

Revelstoke WildSafeBC 2014 Annual Report

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Photo: Louise Williams

In association with:



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Figure 1. Black bears were a common sight in Revelstoke in 2014 (Photo Z. Driediger).

Executive Summary

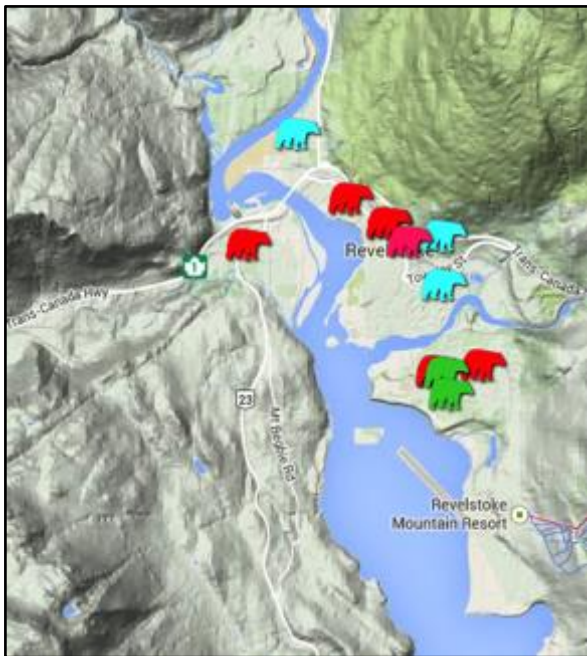
This season in Revelstoke reports of human-wildlife conflict mostly concerned black bears, although there were also reports of a wolf pack, a cougar, a moose, and several grizzly bears. The number of black bear reports in 2014 was the highest in the past decade and was roughly 6 times more than last year.

During the 2014 summer season our educational activities included door-to-door visits, posting “bear in area” signs where conflicts were reported, tagging garbage left out over night, presenting our message to schools and other groups, and running public display booths at farmers markets and festivals. Our Facebook page, local website, and local web list were updated regularly and we had several articles published in the local newspapers.

In addition, we provided information to the City of Revelstoke regarding best practises for keeping backyard hens, and facilitated understanding around electric fencing as a way to protect livestock. WildSafeBC has also been working with the City in its bid to adopt a bear-resistant garbage collection system.

WildSafeBC facilitated the adoption of unmanaged fruit trees by people with the time and energy to harvest the fruit. We also had significant success in encouraging residents and businesses to remove wild and unmanaged fruit trees from Revelstoke.

Revelstoke 2013



Revelstoke 2014

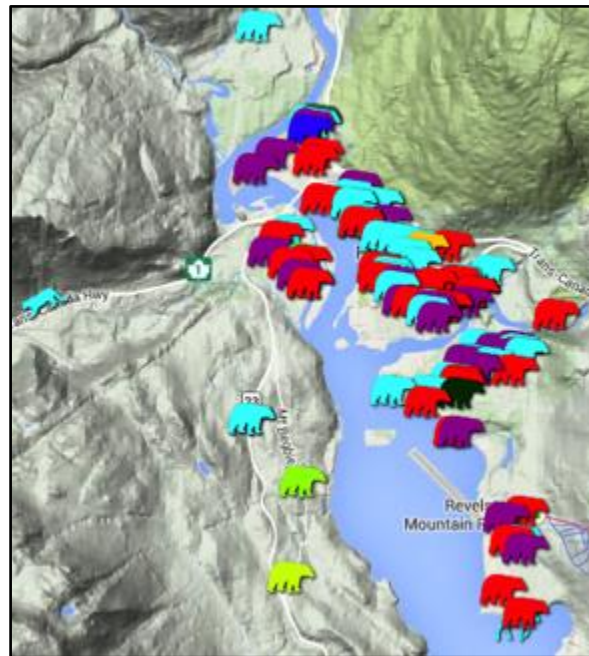


Figure 2. Wildlife conflicts data for Revelstoke in 2013 and 2014 from WildSafeBC's W.A.R.P map.

Highlights of the 2014 season

“Bear in Area” signs

This year we used lawn signs, similar to those used by election campaigners, to indicate where bears were active in the town. Signs were placed where conflict with bears had been reported. Each sign encouraged people to secure all attractants and listed the most common attractants.

Signs were left at the incident site for a maximum of 3 days to ensure that people would know that it related to a current situation. The signs were highly visible and gave an immediate reminder that residents needed to check for any attractants on their property.

Feedback about the signs was very positive and indeed the signs generated a lot of interest, especially as they graphically showed that bears are sighted throughout the whole town.



Figure 3. “Bear in Area” signs proved very effective at increasing awareness of bear activity in Revelstoke.

Removal of wild fruit trees

Last year we mapped wild fruit trees in Revelstoke and made efforts to either manage or remove those trees that were not providing fruit for human consumption. This program has continued and this year we have had several notable successes: BC Hydro removed several hundred wild cherry trees and some apple trees along a public walkway; CP Rail removed several apple trees; the City removed apple and cherry trees; private residents removed 3 groves of fruit trees and another 10 single trees.

It should be noted that all these trees were perennially unmanaged and were not providing good food resources for humans.

Positive steps toward a bear resistant garbage collection system

The City of Revelstoke has been stalled on the issue of introducing a bear-resistant garbage collection system, mostly due to cost. Recently WorkSafeBC informed the City that their present system of garbage collection is prone to injure workers through excessive lifting. The cost of introducing a new bear-resistant system, including purchasing a lifting truck and providing bear-resistant bins to every household, is now similar to the cost of continuing with the status quo. It is hoped that the City will implement a bear resistant system in the near future.

Positive reinforcement for fruit tree pruning

Unmanaged fruit trees are the second most common wildlife attractant in Revelstoke. A pruning workshop in the spring was well attended by the public and many people are beginning manage their trees. Several people have adopted fruit trees owned by others, and with consent from the owners, have helped to prune and manage the trees year round.



Figure 3. Joe Kruchowski with his exceptionally well pruned plum tree, easy harvesting and no ladder required!

Challenges of the 2014 season

Cherry trees

Huckleberry crops failed in the lower elevations of the Columbia valley near Revelstoke this season. At the time when bears in this area should have been feeding on valley bottom huckleberries, cherry trees in Revelstoke produced a bumper crop of sweet fruit. Unfortunately cherries in Revelstoke are mostly infected with cherry fruit fly, which makes them inedible to most humans. For this reason both tree owners and the Gleaning Project (a volunteer based harvesting group) were unable to harvest edible fruit from many cherry trees.

Some people stripped the fruit and disposed of it, but the heavy crop of fruit and lack of appropriate bylaws meant that many residents ignored the advice of WildSafeBC and much of the fruit was simply not harvested.

The result was that for a period of about a month most reported bear sightings involved bears either in or under cherry trees. Warm dry weather meant that the fruit dried where it fell and remained a food source for quite some time. Many bears attracted by these cherries remained in town and turned their attention to other fruit and to garbage when the cherries finally ran out.



Figure 5. A black bear eats dried cherries from a yard after they have all fallen from the tree (Photo: S. Davies).

Lack of a local Conservation Officer

Last December the Revelstoke Conservation Officer retired and it was decided that the position should be moved to Golden, BC. Unfortunately the high number of bears and bear reports in Revelstoke this season made it very difficult for officers from Vernon and Golden to cover many incidents. This led to residents being resistant to calling the RAPP line because they felt that the Conservation Officers would not be able to come.

Municipal Ticket Information (MTI) bylaw

The introduction of a new garbage bylaw in November 2012 has required people to store their garbage container not accessible to wildlife. Unfortunately when the new bylaw came into being, the Municipal Ticket Information (MTI) bylaw was not updated with appropriate tickets for enforcement of the new bylaw. Unfortunately this omission by the City has meant that City bylaw officers are able to issue warnings but not tickets until the MTI is updated in the New Year.

Looking ahead to 2015

Ambassador program

One idea that has arisen out of the door-to-door work done over the last several years is that there are several distinct sections of the population in Revelstoke. In 2015 I would like to use an ambassador program to reach those sections of the population with differing value sets. Ambassadors would be people who identify with a particular section of the population, and who are willing not only to have a clean yard but also to promote the WildSafeBC message to their friends.

Wildlife Attractant Bylaw

WildSafeBC proposed a Wildlife Attractant bylaw in May 2014 but a decision on whether to proceed was deferred until after the Council elections in November 2014. The matter will be brought to the new Council in 2015.

Bear resistant garbage system

2015 will see the need for Revelstoke City to make a decision on a new garbage collection system. WildSafeBC will do everything possible to encourage the City to choose a bear-resistant system.

Our Volunteers and Partners in 2014

This season Revelstoke WildSafeBC has been fortunate to work in partnership with the following organisations:

- British Columbia Conservation Foundation for providing training, funding, materials, mentoring, and support,
- Ministry of Environment for providing funding,
- Columbia Basin Trust for providing funding,
- Revelstoke Bear Aware Society for providing funding and support,
- Parks Canada for office supplies, boardroom facilities, and expert advice,
- The City of Revelstoke for leading the way in removing unmanaged fruit trees,
- The Conservation Officer Service for advice and support,
- The North Columbia Environmental Society for inviting us to share our message at several of their functions,
- The Local Foods Initiative for running fruit preserving working bees to process excess fruit,
- Members of the Revelstoke Bear Aware board of directors for advice and support,
- Revelstoke Farmer's Market for providing free booth space to run public displays,
- School District 19 for allowing us to present our message in schools,
- Community Connections Food Bank for support and promotion of Gleaning Project,
- Scott Renaud of Score Construction for support and information on electric fencing.

