



CANADIAN PARKS AND  
WILDERNESS SOCIETY  
NWT CHAPTER



# Fax

**To:** Hon. Sheila Copps  
Minister of Canadian Heritage

**From:** Greg Yeoman  
Conservation Director  
CPAWS-NWT

**Fax:** (613) 992-2727

**Date:** March 15, 2002

**Pages:** (including cover): 4

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**RE: Threat to Nahanni National Park Reserve from the Prairie Creek Mine**

cc. The Right Honourable Jean Chretien, Prime Minister of Canada  
Grand Chief Michael Nadli, Deh Cho First Nations  
The Honourable Robert Nault, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs  
The Honourable David Anderson, Minister of Environment  
The Honourable Robert G. Thibault, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans  
The Honourable Herb Dhaliwal, Minister of Natural Resources  
Mr Tom Lee, CEO, Parks Canada Agency  
Mr. Vern Christensen, Executive Director, MVEIRB  
Mr. Bob Wooley, Executive Director, MVLWB  
Annalisa Koeman IUCN Programme on Protected Areas

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March 15, 2002

The Hon. Sheila Copps, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Canadian Heritage  
15 Eddy Street, 12th Floor  
Hull, Quebec K1A 0M5  
Telephone: (819) 997-7788  
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**Re: Threat to Nahanni National Park Reserve from the Prairie Creek Mine**

Dear Minister Copps:

CPAWS-NWT is writing in response to the most recent Environmental Assessment report on the Prairie Creek mine. The report states that the Prairie Creek mine threatens the ecological integrity of the Nahanni National Park Reserve and World Heritage Site. The report also states that the environmental assessment process is not the forum to resolve these conflicts, and invites you and your colleague Minister Nault to step forward to ensure protection for the region.

We would like to take this opportunity to outline the threats posed by the Prairie Creek mine, and to respectfully urge you to take immediate action to protect this internationally significant area.

**Threats from the Prairie Creek Mine**

The Prairie Creek mine is in a steep narrow valley 32 km upstream from the NNPR boundary. The existing infrastructure at the mine site includes:

- large fuel storage tanks filled with fuel that has been there for 20 years;
- cyanide and PCBs that have been stored outdoors near Prairie Creek for 20 years;
- a tailings pond that sits within metres of Prairie Creek.

This area has a history of earthquakes as high as 6.9 on the Richter Scale along with associated rock slides. The area is also prone to flash floods. The Prairie Creek mine site is a potential disaster waiting to happen, and it poses a serious threat to one of this country's most spectacular wilderness areas. Surprisingly there is no current surface lease for the mine site, and apparently no security deposit has been posted, a situation which has been allowed to continue for several years.

In addition to the threats that exist at the site now, there are also additional threats if the mine proceeds. We understand that the ore body proposed for mining has extremely high

concentrations of mercury, and also contains arsenic and antimony. This raises more concerns about contamination of Prairie Creek if the mine goes ahead. In order to be economically viable, the mine would also need an access road. Any road to the mine site would travel across an area of globally unique Karst formations that Parks Canada has identified as an area of high conservation value and of interest for park expansion.

#### **Findings of the Environmental Assessment Report**

The most recent environmental assessment report on the Prairie Creek mine identifies significant environmental impacts from the proposed developments. We would like to reinforce that you are identified as a responsible minister in this Environmental Assessment process. We believe that this presents you with an important opportunity to actively protect this internationally significant wilderness area for all time.

The MVEIRB is inviting you to exercise your responsibility and work with your colleague, Minister Nault, to ensure that the ecological integrity of Nahanni National Park Reserve is not compromised by inappropriate development just outside its boundaries. If no action is taken, and the status quo is maintained, the mine will proceed and the Park Reserve and Greater Nahanni Ecosystem will be put at even greater risk.

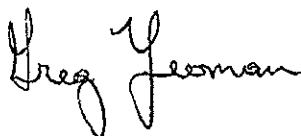
We believe that the following immediate actions are needed to protect Nahanni National Park Reserve:

- That you deliver a strong message to Minister Nault that the Prairie Creek mine is a serious threat to the future integrity of Nahanni National Park Reserve, and undermines the Government of Canada's ability to fulfil its commitments under the Canada National Parks Act, and its international commitments under UNESCO's World Heritage Convention;
- That you request Minister Nault to immediately ensure that the cyanide, PCBs, and other contaminants at the Prairie Creek mine site are cleaned up and removed before an environmental disaster occurs; and
- That Parks Canada request that the Environmental Assessment of the Prairie Creek mine move to a CEAA Joint Panel Review under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act given the national interest that surrounds the future of Nahanni National Park Reserve;
- That Parks Canada indicate to the Deh Cho First Nation and to Minister Nault a strong interest in protecting the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem from industrial development through the Deh Cho Process.

Minister, you are responsible for protecting a world-renowned site that was set aside through the passion for wilderness and decisive action of former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Through his vision, and with the aid of current Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Jean Chretien, Nahanni was protected from development in the 1970s. We urge you to carry forward this vision into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and take bold steps to ensure the long-term protection of Nahanni National Park Reserve and the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem.

We look forward to a response indicating the steps you and your Ministry will take to address the threats to Nahanni National Park Reserve posed by the Prairie Creek mine, and the position that Parks Canada will take on protection of the Greater Nahanni Ecosystem through the Deh Cho Process.

Sincerely



Greg Yeoman  
Conservation Director  
CPAWS-NWT Chapter

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