



## Parks Canada Preliminary Screening under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*

### TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT:

- New
- Amended
- Requires a permit, licence or authorization under the *Preliminary Screening Requirement Regulations* (issuance of a Business Licence pursuant to the *National Parks of Canada Business Regulations* s 4.1)
- Does not require permit, licence or authorization and is proposed by PCA

### 1. DEVELOPMENT TITLE & LOCATION

Guide Outfitter Operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve

### 2. PROPONENT INFORMATION

See “Ecotourism companies” on page 2 of this screening

### 3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT DATES

Planned commencement: 2021-04-12

Planned completion: 2022-03-31

### 4. INTERNAL FILE #

TDN2021-003

### 5. DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION (as posted on the preliminary screening section of the Mackenzie Valley Review Board’s public registry).

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve is located on the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, Northwest Territories. The park reserve is a component of Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area (IPA), which also includes a Territorial Protected Area and a proposed Wildlife Conservation Area (see map). Visitors can access Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve independently, or as a client of commercial guides, outfitters, and tour operator companies. Companies that wish to do business in a national park require a business licence<sup>1</sup>. Parks Canada conducts preliminary screenings before issuing/reissuing business licences to determine any public concern, or adverse environmental, social or cultural impacts according to the requirements of the *Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act*.

Guide outfitter operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve occur throughout the year, with most operations occurring between late June until September when Great Slave Lake is



ice-free and air temperatures are warm. Guided trips range in length from single-day sightseeing tours to multi-day fishing excursions, cultural tours or paddling tours. This preliminary screening pertains to proposed guide outfitter operations by companies applying for a 2021/2022 business licence reissuance for Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve.

Guide outfitter operations include the activities and potential impacts associated with recreating visitors, ecological research, and park management while being accompanied by commercial guides, outfitters and tour operator companies. The following activities and locations are being proposed by the eco-tourism companies listed below, including up to five additional companies that may propose similar guide outfitter operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve after this preliminary screening has been completed:

### **Ecotourism companies**

- Chase East Arm Adventures
- East Arm Pop Up Camp
- Frontier Lodge
- Great Slave Lake Tours
- Hoarfrost River Huskies Ltd.
- Jackpine Paddle
- River's East Arm Tours
- Trophy Lodge

### **Activities**

- Sightseeing tours
- Cultural tours
- Boat charters
- Sport fishing
- Canoeing
- Kayaking
- Overnight camping
- Hiking
- Dog sledding

### **Locations**

Camping and other recreational activities are currently permitted throughout Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve. However, activities may be managed through area closures (e.g., visitor safety concerns) or Superintendent's Orders to ensure the protection of areas identified as culturally or environmentally sensitive.

The following list includes the core areas proposed by the abovementioned eco-tourism companies (see map):

- Artillery Lake
- Great Slave Lake



- Charlton Bay
- Christie Bay
- McLeod Bay
- Reliance
- Wildbread Bay
- Eileen Lake area (south eastern portion of the park)
- Fort Reliance National Historic Site
- Pike's Portage

## **6. VALUED COMPONENTS THAT MAY BE AFFECTED**

### **Indigenous Peoples, and the Social and Cultural Environment**

The National Park Reserve is part of Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). Management of the National Park Reserve is shared between Parks Canada and Indigenous Governments: Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation, Northwest Territory Métis Nation, Deninu Kųę First Nation, and Yellowknives Dene First Nation. Work is conducted collaboratively, and consensus-based decisions are made through two management boards.

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve is a living legacy for all: a place where Indigenous peoples can continue to practice their ways of life, while also coming together to welcome the world. Here, Indigenous peoples continue resource harvesting, cultural, and spiritual practices in accordance with their constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve not only protects the ecological integrity, but also the cultural continuity of its unique landscape for the benefit, education and enjoyment of future generations and visitors from around the world.

#### **• Indigenous People**

The lands now within Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve have provided sustenance and have been travelled by Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Park Reserve encompasses numerous sites of spiritual and cultural importance to Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation, Deninu Kųę First Nation, Yellowknives Dene First Nation, the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, and the North Slave Metis Alliance who also assert traditional territory within the area.

Use of the land continues today, as articulated above, including harvesting, travelling, spiritual gatherings, and monitoring. Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve is a living landscape where culture thrives. Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area, declared by Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation under Dene Law, encompasses the National Park Reserve. Pike's Portage is a both a current and historic access route to the Barrenlands.



- Heritage Resources

Heritage resources are defined as a human work, an object, or a place that is determined, on the basis of its heritage value, to be directly associated with an important aspect or aspects of human history and culture of a heritage area. Examples of heritage resources include archaeological or historic sites, burial sites, artifacts and other objects of historical, cultural, or religious significance, and historical or cultural records.

Heritage resources exist throughout Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve, including known cultural sites, cabins and graveyards located within the Lockhart River – Artillery Lake corridor. Ts’akui Theda (Lady of the Falls – Parry Falls) is also of great cultural importance. Every August, Łutsël K’é community members meet for their annual spiritual gathering near the mouth of the Lockhart River. Fort Reliance – now recognized as a National Historic Site – is another heritage resource. This location was built as a base of operations for expeditions in 1833 and briefly operated as a fur trade post in the 1850s. The Métis have a history of involvement in the fur trade and as expedition guides in the region.

Given the history of the area, additional heritage resources will likely be identified during future archaeological surveys. Areas with spiritual or cultural significance within the National Park Reserve may have specific management requirements and special protection status.

- Visitor Experience

It is estimated that approximately 500 people visit Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve on an annual basis. A wide variety of recreational activities are currently enjoyed throughout the area, including: sailing, kayaking, canoeing and motor-boating, hiking, snowmobiling, dog-sledding, cross-country skiing, fishing and berry picking. Visitation is expected to increase with new service offers from guide outfitter operations, and greater promotion of the National Park Reserve.

Besides air access, boating is the only method of travel into the area. Visitation is generally managed according to the Canada National Parks Act (CNPA). However, if any adverse impacts are foreseen (e.g., excessive soil compaction, fire pit scars and garbage at popular day use and camping areas), mitigation measures will be considered by the cooperative management boards and implemented.

## **Natural Environment**

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve protects approximately 14,000 km<sup>2</sup> of nationally significant boreal forest, freshwater and tundra ecosystems, and represents the Northwestern Boreal Uplands Natural Region in the National Parks System Plan. The area exemplifies the transition from the Taiga Shield Ecoregion to the Southern Arctic Ecoregion – the boundary of which is defined by tree line. It is characterized as having low to moderate relief with innumerable interlocking lakes and large areas of exposed bedrock. Glacial erosion and deposition created these and other unique landscape features, including archipelagos, steep eskers, gorges and waterfalls. The National Park Reserve is situated within the sub-Arctic



climate zone and, to a lesser extent, the Boreal climate zone. The western half of the area is underlain by isolated permafrost patches, while the eastern half is underlain by continuous permafrost. Overall, Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve represents an outstanding example of an intact, remote wilderness area.

- Soil

Soil development and nutrient availability are significant factors influencing the distribution and abundance of vascular plants (e.g., trees, shrubs, flowering herbs etc.). Soil development is dependent on regional source materials, climate and hydrology. The source materials found in and around Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve include granite bedrock, marine clays, and glacial till. Soils within the region are Cryosolic, which is a term used to describe soil development in areas with permafrost. Soil development is considered to be very slow (i.e., a few millimetres per century), with the exception of peat materials that tend to accumulate more quickly.

- Air

No formal observations of air/noise quality have occurred in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve. However, it is expected that these valued components are representative of their natural state as Łutsël K'é is the only nearby community, and industrial activity in the surrounding area is relatively low. Reduced air quality from regional/national forest fires may seasonally occur.

- Water

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve overlaps the east arm of Great Slave Lake, which is the deepest (and fifth largest) lake in North America. The National Park Reserve encompasses Artillery Lake and several freshwater tributaries including the Lockhart and Snowdrift Rivers. Ts'akui Theda (Lady of the Falls – Parry Falls) and the Lockhart River have great cultural and spiritual importance.

Water quality within the National Park Reserve is expected to be pristine as relatively low inputs of industrial and community-related pollutants potentially come from the surrounding area. The Water Survey of Canada (Environment and Climate Change Canada) operates one monitoring station in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve. The station is located on the Lockhart River at the southern end of Artillery Lake and is dedicated to providing only hydrometric information (water level and flow). Data available from 2000 to 2005 indicate no abnormal flow conditions for the site. The Ni Hat'ni Dene Rangers have been monitoring water quality in and around the community of Łutsël K'é, Macleod Bay and Christie Bay since 2008, and have periodically shared this data with the Government of Northwest Territories (GNWT) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Data analysis can be used to detect any changes in water quality over time.

- Vegetation

The shores of lakes and rivers within the forested parts of Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve are lined with dense stands of black spruce, white spruce, and white birch. Southern inland



areas are occupied by stands of white spruce and jack pine, with understories consisting of blueberries and cranberries, feather moss and lichens. Northern inland areas are occupied by open stands of black spruce covering thick understories of lichen. In areas that transition from the boreal forest to the barrenlands, stunted black spruce and tamarack sparsely cover dwarf tundra vegetation and exposed bedrock. Greater detail about the distribution and status of vascular plants in the National Park Reserve will be determined with species inventories. Historical records indicate that one 'At Risk' species may occur in the area. The Canadian Museum of Nature retains a sample of Mackenzie Hairgrass (*Deschampsia mackenzieana*), a plant listed as Special Concern on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*, that was collected near Fort Reliance in 1927.

- Wildlife

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve is home to plethora of wildlife species. Information, particularly traditional knowledge, is most abundant for large bodied mammals and fur bearers because of their cultural and social importance within Indigenous cultures. Hunting and trapping of caribou, moose, muskox, wolf, lynx, wolverine, beaver, red fox, otter, marten, muskrat, mink, snowshoe and Arctic hare provide food and economic benefit to Indigenous peoples. In total, 42 species of mammals are known to inhabit the National Park Reserve. Of those, 4 species are listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*: Little Brown Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), and Northern Myotis (*Myotis septentrionalis*) are listed as Endangered; and Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) and Wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) are listed as Special Concern. Four herds of Barren-ground Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) – the Bathurst, Beverly, Ahiak, and Qamanirjuaq - are of vital importance to Indigenous peoples and are known to occur in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve. Although not yet listed on Schedule 1, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has assessed Barren-ground Caribou as Threatened. All three herds are listed as Threatened under NWT species at risk legislation, with the Bathurst herd being intensely managed after a continued and significant decline in numbers. In light of this, Łutsël K'édé First Nation has recently approved a Caribou Stewardship Plan (called *Yúnethé Xá ǰetthën Hádi*) that includes a self-imposed 2-year moratorium on hunting caribou from the Bathurst herd. Other plans (e.g., Bathurst Caribou Plan), co-management boards and harvest restrictions have also been established to protect and manage these herds.

Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve is also home to approximately 171 bird species; however, species inventories and consistent monitoring are needed to confirm the numbers and status of landbirds, waterfowl and shorebirds. Of note, ten species of hawks and falcons, two eagle species, osprey and six owl species also occur in the area. Islands and cliffs in the area are known to be important nesting habitat for breeding birds and many rocky islands host colonies of gulls and terns. Several species thought to be present in the National Park Reserve are listed on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*: Bank Swallow (*Riparia riparia*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), and Olive-sided Flycatcher (*Contopus cooperi*) are listed as Threatened; and Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*), Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*), and Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) are listed as Special Concern. Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) is not listed on Schedule 1, but it has been assessed by COSEWIC as a species of Special Concern.



Although not yet confirmed, 5 amphibian species (i.e., frogs, toads and salamanders) are expected to occur in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve. Of these, only one species is considered to be 'At Risk'. The Northern Leopard Frog (*Lithobates pipiens*) is listed as Endangered on Schedule 1 of the *Species at Risk Act*.

There are 28 species of freshwater and anadromous fish known to occur in Great Slave Lake and its tributaries. Sport and subsistence fishing activities occur throughout the area. Fish species of particular importance within Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve include: Lake Trout, Lake Whitefish, Burbot, Northern Pike, Walleye and Arctic Grayling.

**7. IMPACT ASSESSMENT** (posted as part of the Development Description on the preliminary screening section of the Mackenzie Valley Review Board's public registry)

See "*Interim Best Management Practices for Guide Outfitter Operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve*".

**8. MITIGATION MEASURES** (posted as part of the Development Description on the preliminary screening section of the Mackenzie Valley Review Board's public registry)

As part of the terms and condition of a business licence, operators will adhere to the mitigations described in the *Interim Best Management Practices for Guide Outfitter Operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve* and, when applicable, the *Interim Best Management Practices for Fuel Caching in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve*.

**9. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESIDUAL ADVERSE EFFECTS**

Given the limited magnitude of effects and the application of mitigation measures, guide outfitter operations are not expected to cause residual adverse effects to natural, social or cultural environments.

**10. ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION**

Parks Canada staff worked with designated contacts from Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation and Northwest Territory Métis Nation to develop and review the *Interim Best Management Practices for Guide Outfitter Operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve*, and the *Interim Best Management Practices for Fuel Caching in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve* in 2020.

The Development Description for Aircraft operations was the same as last year, with only minor changes. It was reviewed by all Indigenous partners involved with cooperative management prior to the February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021 announcement commencing a 30-day public review of the Development Description.



This preliminary screening document has been reviewed by the two Indigenous partners who, through their establishment agreements, help guide park operations: Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation and Northwest Territories Métis Nation.

### 11.1 Bibliography

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## 12. DECISION

Parks Canada has conducted this preliminary screening of "Guide Outfitter Operations in Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve " (the proposed development) pursuant to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act (ss. 124(2) and 125(1)), and has concluded that it is **not** referring the proposal to the Mackenzie Valley Review Board for environmental assessment.

Taking into account the analysis and implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the analysis, the development:

- ❑ Might have a significant adverse impact on the environment, and the proposal should be referred to the *Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board* for environmental assessment.
- ✓ Does not have a likelihood of causing significant adverse impact on the environment.
- ❑ Might be a cause for public concern, and the proposal should be referred to the *Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board* for environmental assessment.
- ✓ Does not have a likelihood of causing public concern.

## 13. APPROVAL

<b>Prepared by:</b>  <i>Danielle Thompson</i> Ecosystem Scientist, SWNWT Field Unit	Date:  March 09, 2021
<b>Recommended by:</b>  łutsël K'é Dene First Nation (Iris Catholique, Thaidene Nënë Department and Steve Ellis)	Date:  March 11, 2021
<b>Recommended by:</b>  Northwest Territory Métis Nation (Arthur Beck, Paul Harrington, Betty Villeneuve)	Date:  March 29, 2021



<p><b>Approved by:</b></p> <p></p> <hr/> <p><i>Laani Uunila</i> Implementation Manager, Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve</p>	<p><b>Date:</b></p> <p>March 30, 2021</p>
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**Map:** Map of Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve, showing Thaidene Nënë Indigenous Protected Area, Territorial Protected Area, the proposed Wildlife Conservation Area, and core areas proposed for guide outfitter operations within Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve.

