

TWEET

The Gwich'in Tribal Council, First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, @ParksCanada and @yukongov explore a new national park in the Peel Watershed.

News Release

For Immediate Release

A new national park in the Yukon being explored by the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, and the Governments of Canada and Yukon

A national park in the Peel Watershed would permanently protect the area, contribute to the recovery of species at risk, and support the continuation of Indigenous cultural practices for future generations

April 22, 2024

Inuvik, Northwest Territories

Parks Canada

On this Earth Day, in partnership with Indigenous peoples and in close collaboration with provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, the Government of Canada re-affirms its commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and to restore biological diversity levels by 2050.

Today, Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Chief Dawna Hope of the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, the Honourable Nils Clarke, Minister of the Environment for the Yukon, and the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada, announced their shared commitment to explore the feasibility of establishing a new national park in the Peel Watershed, situated in the Yukon and in the traditional territories of the Gwich'in and the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun.

The Peel Watershed holds great cultural significance and is central to the traditions, cultures, and ways of life for both the Gwich'in and the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun who have been caring for these lands and waters since time immemorial. It is the habitat for the Porcupine caribou herd boasting a diverse landscape with free-flowing rivers, untouched boreal forest, and deep river canyons. The forests are essential for sustaining boreal caribou as well as other iconic Canadian species including grizzly bears, peregrine falcons, and moose. The canyons welcome an abundance of waterfowl, birds of prey, and other migratory birds each spring, and the Peel River and its tributaries hold important spawning areas for whitefish and other important fish species.

The area being considered includes the Peel River corridor, Turner Lake Wetlands, and Caribou River which are identified for permanent protection under the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan. If established, the proposed new national park would permanently protect 3,000 square kilometres of rich and diverse landscapes, an area more than half the size of Prince Edward Island, help sustain biodiversity, help fight the effects of climate change, and complement the Government of Canada's commitment to conserving 30 per cent of lands and waters in Canada by 2030.

A national park – potentially the fourth in the Yukon Territory -- in the Peel Watershed would only be created with the full support the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun. It would also be co-developed and co-managed with both nations as Parks Canada is committed to a system of national heritage places that recognizes and honours the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples, their histories and cultures, as well as the special relationships Indigenous peoples have with ancestral lands and waters.

Quotes



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“We are thrilled at the prospect of permanently protecting our homelands in the Teet’it Gwinjik (Peel River) Watershed. The Gwich’in have lived in these areas for thousands of years and we continue to exercise our traditional ways of subsistence and living out on these lands. As we work to reconnect our future generations to this vital landscape, it is our intention that a National Park can assist in reconciling our relationship with Canada by sharing this unique ecosystem to Canada and abroad through preservation and the creation of a land-based economy in our traditional territory.”

*Ken Kyikavichik
Grand Chief, Gwich’in Tribal Council*

“The Collaboration Accord we are celebrating today is an important expression of our commitment, with the governments of Canada, Yukon, and the Gwich’in Tribal Council, to jointly implement the Peel Watershed Land Use Plan. It is vindication for all the work of our Elders and Citizens in negotiating the Nacho Nyak Dun Final Agreement and tirelessly advocating for protection of the Peel - all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

As we have said so often over the past 20 years, the Peel is an area of unparalleled cultural and spiritual value for our people. It is our place of refuge. We look forward to collaborating with our Gwich’in cousins and the Governments of Canada and Yukon to co-manage the lands in the Peel in a way that ensures those lands are respected and protected for all time.”

*Chief Dawna Hope
First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun*

“The impacts of climate change are felt around the world but are even more pronounced in the north. Exploring the feasibility of establishing a new national park in the Yukon is a great step toward protecting this amazing territory’s beautiful and unique ecosystems. Thank you to the Gwich’in Tribal Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, the Government of Yukon, and Parks Canada for your initiative and desire to establish a new national park to protect and conserve the important cultural and natural areas the Peel Watershed has to offer.”

*The Honourable Steven Guilbeault
Minister of Environment and Climate Change and Minister responsible for Parks Canada*

“The Peel Watershed is a special place – one of incredible beauty, rich ecosystems, and great cultural value. The signing of this collaboration accord between the Gwich’in Tribal Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, Parks Canada, and the Government of Yukon is great news. Today is a prime example of how we are working together to protect natural landscapes and biodiversity for the benefit of current and future generations.”

*Brendan Hanley
Member of Parliament for Yukon*

“Climate change, biodiversity loss, and human impacts on the environment require bold action to safeguard the Yukon’s diverse ecosystems, culture, and traditions. A feasibility study for a national park is a key next step in implementing the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan. This will further protect this area for future generations and supports the conservation and protection goals of the Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement. I want to express my thanks to the Gwich’in Tribal Council, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, and Parks Canada for supporting this important initiative.”

*The Honourable Nils Clarke
Yukon’s Minister of Environment*

Quick Facts

- The Peel Watershed covers 74,000 square kilometres, from its headwaters in the Yukon to its confluence with the Mackenzie River near Fort McPherson in the Northwest Territories.



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- The Government of Yukon, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and the Gwich'in Tribal Council are co-leading the implementation of the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan (approved in 2019).
- During implementation of the Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan, a northern portion of the Peel Watershed was identified by the Gwich'in Tribal Council as a potential candidate for a new national park.
- The Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement took effect in April 2023. Through this agreement, the Government of Canada is supporting the Government of Yukon and Indigenous governments to work towards initiatives related to conservation, protected areas, and biodiversity.
- A new national park in the Peel Watershed would permanently protect a portion of the Northern Boreal Plains Natural Region which is currently under-represented in the National Parks System Plan.
- Currently, the Yukon Territory has a total of three national parks or national park reserves: Ivvavik National Park; Kluane National Park and Reserve; and Vuntut National Park.

Related Links

- [Parks Canada](#)
- [Gwich'in Tribal Council](#)
- [First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun](#)
- [Government of Yukon](#)
- [Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan](#)
- [Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement](#)
- [News release – Gwich'in](#)

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Caption: Northern lights over the confluence of the Peel River and Snake River in the Peel Watershed.
Credit: Tayu Hayward



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