

Baird confirms new national park reserve in N.W.T.

CBC North

Federal Environment Minister John Baird confirmed Monday that he will create a new national park reserve near the Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Northwest Territories.

"I'm happy to be able to tell you that the area in the upper south Nahanni watershed is now protected by an interim land withdrawal, protecting an area 1½ times the size of Prince Edward Island, from future development," Baird said that morning at a news conference in Ottawa.

CBC News reported last month that the Privy Council Office posted an order-in-council announcing the 7,600-kilometre land withdrawal for areas that will make up the Naats'ihch'oh National Park Reserve.

The land, located west of Tulita, N.W.T., has been withdrawn for five years.

Baird also announced \$500,000 over two years to negotiate permanent land protection with the Sahtu Dene and Métis peoples in the area.

"Water is a big part of our life in the North. That is why we wanted to protect all the waters, all the rivers that come to the Mackenzie River," Grand Chief Frank Andrew of the Sahtu Dene Council said at Monday's announcement.

"Listening to the minister talking about the withdrawal of the lands, I'm happy to hear that. Thank you very much."

Naats'ihch'oh — meaning "stands like a porcupine" in the Dene language — will be adjacent to Nahanni National Park Reserve in the Dehcho region.

The area, traditionally known as Begadeh, will take in the upper quarter of the Nahanni watershed, including Mount Wilson and the Mooseponds.

The land is home to Dall's sheep, mountain goats, woodland caribou and moose. It also has the northernmost population of mountain goats in Canada, while upland areas provide calving grounds for woodland caribou during the summer, according to a draft Sahtu Land Use Plan published in 2007.

"The North is witnessing many great changes, including natural resource development. And amongst this development, the greater Nahanni ecosystem — including the upper south Nahanni watershed — has remained, fortunately, a large, relatively intact wilderness area," Baird said.

"Our government intends to work very hard to keep it this way."