

# WildSafeBC Fernie Annual Report 2015

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Including West Fernie, Island lake Lodge, Fernie Alpine Resort and Mt. Fernie Provincial Park



Prepared by Kathy Murray

WildSafeBC Community Coordinator

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Columbia  
Basin **trust**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report describes the activities for the Fernie WildSafeBC Program between May 1<sup>st</sup> and October 30<sup>th</sup> 2015, including the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to residents and visitors in the City of Fernie and surrounding area. It also includes recommendations for the future of the WildSafeBC program and acknowledges the volunteers and community partners which are crucial for success.

Since 2005, the average number of bears destroyed per year in Fernie was five. To date this year, twenty food-conditioned and habituated black bears were trapped and euthanized, quadrupling the average. Due to very productive berry crops the last few years, Fernie has a high population of bears. The increase in bear mortality was mainly due to an early spring, a hot dry summer and a berry crop failure, resulting in a lack of natural food for bears. There were also many moose, cougar and coyote sightings on trails and in parks. Development, tourism and trail use in Fernie continues to increase as does human-wildlife conflict, highlighting the need for the WildSafeBC program.

Thanks to ongoing support and valuable community partnerships, the WildSafeBC Program continues to be very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase. This is the greatest indication of the program's success. Recruiting suitable and reliable volunteers and educating a mix of new, seasonal, long-time residents and visitors about the storage of garbage indoors between collection days and fruit tree maintenance continue to be the main challenges for the program.

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## HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES OF THE FERNIE WILDSAFEBBC PROGRAM

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported and received, and is in demand from City of Fernie Council, staff, residents, visitors and various groups and organizations. Over the years the program has formed many valuable partnerships with various community organizations. The highlights of the Fernie WildSafeBC Program are as follows:

### Public Displays at Community Events

The WildSafeBC public information display was set up at a variety of community events and continues to be a very effective way to deliver the program. 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 mainly attended by the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), 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:

- Fernie Farmers Market
- Canada Day at Prentice Park
- Fernie Fall Festival
- Fernie Trails Alliance Trails Festival
- Fernie Half Marathon
- Fernie Sunday Social Show and Shine
- BC Wildlife Federation Conference
- Fall Registration Night



Figure 1 THE WILDSAFEBBC DISPLAY AT CANADA DAY EVENT IN FERNIE

## Presentations to Groups of Interest

The demand for WildSafeBC presentations to groups of interest continues to grow. Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps prevent human-wildlife conflict. Presentations included topics such as: wildlife biology and safety (with Bears, Cougars, Coyotes, and Deer), staying safe in bear country and hands-on safe use of bear spray (using inert spray). These presentations were delivered to Front Line Resort Staff at Island Lake Lodge and Fernie Alpine Resort, Adult Life Skills Groups, College of the Rockies Students, Fernie Trail Festival, Fernie Women on Wheels group, Public event at the Bike Park and the Fernie Fall Festival.



Figure 2 FERNIE WOMEN ON WHEELS LEARNING HOW TO PREVENT ENCOUNTERS WITH WILDLIFE AND SAFELY USE BEAR SPRAY

## Children's Educational Program

Children are the greatest advocates of our program and can always be counted on to deliver the message to adults. The WildSafeBC Program was delivered to more than 500 elementary students of Isabella Dicken Elementary and the Fernie Academy, as well as French Immersion classes at École Sophie-Morigeau, Fernie Secondary and the Creative Minds Pre-school. Presentations covered wildlife biology and safety (with bears, cougars, coyotes, and deer); incorporating roleplay and crafts for younger children. A follow up/homework exercise (coloring sheet and WildSafeBC questionnaire) was given to all teachers for kids to take home, complete and then be reviewed by teachers. This was a great way to ensure the message got to a broad range of families throughout the community.



Figure 3 KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS LEARNING TO RESPOND TO BEAR ENCOUNTERS AT IDES

## **The Use of Social Networking to Deliver our Program**

Our online presence with the WildSafeBC Facebook and WildSafeBC Elk Valley Blog has allowed residents and visitors throughout the Elk Valley to access information about wildlife sightings, giving 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. Followers of the linked Facebook pages and Twitter feed received automatic alerts whenever sightings were reported.

We now have close to 800 followers on our Facebook pages and some posts reached up to 4500 people in a day! Our WildSafeBC Elk Valley blog has an RSS feed with Fernie.com and links to other popular sites such as the Fernie Mountain Bike club, Fernie Trails Alliance, Fernie Fix Magazine, Free Press, Fernie Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Fernie and many others. 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 Fernie 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 WCC's choosing. The WCC provided the local radio station with a summary of wildlife activity every week. This support is crucial in keeping both residents and visitors informed.

## New Initiatives

The WildSafeBC Fernie “Bear in Area” signs were initially a trial project 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 4 BEAR IN AREA SIGN

Trail use in Fernie continues to increase as does human/wildlife conflict on trails highlighting the need for WildSafeBC and public education. The Fernie Trails Alliance, Wildsight, Island Lake Lodge and WildSafeBC joined forces to design Wildlife Safety Metal Signs and posters that have been posted at trail heads throughout the city trail network, surrounding recreational areas and posted in sports shops, hotel lobbies and other public places. This has been very effective at providing an educational message to local and visiting trail users.



# FERNIE IS WILDLIFE COUNTRY

**The Safest Wildlife Encounter is One Prevented**






**AVOID SURPRISE ENCOUNTERS**  
Call out, clap your hands, sing or talk loudly.

**LOOK FOR SIGNS OF WILDLIFE**  
Tracks, droppings, diggings, claw-marked trees, torn-up logs, overturned rocks and food caches.

**TRAVEL SMART**  
Stay in groups, stay on marked trails and travel in daylight.

**DO NOT LITTER**  
Pack it in, pack it out.

**CARRY BEAR SPRAY**  
Keep it accessible and know how to use it as your last best defense.

**DOG OWNERS**  
Keep your dogs under control. They may provoke defensive behavior in wildlife.

**CYCLISTS**  
Speed and quietness put you at risk for sudden encounters. Slow down and make noise.

  
 wildsight

  
 Wild Safe BC  
Wildlife Safety & Education

  
 Fernie Trails Alliance

**Never Approach or Feed Wildlife**

Report human/wildlife conflict to  
1-877-952-7277(RAPP) or #7277 on cell.  
For more information on preventing  
human/wildlife conflict visit [www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

Figure 5 FERNIE IS WILDLIFE COUNTRY SGN AND POSTER

## **CHALLENGES TO DELIVERING THE WILDSAFEBBC PROGRAM**

Fortunately the program has continued to be well supported and funded over the years, and the challenges faced are minimal. The storage of garbage outside between collection days and fruit tree maintenance continue to be an issue. The manual garbage collection system is not compatible with overweight residential bear resistant containers which would be an option for residents who have no garage or shed to store garbage between collection days.

Residents have requested that the City of Fernie fine residents leaving garbage accessible to wildlife as per Consolidated Waste & Regulation Bylaw #1845 and that bear resistant dumpsters be mandatory for all businesses. City Council stated at the October 13<sup>th</sup> Committee of the Whole meeting that the city has taken an “education first” policy, meaning that bylaw officers give out warnings before fines.

The main challenge remains the recruitment of suitable volunteers. A small but very effective crew of volunteers assist with key tasks, including: assisting with public events and supporting our blog. Finding people who are able to help out with door-to-door visits on short notice when bears are in the area, or garbage tagging, continues to challenge volunteer participation. Fortunately, WildSafeBC Fernie has an excellent rapport with the Conservation Officer Service (COS). CO's and the WCC have worked together on a number of occasions to visit problem areas, which proved very effective.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2016 WILDSAFEBBC PROGRAM**

As Fernie 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 and provide concrete solutions to preventing human/wildlife conflict. Although human-wildlife conflict increased significantly in 2015 with 20 bears destroyed, there has been a lot of progress in the last 10 years. Back in 2004, 40 bears were destroyed, an average of 5 bears destroyed per year between 2005 and 2014.

Thanks to ongoing support, valuable community partnerships and new initiatives, the Fernie WildSafeBC Program is very well received and the demand for our presence at community events and presentations to groups of interest continues to increase. Preventing human-wildlife conflict should continue to be at the forefront of people's minds with conversations in neighborhoods, local cafés, on social media and at City Hall.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

WildSafeBC Fernie is grateful for the generous support the program receives from sponsors, partners and volunteers. Thanks to our sponsors: Ministry of Environment, the Columbia Basin Trust, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the City of Fernie. Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Conservation Officers Frank DeBoon and Joe Garay, City of Fernie Staff and Council, Free Press, Elk Valley Herald, The Drive 99.1, Summit 107, Wildsight, Fernie Trails Alliance, Tourism Fernie, Fernie Alpine Resort, Island Lake Lodge, Fernie.com and the Fernie Chamber of Commerce. Thank you to volunteers Emma VanTussonbroeck 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!