

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2014

Pacific Rim

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program is managed by the British Columbia Conservation Foundation. The program strives to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The WildSafeBC program was delivered in the municipalities of Tofino and Ucluelet (collectively termed the Pacific Rim) by Community Coordinator John Platenius.

According to RAPP line reports, there were significantly fewer human-wildlife conflict calls through the spring, summer and fall of 2014 compared to the previous year. This is likely due to a strong summer berry crop and a higher level of community awareness about the importance of proper garbage storage methods. Of the reports received in 2014, black bears were the number one problem animal, and garbage continued to be the number one attractant.

There were a high number of cougar sightings in 2014 compared to 2013 (increase of 525%). Cougar sightings were particularly high in the community of Ucluelet. Two of these cougar sightings were reported as aggressive. There was a low number of wolf sightings compared to 2013 (decrease of 283%). Two of these wolf sightings were reported as aggressive. In addition to these bear, cougar, and wolf incidents, there were two deer and two raptors reported through the RAPP line.

This year-end report summarizes the highlights and challenges of the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim program from its inception at the end of May until its seasonal end, November 30, 2014. Suggestions for future regional initiatives with the program are also included.

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Highlights

Public Events

There are two main events in our region worthy of attendance: the Public Market in Tofino and Ukee Days in Ucluelet. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WSCC) attended the Tofino Public market and the delivery was well received. Despite the fact that this is a small market, over 40 individuals were engaged in meaningful human-wildlife related conversations, and over 300 people viewed the displayed materials and/or received educational materials. The coordinator was attending a family memorial during the Ukee Days festival, but expects to attend this event in 2015.

School Presentations

School presentations for the 2014 season began on September 18, before the BC teachers' strike ended. The WSCC provided a program to an independent elementary-age field school that was formed through a partnership between the Raincoast Education Society and the District of Tofino. As the teachers' strike came to a close, the WSCC began delivering programs in the Wickaninnish Elementary Schools on October 9th. The programs have been well received by the students, teachers, and administration. Scheduling has begun for programs in Ucluelet Elementary School, but with the teachers' strike, the program starts have been delayed.

Working with Municipal Staff & Councils

In August, the WSCC delivered a delegation to the District of Tofino's Mayor and Council. The presentation provided an overview of the municipality's human-wildlife conflict strengths and weaknesses. During the presentation, the idea of becoming a Bear Smart Community was introduced. The District of Tofino's staff is now actively engaged with the WSCC in the process of working toward becoming a Bear Smart Community. A review of the Bear Hazard Assessment and Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan is currently underway.

The WSCC is scheduled to deliver a delegation to the District of Ucluelet's incoming Mayor and Council on November 25, 2014. This delegation will be a review of the WSCC's projects and an outline of the program's goals for 2015.

Colouring Contest

The WildSafeBC Junior Ranger Program colouring contest has been distributed through the Ucluelet and Wickaninnish Elementary Schools. In addition to the \$50 WildSafeBC provincial grand prize, Pacific Rim students have been incentivized further by competing locally for a \$50 gift certificate, which was donated by a local restaurant that is popular with children for its donuts and sandwiches.

Garbage Tagging

Garbage surveys were performed as part of the WSCC's role. The intent of these surveys is to determine if residents are putting garbage containers on the roadside the night before municipal garbage collection. The greatest number of refuse containers counted the night before garbage collection was three. Tofino and Ucluelet both have municipal bylaws prohibiting garbage containers on the roadside before 6:00 AM the day of collection, and it appears that residents largely abide by this law.

Media & Editorial

The Pacific Rim's regional newspaper, *The Westerly News*, printed a 750-word article written by the WSCC titled "Roadside Bears: Honk at the Humans". The article was born from discussions with the region's Conservation Officers, who believe that habituation begins for bears in the Pacific Rim when vehicles pull over at the side of the road to watch and photograph the animals.

A 930-word article, titled "Wolves in Clayoquot Sound: Vargas and Flores Islands" has been completed by the WSCC and is approved to be published on the Tourism Tofino website (www.tourismtofino.com) before October 24th. This article was commissioned by the BC Park's Senior Park Ranger for the Clayoquot Region. The BC Parks in the Pacific Rim are home to highly habituated and food conditioned wolves. This article intends to inform residents and visitors how to respond to wolf sightings while camping in the region.

A third article, titled "Reporting Wildlife Sightings" is planned for publication in *The Westerly News* before November 30th. This editorial aims to inform regional residents about the importance of using the provincial RAPP line to report bear, wolf, cougar and deer sightings.

Challenges

The main challenge the WSCC faced was integrating the new position into the region. The inception of the program coincided with the region's busy tourism season. At times it was difficult to communicate and establish relationships with residents, many of whom are tourism-related business owners and are unusually busy during June, July, and August. Now that the program has been initiated, this challenge will not present itself in 2015.

Another small but noticeable challenge has been integrating the school programs into the cramped schedule of the local elementary schools. The BC teachers' strike delayed the start of the school season by almost three weeks. This setback, coupled with the early dismissal of students in June, made the beginning of the school season fairly frantic, as teachers and administrators play catch-up with their schedules and curricula. Despite this impediment, the schools have been receptive to the WildSafeBC school programs and are scheduling programs through November, 2014.

Goals for 2015

The subsequent list details goals and recommendations for the Pacific Rim WSCC for the 2015 season:

- Continue to work with the District of Tofino on becoming a Bear Smart Community. This will require completion of the Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan, which is in progress.
- Investigate District of Ucluelet's enthusiasm for becoming a Bear Smart Community.
- Direct project funds and/or approach the region's Conservation Officers to acquire interactive props for school programs and for use during public displays.
- Expand the number of program volunteers. Now that the WSCC has a full understanding of the program's initiatives, volunteers will be particularly helpful while garbage tagging and during public displays.
- Lead an electric fencing workshop. The Pacific Rim region seems unfamiliar with the use of electric fencing to deter wildlife, despite the relatively high level of chicken coops within the municipalities.
- Build on the burgeoning relationship with the Raincoast Education Society, a local NGO that leads beach walks and naturalist programs in the area. This would be an excellent means to bring the WildSafeBC messaging to the many short-term visitors who are here in the summer months.
- Encourage residents to use animal-resistant bins as a means of garbage storage. This storage method is particularly appropriate for folks who have had bears entering storage sheds.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, the municipalities of Ucluelet and Tofino, the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program.

The WSCC is grateful to *The Westerly News* and Tourism Tofino for providing valuable media outlets for the program.

Four key individuals helped the WSCC find his bearings and move initiatives along: Thank you to Bob Hansen, Todd Windle (Parks Canada), Adrienne Mason (Clayoquot Biosphere Trust), and Francis Bruhwiler (BC Parks).

Thank you also to Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program, particularly for his instructive site visit. Barb Waters and Jen Bellhouse of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation were very patient with the WSCC's learning curve about reporting -- their kindness and tolerance are much appreciated.

Appendix: Photographs

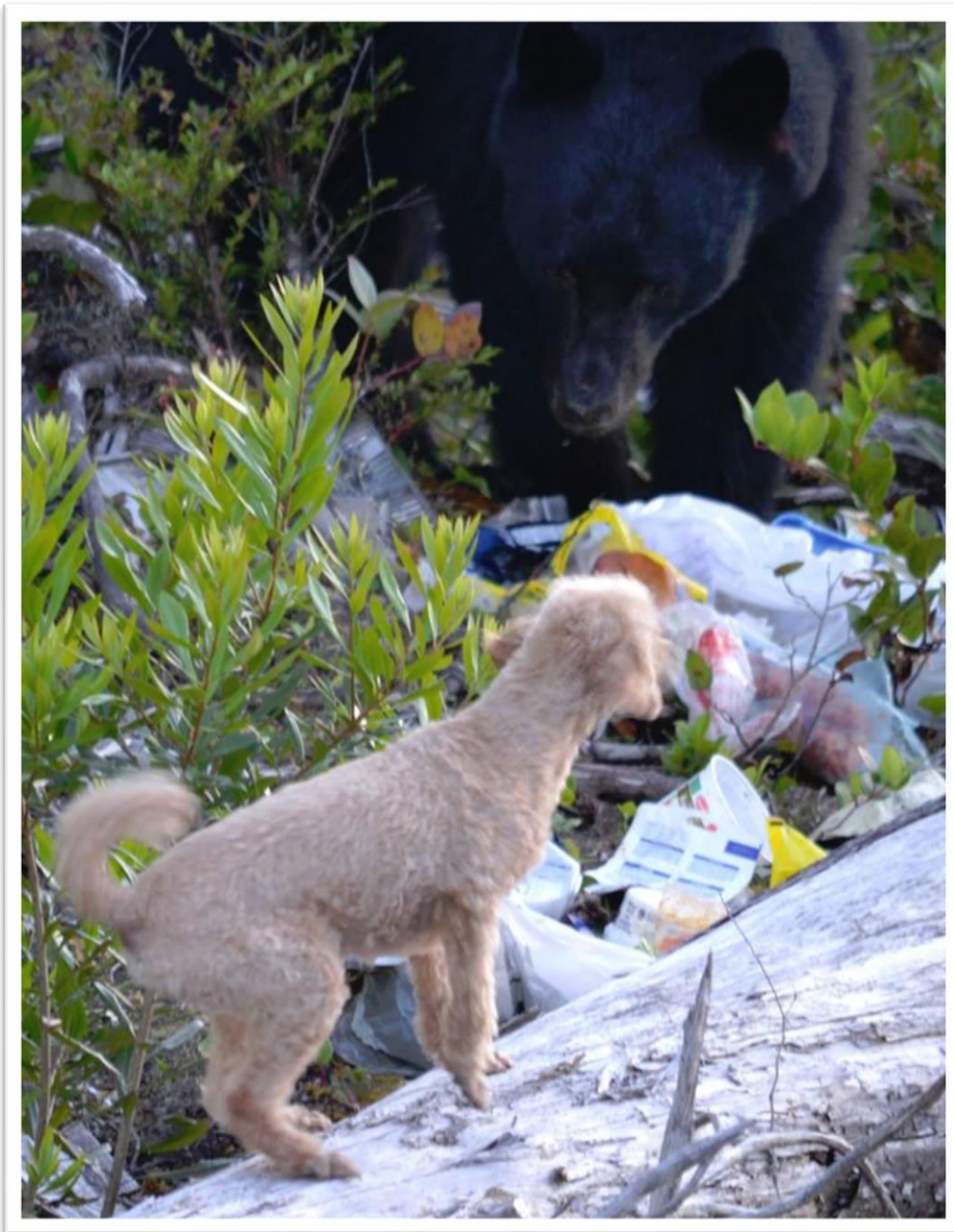


Figure 1. Two human-wildlife conflict examples in one photo: a domestic dog confronts a bear that has broken into the dog owner's shed for garbage.



Figure 2. One of the 25 non-animal resistant refuse containers in Tofino that are now slated to be replaced after the WSCC worked with the municipality's staff, mayor and council.



Figure 3. The WSCC finds evidence of a highly food conditioned bear that Conservation Officers attempted to trap.

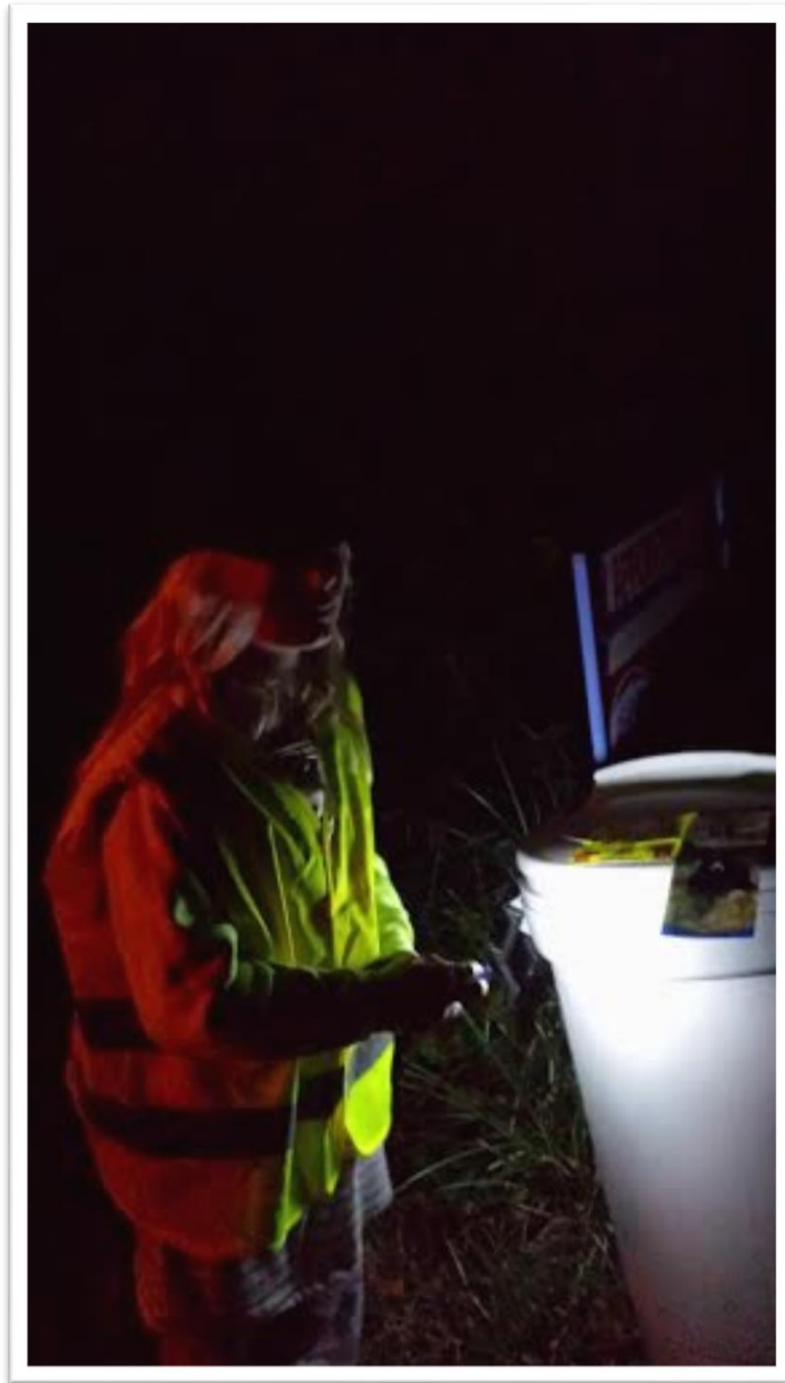


Figure 4. A program volunteer tags a garbage container that was put out at approximately 10:00 PM, the night before garbage collection (in contravention of the municipal bylaw).

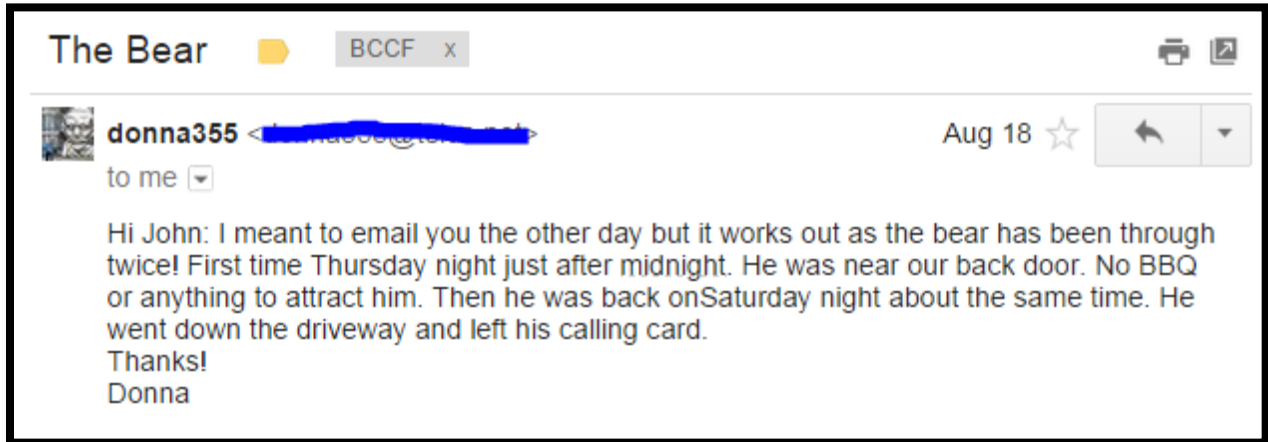


Figure 5. A screenshot of an email shows how residents use the WSCC as a communication conduit for human-wildlife conflict. These communiqués help the Conservation Officers better understand the problem animal's patterns.



Figure 6. The WSCC observed one of the region's Conservation Officers set a trap in an attempt to catch a food conditioned bear.