

WildSafeBC Year End Report 2016

Sunshine Coast

Prepared by: Marina Stjepovic, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator



Photo credit: Louise Williams



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities for the Sunshine Coast WildSafeBC program between May 15th and November 30th, 2016, including highlights, challenges and recommendations for the future.

Most wildlife activity reported was related to black bears and cougars. This year, for the first time ever there were confirmed reports of grizzly bear on the Sunshine Coast.

WildSafeBC focuses efforts on public education and encouraging behavioural changes to reduce the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict. The main activities towards this goal were door-to-door visits in areas experiencing issues, use of social media, tagging garbage bins placed out too early, display booths at community events, delivering the Junior Rangers program in elementary schools, and customized presentations to a variety of local organizations.

Challenges were mainly related to unsecured garbage and fruit trees attracting bears and other wildlife into neighbourhoods. A local mindset of helping wildlife by feeding them fruit and other human foods is another ongoing challenge.

The goals for 2017 will be to continue the WildSafeBC program on the Sunshine Coast, to encourage local governments to assess the effectiveness of their bylaws and policies related to wildlife and human-wildlife conflict, and to deliver the Junior Rangers Program to all local elementary schools.

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Highlights from the 2016 Season



Figure 1 - Sunshine Coast Community Coordinator

The 2016 WildSafeBC-Sunshine Coast (WSBC) program was similar in scope to previous years, with some changes including a new Community Coordinator, the addition of the WSBC Junior Rangers Program and a first time WSBC event in September called 'BC Goes Wild'. The Community Coordinator's focus was on public education and encouraging behavioural changes to reduce the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict.

WSBC continued to collaborate with various community organizations such as the Ruby Lake Lagoon Society, One Straw Society's Fruit Tree Project, Chapman Hatchery, Sunshine Coast Tourism, the Sunshine Coast Visitor Centres, Welcoming Communities, as well as School District No. 46, the BC Conservation Officer Service, the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD)'s Infrastructure department, and SCRD, Gibsons, and Sechelt Bylaw Officers.

Public Reports on Wildlife Activity

Statistics provided by the BC Conservation Officer Service (COS) for wildlife-related calls from January 1st to October 28th, 2016 compared to the same time periods for 2014 and 2015 are as follows:

	2014	2015	2016
Black Bear	259	304	214
Cougar	40	39	101
All Wildlife	398	434	418

The number of calls reflects the number of wildlife sightings and amount of conflict, but also reflects public awareness and use of the reporting hotline, as well as overall community efforts in managing wildlife attractants.

As expected, most calls were related to black bears, and for the first time, a few calls were also related to grizzly bears. The main attractants were garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders and outdoor freezers/fridges.

The second highest number of calls was related to cougars, with most sightings in the southeastern Howe Sound areas. A few of the calls were related to livestock and pet conflicts, but no concerns were reported about human safety.

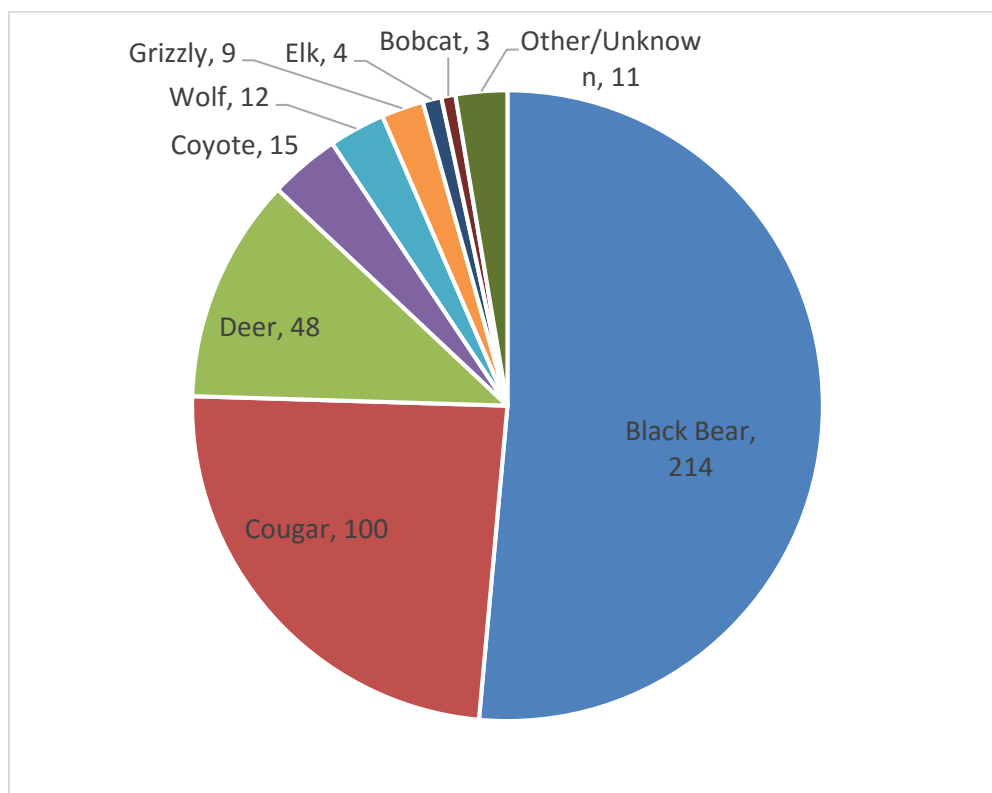


Figure 2 - Wildlife reports Sunshine Coast, Jan 1 to Oct 28, 2016

WSBC Workshops and Events

Electric Fencing Workshop

Local food production and food security is important to the Sunshine Coast community. In September the WSBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, instructed a workshop to help food producers and the general public protect livestock and crops from wildlife through properly installed and maintained electric fencing. However, despite advertising in the local newspaper, via Facebook and a local radio interview, attendance was poor, with only 2 registrants and 1 attendee.



Figure 3 - Electric fencing workshop

BC Goes Wild event

WSBC held its first annual province-wide event to bring attention to human-wildlife conflict and celebrate BC's wildlife species. Sunshine Coast WSBC co-hosted a "Night Nature Walk" with the Ruby Lake Lagoon Society at Tyner Park/Lily Lake, in Pender Harbour. Fourteen people participated, including 6 children aged 6-11 years old. The group only saw bats, but were taught about owls, painted turtles, otters and black bears that frequent the park and ways to keep the wildlife wild.



Figure 4 - waiting for the rest of the participants in the 'Night Nature Walk'



Figure 5 – Participating in SCRDS Trash Bash event

Distribution of Signage, Brochures and Door-to-Door Visits

One of the most effective ways to get the WSBC message out into the community is to meet directly with residents who are looking for information or ideas on how to deal with or avoid human-wildlife conflict.

Approximately 19 hours were spent conducting 112 door-to-door visits in areas either experiencing, or “at-risk” of experiencing human-wildlife conflict. Areas to target were determined as a result of garbage tagging, phone calls or messages about problems (mostly with fruit trees or unsecured garbage), or requests from the Conservation Officers for educational assistance.

WSBC and other informational materials were also distributed to public places from Egmont to Langdale, with specific requests from Town of Gibsons, Sechelt Tourist Info office, District of Sechelt, SCRd, Welcome Wagon, Newcomers Club, Welcoming Communities, the Health Unit, Community Services Resource Centre and several local businesses. Cautionary “Bear In Area”, “Cougar In Area”, and “Coyote In Area” signs were posted throughout the Sunshine Coast, whenever sightings were reported near heavily used trails, parks, public places or schools. Unfortunately, some of the laminated signs were taken down only days after being put up.



Figure 6 - Wildlife caution signs

WSBC also provided a one-page digital brochure on tips for dealing wildlife and attractants to Sunshine Coast Tourism for e-news distribution to 250 of their members who are accommodation owners.

Media/Social Media

Due to the spread-out nature of the Sunshine Coast community, radio, print and social media played an important role in spreading awareness to over 33,000 residents and visitors on Sunshine Coast. Topics covered included cougars, wolves, deer, bears, safety, garbage tagging results, fruit picking reminders, event information, general tips for managing wildlife attractants, and Junior Rangers presentations in schools.

Figure 7 illustrates how a unique situation of how the post of a first ever confirmed grizzly bear sighting on the Coast received 46,968 views and 535 shares for one post on the local WSBC Facebook page. WSBC was able to provide information quickly and then carefully monitor and respond to comments and messages as they arose. This helped to minimize misconceptions and maximize educational opportunities with so many viewers. As a result, the page experienced a huge increase in viewers, which ultimately helped to maintain a high level of community interest in subsequent posts to the page.

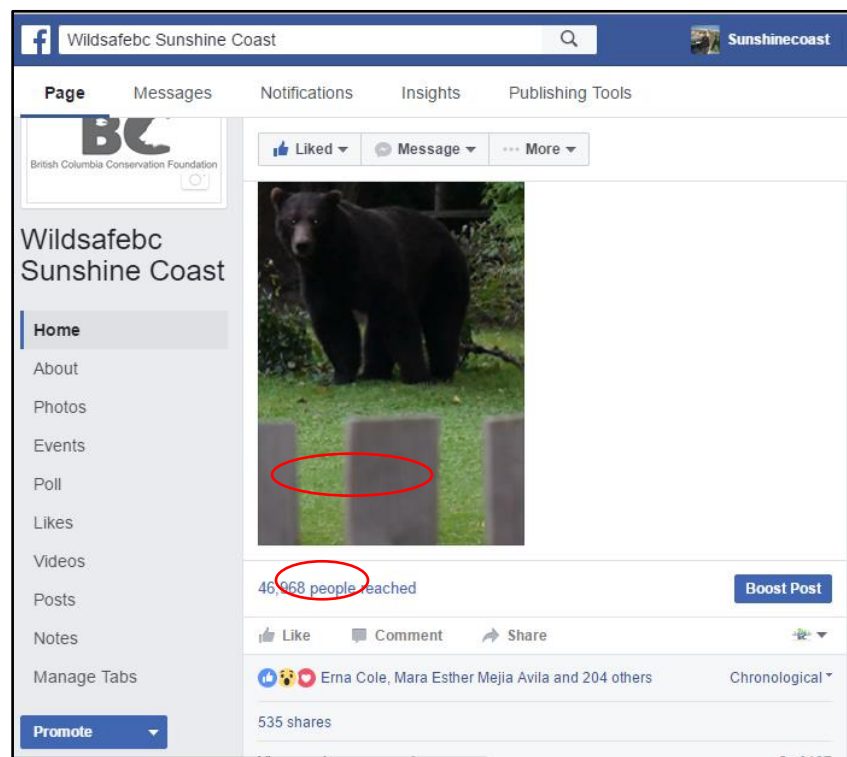


Figure 7 - Facebook post draws record number of viewers

Display Booths

Educational displays at local events continued to be an effective part of the WSBC program's delivery. Children tend to be immediately drawn by the wildlife props (skulls, hides, tracks, and rubber scat) and WSBC tattoos and bookmarks, while adults often discuss their wildlife encounters and access information and solutions for their own attractant challenges.

Public display booths were set up at the following events and locations on the Sunshine Coast during 2016. This year's emphasis was to reach some different events compared to previous years. Many thanks to the event organizers for inviting WSBC to participate!

- Catch a Trout Day, Chapman Hatchery, July 9
- Gibsons Farmers Market, July 22
- Trash Bash, September 17
- One Straw Fall Faire, Roberts Creek, October 2
- Mushroom Festival, October 15
- Rivers Day, Chapman Hatchery, October 22
- Halfmoon Bay Trade Show, October 29



Figure 8 - Display booth at Mushroom Festival

Presentations

WSBC presentations provide insight into the reasons why human-wildlife conflicts occur and what people can do to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Presentations usually provide a basic overview of the biology, behaviour, attractants, and safety tips for wildlife species in our communities, followed by the preventative measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict. The species discussed were black bears, grizzly bears, cougar, deer, elk, coyote, wolves, and raccoons. Most presentations finished off with a demonstration of the proper use of bear spray. In 2016, WSBC delivered 3 customized presentations to:

- Welcoming Communities
- BC Ferries staff at Langdale Terminal
- Halfmoon Bay Childcare Society

The WildSafeBC website (www.wildsafebc.com) includes the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map which shows calls to the Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line as well as species, attractants, sighting or type of wildlife-human conflict, location, and outcome. Anyone can sign up and access this online resource. The website was promoted in all presentations.

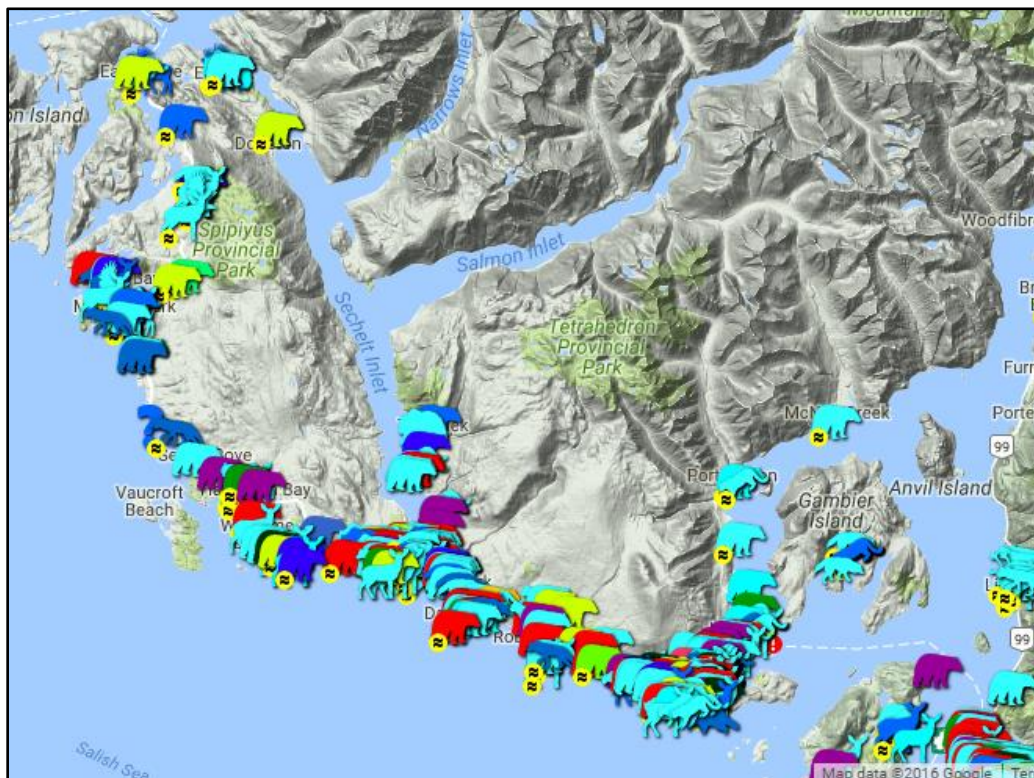


Figure 9 - Wildlife Alert Reporting Program, 2016

A main focus for 2016 was to offer presentations in local schools using the new WSBC Junior Rangers program materials. WSBC delivered the Junior Rangers Program to approximately 475 students at the following elementary schools in School District No. 46:

- Cedar Grove, entire school
- Gibsons, Grades 1/2
- Roberts Creek, Grades 2/3
- Kinnickinnick, Grades 4/5
- Halfmoon Bay, Grades 2/3
- Davis Bay, Grades K-3



Figure 10 - Junior Rangers in training

Garbage Tagging

During July, August, and October, WSBC checked approximately 3,660 homes to identify if garbage bins were put out the night before scheduled pick up. Yellow stickers were placed on a total of 58 bins, as a reminder for residents that when garbage containers are placed out the night before, they are attracting wildlife to the neighbourhood and increasing the risk of human-wildlife conflict. Follow up visits were conducted by the Town of Gibsons bylaw officer in addition to the WSBC Coordinator and very few repeat offenders were found. The number of plastic bags placed out at the curbside also seemed to be much lower this year, perhaps due to efforts to educate in previous years.



Figure 11 - Tagging garbage containers put out too early

Challenges from the 2016 Season

This season, much of the Community Coordinator's efforts were spent in the District of Sechelt (in the areas of West Sechelt, Davis Bay, Selma Park and Wilson Creek) and Elphinstone, where the main issues were unsecured garbage and unpicked fruit.

Unsecured garbage

Despite WSBC's efforts to educate, garbage still remains the number one wildlife attractant by far. It is important that residents and businesses understand the issue and are advised or encouraged to take the steps necessary to reduce the potential for human-wildlife conflict.

Currently only the Town of Gibsons has an enforceable bylaw for refuse collection, specifying allowable times for placing garbage at curbside, and requiring "wildlife-resistant" containers with fitted lids. The Community Coordinator is prepared to assist local governments with bylaw changes if requested.

Culture of unpicked fruit

From July to November, one of the main wildlife attractants luring bears into residential areas is unpicked fruit. Although the Sunshine Coast Fruit Tree Project was able to play an active role in assisting those who could not pick their own fruit, there still remains a "culture" of feeding wildlife by leaving some fruit for the animals too. WSBC posted about the topic on Facebook and discussed it with many people at public events and during door-to-door visits. More effort will be needed to change this mindset.

Goals for 2017

WSBC Sunshine Coast hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues and decrease human-wildlife conflict. The goals include:

- Secure and continue delivery of the WildSafeBC program on the Sunshine Coast.
- Encourage local governments to improve bylaws and policies that would reduce human-wildlife conflict. This could include consideration of wildlife habitat and human-wildlife conflict in official community plans and policies, as well as enforceable garbage collection bylaws, requiring use of wildlife-resistant garbage containers and specifying morning times for placing containers at the curbside.
- Implement the new Junior Rangers Program throughout the Sunshine Coast with the aim of creating generational change as well as providing a conduit for WSBC messaging to the parents of participating youth.

Acknowledgements

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- Ministry of Environment
- Sunshine Coast Regional District
- Sunshine Coast Rod and Gun Club
- Lehigh Materials, Sechelt
- British Columbia Conservation Foundation

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