

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

Columbia Valley

(Village of Radium Hot Springs, District of Invermere, Regional District of East Kootenay Areas F & G)

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Fig. 1: Sharing information on skulls with Konnor at the Farmer's Institute's "2nd Annual Summer Fair"
Photo by Ruth Fast, Snapd East Kootenay media



Executive Summary

2015 is the first year that the Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK) Areas F & G have received programming from WildSafeBC. Considering the high volume of reported black bear conflict in Edgewater, Windermere and Fairmont, it was a good match for both Areas F & G.

While Invermere and Radium have improved in waste management over the past several years, the amount of black bear conflict is still high in these communities. Despite the high amount of reported conflict, only one bear was destroyed in the Columbia Valley this summer/fall. The circumstance involved a young, habituated black bear in Fairmont, likely due to the high volume of tourists and the black bear families that use the Resort property as a corridor when traveling from the river up to the mountain.

Tourists and 2nd homeowners are an important part of the Columbia Valley's economy, but present a unique situation regarding human-wildlife conflict that requires a significant amount of attention.

Overall, the Columbia Valley is a vast, diverse area with many communities that experience different types of conflict. Summer 2015 was aimed at engaging tourists at public displays, and trying to measure and classify the diverse conflict happening throughout different communities in the Columbia Valley.

Fall 2015 was focused on addressing and preventing black bear conflict, particularly regarding waste and fruit tree management.

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Highlights from the 2015 Season

1. Public Displays

Public displays were set up throughout the Columbia Valley at repeating and one-time events (see below). Such displays proved to be a great way to engage tourists and residents alike. Visitors to the displays were able to observe natural artefacts and read information about attractant management. Most visitors were interested to learn where the bears and other wildlife were located, and many people wanted to share their stories of encounters or sightings. This approach to public education was very welcoming and engaging. Children in particular were very interested in the props available, and were excited when they could take something home with them (such as a poster or temporary tattoo).

WildSafeBC set up displays at the following events:

- Fairmont Hot Springs Resort All-Staff Meeting
- Radium Days
- Canada Day Radium
- Farmers Institute Summer Fair
- Radium Market on Main (5)
- Invermere Farmers Market (4)
- Fairmont Artisans Market (3)
- Windermere Fall Fair
- Radium Fall Fair



Fig. 2: Public Display at Radium Fall Fair October 25, 2015

2. Door-to-door Canvassing

Reaching people at their homes and providing information on conflict in certain areas was very important this year, due to the high volume of black bear conflict in many communities. Some homeowners were unaware that there was a black bear in the area, while many others had experienced recent conflict regarding improper garbage storage, fruit trees, compost, or had simply seen a bear walk through their yard.

Information was provided whenever possible to homeowners and renters about how to prevent conflict in the future, in the form of a “homeowner’s checklist” that listed attractants, provided the RAPP line number and WildSafeBC contact info. A WildSafeBC pamphlet on black bears was also provided to increase awareness. In the case of no one answering the door, a calling card/ door hanger was left giving reasons for the visit and also listing ways to prevent conflict. Neighborhoods were targeted based on reports to the RAPP line and recommendations by the Conservation Officers, input from local bylaw officers, as well as reports made by various individuals to WildSafeBC.

Many residents were concerned about neighbours attracting wildlife. WildSafeBC visited 391 homes in the Columbia Valley this year, including 84 homes in Radium, 150 homes in Invermere, 80 homes in Windermere, 48 homes in Fairmont, 19 homes in Edgewater, and 8 homes in Wilmer.

3. Garbage Tagging

Garbage Tagging was undertaken in the District of Invermere (DoI) this year. 12 nights of surveys resulted in 6 full surveys of the DoI, with varying results. A bright yellow sticker was placed on bins left outside the night before curb-side pickup, capturing the homeowner’s attention the next day. Surveys showed positive results later in the season (October), which may be due to increased awareness but may also be due to a lower population during the “slow season” for 2nd homeowners and visitors to the Columbia Valley.

4. Presentations

Although they require more preparation time than other forms of engagement, presentations have been a significant way to reach communities in the Columbia Valley. They provide in-depth information on forms of conflict that are specific to each community. Different groups are interested in different information, varying from human-wildlife conflict reduction in a specific community to educating resort staff on backcountry safety. Presentations were given in various communities this year, with more planned over the next several months:

- Panorama Staff Orientation
- Valleys Edge Resort
- Windermere Town Hall
- Summit Youth Center in Invermere
- Edgewater Community Hall
- Edgewater Youth Center
- Eileen Madson Primary School (2)

5. Media

A bi-weekly column was undertaken over the summer and partially into the fall to engage the Columbia Valley as a whole, particularly when its population was highest (2nd homeowners, tourists). There was a lot of positive feedback regarding the regular updates and information on reducing human-wildlife conflict. Topics the articles addressed include:

- WildSafeBC is Up and Running
- Preventing Habituated Bears
- Know the Signs Before You Go
- Fruit Trees: Dealing with a Major Wildlife Attractant
- WildSafeBC & Garbage Disposal
- Continuing Community Education
- Black Bears & Garbage

Challenges of the 2015 Season

The summer of 2015 was a slow season for wildlife conflict. There were some issues regarding aggressive deer in the spring and summer (when they were raising their fawns). Many communities in the Columbia Valley experience a common problem: one or two does that continue to raise their young in communities and close to homes due to safety from predators. Does can be very aggressive with dogs especially, and have been reported to chase children and have lost their fear of humans in general. Invermere, Radium, Edgewater, and Windermere in particular experienced issues with aggressive deer. This issue requires creative solutions, as deer are not seen as a priority when issues with predators abound.

The summer was followed by a very busy fall season regarding black bear conflict. It is possible that this was due to a lack of natural food sources because of the hot dry summer (e.g. berry crops started and ended early). Whatever the cause, black bears have been more inclined to take advantage of unnatural food sources in town.

It is clear that community education regarding attractant management is still necessary in all communities in the Valley. Waste management continues to be a widespread problem; some households continue to leave bins out overnight before morning of pickup, and improper regular storage is a common issue especially in Invermere.

Fruit trees were also a significant attractant in Invermere, Windermere and Edgewater and should be a focus area for next summer. We should be educating homeowners about their fruit trees in early preparation for the fall. Creating community initiatives like apple press events may help raise awareness about fruit trees and encourage more homeowners to manage their trees. Working with second homeowners to reduce the volume of attractants especially in Windermere should also be a focus for next summer, in preparation for the fall.

Goals for 2016

1. District of Invermere

Wildlife conflict recorded on the WARP system for Invermere this summer/fall consisted mostly of black bear and deer reports. Black bears being “food conditioned” to garbage was the overall issue. Waste management should be the main focus for Invermere in 2016. Public displays at the Invermere Downtown Market should include a strong message about waste management. Working alongside the District of Invermere to improve waste management and disposal will be critical, and door-to-door visits should include a message regarding proper waste management. Garbage tagging should continue with a follow-up in the media.

2. Radium Hot Springs

Conflict reported for the Radium area this summer/fall consisted of mostly black bears and deer. Black bears were attracted mostly by garbage but also by fruit trees. Education should include door-to-door messaging about managing attractants. Public displays are important especially because there is so much emphasis on public events in the Village.

3. Fairmont Hot Springs

Just like Radium, Fairmont sees a lot of tourism and the population is very dependent on season. Public displays are essential for this community as well. The Fairmont Community Association was very eager to help further the WildSafeBC initiative this year, and if the WSBC Community Coordinator has more time to spend in Fairmont in 2016, the message can be more widely distributed through door-to-door campaigning, presentations at timeshares, and through local initiatives like tourism brochures.

4. Windermere

There were many reports of black bears in Windermere this fall. Improper waste management/disposal was the top concern. Fruit trees were also a significant attractant. 2016 should be focused on increasing awareness of wildlife attractants and calling the RAPP line when a predator is seen in town.

5. Panorama

Continuing to educate staff on wildlife safety and respect will be a top priority for this resort village. Reaching out to residents in the village will be important as well, in hopes of preparing them for another potential busy “bear season”. This will be done through door-to-door visits and hopefully an open house held by the resort, to increase awareness about bears and other wildlife in the area.

6. Edgewater

According to the Conservation Officers, conflict is often not reported in Edgewater. Stressing the importance of contacting the RAPP line when a predator is in town should be a top priority for 2016. Conflicts were reported regarding bears entering town to access fruit trees and fridges/freezers stored outside.

7. Wilmer

According to several residents, there are many black bears in the Wilmer area. Garbage storage can be an issue. Hunters sometimes dump animal remains along Westside Rd coming into Wilmer, which attracts bears to the road and can result in collisions. Perhaps working with the Rod & Gun Club to resolve this issue should be looked into.

Final Note: Reducing Conflict in our Region

Overall the Columbia Valley could benefit greatly from increased communication and cooperation. A working group that allows collaboration between stakeholders to reduce human-wildlife conflict could bring about a much-needed conversation. This would promote communication between biologists, community groups, government agencies, and many other stakeholders in the region to determine what next steps should be taken to reduce conflict, particularly regarding bears. Waste management is still an issue after much emphasis on education and awareness, and further steps would benefit the region as a whole.

Acknowledgements

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Thank you to everyone in Invermere, Radium and the RDEK who have worked to reduce the volume of wildlife attractants in our communities, in an effort to keep wildlife wild and communities safe.



Appendix

Breakdown for RDEK coordinator hours worked:

RDEK Areas F & G overall hours worked: 173.25

RDEK General hours worked (not specific to one area/community): 76.76

Area F (specifically): 64.75

Panorama (specifically): 9.75

Fairmont (specifically): 32.25

Windermere (specifically): 22.75

Area G (specifically): 31.75

Wilmer (specifically): 3

Edgewater (specifically): 18.5

Spilli/Brisco/Spur Valley (specifically): 3

Not specific to one community*: 7.25

*This includes activities that were focused on Area G as a whole.