

# WildSafeBC 2016 Annual Report

## District of Vanderhoof

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Ministry of  
Environment

## Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program has been working to reduce human-wildlife conflict in BC through education, cooperation and innovation since 1999. This was the inaugural season of WildSafeBC in the District of Vanderhoof and the program was well received by local residents. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) focused on introducing the program through educational displays at community events, classroom presentations and evening garbage tagging inspections.

The Vanderhoof area has a variety of both natural and unnatural wildlife attractants that draw wildlife into town. Lush green spaces throughout the community offer a bounty of feeding opportunities year round and the riparian area along the Nechako River acts as a wildlife corridor through town. Unfortunately, unnatural attractants like garbage, bird feeders, and domestic fruit are leading to preventable human-wildlife conflict every year. This year alone, there were 70 calls to the Conservation Officer hotline reporting wildlife sightings and conflicts. The most common wildlife species reported were black bears, followed by cougars, deer and grizzly bears.

WildSafeBC focuses on identifying the root causes of human-wildlife conflict (unnatural food) and working with the community to manage these attractants to reduce preventable conflicts and to keep the community safe.

The introduction of the WildSafeBC program to Vanderhoof could not have come at a better time. The tremendous community support has been encouraging to the WCC who looks forward to the continued success of the program.

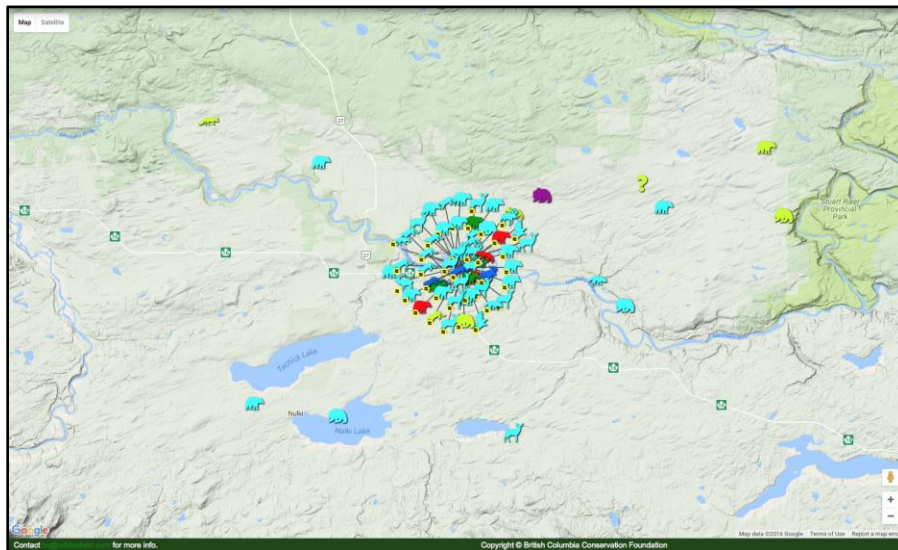


Figure 1 A screenshot of the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map, showing all wildlife sightings and conflicts reported to the Conservation Officer hotline in 2016. Available from [www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

## Table of Contents

<b>Executive Summary.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Highlights of the 2016 Season .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Educational Displays.....	3
Presentations.....	4
Media .....	4
Garbage Tagging.....	4
<b>Challenges of the 2016 Season .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Goals for the 2017 Season .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Acknowledgments .....</b>	<b>7</b>

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 A screenshot of the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) map, showing all wildlife sightings and conflicts reported to the Conservation Officer hotline in 2016. Available from <a href="http://www.wildsafebc.com">www.wildsafebc.com</a> .....	1
Figure 2 WildSafeBC Vanderhoof display at the Recreation and Leisure Fair, 2016.....	3
Figure 3 WCC, Leanna Chaisson introducing the BC Goes Wild Weekend Events to a group of local families, 2016.....	5
Figure 4 Figure 4 A sample 'Bear in Area' sign that could be utilized throughout Vanderhoof in 2017.....	6

## Highlights of the 2016 Season

### Educational Displays

Community events offered a great opportunity for WildSafeBC to reach out to the public through the 2016 season. The WildSafeBC display always drew a crowd and was well received by all ages (Figure 2). These displays offered a platform for casual conversations around wildlife issues and creative solutions to attractant management challenges. Residents were able to access tips for storing garbage securely and managing other backyard attractants like birdfeeders. The WCC also has a great collection of wildlife skulls for visitors to check out and a variety of brochures, bookmarks and other educational materials to take away.

The WCC set up displays at the following events:

- Canada Day Celebrations
- Vanderhoof Farmer's Market
- Vanderhoof Recreation and Leisure Fair
- BC Goes Wild Weekend in Ferland Park



Figure 2 WildSafeBC Vanderhoof display at the Recreation and Leisure Fair, 2016.

### Presentations

Understanding the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour helps residents to understand and prevent human-wildlife conflict. This season, the WCC focused on school-aged audiences, giving classroom presentations to nine classes. As a result, there are many enthusiastic WildSafeBC “Junior Rangers” in Vanderhoof eager to “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

### Media

The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Facebook page has provided an opportunity to share updates on the program to keep the community engaged. The hope is that this page will become a well-known platform for community discussions around wildlife issues and a well-used resource for accessing attractant management tips. This season, the WCC was able to use this page to post details about community events and to share some interesting posts about wildlife in BC.

### Garbage Tagging

Garbage should be kept securely stored until the morning of collection to avoid human-bear conflict. The WCC conducted garbage tagging inspections in the evenings before collection day to check for garbage placed on the curb too early. Garbage cans found on the curb were ‘tagged’ with a yellow warning sticker, encouraging residents to keep garbage securely stored until collection day. The WCC noticed a decrease in the number of garbage bins placed on the curb every time these inspections were conducted through the Fall.

Residents in Vanderhoof are fortunate to have a well-organized waste transfer station in town where garbage can conveniently be dropped off between collection days and yard waste can be composted. Many people take full advantage of this and drop off their garbage as soon as they fill a bag, avoiding the attractant issues that arise when garbage is stored outside.

### BC Goes Wild

As part of the first annual “BC Goes Wild” Weekend, the WCC hosted a Wildlife Scavenger Hunt at Ferland Park in Vanderhoof for local families (Figure 3). Participants learned all about wildlife attractants and some of the easy ways to reduce human-wildlife conflict in our backyards. After a fun-filled Scavenger Hunt, the WCC held an animal track casting workshop and all participants were able to take home an animal track as a reminder to stay observant while in the great outdoors.



Figure 3 WCC, Leanna Chaisson introducing the BC Goes Wild Weekend Events to a group of local families, 2016

## Challenges of the 2016 Season

The WCC received several calls from residents concerned about unpicked fruit trees. In years with a high yield of domestic fruit, tree owners can get overwhelmed with the sheer volume of fruit to process. Unpicked fruit can lead to conflict with many wildlife species, including bears. A fruit gleaning group could be an effective way of dealing with excess fruit to ensure the resource goes to local families and not bears.

The WCC noticed that many residents put their garbage bags on the curb without any sort of bin or receptacle, increasing the potential for conflict with wildlife. Certainly, the presence of unprotected garbage bags on the streets led to many instances of wildlife spreading the contents all over the streets. Fortunately, the District of Vanderhoof will be introducing a new garbage collection system with standard wheeled carts to accommodate automated collection. These carts will help keep crows, ravens and small animals out of the garbage on collection day, but will still need to be stored securely between collection days to avoid access by bears.

## Goals for the 2017 Season

- Provide more opportunities for local families with young children to get involved. Engage local children in the WildSafeBC Junior Ranger program.
- Increase door to door educational efforts in neighbourhoods experiencing human-wildlife conflict.
- Support community efforts to implement a fruit gleaning program, where volunteers can help pick excess domestic fruit, providing food for families and reducing a significant wildlife attractant issue at the same time. Connect farmers with residents with excess, unwanted fruit for livestock feed.
- Utilize “Bear in Area” signs to let people know when bears are frequenting certain neighbourhoods or recreational areas (Figure 4).
- Work with Bylaw Officer and the local animal control facility to address the feral cat issue in downtown Vanderhoof. These cats may attract predators into the community.
- Explore options for expanding the WildSafeBC program outside of the District of Vanderhoof to reach a wider audience in the area.



Figure 4 A sample 'Bear in Area' sign that could be utilized throughout Vanderhoof in 2017.

## Acknowledgments

The WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program would not be possible without the support from the District of Vanderhoof, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) and the BC Ministry of Environment.

The WCC is grateful to the residents of Vanderhoof for the tremendous support in this, the inaugural season of the WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program. Thank you to all residents who have made an effort to manage backyard attractants and to reduce human-wildlife conflict in our community. Thank you to the local businesses for your support and generous donations.

Most importantly thank you to the District of Vanderhoof for recognizing the need to reduce human-wildlife conflict in our community and for supporting WildSafeBC's efforts to "keep wildlife wild and communities safe".



British Columbia Conservation Foundation