

Parks Canada Preliminary Screening under the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act*

TYPE OF DEVELOPMENT:

- New
- Amended
- Requires a permit, licence or authorization under the *Preliminary Screening Requirement Regulations* (issuance of a Business Licence pursuant to the *National Parks of Canada Business Regulations* s 4.1)
- Does not require permit, licence or authorization and is proposed by PCA

1. DEVELOPMENT TITLE & LOCATION

Outfitter Guided Trips in Nahanni and Nááts'jch'oh National Park Reserves

2. PROPONENT INFORMATION

Black Feather Wilderness Adventure Company
(888) 849-7668
info@blackfeather.com

Canoe North Adventures
(519) 941-6654
(867) 587-4440
info@canoenorthadventures.com

Nahanni Wilderness Adventures
(888) 897-5223
info@nahanniwild.com

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT DATES

Planned commencement: 2021-06-01
Planned completion: 2021-09-30

4. INTERNAL FILE #

NAH2021-002



5. DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

Many visitors accessing Nahanni National Park Reserve (Nahanni) and Nááts'j'ch'oh National Park Reserve (Nááts'j'ch'oh) do so as clients of commercial outfitting companies. Guided trips typically begin at earliest the first week of June (more often, the second to third week of June) and, on average, run until the first week of September. They range anywhere from one to three weeks in length and include river tripping and hiking as primary activities. Each guided trip includes a maximum of 15 people (including guides). Commercial river outfitters must obtain Parks Canada business licences to operate in the parks.

The Guidelines for Licensing of Guided River Outfitting in Nahanni and Nááts'j'ch'oh National Park Reserves outline the considerations for safety and sustainability, set quotas for visitation and limit the number of licences Parks Canada issues in Nahanni National Park Reserve. As per the licensing guidelines and in accordance with the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* (MVRMA), the activities of commercial outfitting companies must undergo preliminary screening before their licences can be issued. This preliminary screening applies to the following commercial outfitting companies, which have indicated that they will be applying for their annual business licence renewal, and includes the listed activities/locations:

Companies

- Black Feather Wilderness Adventure Company
- Nahanni Wilderness Adventures
- Canoe North Adventures

Activities

- *Water-based*: canoeing, rafting, kayaking, stand up paddle board, and packrafting (packrafting only on the Broken Skull, Little and South Nahanni, and Flat rivers)
- *Land-based*: camping, day hiking, backpacking (overnight camping), and base camping (only by the above companies who are licenced for base camping at Níonep'ene? Tué and for no longer than 14 days)



Locations (see map, Appendix 1)

WATER-BASED ACTIVITY START LOCATIONS	
Qtaa Tué Fehto (Divide Lake), Nááts'ihch'oh	Access to Píjip'enéh léetóq Deé (Broken Skull River) which travels through both parks and for Tátsók'áá Deé (Raven's Throat River) (river outside of the park; outfitters heli-sling over)
Nááts'ihch'oh Tué (Moose Ponds), Nááts'ihch'oh	Access to headwaters of South Nahanni River, which travels through both parks
Túoch'ee Tué (O'Grady Lake), Nááts'ihch'oh	Access for the Túoch'ee Deé (Natla River) (most of the river is outside of the park – there is a small portion in the park, connecting two parts of Túoch'ee Tué (O'Grady Lake), but most groups put in downstream of this connector section)
Island Lakes, Nahanni	Access for the South Nahanni River
Bunny Bar, Nahanni	
Gahnjthah Mje, Nahanni	
Nájljcho, Nahanni	
Flat Lakes, NT	Access to Little Nahanni River, which travels through both parks
Divide Lake, NT (<i>Note: near Flat Lakes; this is a different location than the Divide Lake in Nááts'ihch'oh</i>)	Access to Flat River which begins outside Nahanni park boundary in NT and travels into Nahanni National Park Reserve joining up with South Nahanni River below Nájljcho.

WATER-BASED ACTIVITY END LOCATIONS	
Gahnjthah Mje, Nahanni	Blackstone Territorial Park, NT
Nájljcho, Nahanni	Łíídlj Kúé, NT
Nahanni Butte, NT	Tulita, NT
Lindberg's Landing, NT	

WATER-BASED ACTIVITY CAMP LOCATIONS	
<i>Nahanni</i>	
Nájljcho	Gahnjthah Mje
Glacier Lake	
Random camp locations along the Broken Skull, Little and South Nahanni, and Flat river corridors	
<i>Nááts'ihch'oh</i>	
Qtaa Tué Fehto (Divide Lake)	Nááts'ihch'oh Tué (Moose Ponds) (on old tundra tire strip)
Níonep'ene? Tué (Backbone Lake/Grizzly Bear Lake)	Túoch'ee Tué (O'Grady Lake) (on sand peninsula)
Random camp locations. Most frequently used: Creek junction above Swallow Falls; Creek junction of creek flowing from Sadée Shúh Gaofáá (Grizzly Bear Hot Springs) and Broken Skull River; Broken Skull Hot Springs, access campsite; Three Valley Confluence (White Wolf Creek, Rainbow Creek and Broken Skull River)	



HIKING / BACKPACKING ROUTES (Note: all are backcountry/non-maintained routes)	
<i>Nahanni</i>	
South Nahanni River to Glacier Lake (multi-night)	Glacier Lake to Fairy Meadows (multi-night)
Gahnjthah Mje to Gahnjthah Tufa Mounds (day)	Gahnjthah Portage and Campground (day)
Sunblood Mountain (day)	Marengo Creek (day)
Pulpit Rock and Gate Viewpoint (day)	Painted Canyon (day)
Scow Creek (day)	Lafferty's Creek (day)
Other exploratory day hike routes along river corridors	Ram Plateau (rarely)
<i>Nááts'jch'oh</i>	
Tuedéveh Tué (Clearwater Lake) / Sedzeeféetó Piehtéh (Broken Heart Plateau) (multi-night)	Níonep'eneᑦ Tué (Backbone Lake/Grizzly Bear Lake) (multi-night or day hikes)
Níonep'eneᑦ Tué (Backbone Lake/Grizzly Bear Lake) to Sadée Shúh Gaofáá (Grizzly Bear Hot Spring) (day)	Píj'p'enéh íéetóq Deé (Broken Skull River) to Píj'p'enéh íéetóq Gaᑦfáá (Broken Skull Hot Springs) (day)

6. VALUED COMPONENTS

Note: Outfitting companies have utilized the same locations in both parks since the 1960's and 70's; many have been surveyed for natural and heritage resources (these surveys are ongoing) and areas of significance are avoided/respected by guides and their clients.

Soil/Land Resources

- The parks are located within the Taiga and Boreal Cordillera Ecological regions of the Northwest Territories. These regions include a complex landscape of rugged peaks and ridges, rolling hills, eroded plateaus, deep V- and U-shaped valleys, fast-flowing braided rivers and streams and slow-flowing meandering rivers, and in the south and west, glaciers and icefields. Glacial deposits are widely distributed and occur mainly on the floors and lower slopes of valleys, lakes and ponds are small and sparsely distributed, and wetlands are locally common only on the floodplains and lower slopes of large rivers and on a few broad plateaus. It is an area of discontinuous permafrost (ECG, 2010). To protect the alpine forests in Nááts'jch'oh, fires at all lakes are prohibited. This does not apply to Sahtu Dene and Métis. The area within the original Nahanni park boundary is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognized for its exceptional representation of on-going geological processes, including karst topography, hot springs/tufa mounds, and caves. Several of these areas are Zone 1, Special Preservation, and visitor access is restricted (Parks Canada, 2010).

Air/Noise Quality

- No formal observations of air/noise quality have occurred in the parks, however it is expected that these valued components are excellent and representative of their natural state. The majority of both parks are zone II Wilderness, which represents



"extensive areas that are good representations of a natural region and are conserved in a wilderness state" and "in much of Zone II, visitors have the opportunity to experience remoteness and solitude. Motorized access is not permitted except for controlled air access" (Parks Canada, 2010 & 2017).

Aquatic Resources

- SARA-listed Bull Trout are present in the South Nahanni River below Nájljcho (Babaluk, 2015).
- The South Nahanni River is silt-laden (March and Scotter, 1975), as is common of many of the rivers and streams in this area as they flow through glacial deposits (ECG, 2010).

Flora and Fauna

- Migratory and SARA-listed birds are present in the parks and may nest at locations visited by guided groups; the general nesting season for this area extends from approximately May 1 to August 25. Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), a ground-nesting species has been observed nesting on the Prairie Creek and Bunny Bar alluvial fans (Tate, pers. comm., 2017; Arnold, pers. comm., 2020).
- Five bat species – Little Brown Myotis (*Myotis lucifugus*), Northern Myotis (*M. septentrionalis*), both SARA-listed bat species, Long-legged Myotis (*M. volans*), Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), and Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*) – have been recorded in both parks (Lausen *et al.*, 2014; EDI, 2019), while the occurrence of two additional species – Longeared Myotis (*M. evotis*) and Eastern Red Bat (*L. borealis*) – has only been confirmed within Nahanni (Lausen *et al.*, 2014). As of 2019, two cave sites within Nahanni, including Grotte Valerie, have been confirmed as hibernacula for Myotis bat species and two additional sites are suspected (Horne and Critchley, 2020). Current evidence suggests that Grotte Valerie is likely used as a hibernaculum by five species: Little Brown Bat, Northern Myotis, Long-legged Myotis, Big Brown Bat and Longeared Myotis (C. Lausen and G. Horne, pers. comm., 2017). All caves in the park reserves are off-limits to visitors.
- Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos* - northwest population) have a widespread distribution throughout the parks (Weaver, 2006). However, grizzly bear encounters in the parks are relatively uncommon with between 0 and 10 sightings reported annually by visitors and park staff in Nahanni from 2010 to 2017 and 1-2 annual sightings reported in Nááats'ihch'oh from 2016 to 2017 (Nahanni National Park Reserve, 2017). The majority of grizzly bear sightings occur in areas of the park where food caches are provided for visitors to store food and other attractants – Gahnjthah Mje, Nájljcho and Glacier Lake. With lower visitor numbers and no designated camping areas/food caches, Nááats'ihch'oh communicates notices of bear activity to visitors as early as possible. In Nááats'ihch'oh, camping within 1km of hot springs is prohibited. This is in part due to the high observations of grizzly bear activity recorded on remote cameras. Additionally, in accordance with Nahanni's Bear Management Plan, all reported bear observations are



carefully reviewed by park staff to determine whether management action (e.g., public alerts, area closures, etc.) should be taken to prevent human-bear conflict.

- Interaction with other SARA-listed species in the parks – i.e., Collared pika (*Ochotona collaris*), Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus* - boreal population) and Woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou* - Northern Mountain population) – will be minimal as visitors either do not frequent habitats where these species are located or visitation does not occur during periods of significant congregation such as calving. No adverse effects are anticipated if the mitigation measures described in this screening are followed.
- No SARA-listed vegetation species will be impacted. Nahanni Aster (*Symphyotrichum nahanniense*), a SARA-listed species, exists at various locations along the Flat and South Nahanni rivers (COSEWIC, 2014). Three of these populations are protected as Zone I Special Preservation (no public access except by permit or with Parks staff present) and the remaining four are in Zone II Wilderness areas (Parks Canada, 2010); revised zoning or alternate protection measures are being examined for these latter populations during the current management planning process.

Social/Cultural Environment (including Wildlife Harvesting)

- Harvesting (wildlife, plants, and trees) and motorized access for traditional activities within park boundaries is a right of local First Nations and Sahtu Métis (Parks Canada 2010 & 2017).
- Public access to Zone I special preservation areas with significant cultural importance, including Mount Nááts'jch'oh and Chitú (Yohin Lake), is not allowed (Parks Canada, 2010; Parks Canada, 2017). Public access to the south tufa mound at Gahnjthah is permitted through guided hikes only (Parks Canada, 2010). Traditional use by local First Nations and Sahtu Métis is not restricted through park zoning

Heritage Resources

Heritage resources are defined as a human work, an object, or a place that is determined, on the basis of its heritage value, to be directly associated with an important aspect or aspects of human history and culture of an heritage area (Parks Canada, 2013). Heritage resources include archaeological or historic sites, burial sites, artifacts and other objects of historical, cultural, or religious significance, and historical or cultural records (MVRMA (s.2)). Heritage resources exist throughout both parks. Although surveys have been conducted to identify these resources at certain locations along major river valleys, lakes, and in the Glacier Lake/Cirque of the Unclimbables area, there remains a high potential for the presence of undocumented resources throughout both parks.

7. EFFECTS ANALYSIS

See "*Parks Canada Best Management Practice (BMP) for Commercially Guided Eco-tourism Activities in Nahanni and Nááts'jch'oh National Park Reserves of Canada*" (Appendix 2)



8. MITIGATION MEASURES

Outfitters will adhere to mitigations described in the "*Parks Canada Best Management Practice (BMP) for Commercially Guided Eco-tourism Activities in Nahanni and Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserves of Canada*" (Appendix 2)

Additional mitigations for base camping at Níonep'eneᑦ Tué (Backbone Lake/Grizzly Bear Lake):

- All human waste will be packed out of the park
- Base camping at the lake will take place on shale substrates only
- If food and kitchen equipment are left unattended, they must be stored in bear resistant containers and bear deterrents must be in place (e.g., portable bear fence, acoustic device). All deterrent(s) must be removed when the camp is dismantled
- The camp location must be left in a natural state, with no evidence of human occupation remaining after dismantling

8.1 COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS

Outfitters, as well as their employees and clients, must comply with all directions and orders issued by the Northwest Territories Chief Medical Health Officer to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The outfitter must:

- a) ensure its employees and clients are aware of updates and/or modifications to the Chief Medical Health Officer's directions and orders as they may occur;
- b) have an evacuation plan for presumed cases of COVID-19;
- c) report any confirmed cases of COVID-19 to the Superintendent.

9. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Surveillance
 - Follow-up monitoring, general
 - Follow-up monitoring, required by legislation or policy (indicate basis of requirement e.g. required by the *Species at Risk Act*)
 - SARA Notification
- ✓ Additional conditions may be placed on business licenses for Nááts'ihch'oh

10. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESIDUAL ADVERSE EFFECTS



Given the limited and short-term magnitude of effects, the location in predominantly pre-impacted areas, and the application of mitigation measures the development is not expected to cause residual adverse effects to natural/cultural resources or visitor experience.

11. EXPERTS CONSULTED

<i>Department:</i> Parks Canada / Government of Canada	<i>Date of Request:</i> January 9, 2018
<i>Expert's Name & Contact Information:</i> Patrick Carroll PO Box 750, Fort Smith, NT X0E 0P0 Patrick.carroll@pc.gc.ca / Tel: 867-872-7936	<i>Title:</i> Cultural Resource Management Advisor, SW NWT Field Unit
<i>Expertise Requested:</i> General information on heritage resource surveys/inventories for both parks	
<i>Response:</i> See information in section 6 (Valued Components)	
<i>Department:</i> Parks Canada / Government of Canada	<i>Date of Request:</i> June 15, 2017
<i>Expert's Name & Contact Information:</i> Doug Tate 22 Third Street, Nipigon, ON, P0T 2J0 Doug.Tate@canada.ca / Tel: 807-372-0011	<i>Title:</i> Ecologist Team Lead, Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area
<i>Expertise Requested:</i> Information on Common Nighthawk nesting locations	
<i>Response:</i> See information in section 6 (Valued Components)	
<i>Departments:</i> Wildlife Conservation Society Canada Parks Canada / Government of Canada	<i>Date of Request:</i> November 2017
<i>Experts Names & Contact Information:</i> Cori Lausen Suite 204 - 344 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 3A7 clausen@wcs.org Greg Horne 1 Compound road, Jasper, AB greg.horne@canada.ca / Mobile: 780-883-0253	<i>Titles:</i> Associate Conservation Scientist Resource Management Officer II



<i>Expertise Requested:</i> Information on bat species potentially using Grotte Valerie as a hibernaculum	
<i>Response:</i> See information in section 6 (Valued Components)	
<i>Department:</i> Parks Canada / Government of Canada	<i>Date of Request:</i> February 21, 2020
<i>Expert's Name & Contact Information:</i> Sarah Arnold PO Box 348, Fort Simpson, NT X0E 0N0 sarah.arnold@canada.ca / Tel: 867-695-7768	<i>Title:</i> Ecologist Team Lead, Nahanni National Park Reserve
<i>Expertise Requested:</i> Information on Common Nighthawk nesting locations	
<i>Response:</i> See information in section 6 (Valued Components)	

11.1 References

Arnold, S. 2020. Personal communication February 2020. Ecologist Team Leader, Nahanni National Park Reserve, Parks Canada.

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COSEWIC. 2014. *COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Nahanni Aster Symphyotrichum nahanniense in Canada*. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. ix + 39 pp. (www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default_e.cfm).

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Lausen *et al.* 2014. *Bats of Nahanni National Park Reserve and Surrounding Areas, Northwest Territories*. *Northwestern Naturalist*. 95:186-196.



Lausen, C. and G. Horne. Email, November 2017.

Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act (MVRMA). 2016. Available online at: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/M-0.2/>

March, A.H. and G.W. Scotter. 1975. Vegetation Survey and Impact Assessment of the Nahanni Hot Springs and Virginia Falls Areas, Nahanni National Park. Prepared for Parks Canada by the Canadian Wildlife Service, Edmonton.

Nahanni National Park Reserve. 2017. Bear Observation Database. Unpublished raw data.

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Parks Canada. 2013. *Cultural Resource Management Policy*.

Parks Canada. 2017. *Nááts'jch'oh National Park Reserve Management Plan*.

Parks Canada. 2019. Guidelines for Licensing of Guided River Outfitting in Nahanni and Nááts'jch'oh National Park Reserves. Available online at: <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/nt/nahanni/info/guides>

Tate, D. 2017. Personal communication June 2017. Ecologist Team Leader, Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area, Parks Canada.

Weaver, J.L. 2006. Big Animals and Small Parks: Implications of Wildlife Distribution and Movements for Expansion of Nahanni National Park Reserve. Wildlife Conservation Society Canada. Conservation Report No. 1.

12. REVIEW PERIOD

The development description was sent to the MVEIRB, for posting on the public registry, and the distribution list on February 23, 2021. Anyone from the public could provide comments on or before March 17, 2021. On March 2, 2020 this activity was discussed by the Nahʔą Dehé Consensus Team. No concerns were raised by the cooperative management board or the public.

13. DECISION

Taking into account the analysis and implementation of mitigation measures outlined in the analysis, the development:

- ❑ Might have a significant adverse impact on the environment, and the proposal should be referred to the *Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board* for environmental assessment.



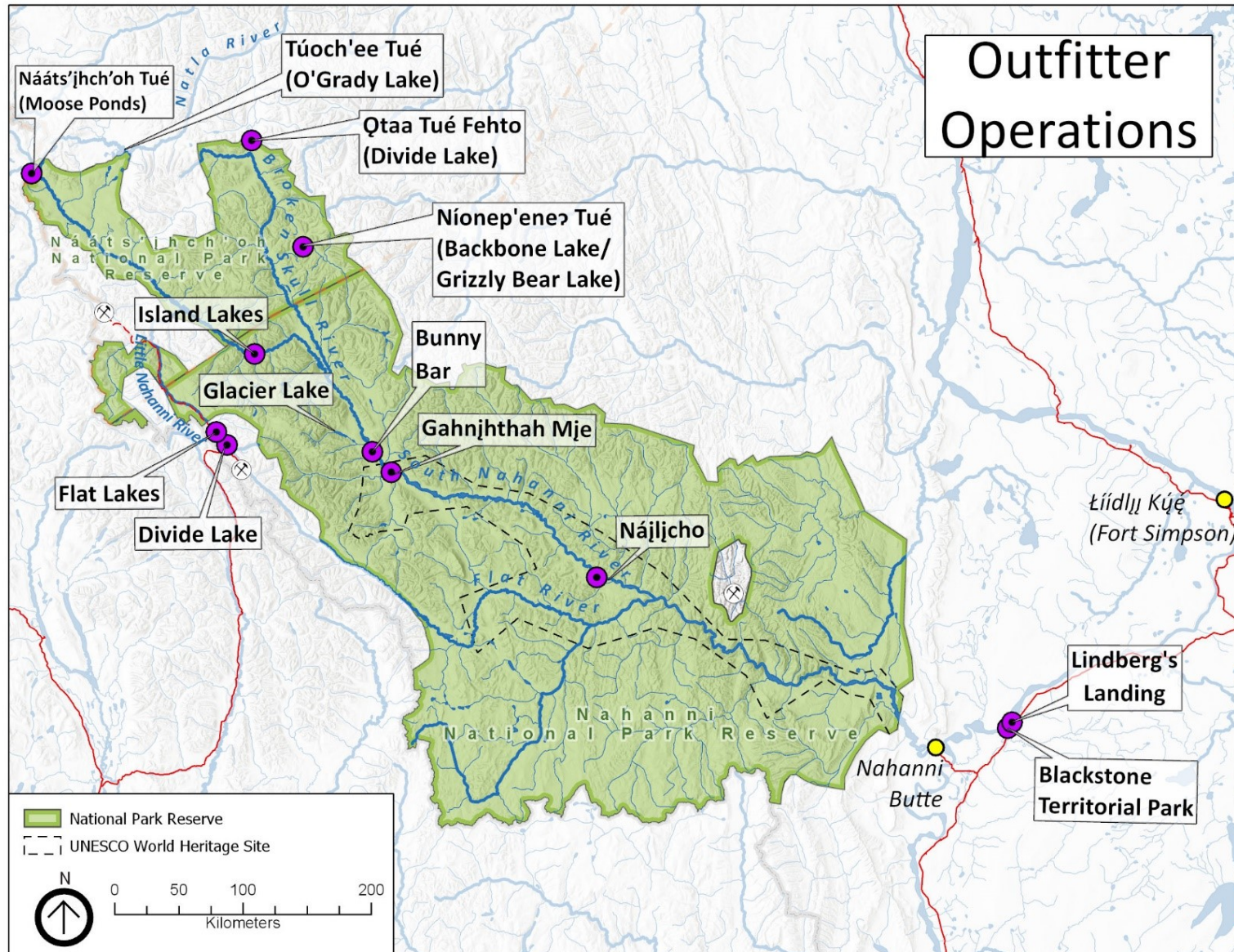
- ✓ Does not have a likelihood of causing significant adverse impact on the environment.
- ☐ Might be a cause for public concern, and the proposal should be referred to the *Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board* for environmental assessment.
- ✓ Does not have a likelihood of causing public concern.

14. APPROVAL

Prepared by: <i>Colleen Murchison</i> Ecologist Team Leader , Nahanni National Park Reserve	Date: March 17, 2021
Approved by: <i>Jim Robson</i> <i>Johanna Robson</i> Superintendent, Nááts'ihch'oh National Park	Date: <i>Mar. 22, 2021</i>
Approved by: Tsetso, Jonathan <i>Jonathan Tsetso</i> Superintendent, Nahanni National Park Reserve	Date: Digitally signed by Tsetso, Jonathan Date: 2021.03.22 14:06:39 -06'00'



APPENDIX 1





APPENDIX 2: *Parks Canada Best Management Practice (BMP) for Commercially Guided Eco-tourism Activities in Nahanni and Nááts'ihch'oh National Park Reserves of Canada*

Note: see attachment in accompanying email



APPENDIX 3 - Distribution List

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Contact</i>
Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board	preliminaryscreening@reviewboard.ca
Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board	jpotten@mvlwb.com ; tyree@mvlwb.com
Grand Chief Gladys Norwegian Dehcho First Nations	Gladys_Norwegian@dehcho.org
Chief Jerry Antoine Liidlii Kue First Nation	chief@liidliikue.com
Chief Stanley Sanguez JMR First Nation	chief@jmrfn.com
Chief Steve Vital Nahanni Butte Dene Band	chiefsteve.nbdb@gmail.com
Chief Joachim Bonnetrouge Deh Gah Gotie First Nation	chief@dehgahgotie.ca
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Chief Dolphus Jumbo Sambaa K'e Dene Band	chief@sambaakefn.com
Chief Lloyd Moses Pehdzeh Ki First Nation	chief@pkfn.ca
Chief Courtney Cayen (via Misty Ireland, Lands Dept) West Point First Nation	land@wpfn.ca
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