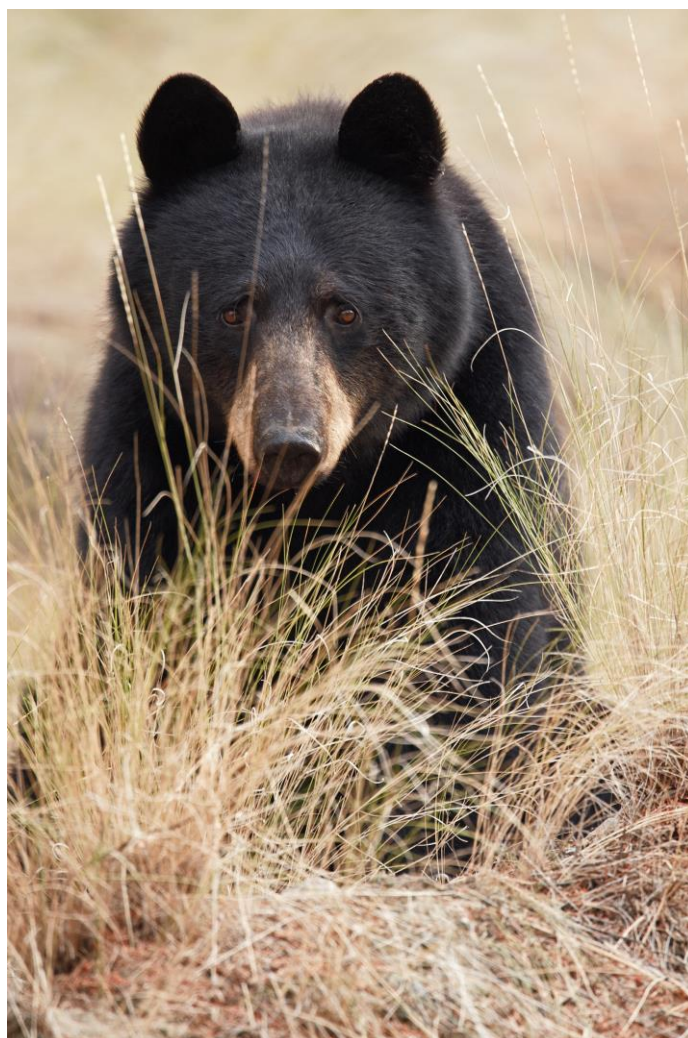


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

District of Tumbler Ridge

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Executive Summary

2015 was the inaugural year for WildSafeBC in the District of Tumbler Ridge. The season began in June of this year following a week of training, in Kamloops BC, for the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Anthony Moreau-Coulson.

The purpose of the program is to reduce human-wildlife conflict through education, innovation, and cooperation within many communities across BC. The WCC delivered this message through displays at community events, door-to-door discussions, and presentations to local schools and community organizations throughout the 2015 season.



WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Anthony Moreau-Coulson, at the Grizfest Music Festival.

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Highlights from the 2015 Season

Presentations

The WCC gave numerous presentations to various community groups throughout the 2015 season including the DND Junior Rangers Program, the Tumbler Ridge and South Peace Volunteer Search & Rescue, BC Parks and Recreation employees, District of Tumbler Ridge Waste Transfer Station Employees, the local primary and secondary schools, the parents of the local StrongStart program, and various tour groups of the Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation.

The majority of the presentations focused on bear behaviour and attractant management associated with bears, as these are the most common human-wildlife conflict species in Tumbler Ridge.

Public Displays

Many public displays were utilized this year to spread the WildSafeBC (WSBC) message to the citizens and visitors of Tumbler Ridge. The displays consisted of a poster board displaying wildlife attractants and pictures of wildlife, informational brochures on local wildlife species, bear spray canisters and bear spray safety container and holster, the skin of a black bear, and a 3D printed black bear paw to help teach track recognition.

Public displays were held at the following locations and events:

- Tumbler Ridge Visitor Information Centre
- Tumbler Ridge Community Centre
- Canada Day celebrations
- Rock 97.7 live radiobroadcast
- Chamber of Commerce Craft fair
- Inauguration of the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark
- Tumbler Ridge Children's Health and Safety fair
- Grizfest Music Festival

The Junior Ranger Program

The Junior Ranger Program is a fairly new program designed by the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) targeted at the K-7 age groups. The program is delivered through presentations at local primary schools and was very well received at Tumbler Ridge Elementary School. Over 200 students participated in the program this year, which teaches students about attractant awareness and management. A colouring sheet, along with checklist, was sent home with each student to help engage parents with their kids in recognizing bear attractants and how to properly manage attractants around the home. Basic bear behaviour and encounter strategies were also discussed with the older students, grades 5-7.



Students from Tumbler Ridge Elementary identifying black bear tracks with a 3D printed track maker.

Bear Spray Training

Grades 7-9 students, from Tumbler Ridge Secondary School, were able to take advantage of the use of inert bear spray canisters to learn the basics of proper storing and transportation techniques. Grades 7 and 8 students, on a field trip to a local provincial park, were taught how to properly travel with bear spray using a hip holster and bear spray safety container. They were also taught how to properly hold the canisters while administering the bear spray in a simulated bear encounter. The cans of inert bear spray proved to be very valuable in teaching these lessons to students, which would otherwise have been impossible.

Along with the use of bear spray, how to behave and react in a bear encounter situation was also taught to these students. The concept of recognizing bear behaviour and reacting accordingly was strongly encouraged, with bear spray being a last resort.

Media

The use of local media was a big asset to the WildSafeBC program in Tumbler Ridge, allowing the WCC to communicate with residents, especially at the start of the season. The editor of the Tumbler Ridge News was a large advocate of the program and was very helpful in spreading the WildSafeBC message.

In July of this year a local radio station from Grande Prairie AB visited Tumbler Ridge for a day of live broadcasting. The WCC was able to speak with them, on the air, and was able to reach approximately 75,000 people across the Peace River Region.

Goals and Challenges for the WildSafeBC Program

The 2015 human-wildlife conflict season was a very successful year in Tumbler Ridge, with no bears being destroyed due to human-wildlife conflict, even with increased bear sightings. The WCC attributes this success to that of the citizens of Tumbler Ridge taking the right steps in ensuring that wildlife attractants were properly secure within residential properties.

At the beginning of the year, the role of the WCC was somewhat misunderstood, as this was the first year of the program in Tumbler Ridge. Some residents thought that the WCC role was similar to that of the Conservation Officer Service's, and were frustrated when the WCC did not approach bears in town and try dissuading them from being within residential areas. Through much pavement pounding, this was quickly rectified and the adaptation of awareness and education was greatly accepted.

Another challenge, which was faced within the District of Tumbler Ridge, was the presence of natural and wild berry bushes inside town limits. Tumbler Ridge was designed to have many green spaces, which is one of the alluring features of the town. These green spaces, however, provide plenty of habitats suitable to the growth of many different berry species. Messaging was delivered to the citizens to avoid such areas, and how to react in the event of an encounter with a bear in these areas. Some discussion was also engaged with the District of Tumbler Ridge staff to possibly rectify this issue, but has yet to be resolved. This issue will be high priority for the WCC in the 2016 season.

An issue, which generated a lot of calls to the RAPP reporting line this year, was that of unpicked crab apple trees at residents' locations which attracted bears onto properties. At the beginning of the conflict season there were no fruit gleaning groups or organizations developed in Tumbler Ridge. However, when there were issues with properties, some residents did go and volunteer time to pick the unwanted fruit. These individuals were supported by the WCC, and developing this further is also a priority for the 2016 season, along with working together with the Bylaw Service to try and rectify this issue on an enforcement basis.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC program in the District of Tumbler Ridge was supported greatly by numerous organizations and individuals within the community. The WCC would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Environment, the District of Tumbler Ridge, the Conservation Officer Service from Chetwynd and Dawson Creek, the Tumbler Ridge Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Information Centre (for allowing us to set up our booth on numerous occasions), all the local businesses that displayed brochures and posters for the WildSafeBC program, School District 59 for allowing us to come present to students, and most of all, the residents of Tumbler Ridge for supporting the program and practicing good wildlife attractant management throughout the 2015 season.

The WCC would also like to thank the staff of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, specifically Jen Bellhouse and Frank Ritcey, for the amazing guidance and support with the WildSafeBC program in the District of Tumbler Ridge.