CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

Nomination Document for the Thelon River Northwest Territories
Submitted by:

The Municipality of Baker Lake;

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Government of the Northwest Territories; and

the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Government of Canada
This document sets out the submission requirements of the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board for the nomination of a river or segment of a river to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS). It is the vehicle by which the nominating agency identifies the heritage significance of the river and justifies the inclusion of the river in the CHRS. The purpose of this nomination format is therefore to act as a guide to nominating agencies and to provide consistency in the nomination process. Instructions to assist in completing this nomination form are set out in Appendix "A" at the end of this document.
The Canadian Heritage Rivers System has been established by federal, provincial and territorial governments for the purpose of recognizing outstanding rivers of Canada and ensuring future management which will protect these rivers and enhance their significant heritage values for the long term benefit and enjoyment of Canadians. To qualify for inclusion in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, a river or section of river must be of outstanding significance in one or more areas: human heritage, natural heritage or recreational values. The nominated section should be large enough to encompass these values and provide the user with a good appreciation of the river’s resources, as well as an enjoyable recreational experience. The responsibility for the collection and analysis of information to determine heritage values and for subsequent nomination of the river rests with the particular government within whose jurisdiction the nominated river lies.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board, composed of federal, provincial and territorial government representatives, will examine each nomination document and will accordingly advise the Minister responsible for Parks Canada and the Minister(s) of the nominating agency(ies) on the suitability of the nominated river for inclusion within the CHRS. When considering a river, the Board will determine the degree to which the “Guidelines for the Selection of Canadian Heritage Rivers” are satisfied by the nominated river. The Board will consider both the river and its surrounding landscape which together capture the heritage values.

Within three years of acceptance of a nomination by the Ministers, a management plan shall be lodged with the Board, at which time the river or section of river shall be formally included in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The Board will undertake periodic reviews of Canadian Heritage Rivers to ensure that the designated rivers continue to merit inclusion in the CHRS.

The authority of the Board to carry out these functions is derived from the Ministers of the Crown of the participating jurisdictions.
1. River Nomination

Purpose of Section: to formally nominate the river or segment of the river for inclusion in the CHRS.
1. River Nomination

WHEREAS the Thelon River, the largest river in the Northwest Territories to flow into Hudson Bay, is a river of outstanding natural heritage, human heritage and recreational value;

WHEREAS the Thelon River provides an outstanding representation of a transition ecosystem between boreal and Arctic, an island of forest in an area surrounded by tundra, which provides habitat for a unique and diverse collection of wildlife species, including as many as 2,000 to 3,000 muskoxen, 330,000 migrating caribou, large numbers of moose, grizzly bears and wolves;

WHEREAS the Thelon River is strongly associated with the development of conservation and wildlife protection in Canada, flowing through the Thelon Game Sanctuary established in 1927;

WHEREAS the Thelon River has an outstanding archaeological record which demonstrates a close association between the river and a succession of cultures dating back 8,000 years;

WHEREAS the Thelon River offers outstanding recreational wilderness canoeing with opportunities for wildlife viewing, and historical and cultural heritage appreciation; and

WHEREAS the Thelon River was judged, in the CHRS Systems Study of Rivers in the Northwest Territories to be among the top three river candidates in the Territories for inclusion in the CHRS;

IT IS THEREFORE RECOMMENDED that the 545 kilometre section of the Thelon River from Wardens Grove, 50 kilometres downstream from the south-western boundary of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, to the mouth of the river at Baker Lake be included in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

/5 June 1989
Date

Title ................................................
Municipality of Baker Lake, N.W.T.

MAY 17 1989

Date

Title ................................................
Department of Economic Development and Tourism
Government of the Northwest Territories

MAY 31 1989

Date

Title ................................................
Department of Indian Affairs & Northern Development
Government of Canada
2. Summary and Justification

Purpose of Section: to draw conclusions concerning the significance of the river's outstanding heritage values in order to provide a rationale for the nomination of the river to the CHRS, and to describe the potential role of the river in the CHRS.

2.1 Summary

From the junction with the Hanbury River, to its mouth at Baker Lake, the Thelon River has been the home to many Inuit now living in the community of Baker Lake. The river and its three principal lakes continue to be used by people in the community. Culturally, the Thelon is characterized by a human past which has played and continues to play a critical role in the lives of the Baker Lake people. The community would like to share the river with the rest of Canada and have the Thelon River’s heritage recognized through the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

The Thelon River has some very old archaeological structures. Archaeologists have excavated sites of the Northern Plano people, the first people to inhabit the Keewatin after the Ice Age. This work has shown that Plano people lived as far north as Beverly, Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes. Also found on the Thelon River are sites of the Shield Archaic culture, which immediately followed the Plano culture. The archaeological record continues to the present, with Pre-Dorset sites (displacing the Shield Archaic around 1500 B.C.), evidence of Taltheilei people (500 B.C. to the historic period) and Dene, and of Thule and Caribou Inuit.

Approximately half of the nomination falls within the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Since 1927, when the Thelon Game Sanctuary was established, the Thelon River has been associated with the conservation movement in Canada. The people of Baker Lake have respected and worked with the sanctuary since it was created, and consider it part of their recent heritage. The list of researchers is impressive, starting with the ill-fated John Hornby, whose information helped create the Sanctuary, and who starved there in 1927. More successful researchers followed, including such pioneers as W.H.B. Hoare in 1928-1930, C.H.D. Clarke in the 1930s, J.P. Kelsall and J.S. Tener in the 1950s, and E. Kuyt in the 1960s. The first recreational canoeist to travel the length of the Thelon was adventurer David Hanbury, in 1899.

The Thelon Game Sanctuary contains an 'Arctic oasis' with unique wildlife assemblages, pristine wilderness and diverse habitats. The sanctuary has preserved a complete, undisturbed ecological system at the boreal/Arctic transition. This 'oasis complex' constitutes a unique natural phenomenon, whereby the river helps to create a boreal environment surrounded by Arctic tundra. This has created a situation with unusual diversity, an
environment which supports both Arctic and boreal species. Muskoxen and caribou are found in the same area as moose and beaver.

The Thelon River also supports the habitats of species not often seen in other parts of Canada. The peregrine falcon, a threatened species, nests along Beverly and Aberdeen Lakes, and in the Thelon Game Sanctuary. Wolverine, classified as rare, live in the area. The tundra swan, a protected species, uses the river during moulting.

The Thelon River provides important habitat for a large muskox population. The Beverly caribou herd, numbering about 330,000, crosses the nominated area before and after calving. A considerable predator population inhabits the Game Sanctuary area, as wolves, barrenground grizzly bear, fox, and lynx thrive in the absence of human competition and harassment. A significant proportion of Canada’s population of the large race of Canada geese nest and moult in the nominated area, with about 10,000 moulting Canada Geese using Beverly and Aberdeen Lakes. One of the few inland nesting sites of lesser snow geese is at the Ursus Islands on the Thelon.

Combined, these human and natural heritage values have made the area a destination for recreational wilderness canoeists. The river has attracted royalty, well-known Canadians and a wide variety of other wilderness users to enjoy its waters, landscapes, and wildlife. The Thelon will continue to attract people in search of a true wilderness experience, especially after its nomination and increased recognition.

Important archaeological sites, a unique environment with extraordinary wildlife resources, over sixty years of wildlife protection, close association with Canada’s conservation movement, excellent recreational value, and the continued importance of the river to the people of Baker Lake, combine to make the Thelon River an outstanding candidate for the designation "Canadian Heritage River".
2.2 Role in the CHRS

Inclusion of the Thelon River in the CHRS will serve the system in a number of ways:

The foregoing summary description and assessment of the resources and features of the nominated area of the Thelon River demonstrates that the river contains human, natural, and recreational values that meet the guidelines for the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. Although many of the heritage guidelines are met, the abundant wildlife resources and the outstanding recreational opportunities are the primary reasons for this nomination of the Thelon River to the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

In William Baker's 1984 system study of the rivers of the Northwest Territories the Thelon River was judged to be one of the best candidates for a heritage river in the Northwest Territories. With high scores in natural and human heritage, and recreational potential the Thelon was second only to the Mackenzie in the selection of rivers with the best heritage values. The Thelon River was judged as third best in the Northwest Territories in Baker's final selection, behind the South Nahanni and Mackenzie Rivers.

The Thelon River is a wilderness river which provides the recreational canoeist with an excellent opportunity to view boreal and arctic wildlife and to appreciate and observe the wilderness, far from any developed area.

The Thelon River provides a representation of early wildlife conservation in northern Canada, with the establishment of the Thelon Game Sanctuary in 1927. A significant portion of the Game Sanctuary is included in the nominated area.

The Thelon River (including the Dubawnt River) drains some 142,400 square kilometres of the barrenlands, and makes up a major, and the most northerly, drainage into Hudson Bay. This river system has the largest unaltered drainage basin into Hudson Bay.

The Thelon River flows through a plain of proterozoic strata, laid down between 2,400 million and 570 million years ago, known as the Thelon Plain. The Thelon Plain is one of five such plains in Canada. The nominated area lies entirely on this physiographic region, and offers excellent representation of it.

The Thelon River provides the Canadian Heritage Rivers System with a unique environment, an 'Arctic oasis' -- a unique natural phenomenon, whereby the river supports a boreal environment in an area surrounded by Arctic tundra. This has created an ecosystem with unusual diversity, an environment which supports both Arctic and boreal species. The 'oasis complex' is in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, which has preserved a complete, undisturbed ecological system at the boreal/Arctic transition.
3. Location

Purpose of Section: to describe the location and regional setting of the river.

The community of Baker Lake recognizes that natural, cultural, and recreational values of the Thelon River exist well upstream of the area shown on the attached map. However, these upstream areas, including the Hanbury River, have a rich history of shared use between the Dene/Metis and the Inuit. In an effort not to confuse ongoing land-claim negotiations in this area, the nomination is, for now, that portion of the Thelon, starting some 50 kilometres downstream of the south-western boundary of the Game Sanctuary. The nomination extends from Wardens Grove to the river mouth at Baker Lake.

When land claim issues are settled in the future, then upstream areas of the Thelon River, and possibly the Hanbury River, could be considered as an addition to this nomination.

The total length of the Thelon River is about 940 kilometres. The nominated segment is about 545 kilometres long, accounting for 58% of the total length. The Thelon River drains an area of 142,400 square kilometres. This figure includes the 57,500 square kilometres drained by the Dubawnt, which flows into the Thelon between Beverly and Aberdeen Lakes.

The Thelon is the most northerly major river system draining into Hudson Bay. The Thelon River has the largest unaltered drainage basin, which is the third largest of all those draining into Hudson Bay. Before several diversions took place, the Nelson River system and the Churchill River system were the larger basins feeding Hudson Bay. After the diversion of 70% of the flow of the Churchill River into the Nelson Basin, the Churchill Basin became smaller, while conversely, in Quebec, the La Grande River Basin with several rivers diverted into it, became larger than the Thelon Basin.

Baker Lake, with a population of over 1,000, lies at the geographic center of Canada, 1,550 kilometres north of Winnipeg, and 900 kilometres east of Yellowknife. Other communities in the region include Rankin Inlet, the regional centre with about 1,400 inhabitants, Arviat (previously Eskimo Point, population 1,200), Chesterfield Inlet (c. 300) and Whale Cove (c. 200). Access to the Thelon River is usually by chartered aircraft from Yellowknife or Baker Lake.
Nomination of the Thelon River to the Canadian Heritage System

Nomination de la rivière Thelon au Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien

BOUNDARY OF THELON GAME SANCTUARY

LIMITES DE LA RÉSERVE FAUNIQUE DE LA RIVIÈRE THELON

Nominated Portion of River

Segments de la rivière représenté

Heritage features are representative only.

Les signes du patrimoine ne sont que symboliques.
4. Identification of Heritage Values

Purpose of Section: to describe and evaluate the heritage values of the river relative to the Guidelines for the Selection of Canadian Heritage Rivers.

4.1 General

The Thelon River has been the home to many Inuit now living in the community of Baker Lake. The river and its three principal lakes supported a way of life that has changed greatly in the past three decades. The people remember well their life on the river, and since they have moved into the community the river area is still extensively used today. The people of Baker Lake would like the river and their life on it recognized and commemorated, for their children and grandchildren, and for anyone travelling its waters.

The Thelon River remains a true wilderness river, with no development along its course, which supports an 'oasis' of boreal forest surrounded by tundra. The wildlife along the river includes muskox, caribou, grizzly bear, wolf, Canada and snow goose and tundra swan.

The Thelon is also recognized as an excellent wilderness river by recreational canoeists. The river's extraordinary wildlife populations, the history of the Game Sanctuary, the clear water, good fishing, natural beauty, and the signs of early habitation, combine to give a first class wilderness experience.

The community of Baker Lake and the Department of Economic Development and Tourism of the Northwest Territories hired David Murray and John Pudnak to work in the community of Baker Lake to determine the heritage components of the Thelon River. Much effort was placed on gathering the history of the river according to the elders of the community. The available literature was collected at libraries in Montreal, Ottawa and Yellowknife, and through a computer database search from Baker Lake. Other knowledgeable people were sought out, including people who had travelled on the Thelon, archaeologists, and biologists (see bibliography and personal communications list).
4.2 Natural Heritage Values

4.2.1 Description

Geology

The Thelon River, in the area of the nomination, has cut a valley through the flat to rolling Thelon Plain. The Thelon Plain is a part of the Canadian Shield overlaid with proterozoic strata. The proterozoic period, between 2,400 million and 570 million years ago, occurred during the latter part of the Precambrian era. The Thelon Plain is one of five proterozoic plains in Canada, the others being the Athabaska Plain in Saskatchewan, the Nipigon Plain and the Cobalt Plain in Ontario, and the Melville Plain in Labrador. Slightly smaller than the Athabaska Plain, but larger than the others, the Thelon Plain is bisected by the Thelon River. The nominated area lies entirely on this physiographic region, and offers excellent representation of it.

Landforms

The area of the nomination shows much of the glacial and post glacial periods. After the withdrawal of the Laurentian Ice Sheet, the area was subjected to a period of submergence. The area of the Thelon above Beverly Lake was entirely flooded by a post-glacial lake, while the lakes complex, below Beverly Lake, was flooded by a post-glacial marine transgression.

In addition to some features associated with ice moulding and glacial river action, such as eskers and drumlins, the area was overlaid with pro-glacial lake and marine sediments. Materials vary from sands and silts on the valley floor to washed till on the slopes. These sediments are being eroded in the river section, and deposited in the lakes sections, where deltas are forming.

Hydrology

The Thelon is the most northerly major river system draining into Hudson Bay. At 142,400 km², the Thelon River has the largest unaltered drainage basin, which is the third largest of all those draining into Hudson Bay. Before several diversions took place, the Nelson River system and the Churchill River system were the larger basins feeding Hudson Bay. After the diversion of 70% of the Churchill River into the Nelson Basin, the Churchill Basin was reduced to an area of 32,060 km². In Quebec, the La Grande River Basin had several rivers diverted into it, increasing its drainage area to 177,700 km², some 35,300 km² larger than the Thelon Basin.
Vegetation

The nominated area crosses an area of vegetation transition, from the boreal forest to the arctic tundra. The striking feature of the nominated area is the area which has been termed the "oasis complex". In the 'oasis complex' area the river sustains the growth of a healthy stand of forest, entirely surrounded by the treeless tundra. The 'oasis' area is characterized by open black spruce and moss woodland, open stands of white spruce and lichen, and low to tall shrubs, mainly feltleaf willow and dwarf birch.

The area around Beverly, Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes is low Arctic tundra. Lichens and mosses predominate, with some low to medium shrubs in the protected areas.

Wildlife

The Thelon River flows through the Thelon Game Sanctuary which is home to a virtually pristine ecosystem. The 'oasis complex' provides habitat for a unique assemblage of species which has been proposed as an International Biological Programme reserve (Nettleship and Smith 1975). Protected from hunting and mining development since 1927, the wildlife populations have developed without human interference, allowing the ecosystem to evolve a natural balance. This balance is especially evident in high carnivore populations, such as foxes, wolves and grizzly bears. These are the only carnivore populations in the Northwest Territories that are not subject to hunting or trapping (Eng et. al. 1988).

The Thelon Game Sanctuary is home to a unique assemblage of boreal and arctic fauna. Among the significant fauna are barren-ground caribou, muskox, barren-ground grizzly bear, moose, wolf, wolverine, red fox, Arctic fox, Arctic hare, and even the occasional beaver. Nesting populations of a wide variety of birds are found in the sanctuary, including rough-legged hawk, peregrine falcon, gyrfalcon, snow goose, Canada goose, white fronted goose, whistling swan, sandhill crane, several species of ducks and shorebirds, and all four species of loons.

The high diversity of species has allowed some unusual interspecies interactions, including predator/prey relationships, foraging interactions and ecological adaptations. For example, muskoxen forage in the same areas that moose do, and both populations are growing, increasing the likelihood of competition for forage or territory between the two species. Muskoxen have been killed by grizzly bears in the Thelon area. While it is possible for grizzly bears and muskoxen to interact elsewhere on the barrens, on the Thelon the vegetative cover allows the bear to approach more closely and launch a more successful attack. Gyrfalcons, normally cliff nesters, have been recorded nesting in trees along the Thelon River.

The Beverly caribou herd calves to the north of the nominated area. The pre- and post-calving migrations cross the river at certain caribou crossings. The present population of the herd is
Lynn Rogers/Travel Keewatin

Peregrine falcon on the Thelon River
about 330,000 caribou. The herd, where it crosses the river on
migration, can be one or two kilometres wide, and crosses at the
same place for over 24 hours.

The large race, or subspecies, of Canada goose uses Beverly
and Aberdeen Lakes for nesting, staging and molting. This part
of the nominated area provides habitat for approximately 10,000
molting Canada Geese (Branta canadensis maxima, and B.c.
moffittii), which is the largest population of molting Canada
geese in the Northwest Territories and "... represents a critical
concentration of the national population of large Canada Geese"
(McCormick, in Eng et. al. 1988).

White fronted geese (Anser albifrons) nest in the nominated
area; 30 broods were counted in 1960. The nominated area has one
of the few inland colonies of lesser snow geese (Chen hyperborea),
at Ursus Islands where 100 pairs have been counted.

Several important raptor nesting sites are also found,
including gyrfalcon (Falco rusticolus), peregrine falcon (Falco
peregrinus) and rough-legged hawk (Buteo lagopus), in the
nominated area, especially along Beverly and Aberdeen Lakes. The
Thelon River valley probably contains the highest density of
breeding raptors of any area on the arctic barrens (Shank, in Eng
et. al. 1988).

Peregrine falcons, classified as endangered and threatened,
nest on cliffs in the nominated area. The two subspecies of
peregrine which may nest near the Thelon River are; falco
peregrinus anatum, which is endangered (COSEWIC 1986), and falco
peregrinus tundrius which is considered threatened (COSEWIC 1986).
While many peregrine nests have been counted in the nominated
area, it is uncertain whether both anatum and tundrius nest in the
area. The anatum falcons are more likely to nest in the more
southerly parts of the river, and in the 'oasis complex', while
the tundrius nests in the treeless section.

Wolverines (Gulo gulo) frequent the Thelon River area, in the
Game Sanctuary and along the lakes. Inuit informants say they are
quite numerous, although no scientific studies of their population
have been done. Wolverines are classified as rare by the World
Wildlife Fund and the Committee on the Status of Endangered
Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC 1986).

The Thelon River is an important molting area for the tundra
swan(Cygnus columbianus), which also nest along the river. While
not considered to be a population at risk, the swan has royal
protection from hunting.

Moose (Alces alces) populations along the Thelon River have
been growing over the past century. Few moose were seen
early this century, Tyrrell and Hanbury mentioned only evidence of
moose, but neither of them saw moose on the Thelon River. The
area between Wardens Grove and Lookout Point on the Thelon River
is said to presently support 75 to 100 moose.
The Thelon Game Sanctuary was established with the protection of the muskox (*Ovibos moschatus*) as a primary goal. Muskoxen were at one time endangered, but muskox hunting was prohibited in 1917, and the Thelon Game Sanctuary protected important habitat from development after 1927. Muskox populations have been able to recover, and are now growing. The Thelon Game Sanctuary is home to at least 600 muskoxen, although recent estimates have been as high as 2,000 to 3,000. No reliable surveys of muskox populations have been done since the 1950s.

Barrenground grizzly bears (*Ursus arctos horribilis*) are often seen by canoeists. The nominated area includes important denning habitat for the grizzly. Ursus Islands is a nesting and moulting area for Canada and snow geese, and the concentrations of these birds and eggs attracts many grizzlies in the spring and early summer.

Sandy areas in the nominated area provide ideal denning habitat for Arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*) and wolf (*Canis lupus*). These animals are numerous in the Sanctuary area because of the good denning habitat and because of the protection from hunting and trapping.
4.2.2 Evaluation

Two of the four natural heritage value guidelines are met.

Outstanding Canadian natural heritage value will be recognized when a river environment meets one or more of the following guidelines.

4.2.2.1 Is an outstanding example of river environments as they are affected by the major stages and processes in the earth's evolutionary history which are represented in Canada. This would include rivers which best represent the major periods of geological time in which the surface of the earth underwent major changes and stream modification.

This guideline is not addressed as it does not appear to be met.

4.2.2.2 Is an outstanding representation of significant ongoing fluvial, geomorphological and biological processes. As distinct from the periods of the earth's development, this focuses upon ongoing processes in the evolution and form of the river and its associated plant and animal communities.

- The nominated area is an outstanding representation of a transition ecosystem, between boreal and Arctic, evolving without human interference, in a pristine, natural state.

- The nominated area, in the 'oasis complex' area, contains outstanding examples of ongoing natural processes. The river and its valley are supporting an island of forest, with an extensive stand of trees, in an area entirely surrounded by a tundra environment. This has led to unusual predator/prey relationships, foraging interactions and ecological adaptations. Muskoxen have been killed by grizzly bears. Along the river, muskoxen can be seen foraging in the same areas as moose. Gyrfalcons, normally cliff nesters, have been recorded nesting in trees.

4.2.2.3 Contains along its course unique, rare or outstanding examples of natural phenomena, formations or features, or areas of exceptional natural beauty.

This guideline is not addressed as it does not appear to be met.
4.2.2.4 Contains along its course habitats of rare or endangered species of plants and animals. This would also include areas where outstanding concentrations of plants and animals of Canadian interest and significance are found.

- The Thelon River, in the ‘oasis complex’ in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, contains a unique assemblage of boreal and Arctic flora and fauna, including barrenground caribou, muskoxen, barrenground grizzly bear, moose, wolves, and beaver.

- Beverly Lake is home to a rare mix of boreal and Arctic fish species, including Arctic char, lake trout, humpback whitefish, round whitefish, Arctic grayling, lake cisco, slimy sculpin, spoonhead sculpin, northern pike, and lake chub.

- Peregrine falcons, classified as endangered and threatened, nest on cliffs in the nominated area. The two subspecies of peregrine which may nest near the Thelon River are: *falco peregrinus anatum*, which is endangered, and *falco peregrinus tundrius* which is considered threatened.

- Wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) frequent the Thelon River area, in the Game Sanctuary and along the lakes. Wolverines are classified as rare by the World Wildlife Fund and the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada.

- The Thelon River is an important moulting area for the tundra swan (*Cygnus columbianus*). While not considered to be at risk, it is protected as the Queen’s bird.

- The Thelon Game Sanctuary supports an outstanding population of muskoxen (*Ovibos moschatus*). This population of muskoxen is growing and serving to repopulate other areas of the Canadian mainland. The estimates of their population have varied from a conservative 600 animals, to a recent estimate of 2,000 to 3,000. No surveys have been conducted since the 1950s.

- The nominated area is important to an outstanding population of caribou, (*Rangifer tarandus*). The Beverly caribou herd, which numbers about 330,000, crosses the Thelon River in the nominated area.

- Approximately 10,000 Canada Geese (*Branta canadensis*) moult in the area of the nomination, which is the largest such population in the Northwest Territories and represents a critical concentration of the national population of the large form of Canada Geese.

- The nominated area contains one of the few known inland colonies of lesser snow geese.
4.3 Human Heritage Values

4.3.1 Description

Prehistory

The first people on the barrens, after the retreat of the glaciers, were the Northern Plano people. The area of the Thelon Basin became free of ice between 7000 B.C. and 5000 B.C. The Plano people probably came north from the plains about 6000 B.C., hunting caribou. The Plano people are known to have lived as far north as Beverly, Aberdeen, and Schultz Lakes.

The Northern Plano people were followed by the Shield Archaic people. Archaeological sites on Beverly and Aberdeen Lakes, and up the Thelon River, are estimated, by radiocarbon dating, to have been occupied by Shield Archaic people around 4000 B.C. This culture is thought to have abandoned the area around 1500 B.C. Shield Archaic culture was wide ranging, and sites are found scattered across the Canadian Shield from the Keewatin to Quebec.

The Aberdeen and Beverly Lakes area also has Pre-Dorset archeological sites, representing a southern extension of Inuit people. The Pre-Dorset culture replaced the Shield Archaic on the barrens around 1500 B.C.

The Pre-Dorset people in turn left the barrens to the Taltitudei people, who occupied the barrens seasonally between 500 B.C. and the historic period. The Taltitudei people are thought to be the ancestors of present day Dene people.

Signs of occupation by Thule Inuit (1000 to 1750 A.D.) have been found near Baker Lake, but Thule people did not extend far up the river. For the most part, the barrens were seasonally occupied by Dene, mostly Chipewyan in the nominated area, up until the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, the Caribou Inuit began to live inland all year, and they expanded up the river to occupy most of the nominated section. The area of the Thelon Game Sanctuary was shared between Dene and Inuit for a period of time, but not much information is available on this use.

Native People

The river is representative of historical native settlement on the barrens, including Dene and Inuit use and occupancy. The area from Beverly Lake to Baker Lake is one of heavy Inuit use continuing to the present day. Before the arrival of a trading post in Baker Lake, Inuit people would travel to the area of forest on the Thelon River above Beverly Lake to gather wood for kayaks, sleds, and other uses.

Exploration of Northern Canada

The nominated area was important in the history of Canadian sovereignty in the barrens, as the first police patrols and government scientists used the river and lakes to enter the
barrens and apply Canadian law.

Joseph Burr Tyrrell with his brother James Williams Tyrrell led the first expedition on the Thelon River system, in 1893. They travelled from Lake Athabaska to the headwaters of the Dubawnt. They canoed down the Dubawnt to Beverly Lake, then down the Thelon River through Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes, to Baker Lake and down Chesterfield Inlet to Hudson Bay, finally to Churchill.

David Hanbury was the first European to travel on the Thelon above Beverly Lake, in 1899. He travelled into the area by himself, and joined with Inuit at various times on his travels. He was travelling in the barrens for the adventure of it, and could be called the Keewatin’s first tourist. He travelled from Churchill to Chesterfield Inlet on a ship, then canoed up the Thelon River (which he called the Ark-i-Linik), through Baker, Schultz, Aberdeen and Beverly Lakes to the Hanbury River (which he called the western branch of the Ark-i-linik). He ascended the Hanbury River to its source, then crossed over to Artillery Lake and continued to Great Slave Lake.

In 1901, with a friend named Hubert Darrell, Hanbury did the reverse trip, from Great Slave Lake to Artillery Lake, then down the Hanbury River and Thelon River to Chesterfield Inlet and Marble Island. They wintered at Baker Lake and explored much of the area around Baker, Schultz, and Aberdeen Lakes.

James W. Tyrrell returned to the Thelon, between Hanbury’s upstream and downstream voyages. In 1900, J.W. Tyrrell, C.C. Fairchild, and Archdeacon Joseph Lofthouse, with a party of Iroquois, crossed over to the Hanbury from Artillery Lake. They named the Hanbury, and canoed down it and the Thelon to mouth of the Dubawnt, at the east end of Beverly Lake. Here Tyrrell split with the rest of his party. He and several of the Iroquois went back up the Thelon, past the confluence of the Hanbury, for some distance. Tyrrell eventually sent the Iroquois back to Artillery Lake with the canoe, while he walked back to Artillery Lake. Lofthouse and Fairchild continued down through the lakes to Chesterfield Inlet.

Police History

The first Mounted Police patrol of the barrens used the Hanbury-Thelon route to cross the barrens from west to east. Led by E.A. Pelletier, with M.A. Joyce, R.A. Walker, and P.R. Conway, the patrol began in 1908. They started at Fort Saskatchewan, and proceeded to Fort Resolution, then by canoe via the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers to Fullerton, a Royal Northwest Mounted Police post established in 1903. They left Fullerton by dog-team, and travelled south along the shore of Hudson Bay, to Churchill, finally ending the patrol in Gimli, Manitoba in 1909. This patrol covered 5,300 kilometres. and was one of the longest that had ever been made by the R.N.W.M.P.

Harry V. Radford and Thomas G. Street set out in 1911 on an ill fated expedition to study wildlife and collect muskoxen and woodbison for American museums. They followed the Hanbury River and the Thelon River through Beverley, Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes.
to Baker Lake and Chesterfield Inlet. A marker left by them is still standing on Hanbury Lake on the Hanbury River. They returned to Schultz Lake, where they wintered. Early in 1912 they went to Bathurst Inlet, en route to the Mackenzie, but were killed, as a result of an altercation with Inuit in June. A later police enquiry, in 1917, led by Francis Henry French and Thomas Benjamin Caulkin, indicated that Radford had provoked the Inuit, resulting in the murders. No arrests were made. French and Caulkin started from Baker Lake, went up the Thelon to Aberdeen Lake, then overland. On their return they came down the Thelon from Aberdeen, by dogteam.

Conservation History

During the 1920s, the conservation movement in Canada was strong, and the government acted to protect wildlife in several parts of Canada, especially in the west and the north, by providing sanctuaries. The Thelon Game Sanctuary was established in 1927. While not the first, the Thelon was one of the earliest game sanctuaries, and many of the sanctuaries established at that time have since been closed. The status of the Thelon Game Sanctuary is now unique. There are bird sanctuaries, but no other game sanctuaries now exist in Canada.

The Thelon Game Sanctuary has been associated with several naturalists and biologists of Canadian significance. One of the most well known figures was John Hornby. After many years exploring in the Great Bear Lake region, Hornby and Captain Critchell-Bullock spent a winter in the Thelon area in 1924-25. This expedition led to Hornby writing a report recommending protection for the area.

"The results of this trip show there is a large uninhabited area where musk-ox are plentiful, swans and geese nest, and caribou have their young undisturbed by man."

That report led to the establishment of the Sanctuary, and that expedition encouraged Hornby to return to the Thelon area. He and two companions set up a cabin on the Thelon in the fall of 1926. Unfortunately they missed the caribou migration and were unable to feed themselves. They starved in the spring of 1927, and their graves are still to be seen in the nominated area. An arm of Great Bear Lake has been named for Hornby, as has Hornby Point on the Thelon River.

Once the Game Sanctuary was established, wardens were hired. The first game wardens were W.H.B. (Billy) Hoare and Jack Knox. They started work in the Thelon Game Sanctuary in 1928, building a cabin that still stands, at Wardens Grove. C.H.D. Clarke conducted a biological investigation of the Thelon Game Sanctuary in 1936, the first wildlife survey in the area, and still the most thorough. Hoare Lake, on the Hanbury River, and Clarke River, a tributary of the Thelon, commemorate two of these biologists. J.P. Kelsall, a well known caribou biologist, and J.S. Tener, Canada's foremost authority on muskoxen, worked in the Sanctuary in the 1950s.
The storehouse under construction in 1929
Thelon Game Sanctuary
4.3.2 Evaluation

Three of the five human heritage value guidelines are met. Outstanding human heritage value will be recognized when a river environment meets one or more of the following guidelines.

4.3.2.1 Is of outstanding importance due to its influence, over a period of time, on the historical development of Canada through a major impact upon the region in which it is located or beyond; this would include its role in such significant historical themes as native people, settlement patterns and transportation.

This guideline is not addressed as it does not appear to be met.

4.3.2.2 Is strongly associated with persons, events, movements, achievements, ideas or beliefs of Canadian significance:

- The Thelon River is representative of exploration in northern Canada. The river provided the way across the barrens, a large region of Canada, not effectively explored until the turn of the century. Early travellers using the Thelon include; geographers J.B. Tyrrell and J.W. Tyrrell in 1893 and 1900, Hanbury in 1899 and 1902, and the first R.C.M.P. patrol into the barrens, and one of the longest in history led by Pelletier, 1908-1909.

- The nominated area offers examples of the early conservation movement in Canada, including the establishment of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, associated with naturalists and biologists such as J. Hornby, W.H.B. Hoare and C.H.D. Clarke. The Thelon Game Sanctuary protected critical habitats and significant species in northern Canada, a role which it still fulfills.

- The nominated area includes several cabins connected to the establishment of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, and the conservation movement. The cabin of J. Hornby and his companions, and their graves, remind one of the work leading up to the establishment of the Sanctuary. The group of cabins and out buildings at Wardens Grove illustrate the work of the Sanctuary wardens. The cabin built by Hoare and Knox in 1929 remains in good shape.
4.3.2.3 Contains historical or archaeological structures, works or sites which are unique, rare or of great antiquity:

- The nominated area contains examples of rare, and very old, Plano culture archaeological sites, the northern-most sites of this culture known. These sites were occupied between 6000 and 5000 B.C.

- An archaeological site of the Shield Archaic culture was excavated on Aberdeen Lake. Other sites have been identified on Aberdeen and Beverly Lakes, and along the Thelon River above Beverly Lake. These sites are dated between 4000 B.C. and 1500 B.C.

- The nominated area contains other structures of great antiquity including Pre-Dorset archaeological sites (1500 B.C. to 500 B.C.), and of Taltheilei culture sites (500 B.C. to the historic period).

4.3.2.4 Contains outstanding examples or concentrations of historical or archaeological structures, works or sites which are representative of major themes in Canadian history.

This guideline is not addressed as it does not appear to be met.

4.3.2.5 In every case consideration should be given to the state of preservation of the river environment relative to its visual appearance during the historic period in which the waterway is considered to be of outstanding importance.

- The visual appearance of the river has not changed from the historic period and remains in a pristine state, as it was when Caribou Inuit were using the area, and when explorers and naturalists first came into the region.
4.4 Recreational Values

4.4.1 Description

The Thelon River is renowned as an outstanding wilderness canoeing river. Two outfitters bring trips into the nominated area, and numerous self-guided trips are run through the nominated area every year. The nominated section provides canoeists with a three to five week canoe trip, although a shorter trip can be arranged by scheduling a pick-up in the lakes area. Most canoeists start their trip above the nominated area, on the Hanbury River, or farther up the Thelon, and end their trip at either Baker Lake, or Beverly Lake.

A cairn on the Hanbury River, above Helen Falls, has been a repository for traveller’s messages. Over the last decade many people have left messages, including Eric Morse, Pierre Trudeau and the Duke and Duchess of York.

The river provides outstanding wildlife viewing. Most travellers on the river observe muskoxen, moose, barren-ground caribou, barren-ground grizzly, wolf, tundra swans, Canada geese, ground squirrels and several other species.

The nominated area provides good places for camping, easily accessible, with accessible shoreline. The area provides easy and rewarding hiking, and many points of interest to hike to, a good alternative activity to canoeing on wind bound days.

The nominated area provides the opportunity for human heritage appreciation, including Hornby’s cabin, a broken down log building which was the site of tragedy in 1927, and the cabins at Wardens Grove, which were the headquarters of the game sanctuary when the first warden was appointed. On the lakes section tent rings and other archaeological features are evidence of the Caribou Inuit who frequented the area. Older archaeological sites are also found, but these can be difficult to recognize.

The river has sufficient water flow to ensure navigability throughout the canoe season. The nominated area contains some rapids, easily portaged or lined, and all of which are navigable, given good water conditions and proficiency by the canoeist.

The natural and human heritage values can be maintained as recreational usage increases, as, apart from wood gathering, most use is non-consumptive and will remain low, and most wilderness users practice modern low impact methods of camping which leave minimal traces of use. Both outfitters operating in the area recognize the importance of practicing such conservation techniques.

Flora and fauna should not be significantly affected by the recreational use of the river, as most canoeists come to observe the beauty of the wilderness setting and no hunting is permitted in the Game Sanctuary.
Muskoxen in the Thelon Game Sanctuary
Present legislation protecting wildlife and artifacts from archaeological sites should prevent people from causing damage. Moreover, the majority of sites have features which are difficult to remove. Renewable Resource Officers and the R.C.M.P., responsible for enforcing wildlife and heritage protection laws, are stationed at the community of Baker Lake, often the canoeist's destination. They should act as a deterrent, and will deal with any detected infractions.
4.4.2 Evaluation

The Thelon River meets both recreational value guidelines:

4.4.2.1 Possesses an appropriate combination of recreational opportunities and related natural values which together provide a capability for an outstanding recreational experience;

- Recreational opportunities include such activities as boating, hiking, swimming, camping, wildlife viewing, and human heritage appreciation;
- Natural values include natural visual aesthetics, that is, diversity and quality of scenic beauty and physical essentials, such as sufficient flow, navigability, rapids, accessibility and suitable shoreline.

- The Thelon River is renowned as an outstanding wilderness canoeing river. The primary recreational value of the river is for canoeists. The nominated section will provide canoeists with a three to five week canoe trip, although a shorter trip can be arranged by scheduling a pick-up in the lakes area.

- The river provides outstanding wildlife viewing, allowing the observation of such species as muskoxen, barren-ground caribou, barren-ground grizzly, wolf, tundra swans and moose, as well as other animals.

- The nominated area provides the traveller with the opportunity to experience the scenic beauty of the barrens.

- The river provides good places for camping, easily accessible, with good shoreline.

- The nominated area has some of the best fishing in Canada, with Arctic grayling and trophy sized lake trout and Arctic char.

- The nominated area provides easy and rewarding hiking with many points of interest to visit, a good alternative activity on wind bound days.

- The nominated area provides the opportunity for human heritage appreciation, including Hornby's cabin and the cabins at Wardens Grove. Farther down, on the lakes, tent rings and other archaeological features are evidence of the Caribou Inuit. Older archaeological sites exist, but these can be difficult to recognize.

- The river has sufficient water flow to ensure navigability.

- The nominated area contains some rapids, easily portaged or lined, and all of which are navigable, given good water conditions and proficiency of the canoeist.
4.4.2.2 Be capable of supporting recreational uses without significant loss of or impact upon its natural, historical or aesthetic values.

- The natural and human heritage values can be maintained as recreational usage increases, with appropriate management. Factors which should facilitate protection are the essentially non-consumptive use, relatively low numbers of users, and the fact that the majority of wilderness users practice modern low impact methods of camping which leave minimal traces.

- Discussions with the two outfitters operating in the area, and a sample of individual canoeists, indicate a high level of appreciation and care for the wilderness and the human heritage of the river. The cairn, with its notes from famous people such as Pierre Trudeau, and the Duke and Duchess of York, has been used for over 15 years without damage.

- Impacts from visitor use will be examined in the management plan.

- Wildlife will not be significantly affected by the recreational use of the river, as canoe travel is quiet, no hunting is permitted in the Game Sanctuary, and the animals on the shore can easily avoid human contact.

- Damaging or removing artifacts from archaeological sites is illegal under existing federal and territorial laws. Moreover, the majority of sites have features which are difficult to remove or deface.

- The trip destination is often the community of Baker Lake, where Renewable Resource Officers and the R.C.M.P. are stationed. These people are responsible for enforcing wildlife and heritage protection ordinances, so any infractions that are detected will be dealt with. The fact that officers are stationed at Baker Lake will act to deter vandalism or other problems.
5. River Integrity

Purpose of Section: to evaluate the suitability of the river for nomination to the CHRS with reference to established CHRS integrity guidelines.

The nomination includes the key natural heritage of the 'oasis complex' in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, as well as the human heritage components found at Wardens Grove, along the river, and in the Beverly, Aberdeen and Schultz Lakes area.

The management plan will be intended to result in the maintenance of the human, natural and recreational values for which the river was nominated. A two level approach is proposed.

As the first level, the plan will identify activity nodes along the river for heritage appreciation and recreational use such as camping, day use, and portages. Visitor use at some of these nodes may require a greater degree of management control by legislated means such as a territorial park designation. Such a designation would also be necessary to allow for the investment of public funds to develop visitor facilities.

The second level of management would be based on existing federal and territorial land and water use legislation and regulations. This existing regime would manage other resource use activities within the nominated area. Furthermore, the management plan will be subject to final settlement of the native land claims. This second level tentatively includes a 1 kilometre corridor on either side of the river, and around the lakes. The location and width of the corridor will be more precisely defined in the management planning process according to specified land use requirements. The management plan will be developed in consultation with the affected communities, government agencies and departments, industry, and interest groups.

A winter road is proposed across Aberdeen Lake, to access a limestone deposit for the Kiggavik mine, which is currently being assessed by a Federal Environmental Assessment and Review panel. The proposed mine is located outside the Thelon River basin.

The nominated section of the river and lakes is sufficient to demonstrate the key aspects of the natural and human processes, features, activities and other phenomena which give the river its outstanding value. The length proposed contains all of the key interrelated and interdependent ecosystem elements which make the nomination significant.
The Thelon River is in pristine condition. No communities, and no existing or foreseen land or resource uses threaten the water quality of the river. The water quality of the entire river, including the nominated section is excellent and meets the integrity guidelines. The Thelon River supports healthy populations of fish species which require good water quality, such as lake trout, Arctic grayling, and Arctic char. The river’s integrity in the nominated area is reinforced by the fact that about half of the nomination lies in the Thelon Game Sanctuary and benefits from its protected status.
6. Selected Bibliography

Purpose of Section: to identify the major sources used in the preparation of this document.


Personal Communications

Baker Lake Residents:

Peter Aasivaaryuk
Hugh Aptonak
Thomas and May Haqqi
Mary Iksiktaaryuk
Matthew Kunungnat
George Tataniq
David Tiktaalaaq
Elizabeth Tunnarq

Other Resource People:

Chuck Arnold, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre
Jamie Bastedo, GNWT Renewable Resources, Planning
Tom Faess, Outfitter- East Wind
Bob Gamble, Parks Canada
Bryan Gordon, Archaeological Survey
Michael Greco, Cooperative Heritage Planning, Parks Canada
Alex Hall, Outfitter- Canoe Arctic
Gord Hamre, Parks Canada
Chris Hanks, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre
Elmer Harp, Jr. PhD, Dartmouth College, NH
Douglas Heard, Renewable Resources, GNWT
L. Greg. Mines, Dartmouth College, NH
Rick Hurst, DIAND
George Luste, University of Toronto
Kevin McCormick, Canadian Wildlife Service
David Morrison, Archaeological Survey
David Nutter, NWT Chamber of Mines
David Pelly, Operation Raleigh
Jim Raffan, Author of Wild waters & canoeing enthusiast
Klaus Roth, Tourism Industry Association of NWT.
Chris Shank, Renewable Resources, GNWT
Andrew Stewart, Royal Ontario Museum, and Operation Raleigh
Nomination Decision

Based on the information contained in this nomination document it is the recommendation of the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board that the nomination to the CHRS of the section of the ........... Thelon ................. River, located between Wardens Grove, in the Thelon Game Sanctuary, and the river mouth at Baker Lake, NWT ........................................, as described in the foregoing document

( ) be accepted

( ) not be accepted.

If accepted, it is further recommended that the Minister responsible for Environment Canada - Parks and the Minister(s) of Economic Development, and Tourism of the Northwest Territories, and Indian Affairs and Northern Development of Canada .................................................. on receipt by the Board of a management plan for the river, designate the said river as a Canadian Heritage River.
Management Plan

It should be noted that before formal designation to the C.H.R.S., the agency which has nominated a river must lodge a management plan with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board. This plan will be prepared by the appropriate federal, provincial or territorial agencies which have responsibility for the planning and management of the river. It may be lodged at the same time as this nomination or at any time within three years of Board acceptance of the nomination.

The specific contents of the management plan will be the prerogative of the managing agencies and will not be 'approved' or 'disapproved' by the Board.

The management plan will establish the boundaries of the river management area which is to be included in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System and will set out the policies and practices to be followed by the managing agencies to ensure its development, management and use consistent with the objectives of the System.

The plan should be brief and should demonstrate the commitment on the part of the nominating jurisdiction to protect the river's heritage values.