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Huge New Wilderness Protection in Northern Canada

Quebec City - Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced today that his government will finalize legislation for a major expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve. Currently at 5,000 km², the Nahanni will be expanded 6 times to more than 30,000 km². The Prime Minister explained clearly that this expansion is possible due to an agreement with the Deh-Cho First Nations whose territory includes the Nahanni region.

Harvey Locke, The WILD Foundation's Vice President for Conservation Strategy, and a central figure in the campaign over many years to secure this expansion, was in Quebec and spoke during the announcement; "This is a very significant victory for wilderness conservation and the role of First Nations in protecting wildlands and cultural resources. It is the direct result of many years of collaborative work between numerous NGOs, First Nations, the private sector, and the government of Canada."

The expansion of the Nahanni makes it the largest protected area in the Yellowstone to Yukon (Y2Y) transnational corridor that extends from Yellowstone National Park through to the Canadian and Alaskan Yukon.

"This expansion increases the Nahanni to some 7.5 million acres, almost 3 times the size of Yellowstone National Park," according to Locke. With the increasing impacts on natural habitat and wildlife migrations caused by climate change, the importance of corridors linking core wildland areas is even more important. According to Locke, "There are two fundamental ways in which this announcement addresses climate change. It increases the ability of wildlife and natural habitats to adapt to the ecological changes produced by climate change. In addition, the protection of large wilderness areas is a critical part of the strategy to avert or mitigate climate change, not just adapt to its impacts."

The important role of wilderness in the global, strategic response to climate change is increasingly recognized. According to Vance Martin, President of The WILD Foundation, "This visionary announcement by the Canadian government shows clearly that they are serious about the important role of large, undisturbed wilderness areas in creating a healthy human society and in mitigating climate change. This is one of the central themes of WILD9, the 9th World Wilderness Congress (Mexico, 6-13 November, 2009). State of the art information will be presented on how wilderness is a key element in a healthy human society, and one that effectively addresses the rapidly worsening effects of climate change."

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