

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2014

Castlegar and Area

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Photo: Steve Ryan



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Executive Summary

The 2014 season was another relatively quiet one for human-wildlife conflict in Castlegar and area, following the quietest bear season in a decade last year. Despite a similar number of reports to the Conservation Officer Service hotline this year compared to last, there were more bears destroyed as a result of conflict this season. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WSBCCC) noted more garbage stored improperly and left accessible to wildlife this season, meaning that while fewer bears may have been active in town, more conflicts arose due to careless attractant management. Motivated by the notion that the lack of bear activity may have led to a decrease in vigilance, the WSBCCC worked to keep attractant management at the forefront of resident's minds through educational displays, presentations and media releases. Responsible attractant management is the only effective long term solution to reducing human-wildlife conflict in the Castlegar area.

With our expanded scope, WildSafeBC was able to provide Castlegar and area residents with information on many different wildlife species. While black bears remain the species most commonly discussed, questions regarding cougars, coyotes, wolves, raccoons and skunks continue to rise and WildSafeBC's expanded species resources were well received by the public this season.



Figure 1 WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Jenny Wallace at a Castlegar Craft and Farmer's Market display, 2014.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
Highlights from the 2014 Season.....	3
Presentations.....	3
Garbage Tagging and Door to Door Education.....	3
Displays.....	3
Wildlife Attractant Bylaw.....	4
West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group.....	4
Media.....	5
Challenges of the 2014 Season.....	5
Goals for the 2015 Season.....	6
Acknowledgements.....	7
Figure 1 WSBCCC Jenny Wallace at a Castlegar Craft and Farmer’s Market display, 2014	1
Figure 2 WSBCCC discussing the differences between various animal skulls at Sunfest, 2014..	4
Figure 3 WildSafeBC volunteers discuss human-wildlife conflict at the Pass Creek Fall Fair, 2014	5

Highlights from the 2014 Season

Thanks to the City of Castlegar, WildSafeBC got an early start to the season this year (April 1 rather than May 1). This early start was extremely valuable as it allowed the WSBCCC to focus on proactive messaging earlier in the season before bears emerged from hibernation.

After the successful launch of the expanded WildSafeBC program in 2013, we were able to kick off 2014 with widespread community recognition. The WSBC Community Coordinator heard from residents far more regularly this season than in previous years and found residents' input and tips invaluable for identifying problem spots in the community and prioritizing education efforts. Keeping WildSafeBC and its message of responsible attractant management in the public eye continued to be a focus this season as well as providing concrete solutions to human-wildlife conflict.

Presentations

Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps residents to understand and prevent human-wildlife conflict. Presentations were developed for a wide range of audiences this season to provide insight into the reasons human-wildlife conflict occurs and what we can do to reduce it.

WildSafeBC Castlegar gave 24 presentations to the following audiences this season:

- Selkirk College ESL students (x2)
- Kinnaird Elementary (Grades: 2(x2), 3)
- Endless Adventure Summer Camp
- Castle Wood Village Seniors Home
- CBAL ESL Family Presentation
- Castlegar Primary (Grades: K, 2)
- Twin Rivers Elementary (Grades: 3-4, 4-5(x2), 5-6, 6-7, 7(x2))
- Robson Community School (Grades: K, K-1, 1-2, 2-3)
- Blueberry Creek Community School (StrongStart, Preschool, Daycare)

Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

WildSafeBC regularly receives phone-calls from concerned residents reporting neighbourhood garbage issues. In response to these calls, the WSBCCC targeted the reported neighbourhoods with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management.

WildSafeBC conducted 13 garbage tagging inspections throughout the season, placing bright yellow "Wildlife Attractant" stickers on bins put out too early. We also visited 262 residences throughout the season to give residents a heads-up about a bear in the area or to discuss neighbourhood attractant issues.

Displays

Educational displays at local events were once again a big hit with local children and a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (Figure 2 and 3). These displays provide area residents with a place to voice concerns or observations about local wildlife activity and share attractant management

success stories. As always, residents were able to access information and solutions for their own attractant challenges. WildSafeBC spent 14 days at the following local events:

- Castlegar Spring Fling
- Castlegar Garden and Nature Fest
- Castlegar Sunfest
- CBEEN (Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network) Environmental Education Expo and Soiree
- CBAL (Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy) Teddy Bear Picnic
- CBAL Ready, Set, Learn Events (3)
- Castlegar Craft and Farmer's Market (2)
- Selkirk College Orientation Day
- Pass Creek Fall Fair



Figure 2 WSBCCC Jenny Wallace discussing the differences between various animal skulls at Sunfest, 2014.

Wildlife Attractant Bylaw

Last year, the WSBCCC completed a draft bylaw with input from the local Conservation Officer Service and other WildSafeBC Community Coordinators. This draft was presented to the Public Safety Committee who then graciously took on the project of refining the bylaw. The bylaw passed three readings this fall and will be implemented next year as an effective tool in solving cases of chronic attractant issues. This move shows a strong commitment to reducing human wildlife conflict in the community and is a major highlight for the 2014 season.

West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group

The WSBCCC continues to sit on this collaborative working group, made up of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets biannually to identify and implement solutions to local human-bear conflicts. The WSBCCC also sat on the group's Bear Resistant Bin Strategy Committee to set a plan in motion for bringing household bear resistant bins to the West Kootenay.

Media

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering over 6000 page views and providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC's messaging through publishing press releases in local papers, playing radio interviews with the WSBCCC and sharing information through social media. The WSBCCC is always amazed by the reach of this media coverage and appreciates the support.



Figure 3 WildSafeBC Castlegar volunteers discuss human-wildlife conflict at the Pass Creek Fall Fair, 2014.

Challenges of the 2014 Season

Unsecured garbage was the number one challenge of the 2014 season. Illegal dumping, unlocked commercial dumpsters and unsecured residential garbage seemed to be everywhere this season and several bears were destroyed as a result. Perhaps the relative lack of bear activity last year meant that attractant management was simply not a priority for many people. Given how crucial *proactive* efforts are in reducing human-wildlife conflict, WildSafeBC hopes that the new Wildlife Attractant Bylaw will help deal with chronic attractant issues and reduce the attractants available to wildlife in our community next season.

Once again, bear resistant bin availability was a challenge in the Castlegar area. Despite growing interest in these bins, it was difficult to offer realistic solutions to residents due to the expensive shipping fees associated with getting the bins to the West Kootenay. The WSBCCC continues to actively seek solutions, namely by sitting on the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group's Bear Bin Strategy Committee.

Time constraints continue to limit the effectiveness of the WildSafeBC program. The program typically runs from May 1 to November 30 despite the fact that wildlife species such as coyotes, cougars and deer are active year-round. An extended contract that allowed for some 'off-season' hours would ensure timely advice and information for residents struggling with wildlife issues in the winter months.

Goals for 2015

Looking forward to the 2015 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues.

- Bring residential bear resistant bins to the West Kootenay through a collaborative initiative with the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group's Bear Bin Strategy Committee.
- Form a community working group that builds upon existing partnerships and involves residents in finding solutions to local wildlife issues.
- Make WildSafeBC an integral part of the Castlegar and area community. Expand the reach of WildSafeBC messaging through innovative use of social media, traditional media and increased community events and informative workshops.
- Expand our program's presence in the rural communities of RDCK Areas I and J.
- Update the Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan for Castlegar and the surrounding area (last conducted in 2004 by Joanne Siderius). The WSBCCC will need to secure separate funding for this project.



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Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties. Let's keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!