

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

Pacific Rim

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program is managed by the British Columbia Conservation Foundation. The program strives to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The WildSafeBC program was delivered in the municipalities of Tofino and Ucluelet (collectively termed the Pacific Rim) by Community Coordinator John Platenius.

According to Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line reports there were significantly fewer human-wildlife conflict calls through the spring, summer and fall of 2015 compared to the previous year. While the overall number of reports was lower in 2015, there was a slight increase (12%) in reports of black bears. This is likely due to a poor summer berry crop, compared to the previous year, and possibly due to the higher level of tourism-based short-term home rentals, the guests of which may not have a proper awareness about the importance of proper garbage storage methods. Of the reports received in 2015, black bears were overwhelmingly the number one problem animal (74%), and garbage continued to be the number one attractant.

There were a low number of cougar sightings in 2015 compared to 2014 (decrease of 60%). Cougar sightings were particularly high in the community of Ucluelet in 2014, due to a female and two juvenile cats that became residents for approximately two months. Three of the 2015 season's four cougar sightings were reported as aggressive. There was only one wolf sighting reported to the RAPP line in 2015, compared to four reported sightings in 2014 (decrease of 75%). The wolf sighting was reported as interacting with a pet. It is possible that regional residents are becoming apathetic about reporting wolf sightings due to increased frequency of their sightings (anecdotal evidence, but widely acknowledged).

This year-end report summarizes the highlights and challenges of the WildSafeBC Pacific Rim program from its inception at the beginning of May 2015 until its seasonal end, November 30, 2015. Suggestions for future regional initiatives with the program are also included.

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Highlights

Public Events

There are two main public events in our region worthy of attendance: the Public Market in Tofino and Ukee Days in Ucluelet.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) attended the Tofino Public market and the delivery was well received. Despite the fact that this is a small market, over 30 individuals were engaged in meaningful human-wildlife conversations, and approximately 250 people viewed the displayed materials and/or received educational materials.

The WCC displayed a booth at Ukee Days for both of the festival's day-long celebrations. Ukee Days is Ucluelet's main summer event, with most of Ucluelet's residents in attendance. This event proved to be an excellent way to outreach to the Ucluelet community, which was identified as a challenge in the previous year's WCC Final Report. The WildSafeBC booth was intentionally positioned next to the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust's (CBT) booth. The CBT was a significant funder to the Pacific Rim's WCC, and this continuity provided a meaningful team atmosphere. Over 600 individuals viewed the booth over the two day festival, many of whom accepted wildlife safety information handouts. One of the highlights of displaying at Ukee Days was a meaningful discussion with the owner of our region's waste collection company and the mayor of Tofino about the challenges and future prospects of adapting wildlife resistant waste collection containers for our region's municipal garbage collection (Figure 4).

School Presentations

School presentations for the 2015 season began on October 14 at Ucluelet Elementary School. The school's principal was very excited to welcome the WCC back to her school. The WCC presented to over 140 students about wildlife safety and ecology. The WCC had the distinct honor of presenting wildlife safety to a young boy who was attacked by a cougar when he was a baby at nearby Kennedy Lake. The boy shared his story, and the WCC who was familiar with the incident, was able to reiterate how the boy's grandfather did everything correctly, which was a powerful way to reiterate the importance of proper wildlife safety protocols. Scheduling has begun for programs at Wickaninnish Elementary School. The WCC expects to reach each of the over 200 students at the school.

Electric Fence Workshop

In June, the WCC co-delivered an electric fence workshop with the WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey. Spectacularly warm and sunny weather kept the attendance low, but there were six engaged attendants. Four of the attendants were actively seeking advice for future chicken coop projects and one of the attendants keeps chickens and goats without electric fencing. The workshop was met with very positive feedback.

Working with Municipal Staff & Councils

On October 15, the WCC delivered a delegation to the District of Ucluelet's Mayor and Council. The presentation provided an overview of the WildSafeBC program and emphasized the need for a stronger presence in the municipality of Ucluelet. The delegation was well received.

The WCC is scheduled to deliver a delegation to the District of Tofino's Mayor and Council on November 10, 2015. This delegation will be a review of the WCC's projects and an outline of the program's goals for 2015.

Garbage Tagging

Garbage surveys were performed as part of the WCC's role. The intent of these surveys is to determine if residents are putting garbage containers on the roadside the night before municipal garbage collection. The greatest number of refuse containers counted the night before garbage collection was three. Tofino and Ucluelet both have municipal bylaws prohibiting garbage containers on the roadside before 6:00 AM the day of collection, and it appears that residents largely abide by this law.

Media & Editorial

The Pacific Rim's regional newspaper, *The Westerly News*, printed an article written by the WCC titled "Garbage is Luring Bears into Tofino". The article was requested by the region's Conservation Officers, who had been receiving many reports about a bear in Tofino that was likely attracted to garbage on the decks of local vacation rental homes and bed and breakfasts.

A second article, titled "Secure your Garbage: Keep our Communities Safe and our Bears Wild" was published in *The Westerly News* in July. This editorial informed regional residents about the importance of keeping garbage secure and introduced and complimented our region's Conservation Officers to our local residents.

A 930-word article, titled "Wolves in Clayoquot Sound: Vargas and Flores Islands" was printed in *Tofino Time*, a free magazine which has a circulation of 20,000 and is available on BC Ferries and many businesses around Vancouver Island and Vancouver. This article was commissioned by the BC Park's Senior Park Ranger for the Clayoquot Region in 2014 – saving this article of publication in *Tofino Time* maximized its audience. The BC Parks in the Pacific Rim are home to highly habituated and food conditioned wolves. This article informs residents and visitors how to respond to wolf sightings while camping in the region.

Challenges

The main challenge the WCC faced in 2015 was the physical and cultural distance between the two communities that make up the Pacific Rim region: Tofino and Ucluelet. The WCC lives and works in Tofino, which makes for frequent word-of-mouth communication between Tofino residents and the WCC. Most reports that the WCC gets about wildlife arrive during impromptu meetings in a coffee shop or on the street. These types of interactions are much less frequent in Ucluelet because the WCC is not located permanently in that municipality. The WCC acknowledged this challenge during a delegation to Ucluelet's Mayor and Council and suggested that the municipality apply for its own Community Coordinator position.

Goals for 2015

The subsequent list details goals and recommendations for the Pacific Rim WCC for the 2015 season:

- Now that Tofino's Bear/Human Conflict Management Plan is completed, Tofino can work with the province of BC and WildSafeBC to become a Bear Smart Community.
- Investigate District of Ucluelet's enthusiasm for becoming a Bear Smart Community.
- Expand the number of program volunteers.
- Build on the burgeoning relationship with the Raincoast Education Society, a local NGO that leads beach walks and naturalist programs in the area. This would be an excellent means to bring the WildSafeBC messaging to the many short-term visitors who are here in the summer months.
- Continue to encourage residents to use animal-resistant bins as a means of garbage storage. This storage method is particularly appropriate for folks who have had bears entering storage sheds.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, the municipalities of Ucluelet and Tofino, the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program.

The WCC is grateful to *The Westerly News* and Tourism Tofino for providing valuable media outlets for the program.

Four key individuals helped the WCC find his bearings and move initiatives along: Thank you to Bob Hansen and Keltie Minton (Connecting Students with Wildlife), Todd Windle (Parks Canada), Dr. Laura Loucks (Clayoquot Biosphere Trust), and Francis Bruhwiler (BC Parks).

Thank you also to Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program, particularly for his instructive site visit and the productive electric fence workshop. Jen Bellhouse of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation was very patient with the WCC's reporting – both Frank and Jen's kindness and understanding are much appreciated.

Appendix: Photographs

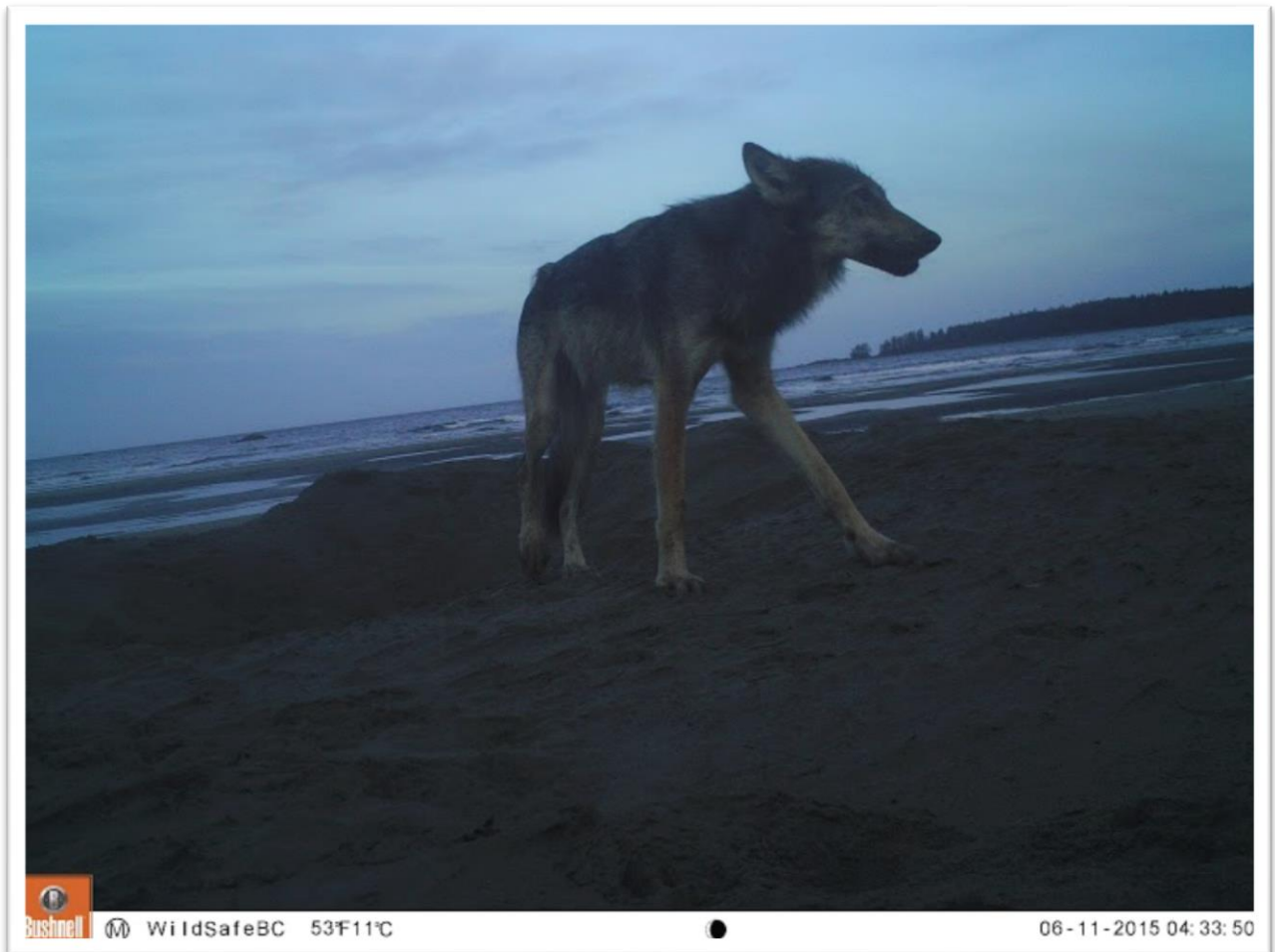


Figure 1. One of 800+ wolf images collected by the Pacific Rim's WildSafeBC trail camera by a grade 5-6 class during a three-night field trip to a remote island beach. The WCC provided set-up instruction and reviewed the images with the class on their return.



Figure 2. Garbage piled up after a long weekend in a Tofino Campground. The WCC spoke with the campground manager about this municipal and provincial law infraction. Conservation Officers were also notified of this infraction.



Figure 3. The WCC worked with Connecting Students with Wildlife in the region's classrooms. Here Bob Hansen and Keltie Minton do a wildlife tracking lesson and exercise.



Figure 4. Tofino Mayor, Josie Osborne, having some fun while talking with the Pacific Rim region's waste collection company owner and the WCC at the Ukee Days festival. The waste collection company claims these bear-resistant bins are too deep for garbage collection and challenged Her Worship to pick something up off the bottom of the container.



Figure 5. Scratches on a western red cedar tree show signs of an active cougar in a greenway of the municipality of Tofino, BC.

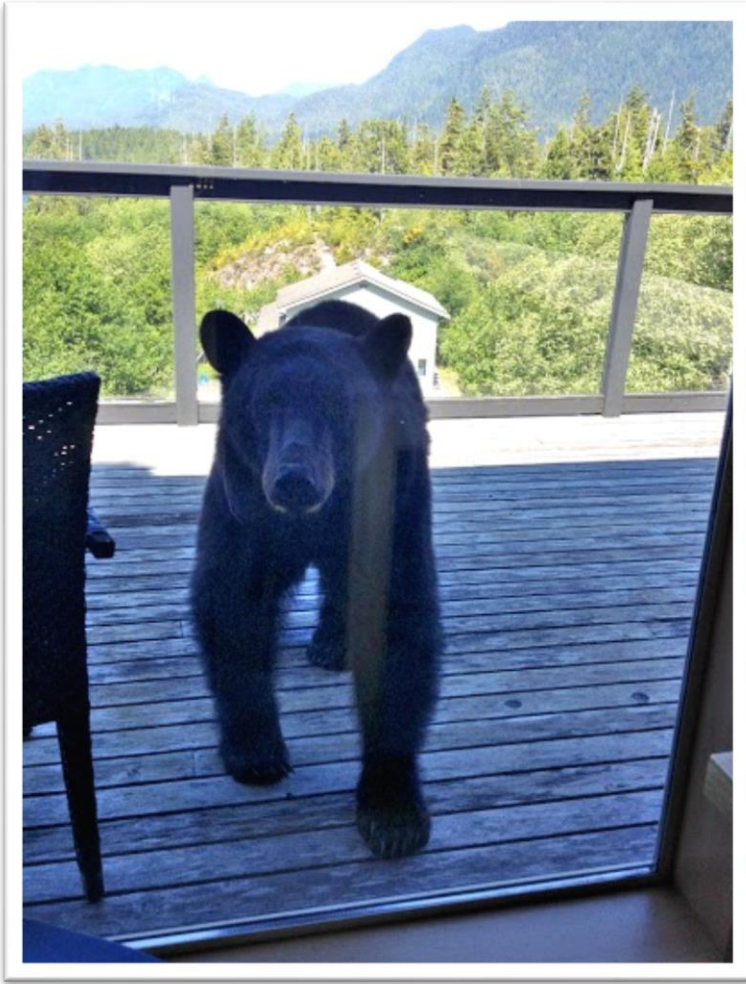


Figure 6. The WCC was emailed this photo of a bear on a Tofino resident's deck, staring into the resident's home. There were no attractant's onsite, indicating an exceptionally high level of habituation. This bear was destroyed a few days later.