

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Sunshine Coast

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Photo credit: Scott McPherson



Ministry of
Environment



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities for the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program between May 1 and November 30, 2017, including highlights, challenges and recommendations for the future.

Most wildlife activity reported was related to black bears and cougars. This year, for the first time ever there were confirmed reports of grizzly bear on the Sunshine Coast.

WildSafeBC focuses efforts on public education and encouraging behavioural changes to reduce the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict. The main activities towards this goal were door-to-door visits in areas experiencing wildlife conflict, use of social media, tagging garbage bins placed out too early, display booths at community events, delivering the Junior Rangers program at summer day camps and in elementary schools.

The final month of the program experienced reduced efforts by the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Marina Stjepovic due other employment commitments.

Challenges were mainly related to unsecured garbage and unmanaged fruit trees attracting bears and other wildlife into neighbourhoods. A local mindset of helping wildlife by feeding them fruit and other human foods is another ongoing challenge.

Goals for 2018 are to continue the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program and to encourage local governments to assess the effectiveness of their bylaws and policies related to wildlife and human-wildlife conflict, and to deliver the Junior Rangers program to all local elementary schools.

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Highlights from the 2017 Season

The 2017 WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program was similar in scope to previous years. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCC) main focus was on public education through various outreach activities with the ultimate goal of encouraging behavioural changes to reduce the likelihood of human-wildlife conflict.

WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast continued to collaborate with various community organizations such as the One Straw Society's Fruit Tree Project, Chapman Hatchery, the Rod and Gun Club, Sunshine Coast Tourism, the Sunshine Coast Visitor Centres, schools in the School District No. 46, the Conservation Officer Service (COS), the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) Infrastructure Department, and bylaw officers from SCRD, Gibsons and Sechelt.



Figure 1. WCC Marina Stjepovic attends an event

Public Reports on Wildlife Activity

Statistics provided by the COS Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line regarding wildlife reports in the SCRD from January 1 to October 31, 2017 compared to the same time periods for 2014, 2015 and 2016 are as follows:

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Black Bear	259	304	214	300
Cougar	40	39	101	53
All Wildlife	398	434	418	408

The number of calls does reflect the amount of wildlife sightings and conflict, but also reflects public awareness and use of the RAPP line, as well as overall community efforts in managing wildlife attractants.

The WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) provides mapping of wildlife reports for the SCRD by species, conflict type and attractant type (Figure 2). The WARP program is publicly available on the WildSafeBC website and provides an alternative method of reporting wildlife sightings to the RAPP line. The WCC utilised WARP mapping results in public presentations to deliver statistical information regarding the trends in human-wildlife conflict in the SCRD.

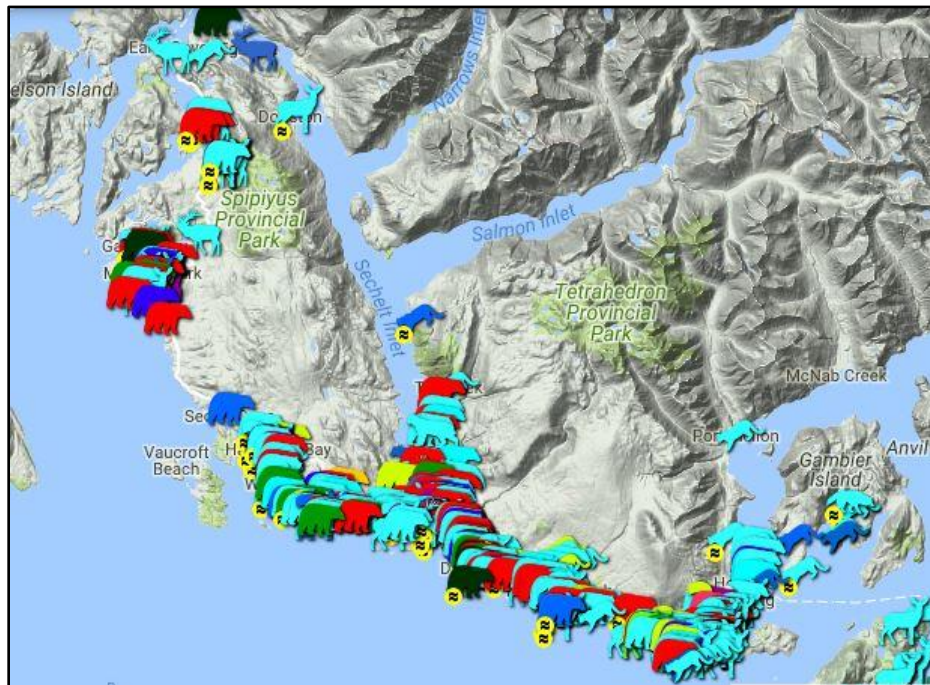


Figure 2. WARP reports for the SCRD January to October, 2017

The majority of reports related to black bear activity with the main attractants identified as garbage, fruit trees, bird feeds and outdoor fridges and freezers. Second to black bears were reports of cougar sightings, with the majority of these reports occurring in the southeastern Howe Sound area. Livestock and pests were indicated as common attractants for cougars; however the majority of cougar reports did not specify an attractant type.

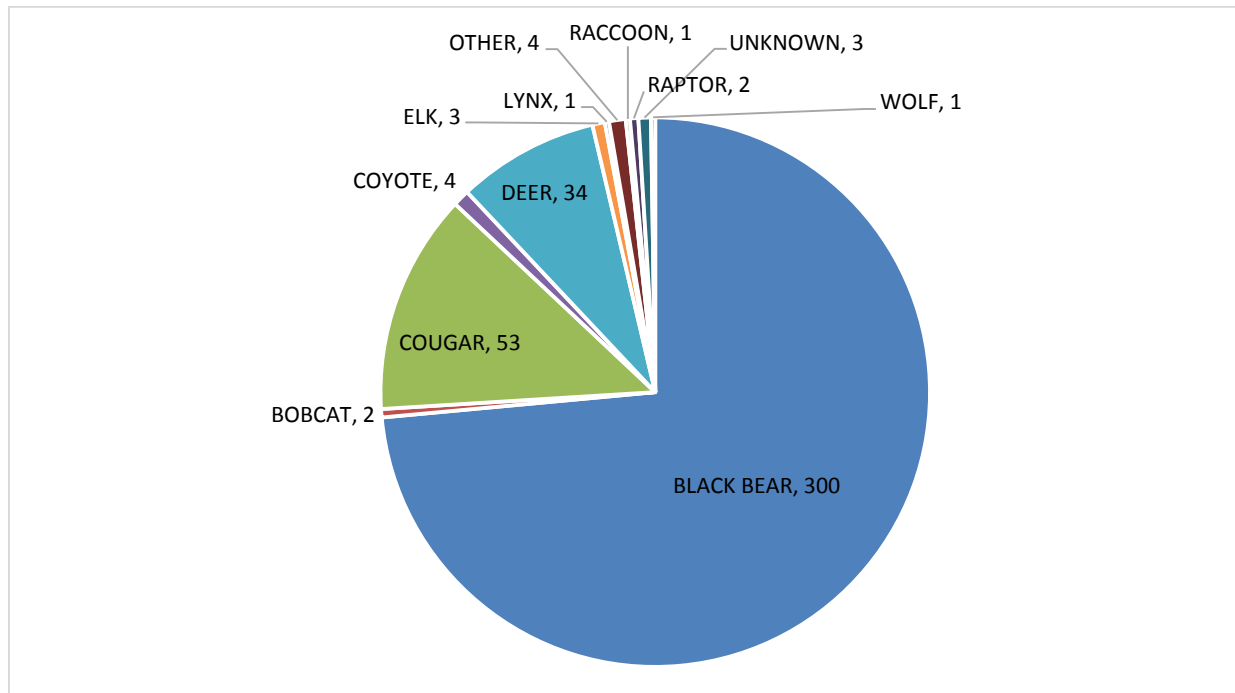


Figure 3. Wildlife reports for the SCR D January 1 to October 31, 2017

Workshops and Events

Electric Fencing Workshop

Local food production and food security is important to the Sunshine Coast community. On July 14 the WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey in collaboration with the WCC presented an electric fencing workshop to demonstrate the use of electric fencing in securing livestock and crops from wildlife. The event was attended by six private property owners, five of which are hobby farmers and one with a produce garden from Gibsons. The presentation focussed on the importance of adequate installation and maintenance requirements for effective electric fencing.



Figure 4. Electric fencing workshop

BC Goes Wild Weekend

The WildSafeBC program held its second annual BC Goes Wild Weekend (BCGWW) event on the third weekend in September. The BCGWW aims to bring attention to human-wildlife conflicts and celebrate the diversity of wildlife across the Province of BC. WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast hosted a “Bear Camping Stories” evening at Porpoise Bay Provincial Park for BCGWW. A total of twenty four people participated; including six children aged 4 – 12, campers at the Park, and the local Conservation Officers. The group shared stories about grizzly bear sightings or encounters in BC, and about times when they accidentally or unknowingly attracted bears to their houses or campsites. The conversation was open and honest, and was an excellent opportunity for the WCC to promote attractant management and bear safety messaging.



Figure 5. Roasting marshmallows and sharing bear stories



Figure 6. Participating in SCRDS Trash Bash event

Distribution of Signage, Brochures and Door-to-Door Visits

One of the most effective ways to get WildSafeBC messaging into the community is to meet directly with residents who are looking for information and ideas to address and avoid human-wildlife conflict. Approximately 23 hours were spent conducting 128 door-to-door visits in areas either experiencing, or 'at-risk' of experiencing human-wildlife conflict. Areas targeted were determined as a result of garbage tagging activities, phone calls and emails from residents regarding unmanaged fruit trees or unsecure garbage, or direct requests from the COS and bylaws. The WCC took a non-confrontational approach by speaking to a group of residents or a neighbourhood area instead of just an individual resident of concern.

Brochures and posters were also distributed to public locations including the Sunshine Coast Tourism, Isis Griffith Nature Centre, Sechelt Tourism Centre, the District of Sechelt, SCRD, the Welcome Wagon, the Gibsons Visitor Centre, as well as several local businesses.

Cautionary "Bear in Area" and "Cougar in Area" signs were placed in temporary locations in response to reports of sightings, particularly at popular trailheads, public parks, or near schools (Figure 7). Unfortunately a number of these signs were taken by members of the community.

WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast also provided a one-page digital brochure to Sunshine Coast Tourism for their website or e-news distribution to their members. The brochure listed tips for dealing with wildlife and attractants around the home or rental accommodation.



Figure 7. Wildlife caution signs

Media and Social Media

Due to the spread-out nature of the Sunshine Coast community, radio, print and social media play an important role in promoting awareness to the 33,000+ residents and visitors of the Sunshine Coast. Topics covered included bear, cougar, wolves, coyote and deer biology, wildlife safety, garbage tagging results, fruit picking reminders, event information, and general tips for managing wildlife attractants. The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast Facebook page reached over 970 likes this season.

Display Booths

Educational displays at local events continued to be an effective part of the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program delivery. Children tend to be immediately drawn by the wildlife props (e.g. replica skulls, hides, tracks, and rubber scat) and WildSafeBC animal tattoos and bookmarks.) Adults often discuss their wildlife encounters and access information and solutions for their own attractant challenges.

Public display booths were set up at the following events and locations on the Sunshine Coast during 2017. This year's goal was to reach different events and audiences compared to previous years. Many thanks to the event organizers for inviting WSBC to participate!

- Sunshine Coast Botanical Garden Plant Sale, May 7
- Canada Day, Hackett Park, Sechelt, July 1
- Catch a Trout Day, Chapman Hatchery, July 8
- RCMP BBQ, Sechelt, August 17
- Halfmoon Bay Apple Festival, October 22 – brochure distribution only
- Rod and Gun Club, Family Day, August 26
- SCRD Trash Bash, September 17
- Oktoberfest, Sechelt, September 30
- Mushroom Festival, October 14



Figure 8. Display booth at Mushroom Festival

Presentations and Junior Rangers Program

WildSafeBC presentations provide insight into the reasons why human-wildlife conflicts occur and what people can do to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Presentations usually provide a basic overview of the biology, behaviour, attractants, and safety tips for wildlife species in our communities, followed by the preventative measures to reduce human-wildlife conflict. The species discussed were black bears, grizzly bears (new this year due to the two new confirmed cases on the Sunshine Coast), cougar, deer, elk, coyote, wolves, and raccoons. Most presentations finished off with a demonstration of the proper use of bear spray. In 2017 the WCC delivered customized presentations to:

- Six presentations at the Chapman Creek Hatchery's nature day camps during July and August (reaching 87 kids and seven adults)
- Halfmoon Bay StrongStart Parent and Tot drop-in (reaching 12 adults)

During the 2017 season the WCC expanded the delivery of the WildSafeBC Junior Ranger program through the support of Telus who provided funding for the purchase of 400 Junior Ranger kits that include educational tools such as a colouring book and bookmarks. The WCC delivered the Junior Ranger program to 43 students at the following elementary schools in School District No. 46:

- West Sechelt Elementary School, Grade 1
- Halfmoon Bay Elementary School, Grade 4



Figure 9. Junior Rangers in training

Garbage Tagging

Between May and November, the WCC spent approximately 20 hours and checked approximately 2,708 homes for garbage bins put out the night before scheduled pick up. Yellow 'Warning' stickers were placed on a total of 16 bins, as a reminder for residents that when garbage containers are placed out the night before, they are an attractant to wildlife within the neighbourhood and increasing the risk of human-wildlife conflict (Figure 10). Follow up visits were conducted by the Town of Gibsons Bylaw Enforcement Officer and by the WCC, and found very few repeat offenders.

The WCC noticed the number of unsecured plastic garbage bags placed out at the curbside seemed to be higher during the summer months, but overall the number seemed to be decreasing, perhaps due to efforts to educate in previous years and local government efforts to educate residents on this topic.



Figure 10. Tagging garbage container put out too early

Challenges from the 2017 Season:

This season, much of the WCC efforts were spent in the District of Sechelt including West Sechelt, Davis Bay and Selma Park, Roberts Creek and Halfmoon Bay. The main attractant issues were unsecured garbage, birdfeeders, unpicked fruit, improperly protected backyard chickens, and outdoor fridges and freezers.

Unsecured garbage

Despite the WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program efforts to educate residents, garbage still remains the number one wildlife attractant. It is important that residents and businesses understand the issue and are advised or encouraged to take the steps necessary to reduce the potential for human-wildlife conflict.

The Town of Gibsons has an enforceable bylaw for refuse collection, specifying allowable times for placing garbage at curbside, and requiring “wildlife-resistant” containers with fitted lids. The District of Sechelt Bylaw Enforcement Officers were noted to be assisting with and acting on garbage complaints. The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program is prepared to assist local governments with bylaw changes if requested.

Culture of feeding wildlife

From spring to fall, a major attractant for bears and other wildlife within residential areas is unpicked fruit. Although the Sunshine Coast Fruit Tree Project was able to play an active role in assisting those who couldn’t pick their own fruit, there still remains a “culture” of feeding wildlife by leaving some fruit for the animals too. Another major attractant is bird feeders. The WCC assisted the COS in “cracking down” on residents who insist on leaving out bird feeders in the spring and summer months.

The main topic of discussion at public events continues to be around individual behaviours, whereby the apparently harmless actions people take on their own properties, such as storing food in outdoor freezers or fridges, feeding birds during bear season, or leaving fruit unpicked, can have a cumulative and negative affect on wildlife. The WCC wrote a news release about the topic of individuals behaviours, which was printed in across three articles in both local newspapers in the months of October and November. Continued efforts will be needed to assist in changes of attitudes and behaviours of residents.

Goals for 2018:

WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues and decrease human-wildlife conflicts. The goals for the 2018 season include:

- Secure and continue delivery of the WildSafeBC program on the Sunshine Coast.
- Encourage local governments to improve bylaws and policies that would reduce human-wildlife conflict. This could include consideration of wildlife habitat and human-wildlife conflict in Official Community Plans and policies, as well as enforceable garbage collection bylaws, requiring use of wildlife-resistant garbage containers and specific times for placing containers at the curbside.
- Continue delivering the Junior Ranger Program throughout the Sunshine Coast with the aim of creating generational change as well as providing a conduit for WildSafeBC messaging to the parents of participating youth.
- Design positive initiatives which encourage behavioural change in the community, and partner with various organizations to deliver programs.

Acknowledgements:

The WildSafeBC Sunshine Coast program gratefully acknowledges its 2017 funders:

- Ministry of Environment
- Sunshine Coast Regional District

Our community partners also provide invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: the Sunshine Coast Regional District Infrastructure Department, SCRD Board and staff; the local Conservation Officer Service, the Coast Reporter; 91.7 CKAY and Mountain FM; local Bylaw Officer departments in the Town of Gibsons, SCRD and District of Sechelt; Sunshine Coast Tourism and the local Visitor Info Centres; Sunshine Coast Fruit Tree Project; and our enthusiastic volunteers: namely Martin, Bailey, Baeleay, Vesna, Katie and Darren.

Thanks also to the BCCF staff and all the other WildSafeBC Coordinators for their support.