

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2014 Bella Coola Valley

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The program was delivered to communities of the Bella Coola Valley in partnership with the Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department in 2014 by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Fraser Koroluk.

A relatively dry summer in coastal BC resulted in few berries in valley forests and alpine areas. This lack of berries coupled with a relatively low salmon escapement for pink and chum salmon, resulted in many grizzly bears seeking food sources near residential areas. Not only did bears seek out salmon in channels near residences but in some instances turned to unnatural food sources from fruit trees, gardens, smokehouses, garbage, and poultry. There were a number of sow grizzly bears with first-year cubs, increasing community concern of conflict with these bears.

Other wildlife reported near residential areas included: cougars, foxes, deer, and raptors. These animals were reported to have periodically accessed human food sources, including small pets, poultry, and gardens.

Bella Coola Valley does not have a permanently stationed Conservation Officer. In 2014 a Deputy Conservation Officer will be trained through a joint BC Parks Conservation Officer Service (COS) initiative. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator will work closely with that officer in the future.

This year-end report summarizes the activities, successes, and challenges of the program in 2014. This report also provides recommendations for future Community Coordinator initiatives that stem from this year's experiences.

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Program Delivery

Introduction

Bella Coola Valley is a low- to moderately-populated coastal valley including three unincorporated communities: Bella Coola, Hagensborg, and Firvale. Residents are spread throughout these communities in low density with abundant wilderness and natural landscape between populated areas. Bella Coola Valley is within the Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) and Traditional First Nations territories, including the Nuxalk Nation. There are no incorporated towns within the CCRD, and therefore, there is little or no bylaw or municipal governance/enforcement within Bella Coola Valley. The nearest COS office is In Williams Lake, approximately 450 km east. Grizzly and black bears and cougars are the predominant wildlife that are considered concerns to humans within the Bella Coola Valley.

Highlights of the Program

Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

A key component to the delivery of WildSafeBC was partnering with the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department to gain knowledge and share experience with various aspects of human-bear conflict within the First Nation community and residential areas. Joint efforts included:

- evening patrols of residential neighborhoods to inform residents of bear activity and personal safety,
- attractant management planning regarding food-fish and fish offal disposal,
- electric fence installation, and
- community strategy for continued education and attractant management.

Events

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WSCC) attended events in Bella Coola Valley, including Oceans Day and various Farmers Markets. Tents and tables were set up to provide literature, show examples of portable electric fences for bear-exclusion from attractants, and provide general information on WildSafeBC objectives in the community. Electric fence demonstrations and samples were the highlight of these events. Booths set up at these events also allowed the WSCC to provide informational brochures, discuss program objectives, and talk one-on-one with Bella Coola Valley residents.

Community Meetings & School Presentations

Presentations and meetings were held with Nuxalk Nation, various community associations, and government representatives/organizations in 2014. The focus of these meetings was predominantly wildlife deterrence related to grizzly bears.

Meetings included:

- Nuxalk Nation (multiple meetings), strategic plan for delivering WildSafeBC and Nuxalk Stewardship program to address attractants, electric fencing, education, and public outreach,
- CCRD (Landfill Management) to review electrification protocols and efficiency at Thorsen Creek Landfill, and discuss new requirements for bear exclusion potentially associated with Multi Material BC Recycling requirements, and facility upkeep,
- RCMP, general discussion of bear and wildlife safety and response planning within the community,
- Conservation Officer Service, overview of COS availability on rotating basis and support available from BC Parks in attraction management,
- BC Parks, review of public bear-viewing areas to ensure minimal attractant procedures and discuss electric fence techniques and public awareness of bear behaviour, and
- Bella Coola Valley Tourism, meeting to discuss importance of bear viewing requirements and public safety throughout Bella Coola Valley.

School Presentations:

Presentations within the Public School system (SD 49) were not practical owing to timing in 2014. Time did not permit a presentation in the Nuxalk Nation administered Acwsalcta School prior to October 31, however, efforts are continuing to deliver a presentation prior to November 30, 2014. Discussion is ongoing with both school systems for presentations in spring 2015.

Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews

The WSCC visited numerous properties throughout Bella Coola Valley to discuss site specific attractant management strategies to reduce wildlife-human conflict. Visits included: private residences, commercial campgrounds, government wharf, agricultural holdings/farms, schools, fish hatchery, BC Parks campsites, industrial garbage collection contractor, and motel/hotel businesses.

Where unnatural attractants were observed, the WSCC provided management solutions including complete attractant removal, attractant management (i.e., fruit picking), or electric fencing.

Electric Fencing

In 2013 the BC Conservation Foundation (Bear Aware) and the BC Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee provided Bella Coola with electric fence components to be distributed on-loan to willing residents, in exchange for a commitment of maintenance, and with the goal of attractant management. Materials available included four portable electric fences and ten permanent fence chargers and high-tensile fence wire.

In 2014, all temporary electric fences were deployed at a total of 10 locations, including:

- 1 compost bin;
- 6 fruit trees/orchards;
- 2 residential gardens; and
- 1 fish hatchery fish-holding tank.

Demand for temporary electric fences during harvest times of September to October exceeded capacity of the limited fence numbers (five fences).

Permanent electric fences included fences designed and installed by landowners and/or the WSCC. These fences included a fence charger and high-tensile wire provided by WildSafeBC. Insulators and miscellaneous connectors were also purchased by WildSafeBC as required for electric fence installation. In 2014 six (6) permanent fences were installed by the WSCC, including:

- 5 chicken coop/poultry enclosures, and
- 1 First Nation traditional smokehouse.

These permanent electric fence enclosures will be used as demonstration sites for electric fence techniques and learning centres for electric fence success in this region. In addition to those electric fences described above, fence wire was supplied to two interested residents to electrify a commercial orchard/garden and a private poultry coop and garden.

Unwanted Fruit Removal

The WSCC opportunistically assisted with removal of unwanted fruit or fruit trees to assist attractant management by landowners, including: assisting with removal of unwanted crab-apple tree, removal of grape vines from house entrance, and cleaning fallen apples from an orchard prior to and after use of a temporary electric fence.

Wildlife Reporting (RAPP & WARP)

Through Facebook, press releases, and community interaction at presentations and door-to-door visits the WSCC was successful in increasing community residents' use of the RAPP (Report All Poachers & Polluters) Conservation Officer Reporting, resulting in an increase of incidences reported on WARP (Wildlife Alert Reporting Program). Prior to 2014, only five (5) incidences were recorded on the WARP database, in 2014 that increased by 21 recent reports, to 26 total incidences, predominantly of grizzly

bears in residential areas. Continued success of reporting incidences to the RAPP line will be a focus on future WSCC activities.

Media

Media is limited in Bella Coola Valley to a bi-weekly newspaper and a recently launched (June 2014) First Nation radio station. The WSCC provided an article to the local newspaper introducing the coordinator and role of WildSafeBC in Bella Coola, and contact information for WildSafeBC was provided by the Nuxalk Stewardship program on a bear awareness feature presented on Nuxalk Radio 91.1 FM. The WSCC remained active on Facebook to promote activities and information throughout the community and residents were encouraged to use Facebook for notice of events and helpful tips.

Challenges to the Program

The primary challenge to the WildSafeBC program is the limited regional governance and lack of Conservation Officer presence in the Bella Coola Valley. There has been a long disconnect of the community to current trends and some reluctance to acceptance of attractant management, reluctance to accepting responsibility for wildlife conflict on property, and a misunderstanding of Conservation Officer Service roles and responsibilities for limiting human-wildlife conflict with community residents. There is also often confusion of the citizens' responsibility under the *BC Wildlife Act* regarding attractants on private property. There are no established bylaws, nor is there bylaw enforcement within the CCRD, so there is little past experience with residents regarding rural wildlife conflict and responsibilities typical of an established community elsewhere in BC.

Limited availability of locally sourced and purchased electric fence components through local hardware suppliers also presents a challenge in promoting electric fencing, as there is a necessity for interested residents to research, source, and order these components from an out-of-town supplier, adding logistical challenges and hurdles to installing private fences.

Future of the Program

The following is a list of recommendations for WildSafeBC initiatives within Bella Coola Valley for future years:

- Further expand the established partnership with Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department to increase buy-in from all valley residents regarding WildSafeBC program initiatives.
- Expand rural landowner knowledge of bear attractants and landowner responsibility to manage attractants.
- Continue to distribute and help establish accessible (inexpensive) electric fence materials for smokehouses, fruit trees, poultry, and other proven attractants.
- Increase interest and understanding of importance to report wildlife conflicts to the RAPP line.
- Use project funds to purchase electric fence components not readily available in our isolated community (e.g., insulators, specific fence components, etc.).
- Set up predator fencing workshops. Many people are interested in workshops, but do not want to commit in advance to attending. If workshops were set up as free events and widely advertised, a higher attendance may be observed.
- Continue discussions of the use of warnings or fines for repeated bear-attractant offenders with Conservation Officers, and address concerns that may arise.
- Gain confidence of the local schools to be able to provide multiple school-visits each school year to establish a culture of WildSafeBC practices.
- Approach local hardware merchants to consider carrying a basic supply of electric fence components suitable for bear deterrence.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department, Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program in Bella Coola.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Conservation Officer Service and BC Parks (Hagensborg Field Office) for assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing allowing WildSafeBC to provide electric fence components to interested local landowners.

Special thanks to Jason Moody, Ron Schooner and Quentin Tallio of the Nuxalk Stewardship Department for their field work. Also Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for field support in Bella Coola and Barb Waters and staff of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for their support.

Appendix: Photographs



Photo 1: WildSafeBC attending Oceans Day at Bella Coola harbour.

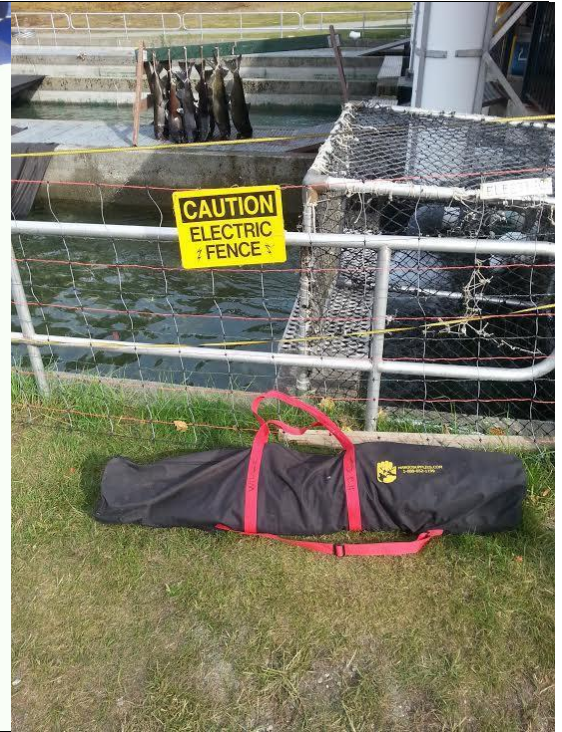


Photo 2: Portable electric fence deployed at DFO Hatchery.



Photo 3: Permanent electric fence around existing chicken coop.



Photo 4: Chicken coop electric fencing.



Photo 5: Temporary electric fence at garden.



Photo 6: Permanent electric fence at Nuxalk traditional smokehouse.



Photo 7: A long busy season, time for a rest.