030.
- Pamphlets with Dene place names and phonetic spelling are developed for staff and visitors by 2021.

**Objective 2.2:** The Dene have a stronger connection to Nahʔą Dehé.

**Targets**

- Parks Canada works with Indigenous cooperative management partners to facilitate annual opportunities for youth and Elders to partake in Dene cultural revitalization efforts in Nahʔą Dehé.
- Educational and outreach activities in local and regional schools are pursued annually.
- Parks Canada works with the community to establish new offices in Fort Simpson and Nahanni Butte by 2025.
- Local and regional schools visit Nahʔą Dehé a minimum of three times by 2030.

**Key Strategy 3: Nahʔą Dehé K' eodhi – Taking Care of Nahʔą Dehé**

The emerging environmental challenges facing Nahʔą Dehé are complex such as managing for species at risk, climate change, proposed resource development pressures and potential for illegal access and poaching. Research and monitoring information, Dene Knowledge and active management strategies will be essential to maintain ecological integrity in Nahʔą Dehé.

**Objective 3.1:** Resource development projects do not significantly impact the ecological integrity of Nahʔą Dehé.

**Targets**

- Permits and licences for proposed mining road developments passing through Nahʔą Dehé and Nááts'ihch'oh meet all legal requirements over the next ten years.
- Continue to monitor, review and comment on all water licences for upstream mine sites and/or exploration so water quality is protected over the next ten years.



- Dene knowledge is incorporated into Parks Canada’s regulatory processes over the next ten years.
- Coordinate with proponents in supporting park-based, community-led guardian initiatives over the next ten years.

**Objective 3.2:** Strategies are in place to prevent unauthorized access and poaching in Nahʔą Dehé.

**Targets**

- Non-personal media (e.g. signage – warning and way finding) that provides important information to users is improved by 2022.
- Develop law enforcement reporting tools/products to share with communities and businesses in Tthenáágó, Fort Liard, Łı́ ı́ dlı́ Kų́ ę́ and Watson Lake by 2021.

**Objective 3.3:** The ecological integrity monitoring program will be efficient and effective.

**Targets**

- Biennial monitoring workshops are held with Dene over the next ten years.
- Strategic review of the current monitoring program is completed by 2023.
- Information gaps for woodland caribou (Northern Mountain population) are addressed by 2025.
- Work with Indigenous cooperative management partners to support a community-led Guardian Program by 2025.

**Objective 3.4:** Cultural Resource Indicators are defined, monitored and rated for the next state of the park assessment.

**Targets:**

- The Cultural Resource Values Statement is completed by 2025.
- Work with the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team to set management priorities for cultural resources including relevant criteria by 2025.
- Develop a monitoring plan for cultural resources which includes considerations for research and monitoring opportunities as a result of climate change by 2025.

**Key Strategy 4: Yundáa Gogha Tu K’ehodí - Waters for Life**

Protecting water resources for future generations is a top priority of the Dene who recognize that clean water is essential to health and well-being. Climate change, human waste management and resource development pressures adjacent to the park have the potential to impact water resources and processes. Parks Canada will continue working with partners and communities to monitor and inform management actions that will maintain water quality.

**Objective 4.1:** Water quality is essential to cultural experiences for the Dene and pristine wilderness experiences for visitors. Park visitation is managed to protect water quality.

**Targets**

- Develop a sustainable human waste strategy by 2025.
- Criteria will be established to determine sustainable levels of visitation by 2030.

**Objective 4.2:** The water quality of Nahʔą Dehé is protected.

**Targets**

- Continue monitoring for heavy metals and potential contaminants against baseline levels over the next ten years.
- New and innovative technology to measure fish presence in streams will be incorporated into monitoring program by 2025.

## 6.0 Zoning and Declared Wilderness Area

## 6.1 Zoning

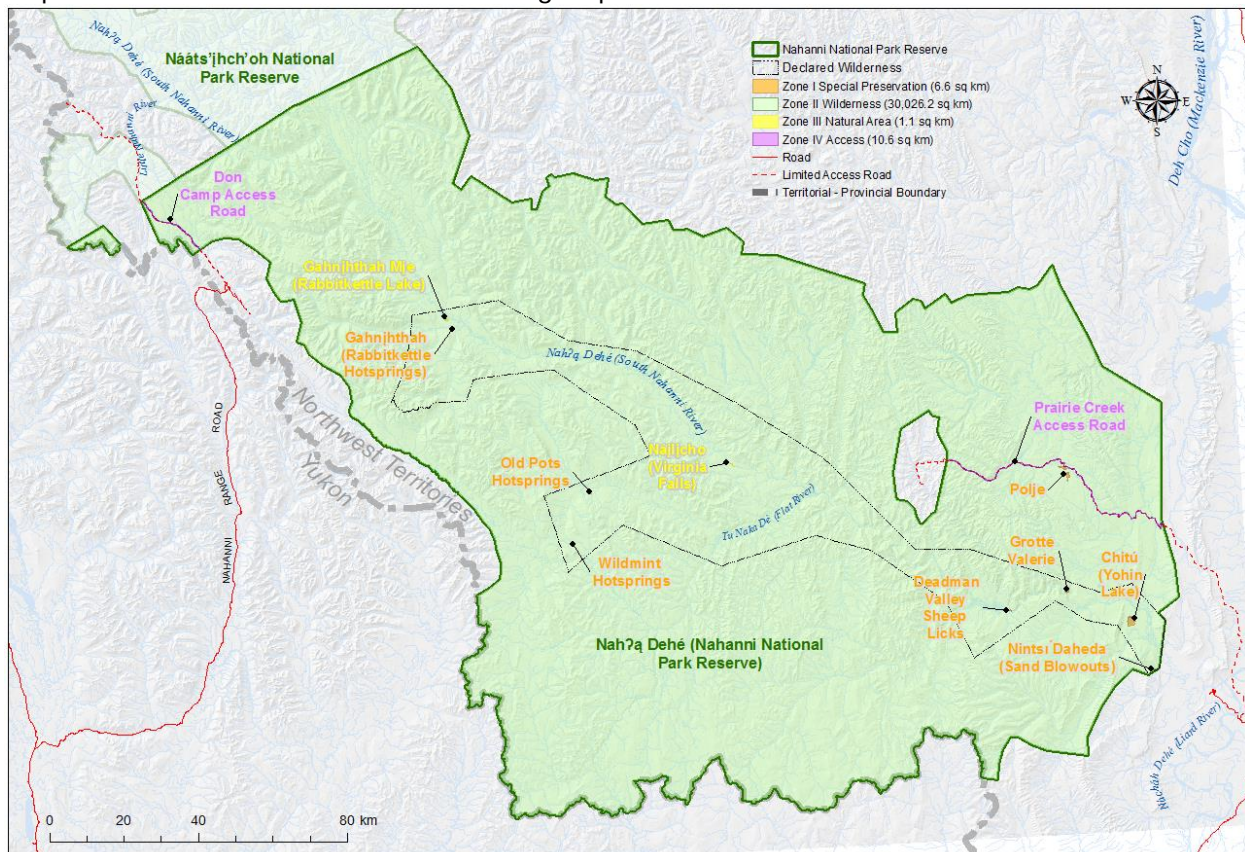
Zoning is an important management tool that supports the vision for Nahʔą Dehé by directing visitor use to appropriate areas of the park reserve, and ensuring that rare, sensitive ecological or cultural areas are protected.

Parks Canada's national park zoning system is an integrated approach to the classification of land and water areas in a national park and designates where particular activities can occur on land or water based on the ability to support those uses. The zoning system has five categories:

- Zone I - Special Preservation;
- Zone II - Wilderness;
- Zone III – Natural Environment;
- Zone IV - Outdoor Recreation; and
- Zone V - Park Services.

The zoning plan for Nahanni is illustrated on Map 3. Four of the zoning system categories apply to Nahʔą Dehé.

Map 3: Nahanni National Park Reserve Zoning Map



### Zone I – Special Preservation

Zone I is the most protective category in the Parks Canada zoning system. This zone is applied to areas of the park reserve that are among the best examples of the features that represent the natural region, or that support outstanding or rare natural or cultural features. This zone may also be used to protect areas that are too sensitive to accommodate facility development or large numbers of visitors. Within Zone I

areas, preservation is the primary management concern. Motorized access and circulation is not permitted. Natural features may be interpreted off-site.

There are seven Zone I areas encompassing a total area of 6.6 square kilometers or .022 percent of park reserve lands. The following areas are included in Zone I:

- Gahnjthah – tufa mounds – is the only Zone I area in the park reserve where public access is permitted through a guided 3.5 kilometre hike.
- Grotte Valerie
- Wildmint thermal springs
- Old Pots thermal springs
- Deadman Valley Sheep Licks
- Nintsi Daheda (Sand Blowouts)
- Chitu (Yohin Lake)
- Poljes

### *Zone II – Wilderness*

Zone II Wilderness areas are meant to protect representative natural landscapes where visitors can experience nature with minimal human intrusion or facilities. The visitor experience in these areas is focused on self-propelled activities. No motorized access or circulation (e.g. driving through this zone) is permitted. However, air access is permitted in this zone at designated landing sites (Map 4) with an Aircraft Access Permit.

The vast majority of Nahʔa Dehé is Zone II encompassing ~30,026 square kilometres or 99.94 percent of the park reserve.

### *Zone III – Natural Environment*

Zone III areas are managed as natural environments that are capable of supporting a range of visitor experiences. These areas enable visitors to enjoy and learn about the park's natural and cultural features through outdoor recreational and educational activities requiring minimal facilities and services.

There are two Zone III areas in Nahʔa Dehé that encompass a total area of 1.1 square kilometres or .0004 percent of the park reserve. This zone recognizes controls on use and facility development at these sites, while allowing for frequent air access. The Zone III areas include:

- Náįlıcho
- Gahnjthah Mje,

### *Zone IV – Outdoor Recreation*

The Zone IV designation is applied to limited areas that are capable of supporting more intensive visitor use and major facilities. These zones provide direct access by motorized vehicles. Mining roads are permitted and built for specific purposes and all access requires a permit, with the exception of traditional users.

A small portion of the park reserve has been designated Zone IV encompassing 10.6 square kilometers or .035 percent of the park reserve. The main reason for this designation is because this zone allows for direct access by motorized vehicles specifically for the ʔepé Nnarehʔá ʔetenéʔ (Caribou Crossing Trail / Howard's Pass Access Road), located in the northwest portion of the park reserve adjacent to Nááts'ihch'oh'. A licence of occupation that pre-dates the park is held by Selwyn for the road. Parks Canada zoning is separate from any permitting process required for the licence of occupation for the road and the issuance of restricted activity permits. There is industrial traffic on this road. The road parallels Łáhtaniłı Deé (also known as Little Nahanni River) for a portion of its length. The river is an important recreational corridor for visitors and is part of the Zone II Wilderness area. This area is important for

species of special concern, such as the northern mountain caribou, as it includes a portion of the South Nahanni herd’s calving, summer and rut ranges. Grizzly bear density is high in this area.

There are safety considerations for travel on the road. For this reason, a restricted activity permit is required for anyone using ʔepé Nɪnarehʔá ʔetenéʔ (Caribou Crossing Trail / Howard’s Pass Access Road) within Nahʔá Dehé or Nááts’ihch’oh, with the exception of Indigenous traditional users.

**6.2 Wilderness Area Declaration**

The intent of legally designating a portion of a national park as “wilderness” is to maintain its wilderness character in perpetuity. Only activities that are unlikely to impair the wilderness character of the area may be authorized within the declared wilderness area of Nahanni National Park Reserve.

In 2009, 98 percent of the UNESCO World Heritage Site boundary was declared a Wilderness Area as illustrated on Map 3.

**6.3 Air Craft Access**

Access to Nahʔá Dehé is primarily by air with designated landing sites (Figure 1) in Zone II and Zone III as illustrated on Map 4. All permits are subject to the *National Parks of Canada Aircraft Access Regulations*. Regional air charter operators are encouraged to reduce disruption to the wilderness experience of visitors, by avoiding low level flights along the river corridor.

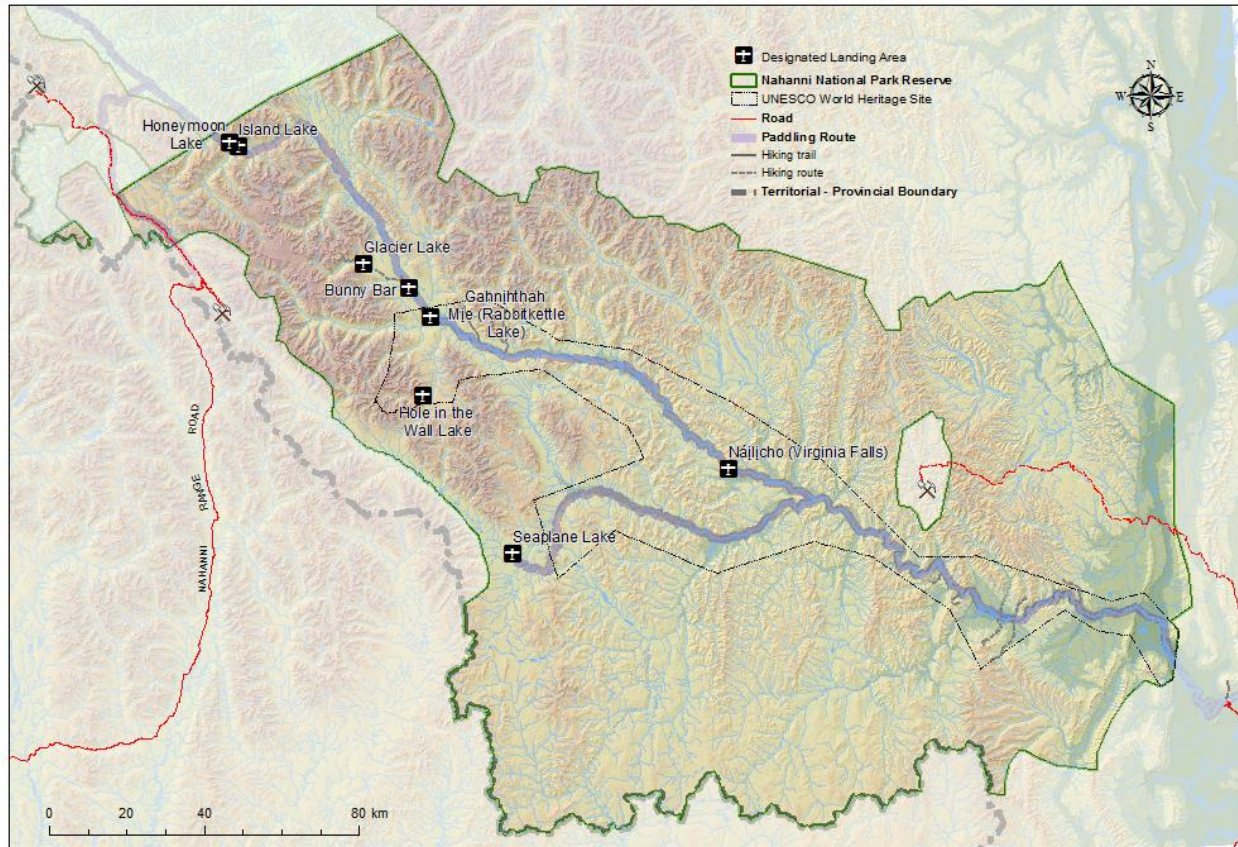
Aircraft access into the park, apart from the designated access points, may be permitted by the Superintendent on a case-by-case basis. These requests will be facilitated through an application process. When making the decision for permitting access, consideration will be given to other reasonable means 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.

Figure 1: Designated Landing Areas

LOCATION	AIRCRAFT			ACTIVITY	
	Float plane	Wheeled plane	Helicopter	Access and Day Use	Access
Nájljcho (Virginia Falls)	✓		✓	✓	✓
Gahnjithah Mje, (Rabbitkettle Lake)	✓		✓		✓
Bunny Bar	✓	✓	✓		✓
Island Lake	✓		✓		✓
Honeymoon Lake	✓		✓		✓
Glacier Lake	✓		✓	✓	✓
Seaplane Lake	✓		✓		✓
Hole In the Wall	✓		✓		✓

Map 4: Nahanni National Park Reserve Designated Landing Areas





## 7.0 Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment

Parks Canada is responsible for assessing and mitigating the impacts of management actions on ecosystems and on cultural resources. The *Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals* prepared by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, requires a strategic environmental assessment of all plans and policies submitted to the federal Cabinet or to a Minister for approval deemed to have important positive or negative environmental effects.

A strategic environmental assessment was undertaken on this management plan, and the management direction found within has been adjusted to respond to findings. The following is a summary of the environmental assessment:

The scope of this strategic environmental assessment included the area within the boundary of Nahʔa Dehé and considered influences from potential external stressors outside of the park. The time frame considered in the assessment was 10 years from the date of the plan, at which time the plan will be reviewed. Valued components evaluated in the strategic environmental assessment include components of the fresh water, forest and tundra ecosystems including species at risk.

Most of the Valued Components were found to not be at risk from cumulative effects, as the primary stressor to the park's natural environment is climate change. A short analysis of cumulative effects was conducted for wide ranging species including woodland caribou (Northern Mountain Population), grizzly bear, and wolverine as these valued components are subject to multiple stressors. In addition, the management plan includes strategies to understand the impacts to a number of valued components including:

- collaboration, partnerships and communication as an integral part of implementing this plan;

- Nah?à Dehé working with others to help maintain the ecological integrity of the park reserve;
- strengthening partnerships to address the emerging demands and challenges of the next ten years such as climate change, proposed resource development pressures and asset sustainability;
- integration of up to date climate change research and predictions into natural and cultural resource management decisions for Nah?à Dehé;
- working with partners and communities to monitor and inform management actions that will maintain water quality;
- management of park visitation at sustainable levels, and ensuring human waste management practices are reviewed and monitored regularly including the development, implementation and monitoring of strategies and/or protocols;
- regular engagement of local communities in water quality monitoring programs with clear communication of results to local communities and land managers; and
- strengthening connections to and understanding of the park by increasing community presence and cultural revitalization efforts for community members.

Nah?à Dehé (UNESCO park boundary) is a World Heritage Site. The outstanding universal values for which it was designated were evaluated to ensure the management plan adequately protects them. Engagement with the Nah?à Dehé Consensus Team and Indigenous communities was conducted and the feedback used to finalize both the management plan and strategic environmental assessment.