



*Nahʔa Dehé*  
**Nahanni**

some things should last forever

A living  
monument  
to Canada's  
wilderness.

## The South Nahanni River stands among the world's greatest natural wonders.

Rushing through the remote Mackenzie Mountains of Canada's Northwest Territories, it plunges over Virginia Falls, a waterfall twice as high as Niagara, and carves a passage through the earth almost as deep as the Grand Canyon.

This northern waterway is at the heart of a great wild ecosystem where eagles fly and grizzly bears, wolves, Dall's sheep and woodland caribou roam freely. It is one of the wildest places in the entire Yellowstone to Yukon region.

In this vast place where fire has shaped the forest and water has shaped the land, the mark of humans is barely visible. To some, Nahanni is the voice of pure wilderness...to others it is the heartbeat of a bountiful homeland.

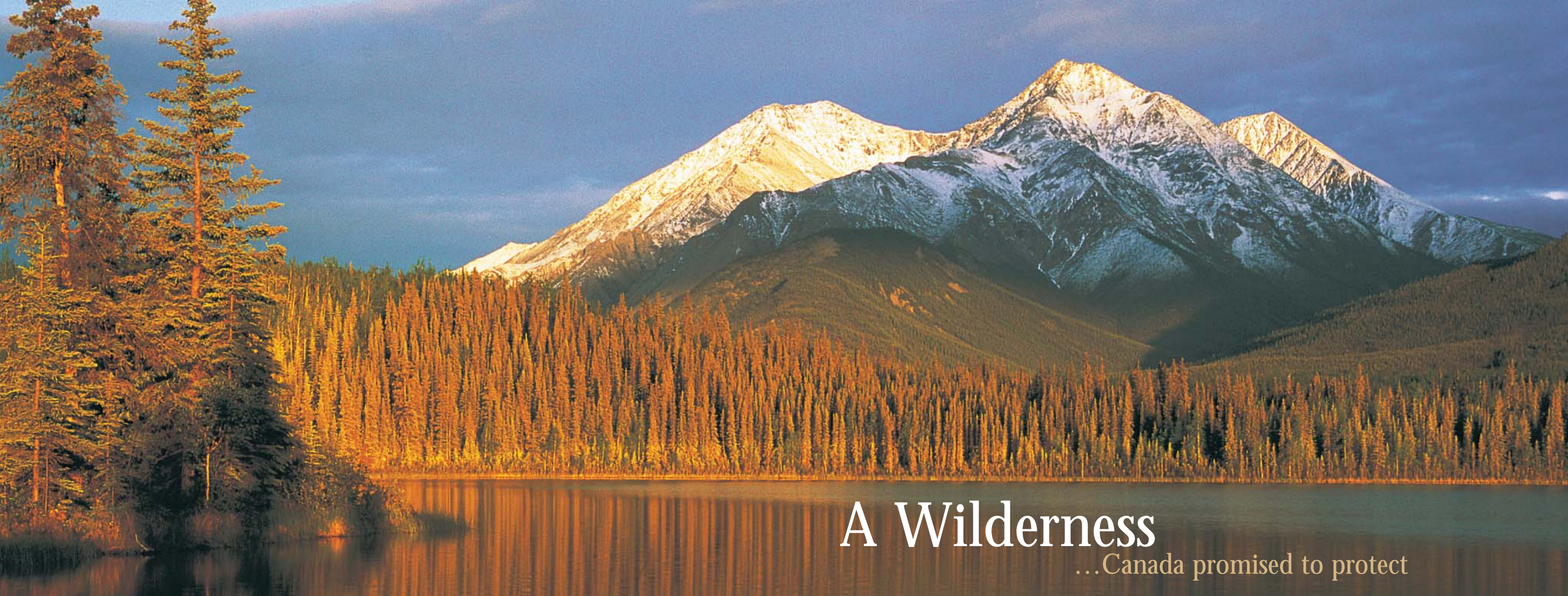


Nahanni National Park Reserve protects a corridor along the River that includes 1/7 of the watershed of the South Nahanni River. Yet outside the park, within the watershed, industrial development threatens the future of this Canadian wilderness icon and its wide-ranging wildlife. Greater protection is needed if Nahanni is to remain wild forever.

In a world increasingly cut by roads, power lines and industrial development, a true northern wilderness, left unscarred by human hands, is a unique treasure that must be cherished and defended.



Indian Paintbrush  
*Roberta Walker*



# A Wilderness

...Canada promised to protect

Rabbitkettle Lake (*Gahnjthah Mje*), Nahanni National Park Reserve,  
*J. David Andrews*

*“We had been allowed to live for a little time in a world apart -- a lonely world of surpassing beauty, that had given us all things from the sombre magnificence of the canyons to the gay sunshine of those wind-swept uplands; from the quiet of the dry side canyons to the uproar of the broken waters -- a land where men pass, and the silence falls back into place behind them.”*

*From R.M Patterson, *The Dangerous River* (1954)*

The Nahanni is a vast, wild place. The powerful waters of the river carve a 580 kilometer course through a pristine boreal forest landscape, far from roads and other human intrusions.

Nahanni has long been revered as a land of mystery. Dene oral history speaks of a fierce tribe called the Nah?a, who disappeared mysteriously, never to be seen again. Early last century, rumours of gold in the Nahanni lured prospectors up the river into the mountains, leaving a legacy of murderous tales and names such as Deadmen Valley and Headless Creek.

# A land of mystery and wild beauty

Throughout the 20th century, adventurers travelled to the Nahanni, and the resulting books and films brought the Nahanni wilderness to the rest of the world. By the 1960s, canoeists were making their way to this icon of Canadian wilderness tradition, and the area was being considered as a potential national park.



Virginia Falls (Náııcho)  
*J. David Andrews*

When, in the late 1960s, hydroelectric development was proposed for Virginia Falls, wilderness lovers cried foul and mounted a campaign to protect the Nahanni as a free-flowing wild northern river. The visit of Prime Minister Trudeau to the river in 1970 cemented the deal to create Nahanni National Park Reserve, which was finally proclaimed in 1976.

In 1978, the Canadian government proposed that the park be designated as one of the first natural World Heritage Sites – a proposal that was accepted by the United Nations and provided global recognition for Nahanni's magnificent wilderness. In 1987, the South Nahanni was added to the list of Canadian Heritage Rivers in recognition of its outstanding wilderness character and recreational value.

Now, hundreds of Canadian canoeists make a wilderness pilgrimage to the Nahanni each year, while paddlers worldwide are drawn to its grandeur and remoteness. All who visit the Nahanni are touched by its wild beauty.



# A Homeland

...for future generations

Elsie Marsellais scraping a hide at the Deh Cho Dene community of Nahanni Butte,  
*Parks Canada*

*Our homeland is comprised of the ancestral territories and waters of the Deh Cho Dene.  
We were put here by the Creator as keepers of our waters and lands.*

*(From Deh Cho First Nations Declaration of Rights, 1993)*

The Dene of the Northwest Territories are inseparable from the land. When translated, the words De Ne mean “being from the land”.

Dene culture is deeply connected to the animal, plant, and spiritual world -- a relationship that has allowed for their survival for thousands of years.

The Dene  
think of their lands  
in the way that other people  
have just recently begun  
to think of as  
“the environment”

*from Deh Cho First Nations web site*

For Dene, home is everywhere. It is where fish will fill their nets. Where a moose can be hunted for meat and hides. Where medicinal plants can be gathered for healing.



*Parks Canada*

The South Nahanni watershed falls within the traditional territories of two Dene First Nations. The Deh Cho traditional territory encompasses 80 per cent of the watershed, while the upper 20 per cent lies in the traditional territory of the Sahtu. Both Deh Cho and Sahtu First Nations have expressed a strong desire to protect the entire watershed of the South Nahanni River to protect the land and its people for all time.

The Deh Cho are currently negotiating land and governance agreements with the federal government. As part of this process, the Deh Cho and Government of Canada have taken the giant first step of providing temporary protection from industrial development for 85% of the Deh Cho part of the South Nahanni Watershed for a period of five years. Parks Canada and the Deh Cho have agreed to work towards expanding the national park reserve during that time. At the same time, the Sahtu are developing a land use plan for their territory, and have suggested setting aside the upper Nahanni watershed for possible national park expansion. First Nations are leading the way to expand protection for the Nahanni.

For Dene, the land, including the Nahanni, is their spirit, their sustenance and their home, and must be protected for the future.



# A Wildlife Habitat

Large animals need large spaces

Osprey at Rabbitkettle Lake (*Gahnjthah Mje*), Nahanni National Park Reserve,  
*J. David Andrews*

*“Too small, too narrow -- that is the problem facing many national parks in trying to conserve ecological integrity. This problem is particularly acute for wide-ranging carnivores that typically occur at low densities and possess little resiliency to human impacts and thus require large, secure areas to sustain viable populations.”*

**John L. Weaver, PhD, Wildlife Conservation Society**

*(From Transboundary Survey of Grizzly Bears, Nahanni National Park Reserve, 2002)*

Ravens and falcons soar above the River's legendary canyons while grizzly bears, woodland caribou, wolves, lynx and Dall's sheep wander the land below.

A remarkably diverse physical landscape provides habitat for a rich diversity of vegetation and wildlife – unusual for an area this far north.



A place  
of remarkable  
diversity  
of life

The Nahanni lies within the boreal forest – a global forest that wraps the northern hemisphere like a green cloak. Forests of spruce, pine and aspen sprawl from rich valley bottoms, up mountain slopes, to alpine tundra and rocky mountain peaks. Fire is the major agent of change in this forested land. Natural wildfires have been allowed to burn unchecked, leaving a rich mosaic of forests of different ages – adding to the diversity of habitat.



The Nahanni provides excellent habitat for moose,  
*Parks Canada*

Bathed in the mist of Virginia Falls, orchids bloom and hundreds of species of lichens cling to rocky mountainsides. Within the park alone there are more than 700 species of vascular plants with mosses and lichens each numbering more than 300 species.

Forty-eight mammal species live in the national park reserve, ranging from huge wood bison to tiny shrews. One hundred and eighty species of birds spend at least part of the year in the park, including trumpeter swans, four species of loon, bald and golden eagles, as well as gyrfalcon and peregrine falcons.

Large mammals such as woodland caribou, grizzly bears, mountain goats and Dall's sheep roam far outside the park for parts of each year. While much of the South Nahanni herd of woodland caribou winter within park boundaries, their prime calving and fall rutting grounds are to the northwest, outside the protected lands. Recent research has confirmed that grizzly bears that use the park also rely on unprotected lands outside the park. If these species are to be assured of a secure future, and continue to thrive, the park should be expanded to include all of their core habitat. Protecting the entire South Nahanni Watershed would serve the needs of these species, would safeguard the Nahanni's pristine water quality, and would create the largest national park in the Yellowstone to Yukon corridor.

Grizzly bears rely on lands outside the current park boundaries,



# The Threats

*The Nahanni is an irreplaceable marvel for which humans are responsible to the extent that they touch it...should there be a single spill from a single tailings pond, the whole system will be changed, damaged, perhaps ruined.*

John Ralston Saul  
*On Equilibrium (2001)*

As industrial development creeps northward, threats to the future of this magnificent wilderness are appearing on the landscape.



Fuel tanks at the proposed Prairie Creek Mine site

Today, the Cantung mine operates on the Flat River, upstream from the national park reserve boundary, while Canadian Zinc is pushing to open a risky base metal mine on the shores of Prairie Creek, just 15 km north of the park reserve. Mineral staking continues within parts of the watershed, and in 2001 alone, more than 400 kilometers of seismic lines for oil and gas were permitted within the watershed, downstream from the Park boundary.

This kind of industrial pressure erodes the wilderness values of the land. Mine effluent and tailings threaten the pristine water quality of the Nahanni and tributaries, while roads and seismic lines fragment habitat and encourage motorized access and other intrusions. Further industrial activity has the potential to compromise the ability of the land to support large carnivores like grizzly bears, and wide ranging species like caribou.

The first steps have been taken towards expanded protection, but achieving the vision requires more.

The national park reserve should protect the entire watershed. The existing threats to the ecological health of the region should be eliminated. This means stopping the proposed Prairie Creek Mine before it can contaminate the Nahanni's pristine water or fragment its wilderness with roads. It means rehabilitating the Prairie Creek mine site and removing its toxic legacy. It means enforcing proper environmental controls on the Cantung mine, and ensuring complete site restoration when it closes. It means not allowing any more industrial development within the watershed while negotiations to expand the park continue.

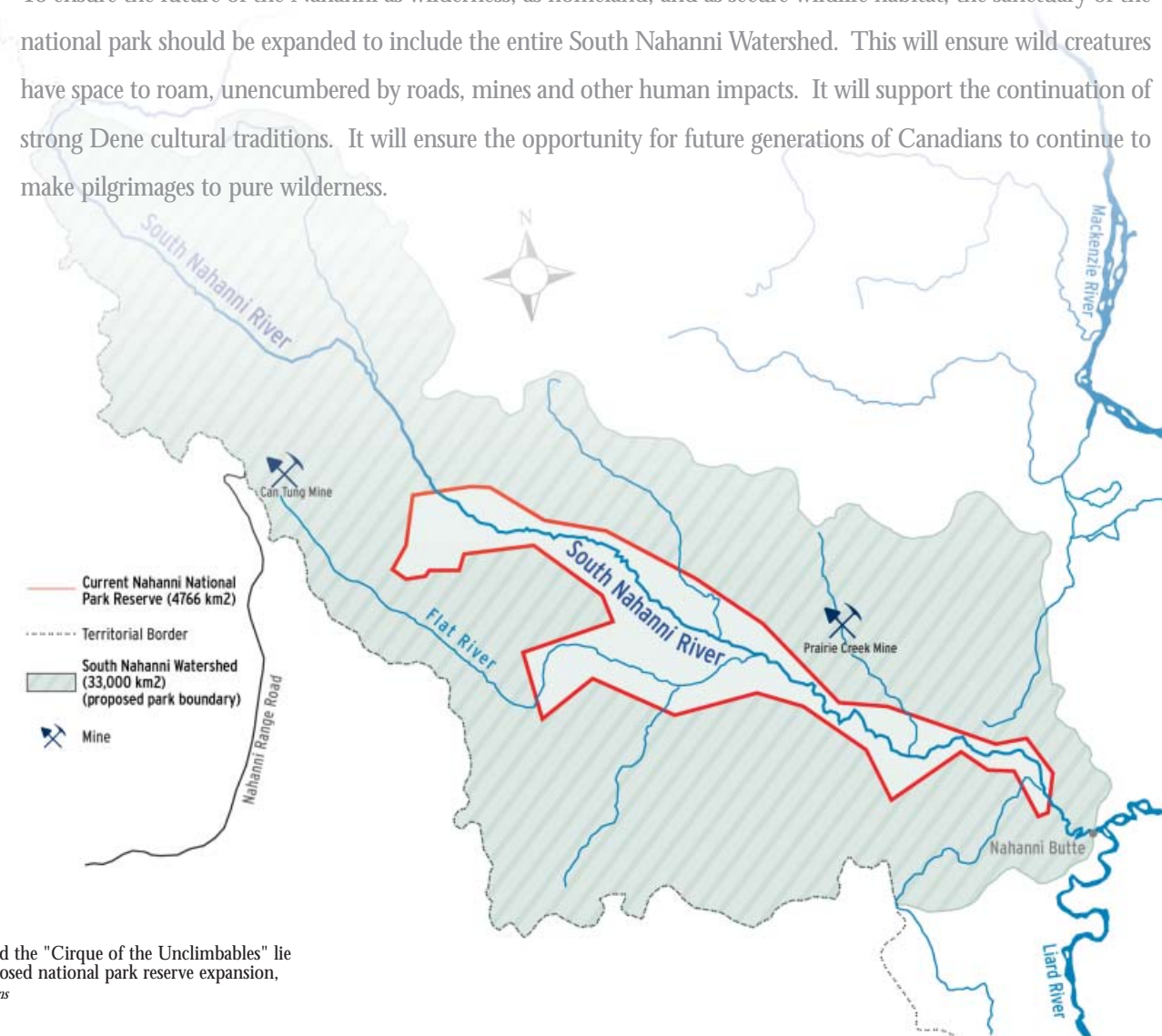
Roads & tracks scar the landscape around the proposed Prairie Creek Mine

# The Vision

The Nahanni is sitting at the confluence of great political forces that will shape its future as truly as the waters and glaciers have shaped its past.

Opportunities to preserve a wilderness like the Nahanni only exist for a moment in time. And that moment is now.

To ensure the future of the Nahanni as wilderness, as homeland, and as secure wildlife habitat, the sanctuary of the national park should be expanded to include the entire South Nahanni Watershed. This will ensure wild creatures have space to roam, unencumbered by roads, mines and other human impacts. It will support the continuation of strong Dene cultural traditions. It will ensure the opportunity for future generations of Canadians to continue to make pilgrimages to pure wilderness.



Glacier Lake and the "Cirque of the Unclimbables" lie within the proposed national park reserve expansion,  
*Bill Mason Productions*

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Nah?ą Dehé is the name for Nahanni in the Dene (South Slavey) language.

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To find out how you can help protect the Nahanni:



Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society,  
880 Wellington St, Suite 506  
Ottawa, ON K1R 6K7  
Telephone: 1-800-333-WILD (9453)  
[www.cpaws.org](http://www.cpaws.org)

