

## **Dennis Bevington, MP Northwest Territories, speech on Bill S-5**

**House of Commons October 2, 2014.**

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-5, which is a bill to create Nááts'ihch'oh national park in the Sahtu Region of the Northwest Territories.

This region is centred around the Mackenzie River and stretches towards the Yukon boundary with an incredibly beautiful mountain range and the magnificent wilderness that is the Northwest Territories.

I represent people who, when polled, have some of the highest regard for the environment among all the people in Canada. We really have that respect, and respect for the idea of national parks is strong in the Northwest Territories.

We have seen the creation of many national parks over many years throughout our territory and we understand the inherent issues that surround the development of national parks. Our first nations people have experience in dealing with park bureaucracies and understand how national parks and their rules and regulations sometimes intervene in their traditional lifestyle.

The Sahtu Dene have agreed to this park and to a comprehensive and co-operative management system that goes along with it. We look forward to seeing more details of that in committee so that we can understand how their interests will be protected going forward.

I am very pleased to see this beautiful area protected; however, I am not happy that the Conservatives chose the smallest size possible for the park.

Through the process of developing this park, there were three options that were set out for the park.

- Option one was a total area of 6,450 square kilometres. It was developed to best protect conservation values while providing an open area around the existing mineral interests.
- Option two was a total area of 5,770 square kilometres, which diminished the achievement of conservation goals and allowed more mineral potential to be available.
- Option three, and this is the one chosen by the Conservatives, was the smallest proposal, with a total area of 4,840 square kilometres. It took advantage of the mineral potential within the proposed park reserve while providing some protection to key values.

The Conservatives made this choice despite option one, the option of 6,450 square kilometres, getting the overwhelming support, at 92.3%, of those who indicated a preference during public consultations on the proposed park.

The people of the north said that they were fine with the park, but they wanted to make sure that the park works for the resources and values that are being included within it. This has not been done completely with this park. That is not surprising, because many on that side of the House see national parks as a waste of land and resources.

For example, the member for Oak Ridges—Markham has publicly stated that Parks Canada staff are not the best stewards of Canada's land. When a national park was proposed for part of his riding, he responded, "We're going to have to do whatever we can to prevent it." He quickly changed his tune, however, when his bosses here in Ottawa told him that he should be in favour of the Rouge national urban park. It is a small park, but it is a park that absolutely has value for urban residents of Canada.

The belief that parks are a waste of land and resources is just plain wrong. National parks create long-term sustainable jobs and they create opportunities in tourism and support industries. These jobs and economic opportunities last forever, unlike those in the resource sector. Extraction only lasts a few years, and we are very familiar with that. Sometimes they leave a legacy of destruction that lasts for eternity, as was the case with the Giant Mine, so we have to be very careful with how we deal with land.

We know that in the Northwest Territories. We understand what goes on with development and we understand why we have to preserve land and why it is important that land be put aside.

Recently I had the opportunity to travel to Yukon to Kluane National Park and Reserve. Yukon's Parks Canada is worked with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations to create a visitor centre at the Da Ku Cultural Centre in Haines Junction. This centre and the numerous businesses in Haines Junction all exist because of Kluane National Park and Reserve. Like other national parks, Kluane has created jobs and economic opportunities that are long lasting and environmentally sound.

However, many times it seems to me that to the Conservatives, tourism jobs and economic opportunities that surround that type of activity are of little value because it puts money not in the hands of big corporations, but in the hands of little people, local people, workers and those who want to see a future for the preservation of our natural beauty and such like. Is this the reason why the Conservatives chose the smallest size possible for the park against the recommendations of all the people who chose to make those recommendations in the public consultations?

I want to talk about the tourism industry, because it is what really will give the economic opportunities to the Sahtu region by putting aside 4,850 square kilometres of land.

Tourism opportunities provide great potentials for our future. They provide local jobs and local businesses, as with Kluane, and Kluane has been done in a very good fashion. It took years to get there. It took many difficult negotiations with first nations so they would achieve benefits, but now they are. We do not want to make those mistakes with any new national park. We want to move to the good side as quickly as possible.

The tourist industry in Canada, though, creates more than \$84 billion in economic activity, more than \$17 billion in export revenue, nearly \$10 billion in federal revenue and employs more than 600,000 Canadians. Tourism's contribution to the GDP is worth more than agriculture, fisheries and forestry combined. Despite these figures, the Conservatives have turned their backs on Canadian tourist operators.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has ranked the lack of support for our tourism industry as one of the top ten barriers to the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. Canada, during the reign of the Conservatives, has cut its tourism marketing budget by 20% over the last nine years. Instead of expanding the budget as it should be with inflation and all the rest, we have seen a cutback of 20%. It has forced the Canadian Tourism Commission to abandon advertising initiatives in lucrative markets like the United States. The Canadian Tourism Commission's core funding has declined from nearly \$100 million in 2001.

The Conservatives continued lack of leadership in promoting tourism at home and abroad is needlessly damaging what was once a good news story for the Canadian economy. A quick look at other countries shows just how little the Conservatives support the tourism industry. Those results are showing in the incredible drop that we have seen in international tourism visitations to Canada.

These are countries where the money has been put in tourism: Ireland spent \$211 million a year in promoting its tourism, which is a 14% increase in the same time; Mexico, \$153 million, 4% increase; Australia, \$147 million, 30% increase; Canada \$72 million, down 10% over that same period. By the time when we factor in inflation, we see a massive decrease in the support for the tourism industry.

There is an old saying, and this is one that the neoliberals like, "A rising tide raises all boats". What we see in the tourism industry is a falling tide which has becalmed the industry and left a lot of tourism boats stranded on the shore.

When we talk about increasing national parks, we want to talk about expanding tourism. What operator is going to create a new market in Canada for a new product when the Conservative government has decimated our tourism market. It has refused to put the dollars into it that can return, promote and increase this very important market. It is very content to see the tide go out and the boats sit on the sandy floor of the bay.

The Conservatives changed the tourism tax rebates, so only those on packaged tours could apply for a tax refund, rather than the old system where any visitor to Canada could get their GST refunded. This change has really hit small tourism businesses, but has provided an unfair advantage to large tourism operations.

What is going to happen in the Northwest Territories? We have small tourism operators. Everybody in the tourism industry starts out small. The average time to make a tourism business profitable is between 10 and 14 years. Someone has to invest. They have to create the market. They have to create the product. They have to make it work. That is what is going to have to happen in Nááts'ihch'oh. That is where we are going to have to put the investment to get the tourism industry to work there.

We need the support of the federal government on the federal programs that increase the volume of tourists to Canada. That is a fundamental.

I have included this in my speech because we want to see benefits from taking 4,850 square kilometres of land and creating a national park, which is a great idea for the people of Canada, and can be a great idea for the people of the North, but we need to promote tourism.

However, there is another story about tourism with the government and how little it supports it, and that is its treatment of Parks Canada. In budget 2012, Parks Canada had 638 positions eliminated. Many of the positions in national parks in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon were lost as well.

When we are trying to build a tourism industry based upon natural beauty, national parks, we see that the cutbacks affect that throughout the system.

Budget 2012 cut Parks Canada's budget by almost 7.1%. The cuts hit parks and historic sites nationwide. Nova Scotia's Fortress of Louisbourg, touted by the Canadian Tourism Association as a signature designation, is facing the loss of 120 jobs. Banff National Park, another prime tourist destination, is losing 40 jobs.

Winter services have been eliminated and visitors are left to guide themselves at historic sites.

We have even cut out cross-country ski trail building. One activity that could be guaranteed in national parks throughout northern Canada was cross-country ski events. We do not have that anymore.

Budget 2014 included \$391 million, allocated over five years, allowing the agency to improve roads, bridges and dams located in Canada's national parks and historic canals. However, the 2014 budget specifies that only \$1 million is allocated for this fiscal year and \$4 million for 2015-16, with the rest to be handed out in 2016 and onward, after the next election.

It is estimated by Parks Canada reports the cost could be as much as \$2.7 billion to complete all deferred infrastructure programs.

We are happy we see an agreement between the Sahtu Dene and Metis and the current government to create a national park reserve: Nááts'ihch'oh. This is a good thing. However, it cannot stand by itself. Efforts have to be made to create a situation where, what the parliamentary secretary talked about, the economic opportunities, the jobs, the local economy that can come out of a national park can flourish, and that is linked to tourism.

Without the effort put into that, without the effort put into Parks Canada to provide it with the resources to promote tourism, without the effort put in by the Canadian Tourism Commission and without the resources to advertise to promote Canada worldwide, we will not see an increase in our tourism, and we will continue this downward trend. This beautiful country, with so much to offer to so many people around the world, is not getting its due right now.

We are spending all kinds of money promoting the oil and gas industry, trying to do the work for multinational corporations that should do their own work because they are making massive profits from these resources. What do we do for the tourism people? What do we do for those little people who are trying to set up small businesses? What do we do to set up the opportunities for people to work in this field? We are cutting back on the resources that are available to promote this very important sector.

As I have pointed out, agriculture, forestry and fishing combined do not match up to the impact that tourism has on our economy. We want to be successful in the Northwest Territories. We want our people to have an opportunity to take advantage of the natural beauty of our country and the land. We want our first nations, which have gone into agreements, to invest in business and opportunities in the tourism sector. That is the real growth potential for the national parks in the Northwest Territories.

However, the government has shown that it is not interested in that. Perhaps after the next election, we will have another government; it looks likely. At that time, we perhaps will see the true potential of the Canadian national parks system, including all those in the Northwest Territories. They will have an opportunity to grow, so the people in that region, who have given up so much to provide these beautiful national parks to Canada for eternity, will have an opportunity to achieve a prosperous lifestyle from doing that. It will be hard. There is nothing easy about the tourism industry. It takes time, effort and resources, but it also takes the active participation of the Government of Canada in promoting Canada as a destination.

We cannot back off from that. We cannot say that it is not important, that we will leave it to the private sector. That does not work. This is our country. We have to make the best opportunities for it. We cannot simply continue to cut the opportunities that exist there to show the world what we have here.

I appreciate this. I really hope the Conservatives this time follow up on this, and have an active plan to get the facilities in place. With the Nahanni National Park Reserve expansion, we were promised seven years ago that these facilities would be built, including a proper visitors centre in Fort Simpson. The Nahanni National Park Reserve is a world heritage site. It is famous around the world. Yet there is absolutely nothing in Fort Simpson to sell somebody on getting in a plane and flying all the way out there to look at it. There is nothing there. There is nothing that has been put in place yet, after seven years. That is a shocking record. That is a record of ineffective behaviour. That is a record of not understanding how to get along with first nations to accomplish this. This is where that sits in the Nahanni National Park Reserve expansion plans.

I trust there is someone on the other side who might be listening to this and understanding that there is work to be done here, that this is not all just clapping our hands for the wonderful things that the government has created. The government has not created anything. It has taken land and put it aside. Now we need the work to go in to making it something.