

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2016

Bella Coola Valley

Prepared by:
Fraser Koroluk
Bella Coola Community Coordinator
November 12 2016



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The program was delivered to communities of the Bella Coola Valley in 2016 by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Fraser Koroluk, in cooperation with the Conservation Officer Service, BC Parks and the Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department.

A relatively abundant chum salmon run in rivers of the lower Bella Coola Valley in early-mid summer, coupled with apparently abundant early summer berries provided a diversity of natural foods for bears in the Bella Coola region for most of the early summer months. Between approximately May and August, natural food availability reduced numbers of grizzly and black bears seeking food sources near residential areas, similar to 2015. However, mid-September through October 2016 saw a significant increase in bear activity and interactions with human food sources through Bella Coola valley, with a higher number of incidents observed in lower valley communities of Hagensborg and Bella Coola. Lower than anticipated coho salmon returns from September through November may have contributed to increased activities of bears seeking human food sources in the late fall.

Other wildlife reported near residential areas included: cougars and wolves. These animals were reported to have been feeding on other wildlife and potentially predating small pets in rural residential areas. There were no reports of bears accessing poultry in 2016, compared to numerous complaints in 2014, which became a focus of local electric fencing of chicken coops since that time.

In 2016 Bella Coola Valley was appointed a split-duty Conservation Officer, sharing BC Parks Administrative roles. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator worked closely with the local Conservation Officer and visiting Conservation Officers from other regions. The Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee continued to meet in 2016 to move forward on initiatives of reducing human-bear conflict and increasing human safety in the community. WildSafeBC is represented through the Community Coordinator for Bella Coola.

WSBC and COS jointly presented a workshop for community members to learn about electric fencing and receive training in use of bear spray as well as participated in a local Nuxualk First Nation radio interview. WSBC Community Coordinator also presented in schools and participated in a radio interview independent of the COS.

This year-end report summarizes the activities, successes and challenges of the program in 2016. This report also provides recommendations for future Community Coordinator initiatives that stem from this year's experiences.

Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Program Delivery	4
Introduction	4
Highlights of the Program	4
Interaction & Involvement with Conservation Officer Service & BC Parks.....	4
Community Events	4
Community Meetings & School Presentations	4
Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department	5
Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews	5
Electric Fencing	6
Unwanted Fruit Removal	6
Wildlife Reporting (RAPP)	7
Media	7
Challenges to the Program.....	8
Future of the Program	8
Acknowledgements.....	9
Appendix: Photographs.....	10

Program Delivery

Introduction

Bella Coola Valley is a low- to moderately-populated coastal valley including three unincorporated communities: Bella Coola, Hagensborg, and, Firvale. Residents are spread throughout these communities in low density with abundant wilderness and natural landscape between populated areas. Bella Coola Valley is within the Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) and Traditional First Nations territories, including the Nuxalk Nation. There are no incorporated towns within the CCRD, and therefore, there is little or no bylaw or municipal governance/enforcement within Bella Coola Valley. The nearest permanently staffed COS office is In Williams Lake, approximately 450 km east. BC Parks staff include a Deputy Conservation Officer, living locally in the community. Grizzly and black bears and cougars are the predominant wildlife that are considered concerns to humans within the Bella Coola Valley. Bella Coola does have a Human –Bear Safety Committee consisting of a variety of governing and resource agencies to deal with wildlife concerns to human safety, in particular, bear issues.

Highlights of the Program

Interaction & Involvement with Conservation Officer Service & BC Parks

WildsafeBC has continued to provide field support to COS members in aspects of attractant management, door to door meetings and interviews with residents, electric fence installations and general community outreach. Owing to the unique nature of the COS/BC Parks interrelatedness in Bella Coola, the WCC has developed a strong working relationship with BC Parks staff as well as COS.

Community Events

In conjunction with the COS the WCC presented an electric fence awareness program and bear-spray safety training seminar at the community Farmer Market in Bella Coola. In addition to this, two interviews and radio-spots were presented on Nuxalk community radio.

Community Meetings & School Presentations

Presentations and meetings were held with various community associations, and government representatives/organizations in 2016. The focus of these meetings was predominantly wildlife deterrence related to grizzly bears.

Meetings included:

- Bella Coola Valley Human-Bear Safety Committee, worked with founding agencies to review annual progress of activities and disseminate information to the community (including Ministry

of Environment, COS, Ministry of Forests Land and Natural Resource Operations, Department of Fisheries, RCMP, and Nuxalk First Nation).

- Conservation Officer Service, overview of COS availability on rotating basis and support available from BC Parks in attraction management;
- Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) – Solid Waste Advisory Group to discuss waste management, composting and solid waste disposal at the landfill location, with emphasis on reducing attractants at that facility; and,
- BC Parks, review of public bear-viewing areas to ensure minimal attractant procedures and discuss electric fence techniques and public awareness of bear behaviour.

Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

A key component to delivery of WildSafeBC has been partnering with the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department to gain knowledge and share experience with various aspects of human-bear conflict within the First Nation community and residential areas. This partnership has been ongoing since 2014 and has in joint-cooperation levels based on requirements and staffing. 2016 projects included:

- school presentations at Acwsalcta school;
- COS and WildSafeBC radio interviews on Nuxalk community radio;
- electric fence installations; and,
- ongoing community strategy for continued education and attractant management through Human-Bear Safety Committee involvement.

School Presentations:

One presentations within the Acwsalcta School was completed in October. Additional presentations were planned, however, timing and final logistics could not be arranged.

Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews

The WCC visited numerous properties throughout Bella Coola Valley to discuss site-specific attractant management strategies to reduce wildlife-human conflict. Visits included: private residences, commercial campgrounds, agricultural holdings/farms, schools, community landfill, and BC Parks campsites.

Where unnatural attractants were observed, the WCC provided management solutions including complete attractant removal, attractant management (i.e., fruit picking), or electric fencing.

On numerous instances the WCC responded to requests from the COS to review attractants at properties owing to calls received on the RAPP line regarding grizzly and black bears

Electric Fencing

Electric fence materials and supplies owned by WildSafeBC were again loaned to community members as needed in 2016. Materials available included four portable electric fence kits, eight additional fence chargers and numerous fence stakes and appropriate fence wire.

In 2016 temporary electric fences and/or fence components were deployed at a total of 21 locations, including:

- 3 storage sheds or workshops containing attractants;
- 1 re-installed charger on an existing chicken coop;
- 15 fruit trees/orchards; and,
- 2 residential gardens.

Permanent electric fences included fences designed and installed by landowners and/or WCC. These fences included a fence charger and high-tensile wire provided by WildSafeBC. Insulators and miscellaneous connectors were also purchased by WildSafeBC as required for electric fence installation.

In 2014 two (2) permanent fences were installed by the WCC, including:

- 1 residential orchard (land owner completed installation WildSafeBC contributed wire and some insulators); and,
- 1 blue berry patch, installed by WildSafeBC and volunteer workers.

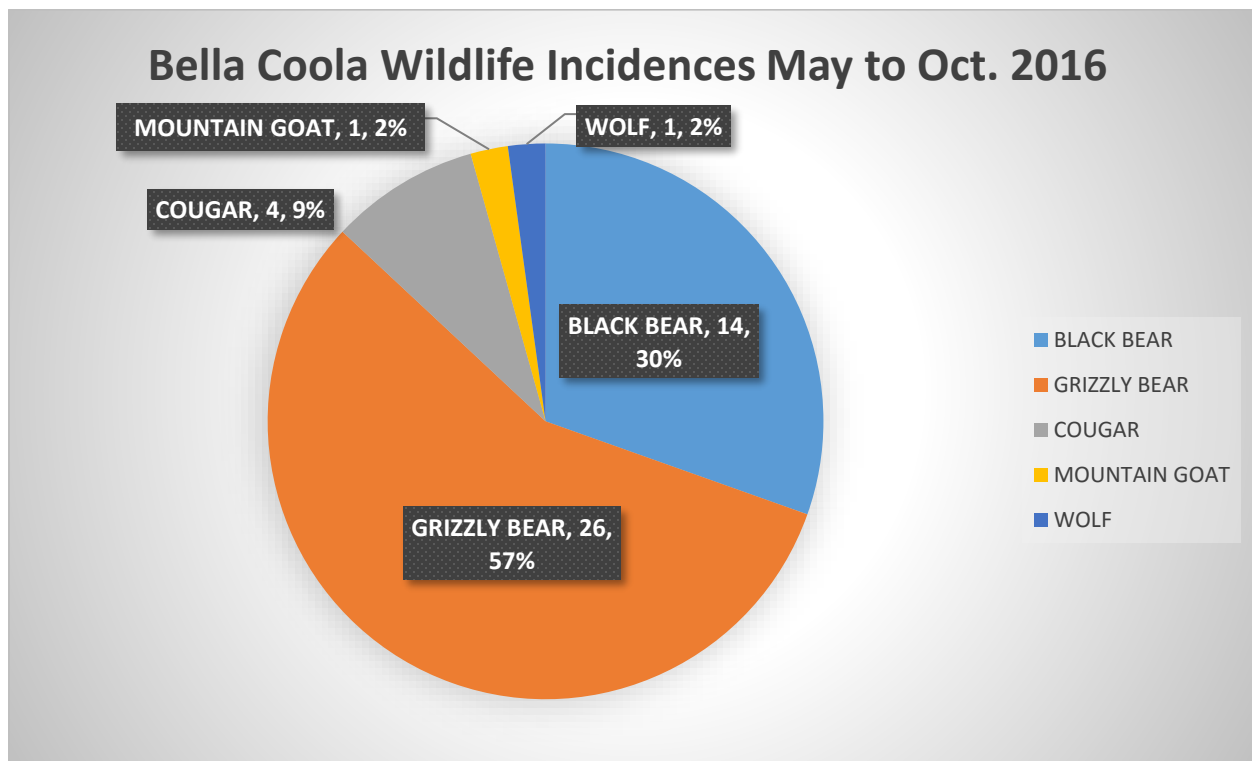
In addition to these fences, WCC assisted with maintenance of existing fences installed in 2014 and 2015. Two new chargers, various wire and insulators and miscellaneous fence equipment was purchased with project funds in 2016 to replace and bolster the inventory supply of fence material available for loan within the program. A local merchant has agreed to be a supplier of appropriate electric fence materials, ensuring locally available components for WildSafeBC and community members.

Unwanted Fruit Removal

The WCC opportunistically assisted with removal of unwanted fruit or fruit trees to assist attractant management by landowners, including working with the COS and Nuxalk First Nation to identify and remove fruit in residential areas of Bella Coola town site and Four Mile Subdivision (ongoing).

Wildlife Reporting (RAPP)

Use of the COS *Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP)* hotline has increased annually since 2014, with 2016 seeing the most reported calls from the time period of May to October, with a total of 46 calls being addressed or referred to the COS. Chart 1 shows the proportion of each type of call, with Grizzly Bears being the main wildlife species of concern in Bella Coola Valley.

*Media*

The WCC reviewed communications from the Human-Bear Safety Committee and assisted in having those communications published on Face Book community pages as well as submission to the local bi-weekly newspaper. Two radio interviews were done with Nuxalk Community Radio, including a joint-presentation with COS. A German film production company shot a german language documentary segment on bear attractants and interviewed an electric fence recipient to gain knowledge of the WildSafeBC program for distribution in Germany.

The WCC remained active on Facebook to promote activities and information throughout the community and residents were encouraged to use Facebook for notice of events and helpful tips.

Challenges to the Program

The primary challenge to the WildSafeBC program is the limited regional governance and rotating Conservation Officer presence in the Bella Coola Valley. The newly appointed Deputy Conservation Officer has aided this, but overall capacity is limited. There remains some confusion of the citizens' responsibility under the *BC Wildlife Act* regarding attractants on private property, including areas of Nuxalk Nation administration on the Townsite and Four Mile Subdivision, and as there are no established bylaws, nor is there bylaw enforcement within the CCRD, there is little past experience with residents regarding rural wildlife conflict and responsibilities typical of an established community elsewhere in BC.

Other challenges included long-established orchards and gardens that have fallen partially into decay and may not be harvested promptly or at all, providing well established and known food sources for multiple generations of bears, making the habit of accessing these attractants by bears very difficult to break.

Funding of the program remains the largest single challenge, and it appears the CCRD has no ability nor interest to assist in program funding, which will require alternate and creative funding sources in the future.

Future of the Program

The following is a list of recommendations for WildSafeBC initiatives within Bella Coola Valley for future years:

- Strengthen the established partnership with Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department to achieve buy-in from all valley residents regarding WildSafeBC program initiatives.
- Expand rural landowner knowledge of bear attractants and landowner responsibility to manage attractants.
- Continue to distribute and help establish accessible (inexpensive) electric fence materials for smokehouses, fruit trees, poultry, and other proven attractants.
- Increase interest and understanding of importance to report wildlife conflicts to the RAPP line.
- Use project funds to purchase electric fence components not readily available in our isolated community (e.g., insulators, specific fence components, etc.).

- Continue with predator fencing workshops and/or bear spray training days. Many people are interested in workshops, but do not want to commit in advance to attending.
- Partner with Nuxalk Nation on a joint-presentation at their proposed (2017) Bear-Day activity.
- Continue discussions of the use of warnings or fines for repeated bear-attractant offenders with Conservation Officers, and address concerns that may arise.
- Continue with school visits.
- Participate in more radio dialogue/interviews.
- Continue participation by WCC in the Human-Bear Safety committee.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Ministry of Environment COS Branch, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program in Bella Coola.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the COS and BC Parks (Hagensborg Field Office) for assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing allowing WildSafeBC to provide electric fence components to interested local landowners.

Special thanks to all members of the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee for ongoing dialogue, in particular with the Nuxalk Stewardship Department, for their ongoing support to these objectives. Also Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for continued support in Bella Coola and Jen Bellhouse and staff of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Appendix: Photographs



Photo 1: Electrified chicken coop.



Photo 2: WildSafeBC demonstrating Bear Spray Safety during Farmers Market in Bella Coola.



Photo 3: WildSafeBC display at local Farmers Market.



Photo 4: Temporary electric fence around apple trees.