



WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Castlegar and Area

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Executive Summary

The 2017 season kicked off with unusually high levels of human-bear conflict throughout the province in the spring followed by a comparatively quiet summer and fall. Human-bear activity in the Castlegar area followed a similar trend, with the peak of bear conflicts occurring in May and overall conflicts being down compared to previous years (Figure 1). Despite the hot, dry weather, many natural bear foods persisted at high elevations into the fall, which may have contributed to the lower level of conflict in town later in the season.

Despite significant steps towards reducing the availability of wildlife attractants within city limits in recent years, the mismanagement of residential attractants like garbage, birdseed, composts and livestock continue to create human-wildlife conflict throughout the program area. While human-black bear conflict remained the most significant wildlife issue in the area, numerous sightings and conflicts with grizzlies, cougars, coyotes, and elk were also reported.

This season was staffed a bit differently than in a regular year as the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) was on maternity leave at the start of the contract. Fortunately, we had a great WildSafeBC Ambassador (WA) fill in from June until the WCC's return in September. WildSafeBC worked to reduce human-wildlife conflict through education and collaboration, spreading the message of responsible attractant management to a wide audience throughout the program area.

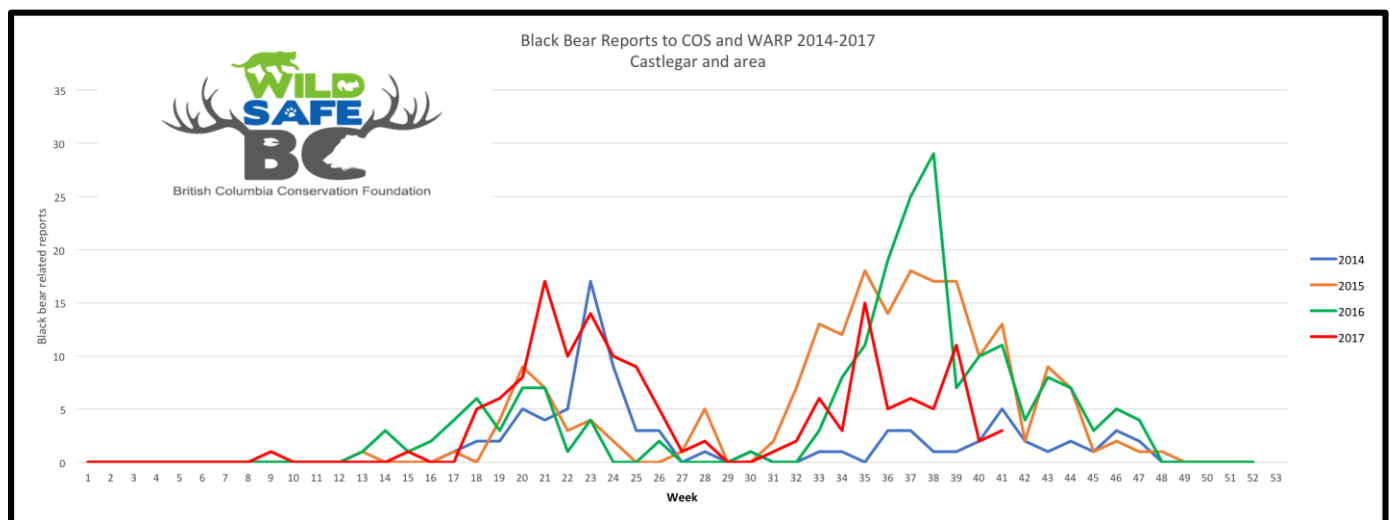


Figure 1: Reported black bear sightings for Castlegar by week from January 1 2014 to October 14 2017

*Includes reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP).

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Highlights from the 2017 Season

While the WildSafeBC program had a much later start than usual this season (June instead of April), Canada Summer Jobs funding provided the WA with full time hours during the summer months (the WCC's typical contract is part-time from April-November). This meant that the WA was able to spend many more hours canvassing neighbourhoods experiencing conflict and finding new creative ways to reach the community with proactive messaging during the relatively quiet summer months.

Progress towards Bear Smart Status in Castlegar continued this season with the City replacing all remaining open public garbage cans with bear-resistant models. The WCC was also able to finalize the Castlegar Bear Hazard Assessment and Bear Conflict Management Plan, fulfilling the final Bear Smart criteria and allowing for the submission of our initial application.

Many residents throughout Castlegar and Areas I and J were extremely helpful in reporting wildlife sightings and conflicts and working to prevent conflict in their neighbourhoods this season. Since prevention truly is the only effective, long-term solution to human-wildlife conflict, the WA and WCC endeavoured to reach a wide audience through as many avenues as possible.



Figure 2: WCC Jenny Wallace (left), visits WA Alyssa Christianson's Kootenay Festival display

Presentations

WildSafeBC presentations were tailored for a wide range of audiences this season with topics ranging from wildlife safety to general attractant management tips. For younger audiences, the Junior Ranger program kept things entertaining while teaching kids about the root causes of human-wildlife conflict and what we can do to keep wildlife wild and our community safe. WildSafeBC Castlegar reached nearly 600 people through 38 separate presentations this season (Figure 2):

- Selkirk College International students (x 3)
- BC Goes Wild Weekend Safety Presentation
- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy Adult ESL Group
- Robson Community School – Gr. 5, 6/7
- Twin Rivers Elementary - Gr.7 (x 3), 5, 5/6 (x 3)
- Blueberry Creek Community School (StrongStart, Preschool, Daycare)
- Kinnaird Elementary – Gr. 4 (x 3), 2/3*
- RDCK Castlegar Summer Cool Camps (x 3)*
- Castlegar & District Public Library Summer Reading Club (x 8)*
- Kootenay Family Place*
- Kootenay Columbia Learning Centre
- Brilliant Cultural Center Preschool (x 2)

** indicates presentations delivered by the WildSafeBC Ambassador*



Figure 3: WildSafeBC presentations offer a hands-on experience with bear hides

Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

It only takes one house with improperly managed wildlife attractants to create issues for the whole neighbourhood. The WA and WCC targeted neighbourhoods experiencing human-wildlife conflict with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management. Thanks to the WA's full time contract, over 700 households were reached through door-to-door canvassing this summer. In partnership with the City of Castlegar Bylaw Officer, WildSafeBC also conducted 12 evening garbage inspections in each of the four collection areas within City Limits.

Bear in Area Signs

WildSafeBC's bright yellow "Bear in Area" signs are becoming an increasingly popular method for giving residents a heads up about local bear activity. As usual, the WA and WCC posted signs in response to specific wildlife conflict reports but also received many requests for signage from residents and from City staff.

Displays

Educational displays at local events were once again a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with the community (Figure 4). The introduction of "Wildlife Wednesday Jeopardy" at Zuckerberg Island in August provided a great opportunity to interact with both locals and tourists. WildSafeBC spent 13 days at the following local events:

- CBAL (Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy) Teddy Bear Picnic *
- COINS (Circle of Indigenous Nations Society) Aboriginal Day Celebration *
- Castlegar Craft and Farmers Market (2) *
- Kootenay Festival *
- Wildlife Wednesday Game Day at Zuckerberg Island (4)*
- Pass Creek Fall Fair (2)
- BC Goes Wild Weekend
- Selkirk College Orientation Day

** indicates displays attended by the WildSafeBC Ambassador*



Figure 4: WildSafeBC display at Pass Creek Fall Fair and WA Alyssa Christianson hosting 'Wildlife Jeopardy' at Zuckerberg Island

Bear Smart Community Progress

In the past three years, there has been incredible progress towards Bear Smart Status within the City of Castlegar. This season, the WCC focused on finalizing and submitting the Bear Hazard Assessment and Bear Conflict Management Plan in order to fulfil the last Bear Smart Criteria. Thanks to the increased enforcement of the Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, an updated Official Community Plan that reflects the importance of responsible attractant management, new bear-resistant public garbage cans and a bear-resistant solid waste management system, there has been a significant reduction of accessible wildlife attractants in the community.

The application for Bear Smart Status has been submitted and is currently under review by the Ministry of Environment. An ongoing commitment to reducing human-bear conflict in the City is essential to the success of the application.

West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group

The WCC continues to sit on this collaborative working group, made up of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets biannually to identify and implement solutions to local human-bear conflicts.

Media

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page was updated weekly throughout the season, garnering close to 115,000 page views and providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC's messaging to a wide audience through publishing articles in local papers, playing radio interviews with the WA and WCC and sharing information through social media.

Challenges of the 2017 Season

Despite every household within City limits having a bear-resistant cart for household garbage, there were still issues with residents leaving their carts unlocked between collection days and putting their unlocked carts on the curb the evening before collection. Continued education focusing on secure garbage storage practices and increased enforcement of the Wildlife Attractant Bylaw will be necessary to ensure the success of this great new Solid Waste Management system.

In RDCK Areas I and J, garbage that was improperly stored between collection days or dump runs resulted in significant human-wildlife conflicts. A recurring challenge is the lack of bylaws regulating the management of wildlife attractants in the Regional District. Without a Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, there are limited consequences for residents that continually leave attractants accessible to wildlife outside of City limits.

Finally, WildSafeBC is typically inactive from December-April despite the fact that wildlife species such as coyotes, cougars and deer are active year-round. An extended contract that allowed for some 'off-season' hours would ensure timely advice and information for residents struggling with wildlife issues in the winter months.

Goals for 2018

Looking forward to the 2018 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues.

- Achieve Bear Smart Community Status for the City of Castlegar
- Form a community working group that builds upon existing partnerships and involves residents in finding solutions to local wildlife issues within the City of Castlegar as well as Areas I and J
- Collaborate with community groups to increase local capacity for fruit gleaning projects
- Focus education efforts on the proper usage of bear-resistant garbage carts
- Encourage local businesses to manage commercial attractants like grease barrels and dumpsters

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Castlegar is grateful for the generous support the program receives from our sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the City of Castlegar, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Canada Summer Jobs and the BC Ministry of Environment.

Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: the local Conservation Officer Service; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the members of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group; the great staff at City Hall; Mayor Chernoff and City of Castlegar Councillors; WSBC Volunteers (Scott Cox, Michelle Matson); Frank Ritcey and the always-supportive staff at BCCF; and the fantastic WSBC Ambassadors and Coordinators across the province.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.

