

By any measure, Canada's progress in creating new parks and protected areas since last Parks Day has been extraordinary. If the Federal Government holds to this year's announcements of new or expanded parks, it could be one of the best years for protecting wilderness the country has seen.

Now in its 18th year, Canada's Parks Day takes place each year on the third Saturday of July. It's an opportunity for Canadians to celebrate the largest national park system in the world, to enjoy provincial parks and to reflect on our progress over the past year in protecting more of our irreplaceable wilderness.

This document is an overview of how far Canada's parks have come in the past year, and Canada's opportunities to become the world leader in conservation.



# NATIONAL PARK ANNOUNCEMENTS SINCE JULY 2007



NAHANNI KARSTLANDS. PHOTO: MIKE BEEDELL

## NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE, NWT

**Ecosystem:** The Nahanni karstlands are one of the features that make the South Nahanni Watershed a globally significant natural area. These fascinating limestone formations are full of caves, sinkholes, alvars, underground rivers and streams, springs and sealed lakes. Because of its ecological values, the area was the first natural UNESCO World Heritage Site

**Progress:** Currently, Nahanni National Park Reserve protects less than 5,000 km<sup>2</sup> of the watershed's approximately 39,000 km<sup>2</sup> area. On August 8th, 2007 Prime Minister Harper announced the expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve to include almost the entire watershed within the Dehcho region.

**Challenges:** The federal government has announced an interim withdrawal of land from development. Time is of the essence, because the withdrawals are effective only until October 2008 for the purposes of park expansion. Industry lobby groups are pressuring the territorial government to reject the proposed park boundaries.

**Size:** 28,800 km<sup>2</sup>

## NÁÁTS'IHCH'OH NATIONAL PARK RESERVE, NWT

**Ecosystem:** The park will protect a critical part of the South Nahanni Watershed—a globally renowned wilderness area. The area includes key calving grounds for Woodland caribou and important habitat for grizzly bear. Both are species at risk that need large, intact ecosystems to survive.

**Progress:** In April 2007, the federal government announced that the headwaters of the Nahanni River in the Northwest Territories would be temporarily protected to enable the creation of a new national park, to be called Nááts'ihch'oh [pronounced naah-tseen-CHO]. The Sahtu Dene and Métis have joining forces with the federal and territorial governments and the Dehcho First Nations to fulfill a shared vision of protecting the South Nahanni Watershed.

**Size:** 6,845 km<sup>2</sup>

## THAYDENE NENE NATIONAL PARK, NWT

**Ecosystem:** the area of Thaydene Nene National Park is home to species such as barren ground caribou, tundra wolf, grizzly bear and moose. It is a unique ecosystem transition zone between taiga and tundra.

**Progress:** The Government of Canada, the community of Fort Good Hope, the Akaitcho First Nations and the Government of the Northwest Territories announced in November 2007 the temporary protection of more than 100,000 square kilometers of Boreal forest in Canada's Northwest Territories from industrial development. This area, which includes Thaydene National Park, has been withdrawn from new oil/mineral leases until 2012 to allow planning for conservation to proceed.

**Size:** 33,000 km<sup>2</sup>

# NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREAS

## LAKE SUPERIOR NMCA, ONTARIO

**Ecosystem:** North shore of Lake Superior, source of fresh water and home to endangered trout.

**Progress:** In October 2007, the federal government established the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, creating the largest freshwater protected area the in world.. Over 10,000 square kilometres of fresh water east of Thunder Bay are now protected from development and dumping.

**Size:** 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>

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## BOWIE SEAMOUNT NMCA, BC

**Ecosystem:** This special underwater mountain, 180 kilometres east of Haida Gwaii (Queen Charlotte Islands) is a marine oasis on Canada's Pacific coast. Seamounts are highly productive geological formations that attract increased numbers of fish and marine mammals, such as whales, dolphins and seabirds. In fact, scientists think a minimum of about 240 species occur around Bowie's top 300 metres alone. Bowie attracts at least 53 fish species, including sablefish, Pacific halibut, Albacore tuna, flying squid and 21 species of rockfish. Bowie Seamount rises to very shallow waters, with its summit just 25 metres below the waves.

**Progress:** After 10 years of work by the federal government and the Haida Nation, a new conservation area announced in April 2008 guarantees protection for the Bowie Seamount.



LAKE SUPERIOR'S NORTH SHORE. PHOTO: JAY MORRISON



TIGER ROCKFISH. PHOTO: MARILYN KAZMERS

# PROVINCIAL PARK ANNOUNCEMENTS



LITTLE LIMESTONE LAKE, MB. PHOTO: RON THIESSEN

## MANITOBA: LITTLE LIMESTONE LAKE

**Ecosystem:** Little Limestone Lake, located near the north-west tip of Lake Winnipeg, is considered by scientists to be Earth's pre-eminent marl lake. Marl is created when calcite, the chief constituent of limestone, is chemically precipitated from warm water. As the temperature rises, the quantity of marl increases, which changes the colour of the lake. The lake and surrounding area are home to the only place in North America where moose, elk, whitetail deer and woodland caribou share habitat, along with some of Canada's greatest concentrations of inland colonial nesting birds.

**Progress:** After years of promoting conservation within the Interlake region, CPAWS welcomed the Province of Manitoba's granting of park reserve status for Little Limestone Lake and surrounding lands in Summer 2007. This designation means the area is now protected from industrial activities while the province consults local First Nations and considers input from all citizens.

**Challenges:** It is essential the province work with local First Nations and all Manitobans to make certain the final protected area is large enough to maintain the lake's health as well as traditional activities and sustainable tourism opportunities for the area's residents. Identifying all the water sources that feed Little Limestone is essential to making this determination. However, the province has not revealed any plans to do the study required to acquire this crucial information.

**Size:** 41 km<sup>2</sup>

## NOVA SCOTIA: EXPANSION OF THE PROVINCE'S PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

**Ecosystem:** A number of important locations in Nova Scotia will soon be protected, including rugged coastal wilderness along the Eastern Shore, rare species habitat, important river corridors, and rich Acadian forest.

**Progress:** The Nova Scotia government has committed to protecting 12% of the province's land by 2015. The establishment of three new protected wilderness areas and over a dozen new nature reserves brings the province a big step closer to its goal. New protected areas include the Blue Mountain – Birch Cove Lakes Wilderness Area near Halifax, Ship Harbour Long Lake Wilderness along the Eastern Shore and sites on the St. Mary's River. The provincial government has earmarked a proportion of its offshore oil and gas revenue to a land trust fund for the purchase and protection of ecologically-significant areas.

**Size:** 250 km<sup>2</sup>

## QUEBEC: NEW PROTECTED AREAS

**Ecosystem:** The Dumoine River is the last wild watershed in southwestern Quebec. Vallée des Montagnes Blanches is an old growth forest ecosystem which supports hundreds of woodland caribou.

**Progress:** The province's May 2008 announcement of more than 18,000 km<sup>2</sup> of new protected areas is an important step forward for conservation and moving closer to the government's goal of securing 8% of the province in protected areas by the end of the year.

**Challenges:** With this announcement, Quebec Environment Minister Line Beauchamp is putting in place the essential tools to create a genuine protected areas network. Quebec now jumps from 4.9% to 6% in protected areas, but still needs to protect 36,000 km<sup>2</sup> to reach its minimal 8% target.

**Size:** 18,000 km<sup>2</sup>, including 1,450 km<sup>2</sup> of the Dumoine River watershed and nearly 1,000 km<sup>2</sup> in the Vallée des Montagnes Blanches.

# PRESSING ISSUES IN PARK PROTECTION

## MONT ORFORD, QUEBEC

Mont Orford Park gained national notoriety in 2006, when the provincial government's decision to sell park land to developers sparked the biggest environmental protest in Quebec's history. The sale was cancelled, and the province announced its intention to acquire private lands and double the size of the park from its current 58 km<sup>2</sup>.

This year, the Charest government acquired nearly 36 km<sup>2</sup> to add to the park, bringing it closer to the ultimate goal of 104 km<sup>2</sup>. However, it still remains to be seen whether the 5 km<sup>2</sup> removed from the park for sale will be reinstated for conservation on private development.

## ALGONQUIN PARK, ONTARIO

It's illegal to log in all 631 of Ontario's protected areas—except Algonquin Park. To make matters worse, Canada's first provincial park contains over 5,300 kilometres of roads—more than the city of Toronto. Despite a recommendation from the Ontario Parks Board to protect over half the park from logging, only 22% is truly protected.

Early in 2008, Natural Resources Minister, Hon. Donna Cansfield, asked the Parks Board and the Algonquin Forest Authority, which itself supports a protected area of 49%, to produce a joint report on how to reduce the footprint of logging in the park. The Minister still hasn't released the report or moved to protect more of Algonquin.

## PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

CPAWS is calling for leadership on these issues in the next twelve months.

### FINALIZE NAHANNI PARK BOUNDARIES

While the federal government has announced an expansion to Nahanni National Park Reserve, the extent of the expanded park has not yet been decided upon. The local Dehcho First Nations gave their approval for an expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve that would protect 95% of the South Nahanni watershed. The area surrounding the existing park was temporarily protected by the federal government nearly a year ago, while Parks Canada completed its consultation process. The fate of this world famous ecological treasure is now in the hands of the federal government, which has not yet announced the new park boundaries.

CPAWS' campaign to protect the entire South Nahanni Watershed by expanding Nahanni National Park Reserve and protecting the adjacent headwaters is supported by three out of four Canadians.

### ACCELERATE NMCA ESTABLISHMENT

Canada has committed under the International Convention on Biological Diversity to establishing a comprehensive network of marine protected areas by 2012. However, Canada is 15 years delayed in creating its promised network of marine protected areas on all three coastlines and in the Great Lakes.

With less than 1 percent of Canadian waters protected, Canada ranks 70th in the world in marine protection. Overfishing and climate change lead the pack of problems facing Canadian waters. Canada has the longest coastline in the world and 20 percent of the world's freshwater. Our responsibility for marine health is global, not just domestic.

CPAWS is calling on the federal government to finally make oceans and marine conservation a priority, starting with finalizing protection for four longstanding candidate marine protected areas: Gwaii Haanas, Tarium Naryutait, Iqalituug and Manicouagan Peninsula.

# CREATE NEW PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS AND EXPAND EXISTING ONES

CPAWS and partners are working to create and expand national and provincial parks and marine protected areas across Canada. We hope to see significant progress on these sites in the next year.

## OKANAGAN, BC

**Ecosystem:** One of the three most endangered ecosystems in Canada, the South Okanagan–Lower Similkameen is part of the “Interior Dry Plateau”, a region of rolling plains dissected by deep valleys and long narrow lakes. Desert-like ecosystems with sagebrush and cactus are found on valley bottoms, changing at higher elevations to dry forests of ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, or sub-alpine forest and alpine tundra. This area is one of the most interesting and ecologically diverse parts of Canada, with many native plants and animals, and natural communities found nowhere else in Canada.



OKANAGAN WILDFLOWERS. PHOTO: BOB MACKAY

## FISHER BAY, MB

**Ecosystem:** Located on the southwest basin of Lake Winnipeg, the park reserve is First Nations traditional territory and home to wildlife such as bears, moose, fox, eagles, and a variety of songbirds. The picturesque area is blessed with treed shorelines, long sandy beaches, large islands covered with old-growth forests and reefs.

**Progress:** Manitoban support for protecting the lands and waters of Fisher Bay is overwhelming. Over 5,500 letters have been sent by citizens to Premier Doer encouraging government action to grant the FRCN’s request for permanent protection of the area. Peguis First Nation, Jackhead First Nation, Arborg, Riverton, and the RM of Coldwell have formally supported Fisher River Cree Nation’s protected area request.

**Size:** 1,600 km<sup>2</sup> — four times the size of Winnipeg



BLACK BEAR PHOTO: RON THIESSEN



FLATHEAD, BC. PHOTO: HARVEY LOCKE

## FLATHEAD VALLEY, BC

*An expansion of Waterton National Park*

**Ecosystem:** The riparian zone and eastern third of the Flathead Valley in British Columbia easily ranks as one of the most biologically important places to protect on earth. This is because it is a free flowing river in the only uninhabited low elevation valley in the most biologically productive part of the Rockies. The Flathead serves as a critical link between the lower 48 US states' carnivore populations and the large gene pool of Canada's north. It is both a critical core area and corridor in the Yellowstone to Yukon region. It is also the missing piece of the world's first international peace park, a World Heritage Site. Expansion of the Waterton-Glacier Peace Park into the Flathead valley would provide a protected core breeding area for wildlife in a part of British Columbia that has none.

**Challenges:** The region's land use plan puts mining ahead of conservation concerns.



GLASS SPONGE. PHOTO: NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA

## HECTATE SPONGE REEFS, BC

**Ecosystem:** Huge mounds of glass sponge reefs were thought to have disappeared in the Jurassic era almost 75 million years ago. But in the early 1990s, Canadian scientists rediscovered the hauntingly beautiful underwater creations off the coast of B.C., the only known place for them to exist. They were found in a 1,000-square-kilometre section of the Pacific Ocean—from Hecate Strait to northern Washington State, including the deep water off the shores of Gabriola, Galiano and Malcolm islands.

**Challenges:** Before they were banned, fishing trawlers demolished kilometres of the reef at a time. Some scientists estimate as much as half the reefs have been destroyed.



PHOTO: BRYAN EVANS



506-250 City Centre Avenue  
Ottawa, ON  
K2K 3L8

[www.cpaws.org](http://www.cpaws.org)  
[info@cpaws.org](mailto:info@cpaws.org)  
t: 613.569.7226

**CONTACT:**

**National parks**

Anne Lévesque  
National Executive Director,  
CPAWS

[alevesque@cpaws.org](mailto:alevesque@cpaws.org)  
613-569-7226 x 228

**National Marine Conservation  
Areas**

Sabine Jessen  
National Manager, Oceans and  
Great Freshwater Lakes Program  
[sabine@cpawsbc.org](mailto:sabine@cpawsbc.org)  
604-685-7445 ext 27

**Provincial Parks:**

British Columbia  
Chloe O'Loughlin  
Executive Director, CPAWS BC  
[chloe@cpawsbc.org](mailto:chloe@cpawsbc.org)  
604-685-7445

Manitoba  
Ron Thiessen  
Executive Director, CPAWS MB  
[ron@cpawsemb.org](mailto:ron@cpawsemb.org)  
204-949-0782

Northwest Territories  
Jen Morin  
Executive Director, CPAWS NWT  
[jennifer@cpaws.org](mailto:jennifer@cpaws.org)  
867-873-9893

Nova Scotia  
Chris Miller  
National Manager, Wilderness  
Conservation and Climate Change,  
CPAWS  
902-477-3714  
[cmiller@cpaws.org](mailto:cmiller@cpaws.org)

Ontario  
Janet Sumner  
Executive Director, CPAWS  
Wildlands League  
[janet@wildlandsleague.org](mailto:janet@wildlandsleague.org)  
416-971-9453 x39

Quebec  
Marie-Eve Marchand  
Interim Acting Executive Director,  
CPAWS (SNAP) Québec  
[memarchand@snapqc.org](mailto:memarchand@snapqc.org)  
514-278-7627 x221