

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2016

## Columbia Valley

(Village of Radium Hot Springs, District of Invermere, Regional District of East Kootenay Areas F & G)

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Figure 1 Setting up trail camera for BC Goes Wild Night Hike in Fairmont Grasslands.



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## Executive Summary

2016 was an important year for WildSafeBC in the Columbia Valley. The program continued in Invermere, Radium and the RDEK Areas F & G (Fairmont, Windermere, Panorama, Edgewater, Wilmer, etc.). This was only the second year that the RDEK received programming. This is important as this type of messaging must be consistent and repetitive before we start to see real change in resident's attitude and actions.

The spring and summer seasons were similar to last year in that the volume of black bear reports was initially low, with a marked increase in activity by August. There were also many reports of skunks in conflict with humans and dogs. Black bear conflict was high again in the fall months; the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) shows that there were 145 reports regarding black bears from mid-August to the end of October. Black bear activity started approximately two weeks earlier (mid-August) than last year (end of August). Overall, 3 black bears were destroyed in 2016 compared to only 1 in 2015. This included 2 bears in Invermere, one in the industrial park that was getting into truck beds and another that was getting into garbage on 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. The third one was in Fairmont at the Mountain Villas that was breaking into vehicles. All of these bears were likely habituated to human food or garbage.

There was a lot of bear activity at the Invermere transfer station again this year, which prompted WildSafeBC and the District of Invermere to work on getting bear-resistant bins from Southeast Disposal, which were installed the first week of September. This was a turning point for preventing human-wildlife conflict in the area in 2016, and there have not been any reports of bears getting into these bins to date.

Tourists and second homeowners remain an important part of the Columbia Valley's economy, and this year saw an increase in visitors to the valley. Spring and summer programming was focused on public displays to engage tourists and second homeowners as the population swells at this time of year and many people spend time outside. Presentations, events and workshops this year highlighted: the importance of Invermere working to achieve Bear Smart status, the new BC Goes Wild weekend, electric fencing, and proper bear spray deployment. The fall of 2016 was also focused on addressing and preventing black bear conflict, particularly regarding waste and fruit tree management. Large "Bear in Area" signs were used from August to October in neighbourhoods experiencing conflict throughout the program area. The Bear Stewardship Committee also met once in the spring to push Invermere forward with achieving Bear Smart status.

## Table of Contents

Highlights from the 2016 Season .....	4
1. Public Displays.....	4
2. Door-to-door Canvassing .....	5
3. Garbage Tagging .....	6
4. Presentations & Workshops .....	6
5. Media .....	7
Challenges of the 2016 Season .....	8
Goals for 2016 .....	8
1. District of Invermere .....	8
2. Radium Hot Springs.....	8
3. RDEK Area F.....	9
4. RDEK Area G .....	9
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	9

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 Setting up trail camera for BC Goes Wild Night Hike in Fairmont Grasslands.....	1
Figure 2 Figure 2 Public Display at Canada Day Festival, Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, July 1st 2016.....	5
Figure 3 WildSafeBC Columbia Valley hosted Gillian Sanders with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for a presentation/workshop on how to properly install and maintain an electric fence for keeping bears away from livestock and fruit trees on October 15 <sup>th</sup> . .....	7

## Highlights from the 2016 Season

### 1. Public Displays

Public displays were set up throughout the Columbia Valley at repeating and one-time events. Such displays proved to be a great way to engage tourists and residents alike. Visitors to the displays saw wildlife tracks, skull and scat replicas and read information about attractant management. Many people wanted to share their stories of encounters or sightings. This approach to public education was very welcoming and engaging. Children were very interested in the props available, such as making tracks in the sandbox provided, and were excited when they could take something home with them such as a ruler/bookmark.

WildSafeBC set up displays at the following events:

- Panorama Village Open House
- Invermere Farmers Market (6)
- Radium Market on Main (6)
- AG Valley Foods
- Canada Day Celebration at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort
- Kinsmen Beach Community Party
- Fairmont Hot Springs Resort RV Park (4)
- Spruce Grove Campground in Fairmont (4)



Figure 2 Public Display at Canada Day Festival, Fairmont Hot Springs Resort, July 1st 2016.

## 2. Door-to-door Canvassing

This was an important aspect of the program again this year, especially when there was conflict occurring in a neighbourhood that residents were unaware of. Informing residents about predators frequenting an area was paramount, followed by delivering information to areas that were more likely to attract wildlife into their yards due to improper waste storage, fruit trees, or other attractants. The WildSafeBC black bear pamphlet was distributed whenever possible, indicating biological information on black bears, how to manage attractants and avoid conflict, and the RAPP line phone number. When no one was home, which is common in this area due to a high volume of second homeowners, a door hanger was left with a message about the reason for a visit, and ways to prevent conflict. 465 homes were visited in the valley this year, including 195 homes in Invermere, 75 homes in Radium, 15 in Rushmere, 70 in Timber Ridge, 60 in Windermere, 20 in Lakeview Meadows, 10 in Fairmont, and 20 in Edgewater.

### 3. Garbage Tagging

Garbage Tagging was undertaken in the District of Invermere again this year. 16 garbage surveys were completed this summer and fall. A bright yellow sticker was placed on bins left outside the night before curbside pickup, capturing the homeowner's attention the next day. If it happened more than once, the coordinator or bylaw officer followed up with these homes to remind them about the bylaw and its purpose. Summer surveys showed between 5-10 bins left out at most overnight, while fall showed between 0-3. Therefore surveys showed positive results in the fall, which may be due to increased awareness but is more likely due to a lower population during the "slow season" for second homeowners and visitors to the Columbia Valley.

### 4. Presentations & Workshops

Although they require more preparation time than other forms of engagement, presentations have been a significant way to reach communities in the Columbia Valley. They provide in-depth information on forms of conflict that are specific to each community. Different groups are interested in different kinds of presentations, varying from general information on local wildlife to how to store and use bear spray. Presentations were given in various communities this year, with more planned over the next several months:

- Wings Over the Rockies – Bear Smart Project & bear spray demonstration
- Fairmont Town Hall – Wildlife Safety & Attractant Management
- Panorama Childcare Staff – Wildlife Safety & Attractant Management
- Windermere Town Hall – Wildlife Safety & Attractant Management
- Fairmont Sunchaser Timeshares Presentations (4) – Wildlife Safety & Attractant Management
- BC Goes Wild Night Hike – Wildlife tracks, sounds and other signs
- Electric Fencing Workshop – how to install and maintain an electric fence for bears
- Castle Rock Community Presentation – Wildlife Safety including bear spray & Attractant Management
- Windermere Elementary School Kindergarten Presentation – Attractant Management & Bear Safety

Presentations planned over the next three months include:

- Headbangers Festival – Urban Wildlife Issues in Radium Hot Springs
- Edgewater School presentations for all classes
- Laird Elementary School presentations for all classes
- Windermere Elementary School presentations for all classes
- Eileen Madson Primary School presentations for all classes





Figure 3 WildSafeBC Columbia Valley hosted Gillian Sanders with Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for a presentation/workshop on how to properly install and maintain an electric fence for keeping bears away from livestock and fruit trees on October 15<sup>th</sup>.

## 5. Media

The Community Coordinator was featured in two articles regarding the bear-resistant bins at the Invermere Transfer Station. A bi-weekly column was also undertaken over the summer and partially into the fall to engage the Columbia Valley as a whole, particularly when its population was highest (including second homeowners, tourists). Columns addressed human-wildlife conflict that was relevant to the Columbia Valley. Topics included:

- WildSafeBC Goals for 2016
- High Skunk Numbers
- Wildlife Encounters & Deterrents
- Electric Fencing Workshop Available
- Community Highlights
- Fruit Trees in the Columbia Valley
- Simple Solutions for Living with Wildlife

## Challenges of the 2016 Season

Many communities in the Columbia Valley are still experiencing black bear conflict due to improper waste storage and poorly managed fruit trees. The message regarding the importance of attractant management has been broadcasted by the local, regional and provincial media, in addition to WildSafeBC programming. Most residents are aware of the consequences of leaving garbage outside, yet some continue to do so. Perhaps it is because they have not yet had an issue with a bear, or perhaps they consider it the “norm”, but this behaviour has been difficult to change for some residents. It seems many people will only respond to legal warnings or fines, which are seldom issued.

Fruit gleaners have been difficult because of the lack of liability insurance and the Community Coordinator has been unable to partner with an organization that does provide the insurance necessary for a volunteer program. The WCC did try to undertake volunteering herself and advertised her services on social media, on posters in all communities and through door-to-door visits, especially when there was an obvious fruit tree on the property; community associations were also contacted and emails were distributed to residents. There were many people who were interested in picking fruit, a valuable resource that should be utilized in the future, if possible. However, very few homeowners contacted the WCC for help to pick fruit. If there are more avenues to contact fruit tree owners, that should be explored in the future. The “Columbia Valley Fruit Exchange” group on Facebook continues to be a somewhat successful way to link tree owners with pickers.

Deer continue to worry many residents because they are habituated and sometimes aggressive in many communities. This issue has not changed in the last year, and it “requires creative solutions, as deer are not seen as a priority when issues with predators abound”.

Skunks were also a common problem for homeowners and dog owners this year, especially in summer months. Many residents contacted the WCC this summer with questions about how to deal with skunks living on their property. CO Greg Kruger gave the Community Coordinator valuable information and advice on this topic.

## Goals for 2016

### 1. District of Invermere

The initiative to make Invermere a “Bear Smart” community was an important one. Many people visit the Valley each year, and Invermere is a tourist destination, along with Radium and Fairmont. Invermere remains the main center for this portion of the Columbia Valley and the Bear Smart status will set a good example for other communities. The transfer station was a significant step this year, but needs follow up, including other waste management efforts (such as bear-resistant bins in other parts of the community) and more signage. The message of attractant management also needs to continue to be conveyed to business owners, residents and visitors of the valley in consistent but creative ways; if the District continues to support WildSafeBC, the message will likely continue to spread effectively. Bylaw enforcement must be consistent as well to ensure the message is received throughout the community.

### 2. Radium Hot Springs

Radium also experiences a large influx of visitors in the summer months. Displays and other outreach events should continue to be a focal point in this community in order to reach this group of people.



Communication also needs to continue with businesses and residents, including strata communities. Radium would benefit from a Bear Smart designation as well, giving the high volume of tourists visiting each year. Businesses should be encouraged to take pride in the “wildness” of resident wildlife including bears as it draws people to the area.

### 3. RDEK Area F

There are many residents who feel strongly about keeping wildlife wild in this area. This resource should be tapped into, as there is the potential for more volunteers with WildSafeBC. The Fairmont Community Association is a valuable partner to the program in Fairmont. Because there was a black bear destroyed here this year at the timeshares, visitors to the valley and those providing accommodation should be focused on in the future regarding consistent education. Windermere does have a Community Association but the WCC was unable to reach them this fall. This could be a valuable partnership in the future, especially regarding fruit gleaning in the area.

### 4. RDEK Area G

Area G, including Edgewater and Wilmer, does not regularly utilize the RAPP line to report wildlife in conflict. This might be a long-term goal for these communities. Area G is currently drafting a bylaw to allow backyard agriculture (chickens, bee colonies, and exclusion fencing). This has been an opportunity for WildSafeBC to express how important electric fencing is in reducing human-wildlife conflict. If possible, it would be beneficial if the WCC continues to work with Gerry Wilkie and Kris Belanger to include electric fencing as part of the backyard agriculture bylaw.



## Acknowledgements

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Thank you to everyone in Invermere, Radium and the RDEK who have worked to reduce the volume of wildlife attractants in our communities, in an effort to keep wildlife wild and communities safe.