



WAPUSK NEWS

The voice of Wapusk National Park

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Parks Canada Photo: Parks Canada staff evaluate camping opportunities at Fletcher Lake

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME? ...ONLY IN THE MOVIES

CAM ELLIOTT

SUPERINTENDENT | WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK & MANITOBA NORTH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES

Hosting visitors in a national park is more complex than building new facilities and hoping that they will attract people. In order to set the stage for experiences that truly meet visitors' needs and expectations, Parks Canada approaches planning

with the visitors' perspective firmly in mind. Here is a behind-the-scenes look at the process used by the skilled professionals who plan visitor facilities in Wapusk National Park.

WAPUSK NEWS IS PRODUCED BY PARKS CANADA AND THE WAPUSK MANAGEMENT BOARD



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Careful planning is essential, especially due to the fact that Wapusk can be a dangerous place to visit. Polar bears come immediately to mind, but the park's remoteness, lack of road or trail access, limited emergency air access, extreme weather and the scarcity of obvious landmarks present risks to visitors. A safe place for people to stay in the park is clearly needed. But, what kind of place?

To answer this question, Parks Canada began research to define appropriate visitor activities for the park. With the help of the Wapusk Management Board, as well as focus groups and workshops held in local communities, the planning team explored many possible visitor activities that would help people connect to Wapusk through engaging and meaningful visitor experiences. A vital element in the planning was that the activities under consideration must be in keeping with the protection of the natural and cultural resources in the park.

Wapusk's Park Management Plan was used to place the list of potential visitor activities into the overall context of managing the park. Finding ways to fulfill Parks Canada's mandate of ensuring ecological integrity while at the same time providing quality experiences for visitors is a key element in this management plan.

As the next planning step, Wapusk National Park staff undertook on-the-ground research to find areas where potential visitor activities could be accommodated. Multi-disciplinary teams drawn from heritage presentation, resource conservation, asset management and warden staff set out to assess the potential of several locations in the park as possible visitor activity areas. At each site, the teams identified the potential for offering visitors meaningful experiences, interpretive elements around which to develop programs, visitor comfort and physical access, public safety risks, risks to cultural resources, risks to ecological integrity, and landform suitability to support activities. With this information, the teams' next step was to determine how the prevention, mitigation and management of risks to public safety and the park's resources could be accomplished. We were fortunate to have a class from the University of Manitoba in the park for a few days to test-drive the risk management exercise. An interpretive hike led by Parks Canada staff was developed

for the class. This enabled staff to determine optimum group sizes, identify and resolve bear safety issues, revise programming, and determine minimum group supervision requirements.

The next area of research is to determine the ability of the land to support visitors. What impact will people have on the vegetation? How resilient is the vegetation to trampling? How many people can an area support in a year? Will new trails proliferate? These and other questions will need to be answered.

Parks Canada staff and research partners began this work in 2007. Some results are in, and the research will continue as new potential sites and different seasonal activities are assessed.

The planning has now reached the point where the Wapusk Management Board has begun to study what kinds of facilities will be needed to support quality visitor experiences and opportunities. The research that the Management Board has commissioned is providing information on visitor markets, visitor facility and accommodation needs and the economic model that is most likely to succeed.

The work is ongoing, and the Wapusk Management Board will be reviewing and using the research results to make recommendations to Parks Canada on future visitor facilities in the park. With environmental science and social science as integral parts of the planning and decision-making process, the facilities that we ultimately build will undoubtedly attract visitors to Wapusk and provide them with the outstanding experiences that they are seeking.



Parks Canada Photo: Beaches near Nestor One research camp.

WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK HOSTS SECOND ANNUAL SCIENCE MEETING

SHELDON KOWALCHUK

RESOURCE CONSERVATION MANAGER | WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK & MANITOBA NORTH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES

An important aspect of Wapusk National Park's mission is to promote and maintain the ecological integrity of the Hudson Bay James Bay Lowlands. The sharing of knowledge among a diverse group of researchers, staff and stakeholders interested in the park creates needed synergies and provides new insights that will help further this mission.

On January 29-30, 2009, Wapusk National Park hosted its second annual research and monitoring meeting at the Norwood Hotel in Winnipeg. This forum provided an opportunity for researchers to present the results of their research, hear from Parks Canada staff on management challenges, monitoring and reporting responsibilities and future direction, and to strengthen and establish new partnerships. Approximately sixty people from various locations across Canada and the United States attended the meeting. Presentations were exciting and enlightening, and covered everything from common eider populations to tree growth to insect diversity.

A favourite presentation for all was one conducted by four University of Manitoba students who reflected on their experiences in the park during a summer course last year. It was evident that these students enjoyed their experience and that Wapusk National Park left a lasting impression on them. They said it was one of the best times they've had.

There is a long history of collaborative research in this part of northern Manitoba, and Parks Canada is committed to maintaining those partnerships. Researchers bring increased human and financial resources to the table as well as their expertise and knowledge on species and issues that are of interest to Parks Canada. Maintaining existing partnerships and establishing new ones will help Parks Canada meet future challenges.

Discussions have already started with the Churchill Northern Studies Centre to hold a joint science meeting from January 20-22, 2011, which will build on the success of the meetings held in 2008 and 2009. This expanded forum will provide an opportunity to learn more about the variety of research that is occurring in the Greater Park Ecosystem and to create new opportunities to conduct research and monitoring projects in Wapusk National Park.

PARKS CANADA PARTNERS WITH TORONTO ZOO!

IAN MARTENS

INTERPRETER | WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK

Imagine visiting an exhibit at the Toronto Zoo and being captivated with delight as you experience polar bears, wolves, and caribou. Starting with a simulated ride on a bush plane, visitors to this new innovative exhibit called "Tundra Trek" will not only experience Canada's North, but also be exposed to Wapusk National Park.

Wapusk National Park's mission is to protect a significant portion of the Hudson James Lowlands ecosystem, and to ensure that visitors to the region have an inspiring and educational experience. Parks Canada strives to reach as many Canadians as possible, so the Toronto Zoo, which draws more than a million visitors a year, is an ideal partner to help bring the story of Wapusk to a large audience, many of whom might never have the opportunity to visit in person.

The exhibit, which the zoo opened in August 2009, is a major renovation and addition to their existing polar bear exhibit. Wapusk National Park will be providing advice and expertise on how to enhance the exhibit, as well as interpretive programs and weather station data. One unique feature of "Tundra Trek" is that it will integrate both natural and human history. Unlike conventional zoos, the Toronto Zoo features significant cultural interpretation with their animals. For example, the exhibit will include Inuit art, items from the Churchill Rocket Range, and the conversion of two on-site shops into Hudson's Bay Company trading posts.

It is through integrating the stories of people and the land that powerful messages of cultural and natural heritage can reach a broader audience. It is our hope that Parks Canada's partnership with the Toronto Zoo will develop and grow in future years to create a base from which to spread the messages of the park.

CLEAN-UP IN WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK CONTINUES

SHELDON KOWALCHUK

RESOURCE CONSERVATION MANAGER | WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK & MANITOBA NORTH NATIONAL HISTORIC SITES.

Parks Canada Photo: Bombardier at Broad River Cache with empty fuel barrels



On the heels of assessing potential contaminated sites in Wapusk National Park, Parks Canada developed a clean-up plan nearly two years ago to reduce the environmental risk associated with old fuel barrels within the park. The plan outlines priorities based on current information and it is updated annually.

Fuel that is used by Parks Canada and various researchers is located at designated fuel caches in the park. These caches are resupplied annually and old barrels are removed from the park on those supply trips. Old fuel has always been removed from these sites, however, over the past two years, a greater emphasis was placed on removing this fuel in a timely manner. A cooperative effort by Parks Canada, research partners and contractor Clifford Paddock, who hauls most of the fuel into the park, resulted in all of the drums more than two years old being removed from these caches. Over one hundred barrels were hauled from the caches this past winter.

In addition to the fuel that exists at designated caches, there are fuel barrels of unknown origin scattered throughout the park that date back many years. These barrels, if ignored, can be an environmental liability if they contain old fuel. Eventually, as the barrels

rust, the fuel can be released onto the ground or into wetlands or watercourses which can have a negative impact on the ecological integrity of the park. Remediating areas that have been impacted by fuel spills can be an expensive process.

Barrels identified for removal are moved to higher ground in the summer and fall so that they can be transported by snowmobile or bombardier in the winter. Throughout the winter of 2008-09, many park users contributed to moving the clean-up initiative forward. It is only through everyone working together that we were able to accomplish so much and we very much appreciate everyone's participation. Over ninety old fuel drums were removed from these outlying areas this past winter. If the progress made over the past two years is any indication of the future, old fuel drums will soon become a rare sight in Wapusk.

All park users have a responsibility to be stewards of the land and it is the intention that, over time, we can reduce the environmental liability associated with old fuel drums in the park. This clean-up effort makes both environmental and financial sense and it will continue in winters to come.

PARKS CANADA AWARDS FIRST BUSINESS LICENCE IN WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK

In May 2009, Parks Canada solicited proposals for a seasonal polar bear viewing camp at Cape Churchill in Wapusk National Park. Invitations to submit a proposal were sent to all lodge and tourist camp operators currently holding a provincial Resource Based Tourism Licence to operate in the vicinity of Wapusk National Park of Canada and in the Cape Churchill and Cape Tatnam Wildlife Management Areas. The request for proposals was developed by the Wapusk Management Board, which placed high priorities on the visitor experience, commitment to aboriginal and local employment, and economic development.

The proposals for a camp operation were reviewed on the 22nd of June, 2009. The process was audited by an independent third party auditing firm to ensure that all proposals were consistently reviewed. On the 26th of June, *Frontiers North's Tundra Buggy Adventure* was awarded the licence to establish and operate a polar bear viewing camp at Cape Churchill for the 2010 through 2014 operating seasons.

"Providing visitor opportunities for polar bear viewing at Cape Churchill from tundra vehicle and camp was one of the key items identified in Wapusk's 2007 Management Plan," said Park Superintendent Cam Elliott. "With the awarding of this licence and the development of a stronger partnership with *Frontiers North*, we've realized that goal and set in place the first building blocks for the public presentation of Wapusk National Park of Canada."

Frontiers North's proposal built on the strengths of their experience and partnerships, with commitments to innovative programming and state-of-the-art green technologies.

"For a few years, in cooperation with Parks Canada, *Frontiers North* has been working hard to meet and exceed the requirements for businesses operating in Canada's National Parks," said John Gunter, General Manager of *Frontiers North*. "We're extremely proud of our progress to date and appreciate the opportunity to continue to host guests at Cape Churchill for years to come."



Photo: © Frontiers North Adventures : Frontiers North camp at Cape Churchill



YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP LAUNCHED AT WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK

IAN MARTENS
INTERPRETER | WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK

*Parks Canada Photos:
Paul Preteau measures
vegetation cover with direction
from Heather MacLeod.*

Leadership Camp staff and students at Nester One research camp. Front Row (l to r): Amanda Spence, Samantha Grosbrink, Nicole Rabiscach-Hill, Heather MacLeod. Back Row (l to r): Melissa Gibbons, Darcy Wastesicoot, Justin Saunders, Paul Preteau, Stanley Spence, Ian Martens, Brendan McEwan.

From July 8th-14th, 2009, Wapusk National Park launched the first annual “Leaders for our Planet” high school student leadership camp.

This inaugural event brought students from Churchill into the park to experience what it means to be an ambassador for the environment. This year’s participants were Justin Saunders, Paul Preteau, Amanda Spence, Nicole Rabiscach-Hill, and Samantha Grosbrink.

Parks Canada’s Karyne Jolicouer-Funk began planning the camp in 2008, and I had the exciting challenge of bringing it all together this year. Using curriculum developed by “Global Explorers”, the program emphasised leadership skills and “on the land” science and traditional knowledge. Putting on the camp required teamwork, and special thanks go to Stanley Spence, Darcy Wastesicoot (Wapusk Management Board) and Parks Canada staff Heather MacLeod, Melissa Gibbons and Nancy Spence.

Students and staff battled through fog, roaring wind, swarms of bugs, and sticky bogs all in the name of having the adventure of a lifetime! Here, in brief, is a look at the week.

The camp began at the Churchill Northern Studies Centre where we explored the Ramsey Trail and played “CSI Churchill”. After supper, we took a

whale-watching tour and were fortunate enough to have belugas come within one foot of our boat and splash us! This was followed by a tour of Prince of Wales Fort, a National Historic Site operated by Parks Canada.

The next day, the adventure really began as the group was ferried into the Park by helicopter. On arriving at Nester One, we got quickly down to business with a presentation on Wapusk geology and a hike to the nearby beach ridges. In the evening, students were introduced to the concept of leadership, setting the tone for the rest of the week. Over the next few days, we delved into presentation skills, communication skills, teamwork skills, and leadership skills.

Students were taught about trapping by Stanley Spence, and paid rapt attention to lessons on traplines, marten boxes and catching foxes. It was extremely valuable to have traditional users of the land with us, as they noticed things on our hikes that others missed. The participation of Wapusk’s traditional users is critical to this program’s success, allowing students to be exposed to many voices and perspectives on the park. It was amazing to see these young people’s excitement about everything from animal scats to caribou bones.

Hands-on science projects gave students a taste of what it's like to work in the Park as both a conservation biologist and archaeologist. Peter Kevan kindly put together kits that allowed students to set out bug traps and bee bowls that they excitedly checked daily for specimens. This activity was directly linked to the National DNA Barcoding Project.

We also visited three heritage sites where students wrote reports that will be used in the park's database for future research. (Special mention goes to Paul Preteau who found a mostly intact rocket that was previously undiscovered!)

Each of these activities contributed to a rich experience that was practical and had tangible results. Students were undoubtedly transformed and, as a leader, it was pure joy to watch them make connections between the study material and the hands-on activities.

Each student took away from the program lifelong memories. Some were enthralled by the whales while others were excited by what they learned about leadership. What brings all of the students' experiences

together, however, is that each and every one of them came away with a willingness and determination to make a positive impact both on the environment and in their communities. The final activity for the camp was the creation of a vision statement for a project that they want to complete. These projects ranged from creating a new waste center in Churchill to starting a company that promotes sustainable housing. These are the future leaders of our community, and our environment. These students have committed to being ambassadors for Wapusk, and I have little doubt that the skills they've learned here will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

It is our hope that Wapusk's "Leaders for our Planet" camp will become an annual event, and that the program will attract students from other communities in northern Manitoba, including Fox Lake and York Landing. Wapusk's sustainability and relevance into the future will depend on dedicated youth with a connection to the park. We're already planning for next year, which I feel will be even better as we move forward in creating the next generation of environmental leaders.

THROUGHOUT THE WEEK, STUDENTS INTERVIEWED EACH OTHER ON VIDEO, ASKING THE QUESTION "WHAT DOES BEING A LEADER FOR WAPUSK MEANS TO YOU?" HERE ARE THEIR ANSWERS:

"To be a leader for this place means a lot to me. It gives me the chance to teach people things such as how to measure the permafrost, and how long a beluga whale can hold its breath ... I hope this stuff will actually teach the people who are here something. I hope people remember the experience of being here." – **Justin Saunders**

"What being a leader for Wapusk National Park means to me is to preserve and protect the environment long enough for future generations to enjoy and get a good view of the history and how it was like and to get into nature." – **Paul Preteau**

"To be a leader, anywhere, you need to show, to lead, to spread the word and to make a difference. Especially here, you want to keep it the same to let others experience what we experienced. "

– **Amanda Spence**

"Being a leader is a very important job. You tell people where to go, what to do and what not to do. Being a leader for Wapusk is especially important ... Make sure people don't take artefacts, and show them the safe way to go, look out for animals and show them things, it's very important. It also means that I'm doing my part to keep people involved in these parks so that Parks Canada is also preserved."

– **Samantha Grosbrink.**

"To me it means to preserve and protect the animals, the surroundings, and traditional ways. To let people experience the things that we experienced throughout the week."

– **Nicole Rabiscah-Hill**



CARIBOU LICHENS IN WAPUSK NATIONAL PARK

MICHELE D. PIERCEY-NORMORE

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES | UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

*Parks Canada Photo: Mainly *C. stellaris* (Caribou lichens) mixed with other ground-dwelling lichens*

It is summer and the caribou in Wapusk National Park (WNP) are feeding on green plants that are rich in protein. During the winter the caribou must dig through snow to eat lichens that are rich in sugars. Common names for these lichens include Caribou lichens, Reindeer lichens, Reindeer moss, or Caribou moss. All Caribou lichens are in the scientific genus *Cladonia*. They are called Caribou lichens because caribou feed on them during winter months in northern parts of Canada and the United States. Reindeer feed on them in Russia and Scandinavia. These lichens have many fine branches and stalks and often look somewhat like mosses. But mosses are deep green with many tiny leaves and Caribou lichens are gray, or yellow green in color and do not have leaves. Caribou lichens grow on the ground absorbing most of their water and nutrients from the air around them in the form of rain, snow, fog, or from dust particles blown over them. They do not have roots like plants and cannot get much water from the soil especially if it is frozen or in permafrost.

Caribou lichens are very abundant in WNP and the surrounding area. There are four known species of Caribou lichens in WNP, in addition to some other lichens that look very similar (Piercey-Normore 2005; 2006). Lichens prefer areas that are fairly dry and receive high levels of light, such as large open areas of the interior peatlands in the park. These peatlands and the sloping sides of the beach ridges near the coast are covered by these lichens. Caribou grazing patches have been commonly seen on the peat where they graze an entire lichen patch completely to the brown peat. When wet, the lichens feel like a sponge but when they are dry they crumble and crunch beneath your feet as you walk across the tundra.

If there are not enough lichens for winter food caribou will move to a different location where lichens are plentiful. So it is important to preserve lichens in these habitats so caribou can continue to survive. Proteins are needed for growth of the caribou and can be obtained by eating herbs during the summer. But sugars are a critical energy source required by caribou

to keep warm during the cold winter months. Caribou lichens contain 83-93% sugars, which is higher than many other ground dwelling lichens (Svihus and Holand 2000). Even though the digestibility of caribou lichens was reported to be low compared with some other lichens (Storeheier et al. 2002), natural products in these particular lichens may promote their digestibility in the caribou gut (Palo 1993). These same natural products have also been shown to have healing properties for wounds and infections or they can act as a defence against herbivores (Rhoades 1979; Schulz 1988). They have even been shown to prevent the growth of plants (Pyatt 1967; Fisher 1979). These properties help to protect the lichen against disease; and keep lichen mats from being overgrown by plants or eaten by insects. Since it takes a long time for a lichen to grow they need protection during that time so they can reach maturity.

The slow growth of lichens also means that they are vulnerable to environmental conditions which include the impact of climate change, pollution or disturbance by animals, and people, as well as consumption by large animals such as caribou. Large herds of caribou may severely impact these lichens by overgrazing and by trampling. Some trampling and grazing is good for these lichen patches because it results in renewal of lichen growth and dispersal by the trampled fragments. But too much grazing and trampling will damage the lichens and cause them to die. Caribou also provide a natural fertilizer for the lichens because their urine

and faeces are high in phosphorus and sometimes nitrogen (Hyvarinen et al. 2002). Nutrients from this natural fertilizer will improve growth of the lichens. However, too much of this fertilizer will act as a poison and kill lichens.

Caribou lichens cover vast areas in WNP and elsewhere and they play an important role in the life of caribou. Conversely caribou also play an important role in the growth of Caribou lichens.



Parks Canada Photo: Caribou grazing patches have been commonly seen on the peat where they graze an entire lichen patch completely to the brown peat.

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STAFF BIOS

ANDERS AALTONEN



I am a student at Ottawa University working to obtain a B.A in arts with a minor in history. Thanks to the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) and to Parks Canada, I had the chance to work at Wapusk National Park this summer as an interpreter. I had the opportunity to learn

much of the human and natural history of the region (although I have only scratched the surface). I have helped other interpreters to give special presentations at Cape Merry and at the Prince of Wales Fort. I also had the chance to give some presentations on permafrost and to experience the particular environment that Churchill has to offer. It has been a good summer.

MATTHEW ASMUNDSON



My name is Matthew Asmundson and I am working with Parks Canada this summer in Churchill, Manitoba, as an Interpreter. I am working in the Visitor Center as part of the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP). I am sixteen years old, I have lived in Churchill for two years

now and absolutely love it here. Besides working here at Parks Canada, I am also a lifeguard at the town pool and during the bear season (October - November)

I work with Hudson Bay Helicopter. I have experienced everything you possibly can in Churchill. I applied here at Parks Canada because I heard from others that it is a great place to work. Working here at the Visitor Centre has been great so far. I have learned a lot about the history of Churchill and gone more in depth on the wildlife of Churchill. The people in the office are great and are very helpful and friendly. I am presently working on a presentation to deliver to the public called Wapusk Wildlife. I look forward to delivering my presentation in the next few days. I am looking forward to hopefully working with Parks Canada for future summers.

DEREK HILDEBRAND



While working as a summer student I have come to realize that my decision to come to Churchill and Wapusk was the best decision I could have made. I was given a great opportunity for job experience in GIS while working on an important issue facing the park. I have also enjoyed being able to experience life in another part

of Canada. Of course, seeing Polar Bears and Beluga Whales in the wild has been amazing too. Finally, this "summer" has taught me not to take things like warm weather, gentle breezes, and fresh fruit for granted.

I was tasked with analyzing Dr. R. Rockwells' research data on Snow Geese and putting it into our GIS for easier use, and better understanding. I am currently working on creating a map that illustrates this information and tells the snow goose story. This work has allowed me to experience invaluable lessons about project management, data usage, and the nature of research. I look forward to completing the map!

Lastly, I would like to thank the welcoming staff at Wapusk National Park, and especially David Walker and Sheldon Kowalchuk for giving me this opportunity.

JEANETTE MARTENS



This is my third summer with Parks Canada in Churchill and this year my Young Canada Works job is all about new media. I've been busy researching Wapusk National Park and writing presentations about everything from permafrost to Polar bears. One day these

presentations will be uploaded to digital media players so that visitors can enjoy them at their leisure. When I'm not working on that, I am improving the geocaching program I set up last summer by developing new geocaching programs for staff to use in the future.

RENAE PLETT



Hello! I hail from Red Deer, Alberta but I am currently studying Adventure Management at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC. I have always been interested in Parks Canada as an important entity that provides protection and presentation of the most culturally and naturally

significant places within Canada. My belief in the work Parks Canada achieves prompted me to apply for the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP). To my delight I was sent a position located in the northern town of Churchill, Manitoba. My position as interpretive fact sheet designer is part of a program in line with the management plan of

Wapusk National Park to share the riches of Wapusk with local residents, the Canadian public, and the world. I have spent my time researching the interesting and valuable aspects of Wapusk's ecology including animals, plants and landscapes as well as its people and history. I then wrote brochures about these topics to be handed out to the public in the future for better understanding and appreciation of the park. This summer has been an exciting time of experiencing a beautiful new place. An exceptionally fun time was actually taking a helicopter to Wapusk and spending a few days there experiencing the park first hand. My time in Churchill has also allowed me to see polar bears, moose, beluga whales, caribou, arctic hares and a landscape unlike any other. I would recommend this place to anyone!

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN WAPUSK

Did you know that certain recreational activities are permitted in Wapusk National Park? To find out more, contact Wapusk National Park by phone at 204-675-8863 or by email at wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca.



GEOCACHE WITH PARKS CANADA



**RENT A GPS UNIT!
\$25 FOR 24 HOURS OR
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Rent a GPS unit from Parks Canada at the Heritage Railway station and learn to geocache. Discover the variety of geocaches in Churchill including seven Parks Canada caches. To learn more call Parks Canada at **204-675-8863.**



SEND US YOUR STORY OR FEEDBACK:

Wapusk National Park of Canada
P.O. Box 127
Churchill, MB R0B 0E0

You may also drop off this information at the Parks Canada office in Churchill, MB or e-mail at: wapusk.np@pc.gc.ca

Name: _____

PO Box/Street address _____

Town: _____ Province _____

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We want to hear from you! The Wapusk Management Board appreciates any comments or suggestions you have about this issue of the newsletter. _____
