

WildSafeBC Elk Valley Annual Report 2014

Including; Elkford and the Rural Elk Valley, Jaffray, Baynes Lake, Elko,
Grassmere and the surrounding rural South Country



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the activities of the Elk Valley WildSafeBC Program between May 1st and October 20th 2014. It includes the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to residents and visitors in Elkford, the rural areas in the Elk Valley, Elko, Jaffray, Baynes Lake, Grassmere, and the surrounding South Country. It also includes recommendations for the future of the program and acknowledges the volunteers and community partners which are crucial for success.

More than a dozen food conditioned and habituated bears had to be destroyed in the Elk Valley and South Country this year. There have also been a number of incidents involving hunters and wildlife. Just recently a hunter was mauled by a grizzly bear; the grizzly was shot in self-defence.

Trail use in the Elk Valley also continues to increase as does human-wildlife conflict on trails highlighting the need for WildSafeBC. There were also many cougar sightings throughout Elk Valley communities and on trails, one reported coyote incident involving bikers and dogs, and many reports of aggressive deer.

Thanks to ongoing support and valuable community partnerships, the WildSafeBC Program was very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase and is indicative of the program's success. The District of Elkford continues to be committed to preventing human-wildlife conflict. Elkford now has 45 bear resistant loaner bins available and have retrofitted all of the commercial dumpsters with metal latches. The end result is less accessible garbage, a cleaner and safer community, and fewer bears destroyed.

Recruiting suitable and reliable volunteers, educating long-time residents about the storage of garbage indoors between collection days, and funding for the Elk Valley WildSafeBC have been ongoing challenges as there are significant mileage costs and hours needed to cover such a large area.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE ELK VALLEY WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand from Elk Valley residents and visitors. Over the years the program has formed many valuable partnerships with various community organizations. The highlights of the Elk Valley WildSafeBC Program are as follows:

Public Displays at Community Events

The WildSafeBC public information display was set up at a variety of community events, (Elkford Wildcat Days, Sparwood Coal Miner Days, Elk Valley Emergency Awareness Event, Baynes Lake Farmers Market, Sports Events, and Kootenay Fall Fair). The informative stand up display, brochures, props (bear pelt, skull, claws, cougar pelt and skull, sample scat, and rubber footprints) and the new banner attracted a lot of attention. The display was attended by the Community Coordinator with the assistance of volunteers on occasion. All of these events were an ideal opportunity for people to approach us in a relaxed and social environment and discuss local wildlife issues. Many great contacts were made with the public and other exhibitors.



Figure 1 THE WILDSAFEBC DISPLAY AT THE KOOTENAY FALL FAIR

Presentations to Groups of Interest

The demand for WildSafeBC presentations to groups of interest continues to grow. Presentations including wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, and the viewing of Staying Safe in Bear Country were delivered to front line resort staff at Island Lake Lodge and Fernie Alpine Resort, Foreign Exchange Students, Adult Life Skills Groups, College of the Rockies Students, and at the Kikomun Creek Campground.

Children's Educational Program

Children are the greatest advocates of our program and can always be counted on to deliver the message to their parents. The WildSafeBC Program was delivered to more than 250 students and teachers at Rocky Mountain Elementary School in Elkford and Tree top Daycare in Sparwood. Presentations included wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, role plays, crafts for younger children, and a follow-up homework exercise (a coloring sheet and WildSafeBC questionnaire) was given to all teachers for kids to take home and then was to be reviewed by teachers. This was a great way to ensure the message got to a broad range of families throughout the community.



Figure 2 WILDSAFEBC AND THE BYLAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICER WORKING TOGETHER TO EDUCATE KIDS
WildSafeBC Open House Event

WildsafeBC and Wildsight joined forces to organize the first annual Open House Event at the Wildsight Office. The event featured an electric fencing workshop, wildlife safety talk including a hands-on bear spray exercise using inert spray, interactive displays, worm composting, community apple pressing day where residents brought in local apples and pressed them into juice, food preservation tools available for use from Wildsight (dehydrator, canning, apple picking, apple press) and kids' wildlife educational

activities. The event was very well attended and an excellent opportunity for local grass root groups to network and join forces to continue reducing human-wildlife conflict. We are planning on making this an annual fall harvest event.



Figure 3 WILDSAFEBC OPEN HOUSE POSTER

District of Elkford takes a big step forward to bear-proof the community

In 2012 Elkford acquired 20 bear-resistant residential containers available to loan to residents who have no garages or sheds to secure garbage in areas with bear activity. Another 25 were purchased in 2014. All the commercial dumpsters have also been retrofitted with metal latches. The end result is very positive, less garbage is easily available to wildlife and so far fewer bears have been destroyed this year in Elkford.



Figure 4 DISTRICT OF ELKFORD DUMPSTER RETRO FITTED WITH METAL LATCHES

The Use of Social Networking to Deliver our Program

Our online presence with the WildSafeBC Facebook pages allowed residents and visitors throughout the Elk Valley to access information about wildlife sightings and gave us the opportunity to reach a wider audience with our educational messages. All wildlife sightings and incidents reported to the 24 hour Conservation Officer Hotline (RAPP) are posted on our blog and Facebook pages. Followers of the linked Facebook pages and Twitter feed received automatic alerts whenever sightings were reported. We now have close to 500 followers on our Facebook pages and some posts reached up to 4,500 people in a day! The use of social media to deliver our message to a wide range of people in a cost effective and timely manner has been very successful.

Support from Local Media

Support from our local media, the *Fernie Free Press* and *Elk Valley Herald* local papers and *The Drive 99.1* continue to be outstanding. I have a weekly column in both local papers where I can inform readers about recent wildlife activity, educational events, and include educational messages of my choice. I also provide the local radio station with a summary of wildlife activity every week. This support is crucial in keeping both residents and visitors informed.

CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

Funding for the Elk Valley Program has been an ongoing challenge as there are significant mileage costs and hours needed to cover such a large area. It is also important to keep the program running and consistent in order to develop community partnerships and maintain traction. Local knowledge and contacts are fundamental as it is a huge area to cover. Community Events, School Presentations, local Media, and Social Networking were the best way to deliver the program. Garbage is consistently available and is the major wildlife attractant throughout the area covered by the Elk Valley program.

WildSafeBC has been working with the Bylaw enforcement Officer in Sparwood and a number of residents have expressed their concerns regarding human-wildlife conflict in Sparwood. WildSafeBC will be presenting to Council in Sparwood on October 20th and a number of residents and the Bylaw Enforcement Officer will be there to support the program. We are hopeful that Sparwood will join neighboring Elk Valley communities and adopt the WildSafeBC program.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2014 WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

As the Elk Valley continues to grow and develop so will the need to continue educational efforts. There will always be new people, new bears, and other wildlife. Keeping WildSafeBC and its message of “keeping wildlife wild and communities safe” should continue to be a focus as should our ability to provide concrete solutions to reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Thanks to ongoing support, valuable community partnerships, and new initiatives, the Elk Valley WildSafeBC Program is very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase. The WildSafeBC Program has proven effective in reducing human-wildlife conflict and has resulted in cleaner and safer communities for people and wildlife. We are also hopeful that Sparwood will join neighboring communities and support the WildSafeBC program.



Figure 5 THE CONSERVATION OFFICER SERVICE AND WILDSAFEBC WORKING TOGETHER CHECKING OUT THE ZAP ANIMAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WildSafeBC Elk Valley is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners, and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: Ministry of Environment, Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, District of Elkford and the RDEK. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Frank DeBoon, Joe Garay, Patricia Burley, and Joe Caravetta, District of Elkford Staff and Council, East Kootenay Park Service, Baynes Lake Lions Club, Free Press (Katelyn Dingman), Elk Valley Herald, The Drive 99.1, Wildsight, and the Elkford Chamber of Commerce. Thank you to my volunteers, Emma VanTussonbroeck, Lindsay Snea, and Rob Welsh.

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