

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

Bella Coola Valley

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British Columbia Conservation Foundation



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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The program was delivered to communities of the Bella Coola Valley in partnership with the Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department and Central Coast Regional District in 2015 by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Fraser Koroluk.

A relatively abundant salmon run in rivers of the Central Coast, coupled with apparently abundant early summer berries provided a diversity of natural foods for bears in the Bella Coola region for most of the summer and fall months. Natural food availability reduced numbers of grizzly and black bears seeking food sources near residential areas, particularly when compared to 2014.

Other wildlife reported near residential areas included: cougars, foxes, and deer. These animals were reported to have periodically accessed human food sources, including fruit and gardens. There were no reports of bears accessing poultry in 2015, compared to numerous complaints in 2014, which became a focus of local electric fencing of chicken coops since that time.

Bella Coola Valley does not have a permanently stationed Conservation Officer; however a Deputy Conservation Officer holding a joint position with BC Parks was recently (2014) designated for the area. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator worked closely with the local Deputy Officer and visiting Conservation Officers from other regions. A committee of resource agencies reconvened a local Human-Bear Safety Committee to move forward on initiatives of reducing human-bear conflict and increasing human safety in the community. WildSafeBC is represented through the Community Coordinator for Bella Coola.

This year-end report summarizes the activities, successes and challenges of the program in 2015. This report also provides recommendations for future Community Coordinator initiatives that stem from this year's experiences.

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Program Delivery

Introduction

Bella Coola Valley is a low- to moderately-populated coastal valley including three unincorporated communities: Bella Coola, Hagensborg, and, Firvale. Residents are spread throughout these communities in low density with abundant wilderness and natural landscape between populated areas. Bella Coola Valley is within the Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) and Traditional First Nations territories, including the Nuxalk Nation. There are no incorporated towns within the CCRD, and therefore, there is little or no bylaw or municipal governance/enforcement within Bella Coola Valley. The nearest COS office is In Williams Lake, approximately 450 km east. BC Parks staff include a Deputy Conservation Officer, living locally in the community. Grizzly and black bears and cougars are the predominant wildlife that are considered concerns to humans within the Bella Coola Valley.

Highlights of the Program

Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

A key component to delivery of WildSafeBC was partnering with the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department to gain knowledge and share experience with various aspects of human-bear conflict within the First Nation community and residential areas. Joint efforts included:

- community outreach through WildSafeBC participation in a bear education day hosted by the Nuxalk Nation;
- school presentations at Acwsalcta school;
- attractant management planning regarding food-fish and fish offal disposal;
- electric fence installations; and,
- ongoing community strategy for continued education and attractant management through Human-Bear Safety Committee involvement.

Funding from Central Coast Regional District (CCRD)

In 2015 the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WSCC) received \$1,500.00 grant funding in aid from the CCRD, representing a significant funding source to the program.

Local Business Funding

Local businesses in tourism and resource sectors and wildlife photography contributed \$1,200.00 to WildSafeBC for purchase of electric fence supplies for the program.

Events

The WSCC attended Nuxalk Resource Stewardship hosted 'Bear Day' as well as interacted with BC Parks Staff and visitors at Atnarko Bear Viewing Station and adjacent camp areas; providing literature, examples of portable electric fences for bear-exclusion from attractants, and provide general information on WildSafeBC objectives in the community. Electric fence demonstrations and samples were the highlight of the Nuxalk Nation hosted event. A booth allowed the WSCC to provide informational brochures, discuss program objectives, and talk one-on-one with residents.

Community Meetings & School Presentations

Presentations and meetings were held with Nuxalk Nation, various community associations, and government representatives/organizations in 2015. The focus of these meetings was predominantly wildlife deterrence related to grizzly bears.

Meetings included:

- Nuxalk Nation, pre-season strategic plan for delivering WildSafeBC and Nuxalk Stewardship program to address attractants, electric fencing, education, and public outreach, multiple field-crew meetings during fencing activities;
- Bella Coola Valley Human-Bear Safety Committee, worked with founding agencies to establish Terms Of Reference and disseminate information to the community (including Ministry of Environment, COS, Ministry of Forests Land and Natural Resource Operations, Department of Fisheries, RCMP, and Nuxalk First Nation).
- Conservation Officer Service, overview of COS availability on rotating basis and support available from BC Parks in attraction management; and,
- BC Parks, review of public bear-viewing areas to ensure minimal attractant procedures and discuss electric fence techniques and public awareness of bear behaviour.

School Presentations:

Three presentations within the Public School system (SD 49) were completed in June and October, as well as one presentation at Acwsalcta School. Additional presentations are planned through November in both schools systems.

Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews

The WSCC visited numerous properties throughout Bella Coola Valley to discuss site-specific attractant management strategies to reduce wildlife-human conflict. Visits included: private residences, commercial campgrounds, agricultural holdings/farms, schools and BC Parks campsites.

Where unnatural attractants were observed, the WSCC provided management solutions including complete attractant removal, attractant management (i.e., fruit picking), or electric fencing.

On five instances the WSCC responded to requests from the COS to review attractants at properties owing to calls received on the RAPP line regarding wildlife (bears and cougars).

Electric Fencing

Electric fence materials and supplies owned by WildSafeBC were again loaned to community members as needed in 2015. Materials available included four portable electric fences and two additional permanent fence chargers and/or installation of high-tensile fence wire.

In 2015, all temporary electric fences were deployed at a total of 10 locations, including:

- 1 bbq area under reconstruction;
- 4 fruit trees/orchards;
- 2 residential gardens; and
- 1 mobile home site (charger only supplied).

There was notably less demand for electric fences in 2015 than in 2014.

Permanent electric fences included fences designed and installed by landowners and/or WSCC. These fences included a fence charger and high-tensile wire provided by WildSafeBC. Insulators and miscellaneous connectors were also purchased by WildSafeBC as required for electric fence installation.

In 2014 two (2) permanent fences were installed by the WSCC, including:

- 1 residential orchard; and,
- 1 community garden (in conjunction with Nuxalk First Nation).

In addition to these fences, WSCC assisted with maintenance of existing fences installed in 2014, as well as assisted the Nuxalk Nation with installation of various additional fences around traditional smokehouses to deter bears from salmon, as part of the Nuxalk Nation delivery of their local bear deterrent program.

Two new chargers, various wire and insulators and miscellaneous fence equipment was purchased with donated funds in 2015 to replace and bolster the inventory supply of fence material available for loan within the program.

Unwanted Fruit Removal

The WSCC opportunistically assisted with removal of unwanted fruit or fruit trees to assist attractant management by landowners, including offering advice on fruit tree removal at SD 49 school yard and an adjacent private orchard in response to reports of a bear in the area.

Wildlife Reporting (RAPP)

It remains uncertain of local utilization level of the COS *Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP)* hotline for reporting problem wildlife in 2015; however, it was evident from a certain number of calls requesting WSCC assistance by COS that the hotline is used periodically. In 2015 there were five requests from COS to assist with attractant assessment and/or management at various properties.

Media

Media is limited in Bella Coola Valley to a bi-weekly newspaper and a recently launched (June 2014) First Nation radio station. The WSCC provided an article to the local newspaper summarizing the initiatives of the Human-Bear Safety Committee and was a presenter during Nuxalk Nan (grizzly) & Tl'a (black bear) Day hosted by the Nuxalk Stewardship Office, which was covered by Nuxalk Radio 91.1 FM in the community and on their Facebook Page. The WSCC remained active on Facebook to promote activities and information throughout the community and residents were encouraged to use Facebook for notice of events and helpful tips.

Challenges to the Program

The primary challenge to the WildSafeBC program is the limited regional governance and lack of permanent Conservation Officer presence in the Bella Coola Valley. The newly appointed Deputy Conservation Officer has aided this, but overall capacity is limited. There remains some confusion of the citizens' responsibility under the *BC Wildlife Act* regarding attractants on private property, and as there are there are no established bylaws, nor is there bylaw enforcement within the CCRD, so there is little past experience with residents regarding rural wildlife conflict and responsibilities typical of an established community elsewhere in BC.

Other challenges included long-established orchards and gardens that have fallen partially into decay and may not be harvested promptly or at all, providing well established and known food sources for multiple generations of bears, making the habit of accessing these attractants by bears very difficult to break.

Future of the Program

The following is a list of recommendations for WildSafeBC initiatives within Bella Coola Valley for future years:

- Continue the established partnership with Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department to maintain buy-in from all valley residents regarding WildSafeBC program initiatives.
- Expand rural landowner knowledge of bear attractants and landowner responsibility to manage attractants.
- Continue to distribute and help establish accessible (inexpensive) electric fence materials for smokehouses, fruit trees, poultry, and other proven attractants.
- Increase interest and understanding of importance to report wildlife conflicts to the RAPP line.
- Use project funds to purchase electric fence components not readily available in our isolated community (e.g., insulators, specific fence components, etc.).
- Set up predator fencing workshops. Many people are interested in workshops, but do not want to commit in advance to attending. If workshops were set up as free events and widely advertised, a higher attendance may be observed.
- Continue discussions of the use of warnings or fines for repeated bear-attractant offenders with Conservation Officers, and address concerns that may arise.
- Gain confidence of the local schools to be able to provide multiple school-visits each school year to establish a culture of WildSafeBC practices.
- Approach local hardware merchants to consider carrying a basic supply of electric fence components suitable for bear deterrence.
- Continue participation by WSCC in the Human-Bear Safety committee.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department, Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program in Bella Coola.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Conservation Officer Service and BC Parks (Hagensborg Field Office) for assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing allowing WildSafeBC to provide electric fence components to interested local landowners.

Special thanks to Jason Moody, Ron Schooner and Quentin Tallio of the Nuxalk Stewardship Department for their field work. And thanks to CCRD, Tweedsmuir Park Lodge, Kynoch Resources and John Giannakos for financial support to the program. Also Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for Continued support in Bella Coola and Jen Bellhouse and staff of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Appendix: Photographs



Photo 1: WildSafeBC demonstrating Electric Fence use at Bear Day with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

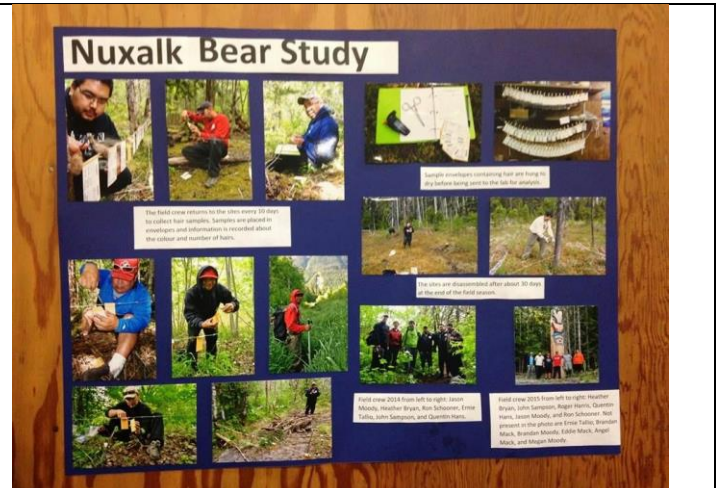


Photo 2: Summary poster of Nuxalk Bear Study in area.



Photo 3: Permanent electric fence around existing orchard.



Photo 4: Temporary electric fence around garden and greenhouse.