

# Wabusk of Wasaho

A part of history and everyday life



Tommy Miles Photo

# Cree Knowledge

Fort Severn First Nation peoples travel the land near and far. We know the land and walk with the Polar Bear.

We know their tracks, have seen their dens and we watch them grow.

Our elders have taught us to live and share the land with the Wabusk.



Archives of Ontario, C 330-14-0-0-162

Douglas Kakekaspun of Fort Severn making bannock at Hudson's Bay, 1953

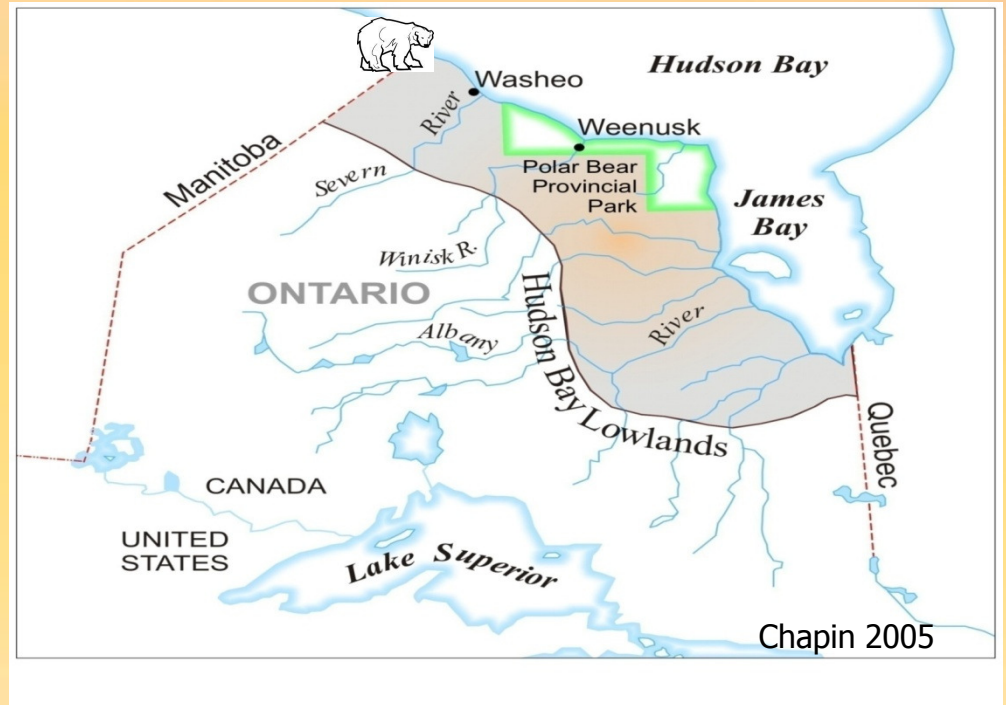
*Thank you to the Elders and Hunters of Washeo First Nation in Fort Severn Territory for sharing this story.*



The Fort Severn Polar Bear can be found along the coast of the Hudson Bay Lowlands and as far inland as two-hundred kilometres.

Male Wabusk travel north up the coast in the fall and gather near the Penn Islands to winter on the ice eating seals and fish. In the spring, bears ride ice flows south to the tundra and return back up the coast.

Mother bears travel inland in the fall and spend the winter in dens in river banks and snow banks. One or two cubs are born and families emerge in February. A mother will leave her cubs at age three in the fall at the coast.



Polar bears have been observed eating seals, fish, goslings, fur bearing animals and beavers.

Polar bears use two methods to catch beavers. They may rip open a lodge or they may guard a hole in the ice and wait for a beaver to emerge.

To catch seals on the ice, they guard air holes and when the seal surfaces for air, they grab them with their claws or teeth.

Polar bear will also steal fish from a net



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Polar bears are not usually a problem to people. The bears often walk through the community in the fall on their way north to meet the ice.

Polar bears have followed trappers as they set their traps and steal the catch.

Black Bears and Wolverines are more trouble as they sometimes break up camps looking for food.



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Cree once hunted Wabusk, mainly for dog food when they were using dog teams, and sometimes people ate it as well, but the meat doesn't taste very good.

Wooden traps were constructed in the past with a trigger and weight of stones, baited with beaver scent, it falls down and crushes the prey.

Hunting for the fur to sell or make handicrafts is the primary economic use now.

Polar Bear bone is used as a scraping tool to clean hides.



Snowmobiles first appeared in the early 1960s. A Roman Catholic priest got the first one and a few years later the HBC started to sell them.

The last dog team existed in the early 1970s.

Outboard motors appeared in the late 1930's with 3-5 horsepower engines allowing farther trips on inland rivers. Before that, dog teams were used to pull canoes up river.



Archives of Ontario, C 330-14-0-0-145



Archives of Ontario, C 330-14-0-0-169



Caribou herds travel the land and are a main source of meat for the community.







Fish are netted in rivers and along the ocean shore. Geese rest on the tundra in great numbers during migration and are hunted twice a year. Fur bearing animals can also be trapped.



Polar Bears are apart of every day life in Fort Severn First Nation. Changes in their movement, and overall health affects the people.

The people of Washeo know the polar bear and continue to track its well being for the future of the species and its connection with the people.





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