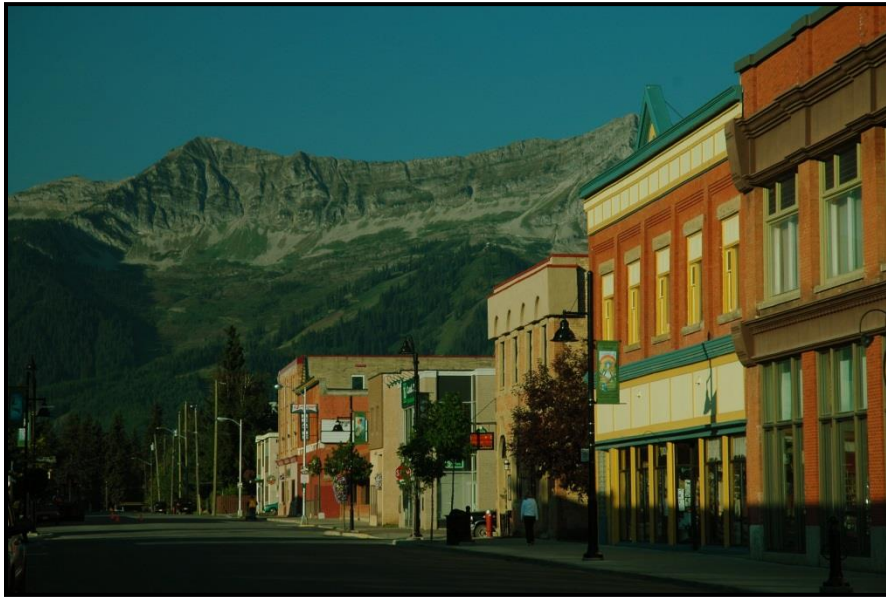


WildSafeBC Fernie Annual Report 2014

Including West Fernie, Island lake Lodge, Fernie Alpine Resort and Mt
Fernie Provincial Park



Prepared by Kathy Murray

WildSafeBC Community Coordinator

October 10, 2014



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE FERNIE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM 4

 Public Displays at Community Events 4

 Presentations to Groups of Interest 4

 Children’s Educational Program..... 5

 The Use of Social Networking to Deliver our Program 5

 Support from Local Media 6

CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM 8

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2015 WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM..... 9

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 9

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes the activities of the Fernie WildSafeBC Program between May 1st and October 15th 2014, including the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to residents and visitors in the City of Fernie and surrounding area. It also includes recommendations for the future of the WildSafeBC program and acknowledges the volunteers and community partners which are crucial for success.

The average number of bears destroyed per year in Fernie since 2005 is five. To date this year, three food conditioned and habituated black bears had to be trapped and euthanized. One was hit by a vehicle in Ridgemont and a grizzly yearling was trapped, sent to Northern Lights for rehabilitation, and released in his natal home range with a radio collar. There were also many cougar and coyote sightings on trails and a few cougar sightings in town. Trail use in Fernie continues to increase as does human-wildlife conflict on trails highlighting the need for WildSafeBC.

Thanks to ongoing support and valuable community partnerships, the WildSafeBC Program continues to be 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. Recruiting suitable and reliable volunteers and educating the mix of new, seasonal, long-time residents and, visitors about the storage of garbage indoors between collection days and fruit tree maintenance continue to be the main challenges.

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE FERNIE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand by City of Fernie Council, staff, residents, visitors, and various groups and organizations. Over the years the program has formed many valuable partnerships with various community organizations. The highlights of the Fernie WildSafeBC Program are as follows:

Public Displays at Community Events

The WildSafeBC public information display was set up at a variety of community events and continues to be a very effective way to deliver the program. 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. WildSafeBC spent 8 days at the following community events:

- Fernie Farmers Market (3)
- Canada Day at Prentice Park
- WildSafeBC and Wildsight Open House Event
- Fernie Trails Alliance Trails Festival
- Fernie Half Marathon
- Wapiti Music Festival



Figure 1 THE WILDSAFEBC DISPLAY AT CANADA DAY EVENT IN FERNIE

Presentations to Groups of Interest

The demand for WildSafeBC presentations to groups of interest continues to grow. Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps prevent human-wildlife conflict. Presentations including

wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, Staying Safe in Bear Country and hands on safe use of bear spray using inert spray were delivered to front line resort staff at Island Lake Lodge and Fernie Alpine Resort, Adult Life Skills Groups, College of the Rockies Students, Fernie Trail Festival, Foreign Exchange Students, and the general public at the WildSafeBC Open House Event.

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 400 students and teachers in both elementary schools and the new French School (yes in French!) in Fernie. The school program was delayed by a few weeks this year because of the strike. Presentations included wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, role plays, a craft 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 KIDS LOVE WILDSAFEBBC INTERPRETIVE PRESENTATIONS 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) were 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* continues 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.

New Initiatives

Educational Materials

Trail use in Fernie continues to increase as does human-wildlife conflict on the trails - this highlights the need for WildSafeBC and public education. The Fernie Trails Alliance, Wildsight, Island Lake Lodge, and WildSafeBC joined forces to design Wildlife Safety metal signs and posters that have been posted at trailheads throughout the city trail network and the surrounding recreational area. This has been very effective at providing an educational message to local and visiting trail users.



Thanks to funding from the City of Fernie, the popular and very effective bear shaped fridge magnets which were originally created in 2009 were redesigned with the WildSafeBC logo and message.

Events

WildSafeBC and Wildsight joined forces to organize the first annual Open House Event at the Wildsight Office downtown Fernie. 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.

Find out more about keeping wildlife wild and our community safe

WILD SAFE BC Open House

SATURDAY SEPT 20th

Learn more about:

- Wildlife Safety
- Electric Fencing
- Worm Composting
- ZAP Protection System
- Apple Pressing
- Food Preservation

Plus, join us for:

- Kids wildlife activities
- Staying Safe in Bear Country Movie

11-1pm: Electric Fencing Workshop Protect your backyard, chickens, fruit trees & bees from wildlife. Join us for a presentation, demonstration and learn how to set up a portable electric fence. Electric fencing supplies generously.

1:15-1:45pm: Wildlife Safety Learn how to use bear spray safely. Get hands on experience using inert bear spray.

Composting: Learn about the many benefits of composting and examine ways to use worm composting systems.

Apple Press: Bring your Fernie apples to use the Wildsight apple press and make juice. Don't forget to bring containers to hold your juice too!

Food Preservation: Check out the EcoGarden's food preservation info board and learn about all the food preservation tools available for rental from Wildsight.

Movie: Staying Safe in Bear Country movie screening all day 10 min.

10am-2pm
@Wildsight Elk Valley
891 2nd Fernie
a by donation event

COLUMBIA BASIN TRUST
a legacy for the people

wildsight

CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

Fortunately the program has continued to be well supported and funded over the years so the challenges are minimal. The storage of garbage outside between collection days and fruit tree maintenance continue to be an issue, however this is improving and is being addressed by Bylaw and Conservation Officer Services.

The main challenge remains the recruitment of suitable volunteers. I have a small but very effective crew of volunteers who assist me with key tasks such as public events and support for our blog. Finding people who are able to help out on short notice with door-to-door visits when bears are in the area or garbage tagging continue to be my biggest challenge. Fortunately we have an excellent rapport with the Conservation Officer Service and have on a number of occasions visited problem areas together which proved very effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2015 WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM

As Fernie 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 Fernie 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 a cleaner and safer community for people and wildlife.



Figure 3 THE CONSERVATION OFFICER SERVICE AND WILDSAFEBC WORKING CHECKING OUT THE ZAP ANIMAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WildSafeBC Fernie 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 and the City of Fernie. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Frank DeBoon, Joe Garay, Patricia Burley and Joe Caravetta, City of Fernie Staff and Council, Free Press (Katelyn Dingman), Elk Valley Herald, The Drive 99.1, Wildsight, Fernie Trails Alliance, Tourism Fernie, Fernie Alpine Resort, Island Lake Lodge, and the Fernie 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!