

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2014

## Capital Regional District



Photo: Peter Sulzle



**BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION**

## **Executive Summary**

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict in British Columbia through education, innovation and cooperation. In May 2014 a local program was launched in the Capital Regional District (CRD) with support from CRD Parks funding. The program was delivered to the community by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WSBCCC) Debbie Read. The launch followed a successful pilot year of the program in 2013 made possible through seed funding from the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and support from the CRD's Parks department.

The WSBCCC worked to keep the management of wildlife attractants at the forefront of residents' minds by implementing numerous initiatives. Namely, educational displays, presentations, and media releases were used to engage the public and build new partnerships for the program. The WSBCCC provided information and advice for a variety of wildlife species including black bears, coyotes, deer, raccoons, and cougars. WildSafeBC hopes to build on this year's achievements and become an invaluable resource for human-wildlife conflict resolution within the CRD.

This year-end report summarizes the activities, successes and challenges of the program in 2014, and provides recommendations for future initiatives.

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	2
Highlights of the Program .....	4
Presentations.....	4
Displays.....	5
Youth Education .....	6
Partnerships .....	7
Coexisting with Carnivores Alliance Group .....	7
Wildlife Attractant Bylaw .....	8
Garbage Tagging.....	8
Electric Fencing.....	9
Media Support.....	9
Challenges of the Program .....	10
Goals for 2015 .....	10
Acknowledgments.....	11

## Highlights of the Program

The WildSafeBC program was very well received in the CRD. Many residents expressed gratitude for having the opportunity to speak directly with a local WSBCCC, and receive education about, and assistance with, wildlife concerns. In addition to providing solutions for human-wildlife conflict, a major focus this season was to establish and maintain the WildSafeBC messaging forefront in the public eye.

## Presentations

Understanding wildlife biology and behavior helps individuals to understand and prevent human-wildlife conflicts. The WSBCCC gave a number of presentations in 2014 to a wide range of audiences including CRD Parks staff and volunteers, local residents, and Juan de Fuca (JDF) community members. The presentations focused on biology, causes of conflict, and methods for reducing conflict.



*Figure 1. WSBCCC Debbie Read discussing the WildSafeBC program with CRD Parks staff and volunteers.*

## Displays

Educational displays at community events were an effective means of generating interest and enthusiasm for WildSafeBC. This year, displays were expanded with the addition of new educational materials including brochures, banners, and table displays. Several full-size wildlife models and props were also donated by the Conservation Officer Service and community members. The displays were especially popular with local children, and gave us the opportunity to discuss wildlife issues with persons of all ages. The displays also provided an opportunity for locals to share wildlife sightings and stories, and receive advice and solutions to challenges in the process. The WSBCCC spent four days at local events: Shirley Days, The Sooke Fall Fair, and One Wave Festival.



*Figure 2. The WildSafeBC booth at the Sooke Fall Fair two day event.*

## Youth Education

In addition to public displays, the WSBCCC incorporated education events for children throughout the season. Children aged 8 to 13 years old participated in an interactive education day at Camp Bernard, where the WSBCCC taught children how to keep a campsite clean, and how to hike safely in the wild. At the Shirley Community Market children had an opportunity to work directly with the WSBCCC and learned how to manage attractants in their own home. Through materials and activities given to the children to take home, the messaging reached parents and families as well as the children.



Figure 3. WSBCCC Debbie Read educating youth at the Camp Bernard and Shirley Market events.



## Partnerships

Partnerships are a key component in connecting with the community and delivering the program's messaging. In 2014, the program reached out to the Sooke Food CHI Society, Sooke Youth Council, Sun River Gardens, Sooke Volunteer Association, Sooke Regional Museum, Communities in Bloom Project, Sooke Mirror, Sooke Voice, Sooke River Campground, Sooke RCMP, and the T'Sou-ke Nation among others. These partnerships have helped create enthusiasm for the program and raise the interest of local supporters.

An important partnership during 2014 was that formed between WildSafeBC and the Conservation Officer Service (COS). By working directly with the COS, the WSBCCC was able to identify problem areas in the community and meet directly with residents to offer specific education for their needs.



*Figure 4. Conservation officer Peter Pauwels discussing the program with JDF staff and volunteers.*

## Coexisting with Carnivores Alliance Group

The Coexisting with Carnivores Alliance group is a local steering committee designed to identify solutions for human-wildlife conflicts and to collaborate with organizations to implement the solutions. The WSBCCC sits on the board, and representatives from the CRD, Parks Canada, RainCoast Conservation Foundation, and other provincial representatives also attend. Participation in the group allows WildSafeBC to provide additional advice to a wide audience.

## Wildlife Attractant Bylaw

In addition to education, local bylaws and enforcement may be an effective tool for reducing conflict with wildlife. The WSBCCC worked with the local Conservation Officer Service and Sooke resident Elaine Ellinger to develop a proposed bylaw prohibiting the feeding of nuisance wildlife. This bylaw was presented to the Sooke council in September and is currently under review.

## Garbage Tagging

The WSBCCC teamed up with the Sooke Youth Council for an intensive garbage tagging campaign (in which bright yellow attractant warning stickers are placed on waste containers that are put out on the curb the night before collection) in the Sun River and Whiffin Spit neighborhoods. Since this event, conservation officers reported fewer garbage bins placed outside homes and fewer conflict reports coming from these communities which were once hot spots. The WSBCCC also worked with student Herb Stark from the Vancouver Island University Resource Management and Protection program in other tagging campaigns.



*Figure 5. WildSafeBC Blitz with Sooke Youth Council.*



## Electric Fencing

A properly installed and maintained electric fence is a very effective means for protecting crops and livestock. WildSafeBC and the Sooke Regional Museum hosted a free electric fencing workshop for the public. Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey demonstrated how to assemble an electric fencing system and explained how it can protect investments while preventing the attraction of wildlife.



*Figure 6. WSBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey teaching electric fence installation techniques to 30 CRD residents.*

## Media Support

The WildSafeBC program was featured in the Sooke Mirror in 2014 through the Bear Buzz column. The column ran regularly in the newspaper to report problem neighbourhoods and educate residents in identifying and managing wildlife attractants. A newly formed relationship with the Sooke Voice News provided more opportunities for further media support in 2014. A Facebook page specifically targeting the CRD was also created and used to reach residents. Residents were encouraged to use Facebook and other social networking websites to receive notice of events and other helpful wildlife tips.

## Challenges of the Program

Improperly secured garbage and poorly managed chickens were the two most prominent issues in 2014. In the fall, fruit trees were also a major cause of conflict in the community. Encouraging the public to keep their garbage indoors was a foremost challenge; many residents preferred to keep garbage alongside their homes or within their yards, usually in unsecured containers.

The limited contract time of the WSBCCC provided further challenges during the 2014 season. Although the program began in early May, many bears and other animals were active in April. In order to avoid early conflicts and prevent habituation of bears in town early in the season, it would be valuable to start the program earlier in the spring.

## Goals for 2015

In order to provide lasting solutions to human-wildlife conflict issues, WildSafeBC aims to build upon partnerships and form new relationships with community groups, local businesses, non-profit groups, and residents. The following are goals for the 2015 season based on this year's experiences:

- Use conventional media, social media, and partnerships with CRD organizations to increase the volunteer base.
- Team up with community partners to make bear-resistant garbage bins more readily available to residents.
- Investigate additional sources of funding to help develop new educational events, workshops, conflict presentations, and school programs.
- Initiate a project to assist communities with unsecure and/or illegal garbage dumping sites.
- Work more closely with CRD Parks and associated volunteers to address attractants within Parks sites and participate in Parks projects.
- Work with the CRD and funding partners to propose an earlier start date for the WSBCCC in order to address wildlife conflict issues that arise before May.

## **Acknowledgments**

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Finally, the program extends a special thank you to all the residents who made the effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and spread the word about wildlife safety and attractant management.