

A proud day for Canada: Nahanni becomes one of world's greatest parks

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The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) is celebrating the historic announcement today by Environment Minister Jim Prentice and DehCho First Nations Grand Chief Gerald Antoine of the final boundaries for the greatly expanded Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories.

The world famous park reserve is now nearly seven times the size of the original one established in 1972. It will permanently protect over 30,000 km² of Boreal wilderness - an area the size of Vancouver Island.

"The Nahanni is the jewel of Canada's Boreal forest, and one of the world's greatest wilderness treasures. Canada has shown true global leadership by protecting it," says CPAWS National Executive Director Eric Hébert-Daly.

"With this announcement the federal government has created a national park that can take its place alongside Banff and Jasper as one of the world's great protected areas," says Harvey Locke, CPAWS Senior Advisor for Conservation.

The announcement of final boundaries comes nearly two years after Prime Minister Harper and former Environment Minister John Baird promised a massive expansion of the park, crowning years of collective work by CPAWS, local First Nations and many

others to convince the federal government to permanently protect this iconic wilderness area.

"The elders of Nahanni Butte and the leaders of the Dehcho First Nations were determined to see this through," says Lani Cook, Executive Director of CPAWS NWT Chapter. "For the past nine years, we have been honoured to work closely with them to get protection for the Nahanni."

National campaign led to Nahanni's protection

Today's announcement caps a 35-year effort by CPAWS to expand Nahanni National Park Reserve. When the CPAWS' campaign went national six years ago, thousands of Canadians across the country became involved, writing letters and demonstrating their support.

"Nahanni's popularity and iconic status are well-deserved," adds Locke.

The Nahanni is a spectacular example of intact Boreal wilderness that is also of spiritual importance to local First Nations. The watershed contains Virginia Falls, which is twice the height of Niagara, deep canyons, and unique limestone caves and formations. It is home to woodland caribou, grizzly bears, mountain goats, and Dall's sheep.

"It's no exaggeration to say that the Nahanni is an ecological treasure of global significance. Today's announcement guarantees its future and promises that generations of Dehcho First Nations, northerners, other Canadians, and visitors from around the world will have the chance to experience this unspoiled wilderness," says Hébert-Daly.

"CPAWS is proud to have played an important part in protecting Nahanni forever. We gratefully acknowledge the support of thousands of Canadians in the North and across the country who made this happen," adds Hébert-Daly.

CPAWS thanks its many supporters over the years on this campaign, including the Canadian Boreal Initiative, the Conservation Alliance, Mountain Equipment Co-op, the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada and Nahanni River Adventures, which along with Blackfeather and Nahanni Wilderness Adventures created a special fund to support CPAWS' efforts to protect Nahanni Forever.

CPAWS will continue to work with the Sahtu Dene and Métis on permanent protection of Nááts'ihch'oh National Park in the Nahanni Headwaters and Sahtu region.

Since 1963, CPAWS has played a leading role in establishing more than two-thirds of Canada's protected areas. Our vision is that Canada will protect at least half of our wilderness forever.