

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2016

Castlegar and Area

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Columbia Basin **trust**




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British Columbia Conservation Foundation

Executive Summary

The 2016 season started out relatively quiet in terms of bear activity, but mid-August brought an influx of bears into the valley bottoms as natural food crops dried up with summer heat (Figure 1). This heightened bear activity has lasted right through until late October. Despite a similar number of total reports to the Conservation Officer Service hotline this year compared to last, we saw a significant reduction in the number of garbage related conflict this season. Many of the reports were simply sightings, with no associated attractant.

While human-bear conflict remained the most significant wildlife issue in the area, conflict with coyotes, cougars and bobcats was also reported with these animals being drawn into residential areas by pets, livestock and animal feed.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) worked to keep responsible attractant management at the forefront of residents' minds by posting "Bear in Area" signs, going door to door to chat with residents, providing tips for effective attractant management and posting regular wildlife updates through social media to keep residents in the loop. As always, WildSafeBC presentations and displays also helped spread our messaging to a wide audience.

Great progress was made this season by the City of Castlegar towards pursuing Bear Smart Community status in 2016. A complete overhaul of the solid waste management system in Castlegar has greatly reduced the amount of garbage accessible to wildlife in the community. Moving forward, it is this kind of concerted effort that will "keep wildlife wild and our community safe".

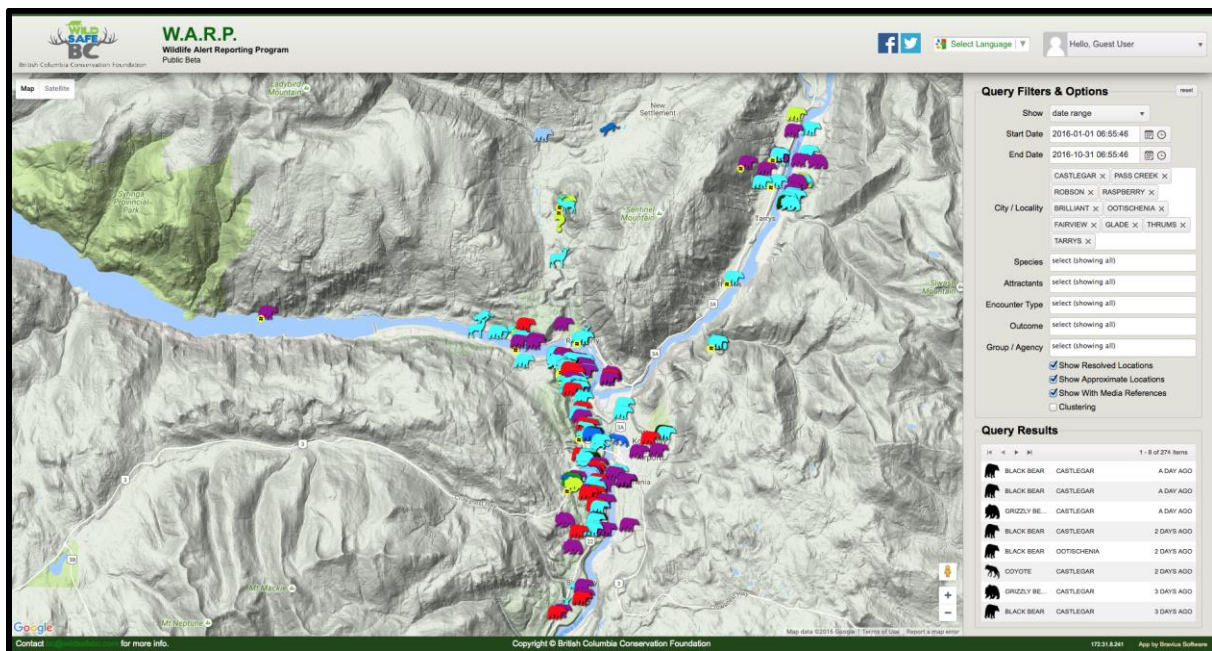


Figure 1 Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map with wildlife sightings and conflicts from January 1- October 31, 2016.

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Highlights from the 2016 Season

Once again, WildSafeBC got an early start to the season this year (April 1) thanks to additional funding from the City of Castlegar. The early start was extremely valuable as it allowed the WCC to focus on proactive messaging earlier in the season before bears emerged from hibernation. This start date also coincided with the roll out of the City's bear-resistant household cart program, which meant the WCC was available for consultation and public outreach during this changeover.

In addition to the provision of bear-resistant household garbage carts, the City of Castlegar also replaced most public garbage cans with bear-resistant models and provided several trailer courts with bear-resistant community dumpsters to address a chronic attractant issue (Figure 1). This reduction of accessible garbage in the community was the biggest highlight of the 2016 season.

Many residents throughout Castlegar and Areas I and J were extremely helpful this season in reporting wildlife sightings and conflicts and working to prevent conflict in their neighbourhoods. In particular, residents from the community of Glade were hugely helpful in resolving an issue with a sow grizzly with two cubs that were present in the community in August. Thanks to vigilant attractant management and cooperation with the Conservation Officer Service, the bears were successfully relocated without any conflict.

Given the high level of bear activity in town this year, the conversation around responsible attractant management and conflict prevention was well received by the community. Since prevention truly is the only effective, long-term solution to human-wildlife conflict, the WCC endeavoured to reach a wide audience through as many avenues as possible.



Figure 2: A sample of the bear resistant garbage containers around Castlegar, including the residential cart.

Presentations

Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps residents to understand and prevent human-wildlife conflict. WildSafeBC Castlegar gave 26 presentations to the following audiences this season (Figure 2):

- Selkirk College ESL students (x2)
- Glade Community Safety Session
- 'BC Goes Wild Weekend' Safety Presentations
- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy Adult ESL Group
- Robson Strongstart
- Robson Community School (Grades: K, K-1, 1-2, 2-3, 4, 6/7)
- Blueberry Creek Community School (StrongStart, Preschool, Daycare)
- Twin Rivers Elementary (Gr.7(x3), 5/6, 6)
- Kinnaird Elementary (Grades: 3(x2), 4)
- Blueberry Patch Summer Camp
- Silly Monkeys Daycare



Figure 3: WCC Jenny Wallace discussing wildlife skulls with a class from Kinnaird Elementary, 2016.

Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

Despite the reduction in garbage-related conflicts this season, there were still issues of residents not keeping their carts properly locked between collection days and putting their unlocked carts on the curb the evening before collection. In response to these issues, the WCC targeted the reported neighbourhoods with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management. In addition, the WCC accompanied the City of Castlegar Bylaw Officer on evening garbage inspections in each of the four collection areas within City Limits. Door-to-door efforts outside City Limits were also targeted based on phone calls and wildlife conflict reports.

Bear in Area Signs

Once again this season, WildSafeBC posted bright yellow “Bear in Area” signs in neighbourhoods experiencing conflict (Figure 3). These signs were very effective in starting neighbourhood conversations and giving everyone in the area a heads up about local bear activity.



Figure 4: Bear in Area sign reminding residents to secure all wildlife attractants, 2015.

Displays

Educational displays at local events were once again a big hit with local children and a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (Figure 4). As always, residents were able to access information and solutions for their unique attractant challenges. WildSafeBC spent 14 days at the following local events:

- Castlegar Spring Fling
- Castlegar Garden and Nature Fest
- Kootenay Festival
- CBAL (Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy) Teddy Bear Picnic
- CBAL Ready, Set, Learn Events (2)
- Pass Creek Fall Fair
- BC Goes Wild Weekend
- Selkirk College Orientation Day
- Twin Rivers Elementary Grade 7 Event at the Doukhobor Discovery Centre
- Glade Community Hall



Figure 5: WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Jenny Wallace at Selkirk College's Orientation Day.

Bear Smart Community Progress

When the WCC first presented to Castlegar City Council about the Bear Smart Community Program in September, 2015, the City had fulfilled 4/6 Bear Smart Criteria. Since then, we have seen increased enforcement of the Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, created an updated Official Community Plan that reflects the importance of responsible attractant management, installed new bear-resistant public garbage cans and implemented a bear-resistant solid waste management system! The remaining steps before applying for Bear Smart status will be to finalize the 2016 updates to the Bear Hazard Assessment and Bear Conflict Management Plan, which are currently underway by the WCC and Selkirk College BGIS student, Jen Peebles.

The City of Castlegar will be in a position to apply for Official Bear Smart Community Status as soon as November, 2016. This process may be delayed until the spring of 2017 due to the WildSafeBC program being 'in hibernation' from December 1 to April/May.

West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group

The WCC continues to sit on this collaborative working group, made up of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets biannually to identify and implement solutions to local human-bear conflicts.

Media

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering close to 20,000 page views and providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

6 Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC's messaging to a wide audience through publishing articles in local papers, playing radio interviews with the WSBCCC and sharing information through social media.

Challenges of the 2016 Season

The roll out of the city-wide bear resistant household cart project was not without its challenges. While many residents continue to store their new carts in a locked garage or shed (the safest place for garbage), there have been numerous cases of carts stored outdoors without the clips locked. These carts will only be effective if residents keep both clips locked at all times between collection days, without exception. An integral part of this process will be continued education and proactive enforcement to ensure the necessary steps are being taken to keep these carts secure.

Unpicked fruit leads to conflict every year, but domestic fruit trees were responsible for a large part of the conflict throughout the region this fall. The Kootenay Food Strategy Society and WildSafeBC worked to create a new fruit gleaning initiative "Castlegar Harvest Pickers" to help address this issue, but ran into issues due to a lack of resources and capacity to run this type of program effectively. Revitalizing the local fruit gleaning movement in the future could help address this significant attractant issue, providing fresh fruit for local families- not bears.

Another recurring challenge is the lack of bylaws regulating the management of wildlife attractants in the Regional District of Central Kootenay. Without a Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, there are limited consequences for residents that continually leave attractants accessible to wildlife outside of City limits.

Finally, WildSafeBC typically runs from May 1 to November 30 despite the fact that wildlife species such as coyotes, cougars and deer are active year-round. An extended contract that allowed for some 'off-season' hours would ensure timely advice and information for residents struggling with wildlife issues in the winter months.

Goals for 2017

Looking forward to the 2017 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues.

- Assist the City of Castlegar in applying for Bear Smart Community Status
- Form a community working group that builds upon existing partnerships and involves residents in finding solutions to local wildlife issues
- Expand our program's presence in the rural communities of RDCK Areas I and J
- Collaborate with community groups to increase local capacity for fruit gleaning projects
- Continue to explore innovative solutions to community attractant issues

7 Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Castlegar is grateful for the generous support the program receives from our sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the City of Castlegar, and the Regional District of Central Kootenay.

Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: the Conservation Officer Service, including CO Ben Beetlestone, CO Blair Thin, CO Jason Hawkes and CO Nathan Smienk; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the members of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group; the great staff at City Hall; Mayor Chernoff and City of Castlegar Councillors; Rena Vandenbos, Tracey Harvey and Jen Peebles of Selkirk College; Castlegar News; The Castlegar Source; TheGoatFM; EZRock; WSBC Volunteers (Scott Cox, Katie Panchyshn, Heather Blow); Frank Ritcey and the always-supportive staff at BCCF; and the fantastic WSBC Community Coordinators across the province.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.



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