

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2016

Okanagan Westside

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WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Year End Report | 2016

Executive Summary

The 2016 season was the first year for the WildSafeBC program for the Okanagan Westside. Funding for the program was provided by the City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland, Westbank First Nation, and the Regional District of Central Okanagan. By the end of the season the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP), for Peachland and West Kelowna had recorded total of 338 wildlife calls. Black bear accounted for nearly 70% of these reports, with a total of 233 reports during the specified period. Other wildlife regularly reported in the area included: deer, cougar, moose, coyote, bob cat, raccoon and several others.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) attended many farmers' markets and other community events throughout the West Kelowna and Peachland to share information on how to reduce conflicts with wildlife. Brochures covering safety and attractant management for these species were available for the public at all events. Colouring books/pages, bookmarks and temporary tattoos were available for children at all events and displays.

The WCC also gave numerous presentations to school groups, and adult associations such as the Peachland Rotary Club and Kelowna Newcomers Association. This year was also the first annual WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild weekend, for which the WCC held a bear spray and safety training course.

In its first year, the WildSafeBC program played an important role in helping to spread information about wildlife safety, sightings and attractant management.



Figure 0-1 WCC Andrea Tait speaks to residents about wildlife attractants at the Hardy Falls salmon spawning event

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1. Introduction

The 2016 season was the first year for the WildSafeBC program for the Okanagan Westside. The objectives of the program were to 1) introduce WildSafeBC to the community through positive and engaging events, and 2) to begin the process of shifting the public opinion from reactive management of “problem bears” to proactive management of wildlife attractants. The basis of this is to empower residents with education so they may be able to make informed and effective choices that will ultimately help reduce human-wildlife conflict in our community.

In Peachland and West Kelowna, there was a total of 358 wildlife calls from January 1, 2016 to November 14, 2016. Black bear accounted for nearly 70% of these reports, with a total of 233 reports during the specified period. Other wildlife regularly reported in the area included: deer, cougar, moose, coyote, bob cat, raccoon and several others (Figure 1-1).

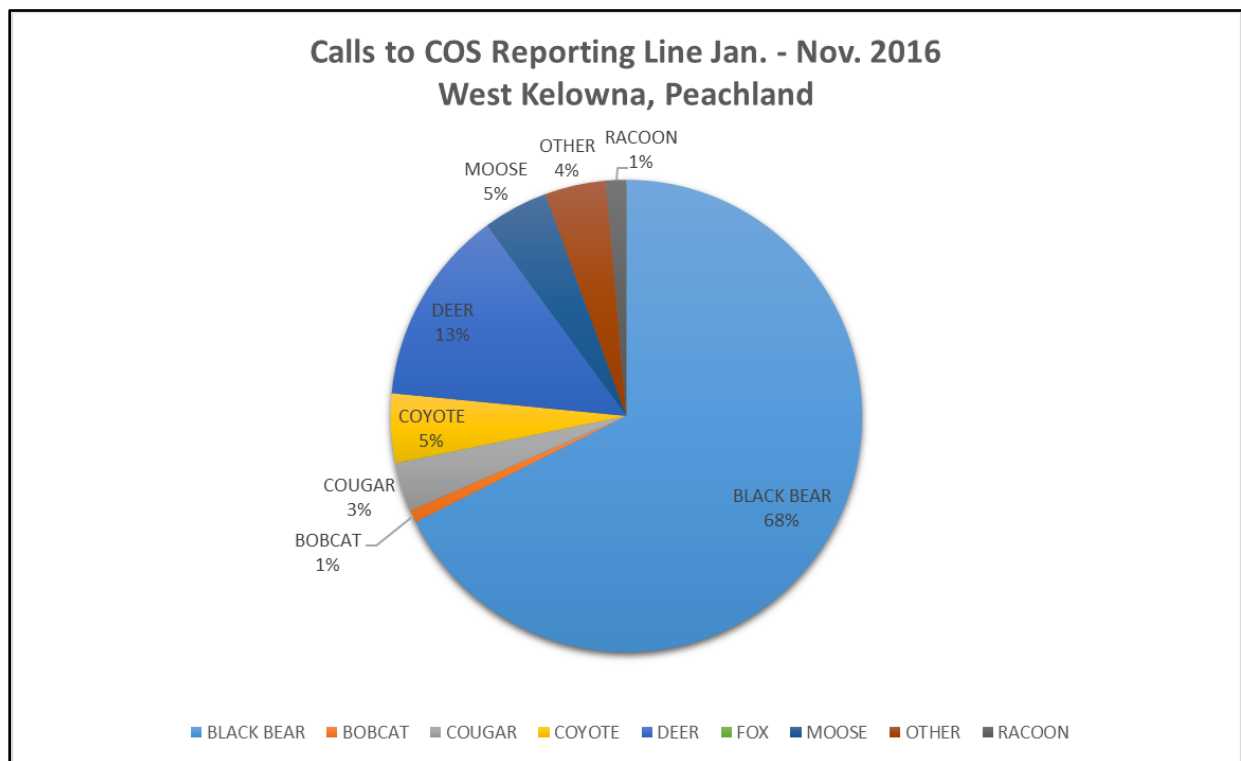


Figure 1-1 Wildlife Reports for Peachland and West Kelowna for January 1, 2016 to November 14, 2016

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Attractants specified varied between Peachland and Kelowna. The data presented in the following graphs is from January 1, 2016 to October 27, 2016.

In Peachland, for those black bear reports where the attractant is specified, approximately 58% of those reports are the result of unsecured garbage. Fruit trees accounted for approximately 37.5% of reports, and compost accounted for 12.5% of black bear related calls (Figure 1-2).

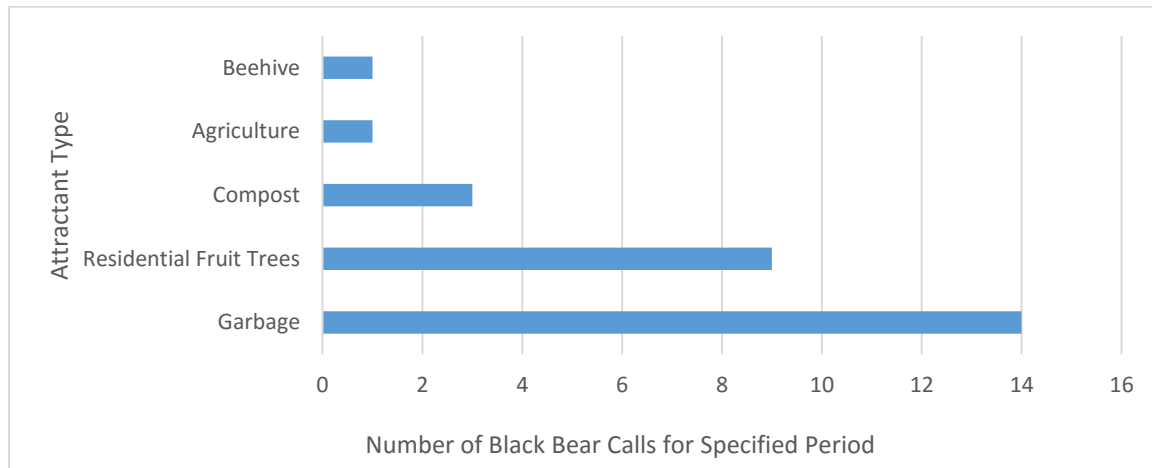


Figure 1-2 Black Bear Attractants (when noted) in Peachland

In West Kelowna, for those black bear reports where the attractant is specified, approximately 57% of those reports are the result of unsecured garbage. Fruit trees accounted for approximately 16% of reports, and vegetable gardens accounted for just under 9% of black bear related calls (Figure 1-3).

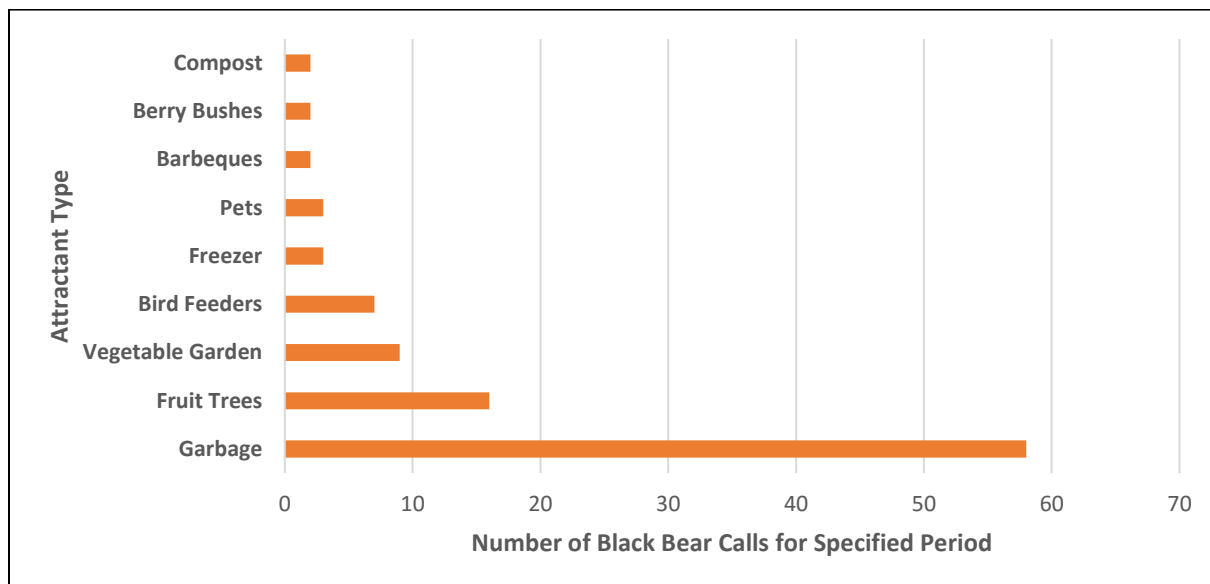


Figure 1-3 Black Bear Attractants (when noted) in West Kelowna

Evidently, garbage continues to be by far the most significant attractant of black bears in these communities.

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2. Presentations

Presentations are a great way to convey detailed information about the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour. This helps to provide insights into the reasons human-wildlife conflict occurs and what we can do to reduce it. Presentations were developed for adult groups, elementary school students and pre-school age groups this season. Following the presentations children were provided with either a Junior Rangers colouring book or some colouring pages, a bookmark, and temporary tattoo. The teachers at each of the schools were presented with information on how they could continue education in the classroom on reducing human-wildlife conflict; To facilitate this, they were also provided with a set of Junior Rangers activities. The WCC for the Okanagan Westside gave a total of 20 presentations to the following audiences this season:

- 2x Rose Valley Elementary – Gr. K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 400 students
- 3x Shannon Lake Elementary – Gr. 2, 3 and 4; 144 students
- Glenrosa Elementary – Gr. 3 and 4; 54 students
- 3x Mar Jok Elementary – Gr. 3 and 4; 129 students
- 2x Helen Gorman Elementary; Gr. K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; 234 students
- 2x George Pringle Strong Start; 27 children and their parent(s)
- Hudson Road Elementary Strong Start; 16 children and their parent(s)
- Peachland Elementary Strong Start; 19 children and their parent(s)
- Peachland Rotary Club
- District of Peachland Employees (approximately 25 people)
- Kelowna Newcomers Association (approximately 180 people)
- Kelowna Newcomers Association Alumni (approximately 85 people)
- WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild bear spray training and hike on Mt. Boucherie (22 participants)

On the weekend of September 17th and 18th, WildSafeBC held their first annual BC Goes Wild weekend. This third weekend in September is the time when human-bear conflict tends to peak in the province, and WildSafeBC held numerous events across the province to encourage people to “Keep wildlife wild and communities safe”. On September 18, the WCC, in collaboration with local hiking group, HikingAddiction, held a bear safety and bear spray training course followed by a hike on Mt. Boucherie, in West Kelowna. The event was very successful and drew 22 enthusiastic participants (Figure 2-1).



Figure 2-1 WCC Andrea Tait provides bear safety and bear spray training for BCCF BC Goes Wild Event on September 18, 2016

3. Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

WildSafeBC regularly receives phone-calls from concerned residents reporting neighbourhood garbage issues. In response to these calls and postings on the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program, the WCC targeted the reported neighbourhoods with door-to-door visits homes throughout the season to give residents information (brochure) about wildlife in the area or to discuss neighbourhood attractant issues. When residents were not at home, they were left a door hanger with contact information for the WCC. In total, 80 residents were contacted through door-to-door education. Garbage tagging to encourage responsible attractant management. WildSafeBC also conducted garbage tagging throughout the season, placing bright yellow “Wildlife Attractant” stickers on bins put out too early. Garbage tagging was conducted in the Glenrosa, Shannon Lake, and Rose Valley communities of West Kelowna.

4. Displays

Educational displays at local events were popular with children and adults alike, and provided a great opportunity to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (Figure 4-1 and Figure 4-2). These displays provide area residents with a place to voice concerns or observations about local wildlife activity and share attractant management success stories. The display is inviting and engaging, with a bear and cougar hide and several wildlife skulls for the residents to view and explore. Residents were drawn in by these items and they created an opportunity to discuss the additional topics of wildlife attractants and human-wildlife conflict. The WCC gave out bookmarks, colouring pages, and applied the popular temporary tattoos to children at these events, and this was a great opportunity to speak to them one-on-one about wildlife safety. WildSafeBC held displays at the following local events:

- RDCO Go Fish Weekend
- RDCO Hardy Falls Salmon Spawning event
- Westside Daze (West Kelowna) Canada Day Festival (2 day event)
- Westbank First Nation Aboriginal Day
- Peachland Farmers Market (2 days)
- Westbank Farmers Market (2 days)
- Westside Skatepark Grand Opening



Figure 4-1 WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Booth Display

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Figure 4-2 WCC Andrea Tait with Booth Display



Figure 4-3 Ariella Amato holds a Black Bear skull at the Westbank Farmer's Market

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5. Media

The WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering hundreds of page views and receiving more than 65 “likes” providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC’s messaging through publishing press releases in local papers, posting information from interviews online with the WCC and sharing information through social media. Articles were published in the following newspapers: Kelowna Daily Courier (x2), Castanet, AM1150, Westside Weekly, and EZ Rock 105.

Additionally, the City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland and the Westbank First Nation included WildSafeBC articles in the July newsletter that was sent to all homeowners along with the quarterly utility bill. In total, more than 17,000 residents received these newsletters. The newsletter was an excellent opportunity to introduce residents to the WildSafeBC program, and was regularly mentioned by residents when they contacted the WCC.



Figure 5-1 Newsletter sent to West Kelowna, Peachland and Westbank First Nation residents

6. Bear-Resistant Bin

In October 2016, OK Environmental, the waste management company which is sub-contracted by the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) developed six prototype bear-resistant garbage carts. Over the next year these carts will be tested by residents, and feedback will be collected. Following these local tests, WildSafeBC hopes to see these bins become certified bear-resistant. When testing has been completed, the RDCO will review opportunities to include bear-resistant garbage carts in their rental program for residents.

7. Cougar in Area

Early in the season West Kelowna received several reports of cougars in the Gellatly and Glenrosa communities. City staff and the WCC developed a sandwich board which can be utilized in the future to effectively notify residents when there is potentially a “Cougar in Area”.

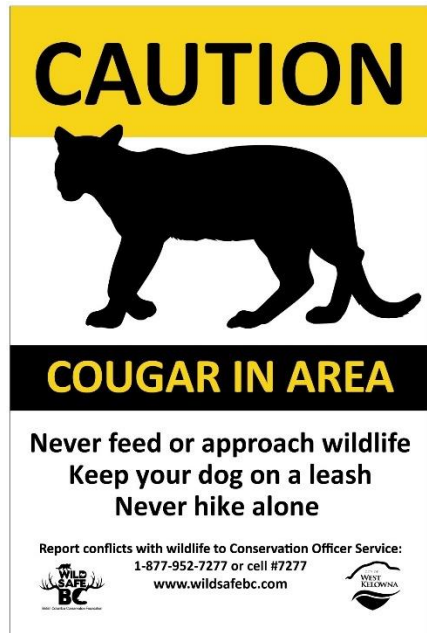


Figure 7-1 Cougar In Area Sign Designed for West Kelowna

8. Challenges of the 2016 Season

This was the first year for the program in the area, and the focus of the program was to introduce the WildSafeBC brand and messaging. The population of the area has grown considerably in the past decade, with many residents moving to the area from other parts of the country or from abroad. Evidently there is little understanding of the fact that wildlife may be present in the area, nor do people seem to understand the basics of attractant management. Thus, unsecured garbage is one of the most significant challenges for the community, with most residents storing their garbage outside beside their homes. The importance of securing garbage was the primary focus of all media communication, public displays, presentations and one-on-one conversations with residents. There was some resistance to this, due to the smell, or the fact that many residents did not possess a shed or garage. Methods for reducing smell were provided, such as freezing certain items that may create the most smell.

Given the temperate climate, the area is also home to many orchards, vineyards, and residential fruit trees. Many residents misunderstand the significance of wildlife, namely bears, accessing fruit trees. Special attention was given at public displays and presentations to explain that access to fruit trees is a step towards habituation and thus potentially a food-conditioned bear.

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9. Goals and Opportunities for 2017

Looking forward to the 2017 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make WildSafeBC an integral part of the communities of West Kelowna and Peachland.

There are many opportunities available to continue and develop the program in the community, including:

- Increased presence at public events, such as additional days' attendance at Farmer's Markets which proved to be very successful.
- Expand presentations to summer camps and children's clubs such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Canada, as well as all primary, middle and high school students.
- Create additional opportunities for bear-spray and bear-safety training workshops, as this was regularly requested by residents.
- Given the continued influx of new residents from out of province or country, opportunities to connect with newcomers is recommended. Options may include coordination of events or information distribution to Welcome Wagon and/or local realtors, and continued relationship with the Kelowna Newcomers Association (which includes members from both West Kelowna and Peachland).
- Accomplish additional door-to-door education, as this is an excellent way to speak directly to residents in high-risk areas. A recommendation for next year will be to provide residents with a "Homeowner Checklist" which they can use to assess their property for wildlife attractants.
- Displays or events in coordination with local outdoor sports or hunting stores. Additionally, these companies can be contacted for donations in kind which may be used for prizes at local events.
- Increase the use of WARP by residents as well as increase the reach of social media.
- Work with the City of West Kelowna and the District of Peachland to review and update their bylaws in relation to attractant management, namely by specifying requirements for properly securing garbage. In relation to this, discussing the feasibility of providing a storage-shed rebate for residents who purchase a shed for their garbage cart.
- Work with OK Environmental and the RDCO to review the success of the bear-resistant garbage carts, and determine the feasibility of including these carts as part of their regular garbage cart rental program.

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Acknowledgements

Thank you the City of West Kelowna, the District of Peachland, the Westbank First Nation, the Regional District of Central Okanagan, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program and activities.

Special thanks to Shelley Schnitzler, Kirsten Jones and Kevin Bouchier of the City of West Kelowna; Nicole Cressman with the District of Peachland, Della Elliott with the Westbank First Nation, and Rae Stewart and Nicole Kittmer with the Regional District of Central Okanagan.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Sergeant Jim Beck with Conservation Officer Service, Mike Cain Senior Bylaw Enforcement Officer with the City of West Kelowna and Officer Richard Johns with the Westbank First Nation Law Enforcement for their assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing.

For helping to make the first annual BC Goes Wild Okanagan Westside event a success, thank you to Josh Hoggan, founder of HikingAddiction.

Thank you to Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for your guidance throughout the season; and Jen Bellhouse, Trina Radford, and Shelley Nohels of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for your continued support and assistance.

Finally, thank you to the volunteers who generously donated their time to the WildSafeBC program, especially Dave Calder, who has been a long-time advocate for the WildSafeBC program for the Okanagan Westside, and last but not least, to the residents who made an effort to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.

Let's continue to work together to keep wildlife wild and our community safe!



British Columbia Conservation Foundation