

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2015

Powell River Regional District

Prepared by: Francine Ulmer, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator

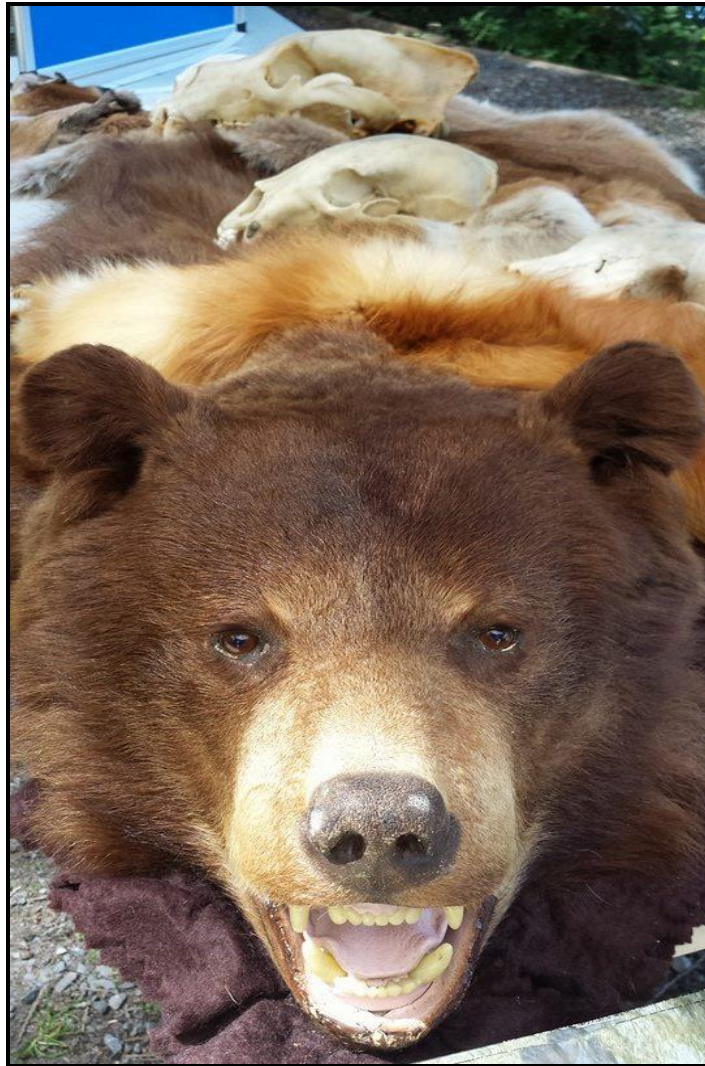


Photo: Francine Ulmer



Executive Summary

Conservation Officers in Powell River have seen the growing need for public education about “attractant management” in their efforts to reduce human-wildlife conflict and have lobbied the community for support and funding for WildSafeBC. Together with corporate sponsors, and support from the Regional District, funding for a WildSafeBC program was secured for a short season.

While deer, cougar, raccoon, and wolf cause concern, it is the black bear that overwhelmingly uses Conservation Officer resources each year. This year local Conservation Officers received 239 bear complaints in the month of September alone, more than doubling last year’s bear complaints for the same month. Due to the severe drought over the summer there was a failure in the berry crop and more bears than usual found their way to town for easy food sources. As a result, by the end of October, 33 bears were destroyed. This is considerably more than the usual 10 destroyed in an average year and likely not the final count for 2015.

Experience has shown that through education, innovation and cooperation, WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCC) can work with community partners to create local solutions. Through public education about managing how we live, work, play and grow with respect to wildlife, residents learn ways to reduce human-wildlife conflict. With such a busy year for the Conservation Officers we could not have chosen a better year to debut the WildSafeBC program in the community.

This year the WCC attended local events providing information about wildlife and attractant management, canvassed door to door in areas experiencing conflict, responded to residents calls and emails, wrote and contributed to articles about human-wildlife conflict in print and online media, presented to community groups and school classes, and used Facebook and radio to get WildSafeBC messaging out to the public.



Figure 1 Images from summer display booths around the community.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Highlights from the 2015 Season.....	4
Presentations.....	4
Displays.....	5
Door to Door Education.....	5
Media.....	5
Community Collaboration.....	6
Challenges of the 2015 Season.....	7
Goals for the 2016 Season.....	7
Acknowledgements.....	7

Figures

Figure 1. Images from summer display booths around the community. From left to right; Francine Ulmer and display at Family Fishing Day in June, Jaida with display cougar hide wearing a WSBC bear paw tattoo at the Texada Farmers Market in August, Francine Ulmer and display at the Farmers Market in Powell River in July.....2

Figure 2. Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, and WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Francine Ulmer hosting an Electric Fencing Workshop at Sycamore Commons in June, 2015.....4

Figure 3. (Left) City Parks staff installed bear resistant garbage bins at Mowat Bay, and at the Complex Bike Park in June as a proactive move to secure garbage and promote public safety. (Right) Garbage cans tested at the Kamloops Wildlife Park during WSBC training in May took less than 10 seconds for bears to break into.....6

Highlights from the 2015 Season

As a community, Powell River experienced the highest number of black bear complaints on record, one resident suffered the first bear attack ever recorded, and a record number of bears were destroyed. Working closely with Conservation Officers, the WCC addressed issues as they arose and educational messaging in the media was informed by residents' unique cases of human-wildlife conflict.

Presentations

Although this was a short season, presentations were made to the Regional District and Powell River City Council, as well as Rotary. The focus of these presentations was to share information collected on the community from this season and to explain some of the challenges the community faces while offering potential homegrown solutions.

Due to the extension of the program into the month of September, some school classes were visited. This fall, many school grounds were experiencing higher than usual bear sightings, and all schools would have benefited from school visits. Six classes at James Thomson Elementary School received visits, reaching 120 students, with educational information going home to families. Teachers received educational resources about bears and reducing conflict.

WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, came to Powell River in June and facilitated an Electric Fence Workshop where 23 participants learned how to install and maintain an effective predator resistant electric fence. As a result of this workshop, 3 participants installed an electric fence this season, and many more participants hope to do so in the near future. Promoting electric fences as an effective tool in protecting a range of attractants against a host of predators is one important aspect of the program.



Figure 2. Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, and WildSafeBC Powell River Community Coordinator, Francine Ulmer hosting an Electric Fencing Workshop at Sycamore Commons in June, 2015.

Displays

Thanks to the Conservation Officers who shared their resources, all displays featured skulls and hides offering the community an opportunity to see predators up close and in great detail. These props started many conversations about living alongside wildlife. The following 15 events benefited from the WildSafeBC educational display in June, July, and August.

- ❑ Powell River Farmers Market (6 times)
- ❑ Kelly Creek Garden Market
- ❑ Fathers Day Family Fishing Day at Inland Lake
- ❑ Lang Bay Days
- ❑ Sea Fair (all 3 days)
- ❑ Texada Farmers Market
- ❑ A Fall Affair (2 days)

Door-to-Door Education

At the request of Conservation Officers, several areas experiencing wildlife conflict were targeted for door-to-door educational campaigns. Both cougars and bears were the target species. The WCC was able to answer residents' questions, provide advice on attractant management, dispel myths, explain the role of the Conservation Officer Service, and inform the public of recent bear and cougar activity. The following neighborhoods were visited with educational brochures and WildSafeBC messaging.

- ❑ Lund
- ❑ Craig Road
- ❑ Sturt Road
- ❑ Wildwood
- ❑ Paradise Valley
- ❑ Westview

Media

Relationships were built with local media and the future potential for outreach due to the foundation laid this year is enormous.

Radio

- Public Service Announcements about attractant management were made on Coast FM radio news.
- A live broadcast of the Let's Talk Trash Show on CJMP Community Radio featured the WCC talking about composting in bear country for the launch of the Powell River Regional District resource on *'5 Easy Tips for Composting in Bear Country'*.

Print

- The Peak Newspaper featured an article on the launch of the WSBC program in Powell River.
- An article on cougars was informed by a press release.
- Comments from the WCC were included in coverage of local human-bear conflicts.
- A “viewpoint” letter was featured discussing fruit tree management. Powell River Living Magazine featured an article written by WCC in the October edition.
- The online news blog Powell River Daily News featured articles written or contributed to by the WCC throughout the program.
- Eight articles on local bear conflicts alone in the month of September garnered 6,927 views getting the WSBC message out.

Facebook

Through a WildSafeBC District of Powell River Facebook page social media was used to communicate with local residents. By September the page had built up 231 page likes and as a result 11 September posts reached 2,116 people living in Powell River. Social media has been a place for sharing photos and wildlife sightings and having a WCC weigh in on the conversation adds relevant biological information to the discussion, dispels myths, and at times explains the logic behind Conservation Officer actions.

Community Collaboration

WildSafeBC finds success through education, innovation and cooperation. One such example that highlights this potential is how through meetings and design consultations with the Let’s Talk Trash team, a brochure for *‘5 Easy Tips for Composting in Bear Country’* was developed as a waste management educational resource. This is an example where the WCC’s collaboration with the Regional District encouraged development of resources to address the complex problem of attractant management. This resource will be a valuable tool considering the future development of curbside organic food waste collection services. A proactive educational approach can work towards reducing the need for reactive wildlife management. Find the brochure at http://powellriverrd.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/compostbrochure_oct5.pdf



Figure 3. (Left) City Parks staff installed bear resistant garbage bins at Mowat Bay, and at the Complex Bike Park in June as a proactive move to secure garbage and promote public safety. (Right) Garbage cans tested at the Kamloops Wildlife Park during WSBC training in May took less than 10 seconds for bears to break into.

Challenges of the 2015 Season

Being the first year for WildSafeBC in Powell River there were several challenges. The most significant challenge was the shorter than usual length of the program due to funding being limited to the base level. The community could have used support further into the fall as bear activity remained high. Conservation Officers and residents would have benefited from the additional support.

Attractants in the community are everywhere and we will continue to experience human-wildlife conflict if we do not work together as a community to find proactive solutions. Garbage, fruit and nut trees, livestock, chickens, and compost remain among the top attractants. With a strong history of self-sufficiency, homesteading, and a recent emphasis on food security we continue to have resources bears see as food sources. Through continued education we can learn how to keep wildlife wild and communities safe.

Goals for the 2016 Season

Many seeds were planted this year and the future holds great possibilities for local solutions, partnerships, and innovative collaborations with community leaders and residents. The following list of goals for the 2016 season will further support the community in addressing attractant management issues.

- ❑ Form a community working group to involve residents in finding solutions to local wildlife issues.
- ❑ Develop a list of recommendations for garbage and compost collection based on best practices of communities who are following the Provincial Bear Smart Community Program.
- ❑ Work with community partners to propose revisions and updates to bylaws that would address attractant management according to best practices of communities following the Provincial Bear Smart Program.
- ❑ Collaborate with the local food security movement to develop, expand and promote efforts to glean fruit and nuts in the community.
- ❑ Investigate potential opportunities for increasing signs in the community for educating about wildlife and attractant management.
- ❑ Increase number of public displays, school visits, radio broadcast, and articles to spread the WildSafeBC message throughout the community.

Acknowledgements

The success of our program is due in large part to the strength of our partnerships with the provincial government, regional districts, and communities that we deal with.

Thank you to the Regional District for sponsoring the WSBC program and bringing this important education program to the community. And also a thank you to the Provincial Government's Ministry of Environment for providing the core funding for this program.

The British Columbia Conservation Foundation aims to bring as many community partners to the table as possible in order to benefit all and corporate sponsors Agusta Recyclers Incorporated and Alterra Power Corporation contributed significantly to this program.

Conservation Officers Andrew Anaka, Gerry Lister, Sergeant Murray Smith, and Dean Miller provided valuable insight into local attractant issues. Building on this relationship there are great possibilities for the future of human-wildlife conflict reduction in Powell River.

Frank Ritcey, Jen Bellhouse and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation staff have provided training, resources, guidance and support for this community.

