

# WildSafeBC Elk Valley and South Country Annual Report 2015

---

Including; Elkford, Sparwood and the surrounding rural Elk Valley and South Country

---



Prepared by Kathy Murray  
WildSafeBC Community Coordinator  
October 30, 2015

Columbia  
Basin **trust**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report describes the activities of the Elk Valley and South Country WildSafeBC Program between May 1st and October 30th 2015. It includes the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to residents and visitors in Elkford, Sparwood, rural areas in the Elk Valley, Elko, Jaffray, Baynes Lake, Grassmere, and the surrounding South Country. It also includes recommendations for the future of the program and acknowledges the volunteers and community partners which are crucial for success.

To date, (from January 1, 2015) more than fifteen food-conditioned and habituated bears had to be destroyed in the Elk Valley and South Country. There have also been a number of incidents involving hunters and grizzly bears. Trail use in the Elk Valley also continues to increase as does human-wildlife conflict on trails highlighting the need for WildSafeBC.

Thanks to ongoing support and valuable community partnerships, the WildSafeBC Program was very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase and is indicative of the program's success. The District of Elkford continues to be committed to preventing human-wildlife conflict. Elkford now has 45 bear resistant loaner bins available and have retrofitted all of the commercial dumpsters with metal latches.

The District of Sparwood is now supporting WildSafeBC and has made great efforts in a short period of time to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Some of the commercial dumpsters have been retrofitted, the community compost site has new signage, is monitored and cleaned up regularly and the bylaw officer has been issuing warnings to residents attracting wildlife. The district has also been actively promoting the importance of securing wildlife attractants.

Recruiting volunteers, educating long-time residents about the storage of garbage indoors between collection days and funding for the WildSafeBC Program have been ongoing challenges. Our delivery costs are high as there are significant kilometers driven and many hours needed to cover such a large area.

# Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 2

HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE ELK VALLEY AND SOUTH COUNTRY WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM ..... 4

    Public Displays at Community Events ..... 4

    Presentations to Groups of Interest ..... 5

    Children’s Educational Program..... 5

    Elkford continues to bear-proof the community..... 6

    Sparwood joins WildSafeBC..... 6

    The Use of Social Networking to Deliver our Program ..... 7

    Support from Local Media ..... 7

    New Initiatives ..... 7

CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM ..... 8

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2016 WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM..... 8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... 9

## **HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE ELK VALLEY AND SOUTH COUNTRY WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM**

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand from Elk Valley residents and visitors. Over the years the program has formed many valuable partnerships with various community organizations. The highlights of the Elk Valley and South Country WildSafeBC Program are as follows:

### **Public Displays at Community Events**

The WildSafeBC public information display was set up at a variety of community events throughout the Elk Valley and South Country. The informative stand-up display, brochures, props (bear pelt, skull, claws, cougar pelt and skull, sample scat, and rubber footprints) and banner attracted a lot of attention. The display was attended by the Community Coordinator with the assistance of volunteers on occasion. All of these events were an ideal opportunity for people to approach us in a relaxed and social environment and discuss local wildlife issues. Many great contacts were made with the public and other exhibitors. WildSafeBC spent eight days at the following community events.

- Sparwood Coal Miner Days
- Sparwood Emergency Awareness Event
- Sparwood Fall Registration Event
- Sparwood Farmers Market
- Elkford Wild Cat Days
- Elkford Fall Registration Event
- Baynes Lake Farmers Market x 2



Figure 1 THE WILDSAFEBC DISPLAY AT THE SPARWOOD FARMERS MARKET

## **Presentations to Groups of Interest**

The demand for WildSafeBC presentations to groups of interest continues to grow. Presentations including wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, the viewing of Staying Safe in Bear Country and how to safely use bear spray were delivered to front line resort staff at Island Lake Lodge and Fernie Alpine Resort. These presentations were also delivered after the community fall registration events in Sparwood and Elkford.

## **Children's Educational Program**

Children are the greatest advocates of our program and can always be counted on to deliver the message to their parents. The WildSafeBC Program was delivered to more than 800 students throughout the Elk Valley and South Country. Presentations included wildlife biology and safety with bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, role plays and a craft for younger children. A follow-up homework exercise (a coloring sheet and WildSafeBC questionnaire) was given to all teachers for kids to take home and then was to be reviewed by teachers. This was a great way to ensure the message got to a broad range of families throughout the community. WildSafeBC presentations were held at the following schools:

- Frank J Mitchell Elementary in Sparwood
- Rocky Mountain Elementary in Elkford
- Jaffray Elementary School



Figure 2 CHILDREN LEARNING TO RESPOND TO WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

## **Elkford continues to bear-proof the community**

In 2012 Elkford acquired 20 bear-resistant residential containers available to loan to residents who have no garages or sheds to secure garbage in areas with bear activity. Another 25 were purchased in 2014. All the commercial dumpsters have also been retrofitted with metal latches to make them bear resistant. The end result is very positive; less garbage is easily available to wildlife. A combination of education, bylaw enforcement, availability of residential bear resistant containers and retrofitted communal dumpsters has proven effective in reducing human-wildlife conflict in Elkford.



Figure 4 DISTRICT OF ELKFORD DUMPSTER RETRO FITTED WITH METAL LATCHES

## **Sparwood joins WildSafeBC**

New to the Elk Valley program this year is the District of Sparwood. There is a long history of human wildlife conflict in Sparwood and last year newly elected Council voted to try the program for 3 years. Volunteers helped identify the problem areas in Sparwood. Commercial dumpsters at the Causeway Bay Hotel, Mountain Shadows Campground and the Convenience store in Sparwood Heights did not close properly and were bear attractants. Residents also routinely dumped apples and other attractants at the community compost site designated for grass clippings and sod only. Garbage is also routinely stored outdoors accessible to bears between collection days.

The District of Sparwood has made great efforts in a short period of time to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Some of the commercial dumpsters have been retrofitted to prevent access to wildlife. There is new signage and the compost site is monitored and cleaned up regularly, the wildlife attractant bylaw was amended and the bylaw officer has been issuing warnings to residents attracting wildlife. The district has been actively promoting the importance of securing attractants in newspaper ads, community newsletters, on their website and on the Welcome to Sparwood arch. The WildSafeBC program was delivered to all students at FJ Mitchell elementary and the WildSafeBC display was attended by the Community Coordinator and volunteers at various community events. Sparwood has taken a very big step forward towards preventing human-wildlife conflict.

## The Use of Social Networking to Deliver our Program

Our online presence with the WildSafeBC Facebook page and WildSafeBC Elk Valley Blog has allowed residents and visitors throughout the Elk Valley and South Country to access information about wildlife sightings and give us the opportunity to reach a wider audience with our educational messages. All wildlife sightings and incidents reported to the 24 hour Conservation Officer Hotline (RAPP) were posted on our blog and Facebook pages. We now have close to 800 followers on our Facebook pages and some posts reached up to 4500 people in a day! The use of social media to deliver our message to a wide range of people in a cost effective and timely manner has been very successful.

## Support from Local Media

Support from our local media, the Free Press and Elk Valley Herald local papers, The Drive 99.1 and Summit 107 continues to be outstanding. WildSafeBC has a weekly column in both local papers where readers are updated on recent wildlife activity, educational events and include educational messages of the Coordinator's choosing. WildSafeBC also provides the local radio stations with a summary of wildlife activity every week. This support is crucial in keeping both residents and visitors informed.

## New Initiatives

The WildSafeBC "Bear in Area" signs were initially a trial project and are now proving very successful. The signs were placed in areas with current bear activity and served as a reminder for people to give bears space (when seen) and remember to keep household attractants for wildlife secure. The signs were left for one week at a time and removed if bears had moved on or moved to an adjacent strategic location so that people didn't become desensitized to the message. This initiative was also a great way to engage the neighborhood, start discussions and create awareness for people passing by.



Figure 3 BEAR IN AREA SIGN

## **CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM**

Funding for the Elk Valley and South Country Program has been an ongoing challenge as there are significant mileage costs and hours needed to cover such a large area. It is also important to keep the program running and consistent in order to develop community partnerships and maintain traction. Local knowledge and contacts are fundamental as it is a huge area to cover. Community Events, School Presentations, local Media, and Social Networking were the best way to deliver the program. Garbage kept outdoors between collection days and accessible to wildlife is the root cause of human-wildlife conflict in the Elk Valley and South Country.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2016 WILDSAFEBC PROGRAM**

As the Elk Valley continues to grow and develop so will the need to continue educational efforts. There will always be new people, new bears, and other wildlife. Keeping WildSafeBC and its message of “keeping wildlife wild and communities safe” should continue to be a focus as should our ability to provide concrete solutions to reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Thanks to ongoing support, valuable community partnerships and new initiatives, the WildSafeBC Program is very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase. The WildSafeBC Program has proven effective in reducing human-wildlife conflict and has resulted in cleaner and safer communities for people and wildlife. Preventing human-wildlife conflict should continue to be at the forefront of people’s minds with conversations in neighborhoods, local cafes, on social media and at City Hall.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

WildSafeBC Elk Valley is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners, and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: the Ministry of Environment, the Columbia Basin Trust, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the District of Elkford, the District of Sparwood and the RDEK. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Frank DeBoon, Joe Garay, District of Elkford and Sparwood Staff and Council, East Kootenay Park Service, Baynes Lake Lions Club, Free Press, Elk Valley Herald, The Drive 99.1 and Summit 107 radio stations. Thank you to my volunteers, Theresa Jackson, Sandra Roe Wilson, Emma van Tussenbroek, and Dan Savage.

Finally, thank you to all the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties. Let's keep wildlife wild and our community safe!