

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

District of Invermere

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) worked closely with the District of Invermere (DOI) this season, particularly regarding municipal waste collection and storage, and fruit trees. Further steps were taken towards Bear Smart status in the community, including a pilot project at Westside Park in order to gauge the success of communal bins as an alternative to curbside pickup. The transfer station received new signage, and all District-contracted bins were replaced with bear-resistant containers.

The Conservation Officer Service (COS) was very supportive again in its efforts to aid WildSafeBC with several successful events and neighborhood visits. Despite the many efforts on behalf of the WCC, DOI and COS, four bears were destroyed within Invermere's boundaries this season. The first three were black bears in CastleRock, which were habituated and food-conditioned. A dumpster with a plastic lid, garbage left outside of dumpsters, as well as birdfeeders and compost in the area attracted the bears which were then considered a safety issue. The last was a black bear frequenting Wilder and Fort Point neighborhoods in September, during the day, and accessing garbage and fruit. Overall there were 57 reports of black bears and three reports of grizzly bears in the Invermere area this season.

Besides the heightened human-bear conflict in May and September, there were 31 deer reports, three cougar reports, and one coyote report to the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP).



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Highlights from the 2017 Season

Cooperation with the Conservation Officer Service

The WCC worked closely with the COS this year, beginning with addressing attractant management in CastleRock. Three bears frequented the area in May, accessing garbage, barbeques, bird feeders, and compost. CO Greg Kruger and the WCC informed the public through door-to-door canvassing and “bear in area” signs. A live bear trap was set near the strata garbage bins, where three bears were ultimately destroyed. The WCC and COS worked together to address this issue in the media and in the community.

Throughout the summer and fall, the COS supported and attended events put on by WildSafeBC. CO Greg Kruger attended Bear Awareness Day and gave a bear trap demonstration and presentation on attractant management. Both CO’s attended the BC Goes Wild Bare Camping and Bear Spray demonstration event, to show their support.

Starting in August and progressing into September, fruit trees became a significant attractant in Invermere. A brown-phased black bear began frequenting the Wilder subdivision, consuming fruit that had fallen on the ground. The CO’s accompanied the WCC on two occasions to speak with homeowners who had obvious fruit trees in the Wilder subdivision. The bear moved on to Fort Point, where it began accessing garbage and more fruit. The bear was seen frequenting the area during the day and no longer displayed fear toward humans. This bear was destroyed in Fort Point in September, and the COS spoke with residents in the area about the importance of managing garbage and fruit.

In addition to supporting the WildSafeBC program, CO Sergeant Andrew Milne introduced the concept of a working group between communities in the Columbia Valley, and organized a preliminary meeting to discuss goals and priorities. Once again, the COS was a huge support to the WildSafeBC program and the reduction of human-wildlife conflict in Invermere.

Cooperation with Bylaw Services

The WCC worked closely with Invermere bylaw officer Mark Topliff to address residents storing garbage outside, garbage accessed by wildlife on pickup day, as well as informing residents about removing ripe fruit and birdfeeders. The bylaw officer was also involved in notifying residents in CastleRock about the three bears frequenting the area and the importance of managing attractants.

The bylaw officer accompanied the WCC on an audit of the Westside Park community in September, where a pilot project was occurring to consider changing the waste system to three communal bins instead of curbside pickup. Several residents were reminded to store waste inside or in the bins, and to remove oils and antifreeze from their porch.

The bylaw officer issued 11 warnings as of the end of September this season to residents not storing garbage or other attractants properly, however no tickets were issued.

Door-to-door canvassing

The WCC visited many homes in Invermere this year, beginning with CastleRock in May with both the CO and bylaw officer as mentioned above. In August, September, and early October the WCC focused on the Wilder subdivision and Fort Point regarding fruit trees. Regular visits to Westside Park were undertaken regarding the pilot project and the importance of storing garbage where wildlife could not access it (i.e., in the bear-resistant bins provided).

Public Displays and Events

WildSafeBC Invermere was involved in several important events this season, including the newly created “Bear Awareness Day”, which brought together WildSafeBC, Wildsight, the COS, and the DOI. The event included a bear trap demonstration, an attractant management and bear spray deployment presentation from the WCC, a library reading about bears for kids, and several displays and activities put on by Wildsight Invermere.



Figure 1. Members of the Shuswap Indian Band participated in Bear Awareness Day, including Floyd Sam who recently received training for the WildSafeBC program.

Another new event was the Laird Environmental School Fair, where WildSafeBC set up a display and interacted with students.

Wildsight organizes a Wild Ideas Workshop every month, and WildSafeBC was invited to participate this summer, to break down the myths surrounding human-bear interactions. This included such myths as “bears don’t see very well”, “bears can’t run downhill”, and “grizzlies are more dangerous than black bears”. Several exchange students from Germany left with important information.

WildSafeBC was also part of Wings Over the Rockies again (Interpretive and Safety Walk) as well as BC Goes Wild (Bare Camping and Bear Spray Demonstration) and four Invermere Farmers Markets.



Figure 2. WCC Andrea Smillie giving a bear spray demonstration.



Figure 3. CO Greg Kruger giving a bear trap demonstration.

Presentations to School and Community Groups

The WCC gave presentations about wildlife safety and attractant management at the following venues this season:

- Seniors Lunch at the Legion
- CastleRock Community Association
- Immigrant Welcome Center
- JA Laird Middle School
- Eileen Madson Primary School (EMP)

Presentations are scheduled for all classes at EMP for October 2017, which will include information on entering a regional coloring contest with WildSafeBC in the Columbia Valley.

Fruit Tree Outreach and Education

Fruit trees were a primary focus this August, September and October, and the WCC worked with the DOI, COS, bylaw officer, and residents to remove as much of the attractant as possible. Fruit tree surveys were carried out on a weekly basis, and homes with obvious fruit trees were recorded, approached, and followed up with by the WCC. If the resident was not home, the WCC left a door hanger with information. Sometimes the WCC was able to call the homeowner using the DOI directory. This was extremely helpful, especially when the resident was a second

homeowner and didn't realize their fruit tree was a potential attractant, or were not around to receive the messaging.

Particular effort was made in the Wilder subdivision and in Fort Point, because of the bear frequenting the area. Addresses were recorded in order to reach the same residents regarding next season. Fort Point was identified by the bylaw officer as having the most residents storing garbage outside and not managing fruit trees. The DOI wrote a letter to Fort Point residents informing them of the bear destroyed in the area, and reminding them about the *Wildlife Act* and garbage bylaw.

Many residents did comply after receiving messaging from the WCC or the COS. The WCC followed up on the high volume of fruit (and high number of visits in the community) with a column in the Pioneer, addressing the issue and its importance, identifying the steps for managing a fruit tree, and asking residents to contact the WCC now to organize a management system for next year.



Figure 4. The brown-phased black bear that frequented Wilder and Fort Point, and was ultimately destroyed due to habituation

WildSafeBC in the Media

WildSafeBC Invermere interacted with local media in several ways, including:

- Radio Interviews (The Drive, Summit 107, CBC Radio West) regarding the bears destroyed at CastleRock and how to prevent this from happening in the future, and Bear Awareness Day.
- Columbia Valley Pioneer articles regarding the bears destroyed at CastleRock and Fort Point, promotion of the Wild Ideas workshop, and "the Future of Fruit trees" column.

- **Social Media** – Facebook posts were created on the May and September long weekends, reminding visitors and residents to use transfer station bins properly. These posts reached over 1000 people, many who hadn't heard of WildSafeBC before, and directed them to the website.

Prompts

Prompts are materials that remind people to act a certain way. WildSafeBC Invermere included several prompts in its programming this season to help residents manage their attractants.

These included:

- **Bear in Area signs:** these were put up in neighborhoods where bears were reported to either the COS or WARP. They notified residents that they should take extra caution, and were especially useful in areas where kids walk to school.
- **Garbage tagging:** this was undertaken again in 2017. Ten residential garbage surveys were conducted, covering the DOI boundary five times (half of Invermere was surveyed each time). Overall, there were 35 residences were recorded as having their garbage curbside the night before pickup.
- **Strata informational handouts:** strata managers received handouts from the DOI explaining the importance of attractant management and how to use the new bear-resistant bins correctly.
- **Bin Signage:** the DOI-contracted bins each have a new decal and the Transfer Station has large signs explaining the importance of keeping the lids closed properly on the bear-resistant dumpsters and the surrounding area clean.

Successes of 2017

1. Bear Smart steps were continued in 2017, which primarily focused on improving the waste management system in Invermere:

- **Westside Park Pilot Project:** The WCC worked with the DOI to create a pilot project at Westside Park that replaced curbside bins with communal dumpsters (still in progress). This was one of the main goals originally set out in the Human-Bear Conflict Management Plan. Because most residents in this neighborhood do not have garages, many of them store their waste outside in non-bear-resistant garbage containers. Offering this high-density neighborhood an alternative will hopefully help to mitigate human-bear conflict. To this point, there has been no human-bear conflict reported in the Westside Park community since the project began on September 15th.
- **Invermere Transfer Station:** Last season, garbage bins with plastic lids were attracting black bears into the industrial park and human-bear conflict was high. These bins were all replaced with bear-resistant ones in September 2016. Further improvements were made to the Invermere Transfer Station this season, where two 4 x 6 foot signs were installed next to the dumpsters indicating the importance of keeping the area free of garbage, and insuring that the lids were closed properly. The WCC did propose to electrify the transfer station as outlined by Grizzly Bear Solutions (Gillian Saunders) and Top Crop (Martin Davis), but that has not yet been undertaken.
- **DOI-contracted Bin Replacement:** Upon recommendation by the WCC, the DOI changed all dumpsters under their contract to bear-resistant ones (instead of bins with plastic lids). New decals were applied to all DOI bins (mostly at strata's) around town,

explaining the importance of closing the lid and keeping the surrounding area clean. It also gave directions to the transfer station in case the bin was full.

- **Apple Tree Removal:** The DOI Public Works department identified three apple trees on DOI property that no one was picking, and where apples were accumulating on the ground around the tree. These trees were removed by the town's arborist, with support from the COS, in order to remove the attractant but also to set a good example for residents in the community.

2. Cooperation with RDEK/Radium coordinator: It was extremely helpful to have two coordinators in the Columbia Valley this season instead of just one. In the past, the position has been undertaken by one person, but this year there were two coordinators. They worked together on events such as BC Goes Wild, created a region-wide coloring contest, and were able to work with the COS in creating the opportunity for a regional working group. This support network in the valley, including the Golden coordinator Sarah Osadetz and all her efforts and input to the program, allowed the Invermere program to learn from other communities and to connect with others. For example, WildSafeBC Golden held an electric fencing workshop which residents from Invermere were invited to attend. The program also worked with other organizations like Wildsight Invermere (Bear Awareness Day) and hopes to work with Groundswell in the future to address the abundance of unused fruit in town.



Figure 5. Columbia Valley WCC's Thea Rogers (Radium & RDEK) and Sarah Osadetz (Golden) and Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey

3. Positive presence in the community through events, displays, and workshops: The WCC received many phone calls this season regarding the four bears destroyed, and there was a lot of negative feeling surrounding this contentious issue. This negative feeling was countered by the positive presence that WildSafeBC has established in the community, through educational opportunities such as displays at the Farmers Market, interactive school presentations, workshops like Wild Ideas and Wings Over the Rockies, and events like Bear Awareness Day.

Challenges of the 2017 Season

1. **Waste Management:** Many CastleRock residents were very upset regarding the destruction of three bears in May, and contacted the DOI and WCC regularly regarding their concerns. Concerns included a dumpster with a plastic lid, having dumpsters accessible to the public (resulting in people dropping waste off beside full bins), and the overall destruction of wildlife. The month of May saw a spike in human-bear conflict reports, partly because of CastleRock and the high density of habituated bears. Regarding Westside Park, most of the residents were in favor of the pilot project, but there were some concerns regarding three dumpsters being placed in the community that were basically open to all members of the public (though signage explained otherwise). This may become a problem during summers and long weekends, and a long term plan should be established.

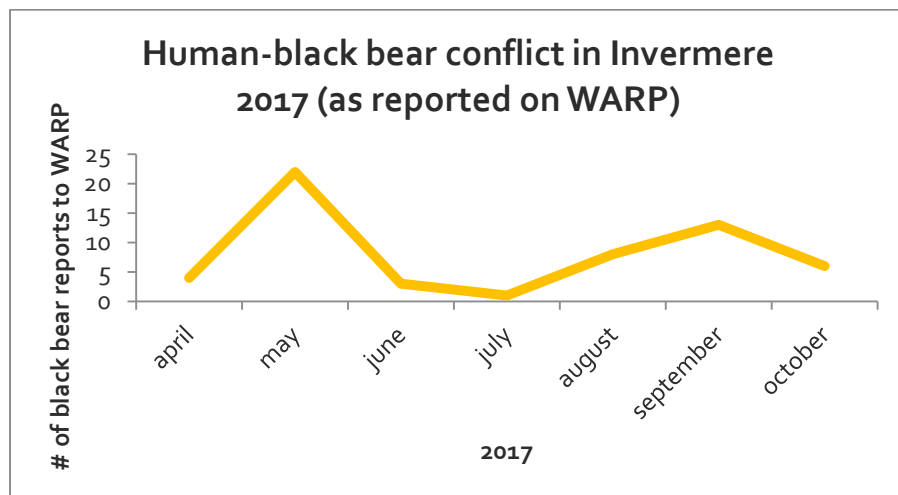


Figure 6. Human-bear conflict reports to WARP for the 2017 season

2. **Fruit trees:** it was an abundant apple season, with many residents dealing with (or not dealing with) high volumes of fruit. The WildSafeBC program mainly addressed apple trees, since it is a desired fruit and there were many reports of bears accessing apples in the Fort Point and Wilder neighborhoods. However, crabapple, pear, berry bushes, chokecherries, plums, and apricots were also abundant in the community. 63 homes were recorded as having obvious fruit trees. It was difficult to address this issue when there were few resources to help residents pick their fruit, although the “Columbia Valley Fruit Exchange” group on Facebook did help to an extent.

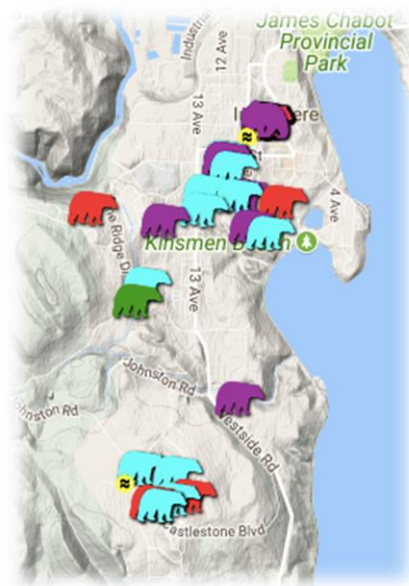


Figure 7. Black bear reports in Invermere in 2017



Figure 8. Misuse of bear-resistant bins at transfer stations and strata bins around Invermere

3. Difficulty reaching part-time homeowners: There have been ongoing challenges reaching part-time homeowners in Invermere, particularly regarding fruit trees. Door hangers were not as effective when a resident was gone for several weeks or more. Phone numbers provided by the DOI were often no longer in service. Mail reached residents sometimes, but there was usually no response. This allowed the WCC to come to the conclusion that programming must be planned well in advance; for example, contacting residents now who have obvious fruit trees and asking them to sign up with a volunteer if they are unable to pick their own fruit will help to improve communication in the future.

Goals for the 2018 Season

1. Continue waste management improvement: The CastleRock community is building a garbage building, which will help this particular neighborhood (which backs onto grizzly bear habitat) to manage their waste and will hopefully eliminate the piling of garbage around the easily-accessible bins on long weekends. A long-term plan is required for Westside Park regarding waste pickup and storage, as well as for the town of Invermere in general. The DOI is currently planning for curbside composting, which must be addressed from a human-wildlife conflict perspective. The type of bins used for pickup and a bylaw to manage this potential attractant should be included in the composting plan.

2. Continue Bear Smart Next Steps: In order to apply for and receive Bear Smart status, the DOI will need to update its garbage and wildlife attractant bylaws as drafted by the WCC. These updated bylaws will: a) allow the bylaw officer to enforce them more effectively, b) outline how compost should be stored and collected, and c) address commercial waste storage. A Wildlife Attractant Policy should also be written by the DOI in order to create a robust and consistent plan for issues such as new development in bear habitat, removal and planting of attractant trees, and other activities undertaken within DOI boundaries.

3. Pursue a regional working group: This concept which was proposed by CO Andrew Milne, who has undertaken such an effort in Whistler, would be a tremendous link for communities in the Columbia Valley which are experiencing similar issues. Solutions could be shared efficiently between community members and professionals.

4. Utilize CBEEN Leadership Clinic results: The community-based social marketing clinic that is held at the end of November 2017, which WildSafeBC is currently collecting data for, should provide the program with achievable goals that will address how to change behaviors surrounding the two greatest issues in Invermere: garbage and fruit. These outcomes and goals should be focused on in years to come.

6. Fruit Gleaning partnership with Groundswell: There are two components that should be focused on in the future regarding fruit in Invermere. The first is building a database for fruit tree owners and their contact information, and reaching out to these residents as early as possible. The second is building a relationship with Groundswell, which may include:

- Applying for or assisting Groundswell with a grant application for a community fruit press and picking supplies
- Creating a referral process for fruit tree owners and volunteers
- Creating educational opportunities surrounding fruit gleaning

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Invermere would like to acknowledge the ongoing support from its sponsors, including the Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the District of Invermere, and the BC Ministry of Environment.

Additionally, the following people have aided in the success of the program: COS: CO Greg Kruger, CO Andrew Milne, Mike Badry. BCCF: Frank Ritcy, Trina Radford, Shelley Nohels, Corinne Hutchinson, Mitchell Bymoen. DOI: Chris Prosser, Mark Topliff, Laura Moberg. Shuswap Indian Band: Floyd Sam. Wildsight Invermere: Baiba Morrow, Pat Morrow, Mandi McRobbie. CastleRock Community Association: Sue Kristiansen. Fairmont Community Association: Linda Pfeiffer. WildSafeBC Community Coordinators: Thea Rogers, Sarah Osadetz. Invermere Farmers Market: Bill Goodwin. Volunteers: Josy Avila, Ian Houghton, Jessie King.

Thank you!

WildSafeBC Invermere Addendum to Final Report 2017

Since mid-October, WildSafeBC Invermere has continued to be involved in the community in several ways. School presentations were continued at Eileen Madson Primary School; all classrooms received a presentation on wildlife safety and explored the school grounds in an attempt to “think like a bear”! Students were encouraged to find one food source, one water source, and potential shelter. Students participated with enthusiasm. During the school presentations, the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) encouraged participation in the regional coloring contest. Some classes handed in drawings right away and others discussed participating later in the month. All students in the Columbia Valley were welcomed to participate and a winner will be announced in the Columbia Valley Pioneer. Advertising for the contest other than communicating with teachers included the local paper and Facebook. Prizes were showcased and included a COS thermos, Peppi’s Pizza gift certificate and coloring materials.

The WCC attended a COS regional meeting on November 2nd and presented the annual report for Invermere. The COS Kootenay unit expressed their support and appreciation of the WildSafeBC program and asked if further support was needed in the region. The WCC acknowledged the widespread support from the COS and the work done by the two officers in the Invermere area. The potential for the COS supporting the WCC at a local Council meeting was suggested as an item for the future. The COS was also involved in an additional working group meeting on November 7th in Fairmont, which was attended by many regional stakeholders. Unfortunately, the WCC was the only participant from Invermere. Participation and attendance in this working group by the CAO and bylaw officer from Invermere, and other potential players, will be an excellent strategy for future conflict reduction in the community. The next meeting is scheduled for April 2018.

The WCC prepared a proposal to Groundswell Network Society (GNS) in hopes of establishing a collaborative partnership for the next fruit picking season. The proposal was sent to the WSBC Provincial Coordinator for review. GNS is currently re-strategizing so it may take some time to establish a program with the organization, but it should be a key focus starting in spring 2018.

Because WildSafeBC is participating in the Community Based Social Marketing Leadership Clinic through CBEEN this year, the WCC was involved with conducting community surveys about garbage storage and fruit tree management in the area. A display was set up at Sobeys and the WCC worked with a volunteer to collect 15 surveys for the Clinic. The WCC will attend the Clinic from Nov. 26th to 29th. Additional items since mid-October include one garbage tagging survey and a phone interview with Columbia Basin Trust to offer feedback on the WildSafeBC program in the Columbia Basin.