

WildSafeBC Year End Report 2014

Kaslo and Area

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Executive Summary

WildSafeBC aims to keep wildlife wild and communities safe. A huge part of meeting this aim is managing wildlife attractants that bring wildlife into residential areas. Kaslo WildSafeBC promotes attractant management by: helping to install electric fencing to protect livestock and fruit trees; and through promoting the use of bear resistant bins for garbage or feed. The program also works with the “Feeding Families, Not Bears” program to reduce the amount of excess fruit in Kaslo, specifically near JV Humphries School.

In 2014 there were few bears getting into trouble and no real conflicts until mid-October when one resident was leaving out lots of garbage. This is currently being dealt with through Kaslo’s Animal Attractant Bylaw. The huckleberry (*Vaccinium spp.*) crop was abundant throughout the region and provided bears with ample wild food. However, there were numerous cougar sightings in and near Kaslo throughout 2014 with calls being made to the Conservation Officer RAPP line. School presentations in Kaslo and Meadow Creek included information about cougars, urban deer, and coyotes. Education on cougar and coyote behaviour and safety is well-timed, as there have been more sightings of both these species. Kaslo WildSafeBC has support from local Conservation Officers, in kind advertising from the Pennywise, and funding from Columbia Basin Trust, Regional District Central Kootenay, the Village of Kaslo, and BC Conservation Foundation.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Community Coordinators Bree Lillies and Gillian Sanders teaming up at ToadFest 2014.

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Highlights from the 2014 Season

One of the highlights of the Kaslo WildSafeBC 2014 program included the relatively new (began 2013) expanded educational efforts to provide information on cougars and coyotes as well as bears. This multi-species approach has enabled Kaslo and area residents to better understand and appreciate local wildlife, and to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

Residents of Kaslo and the North Kootenay Lake area have developed much better management of garbage since the program began in 2005, and in 2014 most residents did not leave garbage outside. It was noted by the program coordinator that neighbours are helping to educate each other and pressure those who might mistakenly leave garbage out to clean it up via social media. This type of education shows a change in social norms regarding garbage management and helps to disseminate correct information without all messaging needing to be from the program.

2014 was a good fruit producing year, both for wild berries and also for domestic fruit. An ongoing highlight to meet the goal of reducing human-wildlife conflicts is the partnership between Kaslo WildSafeBC and the “Feeding Families, Not Bears” program that helps manage the excess of fruit in the Kaslo area. Unmanaged fruit trees in and on the edges of our neighbourhoods can be a major cause of human-wildlife conflict. Old fruit trees are located on paths near cover (trees, shrubs) that are easily accessible to bears and other species, and have become reliable food sources. In Meadow Creek, unmanaged fruit trees encourage grizzlies that are feeding on spawning kokanee to enter people’s yards. The partnership with the “Feeding Families, Not Bears” program helped to manage these fruit trees, utilize the excess of fruit in 2014, educate the community, and continued to build community support for the program.

The Pennywise, our local newspaper, sponsored display ads in their paper. These ads keep residents informed of local bear activity and sightings and provide reminders on management of common bear attractants. The program also posted classified ads and additional display ads throughout the season. Ads were placed in the *Kaslo Visitors Guide* and the *Kaslo Go & Do* to help to educate tourists and visitors to the area.

Presentations

Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps people to understand and the cause of, and the means to, reduce 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. School presentations at JV Humphries and Jewett schools were well-received, especially with information shared about cougar safety. WSBC Community Coordinator Gillian Sanders also gave a presentation at Jewett School Safety Fair (Figure 2) and to forestry students learning job skills training.



Figure 2 WSBCCC Gillian Sanders at the Jewett School Safety Fair to discuss wildlife safety with parents and students.

Displays

Educational displays at local community events proved once again to be an effective part of the program's efforts to educate both visitors and residents as to how to reduce human-wildlife conflicts. The program expanded its display this year with a new table banner, a bobcat hide and skull, and a cougar skull. The display was once again a big hit with local children and a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (Figure 3). People shared their own wildlife sightings and stories and were able to access information and solutions for their own attractant challenges. The new tattoos of bear paw, cougar, bear picture, and WSBC logo were a great hit with kids of all ages. The best events were at ToadFest at Summit Lake where the program shared a booth with Bree Lillies of the New Denver WildSafeBC program and at the Meadow Creek Spawning Channel Open House.



Figure 3 WSBCCC Gillian Sanders discussing human-wildlife issues at ToadFest 2014.

Wildlife Attractant Bylaw

The notification of the Village of Kaslo's Wildlife Attractant Bylaw was published in the Pennywise in both spring and fall editions. This ad helps to ensure ongoing attractant management efforts and educates residents on potential financial consequences of leaving animal attractants available to wildlife.

Wildlife Attractant bylaws that regulate the management of backyard wildlife attractants are becoming the norm in many BC communities. They provide an effective tool in solving cases of chronic attractant issues where education is just not enough.

Electric Fencing

The use of properly-installed and well-maintained electric fencing is effective in keeping small livestock and fruit trees safe from bears. Bears that kill livestock are usually destroyed immediately. In 2014 the program installed 7 electric fences to prevent conflict with bears in Kaslo and the North Kootenay Lake area. In all 7 cases, the fencing proved effective. Residents were pleased to know that their livestock was safe and/or that they were able to harvest their ripened fruit before bears came in to eat it. Additionally the fences prevented bear induced damaged to the fruit trees.



Figure 4 WildSafeBC temporary fencing around 2 apple trees while fruit is ripening to protect trees from bear damage.

West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group

Kaslo WildSafeBC sits on the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group, an initiative of local bear biologists and the Conservation Officer Service. The group consists of representatives from the RDCK, City Councillors and City staff from around the West Kootenay, local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, interested citizens, and WildSafeBC coordinators. Meetings are held bi-annually with the goal of identifying solutions to human-bear conflict and collaborating to find ways of implementing those solutions. This group has also formed a bear bin committee where we are looking at funding opportunities to provide access to bear resistant bins for West Kootenay residents.

Challenges of the 2014 Season

Despite the reduction in human-bear conflicts this season, it only takes one yard with unsecured attractants to create conflict. To prevent conflicts from starting in the spring, the program would also be better served with an earlier start date to the coordinator's contract to address human-bear conflicts in April.

Goals for 2015

The main goal in 2015 is to pursue Certified Bear Smart Community Status. Kaslo WSBC coordinator Gillian Sanders will be updating the Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan over the winter and will be applying for Bear Smart Status in spring 2015.

Acknowledgements

Kaslo WildSafeBC thanks the following sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, the Ministry of Environment, BC Conservation Foundation, Regional District Central Kootenay, and the Village of Kaslo. The program is grateful to Betty Gutierrez and volunteer fruit harvesters of the “Feeding Families Not Bears Fruit Tree Project” and to Conservation Officer Jason Hawkes for his ongoing advice and support for the program. Also thanks to the many residents who make the effort to manage wildlife attractants to keep wildlife wild and communities safe!

