



# WAPUSK NEWS

THE VOICE OF WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK



[www.parkscanada.gc.ca/wapusk](http://www.parkscanada.gc.ca/wapusk)

## “It’s Not Easy Being Green...”

**Heather Stewart**

Ecosystem Scientist,  
Wapusk National Park

The area in and around Wapusk National Park (NP) is recognized around the world for its significant biological diversity. The park protects important habitats and populations of polar bears, birds and plants. Wapusk NP also contains some of the youngest land in Canada, as a result of the retreating Hudson Bay shoreline in response to isostatic rebound – the rising of the land following the glacial period.

But if you think that all of this points to a cushy life for plants, you’d be mistaken. In Wapusk NP, it’s not so easy being green...

Plants growing along the Hudson Bay coastline, and for a considerable distance inland, are rooted in shallow soil underlain by permafrost. Here, they are exposed to northeasterly storms and are subject to abrasion from ice crystals driven by winds sweeping across a treeless terrain where the mean annual air temperature is  $-3.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . And, conditions are not much friendlier to plants growing farther inland. Here, although they are more sheltered, plants must grow in peat bogs that are acidic, low in nutrients and poorly drained due to the permafrost below the surface which holds water on the low-lying landscape. Despite these challenging conditions, or



**Colourful flowers along the bank of the Owl River.**

Not all of the park’s flowering plants are small ground-hugging species, and many colourful blooms can be seen in areas of the park other than the beach ridges. Wapusk NP, in the right season, can have carpets of showy flowers covering the gravel banks of the Owl and Broad Rivers. Most of the plants in this photograph, such as broad-leaved willowherb (*Epilobium latifolium*), northern hedysarum (*Hedysarum mackenzii*), alpine arnica (*Arnica alpina*) and alpine goldenrod (*Solidago multiradiata*), are usually found north of Churchill.

possibly because of them, many noteworthy species occur within the park, making it a very special place to see plants.

So, given these unique habitats, how many plant species are found in Wapusk NP? The current tally of plants (excluding mosses and lichens) is approximately 370 confirmed species. This

inventory is the combined result of work completed by University of Manitoba Botany Inventory (2002-2008), the ParkSPACE Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping (TEM) project (2009-2010) and the work of individual researchers (multi-year projects since 1996).

*continued on page 2...*



### Lepage wild flax

One of the park's more rare plants, lepage wild flax (*Linum lewisii* var *lepagei*), is irregularly found right at the coast at the high tide mark, growing among sea lyme grass (*Leymus mollis*). This plant is one of only a few species which arrived in Canada after the last ice age.



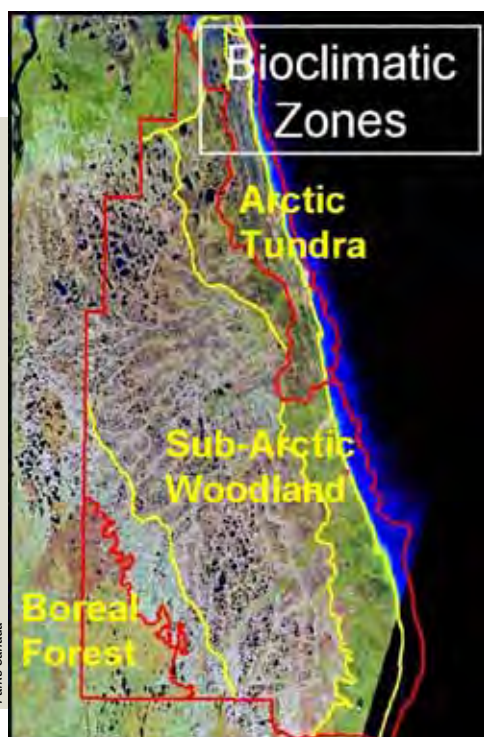
### Purple saxifrage

Purple saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*) is a true harbinger of spring. It flowers as soon as the snow begins to melt, often between snow patches. Without the large showy cushions of bright purple flowers, these plants are often overlooked later in the season (they seem like dead patches of scaly leaves) but they carpet the beach ridges with vibrant colour in June.



### Small butterwort

A very small insect-trapping plant called small butterwort (*Pinguicula villosa*) is a northern species frequently found along treeline wetlands in the park. Given its small size, this butterwort is often overlooked, but during flowering season, the small bright purple flowers are easy to spot. Its' buttery leaves, which trap insects, are well hidden beneath the mosses. After the flower is past, only the single stalk, like a toothpick, remains visible.



This **Terrestrial Ecosystem Map of Wapusk National Park** was created using satellite data.

The plant species found in Wapusk NP are spread over three broad ecological zones – the Boreal Forest, Sub-Arctic Woodland, and Arctic Tundra Bioclimatic Zones. Most of the plants in the park, about 52%, have subarctic affinity. Boreal/temperate plants make up about 38%, and the remaining 10% are arctic species.

The diversity and complexity of habitats, the weather conditions and the rebounding shoreline ridges truly make Wapusk NP a fascinating place to see flowering plants, including many which are usually found farther north.

It may not be easy being green here, but that makes it all the more fascinating!



## Some of Wapusk's flowering plants... up close.



### Mountain avens

On beach ridges along the coast, low growing white mountain avens (*Dryas integrifolia*) is the "pioneer species" – the first to be able to gain a foothold on the open ground. Its low, woody mats of foliage trap seeds and organic material. This plant is commonly found further north, growing on dry tundra, but here in the park it is restricted to a narrow band along the coast. It does not grow well further inland because it is shade intolerant and is crowded out by shrubs.

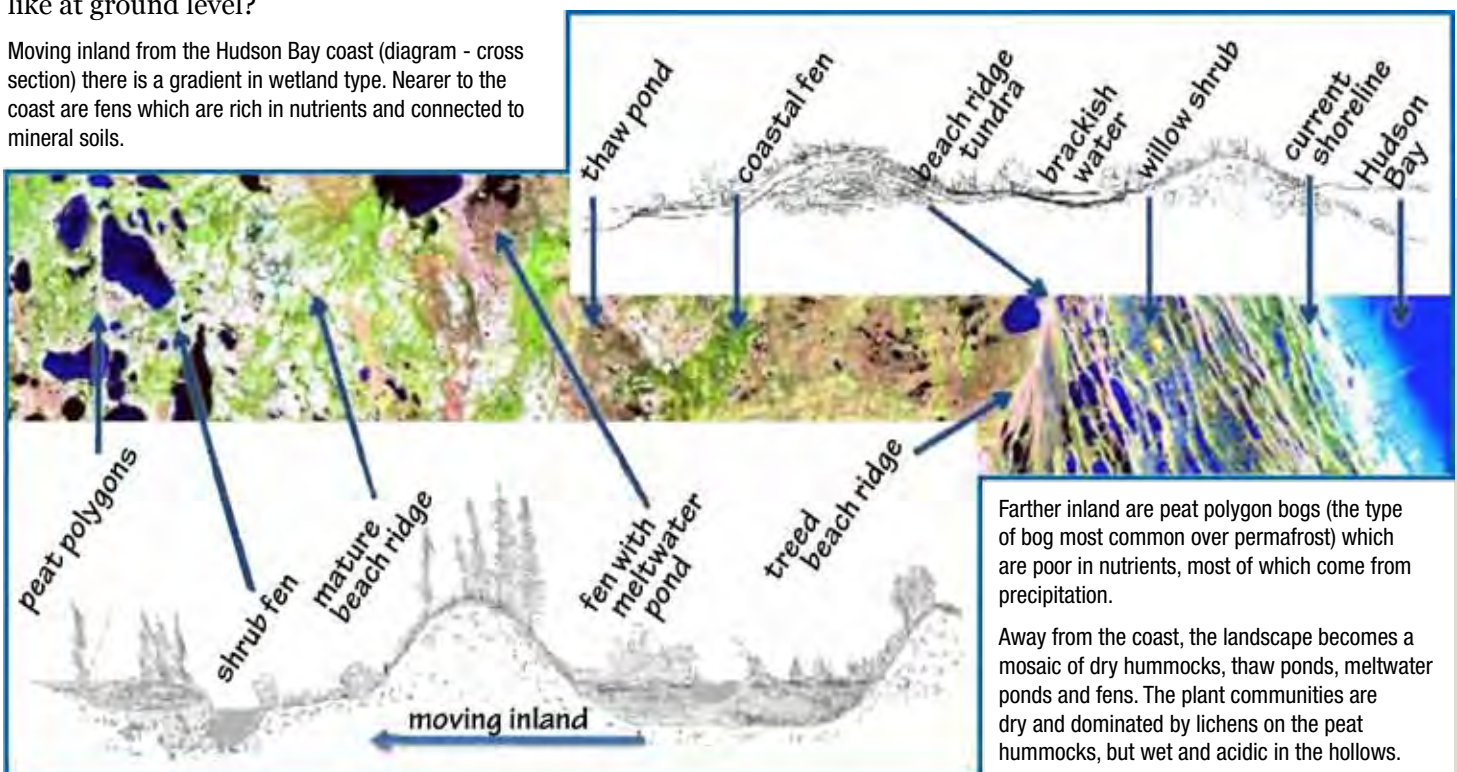


### Prickly saxifrage

Another common plant on the beach ridges is the prickly saxifrage (*Saxifraga tricuspidata*). In some places this densely matted saxifrage is as common as mountain avens. These plants thrive on exposed, gravelly areas with basic pH.

**Satellite images of Wapusk NP** show stunningly complex patterns in the landscape. What do these patterns look like at ground level?

Moving inland from the Hudson Bay coast (diagram - cross section) there is a gradient in wetland type. Nearer to the coast are fens which are rich in nutrients and connected to mineral soils.





## Parks Canada and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre Host Science Symposium



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The final afternoon of the symposium was a cooperative initiative involving the Parks and Protected Area Research Forum of Manitoba, Parks Canada and the Churchill Northern Studies Centre. Over 175 people were in attendance at this joint session.

### Sheldon Kowalchuk

Resource Conservation Manager,  
Wapusk National Park and Manitoba  
North National Historic Sites

On January 19 and 20, 2011, nearly 100 people attended a science symposium in Winnipeg that was hosted by both the Churchill Northern Studies Centre and Parks Canada. The purpose of the symposium was to bring together people with a common interest in northern Manitoba to raise awareness about research and monitoring

activities through sharing results, and to build partnering relationships amongst the research community.

A total of 23 researchers gave presentations and 25 presented posters during the symposium. The two-day event ended with two informative presentations by Dr. Jim Duncan from Manitoba Conservation, which focussed on Biodiversity in Manitoba, and by Dr. Nick Lunn of Environment Canada who spoke about the long-term research on the polar bears of western Hudson Bay.

This symposium was a tremendous success, shining a spotlight on the impressive number and variety of world class research initiatives occurring in Wapusk National Park (NP), the Churchill Wildlife Management Area and the Churchill region. The meeting also highlighted the value of the scientific community working collaboratively to achieve results. Working with partners greatly enhances Parks Canada's ability to deliver on its research and monitoring goals in Wapusk NP.

## Wapusk Leadership Camp 2011

The **Wapusk Leadership Camp: Leaders for Our Planet** offers the opportunity to experience one of Canada's most remote national parks – Wapusk. Students spend time in Churchill, MB before taking a helicopter to Wapusk National Park where they will get to experience the natural and cultural wonders this park has to offer.



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The camp involves developing self-confidence, personal skills and having fun while learning and contributing to current research in the sub-arctic.

This year's camp will involve 10 to 15 Manitoban students from **Grade 11** and will be happening from **July 7th to 13th**.

# Parks Canada welcomes David Britton to Churchill...

## Marilyn Peckett

Superintendent,  
Manitoba Field Unit, Parks Canada

In January, 2011, Parks Canada welcomed David Britton as the acting Superintendent of Wapusk National Park (NP) and Manitoba North National Historic Sites. David has joined the dedicated staff working in the Churchill Visitor Centre offices until mid-October, 2011. He replaces long-time Superintendent Cam Elliott, who is on a temporary assignment in Winnipeg working on a park establishment project in north-central Manitoba.

David has been working for Parks Canada in our National Office, as the Senior Policy Advisor to the Director General of the National Historic Sites Directorate. He is enjoying this unique opportunity to work “in the



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field”, far from the tall offices and glass windows of Ottawa.

David has a lot of experience with national historic sites from the policy angle, but now he’s getting the chance to contribute on-the-ground in two of Canada’s most remote sites - Prince of Wales Fort and York Factory. And, he brings fresh eyes and enthusiasm to Wapusk NP as both a manager and a visitor.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our jobs at Parks Canada is meeting visitors and working with the people and communities near our parks and sites. As David travels about over the next number of months into communities or out on the land, he is looking forward to connecting with many of you. Say hello, and help him discover the “real and inspiring” nature and culture of northern Manitoba!

## Parks Canada Issues First License of Occupation in Wapusk National Park

## Sheldon Kowalchuk

Resource Conservation Manager,  
Wapusk National Park and Manitoba  
North National Historic Sites

On November 15, 2010, Marilyn Peckett (Superintendent, Manitoba Field Unit, Parks Canada) and John Gunter (General Manager, Frontiers North Adventures) signed the first License of Occupation in the history of Wapusk National Park (NP). This was the culmination of a process that included a request for proposals to operate a polar bear viewing operation from tundra vehicles and lodge at Cape Churchill in Wapusk National Park.

Frontiers North Adventures and Parks Canada have been working together since the company was chosen as the successful bidder in a public request for proposals to provide this visitor opportunity.



Parks Canada

An environmental assessment had to be completed and forms a key part of the License of Occupation as it provides direction on what conditions are necessary and must be met to protect the ecological health of the park during operations.

“Frontiers North is thrilled to have earned the first-ever business license in Wapusk National Park. We also appreciate the opportunity to have worked with Parks Canada on an environmental impact assessment which guides our operations in the Park and in other areas of our business.” said Mr. Gunter.

Guided by the Wapusk National Park Management Plan, Parks Canada will be working to license new activities with other business operators in the future to expand the range of opportunities for Canadians to experience this spectacular park.



## Music and Film - Inspired by Wapusk



Geoff Morrison

Kathleen's guitar and notebook; as she takes a break from writing a song in the park

### Karyne Jolicoeur-Funk

Interpretation Coordinator,  
Wapusk National Park

Last summer, **The National Parks Project** brought one great film maker and three outstanding Canadian musicians to Wapusk National Park (NP) to create something special. This collaborative project between Parks Canada, FilmCAN and Primitive Entertainment traveled to 13 national parks across Canada from May to October, 2010. Film makers and musicians were sent to each park to create a short film and soundtrack to reflect these magical places and their experiences in them. All the while, Discovery World HD followed the artists, capturing them at work and at play.

Wapusk NP was privileged to welcome the Academy Award-nominated director, Hubert Davis, and the renowned musicians Kathleen Edwards, Matt Mays and Sam Roberts along with an extremely talented support crew who helped to make the project a reality.

The first to arrive in Churchill, Geoff Morrison (Producer), Barry Bichard (Assistant Director) and Paul Aucoin (Music Engineer) were greeted by 80km winds blasting off the Hudson Bay. The rest of the group arrived the next day with better weather, eager to begin their adventure. An orientation by Parks Canada's Melissa Gibbons gave them a sneak peek of what to expect. A short video, taken only a few weeks earlier from a remote sensor camera, revealed a polar bear being harassed by a swarm of mosquitoes at the very site where they would be

staying. Was this a premonition of the trip ahead?

Fortunately for them, Wapusk NP was kind. For five days, the sun shone, the breeze kept the insects at bay and the Northern lights danced. *What luck!*

With such a large group, fifteen in total, work teams often split up to capitalize on their short time in the park. Hubert Davis (Director) and Chris Romeike (Film cameraperson) often took time to appreciate the subtleties of one area, capitalizing on changing light over the vast tundra landscape to create their images on film. The musicians spent hours hiking and exploring, often accompanied by the riffs from Matt's electric guitar as he strolled the tundra "plugged-in". Sam was continually searching to spot another fossil along the riverbank and Kathleen enjoyed the feel of the tundra as she blissfully rolled in peat hummocks.



After getting acquainted with the landscape, the creative processes truly began. Whether it was the three musicians playing a lonely concert on the banks of a remote river, or a film maker discovering canoeing for the first time, the crew from Discovery HD was there to capture every moment.

The longest and most ambitious day brought us all to the edge of Hudson Bay... or almost. The artists, along with myself and Mark Ellam (TV cameraperson), enjoyed a canoe trip down the Broad River toward the coast, while the rest of the group hiked the fens and the beach ridges heading to the same destination. A few kilometres' short of the coast, we encountered a spectacular sight - a mother polar bear and her two cubs. We moved off to give her, and us, some space and finally joined the hikers on the bank of the river. We felt privileged to have seen the bears and witnessed their beauty and agility. It was only after really seeing a polar bear that the group understood the necessity of having a fenced area to sleep in at night and staff working as bear monitors constantly scanning the landscape.

After five days, and plenty of video footage, sound and music recordings, the crew flew out of Wapusk NP and finished off their trip in true Churchill fashion - with a bonfire by the Churchill River and one last spectacular show of northern lights.



Film director, Hubert Davis



From left to right; TV Director, Mike Downie; TV soundman, Chris Miller; Music Engineer, Paul Aucoin; TV Director of Photography, Mark Ellam and artists; Matt Mays, Sam Roberts and Kathleen Edwards

Thank you to the participants and everyone who helped to make this project a success!

#### **National Parks Project Group for Wapusk National Park:**

Geoff Morrison – Producer

Barry Bichard – Assistant Director

Hubert Davis – Film Director

Chris Romeike – Film cameraperson

Sam Roberts – Artist/Musician

Matt Mays – Artist/Musician

Kathleen Edwards – Artist/Musician

Paul Aucoin – Music recordist

Michael Downie - TV director

Mark Ellam – TV cameraperson

Chris Miller – TV soundperson

Simon Pottok – Camp cook, Northern Soul Wilderness Adventures

Rodney Redhead – Parks Canada, Resource Conservation Technician

Chantal Thompson – Parks Canada, Young Canada Works student

Karyne Jolicoeur-Funk – Parks Canada, Interpreter

#### **The National Parks Project**

has resulted in a collection of 13 films that showcase Canada's natural diversity and the breadth of its artistic talent. The films can be viewed online at:

[www.nationalparksproject.ca](http://www.nationalparksproject.ca)

**Discovery World HD** started broadcasting this series on television in March, 2011. To see a previously aired episode, check their website at:

[discoveryworldhd.ca](http://discoveryworldhd.ca)

And beginning May 3rd, you'll be able to download Hubert's Wapusk film on iTunes, as well as the full-length NPP soundtrack:

[itunes.apple.com/ca/album/national-parks-project-gwaii/id425289741](http://itunes.apple.com/ca/album/national-parks-project-gwaii/id425289741)

If you'd like to view the film made in Wapusk NP by the National Parks Project, you can request a screening at the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill.

# A Northern Treasure

An Interview with  
Myrtle deMeulles, OM

**Heather MacLeod**

Heritage Presenter,  
Wapusk National Park & Manitoba  
North National Historic Sites

It is a long way from the trap lines in the forest surrounding Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, to the modest and welcoming Métis Hall in Churchill Manitoba, and further still to the grand halls of the Government House in downtown Winnipeg. The life journey of noted storyteller Myrtle deMeulles is one she has recounted to thousands of visitors to the Churchill area through her presentation “A Trapper’s Daughter”.

Myrtle deMeulles (nee McCuley) was one of 12 children (6 boys and 6 girls) who grew up in the small community of Cumberland House, Saskatchewan, where she was born in 1941.

Myrtle’s fondest early memories are those of the trap-line. Although the women and girls worked hard setting up tents, cleaning and stretching the furs and making the meals, it felt like a holiday. Living off the land meant that there were often lean times and, by the time trapping season rolled around in March, the larder at Cumberland House was getting bare. Myrtle cracks a smile as she remembers the trap-line feasts of muskrat and beaver and the pleasant sensation of a full belly after a long winter. It is stories like these, about a lifestyle that has become only memory, that captivate audiences. Her distinctive melodic voice and heartfelt delivery immediately connects with people, and she never fails to provide comedic relief as she regales her audience with the stories from her youth. These stories resonate with people of every age.



Myrtle deMeulles displays samples of her trademark artwork, “caribou hair sculpting”.

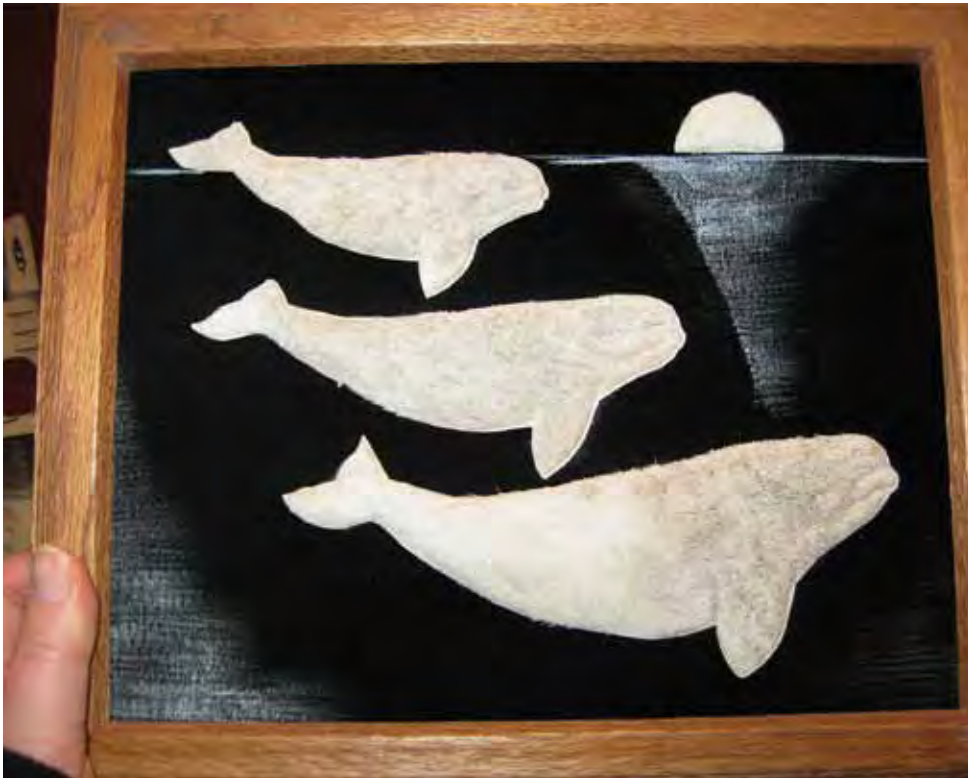
Cumberland House, on the Saskatchewan River, has connections to Churchill via the historic water trading routes through Winnipeg’s Lower Fort Garry and eventually, via the Hayes River, to two important HBC trading posts, York Factory and Prince of Wales Fort. Cumberland House was one of the first inland trading posts built by the Hudson Bay Company in 1774 under the direction of Samuel Hearne, who would later return to Churchill as governor of Prince of Wales Fort. So, it is somehow fitting that Myrtle would make Churchill her destination when she moved to Manitoba as a teenager.

In the old days, Myrtle explains, the young women were geared to be marriage-minded. By the time she was fourteen, she followed her sister to Churchill to look for work and a suitor. Work she found at the newly constructed Hudson Bay Port where she helped to feed 500 men three square meals a day. The Port was also where she met her husband, Robert deMeulles, and they were married three days shy of her 18th birthday in the local Catholic Church. Fifty-two years later, Myrtle relates that he is still fulfilling the promise he made to her father to take good care of her.

Myrtle affirms that one of her goals is to instil pride of the Métis culture in the youth of Churchill and to nurture the Métis art and craftwork that have been handed down many generations. Her trademark artwork, “caribou hair sculpting”, on which she holds the patent, was inspired by the wildlife and landscapes of the Churchill area. These things are all found in Wapusk National Park, and Myrtle has shared her love of the land with Parks Canada by giving a workshop on her sculpting method to the students involved in the park’s “Leaders for our Planet” youth leadership camp.

Taught to draw by her father, her first images were of polar bears and caribou, and later moose, loons and other northern subjects. Reflections of the north, depicting Cree and Inuit culture, abound in her artwork, although she has now expanded her repertoire to include custom orders of all kinds. Her display of artefacts and artwork proudly resides at Métis Hall to remind Métis youth of their ancestry, but is equally enjoyed by the many visitors to the Churchill area during the popular “Polar Bear Season” in the fall of each year.





Myrtle creates images of northern wildlife, like these beluga whales (above) and polar bear den (below).

Cultivating an appreciation and awareness of the Métis as a distinct Aboriginal culture to stand proudly beside the Cree, Dene and Inuit is another of Myrtle's important ambitions. Myrtle's father, Joseph McCuley, was a Scot who, like many others before him, came to Canada and married an Aboriginal woman (her mother, Margaret, is Cree), so she feels a connection to both peoples and the Métis culture that was forged by that union. But Myrtle feels that the Métis culture is widely unknown and underappreciated, especially by the international community. She has made a huge contribution to fostering an understanding of the Métis peoples through her public speaking engagements.

So, this is what brought Myrtle to Government House in Winnipeg. In 2008, the Manitoba Government officially recognized the contribution Myrtle has made to the Métis people and culture with the awarding of the Order of Manitoba. This prestigious civilian honour is bestowed on Manitoba residents for conspicuous achievement

and it followed closely on the heels of the formal recognition by her peers in the Manitoba Métis Federation as a valued elder within the Métis community.

Her debut storytelling presentation was at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre almost two decades ago and she recalls that there was standing room only. But what could she tell all these people who all had degrees and who had travelled from the four corners of the globe to be in Churchill? Early on in that first appearance, she realized that the audience was engaged by her stories of life as a trapper's daughter and she has been captivating audiences ever since. Her family history is one of 11 generations of story tellers and Myrtle deMeulles has done her ancestry proud as she stands as one of Northern Manitoba's talking treasures.





100 YEARS 1911 - 2011  
parks canada.gc.ca

# Happy 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Parks Canada!







## 100 years, Come Celebrate!

We have a lot to celebrate this year, with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wapusk National Park (April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2011) and the grand centennial of the creation of Parks Canada, the world's first national parks service! (May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011).

**Parks Canada in Churchill has decided to celebrate it all with a grand event on Parks Day, Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011.** In conjunction with Variety, The Children's Charity of Manitoba and the community of Churchill, Parks Canada will be throwing a big centennial celebration. Join us in the Hudson Bay square, in the heart of Churchill, Manitoba. There will be something for everyone, including kid's games, live entertainment, food and art!

Parks Canada Centennial events planned for Churchill in 2011:

- **July 1<sup>st</sup> - Canada Day Bay Dip**
- **July 16<sup>th</sup> – Parks Day**
- **August 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> - Famous Forts Weekend**

### Regular Programs for Visitors:

Once again Parks Canada is pleased to announce another summer and fall season filled with special presentations by staff, researchers and guests along with tours of the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill's Heritage Railway Station. For additional information, call us at **204-675-8863**.

## Centennial Facts - Did you know?

... Canada was the first country in the world to have a national service entirely dedicated to parks.

... Parks Canada manages a system of protected areas covering more than 300,000 km<sup>2</sup>. That's an area larger than Italy!

... Parks Canada is the greatest source of tourism and travel experiences in Canada.

... Parks Canada has exciting and memorable holidays waiting for you in every province and territory across the country.

With an impressive network of 42 national parks, 167 national historic sites and 4 national marine conservation areas, and thanks to its passionate team, Parks Canada invites Canadians to come and discover some of the most fascinating places in the country, and promises to turn vacation ideas into unforgettable experiences.

Last but not least... Did you know that Parks Canada is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday this year?

**In 2011, come celebrate!**

**[parkscanada.gc.ca](http://parkscanada.gc.ca)**

## The Wapusk Management Board

Wapusk National Park is managed by a 10-member board made up of representatives of Canada, Manitoba, the Town of Churchill, York Factory First Nation and Fox Lake Cree Nation. The Board advises the Minister responsible for Parks Canada on the planning, management and operation of the Park. The work of the Board reflects the philosophy, expressed in Wapusk's Park Establishment Agreement, that people are Keepers of the Land.



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See past issues of **Wapusk News** on-line at [www.parks canada.gc.ca/wapusk](http://www.parks canada.gc.ca/wapusk)

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**Wapusk News** is produced by Parks Canada and the Wapusk Management Board.



## ***We want to hear from you!***

**Parks Canada and The Wapusk Management Board would appreciate any comments about this issue of *Wapusk News*, or suggestions for future issues.**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number or e:mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Send your feedback to:**

Wapusk National Park of Canada  
P.O. Box 127, Churchill, MB, RoB oEo

Telephone: 204-675-8863

You are also invited to bring your comments to the Parks Canada Visitor Centre in Churchill, Manitoba, or send us an e:mail at: [wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca](mailto:wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca)

