

NAHANNI NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

FACT SHEET

July 2000

Purpose

Nahanni National Park Reserve is an outstanding example of northern wilderness rivers, canyons, gorges, and alpine tundra. Its designation as a national park gives protection for all time to a natural area of Canadian significance representative of the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region and enables present and future generations to continue to appreciate and experience the park's wilderness environment.

Regional Setting

Nahanni National Park Reserve occupies a 4766 square kilometre area in the heart of the Mackenzie Mountains Natural Region, centred on the river valleys of the South Nahanni and Flat Rivers in the southwest part of the Northwest Territories. Because it follows the river corridor, the park has a linear overall shape, with a general northwest – southeast orientation. Virtually every river and stream flows from outside the park boundary into the park. The park area overlaps two major Ecozones – Taiga Plains to the east and Taiga Cordillera to the west – and abuts the Boreal Cordillera Ecozone to the south. In the 1994 *Management Plan Amendments*, the 'Greater Nahanni Ecosystem' was defined to facilitate an ecosystem-based approach to management. The entire South Nahanni River watershed, of which Nahanni National Park Reserve occupies approximately one-seventh, and a small portion of the Liard River basin adjacent to the confluence with the South Nahanni River, comprise the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.

Park administration offices are located in Fort Simpson, 150 km by air to the east of the park. The closest community to the park is Nahanni Butte, 30 km downstream of the southeast border at the confluence of the South Nahanni and Liard Rivers. There is no road access to the park.

Nahanni National Park Reserve is part of the Southwest NWT Field Unit, along with Wood Buffalo National Park and four National Historic Sites in the vicinity of Great Bear Lake, Sahtu Settlement Region. Nahanni has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (commemorative plaque at Virginia Falls) for its unique geological features, and the South Nahanni River has been given Canadian Heritage River designation, recognizing the wilderness quality and rich history of the rivers.

Wilderness river trips are the primary experience visitors expect from Nahanni National Park Reserve. River trippers can access the South Nahanni River in the Park at Rabbitkettle Lake or Virginia Falls. Several points upstream of the Park boundary are also accessible by air (Moose Ponds, Island Lakes, Bunny Bar) or by using the Canol

Road from Yukon. The Nahanni Range Road to Tungsten also offers a potential road access to the Little Nahanni or Flat River, both of which flow into the South Nahanni.

Day users may fly in from Ft. Simpson (NT), Ft. Liard (NT), Watson Lake (YT), Muncho Lake (BC), Fort Nelson (BC), or Yellowknife (NT).

The park is the flagship destination in the Northwest Territories and Virginia Falls is one of the most recognizable symbols of the north. Additional national and international attention is focused on the park due to its designation as both a Canadian Heritage River and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Many feature films, books, and other special products are produced, requiring NNPR logistical support.

Establishment and the Future

Nahanni National Park Reserve was established to protect the South Nahanni River corridor as a free-flowing wilderness river. Potential hydro-electric power development provided much of the impetus for the Park establishment process in the early 1970's. The park area was formally set aside by an order-in-council as a park reserve in 1972, and was included (gazetted) as a national park reserve in an amendment to the *National Parks Act* in 1976.

into DIAWP
info here .

Full national park status and the final boundary of the park is pending the settlement of the Deh Cho Process. At present Canada and Deh Cho First nations are negotiating an interim measures agreement which will establish a known operating environment while negotiations proceed. Early in the process Deh Cho First nations have expressed the desire that Nahanni National Park should eventually protect the entire watershed. To this end they have indicated that they may ask for an interim land withdrawal as an interim measure to allow for future consideration of this option.

Parks Canada's current management plan expresses the desire to add three candidate areas to the park and adjust the future boundary to allow the maintenance of ecological integrity. Work currently underway to develop an ecological integrity statement appears to support the concept of a watershed boundary however Parks Canada must also consider the logistic and financial constraints of such a large area.

Partnership with Deh Cho First Nations

In March 2000, Parks Canada and the Deh Cho First Nations agreed to develop an interim management arrangement taking into consideration models found in existing agreements between Canada and Aboriginal people with respect to the management of National Parks.

To achieve this Deh Cho First Nations and Parks Canada have agreed to form a group of six people comprised of three Deh Cho and three Parks Canada members who would work in partnership to review and recommend 1) the Ecological integrity statement for Nahanni National Park Reserve 2) the Park Management Plan and 3) make

recommendations to the Deh Cho process main table for interim management arrangements.

Regional Socio-economic Environment

The region around Nahanni National Park Reserve is sparsely populated, with approximately 2000-2500 people; about half of this population lives in the village of Fort Simpson. Other local communities include Fort Liard (500), Nahanni Butte (100) and Jean Marie River. The region is part of the Deh Cho Land Claim area, and the majority of the population is of Dene origin.

Land management responsibilities for the region are shared among the Renewable, Wildlife and Economic Development (RWED) branch of the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and the Deh Cho First Nations (DCFN), all of whom have offices in Fort Simpson. Local First Nation organizations which assume varying degrees of land management responsibility include Liidli Koe First Nation (Fort Simpson), Acho Dene First Nation (Fort Liard) and Nahanni Butte Development Corporation (Nahanni Butte).

Politically, the Deh Cho First Nation sees itself as the aboriginal governing body for the region with land use jurisdiction as described in the *Deh Cho Declaration*. As a result, communities such as Nahanni Butte are negotiating benefits agreements with mining companies in return for band support of licencing applications by the companies. One of the repercussions of this approach is that the community now officially supports the proposed all season road into the Cadillac (Prairie Creek) Mine which would cut through the Nahanni Karst, an area in which the Minister has publicly indicated an interest in park expansion.

Traditional hunting, trapping and fishing activities continue to occur in the south-eastern portion of Nahanni NPR. Primary traditional users are from the community of Nahanni Butte, although some hunting pressure is experienced from other communities. The legal right to traditionally harvest is extended to "persons of aboriginal descent who live in the Northwest Territories". By this wording, members of the entire Deh Cho, as well as the North and South Slave, Dogrib, Sahtu, Gwich'in, and Inuvialuit settlement areas, as well as aboriginal persons from jurisdictions outside the NWT who are now residents, are extended full access to the park for traditional uses. The implications for access by residents of Nunavut, since the separation with NWT, are unclear.

Motorized access in the park is only permitted by aboriginal persons pursuing traditional activities. This definition has created a growing interest in 'recreational jet boating' by aboriginal persons who live in the Northwest Territories, disguised as traditional users. This has caused a significant degree of discomfort in Nahanni Butte as their interpretation of the intent of the traditional harvest section is that it provides the right to bona fide historical users, *i.e.* the community itself. Most of the jet boat community resides in Fort Simpson and Hay River.

Extraction industries in the area include forestry and mining activity. There are forestry operations expanding into the region from the south, from Fort Liard to Nahanni Butte along the Liard River valley. The Mackenzie Mountains is a heavily mineralized area and claims are staked for gold, tungsten, silver, lead and zinc. A mothballed mine, which has recently changed ownership, and abandoned townsite exists at Tungsten, northwest of the park at the headwaters of the Flat River. It has a mineable ore body and only requires an improvement in tungsten prices to go back into operation. A lead/zinc mining operation (San Andreas Corporation's Cadillac mine) exists on Prairie Creek, 15 km upstream of the South Nahanni River. The ore body has been verified for several years; operation is dependent on lead/zinc prices and the construction of an all season road. They have recently signed a benefits agreement with the Nahanni Butte Band in order to secure the band's support to lobby government for assistance in building the road. A third abandoned mine site, with buildings on-site and previous road access, exists at Lened Creek, in the upper South Nahanni watershed.

The different levels of government account for the majority of employment in the region. Work associated with the oil pipeline and other resource development provides many additional local employment opportunities. Current resource development, particularly oil and gas exploration in the Fort Liard area, represents a significant potential for change in the regional socio-economic environment. The population influx, local prosperity, and improved road and air access to the Nahanni area may affect the affordability, pattern and frequency of access by traditional users and others. Increasing tourism pressure is anticipated.

Annual Visitation

Nahanni National Park Reserve receives the highest visitation of any national park in the Northwest Territories. Backcountry visitation, almost entirely river trips, accounts for between 450-800 visitors annually, with an average length of stay in the park of 11 days, for a total of 5,000-9,000 person-days. Day use, which consists almost entirely of visits to Virginia Falls, accounts for an additional 200-300 visitors (~250 person-days). Both overnight and day use is heavily concentrated in the summer, with over 80% of visits in July and August. These figures are based on visitation records to 1998.

Ecological Values

Geology / Geomorphology

The landforms of Nahanni have played a significant role in shaping its biological communities, as well as the history of human use and culture of the land. From the lower reaches of the South Nahanni and Yohin Lake in the southeast (Taiga Plains), the mountains rise through sedimentary sandstone, shale and limestone ranges through to the stark igneous peaks of the Ragged Range in the northwest end (Taiga Cordillera). The range of elevation within the park is from 180 m ASL to 2640 m ASL. Other significant geological features include areas of high geothermal activity, as evidenced by numerous

hotsprings, and limestone karst and pseudokarst topography with the associated caves and sinkhole formations.

Although previous glacial events extended well into the South Nahanni watershed, during the most recent Wisconsin Ice Age, much of Nahanni National Park Reserve remained a glacial refugium. The river entrenchment of the lower South Nahanni, which has resulted in sheer canyon walls up to 1000m high, indicates an antecedent river – one which preceded the uplift of the mountains, maintaining its course by cutting through the rising mountains rather than being diverted around. Virginia Falls, with a vertical drop of 90 m (nearly twice that of Niagara), is one of North America's great waterfalls, and is one of the most recognizable icons of the Canadian north.

Climate

Climate of the park area is continental. Wide monthly variations in temperature and precipitation occur within and between years, and weather varies from the eastern to western ends of the park - the eastern end being generally warmer and drier. Hot, dry summer weather may predominate for weeks, but snow has been recorded in all months of the year.

Detailed climatological data are not available for the park itself, but the regional climate can be characterized by information from communities around the park. At Fort Liard, temperatures have ranged from +34 to -46.7°C; at Tungsten +26.7 to -50.0°C. July and August typically have the highest total precipitation (60-90 mm); February and March the least (20 mm). Spring is generally drier than autumn. Despite the averages cited, occasional large-scale summer storms can provide general and widespread precipitation of two to three days duration. Due to the rapid runoff encountered in mountainous terrain, the South Nahanni and its tributaries are subject to relatively rapid flooding, particularly if such rains coincide with the spring freshet, as occurred in 1999.

Vegetation

The area of Nahanni National Park Reserve is far richer in terms of vegetation diversity than any other area of comparable size in the continental Northwest Territories. Approximately 230 genera and 700 species of vascular plants have been recorded, including several first occurrences for the NWT, and the only known locations of the Nahanni Aster (*Aster nahanniensis*). Likewise, the bryophyte and lichen floras are extensive when compared to other northern areas. Only a small number of the park species are introduced or escaped from cultivation.

The vegetation of the park is predominantly boreal with a transition from lowland wet areas to alpine tundra. White spruce and trembling aspen characterize valley bottoms. Montane and sub-alpine zones are the most common vegetation zones in the park with extensive pine (*Pinus banksiana* and *P. contorta*) and spruce (*Picea glauca* and *P. mariana*) mixtures. The complex mosaic of vegetation is maintained through naturally occurring fire activity.

Several noteworthy plant communities are represented around specialized habitats, including hot and cold mineral springs, wet calcareous substrates, mist zones of waterfalls, alluvial fans and in the karst plateaux. The presence of unglaciated terrain, discontinuous permafrost and periglacial habitats contribute to the floral diversity.

Wildlife

The wildlife of Nahanni National Park Reserve is diverse for the relatively high latitude of the park. The meeting of three ecozones in the park area, the range of altitude, vegetation mosaic and presence of specialized habitats support this faunal diversity. The dominant characteristic of wildlife species in the park is their adaptation to a highly seasonal environment. The majority of species either migrate to a less severe wintering area or spend time in a period of winter torpor. Consequently, the diversity of wildlife is only apparent during a relatively short summer season. The movement of many species that are year-round residents also correlates with the seasonality of the environment.

Nahanni possesses a complete mammalian fauna, in terms of the occurrence of present species in relation to historical presence. A number of ungulate species occupy a wide range of ecological niches in the park. Moose are the most common and widely distributed ungulates, while mountain goats occur only in small numbers in a few alpine areas; most of their range is outside the park borders. Dall's sheep are commonly observed in Nahanni, although their ranges also extend well beyond the park area. Woodland caribou can be observed year round, however, the park seems to be used most heavily in winter. Much of the calving, summer, and fall rut habitats are found further to the northwest, still largely within the South Nahanni River watershed.

Both black and grizzly bears commonly occur in Nahanni, and Rabbitkettle Lake area has been identified as important high-use bear habitat. Wolves are common along the river valleys, and field observations suggest moose and caribou are staple prey items. Several mustelid species, including wolverine, occur in the park, as do a variety of rodents, insectivores and bats.

The birds of Nahanni show an interesting diversity in terms of number and type, comprising a zoogeographic mixture of cordilleran, boreal and great plains species. Over 170 species have been recorded in the park, and the total number is estimated at 200 species. The range of habitats, from marshes and lakes to alpine tundra, each have their particular associated avian community. Yohin Lake is a particularly important location for breeding waterfowl, and bird associations at some of the hot springs closely resemble southern communities, and may represent important disjunct populations. Of particular note are Trumpeter Swans breeding at Yohin Lake and other sites, breeding records for both Bald and Golden Eagles, and observations of Gyrfalcon and Peregrine Falcons.

Knowledge of reptiles and amphibians in Nahanni National Park Reserve is limited – only the Wood Frog has been confirmed by collection in the park. Boreal Chorus Frog is expected to occur, and toads have been observed in the Yohin Lake area. These are

thought to be the Western (Boreal) Toad, as this species has recently been found as close as Fort Liard.

Information on invertebrate fauna of Nahanni National Park Reserve, other than limited opportunistic observations and anecdotal accounts regarding the abundance of biting flies, is essentially non-existent. No collections or systematic surveys have been carried out in the park.

Zone I Areas

There are 7 sites designated as Special Preservation, or Zone I Areas, in Nahanni National Park Reserve.

1). Rabbitkettle Hotsprings – this hot spring has developed the largest known travertine mounds, or tufa mounds in Canada. These mounds form through the deposition of calcite from water flowing out of the springs, and the larger north mound has accumulated to a height of nearly 30 m. The calcite is delicate in structure, and susceptible to damage from uncontrolled foot traffic. Public access is permitted only on guided hikes, and a monitoring program is in place to ascertain levels of impact.

2). Wildmint Hotsprings – a hot spring complex 100 km upstream from the South Nahanni on the Flat River. The tufa walls are brittle and crumble easily. The concentration of wildlife and unusual vegetation species require protection. Access to the site is limited to park-approved scientific research.

3). Old Pots Hotsprings – hot springs on the Flat River with several tufa ‘pots’; very susceptible to damage. One of only two known sites of the endemic Nahanni Aster (*Aster nahanniensis* W.J. Cody). Access to the site is controlled to protect the fragile tufa domes, and is limited to park-approved scientific research.

4). Deadmen Valley Sheep Licks – mineral outcrops or ‘licks’ located along the South Nahanni River’s edge in Deadmen Valley. These areas are frequented by Dall’s sheep, as well as bears and wolves in search of prey; the sensitivity to disturbance of this area is unknown. Access to the site is limited to park-approved scientific research.

5). Grotte Valerie – a 2 km aggregate of ancient karst caverns above First Canyon, estimated to be ~350,000 years old. Contains fragile cave features, ice-embedded sheep skeletons and other animal remains. Access to the cave is strictly controlled for reasons of public safety and protection of cave features, and is limited to park-approved scientific research.

6). Yohin Lake – this shallow marshy lake is the largest in the park, providing significant waterfowl habitat, including a Trumpeter Swan and Black Tern (probable) breeding area, and diverse waterfowl community. No public access, however, traditional harvest, primarily a jackfish (Northern Pike *Esox lucius*) winter fishery, continues in area. Nahanni Butte residents access the lake via snowmobile trail, and constructed a log cabin

beside the lake in 1998. The ecological impacts of these aspects of the traditional harvest are not known. The sensitivity of this site requires that access be strictly controlled and limited to park-approved scientific research.

7). Sand Blowouts – a small area of unusual weather-sculpted sandstone outcrops just inside the southeast boundary of the park. The sandstone features are easily eroded, and susceptible to trampling; consequently, access to this site is controlled, and limited to park-approved scientific research.

Interpretive Themes

‘The Nahanni’ is often referred to as Canada’s premier wilderness river, both in Parks Canada publications and private literature. One of the goals of park management is to maintain this wilderness quality, and interpretation is an integral means to that end. There are four interpretive themes as defined in the *Park Management Plan* of Nahanni National Park Reserve. These are:

1. Formation and Ecology of the South Nahanni River Corridor
2. Ecology of the Mackenzie Mountains
3. Human Heritage of the Nahanni Wilderness
4. The Meaning and Management of Wilderness

General State of the Park

The cumulative impacts of stresses to the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem was ranked as a 3, on a scale of 1 – 5, in the 1996 State of the Parks Stress Questionnaire. Stresses originating within the park were considered to have little or no impact; the major ecological stresses to Nahanni National Park Reserve arise from sources outside the park boundaries.

Overall, Nahanni National Park Reserve is considered to have a high degree of ecological integrity, as the park has retained a complete mammalian fauna and a diverse array of bird communities in its varied habitat types. At this time, most ecological processes appear to be naturally occurring, including fire and flood regimes, landfalls, vegetation succession and predator-prey relationships. These processes are not actively managed by park policies, except for a small area at the southeast end the park (east of Yohin Ridge, ~5% of total park area) where fire suppression does occur. As the GNE is a fairly remote area, there is relatively little active land management (e.g. dams, bank stabilization, fire suppression, vegetation clearing) outside the park boundaries as well.

Main Stressors

Four main stressors were identified in the 1996 Stress Questionnaire, however, only two of these were reported in the State of the Parks Report. **Mining** was declared the single greatest threat to the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem (GNE), considering the cumulative impacts of mining, heavy metals, solid waste and increased road access. Direct impacts could occur on water quality of the South Nahanni River, and multiple indirect effects would likely result from road development.

Climate change is a potential threat to the entire boreal component of the GNE. In the event of an increase in average temperature, the fire regime is predicted to increase in both frequency and intensity. Dramatic changes in vegetation communities, succession patterns and wildlife populations could occur. Potential effects on alpine systems and water regimes are unknown.

Improved access to previously remote areas is increasing the **hunting** pressure on many species in the GNE. The potential for overharvest of game and fur-bearing species, by native and non-native hunters is a threat to some wildlife populations. Little is known about the level and sustainability of harvest in the GNE.

Visitation was also identified as a source of stress. The popularity of the GNE as a wilderness destination is growing and the potential for increased human disturbance and a proportionate loss in the quality of wilderness experience is to be expected. The cumulative impacts of visitation are not well documented, although they are noticeable, as the great majority visitors tend to stay at the same popular camping sites.

Ecological Monitoring

A priority for 1999/2000 is the development of an Ecological Integrity Statement for Nahanni National Park Reserve, to outline goals, objectives and indicators for monitoring the state of the park's ecological integrity, and set park research priorities. Nahanni's current ecological monitoring program consists of a selected set of protocols developed by Parks Canada's NWT Ecological Monitoring Steering Committee .

These ecological monitors include Aspen Flowering Phenology, Decomposition Rate and Standing Tree Biomass, NWT Bird Checklist Survey (Spring Survey at Rabbitkettle Lake), as well as an automated weather station (logistical problems, equipment failure and bear damage, have resulted in incomplete climate data). Threat-specific monitors include monitoring of human impact (trampling) on the tufa mounds at Rabbitkettle Hotsprings, and an intensive Water Quality monitoring program on the South Nahanni River and its tributaries.

Recent park-sponsored research has included an assessment of bear habitat and public safety risk at Rabbitkettle Lake, which indicated the area is an important, high-use area for both grizzly and black bears. Strategies to reduce probabilities of human-bear conflicts (for the benefit of both) were also identified. Recommendations are currently being implemented.

A radio-telemetry study of woodland caribou initiated by Nahanni National Park Reserve is now in its 5th year; it has assisted in delineating important seasonal habitats for caribou both in and out of Nahanni NPR, during winter, spring calving and fall rut. Use of park habitats is most extensive in winter, with some animals remaining in the park most of the year. The GNWT has taken the lead role in continuing this study - current priorities include determination of pregnancy and calving rates, mortality, and a total herd census. The information derived from caribou movements has also lent some support to the definition of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem; although much of the caribou range is outside the park boundaries, the vast majority of habitats used lie within the GNE.

Organization and Annual Budget

Nahanni National Park Reserve has an annual operating budget of \$997.8 K, with a budget of \$61.3 K for ongoing capital requirements. The park maintains \$6.22 M in contemporary assets and \$0.3 M in equipment. There is no major recapitalization budget, despite the required Virginia Falls recapitalization project. This is the major visitor facility in the field unit, including extensive boardwalks, information display and primitive campground. The recapitalization project is required to significantly reduce annual operating costs to maintain this visitor facility. Total costs estimated at \$500.0 k over 3 years. Project is identified in the Asset Plan Report - Unfunded Priority.

The park is staffed with the equivalent of 9 full-time employees, including:

- Park Superintendent
- Finance & Administration Officer
- Senior Heritage Programs Officer
- Warden Service Manager
- Senior Park Wardens (2)
- Conservation Biologist
- General Works Manager (0.75 PY)
- Park Patrol Staff (3 Seasonals)
- Maintenance Labourer (1 Seasonal)

The Superintendent and Heritage Programs positions are also responsible for the management of four National Historic Sites around Great Bear Lake in the Sahtu Region. Nahanni does receive some technical support from the Field Unit Secretariat based in Wood Buffalo National Park, Fort Smith.

The following figures (X \$1000) are derived from the 1999/2000 Business Plan.

	1999/2000			2000/2001			2001/2002		
	G&S	Cap.	Non A-Base	G&S	Cap.	Non A-Base	G&S	Cap.	Non A-Base
Establishment of New Heritage Places	0	0	130.0	0	0	105.0	0	0	105.0

Protection of Heritage Resources	64.1	20.0	4.5	79.0	8.0	4.5	77.6	8	4.5
Presentation of Heritage Resources	20.5	0	0	18.5	5.0	0	18.5	0	0
Visitor Services	81.7	16.3	0	77.5	45.0	209.0	78.9	45.0	191.0
Management of Parks Canada	205.2	20.0	0	204.2	13.3	8.7	204.2	18.3	9.7
People Management	67.1	15.0	0	59.4	0	0	59.4	0	0
Totals	438.6	71.3	134.5	438.6	71.3	327.2	438.6	71.3	310.2

	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
	Salary	Salary	Salary
Establishment of New Heritage Places	9,263.0	8,233.8	9,263.0
Protection of Heritage Resources	121,962.6	120,933.0	119,904.1
Presentation of Heritage Resources	216,13.6	21,613.6	21,613.6
Visitor Services	132,769.4	159,529.0	161,587.5
Management of Parks Canada	143,674.0	120,002.0	117,943.5
People Management	35,508.1	34,478.9	34,478.9
Totals	464,790.6	464,790.6	464,790.6

Ecosystem Management Partnerships

Environment Canada - Nahanni has had a 10+ year water quality program, operating in cooperation with EC-AES water quality specialists in Yellowknife, NT. This program is ongoing.

Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) - Nahanni NPR has a fire control agreement with the GNWT. On behalf of the Park, they respond to fires east of Yohin Ridge or those which threaten other interests in need of protection. Also a partner in woodland caribou study (below).

Yukon Territorial Government (YTG) - The South Nahanni Woodland Caribou study, initiated by Parks Canada in 1993 with support of the local First Nations, has benefited greatly from the assistance of the YTG (Renewable Resources) in both project design and field work. The GNWT has now taken over scientific and fiscal responsibility for the project.

EMAN - Nahanni National Park Reserve is an active EMAN North field site, and data is shared accordingly.

Field Unit - Wood Buffalo National Park and Field Unit Ecosystem Secretariat staff provide some technical support to Nahanni such as data and financial

management, as well as providing an unofficial mentoring role between senior and junior staff.

Universities – A number of universities have conducted research in Nahanni National Park Reserve with support from Parks. Projects include Bear Habitat and Risk Assessment at Rabbitkettle Lake (University of Calgary), Climate Change and Recreation in a northern National Park (University of Waterloo), visitor experience survey (University of Manitoba).

ENGOS – Nahanni National Park Reserve is a cooperating partner with Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), other ENGOS and other government levels in development of the Protected Areas Strategy for the Northwest Territories, as well as the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) conservation initiative.

Communication

Nahanni National Park Reserve does not have a formal Communications Plan. The majority of messages to the public, including trip information to prospective park visitors, are primarily public-safety oriented, due to the level of wilderness skills required to travel on the rivers, and the presence of bears in the park. Interpretive programs in the park have consisted of guided hikes to the Rabbitkettle tufa mounds, and have focussed on the sensitivity of the resource, as well as bear safety.

In 1999, a Senior Heritage Programs Officer was hired - the first position dedicated to communication in Nahanni National Park Reserve. Types of communications occurring are summarized below.

Visitor Services – consists of providing information to the public in and outside the park

Pre-trip info - answering phone
information package
web site(to be developed)

Trip info - greeting visitors in Fort Simpson and the park

Post-trip - assessing pre-trip info through the River Incident Survey
incorporate visitor input (river incidents, e.g. spills)
improve info for future river users

Interpretation - guided hikes within the park

Guided hikes are scheduled twice daily to Rabbitkettle Hotsprings, a Zone 1 Area. Warden & Patrol Staff lead hikes, messages focus on sensitivity of resource, as well as public safety. Approximately 90% of river users starting at Rabbitkettle Lake or above (~50% of total river trips) participate on this guided hike (this is an unusually high proportion of visitors, in most national parks, only a small portion of people entering the park in guided hikes).

Environmental Education – includes school programs for 6 local communities. This program is currently in the beginning phase. Heritage Presentation officer participated on 1999 school raft trip on South Nahanni River (10 days; grade 7; annual event). Three pre-trip sessions were held with classes in Fort Simpson and Nahanni Butte.

Community Liaison /Outreach – presence at meetings, community events, participating in national and regional outreach strategies. This is also in the beginning phase, and has been a low priority to date because of summer operational requirements, and upcoming commemoration of Deline Fishery National Historic Site. Heritage Presentation officer is on the board of the Ft. Simpson Historical Society.

Challenges facing the communications strategy for Nahanni National Park Reserve include the difficulty in contacting visitors. Detailed public safety information must get to potential trippers *before* they decide to canoe the river, for prevention / reduction of accidents and bear encounters, and to encourage low impact camping practices. Visitors come into the park via numerous locations - over 50% of the park backcountry users fly in from Fort Liard. With all staff based out of Fort Simpson, it is not feasible to have direct contact with these visitors until they have arrived in the Park and check-in at Rabbitkettle Lake Warden Station (~50%) - at that point trippers are committed. Another 50% of visitors begin their trip at Virginia Falls where there is no Warden Station

Day users are even more of a challenge to contact. The majority of day-users (~1/3 - 1/2 of visitation) receive no pre-trip info and have no contact with Park staff. Information on Park policies and Park messages are received second hand from air charters or not at all. This is also the user group who typically have the lowest level of environmental awareness, and could therefore benefit most from Park messages.

The content and strategy for messages will be within our grasp in the near future, following the EIS and PMP review. However, the ability to deliver the messages is beyond our current resources. We will need to target our resources and our audience. This should not be considered a solution. It simply means that basic information and short term priorities will be the order of the day. Long term communication strategies aimed at ecological integrity achievements will be the objective.



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