

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

## Castlegar and Area

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Photo: Kirk Friederich

Columbia Basin **trust**



  
**CASTLEGAR**  
*happily ever after*



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## Executive Summary

The Castlegar area experienced more human-wildlife conflict in 2015 than in the previous two years combined (Figure 1). The hot, dry weather this season meant that many natural food crops dried up early or failed altogether, bringing wildlife into the valley bottom seeking alternate foods like domestic fruit and garbage. While human-bear conflict remained the most significant wildlife issue in the area, reports of other species were also up this year, with coyotes, cougars and bobcats being drawn into residential areas by pets, livestock and animal feed.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) received countless calls from concerned residents this season and stayed busy posting “Bear in Area” signs, going door to door to chat with residents, providing tips for effective attractant management and posting regular wildlife updates through social media to keep residents in the loop. As always, WildSafeBC presentations and displays also helped spread our messaging to a wide audience.

Perhaps the biggest highlight of the 2015 season came out of positive collaborations and partnerships in the community. Great progress was made this season by the City of Castlegar in addressing community attractants and pursuing Bear Smart Community status. Moving forward, it is this kind of concerted effort that will “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

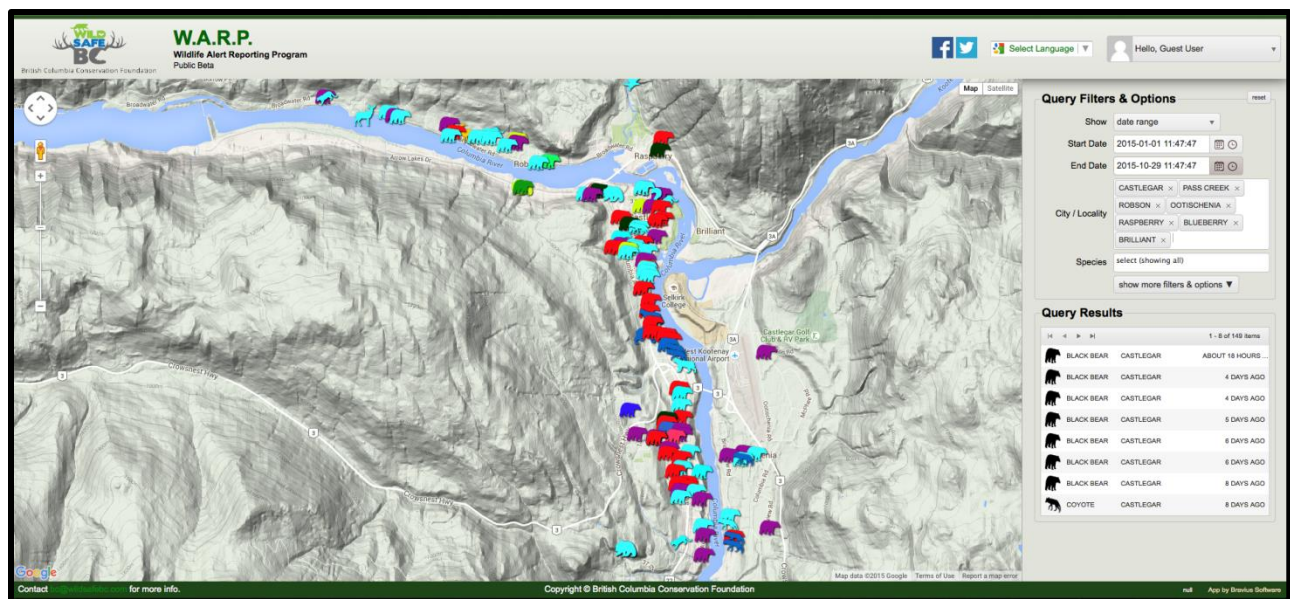


Figure 1 Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map with wildlife sightings and conflicts from January 1- October 25, 2015.

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## Highlights from the 2015 Season

Thanks to the City of Castlegar, WildSafeBC got an early start to the season this year (April 1 rather than May 1). This early start was extremely valuable as it allowed the WCC to focus on proactive messaging earlier in the season before bears emerged from hibernation.

Given the high level of bear activity in town this year, the conversation around responsible attractant management and conflict prevention was well received by the community. Since prevention truly is the only effective, long term solution to human-wildlife conflict, the WCC endeavoured to reach a wide audience through as many avenues as possible.

## Presentations

Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps residents to understand and prevent human-wildlife conflict. WildSafeBC Castlegar gave 22 presentations to the following audiences this season (Figure 2):

- Selkirk College ESL students
- Kinnaird Elementary (Grades: 4(x2),3,2(x2))
- Kootenay Family Place(KFP) ESL Family Group (x2)
- KFP Adult ESL Group
- Robson Strongstart (x2)
- Hobbit Hill Daycare
- Kinnaird Kids Club
- Castlegar Primary (Grades: K, 1)
- Robson Community School (Grades: K, K-1, 1-2, 2-3)
- Blueberry Creek Community School (StrongStart, Preschool, Daycare)



Figure 2 WCC Jenny Wallace presenting to a class from Kinnaird Elementary, 2015.



## Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

WildSafeBC regularly receives phone-calls from concerned residents reporting neighbourhood garbage issues. In response to these calls, the WCC targeted the reported neighbourhoods with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management. WildSafeBC conducted 14 garbage tagging inspections throughout the season, placing “Wildlife Attractant” stickers on bins put out too early. We also visited 350 residences throughout the season to give residents a heads-up about a bear in the area or to discuss neighbourhood attractant issues.

## Bear in Area Signs

This season, WildSafeBC created bright yellow “Bear in Area” signs that could be posted in neighbourhoods experiencing conflict (Figure 3). These signs were a big success, starting neighbourhood conversations and giving everyone in the area a heads up about local bear activity.



Figure 3 Bear in Area sign reminding residents to secure all wildlife attractants, 2015.

## Displays

Educational displays at local events were once again a big hit with local children and a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (Figure 4). As always, residents were able to access information and solutions for their unique attractant challenges. WildSafeBC spent 11 days at the following local events:

- Castlegar Spring Fling
- Castlegar Garden and Nature Fest
- Castlegar Sunfest
- CBAL (Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy) Teddy Bear Picnic

- CBAL Ready, Set, Learn Events (3)
- Castlegar Craft and Farmer's Market (1)
- Pass Creek Fall Fair



Figure 4 WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Jenny Wallace at the Pass Creek Fall Fair, 2015.

## **Bear Smart Community Progress**

Great strides have been made this season towards Official Bear Smart Community Status for the City of Castlegar. The WCC presented to Castlegar City Council about the Bear Smart Community Program in September, outlining the progress already made by the City and the remaining criteria that still must be addressed (the City has currently fulfilled 4/6 Bear Smart Criteria). Since then, we have seen increased enforcement of the Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, a new Bylaw to discourage placing garbage on the curb the night before collection, and even new bear-resistant public garbage cans. The City is considering ways of addressing the remaining criteria (bear-proofing the solid waste management system and ensuring community planning documents reflect human-wildlife conflict reduction as a priority). The WCC has also been collecting data and working with Selkirk College to update the Bear Hazard Assessment map. Applying for Bear Smart Community Status may be a possibility as soon as next year!

## **West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group**

The WCC continues to sit on this collaborative working group, made up of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets biannually to identify and implement solutions to local human-bear conflicts. The WCC also sat on the group's Bear Resistant Bin Strategy Committee which secured funding this season for bringing household bear resistant bins to Area J residents.

## Media

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering close to 60,000 page views and providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC's messaging to a wide audience through publishing articles in local papers, playing radio interviews with the WCC and sharing information through social media.

## Challenges of the 2015 Season

After two very quiet bear seasons (2013-14), there was a definite level of complacency in terms of attractant management at the start of the 2015 bear season. Once it was clear that this would be a very different bear season than the last two, many residents secured their garbage and other attractants, but by this point, many bears were already food conditioned and seeking unnatural foods.

For the first time in many years, domestic fruit beat garbage as the #1 attractant responsible for human-wildlife conflict. The huge amount of unpicked fruit and forgotten fruit trees attracted many hungry bears into the Castlegar area. Revitalizing the local fruit gleaning movement could help address this significant attractant issue, providing fresh fruit for local families- not bears. The WCC was able to meet with local food groups this season, establishing promising partnerships and plans for next season.

Another recurring challenge is the lack of bylaws regulating the management of wildlife attractants in the Regional District of Central Kootenay. Without a Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, there are limited consequences for residents that continually leave attractants accessible to wildlife outside of City limits.

Finally, WildSafeBC typically runs from May 1 to November 30 despite the fact that wildlife species such as coyotes, cougars and deer are active year-round. An extended contract that allowed for some 'off-season' hours would ensure timely advice and information for residents struggling with wildlife issues in the winter months.

## Goals for 2016

Looking forward to the 2016 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues.

- Complete the updated Bear Hazard Assessment Map (in partnership with Selkirk College)
- Assist the City of Castlegar in applying for Bear Smart Community Status
- Form a community working group that builds upon existing partnerships and involves residents in finding solutions to local wildlife issues
- Expand our program's presence in the rural communities of RDCK Areas I and J
- Increase social media reach (aim to double page "Likes")
- Collaborate with community groups to increase local capacity for fruit gleaning projects

## Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Castlegar is grateful for the generous support the program receives from our sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the City of Castlegar, and the Regional District of Central Kootenay.

Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: the Conservation Officer Service, including Sergeant Tobe Sprado, CO Ben Beetlestone, CO Blair Thin, CO Nathan Smienk and CO Jason Hawkes; Castlegar Bylaw Officers Fred Nevakshonoff and Wayne Cox; the members of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group; Tracey Butler and the rest of the great staff at City Hall; Mayor Chernoff and City of Castlegar Councillors; Rena Vandenbos, Tracey Harvey and Jen Peebles of Selkirk College; Castlegar News; The Castlegar Source; TheGoatFM; EZRock; WSBC Volunteers (Scott Cox, Heather Blow); Frank Ritcey, Jen Bellhouse, and the always-supportive staff at BCCF; and the fantastic WSBC Community Coordinators across the province.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.

