

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2016

Thompson Nicola Regional District

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Ministry of
Environment

WildSafeBC TNRD Year End Report | 2016

Executive Summary

The 2016 season started off relatively quietly for human-wildlife conflict in the TNRD and picked up in the fall, as is the normal pattern. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) attended many farmers' markets and other community events throughout the region. Wildlife safety information posters were posted on info boards in communities all the way from Lytton to Chase to Blue River. The WCC also gave numerous presentations to school groups, adults and campers, and ran an electric fencing demonstration for the beekeepers from the region. The Bear-Resistant Bin Loan Program was continued in Merritt with great success and the program generated interest from other communities as well. Garbage tagging and door-to-door canvassing was continued this year with the focus on Merritt, Cherry Creek and Blue River. The Junior Ranger Program continues to be very popular with students and the addition of the colouring book was welcome enthusiastically. This year was the first annual BC Goes Wild Weekend around the province. Hikes, talks and public displays were held throughout BC to celebrate keeping wildlife wild in BC and this event proved to be very popular. In communities throughout the TNRD the media played an important role in helping to spread information about wildlife safety, sightings and attractant management.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Mandy Ross talking to beekeepers about the use of electric fencing to keep bears away from hives, Monte Creek, 2016.

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Wildlife Encounters

Overall, calls and reports to the Conservation Officer Service and WARP have gone down dramatically over the past three years in the TNRD. Black bears calls in 2014, 2015 and 2016 were 426, 211 and 139 respectively. This follows a general trend around the province throughout the summer (Figure 2). The peak in the graph shows the increase in calls during the fall. Hopefully this is due to better attractant management around the TNRD. No doubt the implementation of the garbage bylaws in Merritt and the bear resistant loan out program have helped to reduce encounters. Calls about cougar encounters have remained relatively steady and deer and coyote calls have steadily decreased. Talk of increased raccoon activity in some communities had been steady, but no calls were made in this regard.

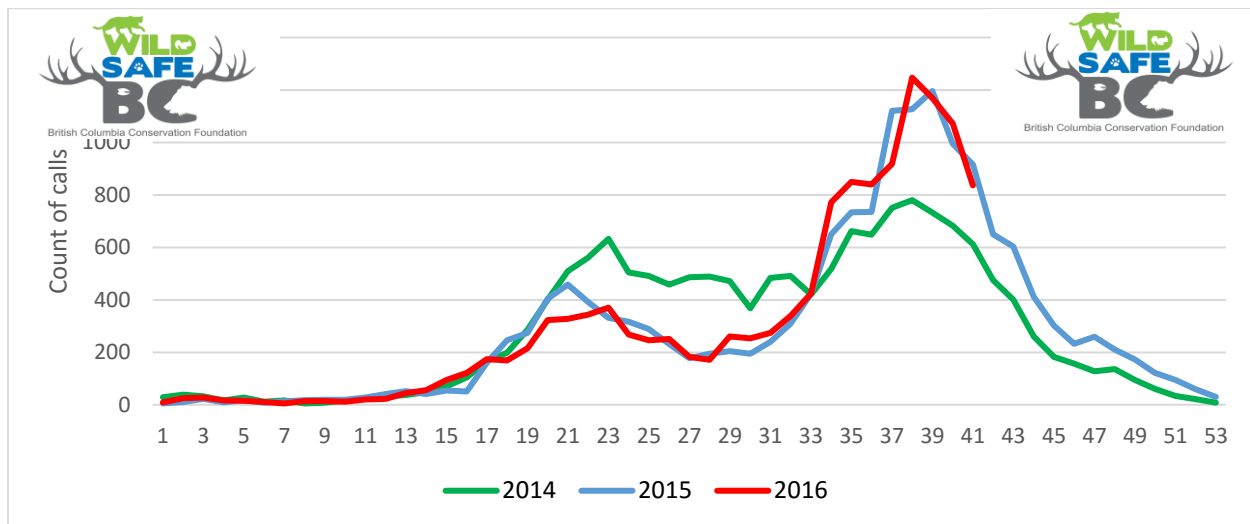


Figure 2. Calls to the Conservation Officer Service regarding black bears in all of BC Jan 1, 2014 to Oct 8, 2016

A more specific breakdown of wildlife reports for the TNRD through the 2016 season can be found in Figure 3. Weekly black bear reports are in Figure 4, as with the rest of the province, calls are low throughout the summer and peak in the fall when bears are foraging for food.

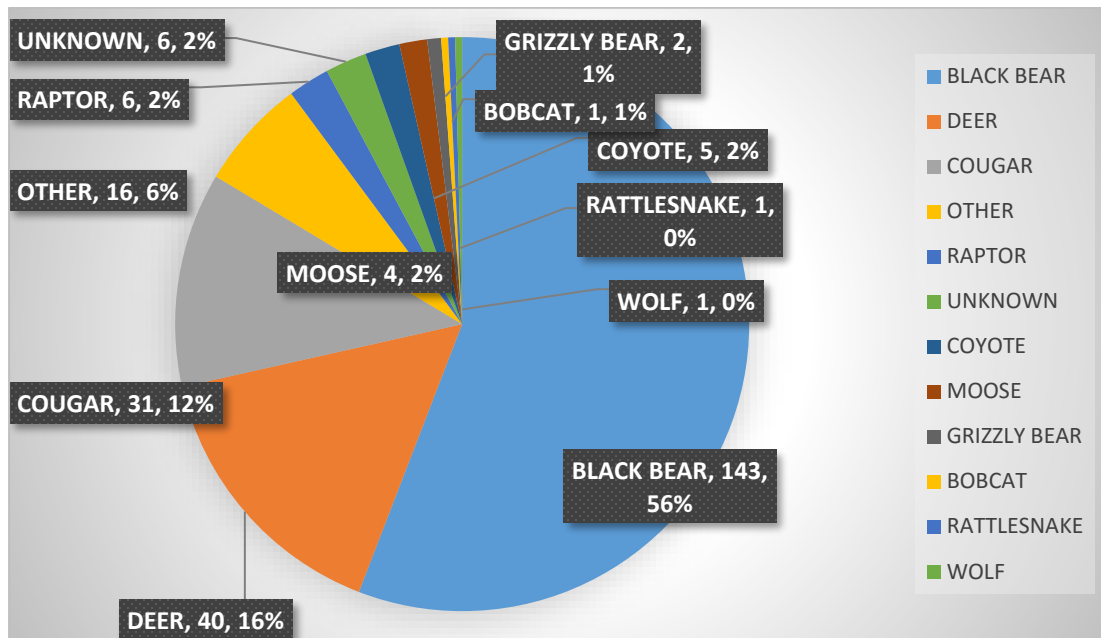


Figure 3. Calls to the Conservation Officer Service about wildlife in the TNRD for Jan 1, 2016 to Oct 30, 2016.

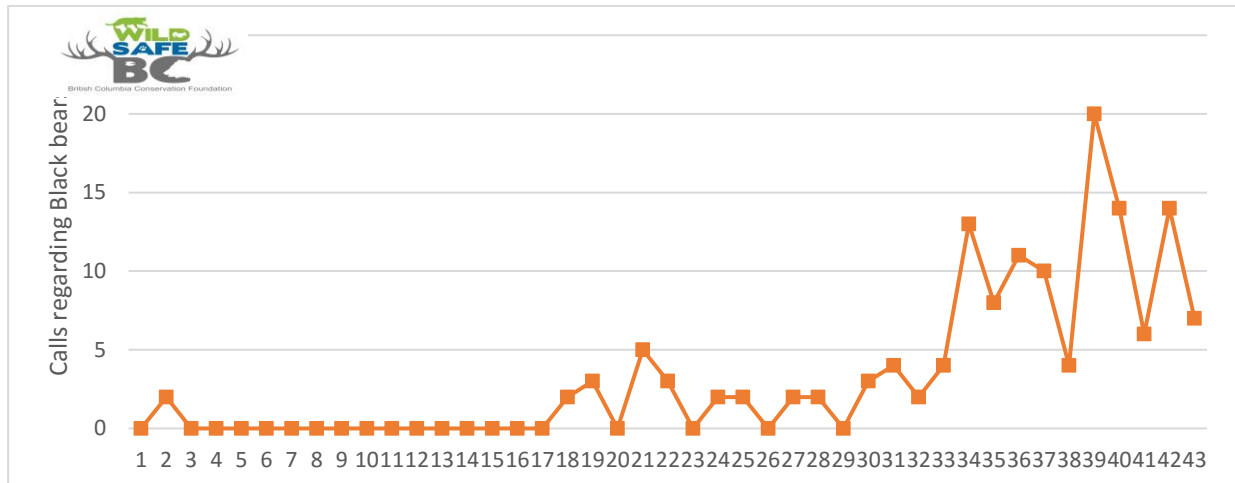


Figure 4 Calls to the Conservation Officer Service regarding black bears, Thompson Nicola Regional District, January 1 - October 30 2016.

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

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occurs and what we can do to reduce and why attractant management is important. Presentations were developed for children's science camps this season. In the fall, once the Junior Ranger Program was rolled out, all students were signed up as Junior Rangers to get them to help spread the word about wildlife safety. These presentations included a Junior Ranger Kit with a pencil, ruler/bookmark, sticker, ID card, button and oath card. Also included this year was the Junior Ranger Colouring Book; this was a big hit with students throughout the season. WildSafeBC TNRD gave presentations to the following audiences this season:

- Lytton Preschool presentation
- Eureka Presentation - Barriere
- Eureka Presentation - Clearwater
- Girls Science Camp presentation – Harper Mnt Ski Club
- Nicomen Band presentation
- Simpcw Elementary School
- Raft River Interpretive program - Clearwater (3 days)
- Cache Creek Elementary School
- Lytton Elementary School
- Blue River Elementary School
- Logan Lake Elementary School
-

Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

WildSafeBC regularly receives phone-calls from Conservation Officers, Bylaw Officers and concerned residents reporting neighbourhood garbage issues. In response to these calls and postings on WARP, the WCC targeted the reported neighbourhoods with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management. The WCC visited Harmon Lake estates, on Nicola Lake, at the Conservation Officer request. Fruit trees were the major concern in this area. A mobile home park was visited at the superintendent's request, to chat with residents about safe garbage storage. The Community Coordinator also went door-to-door in Blue River to talk about the proper use of the bear resistant bins used in that community. At a resident's request, a mobile home park in Cache Creek was visited. This neighbourhood has issues with fruit trees and bears.

Garbage tagging was carried out again, primarily in the Merritt area. One community within Merritt, Collettsville, has high bear activity and it was great to see high compliance in the neighbourhood with the garbage bylaws. Bins were also tagged in the Cherry Creek area, and very many bins were left out in that community. Most houses have long driveways, so the bins may stay at the roadside most of the time. Some increased education about wildlife attractants and the use of secure garbage storage in this area is recommended.

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Poster and Brochure Distribution

WildSafeBC Bear Safety posters were put up in all communities that the Community Coordinator visited. They were posted at hotels, parks, libraries, coffee shops, outdoor stores and other public spaces. Bear and cougar information brochures were also distributed at many locations throughout the TNRD, including hotels, libraries, info centres, cafes and condo lobbies.

“Bear in Area” warning signs were placed around the village of Sun Peaks in the fall to remind locals and visitors to be careful about garbage and fruit.

Displays

Educational displays at local events were popular with local children and adults alike, and provided a great opportunity to discuss local wildlife issues with residents. These displays provide area residents with a place to voice concerns or observations about local wildlife activity and share attractant management success stories. The WildSafeBC display is inviting and engaging, and residents are drawn in to learn more. The WCC gave out 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 spent 31 days at the following local events:

- Chase Market (2 visits)
- Merritt Market (3 visits)
- Merritt Spring Garden Festival
- Spences Bridge Market
- Ashcroft Fun Fair
- Lytton Market (2 visits)
- Barriere Market
- Logan Lake Craft Fair
- Barriere Block Party
- Sun Peaks Market (3 visits)
- Clearwater Info Centre (2 visits)
- Desert Daze Fest in Spences Bridge
- Teddy Bear picnic Barriere
- Lytton Family Fun day
- Pinantan Lake Country Fair
- Barriere fall fair (3 days)
- Ashcroft Fall Fair
- Cache Creek River Day
- Merritt Canada Day
- Clearwater Market (2 visits)
- Logan Lake Day



Figure 5. WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Mandy Ross, with the market display, Merritt Spring Garden Festival, 2016.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

This year “BC Goes Wild” was rolled out across the province. Hikes, talks and public displays were organized to celebrate keeping wildlife wild in BC. In the TNRD two hikes were lead by the Community Coordinator over the weekend. On Saturday, the hike was in Sun Peaks and was joined by the Sun Peaks Scouts, Kamloops NatureKids and other locals. We went for a “bear hike” looking for signs of bear activity along the way, such as scat, scratches, overturned rocks and bear foods. The kids completed a nature scavenger hunt on the return trail, which proved very popular. The scavenger hunt involved collecting small pieces of plants and rock, and drawing evidence of bear activity. On the rainy Sunday, the hike was in Merritt. This time the Merritt Beavers joined in for the hike and nature scavenger hunt. The cold and rain made it a bit of a challenge, but fun was had all around.

Bear-Resistant Bin Loan Program

This year WildSafeBC continued the Merritt Bear-Resistant Bin Loan Program. The TNRD purchased smaller sized bins this year, to match with the existing bins used by most residents. The program was popular with Merritt residents again, but this year people were reporting fewer bear sightings so the program was less busy. The program offered a loan period of about six weeks with the option to purchase the bins at the end and some residents took that option.

Media

The WildSafeBC TNRD Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering over 9,000 page views and 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. Q101 ran radio ads throughout the bear season and the WCC regularly heard from people who had heard the recordings.



Figure 6. Children get up close with the black bear pelt at Lytton Farmers Market, 2016.

Challenges of the 2016 Season

Unsecured garbage and fruit trees continued to be the biggest attractants of the 2016 season. A slower start to the bear season may have allowed people to believe that attractant management was no longer a concern. Door-to-door canvassing and garbage tagging helped to remind people to lock up attractants.

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This year bear activity reports were quiet throughout the summer, at least in the public perception. This can lead to complacency in terms of attractant management, so increased door-to-door visits, radio reminders and garbage tagging may be in order for 2017

The WCC had many requests for increased education for tourists and short term rentals in Sun Peaks this year. Efforts were made to get this started, with the beginning of the Bear Smart Committee and this will need to continue in future years.



Figure 7. WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Mandy Ross, giving an electric fencing demonstration in Monte Creek, 2016.

Goals for 2017

Looking forward to the 2016 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant ~~issues~~.

- Continue the Merritt Bear-Resistant Bin program.
- Make WildSafeBC an integral part of the TNRD. Expand the reach of WildSafeBC messaging through use of social media, traditional media and increased community events and informative workshops.
- Increase TNRD's resident's use of WARP as an educational tool.
- Expand our program's presence in Logan Lake and other smaller communities.
- Continue work with Sun Peaks to implement the Bear Smart Community Status.



Figure 8. Children enjoy the new Jr Ranger Colouring Book, Logan Lake Day, 2016.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Thompson-Nicola Regional District, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program and activities.

I would also like to acknowledge the various media outlets that ran stories to help spread the WildSafeBC message. These include the Clearwater Times, the Merritt Herald, the Barriere Star Journal and Q101.1 Merritt.

Special thanks to Adriana Mailloux, Cassie Enns, Denise Roberts and Jamie Vieira of the TNRD; Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program; and Jen Bellhouse, Shelley Nohels, Trina Radford and David Feller of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the WSBC Volunteer, Andrew Corks.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties. Let's keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!

