
WILDSAFEBC VERNON ANNUAL REPORT 2016

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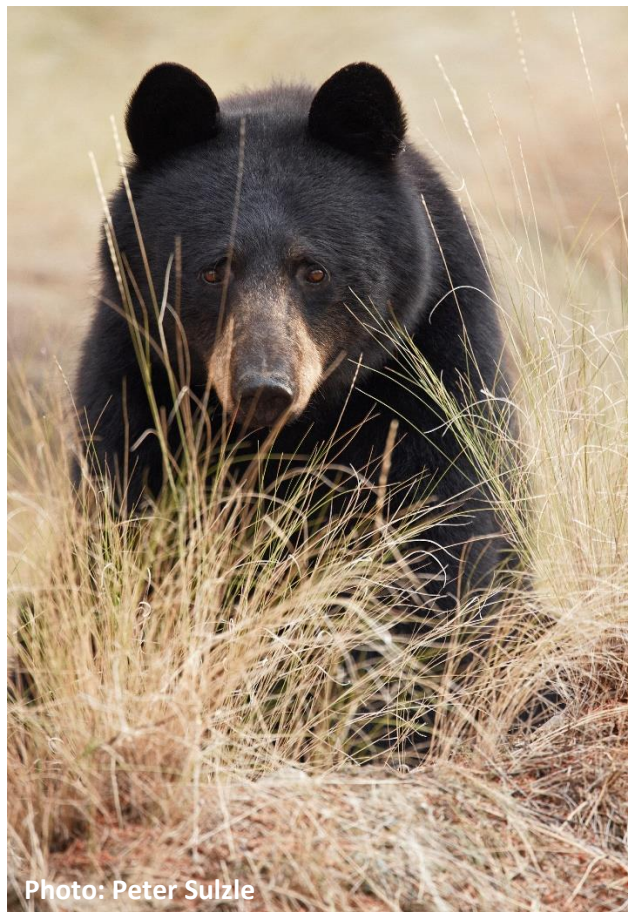


Photo: Peter Sulzle



Executive Summary

After a busy spring, it was a slow summer for bear conflicts in Vernon. Despite the lack of bear activity, the WildSafeBC ambassador, Tessa Coulthard, was active in the community, informing residents about different species and how to reduce human-wildlife conflict in their neighbourhoods. Cougars, coyotes, deer, and rattlesnakes were also reported to be in conflict with Vernon residents this summer. Black bears remain as the species with the most reports of human-wildlife conflict. The WildSafeBC ambassador used door-to-door canvassing, garbage tagging, and social media in addition to presenting at community events, elementary school classrooms, and kids' camps to deliver the message of "keeping wildlife wild and communities safe". Attendance at the Vernon Farmer's Markets and articles in the Vernon Morning Star also helped promote the WildSafeBC program in the community.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Ambassador, Tessa Coulthard, at the annual Vernon Canada Day Festival, 2016.

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Highlights from 2016 Season

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

During the 2016 season, the WildSafeBC Ambassador visited 398 homes in Vernon neighbourhoods that had experienced human-bear conflict within the last two years. Many of these homes had been visited by the Ambassador previously during the 2015 season. Going door to door offered the opportunity to discuss proper wildlife attractant management with residents, as well as letting residents know of any recent reports of black bear or cougar in the area. It also provided the opportunity to reinforce the message that had been delivered in the 2015 season. After going door to door in the daytime, the WildSafeBC Ambassador returned to the neighbourhoods the night before garbage collection to place “bear attractant warning” stickers on any garbage cans that had been placed curbside early. Garbage tagging efforts were conducted nine times, with over 90 garbage cans being tagged this summer by the ambassador and her volunteers. Due to the minimal bear activity during June and July, fewer neighbourhoods experienced garbage related bear conflict than in the 2015 season.

Media

WildSafeBC was very well supported by the local media this season. The Vernon Morning Star newspaper printed an article about the program with a picture taken in a Vernon neighbourhood of a black bear eating garbage, which was an excellent way to bring the issue of improper attractant management to the public’s attention. Another article was printed by the Vernon Morning Star at the end of the WildSafeBC season to remind residents to continue managing their wildlife attractants appropriately throughout the late summer and fall. The WildSafeBC Vernon Facebook page was also frequently updated throughout the season, and gained 28 new “likes” this season.

Kids’ Presentations

The WildSafeBC Vernon ambassador presented to five classrooms at two elementary schools in June, as well as a kids’ camp run by the City of Vernon in July. These presentations involved information about the different wildlife species found in British Columbia, wildlife safety, and even attractant management at home. The presentations were accompanied by a story about wildlife, a question-answer period, and lots of wildlife tattoos and bookmarks at the end. Presenting to the little kids was one of the most fun and most rewarding experiences as the WildSafeBC ambassador.



Figure 2. WildSafeBC presents at City of Vernon's minicamps, 2016.

Events and Farmer's Markets

WildSafeBC attended three of the local farmer's markets, the Vernon Sunshine Festival, the Vernon Canada Day Festival, and the Vernon Downtown Night Market during the 2016 season. The events offered great opportunities for conversation with a variety of people, and the ambassador was able to provide information on species and advice about attractant management challenges to many concerned residents. These events were also an excellent way to talk to kids about wildlife, with lots of tattoos, brochures, and bookmarks being given out to children of all ages. Many people at these events recognized the WildSafeBC logo and name from last year, as well as from the article in the local newspaper, and from our door-to-door canvassing.



Figure 3. WildSafeBC presents at the annual Vernon Sunshine Festival, 2016.

Challenges from 2016 Season

While the WildSafeBC program had a very successful season, a few challenges were encountered along the way. Expanding the reach of the Facebook page proved to be a little challenging, as there was not much extra funding to “boost” the page’s likes. Another challenge was informing and encouraging residents to manage their attractants, even if they had not experienced bear activity that season. Many people were reluctant to make changes on their properties this summer because there was very little bear activity during June and July. The city boundaries were also challenging, with human-bear conflict often occurring just outside of the City of Vernon. Areas like Coldstream, the BX, and Armstrong experienced bear sightings and conflict, but were not included in the door-to-door and garbage tagging efforts.

Goals for the 2017 Season

Looking forward to 2017, WildSafeBC Vernon hopes to expand the territory covered by the ambassador or community coordinator to include greater Vernon, to better prepare the public in preventing human-wildlife conflicts. This was a goal for the program last year as well, and should be pursued over the next few seasons. In addition to expanding the program to encompass more of the North Okanagan, the following points would also greatly benefit the program in Vernon next season.

- Maintain connections with the RDNO, City of Vernon, and Conservation Officer Service.
- Attend all major events and festivals.
- Present to at least 3 classrooms at two different elementary schools.
- Be proactive in pursuing bear smart community status.
- Work to put in place a bylaw that prohibits the placement of garbage on the curb before 4am on the morning of collection.
- Acquire more supplies for presentations at farmer's markets and kids' camps.
- Increase number of followers on the local Facebook page.
- Organize a viewing of "Staying Safe in Bear Country" for the local naturalists club or mountain biking society



Acknowledgements

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