

Louie Azzolini

From: nwonline@toronto.cbc.ca
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To: Louie Azzolini
Subject: CBCNEWS NORTH - Park expansion could threaten mine development

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PARK EXPANSION COULD THREATEN MINE DEVELOPMENT

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Yellowknife, N.W.T. - A Northwest Territories first nation wants more protection for the watershed around Nahanni National Park Reserve. The Deh Cho say they may set aside more land for protection under its claim. However, the move has concerned people who plan to mine-- or are mining-- in the area.

Deh Cho First Nations assistant negotiator Herb Norwegian says he met with Parks Canada staff this week to talk about expanding the park's boundaries.

The park protects about 20 per cent of the south Nahanni River watershed. Norwegian says the Deh Cho may agree to set aside additional land for the park under its interim measures agreement.

The Deh Cho First Nations and conservation groups oppose the re-opening of the CanTung and Prairie Creek mines within the Nahanni watershed.

"There are some really sensitive areas within the watershed that need some protection right away," he says. "In the event that development the way it's been creeping up on us we could very well see a series of mines around the park. Right now we only have two, but right now is a good time to do business."

The CanTung tungsten mine, located about 40 kilometers west of the park on the Flat River, reopened in January. Even though a fuel spill there soon afterwards didn't reach the water, it demonstrated how vulnerable the park is.

Another mine, Prairie Creek, sits just 14 kilometers to the north of the park. Its owner, Canadian Zinc, is already having trouble getting permits to begin advanced exploration.

Malcolm Swallow, the company's president, says people in the Northwest Territories should think hard about closing the Nahanni to development, and forfeiting royalties from mining.

"If all development is going to be stopped in that area, then, really, apart from the thousand people a year who visit this park, no other economic activity is going to take place," he says. "I don't know whether this is really what Northwest Territories wants in the event it becomes totally self-governing."

However, it is what the Deh Cho First Nation wants.

Norwegian says he's hopeful that once the land has been withdrawn, approval of the expanded park will be fast-tracked by Ottawa.

In Monday's throne speech, the federal government promised to create ten new national parks in the next couple of years.

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