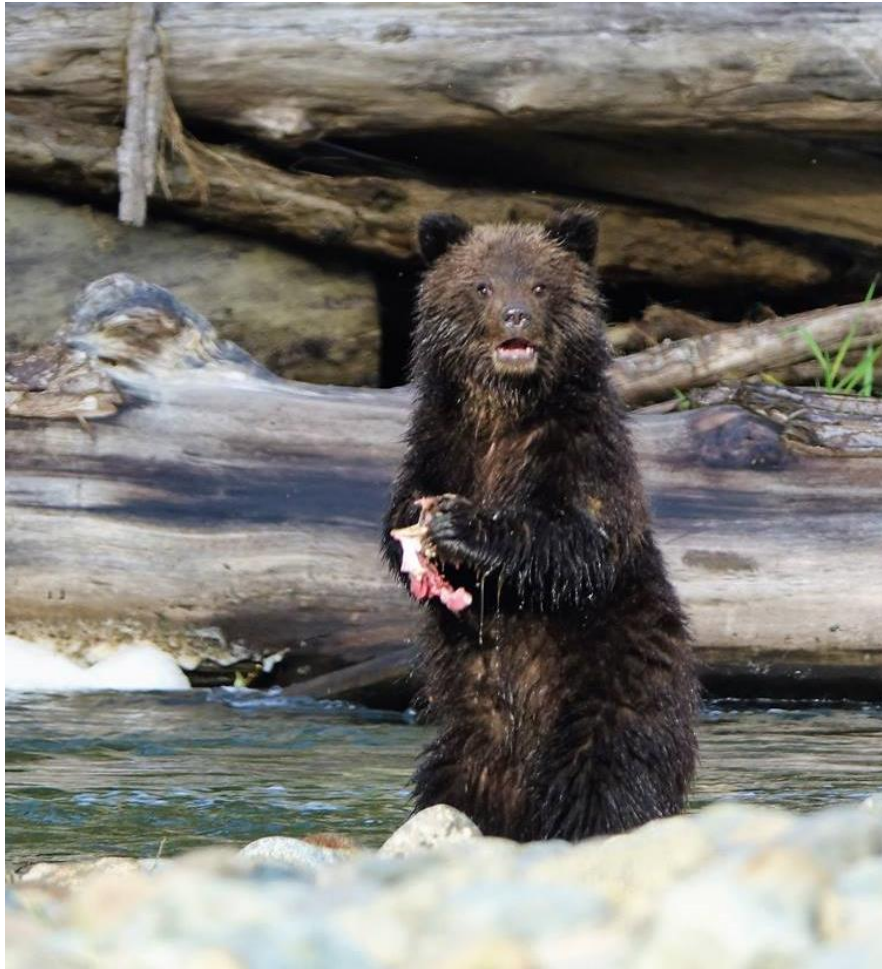


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Bella Coola Valley

Prepared by: Fraser Koroluk, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator



Ministry of
Environment



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The program was delivered to communities of the Bella Coola Valley in 2017 by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Fraser Koroluk, in cooperation with the Conservation Officers Service (COS), BC Parks and the Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department.

Similar to 2016, a relatively abundant chum salmon run in rivers of the lower Bella Coola Valley in early-mid summer, coupled with apparently above average pink salmon returns to the Bella Coola River watershed provided a variety of natural foods for bears in the Bella Coola region for most of the summer and fall. Similar to 2015 and 2016, between approximately May and August, however, with increases in pink salmon, there were few or no noted increases in negative human-bear interactions in the communities of Bella Coola Valley.

There were no reports of bears accessing poultry in 2017, compared to numerous complaints in previous years, which became a focus of local electric fencing of chicken coops since that time.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) continued to work closely with the local COS and visiting Conservation Officers from other regions. The Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee continued to meet in 2017 to move forward on initiatives of reducing human-bear conflict and increasing human safety in the community.

This annual report summarizes the activities, successes and challenges of the program in 2017. This report also provides recommendations for future Community Coordinator initiatives that stem from this year's experiences.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
The 2017 Season.....	3
Introduction	3
Highlights of the Program	3
Interaction & Involvement with Conservation Officer Service & BC Parks	3
Community Meetings	3
Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department.....	3
School Presentations:.....	4
Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews	4
Electric Fencing	4
Unwanted Fruit Removal	5
Challenges to the 2017 Program.....	5
Goals for the 2018 Program	6
Acknowledgements	6
Appendix: Photographs.....	7

The 2017 Season

Introduction

Bella Coola Valley is a low-to-moderately populated coastal valley including three unincorporated communities: Bella Coola, Hagensborg, and, Firvale. Residents are spread throughout these communities in low density with abundant wilderness and natural landscape between populated areas. Bella Coola Valley is within the Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) and Traditional First Nations territories, including the Nuxalk Nation. There are no incorporated towns within the CCRD, and therefore, there is little or no bylaw or municipal governance/enforcement within Bella Coola Valley. The nearest permanently staffed COS office is In Williams Lake, approximately 450 kilometers east. BC Parks staff include a Deputy Conservation Officer, living locally in the community. Grizzly bears, black bears and cougars are the predominant wildlife that are considered concerns to humans within the Bella Coola Valley. Bella Coola does have a Human–Bear Safety Committee consisting of a variety of governing and resource agencies to deal with human-wildlife conflict and safety, in particular, bear issues.

Highlights of the Program

Interaction & Involvement with Conservation Officer Service & BC Parks

WildSafeBC has continued to provide field support to COS members in aspects of attractant management, door-to-door *canvassing* and interviews with residents, electric fence installations and general community outreach. Owing to the unique nature of the COS/BC Parks interrelatedness in Bella Coola, the WCC has developed a strong working relationship with BC Parks staff as well as COS.

Community Meetings

Presentations and meetings were held with various community associations and government representatives/organizations in 2017. The focus of these meetings was predominantly wildlife deterrence related to grizzly bears. Meetings held during 2017 included:

- Bella Coola Valley Human-Bear Safety Committee, continued to work with founding agencies to review annual progress of activities and disseminate information to the community (including Ministry of Environment, COS, Ministry of Forests Land and Natural Resource Operations, Department of Fisheries, RCMP, and Nuxalk First Nation).
- Conservation Officer Service reviewed specific regional areas and properties to effect attractant management and promote and install electric fencing.

Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

In previous years a key component to delivery of WildSafeBC had been partnering with the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department to gain knowledge and share experience with various aspects of human-bear conflict within the First Nation community and residential areas.

This partnership has been ongoing since 2014 and 2017 projects included offering resources and material for electric fences, on request as needed, and, attractant management through Human-Bear Safety Committee involvement.

School Presentations:

School presentations were not undertaken in the 2017 season in Bella Coola.

Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews

The WCC visited numerous properties throughout Bella Coola Valley to discuss site-specific attractant management strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Visits included: private residences, commercial campgrounds, and, agricultural holdings/farms.

Where wildlife attractants were observed, the WCC provided management solutions including complete attractant removal, attractant management (e.g. fruit picking), or electric fencing.

In a few instances the WCC responded to requests from the COS to review attractants at properties owing to calls received on the RAPP line regarding grizzly and black bears.

Electric Fencing

Electric fence materials and supplies owned by WildSafeBC were again loaned to community members as needed in 2017. Materials available included four portable electric fence kits, 15 additional fence chargers and numerous fence stakes and appropriate fence wire.

In 2017 temporary electric fences and/or fence components were deployed at a total of 23 locations, including:

- 1 storage shed or workshops containing attractants;
- 2 re-installed chargers on an existing chicken coop;
- 14 fruit trees/orchards;
- 1 apiary;
- 2 mixed orchard/garden areas; and
- 2 residential vegetable gardens.

In addition to these temporary or ongoing seasonal fence installations, the WCC offered support through loaning materials which were then replaced by the land owner at one location. As well, WCC assisted with maintenance of existing fences installed in 2014 through 2017 (approximately four permanent orchard and chicken coup installations from 2014 through 2016).

Seven new chargers, various wire and insulators and miscellaneous fence equipment were purchased with project funds in 2017 to replace and bolster the inventory supply of fence material available for loan within the program. A local merchant has agreed to be a supplier of

appropriate electric fence materials, ensuring locally available components for WildSafeBC and community members.

Staff from a local Bear Viewing Tourism Operation also helped to set up fences and donated time to assist with fence construction and remote camera monitoring of animals near attractants at some sites.

Unwanted Fruit Removal

The WCC opportunistically assisted with removal of unwanted fruit or fruit trees to assist attractant management by landowners, including working with the COS as required.

Challenges to the 2017 Program

The primary challenge to the WildSafeBC program is the limited regional governance and their lack of availability to support the WildSafeBC program. There remains some confusion of the citizens' responsibility under the *BC Wildlife Act* regarding attractants on private property, including areas of Nuxalk Nation administration on the Town site and Four Mile Subdivision, and as there are no established bylaws, nor is there bylaw enforcement within the CCRD, there is little past experience with residents regarding rural wildlife conflict and responsibilities typical of an established community elsewhere in BC.

Other challenges included long-established orchards and gardens that have fallen partially into decay and may not be harvested promptly or at all, providing well established and known food sources for multiple generations of bears, making the habit of accessing these attractants by bears very difficult to break.

Funding of the program remains the largest single challenge, and it appears the CCRD has no ability or interest to assist in program funding, which will require alternate and creative funding sources in the future. Funding to get the 2017 program initially came from two private donations, from local Bear Viewing Tourism operators. An anonymous donation was also made late in the season in 2017; however, ongoing funding remains uncertain.

Goals for the 2018 Program

The following is a list of recommendations for WildSafeBC initiatives within Bella Coola Valley for future years:

- Strengthen the established partnership with Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department to achieve buy-in from all valley residents regarding WildSafeBC program initiatives.
- Expand rural landowner knowledge of bear attractants and responsibility to manage attractants.
- Continue to distribute and help establish accessible (inexpensive) electric fence materials for smokehouses, fruit trees, poultry, and other proven attractants.
- Increase interest and understanding of importance to report wildlife conflicts to the RAPP line.
- Use project funds to purchase electric fence components not readily available in our isolated community (e.g., insulators, specific fence components, etc.).
- Continue with predator fencing workshops and/or bear spray training days. Many people are interested in workshops, but do not want to commit in advance to attending.
- Partner with Nuxalk Nation on a joint-presentation at their proposed (2018) Bear-Day activity.
- Continue discussions of the use of warnings or fines for repeated bear-attractant offenders with COS, and address concerns that may arise.
- Continue with school visits.
- Participate in more radio dialogue/interviews.
- Continue participation by WCC in the Human-Bear Safety committee.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, I would like to thank the Ministry of Environment COS Branch, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program in Bella Coola. As Tweedsmuir Park Lodge and Kynoch Adventures supplied critical seed money and initiative to get the program started in 2017.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the COS and BC Parks (Hagensborg Field Office) for assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing allowing WildSafeBC to provide electric fence components to interested local landowners. As well all volunteers that helped where they could on various projects in Bella Coola.

Special thanks to all members of the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee for ongoing dialogue, in particular with the Nuxalk Stewardship Department, for their ongoing support to these objectives. Also Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for continued support in Bella Coola and all staff of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Appendix: Photographs



Photo 1: Temporary seasonal electric fence around berries and fruit trees (plastic Stakes)



Photo 2: Semi-permanent electric fence around orchard.



Photo 3: WildSafeBC volunteers placing game cameras.



Photo 4: Grizzly sow and cub feeding on wild salmon of the local rivers.