

WILDSAFEBC YEAR END REPORT 2015

ROSSLAND & TRAIL

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Photo by Sharon Wieder



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2015 season saw a big increase in bear activity compared to the last two years and the highest number of bears destroyed since 2010. This was generally credited to an unusually dry season and the failure locally of natural berry crops, especially huckleberries. The season also provided an abundant urban fruit crop that brought the bears back into town starting in mid August. This return of bears was about a month earlier than normal. Fruit trees came very close to garbage as the main source of conflict and provoked many heated discussions on local social media about who is responsible for bears being destroyed due to unmanaged fruit. While black bears continue to be the most discussed animal, there was also an increase in grizzly bear sightings. Raccoons, wolves and coyotes were also species that generated many questions and concerns. Coyote sightings were up from previous years with a higher incidence of reported conflict involving domestic dogs. It was a very quiet year for reported cougar sightings.

The WildSafeBC website continued to provide valuable information to residents with the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map as well as postings regarding animal behavior and attractant management. Viewer traffic on the WildSafeBC Rossland Trail Facebook page increased significantly over last year. These resources were shared at public displays, presentations and on a one-to-one basis. There was a shift in community coordinator activities towards more one on one contact with residents and behind the scenes contact with local and regional governments regarding wildlife policies and support for residential bear resistant bins. The 2005 Rossland Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) update was started with new GPS readings and a partnership formed with the Selkirk College GIS program to create new mapping for the BHA. A revised draft BHA will be available next spring.

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2015

High bear activity this year resulted in less time spent at presentations and displays and more people reached through door-to-door and phone conversations. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) spent time working with Conservation Officers and local bylaw enforcement in a concerted effort to reduce the availability of attractants. The WCC conducted a campaign to place 'Bear in Area' signs where high bear activity occurred. The signs were requested by many and commented on as being seen everywhere. The abundant fruit kept the Harvest Rescue team very busy. In response to four bears being shot on the same day in an area rife with unpicked fruit trees, the mayor of Rossland spearheaded a community pick and press day culminating in a Fruit Press Day that produced 240 liters of juice! Two more fruit press events were organized to help deal with the volume of fruit and the timing of ripeness. These produced more than 200 liters of juice each day. The WildSafeBC Rossland Trail Facebook page gained 'Likes' over the season increasing from 78 in January to 219 by the end of October. More than 11,000 people viewed the Facebook posts regarding grizzly bear activity in the Nancy Greene Summit area. Over 1,760 people were reached this season through all program activities.

DISPLAYS

Displays at public events are an opportunity to spread the message and allow people to pick up educational materials. They can also ask questions and receive advice on their particular wildlife issues. The WildSafeBC community coordinator set up displays at the following events:

- Rossland Farmers Market
- Rossland Museum - Visitor Information Kiosk
- CBEEN Community Celebrations – Nelson and Rossland
- Community Fruit Press Day
- Broken Goat Foot Race



Figure 1 CBEEN Community Celebration

PRESENTATIONS

Understanding wildlife behavior and biology can help people realize how their actions affect wildlife and help them change their behavior to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Every year, new groups are approached for the opportunity to present to a different demographic. This year it was CBEEN's Community Celebrations and the Broken Goat Foot Race participants.

The WildSafeBC community coordinator presented to the following groups:

- Rossland Museum Kids Camp
- Camp Cawabunga
- CBEEN Community Celebration – Rossland
- Broken Goat Foot Race
- Scouts' Beaveree
- Rossland Museum 'Where the Wild Things Are' family event



Figure 2 Scout's Beaveree Presentation

MEDIA

Local media was on board with spreading the message about managing attractants, especially regarding fruit. Media helped keep people informed on bear activity and Harvest Rescue options as well as alerting residents to the bright yellow Bear In Area signs. Newspaper articles and radio interviews reached a wide audience of more than 90,000 impressions.



Figure 3 Bear In Area sign

OTHER

The West Kootenay Human-Bear Conflict Working Group pursued a project to secure funding for residential bear resistant bins to distribute to areas most needed on a loaner and cost-share basis. Funding was received for communities in RDCK but not RDKB.

There were 9 bears destroyed in Rossland this year and 11 bears destroyed in Trail compared to none in Rossland and two in Trail in 2014.

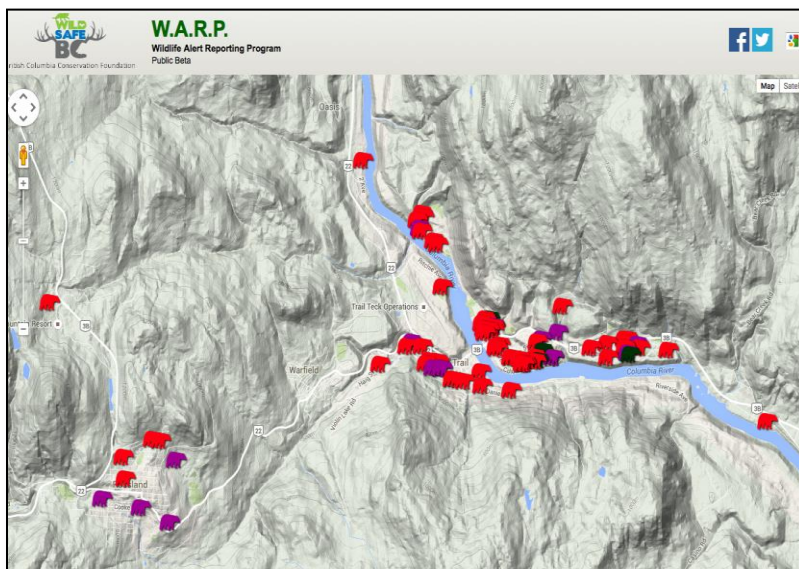


Figure 4 WARP Map showing Bear in Garbage or Fruit Tree reports



Figure 5 Bear Resistant Residential Bin

CHALLENGES OF THE 2015 SEASON

A busy bear season viscerally reinforces the message that people need to manage their attractants for **when** a bear shows up, not **if** a bear shows up. During a quiet season, it is easy to believe that your attractants are not a problem. This year it was impossible to ignore the need to find solutions to managing attractants to reduce conflict with wildlife.

Historically, garbage and fruit trees are the first and second greatest attractants that create human-wildlife conflict. This year unmanaged fruit trees were significantly closer to garbage than in previous seasons.

The number of bears destroyed this year fueled some very acrimonious conversations on social media. Sadly, most of the anger was directed at the Conservation Officers and RCMP who had to shoot the bears instead of being directed at solutions to reduce attractants. The Conservation Officer Service encouraged residents to be more tolerant to the presence of bears and worked with WildSafeBC Community Coordinator to spread the message that EVERYONE needs to do their part to make sure bears and other wildlife don't find food in our neighbourhoods.



Figure 6 Fruit Pick Day



Figure 7 Fruit Press Day



Figure 8 Sticker on Dumpster

GOALS FOR 2016

Looking ahead to next season, WildSafeBC would like to work in cooperation with our partners on projects to continue reducing human-wildlife conflict.

- Neighborhood watch committees to monitor attractants and do group door to door
- Partner with municipalities and RDKB to make bear resistant bins available to residents at a reasonable cost.
- Bear Smart status for Rossland
- Request Trail city council adopt a Wildlife Attractant bylaw
- Fruit Tree management

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WildSafeBC and the Rossland Trail Bear Smart Committee are grateful for the generous support from many sources. Thanks to our sponsors: The BC Ministry of Environment, The Columbia Basin Trust and the Cities of Trail & Rossland (councilors and staff, including bylaw staff). Thanks to our supporters and volunteers: Rossland REAL Food including the Harvest Rescue team, Trail Harvest Rescue coordinator Sita Lawson and all her fruit picking volunteers.

Thank you to the media for helping to spread the message: EZ Rock, Rossland News, Trail Daily Times and The Rossland Telegraph.

The assistance from Conservation Officers Blair Thin, Ben Beetlestone, Jason Hawke and Sergeant Tobe Sprado is greatly appreciated as always. Thank you to the members of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group and all my fellow WildSafeBC coordinators around the province.

Special thanks to volunteers that spread the message about how to reduce human bear conflict and who care enough to make the effort to set a good example and to report those that disregard the message.

