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# Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, November 24, 2005**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Alan Tonks**

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## Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development

Thursday, November 24, 2005

• (1540)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, members of the committee. This is a rather interesting time we're slotting in here, given what's happening in the House. We do have extremely interesting subject matter, and we're pleased to have our representatives from Parks Canada here.

This is the 62nd meeting of this committee. It may seem either more or less, but it is the 62nd meeting. We are video-conferencing today from the University of Western Ontario. Pursuant to the Standing Orders, we're studying the expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve and Waterton Lakes National Park.

As I say, we have Parks Canada Agency witnesses: Alan Latourelle, who's the CEO, and Kevin McNamee, director for parks establishment. From the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society we have Timothy Feher, executive director; Alison Woodley, northern conservation specialist; and—through video-conference—Harvey Locke, senior conservation adviser. As well, from the Deh Cho First Nations, we have Grand Chief Herb Norwegian.

Welcome to all of you. Thank you to the members of the committee for being here so promptly; I know other meetings are going on.

Without any further ado, we'll pass it to Mr. Latourelle immediately. Then we'll play it by ear in terms of who else would like to follow you. We'll get to questions and answers as quickly as possible.

I think you've been here before, so you know the routine. It's ten minutes of questioning through the parties, and then we go to five minutes of questioning.

Grand Chief and Harvey Locke, can you hear what we're saying now? Is everything coming through? Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Latourelle.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alan Latourelle (Chief Executive Officer, Parks Canada Agency):** Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the invitation to present the perspective of Parks Canada on the proposed expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada.

Expansion of Nahanni is a goal under the federal government's October 2002 Action Plan to Protect Canada's Natural Heritage which called for the creation of 10 new national parks and 5 new national marine conservation areas and the expansion of 3 existing national parks.

The lands and waters protected in Nahanni National Park Reserve are of national and international significance. Yet this global trust remains incomplete. Since 1984, the Government of Canada, through Parks Canada, has been on record as wanting to expand Nahanni. Scientists, the Deh Cho First Nations, and Canadians have encouraged us to take action to further protect the watershed that gives life to the waters and the wildlife that is Nahanni.

[English]

This afternoon, I would like to briefly provide you with some background on Nahanni National Park Reserve, the rationale for the expansion, and the process we at Parks Canada will be following.

If there is one message I would like to leave with the committee, it's that Parks Canada is committed to working with the first nations in whose traditional territory we are contemplating an expansion, and that we will consult broadly on this initiative. In the end, Parliament will clearly have the final say on the expansion of this national park reserve.

Parliament formally established Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada in 1976, legally protecting it as Canada's 26th national park under the Canada National Parks Act. It was established as a national park reserve in view of the fact that there are still outstanding land claims to the area, claims that had been accepted by the Government of Canada. It will only become a full-fledged national park once an accord has been reached with the Deh Cho First Nations.

Nahanni National Park Reserve is of global significance. In 1978, it was the first area added by UNESCO to its list of world heritage sites. In fact, it was added before the Galapagos Islands and Yellowstone National Park. Thus, in the eyes of the world, Nahanni is truly a special place. There are only 13 sites in Canada designated as world heritage sites, eight of them being national parks.

Nahanni received this prestigious designation because of the ongoing geological processes and the superlative natural phenomena protected by the park. In UNESCO's view, Nahanni is special because it is an unexploited natural area. The presence in this area of three river canyons cutting at right angles to the mountain ranges, with walls up to 1,000 metres high; the dramatic Virginia Falls, which drops over 90 metres; the hot springs, sinkholes, and tufa mounds of the Rabbit Kettle Hotsprings; and the karst topography are a combination unique in the world.

• (1545)

[Translation]

Here too we find a diverse assemblage of plants, almost 700 species in total. There is undisturbed habitat for large carnivores such as black and grizzly bears, and wolves. Ungulates such as Dall's sheep, mountain goats, woodland caribou and moose, as well as 180 bird species, find habitat upon which they thrive. This totality of life amidst a spectacular and evolving landscape makes this area truly a national treasure.

Thus, we not only have a national responsibility to protect the ecological health of Nahanni National Park Reserve under the Canada National Parks Act for the benefit, education and enjoyment of Canadians, we have a global responsibility.

[English]

Up to this point, I have spoken only of the ecological importance or significance of Nahanni National Park Reserve. Long before planners with Parks Canada or canoeists from southern Canada discovered the Nahanni, the Dene peoples used the lands in and around the park reserve for thousands of years. Long before the legends of the haunted valleys and lost gold, the Naha tribe, a mountain-dwelling people, and later the Mountain Dene, were moving through and sustaining themselves in the rich diversity of life that is the Nahanni.

To achieve an expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve into the headwaters of the South Nahanni River watershed must and will require the full support and cooperation of the Deh Cho First Nations as well as the Sahtu Dene further to the northwest. The Nahanni watershed is 39,000 square kilometres in size and it spans the territory of the Deh Cho and the Sahtu.

As early as 1977, attention was being drawn to the inadequacies of the boundaries of Nahanni. In fact, in considering and approving the nomination of Nahanni National Park Reserve for world heritage status, the World Heritage Committee stated that "It would be desirable to incorporate the entire upstream watershed in the World Heritage Site."

In 1977, in response to public appeals, the minister responsible for Parks Canada directed Parks Canada officials to examine the possibility of expanding Nahanni National Park Reserve to include more of the headwaters of the South Nahanni and the internationally significant karst terrain. Several studies were conducted to further assess this potential.

However, between 1983 and 1987, when Parks Canada first consulted on the possibility of expanding the boundaries of the park as part of the development of its first management plan, it had not engaged in discussions with the Deh Cho First Nations. However, due to the lack of progress on the outstanding land claims of the Dene and Métis in the larger areas, little progress has been made.

In January 2000 a delegation from the Deh Cho First Nations met with my predecessor, proposing that Nahanni National Park Reserve be expanded to embrace part of the entire South Nahanni watershed. This led to the signing, in 2003, of a memorandum of understanding between the federal minister responsible for Parks Canada and the Grand Chief of the Deh Cho First Nations that committed both

parties to work together to identify and consult on a boundary for an expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve by September 2006.

Let me now address the rationale for boundary expansion.

[Translation]

First, in its current configuration, the park reserve protects only a narrow corridor along the rivers and includes only one complete sub-watershed.

Second, it is the relative isolation and wilderness condition of the larger watershed outside the park reserve that has provided de facto protection of the park reserve. However, given existing and proposed activities on land within the watershed, such as mineral exploration and development and road development, the ecological health of the park is increasingly at risk.

[English]

Third, a major goal of the national park is to represent the MacKenzie Mountains natural region of the national park system. The inclusion of a number of representative features will vastly improve the park reserve's ability to both represent this natural region and maintain its ecological integrity.

For example, by including the Ragged Range, we would protect calving and rutting areas for woodland caribou, important grizzly bear habitat, and several intact watershed sub-basins. By including the Tlogotsho Plateau, we would protect prime Dall sheep range and the largest known fall and wintering habitat for moose in the region. The Nahanni karst belt is increasingly recognized as unique in the world. Briefly, karst landscapes are moulded by the dissolving action of rainwater on soluble rocks such as limestone, producing springs, caves, towers, arches, and canyons.

Fourth, a major role of the national park reserve is found in the conservation of wildlife habitat. The park boundary does not currently include a number of sub-watersheds, critical habitat, and animal movement corridors. Their absence from the park—and if they're developed—could jeopardize the ecological integrity of the park.

At this point, Mr. Chairman, I would like to make it clear that Parks Canada's overall interest and primary concern in the Nahanni region is the protection of the ecological integrity of the entire Nahanni watershed, or what the Deh Cho call Naha Dehe. This is key to maintaining the natural and cultural values of this landscape.

It is through the conservation of the entire watershed that we will meet our obligation to pass on, unimpaired, to future generations all of the spectacular features and wildlife that make Nahanni globally unique. Further to this, our interest is in working with the first nations, including the Deh Cho and Sahtu, to achieve this conservation goal.

Our primary goal is to achieve an expanded national park reserve boundary that will protect the key features of the Nahanni, as I've described previously. This vision, jointly developed with elders, community leaders, government agencies, research scientists, and other interest groups, calls for the protection of the wilderness watershed, protection of special features, sustainable wildlife populations, and the continuation of traditional subsistence harvesting.

What that final boundary will look like depends on the results of joint work of the Parks Canada and Deh Cho working group established under the MOU, the results of an ongoing mineral and energy resource assessment, and consultation with stakeholders, first nations communities, and Canadians.

At the same time, we must respect the existing tenures and licences by either accommodating them where possible through boundary definition or purchasing them on the willing seller and willing buyer basis.

I would also like to point out to the committee that the national park is an essential element of the Deh Cho process, which will determine the ultimate terms under which it will be established as a national park.

It is also through the Deh Cho process that there is currently interim protection in place within the Deh Cho portion of the watershed. This withdrawal, plus the existing park area, protects two-thirds of the overall watershed from further allocation to exploration or development. It does not impact on traditional activities or on commercial outfitters. Parks Canada officials continue to meet with leaders in the Sahtu regarding the potential to put in place a land withdrawal to provide interim protection to the watershed within their territory.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to make the following points.

The final expansion will proceed only through the Deh Cho process and if an agreement is reached with the Sahtu for their portion of the watershed. In cases where there are private or commercial interests such as mines, Parks Canada does not expropriate. We proceed on a willing seller and willing buyer basis, and only if we have the need, the interest, and the funds.

Public consultations on the expansion will begin once the mineral and energy resource assessments have been completed by the Geological Survey of Canada and reviewed by the Department of Indian Affairs, Natural Resources Canada, Parks Canada, and the Government of the Northwest Territories. Ecological and economic information will be available to the public through an extensive public consultation process.

• (1550)

Finally, as I mentioned before, Parliament will have the final say on the expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve, as any changes to the boundaries need to be introduced in both houses.

Expansion is clearly not the unilateral decision of Parks Canada. Parks Canada will submit to the government a report on the expansion, including the results of the consultations. The government will then make a proposal to both the House of Commons and the Senate, so that there will be an opportunity to debate the proposed expansion.

In closing, the Government of Canada is committed to expanding the boundaries of the Nahanni National Park Reserve, but only through due process, which includes a mineral assessment, public consultations, and reaching cooperative management arrangements with first nations.

Thank you very much.

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Latourelle.

Mr. Latourelle, I understand that you will have to leave around 4:30, so in the course of things, you'll excuse yourself quietly and the committee will understand.

We'll go to Mr. Feher, and then the order will be Ms. Woodley and Grand Chief Herb Norwegian.

**Mr. Timothy Feher (Executive Director, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee today, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to committee members as well.

My name is Timothy Feher. I'm the national executive director for CPAWS, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

Since 1963, CPAWS has been Canada's community voice for wilderness protection. In our view, wilderness really defines the Canadian identity, and as we say at the Nahanni, some things should just last forever.

CPAWS has 20,000 members engaged by our 13 chapters across Canada, and our work on Nahanni is coordinated by our chapter in the Northwest Territories. We're honoured to have a number of presenters for you today. Of course, we are very honoured to be joined by the Grand Chief of the Deh Cho First Nations, Herb Norwegian, who will join us from London, as well as our CPAWS strategic counsel, Harvey Locke.

First, I'd like to turn the speaking over to our northern conservation specialist who has expertise in this area of Nahanni and Canada's north, Alison Woodley.

**Mrs. Alison Woodley (Northern Conservation Specialist, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society):** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for giving us an opportunity to present our ideas on these important opportunities for nature conservation in Canada.

The expansion of Nahanni and Waterton Lakes National Parks are extremely important priorities for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society.

[*English*]

This afternoon I will focus my comments primarily on the Nahanni expansion. I won't talk about Waterton Lakes National Park except to say that Canada has an extraordinary opportunity, in our view, to fill in the missing piece of the world's first international peace park in Waterton Lakes. CPAWS is deeply committed to this expansion initiative, and my colleague Harvey Locke, who is with us from London today, will be happy to answer questions about this initiative after our speaking. I will focus my comments on the Nahanni.

The CPAWS vision for the Nahanni supports the vision of the local Deh Cho First Nations, that the national park reserve should be expanded to protect the entire watershed of the South Nahanni River, including the Nahanni karst lands. This area is also the area of interest that's formally identified in the Deh Cho and Parks Canada agreement to work towards park expansion. The policy framework, the position of local first nations, and the position of CPAWS, a national conservation organization, are remarkably compatible in the Nahanni, and therein, in our view, lies a great opportunity for a good-news story on conservation.

CPAWS has been involved in working to protect the Nahanni since the last 1960s, when we led a public outcry about a proposal to dam Virginia Falls for hydroelectric development. Virginia Falls is the iconic waterfall that sits at the heart of the current Nahanni National Park Reserve, and in the 1960s there was a proposal to dam this spectacular place. In 1972, after a visit to the area by Pierre Trudeau, Nahanni National Park Reserve was established in the face of this threat of hydro development, thus protecting a narrow corridor along the South Nahanni River.

As Mr. Latourelle has already mentioned, in 1978 the United Nations followed this move by Canada by recognizing the global significance of the Nahanni and included it on the first list of world heritage sites. In fact it was the first natural world heritage site designated. Interestingly, at that time the IUCN, or the World Conservation Union, which is responsible for advising the United Nations on world heritage, in their recommendation to the World Heritage Committee recommended that the entire watershed of the South Nahanni River be designated as a world heritage site. That wasn't done at the time, but we do have the opportunity, a number of years later, to complete this work.

As a signatory to the World Heritage Convention, Canada has promised to do all it can to protect world heritage for future generations of the entire global community.

The timing is particularly good for strong Canadian leadership on world heritage, since Canada, just last month, was elected as one of 21 states on the World Heritage Committee that oversees the application of the convention. Taking strong steps to protect our own world heritage is a starting point for Canada to play a leadership role on this committee and to lead through concrete examples.

Now I'd like to talk a bit about CPAWS involvement on the issue. One of CPAWS's great strengths as an organization is our work to engage the public in protecting Canada's wilderness. Right now we're in the middle of a 17-city, Canada-wide tour called Nahanni Forever. This is why Mr. Locke and Grand Chief Norwegian are in London, Ontario, right now, because tonight they will be presenting the Nahanni Forever event at the University of Western Ontario.

Across the country as part of this tour we've been joined by such well-known Canadians as Justin Trudeau, Cathy Jones of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, Sarah Harmer, a Juno-Award-winning musician, Dr. David Schindler, perhaps the most decorated biologist in Canada, the most award winning, and many others.

I've included some of the media response to our tour today in the briefing packages that I sent to your offices last week, including mention on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* of our launch event

in Toronto. But to me the most rewarding part of this outreach has been the response of individual Canadians who have been inspired by our talking about the Nahanni.

The phones have been ringing steadily since the tour began: Canadians asking what they can do to help protect this special place; people phoning us to tell us how a trip down the South Nahanni River changed their lives; lawyers, teachers, artists, photographers, scientists, all wanting to get involved.

● (1600)

Yesterday I received a call from a boy scout leader who had been to our event at McMaster University and wanted us to send him images of the Nahanni so that he could use this as a case study for the boy scouts who were studying to earn their conservation badge.

The Nahanni really is a place that touches the hearts of Canadians.

There have been very positive steps taken by Parks Canada to date towards expanding Nahanni National Park Reserve. The question that remains, and this is a question that requires a decision by the Government of Canada as a whole, is what will the boundaries be for the park expansion?

As Mr. Latourelle mentioned, the boundaries that were drawn in 1972 protected Virginia Falls and the downstream canyons, but only included 15% of the watershed. They left out the habitat of wide-ranging species of wildlife—for example, woodland caribou, grizzly bears, mountain goats, Dall sheep. All are species that use much more habitat than is protected in the national park and in fact rely on areas far outside the park. The current boundaries obviously don't work for wide-ranging species of wildlife, and the park clearly needs to be expanded to protect these species.

The second priority for the expansion is the need to protect clean water. As long as lands upstream of Nahanni National Park Reserve are open to industrial development, and in particular, mining, which has a history of significant impacts on water quality, we can't ensure clean water in the Nahanni for future generations. Protecting the entire watershed, on the other hand, would secure clean water.

Another area that was omitted from the original park boundaries is the amazing Nahanni karst lands, which are an area of globally significant limestone features. Interestingly, the Nahanni karst lands look like they are outside the watershed of the Nahanni, but much of the water that flows through them flows underground into the South Nahanni River. So it's particularly important to include this area in the expanded park because of its linkage to the water flows within the South Nahanni watershed.

These key values all need better protection in the Nahanni. The question becomes, what are the obstacles to achieving full watershed protection?

Mining development is the main obstacle, and we are particularly concerned about the Prairie Creek mine proposal. We don't believe this mine should be allowed to go ahead in the heart of the Nahanni watershed. It's located just 32 kilometres upstream from the current national park boundary. It sits right beside Prairie Creek, as you can see in the photographs that I provided in the package.

In the brochure, there is a photograph of the mine site. There is a very good, detailed description of the Prairie Creek project in the package I sent last week in an article published last month in the *Edmonton Journal*. I encourage you to read that to get a more detailed description of what is happening at the site and what the history of the site is.

CPAWS views the Prairie Creek mine as a significant threat to the ecological integrity of the current park and of the park expansion. We have serious concerns about the impact of the mine on water quality, given its location. There are, for example, 40 tonnes of cyanide, along with other chemicals, that have been stored a few hundred metres from the creek for 20 years. These kinds of things are a clear risk to the current park, the park expansion, and the ecological integrity of the watershed.

For the mine to go ahead, a mine haul road is needed. The road would pass right through the heart of the sensitive Nahanni karst lands, an area that's vulnerable to groundwater contamination.

Adding to the risk of this mine, and in fact mining in general in the Nahanni, is the natural instability of the region. Two of the largest earthquakes in recent Canadian history occurred in the Nahanni region in 1985, 6.5 and 6.9 on the Richter scale. We don't hear about them because there's not a lot of human infrastructure in the area. These are significant events.

Flash floods have occurred in neighbouring creeks that run parallel to Prairie Creek. This kind of natural instability of the landscape means that any human infrastructure, such as a mine, is vulnerable. It elevates the risk of a catastrophe. We strongly believe this mine should not be allowed to proceed, because it poses too high a risk to a place that Canada has promised the world we will protect.

So what's needed from the Canadian government? Well, Canada has a decision to make. Allowing mining to go ahead would degrade the world-class natural values of the South Nahanni watershed. Protecting the entire watershed would protect them and the Deh Cho culture. We ask that you, as members of the environment committee, join us in supporting full watershed protection in the Nahanni National Park Reserve expansion.

That concludes my comments.

●(1605)

I would like to introduce Grand Chief Herb Norwegian, if that's appropriate.

**The Chair:** Absolutely, Ms. Woodley.

Thank you.

Grand Chief, consider yourself introduced, and thank you for being with us.

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian (Grand Chief, Deh Cho First Nations):** Thanks for allowing me to come to this part of the country to talk about something that's really sensitive in our area.

Again, the Nahanni National Park has been an area we've been really concerned about for the last ten years. Over the course of the years, we've been engaged with Canada in protecting a good part of our territory. The Deh Cho territory is right smack in the middle of the Mackenzie Valley, and one of the big issues we're dealing with right now is on the whole Mackenzie Valley pipeline. That gives you an idea of where we're located.

Over the last few years we've been engaged with Canada in trying to reach a land and governance agreement. One of the big-ticket items for us has been dealing with the South Nahanni watershed. The South Nahanni watershed has been something that has been very close to our hearts over the years.

We got together about six years ago and talked about what we should be doing about the South Nahanni watershed. Elders, environmental groups, park people, and leaders got together for a good four-day conference to talk about the park. At the end of their conclusions, the decision was that the existing park, with the small sliver-sized boundaries that were drawn on each side of the river, wasn't enough to protect the great South Nahanni River.

We then drew a map, and we had drawn the perimeter around the entire watershed. We explained to the elders that if we were going to do any justice to the area, the park would have to be fully expanded. After we drew an area around the whole watershed, it showed that the park would actually expand something like about seven times.

Our people were quite amazed by that, and they said that the water was really a sensitive issue for them. The South Nahanni people live downstream from two existing mines. They were quite concerned that in the event some catastrophe took place, there could be landslides and a blockage of main tributaries. It could very well happen at the Prairie Creek mine that is situated there. It's a matter of time; it's a time bomb. The elders have been very clear about that. They said that water is sacred to them, and they want to have the whole watershed protected.

Over the course of the years, we've been negotiating with Canada. We now have roughly 80% of the watershed withdrawn. Right now there are still areas that have been left open. We need to have Canada onside to completely withdraw the entire area so that we can have the entire watershed fully protected.

As Alison mentioned, we have a co-management agreement that we worked on and signed with Parks Canada a couple of years ago. We're quite pleased that we're at the forefront of jointly managing a very beautiful area with Parks Canada.

We want to take it a little further. We're telling Canada that the mines have to be taken out of the area, and we have to move forward. Over the last few days I have been speaking to numerous people right across Ontario. The feeling is that Canada needs to be onside and needs to actually take a step forward to help us protect a very sacred area.

This is something that has been a lifelong dream for many of us, especially people like Elsie Marcellais and Jonas Marcellais, elders who have been right at the forefront in helping to move this whole item forward. The other day we laid to rest an elder, Leon Sassi, who helped us bring this whole dream right to the doorstep.

As a result, we've done some good stuff. Elders have been onside, and leaders are raring to go. There has been good work done by Alan Latourelle and his parks people, the CPAWS people.

Of course, the good reception that we received across Canada in the last few days has been incredible.

•(1610)

I thought I was the only one who knew about the Nahanni River, because when I have travelled up there I've only seen a few paddlers and people hiking through the area. But coming into southern Ontario and explaining where I came from and describing the land, there are a ton of people who have actually gone through the area and who have, at some point or another, read something about it or seen pictures of it. At these speaking engagements, I talk about the land aspect, the spiritual aspect of that whole area. It's just incredible.

People like you need to take a trip down there and actually see the whole thing to actually believe it. It's spectacular. I'm really honoured that I come from such an area.

Again, I want to thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the time to talk about the area that is so close to our hearts.

Thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Grand Chief.

We were just commenting that the committee would like to go to Fort McMurray, and has agreed that it will. Perhaps we can do a round trip to the Nahanni and take advantage of your invitation, but it won't be for at least a month and a half, I'm afraid.

I think at this point we'll go to the top of the order. Mr. Richardson is going to lead off.

**Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, all of you, for coming, particularly the group from CPAWS, who we don't see as often as our friends from Parks Canada. I appreciate your presentation today on this really very important issue.

I'm going to start with Mr. Latourelle, because I know you have to leave—though I do want to get back to CPAWS.

Could you tell me, just in a nutshell, what the current status is of the park expansion feasibility study, and what the proposed timeline at this point is for park expansion? More specifically, what is the Parks Canada view on the reactivation of the Prairie Creek mine and the winter access road? Is it possible to ensure the expanded park's

ecological integrity, despite an imbedded active zinc mine and access road?

•(1615)

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** In terms of where we're at in the process, we're completing our ecological studies and are at the same time working with the Geological Survey of Canada, which is completing the mineral and energy resource assessments. The objective is to have that work completed by early 2006 and then to initiate the public consultation discussions in 2006 and, clearly, to work with the Deh Cho First Nations. The ultimate objective is a park expansion agreement with the Deh Cho First Nations by 2008.

In terms of the mine, I maybe just want to speak about the legislative framework in which we operate, because I think it's critical to understanding the issue. As we expand or create new parks everywhere in Canada, we do not have the authority to expropriate. When there's mining or forestry or other activities surrounding a park, we work with them in terms of environmental leadership standards, which is one way; in other cases, we bought out some commercial interests. So I think in terms of the mine, there are different options at this point, but we can't go in there and say we're going to expropriate it; we can't do that.

If we had interests financially speaking, and if we had the funding to purchase it, that's one option. At this point, though, we haven't looked at that option because of the cost implications.

We work with the proponents—and also through the approval processes, such as some of the Mackenzie Valley review boards—to provide our expertise and our knowledge about the potential implications for the national park reserve.

**Mr. Lee Richardson:** I was listening to you mention your expropriation opportunities, and the lack of them in these cases. Do they have title to this land, these commercial developments, and are there other commercial developments in the proposed conservation area?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** There are two mines: Canadian Zinc and another mine. There are also large outfitters that have commercial interests. As we negotiate new national park expansions, mining is somewhat a challenge, but we've been able to successfully work with other commercial interests to come to an acceptable resolution with all parties involved. Even in mining or exploration, in some places.... For example, Shell Canada has given up its rights in British Columbia, in some parts of the Gwaii Haanas, the proposed national marine conservation area we have there. We do work with the oil and gas industry. In some cases, like in B.C., they have freely given up their rights.

**Mr. Lee Richardson:** Thank you.

I must say, I'm very encouraged. I hope that was an invitation, Grand Chief Norwegian, to this committee to come and visit Nahanni. I'm sure those of us here, and I wanted to mention particularly our environment critic, Mr. Mills, have a very keen interest in Nahanni and the expansion. I'm sorry he's not able to be with us today, and he asked me to express his regrets to you. I know that you speak to him on a regular basis.

I'm going to pass to Mr. Jean for this round, and then we'll get back to questions.

**Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC):** Thank you.

Thank you again for attending today.

I'm curious as to why the areas were left out of the original park. I'm not sure who can answer that, but there were obviously specific areas left out. You referred to it, Ms. Woodley, and I'm curious as to why. Were there specific reasons why they were left out?

**Mr. Harvey Locke (Senior Conservation Advisor, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society):** Do you want me to speak to that a little?

• (1620)

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Sure, Mr. Locke.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** The only way you can understand the current boundary of Nahanni National Park is to understand that it was designed to prevent hydroelectric development. It's a very irregular boundary that follows where the Flat River and the Nahanni River would have had a volume drop to create hydro development. If you look inside that brochure, you can see that it's very much a park about a river.

There were evaluations done by the Canadian Wildlife Service at the time the park was established that said that a much more rational boundary was needed, from a nature point of view. It's our understanding, through institutional memory, I guess, that it was always understood that more was to follow on this park, and that what was being done was what was necessary to secure the immediate threat.

The problem has been that we've been waiting 30 years for that follow-up, and it hasn't happened. And now we have an acute problem with this Prairie Creek mine proposal, which was abandoned at one point but is now being put on the table, with an access road being proposed across some of the very lands you would include in the park. That is what has made this issue urgent. We view it as very urgent that Canada make a decision, one way or the other, about whether this area will be fully protected or whether it will be degraded by the proposed mine being operationalized.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I'm curious, as well, and excuse my ignorance, but it appears that the rivers flow from north to south in an easterly direction. Is that correct?

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Yes, broadly speaking, they flow from the Yukon and Northwest Territory divide in the west, east towards the Mackenzie River, on an angle northwest to southeast.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** That's how it appears. But I'm curious. Is there any type of control we have over any damage that would come from Alaska?

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** There's nothing upstream of the South Nahanni watershed other than the Continental Divide. Alaska, being farther away, is not a hazard in any way. Any activity in Alaska would not be a hazard to the Nahanni. The Yukon is actually in between the Nahanni and Alaska.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** If we were to expand the park boundaries, would we have anything that would affect the natural area itself that was beyond our control, in essence?

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Happily, the air quality and the things that travel, but not by land, are not really a big problem in that part of the world. It's not like southern Ontario, with emissions from coal-fired plants that come up from the Ohio Valley or something. We're dealing with a very healthy, natural system up there, with very large, intact landscapes, so far.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I live in Fort McMurray, which has the Clearwater River, which is also a heritage river. I know it's very difficult to protect that area, especially at this stage, with all the leaching that goes in, but it's nice to see something like this.

You mentioned two mines and some outfitters. The outfitters would have a minimal impact on the environment in that particular area, I would suggest, depending on what they did. Except for the mines, are there any major threats to the area?

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** No. Happily, this is not a very complex problem. We have one old mine that has caused some issues, but it's almost done and needs to be reclaimed. Now we have this new proposal. So we're right at the point where we can clean up what's been done and prevent a further threat. Getting the guide outfitters out of the area is something that I'm sure could be negotiated in some amenable way. The list is very short after that.

One of the concerns, though—and Grand Chief Norwegian spoke to this—is some of the area has remained open to staking of mineral claims. So even as we sit here, the government has not fully protected the area while they're studying it. We're very concerned that things could worsen and the condition could deteriorate.

Do you want to speak to that, Grand Chief?

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** It's quite a sensitive area. I think we're talking about Prairie Creek. It's a mine that's situated in a valley that's probably about 50 or 60 kilometres long. You have a mine situated right in this sensitive area. Over a few years we've seen some pretty dangerous stuff happen up in that part of the country because of earthquakes, and of course snowfalls.

On what we see happening in the next years to come, a slide could very well block off the entrance of Prairie Creek. You would end up with about a 50-kilometre-long lake that would totally wipe out the mine, which is situated right at water level. So we're really concerned about that.

This is a time bomb. It's just a matter of time before something happens. It's quite common for these rivers up in that part of the country to be flooded over because of landslides and rock slides. It's quite rough country. So we need to look at this issue and try to deal with it right away.

• (1625)

**Mr. Brian Jean:** How many of the Nahanni people would be affected?

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** In the community of Nahanni, about 100 people live downstream at the mouth of the south Nahanni. Then you continue on down the Liard River, which the south Nahanni drains into. Then you come to the large community of Fort Simpson. There are about 1,200 to 1,400 people living there. Then going down the Mackenzie River, the next communities are Wrigley, with about another 150 people, Tulita, Norman Wells, Good Hope, Inuvik, Tuktoyaktuk, and all the other communities. So there would be a domino effect. It's just a matter of time before something like this takes place.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jean.

Mr. Bigras, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ):** Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I only have a few questions. The first one is for Mr. Latourelle. Please excuse my ignorance, but I would like you to explain the impact that will be caused by the changing of a national reserve into a national park. This is the first time that I have come across something like this. What impact will it have on the classification of protected areas? Have there been many similar precedents?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** There are national park reserves in many parts of Canada. A reserve is established instead of a national park if the land claim process has not yet been completed. When there is a land claim agreement, a reserve can be changed to a national park. In order to have a national park reserve, the rights of the aboriginal community must not be affected, as is the case here.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** My next question is to the Grand Chief. In what way, if any, will this new management impact your traditional activities?

[English]

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** Thanks. That's a good question.

We have a co-management agreement with Parks Canada, which we've worked on for about the last four years. Right now we have an agreement to jointly manage the park. Aboriginal activities, the ability for us to continue to hunt and trap, will be ongoing. Our people will still be able to harvest the area, because we see ourselves as part of the cycle of the way the animals function in the park. We're part of the cycle as carnivores, so we actually play a major part in balancing the whole system within the watershed.

First nations will continue to hunt, trap, and be able to harvest. That's going to be the key component for the first nations. The ability to continue their way of life is the centrepiece of this agreement.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I note that feasibility studies have been requested for the expansion of Waterton Lakes National Park. Everyone but the provincial government seems to be in agreement. Can you give us a progress report on this project and explain British Columbia's objections?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** When National Parks are expanded, we make sure that we have the support and collaboration of the provincial governments. In this case, British Columbia entered into an agreement with Canada, providing for the creation of certain

parcs and the creation of national marine conservation areas in that province. However, the BC government was not willing to support feasibility studies on expanding the Waterton Lake National Park of Canada. Parks Canada cannot carry out feasibility studies without the support of the province.

• (1630)

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** What reasons did British Columbia give for not supporting the study?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** It was a government decision. The BC government did not tell us what led them to this decision. It was taken by cabinet.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I see.

As regards mining, did the International Joint Commission consider this issue? Did it give its opinion? Do you believe that the IJC should play a greater role because of the negative environmental consequences south of the border?

**The Chair:** Who is the question for?

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** The question is for everyone.

[English]

**The Chair:** It's whoever can answer.

[Translation]

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** It is my area, I work in it a lot, I will try to answer.

Twenty years ago, the International Joint Commission carried out a major study on a coal mine to be built on the shores of Flathead River, which flows from Canada to the U.S. The commission said that a mine located in that area could pose a problem. The commission wanted a detailed study of the ecosystem on both sides of the border. The study was never done, and in our opinion, it would be good to carry out an extensive study on all proposed mines because of the very high coal prices, as they currently are... [Editor's Note: *Technical difficulty*] ...many mines as well as methane derived from coal and propose several areas.

A study on carnivores shows that this area has the highest concentration of grizzlies and all carnivore species in North America. Water is also very precious because the Flathead River is... [Editor's Note: *Technical difficulty*] ...in the U.S. To our mind, current management of the region by the BC government is inadequate in protecting the region's wealth and assets. We believe that a major study should be done and that the IJC should be involved.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** What does Parks Canada think of that?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I cannot speak for all government programs, nor for Parks Canada and how it views the program. We work with different stakeholders; in this case, they are the provinces and territories. We cannot bring any influence to bear so long as support is lacking. We can carry out feasibility studies. That is what we suggest when we have the province's support. In this case, we do not have their support. We are still very interested in this area, as well as its ecologic importance, but we respect the rights of provinces. Ultimately, the parks are on their lands.

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bigras.

Mr. Powers.

**Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Library of Parliament staff have given us a kind of situation analysis of what's going on, and I'll start off by asking some questions.

There's an agreement between Canada, the Regional District of East Kootenay, and the Ktunaxa Nation with regard to moving ahead on a proposal, and the Province of British Columbia and the State of Montana seem to have either a parallel or a different agreement on things such as that. The first question is, why hasn't British Columbia bought in? I'll make some assumptions and people can tell us otherwise, but perhaps first you can explain why the British Columbia government isn't privy to something that at first blush makes so much sense.

•(1635)

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I think it would be inappropriate for me to try to represent the position of the Government of British Columbia.

Here's a positive perspective. I think we need to appreciate that we've established a Gulf Islands National Park Reserve through the agreement with British Columbia. We've jointly agreed to move forward on two national marine conservation areas. We've also agreed to do a feasibility study, which we're carrying out now in the south Okanagan-Similkameen area. So we have an agreement with British Columbia to proceed on four protected areas, one of which has now been established as a national park reserve.

Now, as to why British Columbia at this point in time has not accepted our offer for a feasibility study, I think it would be inappropriate for me to comment on that.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** According to a report out of the British Columbia provincial government, they're developing a southern Rocky Mountain management plan that aims to balance economic interests, the needs of people in the region, and the environmental concerns but does not include the expansion of the park. I think just by laying out those terms you can perhaps see below the surface as to where their intentions are, and I encourage you to get them onside and get a partnership here.

Notwithstanding that, I'd like to perhaps move on to the watershed. I've had a goodly number of years of involvement in watershed and as members of the conservation authorities in the province of Ontario.... As you're aware, there are 38 that are established as a result of defined watersheds, and I'm quite knowledgeable about that.

In the report I have it's unfortunately in shades of grey and black, and all I can do is assume what it says: the original or the current park, the expansion.... Are we doubling it, tripling it, or whatever the case is? And then I'll lead into my questions about watershed.

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** In terms of size, the current park is approximately 4,700 square kilometres. The entire watershed is close to 40,000 square kilometres. For comparison, Wood Buffalo

National Park in the Northwest Territories and Alberta is 44,000 square kilometres, so it gives you an order of magnitude.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Ms. Woodley, in your remarks you've made reference to what I'll call the subterranean watersheds and things like that. On the map as proposed, is that encompassed within that 40,000...? Does the area defined here take into consideration the legitimate concerns you have with regard to true watersheds?

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Yes, the area of interest for the park expansion includes both the South Nahanni watershed and the adjacent Nahanni karst-land areas, which are where these subterranean drainage issues are so important. Actually, that area is under an interim land withdrawal currently.

Our concern, though, is with the access road that would run through that area to the Prairie Creek mine. If the mine were to go ahead, it would run very close to some of the globally unique karst features that are in that area, and karst landscapes are very vulnerable to groundwater contamination. That water moves very quickly, and it moves underground in directions we don't always expect, so with respect to any spills either of fuel or of chemicals that may occur, the potential impact of contamination from there just being a mine haul road over a long period of time leads us to have concerns about the possibility of that haul road going through that.

If the park expansion occurred and left a hole in the middle, a mine, and an access road across the karst lands, we would be in a situation where we would have exactly that, a globally significant national park with a hole in the middle and a mine haul road through it. Our opinion is that's not what the people of Canada would really appreciate or expect of us in such a globally unique environment.

•(1640)

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Dr. Derek Ford, who was a colleague of mine at McMaster University, and I located a karst area just above the city of Hamilton. It's now part of one of the conservation areas. Dr. Ford has clearly identified the radiation effect, if you want to call it that, of the karst.

Your best intention is that you drop the water in here and you would suspect it might come out there, but that's not the case. So I think the rationale that you're outlining, not only the unique feature of a karst.... There are not a lot of them around. You have to have the right combination of sedimentation and rock values and things like that. When you identify a karst and there's some way you can incorporate it, in my opinion, it will make another unique feature of Nahanni. Like probably all of my colleagues here, I've heard about it and I've seen the pictures, but the characteristics are just so much sense.

With regard to watersheds, I'm a firm believer that what you put in upstream has an adverse effect not only along the stream, but at the bottom end. I think Montana and even British Columbia and those particular areas have indicated the potentially detrimental impact it could be outside of the borders, which would affect everything inside and downstream.

I probably have a minute if somebody would like to comment on that. I can always come back to that question later on.

**The Chair:** Mr. Locke.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Sure. The downstream effect on Montana is a major preoccupation for our American friends in the Flathead River system. A lot of that doesn't have much to do with the national park proposal but rather with the coal and coal bed methane values that are upstream, in particular a proposal that's moving along now rather quickly.

It's really interesting. The Flathead River in the United States is a very, very famous place, and in Canada it's not very well known. It's just a cultural difference. There's a lot of concern there. That's why your briefing notes contain information about that, because it's a cultural icon for Americans.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Powers.

Mr. Watson, any questions?

**Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the panellists for appearing here today.

Allow me just a second as I gather my thoughts. Forgive me if I've missed this in the presentation; I think it probably was touched upon. What is the current status again of the feasibility study with respect to the Nahanni National Park Reserve? When is that expected to be completed?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I hope I give you exactly the same answer as before.

Currently, we're completing our ecological studies. At the same time, the Geological Survey of Canada is completing the mineral and energy resource assessments. That should all be completed by early 2006. It's our intent to initiate the public consultation program at that point.

The objective is to reach an agreement with the Deh Cho First Nations by 2008. That's what we've committed to do in terms of the existing memorandum of understanding we have signed with the Deh Cho First Nations.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Does the feasibility study include such things as the cost for purchasing the existing mines in the region?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** The feasibility study looks at the proposed boundaries for the national park expansion, the mineral interests or mineral potential, and the ecological values that are in the area. Based mostly on those issues, clearly that would identify the public consultation interest that may come out through that process. We need to recognize that it is through the Deh Cho process and the negotiations between Canada and the Deh Cho First Nations that the final boundary will be agreed to. It will then be recommended to the government and submitted to Parliament.

• (1645)

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Okay.

At what point in the process will there be a discussion about the cost of purchasing mines, if that's an option that is going to be pursued down the road?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** Once we have the boundary and we have a good understanding of where the final boundary will be, it's through

those discussions that clearly we would have to look at those options.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** There's no idea of what it might cost?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** Not at this point.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Can I take a stab at that? I think you're zeroing right in on the problem.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Go ahead. But I want to interject for a moment here, because it raises an important question for Parks Canada. Is it possible that the final boundaries for expanding the reserve might not include the mines?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** There's one scenario in which we proceed, which is the willing seller and willing buyer scenario, where we purchase the mine, for example, and decommission it. That's one option. Then the boundaries would include the site area. If it doesn't, clearly, our current legislation—which we have to respect—is that the boundaries may have a broader area, the whole watershed, but exclude the current commercial interests that are within that watershed area.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** That would be a problem.

I'm sorry about interjecting earlier. You can finish your answer now. Thank you.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** I'm glad you've asked what you've asked, because it would be a problem. We're a little less fettered than Parks Canada because we're not necessarily part of the entire Government of Canada's decision-making hierarchy. The reality is there's a decision to be made here, and having a hole in the donut, as my colleague said, is a big, big problem.

We need to get this mine out of there. The Government of Canada needs to figure out what it will cost and do it. We would love it if this committee would come out and say that. The *Edmonton Journal* editorialized to that effect about two weeks ago. The Deh Cho First Nations—you can see the Grand Chief beside me nodding assent—have the same point of view: let's make a decision here, let's figure out what it costs to take this mine out of here, let's expand this park, and let's have a great accomplishment for the people of Canada. That's why we're so eager to hear you talking about this today.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** What kind of a budget does Parks Canada Agency have available to make such purchases? How much do you have at your disposal?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** The capital program we have for the expansion is roughly \$3.5 million, then about \$1 million for ongoing operations. To be very frank, I have no idea of the cost. If you're looking at mine purchases, there are two.

I want to be clear, we're not against purchasing a mine. But I think as we embark on park expansion and new parks, the day that we go in and force our way through it without negotiating, without working in good faith with the commercial interests, we will not be welcome to look at new parks anywhere else in Canada.

Would we prefer there not be a mine? Yes, we would, clearly. But what I think we can't do is unilaterally go in there and expropriate them.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I'm not pushing for expropriation, I only want to know how much money is on the table to purchase the land, or whatever you could agree to. I would imagine it would probably exceed what your budget is.

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I would assume—

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Will there also be a cleanup cost associated with it if the mine were to be...?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I assume there would be a significant acquisition cost and a significant cleanup cost. My assumption is that those two costs together will probably be greater than our expansion budget for our ten-park expansion.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Would the negotiating position be polluter pays or government pays to clean up?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** Would the position of your agency be that the polluter pays or the government pays, in negotiating the purchase of such a site?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** It is not up to Parks Canada to make that determination.

**Mr. Jeff Watson:** I think that's all I have right now.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Watson.

Do any other members of the committee have questions?

Mr. Powers.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** I'd like to come to the mines for a second. Can you tell me about the Cantung mine? There's perhaps the urgency of both activating the Prairie Creek mine and the intrusive road that will go to it. Can you tell me about the Cantung mine? Then we'll shift to the Prairie Creek mine.

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** The Cantung mine is also within the watershed. It's a tungsten mine that has been operating on and off since the early 1960s. According to the company, it's two to seven years away from the end of its economic life.

The CPAWS position on the Cantung mine has been that while the damage is mostly done there, the idea of going in and having a big fight to stop them at this point is really not the most productive approach to take. We've been working very hard in the regulatory process to try to persuade regulators to require a full security deposit of the company so that the company is responsible for cleaning up the mine when it finishes. Then we would be supportive of a grandfathering clause until the mine was finished within that two to seven years. Then we'd close it down, clean it up, and add it to the park.

As I said, the damage there has mostly been done. There have been some significant problems. There was a 30,000-litre fuel spill, and the mine has been operating on and off. The company just re-emerged from bankruptcy protection recently and was reopened. There have been a number of government studies on the liability at the mine site, ranging from somewhere around \$10 million to \$43 million looking at the current liability at the site, so there is an issue there. The company right now has only posted something less than \$4 million as a security deposit.

So there are issues, but, again, the damage is done. We're not trying to stop a new mine. Whereas in Prairie Creek, the mine has never operated, so we have the opportunity to prevent most of the damage before it's done.

• (1650)

**Mr. Russ Powers:** As Mr. Locke indicated earlier, there is perhaps a finite life to this mine, and you can actually see an end to the operation of the mine, not meaning that the rehabilitation will have taken place. So your initiative is to move ahead and to try to get an acceptable remediation plan for the property in question.

We talked about the Prairie Creek mine too. It's hard to visualize on a map. What is it now? What's the anticipated size? Can we talk about operations or things like that? I want to try to visualize an impact of what it may or may not do—or more likely what it will do if it becomes more operational.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Alison, do you want to try that, or do you want me to try?

• (1655)

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Do you want to give it a stab?

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** Sure.

The company has plans, of course, and we can't speak for all its plans. One of the big things is to install a road across the karst land from somewhere where the highway is on the far side of the Liard River. There is no bridge across the Liard River, for example, right now, and there has to be some kind of a road. The old trail that was put in to put the current stuff in followed creek beds and so on, which wouldn't likely be permitted now, so there will have to be a major road infrastructure put into place.

You need to visualize this place. The infrastructure is down in a very tight gorge in a narrow mountain valley, and there's currently a tailings pond that has a berm between it and the creek, which is not very wide—the creek is right there. There are a bunch of buildings that have been there for about 25 years. As for the history of this, it was a Hunt brothers operation. Perhaps you remember its silver market efforts about 25 years ago. The operation went broke when the silver price collapsed, and then this new company bought the property in the last few years and has promoted it as a lead-zinc property. They talk about mining and putting tailings underground and so on. We have a lot of concern about things like acid mine drainage that occur. There is also a high amount of mercury in the area.

Generally speaking, the goal is to get a very large deposit of minerals out, which means an awful lot of impact on the area. A recent study of grizzly bear usage of the Prairie Creek mine area shows that the area is quite heavily used by grizzly bears at present in its non-operating state because it's a very highly valued habitat in that area of the South Nahanni River. Of course all of that would be displaced by a busy mining operation with trucks.

We're also very fearful of spills. As the Grand Chief talked about, this is a very seismically active part of the world. There have been floods of enormous proportions from rock slides coming down into creeks and nearby drainages. These are not fantasy concerns.

You mentioned Derek Ford, the global karst expert who is on tour with us. He's been telling audiences across the country that the largest earthquake in Canada during the time he's lived here, which is close to 50 years, occurred about 50 kilometres from this area. The basic area is still under development from a geological point of view, and when you think of the risks of all that stuff washing downstream, we just don't think it's an appropriate risk to run. This is not an average place.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Locke.

I believe that Mr. Jean also has a question.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I do. Actually my curiosity has the best of me. What happened in relation to the 30,000 litres of fuel that were spilt? What was the environmental impact and liability?

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** That was the Cantung mine. Fortunately it was in the winter, so it was contained, as far as we know. Although it took a while even for inspectors to get in and look at it. Fortunately I think there wasn't a long-term effect, particularly on the park downstream, but there could have been. If it had happened in the summertime, for example, it would have been much more difficult to contain. It's much easier to clean up spills when they're in the snow, rather than flushing down the river. It slows things down.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** As far as you are aware, there was no environmental impact farther down the stream from this particular spill?

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Frankly, I don't think the studies were done to look at it. It's a very remote place. It took a couple of weeks to get inspectors in, and the studies haven't been done on the impact.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** So from your information, there may be an impact now. There might be some empirical data to suggest it has had an impact, but at this stage you're telling me there hasn't been any kind of study done?

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Not that I know of.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** That seems bizarre.

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** There may have been inspection reports on file I haven't seen, but in terms of a comprehensive study of what the impacts are.... Regarding the impacts from the entire mine outside the park, there are records of tailings downstream from the mine. There had been some concerns about seepage from the tailings pond. There are inspection reports, but I'm not that familiar with the precise nature of the inspection reports on that mine.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Are there any ongoing water assessment studies that ascertain the quality of the water coming out of that area?

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** At Cantung?

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Yes.

**Mrs. Alison Woodley:** Again, I'm not that familiar with the details of the Cantung mine.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Would the chief have any better ideas if there was any impact caused by this particular fuel spill that he's seen over the time period he's been living there?

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** You have to understand that this part of the country is all mountainous, and the gravel the whole mine site is set on is roughly 40 to 50 feet thick. Now, if you have a fuel spill of that nature, it will quickly disappear because it will go right down to the bedrock. What happens then is that it will seep along the

bedrock into places where it wants to travel. So it's pretty dangerous. Once you get a fuel spill of this magnitude, it would be almost impossible to clean it up, because it's gone. It follows the whole rock basin and takes off on its own. Lord knows where these things go. They could end up in another tributary in the next year or so.

In the last two years or so, the Nahanni Butte people who traveled up to the park boundary have complained constantly about water colouration. You could see a rainbow kind of fuel spill in the back eddies of the river. This is something that's probably showing up only now. This happened a few years ago. So eventually the fuel would find its way down the river, and this is what we're starting to see.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** Are you aware of any studies that have taken place in relation to this particular spill?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** I'm not sure it concerns this specific spill, because I don't know all the operational details there. But we do have some monitoring systems for water quality, not necessarily related to this incident, but in terms of the current national park reserve area.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** So you do water quality studies now, and you have for some period of time?

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** We monitor several of our national parks across the system in terms of our aquatic monitoring systems.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I would ask you to provide that information from the Nahanni River if possible, and not just recently, so we could have an idea over the last five years to be able to do our own balanced assessment.

My final line of questioning is in relation to any opposition you have from people who live in the area. I'm not certain, but I would suggest that there might be trappers, and obviously there are guiding outfits, etc. Is there any opposition from the aboriginal peoples who live in the area, as far as allowing these people to stay until their leases or trapline leases run out?

● (1700)

**Mr. Alan Latourelle:** In terms of the commercial interests—for example, the guiding companies—we would have to work out some sort of solution with them. If the expanded area includes the whole watershed, we would try to work on a willing seller and willing buyer to buy those out. That would be our preferred option by far.

**Mr. Brian Jean:** I'm just wondering if the chief can comment on whether he has any opposition to those trappers or guiding outfits staying in the area, or whether allowing them to continue on their lease would have any impact on it.

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** I think the trappers and the harvesters who are in there are rather concerned about these activities that are taking place. Our people had gotten together, talked it over, and said it's a pretty serious issue that we need to discuss, but at this point, as far as objections to all of this is concerned, there's probably a small handful of our own people out there who are objecting. Then, the next day, when we give them the information and explain to them where we all are with this, there's pretty solid support. It just takes off on its own. So far, then, we're pretty well all on the same page, and there's good support out there for it.

**Mr. Harvey Locke:** I think he's also asking you whether you want to see the guide outfitters staying or being bought out.

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** As far as the big game outfitters are concerned, the horror stories that I'm getting are that these outfitters who are in there are actually taking the bighorn sheep, the Dall sheep, the moose, the caribou. A lot of the big-antler game that they take are all the main breeders, so we have some concerns about that. We've had concerns about this for the last ten or twelve years. Every time we'd go to the renewable resources people who monitor this stuff, they'd give us the details about how much game was being taken out of there. We were just blown away.

This big game hunting activity is not decreasing. People are in there steady. They're constantly in there and hauling out antlers and what not. What happens to the wild meat that they take out of there? When I was a local chief there a few years ago, I got on their case because they were actually taking something like about a hundred Dall sheep out of the area. We asked them what they were doing with the meat. Only the next year, they were able to come back. They brought tonnes and tonnes of plane loads of wild meat into the communities and distributed it. I think there were something like two Twin Otter loads of Dall sheep and caribou brought in, but what were they doing with that meat the year before? So those kinds of things raise a lot of concerns.

From my point of view and from our point of view, it's necessary to actually get these guys out of there. The big game outfitters have to go. They're not doing anything for our community and they're not doing anything for the people who live in the area. So the mines have to go and the big game outfitters have to be taken out of the area.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Powers, do you have a final question?

**Mr. Russ Powers:** My last set of questions is just a continuation on the mining and all that.

The expansion of the park became a priority in 2002. Obviously there has probably been a desire for expansion of the park from day one, dating back probably thirty-some years, but when has it become...?

I have this uneasy feeling about the Canadian Zinc Corporation. I don't know whether they're looking at a viable operation or perhaps using it as a leverage for a buyout on these things. I'm just suspect with regard to their motives.

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** Did you want me to handle that?

**Mr. Russ Powers:** It's probably a rhetorical question, but I would welcome an answer if you're prepared to give one.

**Grand Chief Herb Norwegian:** This whole thing began when we were getting our negotiations under way with Canada. We brought our people together roughly about four years ago, five years ago, to talk about the Prairie Creek. At that point it was just a little shell of a mine that wasn't really doing anything. We started talking about expanding the park and making sure the whole watershed is protected, and it was during that time we also did the land withdrawal negotiations through an order in council and about 80% of the entire watershed was withdrawn. Of course, Canada being Canada, at the negotiating table they were quite adamant that they didn't want us to close off the option of taking in the mine, so the mine became like a donut hole in the whole watershed.

As a result of that, it was within the first two years that the mine aggressively went into the community of Nahanni Butte, worked out a joint venture agreement with them, and the community was outside for a while until they started hearing the horror stories and the things that were happening at the mine site. Finally, it was about two years ago that the community actually pulled out of that joint venture agreement.

Your suspicion is the same as mine. These guys are probably out there just rubbing their hands and trying to get in there and cut themselves a deal, knowing that probably Canada will eventually buy them out. They're a small-time operating little company. They are in there to get the mine going, and when they get all the papers in place and they get the all-weather road in place, I would suspect that they would want to probably sell out to a larger company. Of course, they're lining their pockets and trying to put a price tag on this. I don't think we should really go for it. We should call their bluff and just go ahead and buy it out for whatever it's worth, but not at their cost. We have to start with the lowest common denominator, their lowest dollar, and start from there. I don't think these guys should be given what they think they're worth.

•(1705)

**The Chair:** Members of the committee and those who are watching the proceedings, I think we all have a sense of the urgency and the graphic illustration here. Profoundly, we see the beauty in the Nahanni.

Grand Chief, we respect very much the role that your people and Parks Canada are playing together in this partnership, and I think, on behalf of the committee, we would like to have the assurance, particularly from Parks Canada, that the committee will be kept up to date with respect to the process that has been outlined here. Obviously we're talking about the legacy, the past legacy and the present situation with respect to the large trappers and outfitters and the existing mine operations.

I think we have to leave it at this point to Parks Canada, which, together with you, Grand Chief, is in the process of attempting to find a resolution to those kinds of intrusive and invasive operations to the vision that we all have. On behalf of the committee, we're going to direct—if that's the right term—Parks Canada, in cooperation and working with you, Mr. Feher, CPAWS, and all others, to update us from time to time on how this is proceeding. When I say “from time to time,” I would think in the context of the next six months.

We do thank you for being here, Grand Chief.

Also, Mr. Locke, thank you for participating through the video-conference. I think it worked out fairly well.

And to Parks Canada, thank you for being here.

Members of the committee, my instinct is telling me here that we're running out of time with respect to the report. It wasn't a report; it was comments that were made in relation to our report.

There are two ways we could proceed, and I'd like to get some direction back from you. The first way is that we could have a discussion of our research response, and we could then direct our researcher to write a letter of transmission to the minister on some of the concerns that have been raised on responses we had from the ministry.

We could handle it that way, or we could table this response until the next committee. This committee, in its present form, obviously will not be meeting again—I don't think that's being presumptuous. We do consider it a matter of urgency, but the next committee should have it tabled and deal with it.

I would like to get some response back from the committee on how you feel about that.

• (1710)

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** No comment.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** What do you feel is preferable?

**The Chair:** My feeling is that it would be better to table the report and deal with it in two months when we come back. I don't think the response is going to change. I think we'll have the benefit of time.

All right, I think we have a consensus on it.

Thank you very much, and good luck.

Mr. Bigras.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Bigras:** I would like to thank you for the work you accomplished as chair of this committee over the last weeks and months. My colleague expressed thanks a few days ago, but I would like to join all our colleagues in thanking you for your work.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bigras. I do appreciate that very much, and how much I've enjoyed working with you. Thank you, and the very best in the next few weeks.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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