

# WildSafeBC 2016 Annual Report

## Grand Forks

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Ministry of Environment



## Executive Summary

WildSafeBC delivered its third year of programming in Grand Forks, BC, with Laurie Grant returning as the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) in May, 2016. The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict by providing residents with information and advice regarding bears, cougars, coyotes, deer, moose, raccoons, and rattlesnakes.

The early spring this year meant that many natural food crops dried up quickly or failed altogether, bringing wildlife into the valley bottom seeking alternate foods like unsecured compost, garbage and unpicked domestic fruit. The WCC started the season with the primary focus of reducing human-deer conflict throughout the community (Figure 1). The WCC's messaging focused on the negative outcomes of feeding deer within the community and included spreading awareness about the City's deer feeding bylaw (Bylaw #1967).



**Figure 1 Urban deer in Grand Forks Photo Credit Laurie Grant**

Although the season started off relatively quietly in terms of bear sightings, there was a sharp increase in reports in August, which continued through the fall. Human-bear conflict resulted in multiple habituated bears being destroyed in the city. Reports of other species were also up this year with cougars, coyotes and bobcats being drawn into residential areas by pets, livestock and animal feed.

The WCC worked to keep attractant management at the forefront of residents' minds through garbage tagging, educational displays, door-to-door visits, community presentations, media releases, and the community Facebook page. We worked closely with the City Bylaw Office and local Conservation Officers to educate the public about attractant management and human-wildlife conflict reduction

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## Highlights from the 2016 Season

In its third year in Grand Forks, the WildSafeBC (WSBC) Program continues to be valued by the local residents, visitors, local educators, the City Bylaw Office, local Conservation Officers and other communities within the RDKB.

WSBC was able to become more established in the community this season and was more widely recognized by community members. Residents appreciated the availability of a designated coordinator to address wildlife-related questions and concerns and local venues requested educational materials for display (Figure 2).



Figure 2 WildSafeBC Materials. *Photo Credit Laurie Grant*

## Presentations

Hands-on displays, videos, power point presentations and local hikes were developed for a wide range of audiences this season to provide insight into the reasons human-wildlife conflict occurs and what we can do to reduce it (Figure 3). Presentations were offered to the following audiences this season:

- Grand Forks and District Public Library
  - Let's Talk About Deer (June)
  - Let's Talk About Rattlesnakes (July)

- Let's Talk About Bears (August)
- BFISS - New mom's group – staying safe in bear country
- Regional District of the Kootenay Boundary Board Meeting – WSBC expansion to RDKB
- Silver Kettle Village - Let's Talk About bears, deer and other local wildlife
- Junior Ranger Program:
  - Community Integration Summer Program Youth Group
  - Grand Forks Sparks/Brownies and Girl Guides Clubs
  - Hutton Elementary School
  - Perley Elementary School



**Figure 3 Library Presentation.** *Photo Credit Les Johnson, Grand Forks and District Public Library*

## Displays

Educational displays at local events were once again a big hit with people of all ages. These displays offered a place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents and visitors and allow them an opportunity to get up close to wildlife skeletons and furs (Figure 4). As always, residents were able to access information and solutions for their own attractant challenges with take-home WSBC Bookmarks, wildlife tattoos, WSBC brochures, posters and species-specific reading materials. WildSafeBC set up displays at the following local events:

- Grand Forks Farmers Market (weekly)

- Grand Forks Fall Fair
- Rock Creek Fall Fair (2 days) (paid for by Rock Creek Fall Fair)
- Greenwood Founder's Day (Paid for by Greenwood Founder's Day)



Figure 4 Founder's Day WildSafeBC display Photo Credit Founder's Day volunteer

## Media Coverage

WildSafeBC Grand Forks received great support from local media this season (Figure 5). WildSafeBC presentations were advertised through the Grand Forks Gazette, the Boundary Sentinel and also 102.3 Juice FM. In addition, the following WildSafeBC articles and photos appeared in print and online in the Grand Forks Gazette and the Boundary Sentinel:

- 2016-06-01 Appreciate deer fawns from a distance
- 2016-06-15 Let's Talk About Deer Presentation
- 2016-06-17 Laurie Grant Returns as WSBC Coordinator
- 2016-07-01 Let's Talk About Rattle Snakes Presentation
- 2016-07-01 You can live in Peace with Rattlesnakes
- 2016-07-27 photo re: Rattlesnake Presentation

- 2016-08-25 Let's Talk About Bears Presentation
- 2016-08-25 Let's Talk About Bears Presentation
- 2016-08-25 Let's Talk About Bears Presentation
- 2016-09-01 Grand Forks Fall Fair Advertising
- 2016-09-01 Rock Creek Fall Fair Advertising
- 2016-10-15 Bear Activity is on the Rise



**Figure 5** A sample of WildSafeBC coverage in the Grand Forks Gazette *Photo Credit Della Mallett*

The WildSafeBC Grand Forks facebook page has been a great platform for community discussion around local wildlife issues. The WCC was able to increase the reach of Grand Forks WildSafeBC Facebook page this season, achieving a total of 370 likes.

Popular posts often reached between 300-400 views and were frequently shared, initiating many online discussions informing the local community about attractant management and wildlife sightings (Figure 6).



Figure 6 WSBC Grand Forks Facebook reach, 2016.

### Signage

In an effort to reduce wildlife-human conflict, signage was posted in public areas to alert citizens to wildlife sightings throughout town and also along roadways at frequent wildlife crossing locations.

“Bear in Area” signs were posted in 10 high-traffic pedestrian locations throughout the city as reminders of recent activity and moved as required (Figure 7). “Deer Crossing” signs were also posted, but disappeared and were not recovered. It is recommended that the City consider more permanent Deer Crossing signs for known high-traffic, high-collision locations in the city.



Figure 7 Bear in Area signage Photo Credit Laurie Grant



### Door-to-Door Education

The WCC joined local Conservation Officers to respond to reports of human-wildlife conflicts. We visited numerous properties in Grand Forks to discuss site-specific attractant management strategies and to offer informational brochures and advice. Where unnatural attractants were observed, the occupants were advised of management solutions including complete attractant removal, attractant management or electric fencing. Residents were eager to discuss deer and bears in particular, but rattlesnakes, raccoons, and other wildlife were also discussed.

### Garbage Tagging

The WCC conducted evening garbage tagging inspections throughout the season to remind residents that garbage and compost bins left on the curb overnight are a major wildlife attractant (Figure 8). During these evening inspections, the WCC placed yellow “Bear Attractant” stickers on garbage and compost bins that were put out too early. During the first inspection, over 40 garbage bins were tagged. These numbers dropped dramatically in subsequent inspections. Repeat offenders were visited to discuss the issue.



Figure 8 A compost bin, overturned by a bear. Photo Credit Laurie Grant

### Deer Counts

Despite the Grand Forks Deer Committee folding this year, the semi-annual deer count continued. The WCC participated in both Deer Counts in April and October.

The 194 observed deer represents the largest spring count to date (Figure 9).

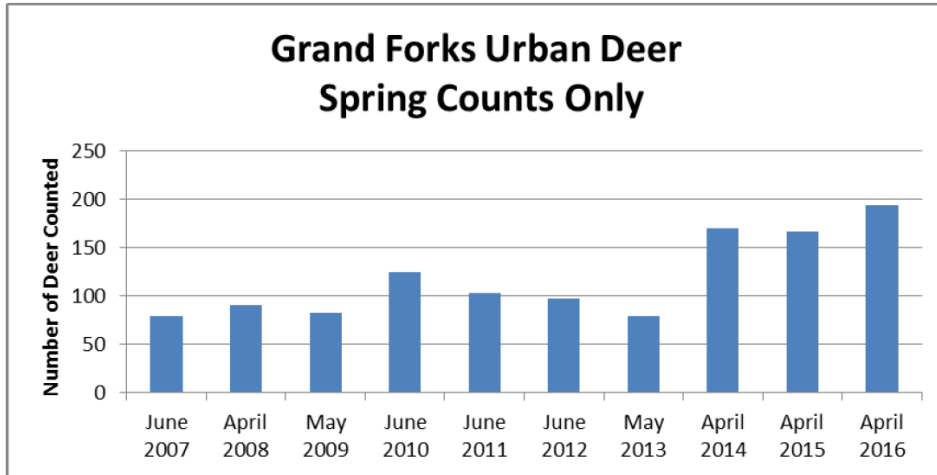


Figure 9: Grand Forks Spring Urban Deer counts to April 2016. Credit: Craig McLean, FLNR:EX

The 199 observed deer in 2016 represents a slight decrease from the 2015 largest fall count to date (Figure 10).

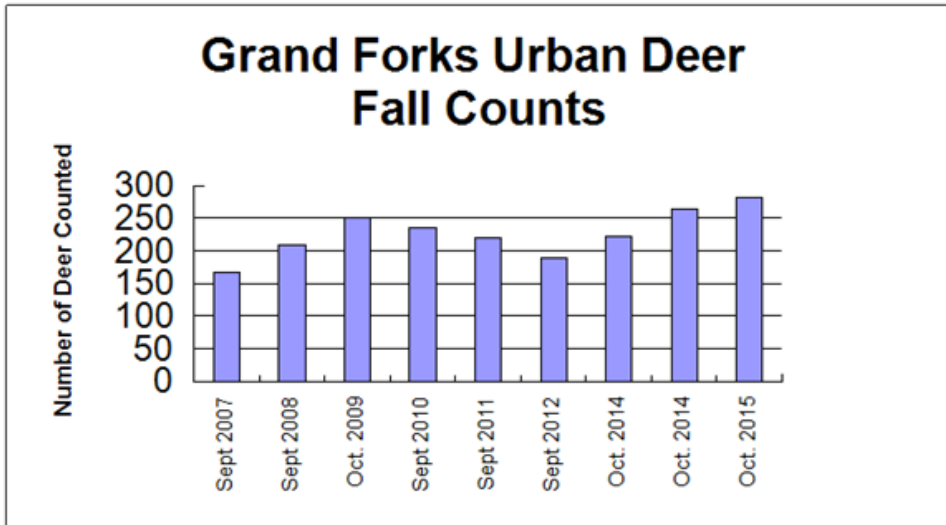


Figure 10: Grand Forks Fall Urban Deer counts to Oct 2015. Credit: Aaron Reid, FLNR:EX

## Challenges in the 2016 WSBC Season

### Deer-related Challenges

The abundance of natural vegetation, unfenced gardens and landscaped yards attract deer into backyards and create an unnatural concentration of the animals in the community. The lack of deterrents in use lead to a sense of security for deer within city limits, adding to the problem. There was an increase in aggressive deer reports this year and deer-vehicular collisions remain high in Grand Forks. Frequent collisions with deer cause thousands of dollars of property damage, high insurance rates and the unnecessary death of animals. The main highway through town is under the jurisdiction of the provincial government.

Interestingly, as more and more homeowners fence their yards, some urban deer are struggling to access adequate nutrition in the community. While this may lead to short-term challenges, it is this sort of attractant management that will reduce human-deer conflict in the long run.

The implementation of the deer feeding bylaw and the presence of a bylaw enforcement officer on duty this season seems to have deterred feeders. No issues of feeding were reported to the WCC this season.

### Bear-related Challenges

Unsecured garbage, compost, bird feeders and unpicked fruit were again the largest attractant problems for bears in 2016. WildSafeBC assisted by offering suggestions to help residents to reduce the attractants available to wildlife.

Some residents are reluctant to report bear sightings for fear of the bear being shot. However, reporting wildlife to the RAPP line actually helps initiate proactive efforts to prevent conflict from escalating and also notifies residents when wildlife is active in the community (through the WildSafeBC WARP map: <https://wildsafebc.com/warp/>). Residents are encouraged to report all wildlife conflicts and sightings.

### Cougar-related Challenges

There was an increase in local cougar activity over the summer, with 11 cougar sightings and conflicts reported to the RAPP line. Cougars can pose a risk to local children and pets.

## Goals for 2017

Looking forward to the 2017 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to reduce human-wildlife conflict and has set the following goals:

- Liaise with the local community regarding the potential for an urban deer cull in Grand Forks. This is likely to be a contentious issue in the community and the WCC will play a key role in providing neutral and evidence-based information to local residents.
- Increase the efficacy of the deer feeding bylaw with increased signage and increased enforcement. Also, suggest amending the bylaw to include all wildlife.
- Expand the WildSafeBC Program to include the Regional District of the Kootenay Boundary Areas C, D, and E. This would allow outreach to the rural areas of Grand Forks as well as Christina Lake, Greenwood, Midway, and Rock Creek where the presence of a WCC has been in high demand.
- Continue to offer outreach and education to a wide range of audiences, offering presentations that target wildlife species that cause concern locally.
- Assist the City of Grand Forks to achieve Bear Smart Status.

## Acknowledgements

Grand Forks WildSafeBC is grateful for the generous support the program receives from its sponsors, partners and volunteers.

Thanks to our sponsors: City of Grand Forks, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: Staff at City Hall, Mayor Frank Konrad and City of Grand Forks Councilors, Bylaw Officer Bud Alcock and local Conservation Officers Dave Webster and Logan Proulx.

Thanks also to:

- ❖ Vicky Gee, Area E Director.
- ❖ Grand Forks Gazette (Della Mallette, Jenny, Kathleen Saylor and Craig Lindsay).
- ❖ The Grand Forks and District Public Library Staff for your generous presentation support (Lizanne Eastwood, Les Johnson)
- ❖ Granby Wilderness Society biologist Jenny Coleshill
- ❖ Boundary Neighborhood Watch (Lorraine Dick).
- ❖ Hutton Elementary School (Principal Marcie Butler), Perley Elementary School (Principal Bob Chapman).
- ❖ Marty Thomas (Alpine Taxidermy) and Boundary Museum and Interpretive Centre for lending out amazing display materials.
- ❖ Boundary Family and Individual Services Society, Grand Forks Sparks, and Silver Kettle Village for offering space for presentations.
- ❖ Grand Forks Visitor Centre and Service BC Grand Forks for displaying brochures.
- ❖ BCCF Staff (WSBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey, Jen Bellhouse, Trina Radford, Shelley Nohels);
- ❖ Rock Creek Fall Fair's Mary Lautard who requested WildSafeBC to attend their annual event.
- ❖ Janet Matsalla Founder's Day Vender Coordinator who requested and arranged funding for WildSafeBC to attend their annual event.
- ❖ West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group and other WSBC Community Coordinators across the province for your support and insight as well as sharing photos and materials.

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

*Together, we can keep wildlife wild and communities safe!*