

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Thompson Nicola Regional District

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Ministry of
Environment



Executive Summary

The 2017 season was the first year for the TNRD WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Rhiannon Guerra, and started off quickly with activities and events in the spring and then picking up again in the fall. This year there were many wildfires happening in a large area of the TNRD north-west from Cache Creek up to 70 Mile with evacuation orders in place, therefore these communities were not visited during 2017. The WCC attended farmers markets, community fairs, and festivals with the WildSafeBC informational display booth. Wildlife attractant management informational brochures and posters were distributed from Merritt to Blue River. The WCC also gave presentations to EUREKA Science camps in Merritt, Lower Nicola, and Barriere, as well as the very popular Junior Ranger Program to schools from Merritt, Logan Lake, Cache Creek, and Sun Peaks. Garbage tagging and door-to-door canvassing continued this year with focus on Merritt, Logan Lake, Clearwater and Blue River.

Sun Peaks Bear Smart Committee meetings continued from work done by the 2016 WCC. WildSafeBC is helping to facilitate Bear Smart Community status in Sun Peaks as recognized by the Ministry of Environment and will continue with this process into 2018.

The second annual BC Goes Wild Weekend was held across BC with various activities and contests being held by all the WildSafeBC Community Coordinators. Media throughout the TNRD and on our WildSafeBC social media pages continued to be an important aspect to spread information and awareness of what it is we do at WildSafeBC and how to manage our attractants and learn more about our BC wildlife.



Figure 1. WCCs attend an informational display booth at the Car Free Day Event in Kamloops

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Highlights from the 2017 Season

Wildlife Encounters

Overall, calls and reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) and the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) have reduced dramatically over the past few years in the TNRD (Figure 3). Black bear calls still make up the majority of calls to COS every year. Since a spike in 2014, the number of reports has seen a significant decrease. Increased wildlife reporting statistics since the introduction of WARP in 2013 may be attributed to the promotion of the WARP program, an increase in COS reporting to WARP, as well as natural influxes of wildlife populations in certain regions. Hopefully the decrease in reports is due to better attractant management around the TNRD. No doubt the implementation of the garbage bylaws in Merritt, the bear resistant bin loan out program and ongoing educational programs have helped to reduce encounters. Calls about cougar encounters have increased in 2017 to 72 reports from 56 calls in 2016. Deer have seen a slight increase in the TNRD, and coyote and other species have been reported to plateau or decrease in 2017.

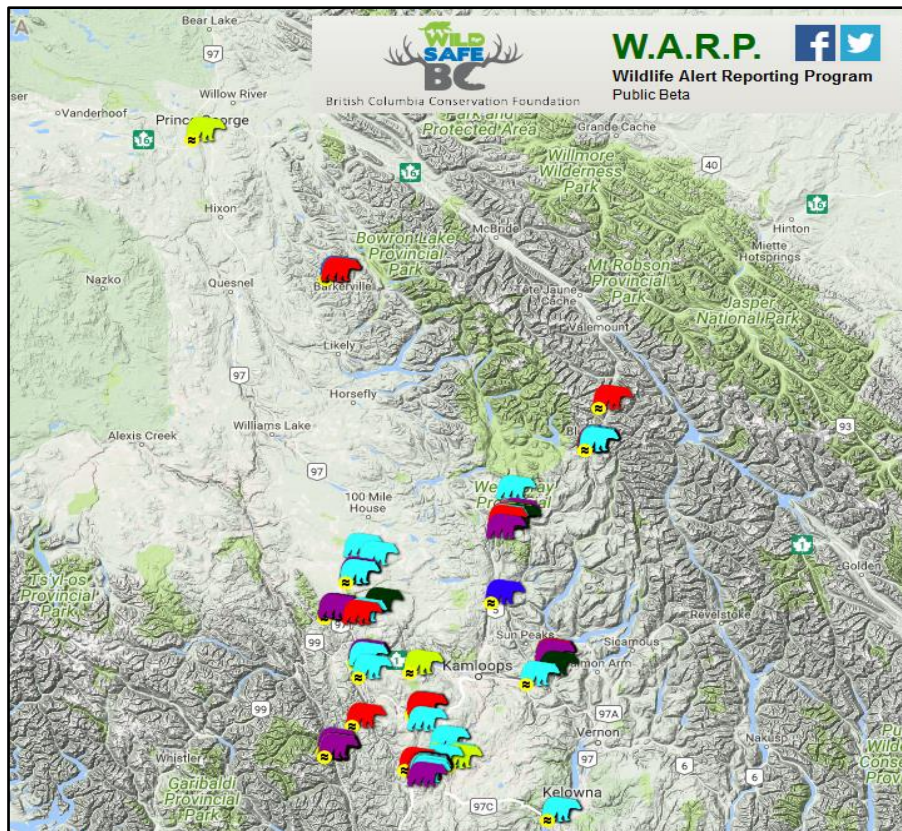


Figure 2. Black bear reports in the TNRD on WARP

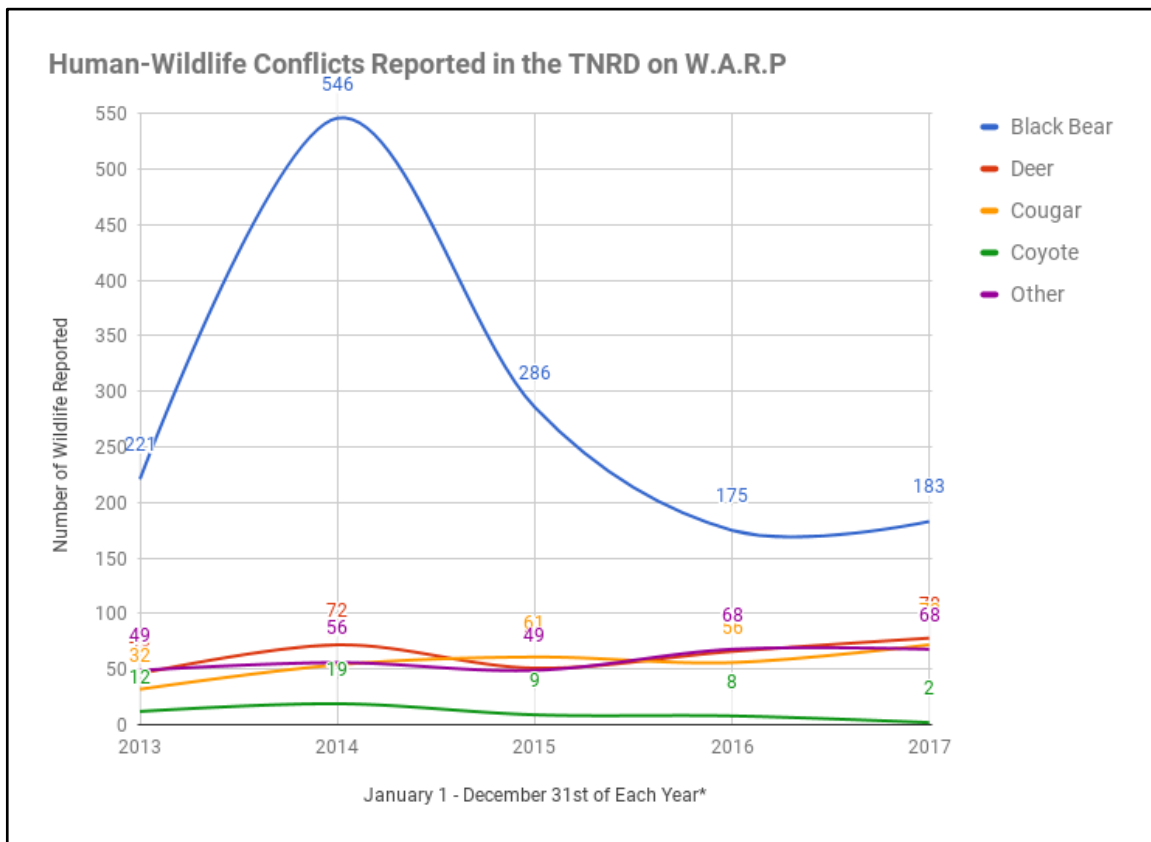


Figure 3. Chart of key wildlife conflicts in the TNRD from the COS and WARP

Dated from January 1st 2013 to October 5th 2017 'Other' listed as 24 species WARP options not listed individually.

**The TNRD is defined in these graphs as the following communities listed from the data on WARP: (Merritt, Wells Gray, Big Bar, 70 Mile, Loon Lake, Spences Bridge, Walhachin, Savona, Douglas Lake, Lower Nicola, Quilchena, Aspen Grove, Brookmere, Clinton, Cache Creek, Ashcroft, Logan Lake, Lytton, Barriere, Chase, Sun Peaks, Clearwater, Avola, Kelly Lake, Westwold, Lac Le Jeune, Monte Creek, Monte Lake, Pinantan, Turtle Valley, Heffley Creek, Adams, Lake, Whitecroft, McClure, Black Pines, Louis Creek, Darfield, Little Fort, Blackpool, Vavenby)*

Black bears continue to be the most reported wildlife species in conflict across BC (Figure 4). When comparing the provincial black bear reports to the number of calls made within the TNRD we see the same general flow of decreased calls from 2014/15. We hope this is due to the hard work of WildSafeBC Coordinators around the province sharing valuable information on reducing human-wildlife conflicts by managing attractants.

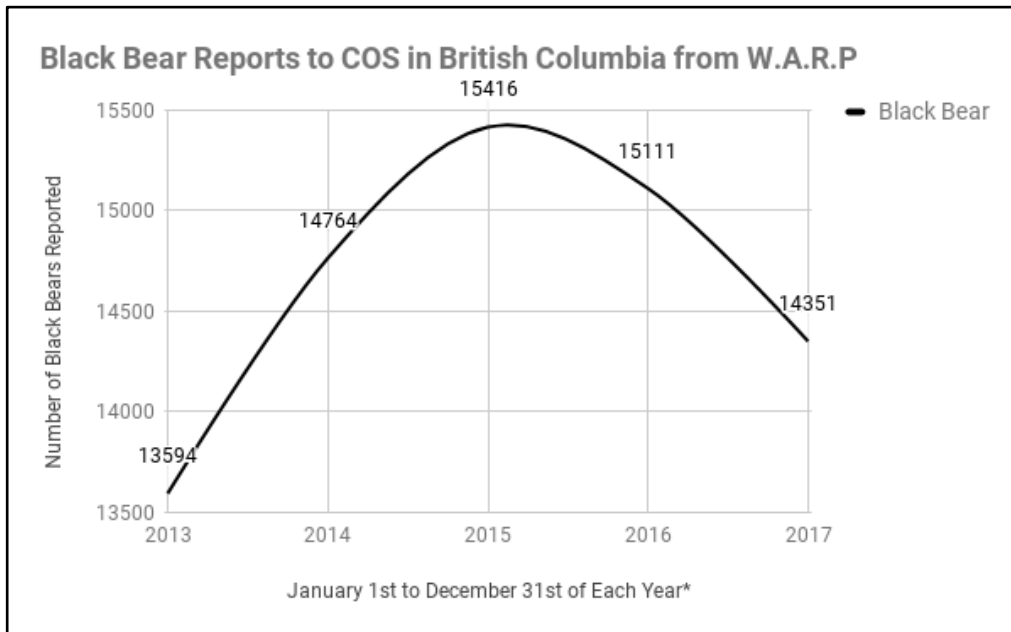


Figure 4. Black bear reports to the COS and WARP from January 1st 2013 to October 5th 2017

Black bear reports follow the general trend of spiking in the fall season. The TNRD saw the largest number of bear calls in August, September and October which follows the hyperphagia phase of the bears before denning for the winter. Attention to community outreach, garbage tagging, presentations, and school programs are important during this time.

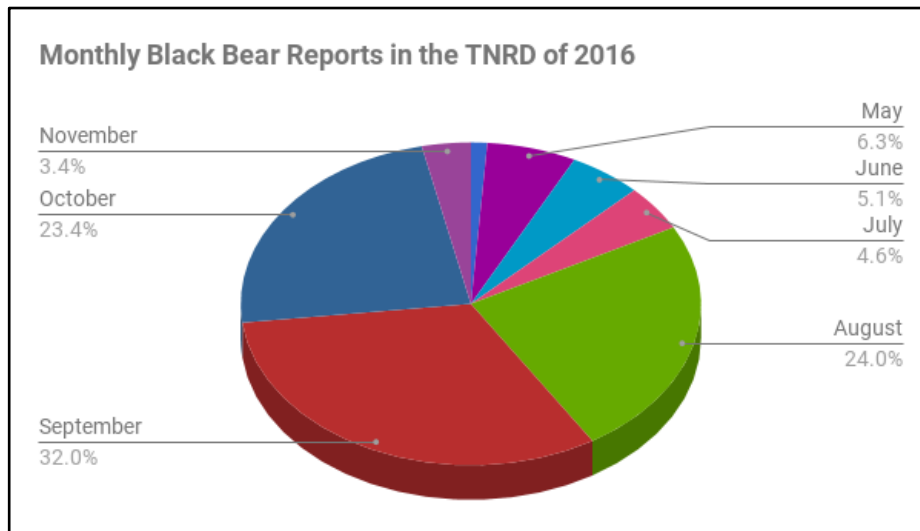


Figure 5. Black bear calls reported to WARP in 2016

Presentations

Presentations are an important aspect of community outreach for the TNRD. They aim to entertain and inform the audience about wildlife biology, our ecosystems, and attractant management to further better understanding of wild animals which will reduce human-wildlife conflicts. While teaming up with another well-established event is great for connecting with adult audiences, our kid's presentations are also essential to educate the younger generation and encourage attractant-mindful individuals and families. In the fall, our Junior Ranger (JR) program visits local elementary schools to get children involved in WildSafeBC messaging and is always well received. These presentations included a Junior Ranger Kit with a coloring book, pencil, ruler/bookmark, sticker, ID card, button and oath card. The WildSafeBC TNRD program received 250 extra kits donated by Telus this year. The WCC gave presentations to the following audiences this season:

- Eureka Presentation - Barriere
- Eureka Presentation - Collettville Elementary
- Eureka Presentation - Nooaitch Band Hall
- Merritt Central Elementary School (9 Classes)
- Cache Creek Elementary School (3 Classes)
- Sun Peaks Elementary School (9 Classes)
- Logan Lake Campground
- Logan Lake Elementary (6 Classes)
- Savona Library



Figure 6. TNRD WCC gives a JR presentation at the Nooaitch Band Hall, 2017

Garbage Tagging and Door-to-Door Education

The WCC stays connected with local Conservation Officers from Kamloops, Merritt, and Blue River. When bears are reported to be getting into garbage, fruit trees, bird feeders, or a number of other attractants in a community, the WCC can be called to check in with this community via door-to-door visits and/or garbage tagging. The WCC has gone door-to-door in Blue River after reported sightings on the WARP, attended a neighbourhood in Merritt on the COS request when food conditioned bears were spotted, and touched base with Clearwater and Sun Peaks residents as well. In partnership with Forest, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) a door-to-door trip to Thompson River Estates and Walhachin was made for rattlesnake stewardship. Rattlesnake stewardship was also made in the La Farge area with the Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator.

Merritt and Logan Lake were visited by our garbage tagging program wherein bins that were put out before the 5:00 am pick up time on collection day were tagged with our bright yellow warning stickers. These communities have local garbage collection bylaws. Out of the four collection zones in Merritt two of them were very compliant with garbage bylaws, which also happened to be the highest bear reporting sites. The WCC partnered with the Kamloops WCC to create an informative video on garbage tagging to inform communities about the process of garbage tagging and what it means.

Poster and Brochure Distribution

WildSafeBC Bear Safety posters were distributed in all communities that the WCC visited. They were posted at hotels, parks, libraries, coffee shops, outdoor stores and other public spaces. Bear, cougar, and deer information brochures were also distributed at many locations throughout the TNRD, including hotels, campgrounds, RV parks, libraries, info centres, cafes and condo lobbies.

Displays

Educational displays at local events were popular with local children and adults alike, and provided a great opportunity to discuss local wildlife issues with residents. These displays provide area residents with a place to voice concerns or observations about local wildlife activity and share attractant management success stories. The WildSafeBC display is inviting and engaging, and residents are drawn in to learn more. The WCC gave out and applied the popular temporary tattoos to children at these events, and this was a great opportunity to speak to them one-on-one about wildlife safety. The WCC spent time at the following local events:

- Barriere Market
- Logan Lake Day Festival
- Sun Peaks Market
- Sun Peaks Alpine Bloom Festival
- Clearwater Market
- Kamloops Car Free Day
- Desert Daze Fest in Spences Bridge
- Pinantan Lake Country Fair
- North Thompson Fall Fair and Rodeo (3 days)
- Chase Kindergarten Fair with Kamloops COS
- Savona BCGWW



Figure 7. Educational display booth for the Chase Kindergarten Fall Fair, 2017

BC Goes Wild Weekend

The second annual BC Goes Wild Weekend was held across the province on the third weekend of September, which falls in line with the busiest time of year for wildlife conflict calls. There were many activities held in various communities with WCCs organizing hikes, presentations, scavenger hunts, fruit juice making, campsite detective games, film nights, photography and nature walks. The WCC held an educational presentation followed by a stop-motion/claymation workshop at the Savona Library. Kids were encouraged to come and make a stop-motion film about managing attractants to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe. They created the stories, the characters, the sound effects and the voice overs which were then made into a short educational film. The TNRD has so many communities that an event like this one helps get smaller populations involved while being able to share our messaging around the province via media sources.

Bear-Resistant Bin Loan Program

This year WildSafeBC TNRD continued the Merritt Bear-Resistant Bin Program in partnership with the TNRD. The program offers a loan period of about six weeks with the option to purchase the bins at the end or to purchase bins out right. There was continued interest in the bins from the community of Merritt, and more focus on promotion of this program will be continued in 2018.

Media

WildSafeBC TNRD continues to promote our social media pages, with outlets on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The WCC has access to a WildSafeBC TNRD Facebook page that focuses on interests and activities within the region. This page is updated regularly and posts information on WildSafeBC messaging, wildlife activity in TNRD communities, and events being

held for the public. This season has garnered a reach of 12,758 from posts made from June 1st until October 16th 2017. The WCC was involved in creating informational video content for WildSafeBC media.

Local media outlets have helped spread our messaging through press releases in local papers, and interviews online and on the radio. Q101 from Merritt shared information ads during the season and shared social media posts as well.

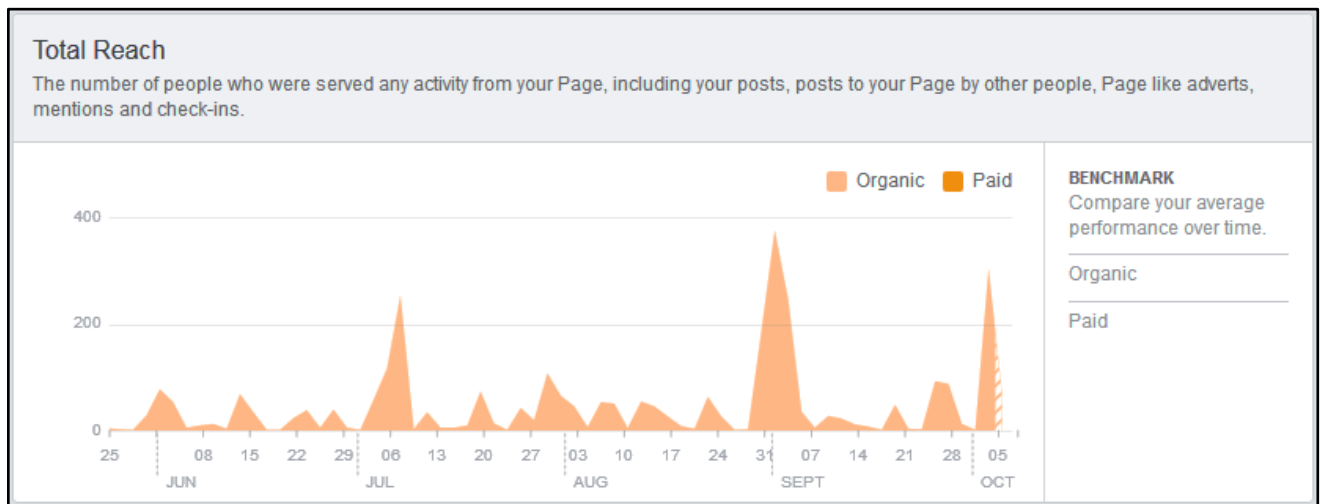


Figure 8. Reach of the WildSafeBC TNRD Facebook Page from June 1st to October 5th



Figure 9. WCCs featured in the Sun Peaks Independent Paper

Challenges of the 2017 Season

In 2017 we had massive wildfires breakout beginning July 1st that burned over 890,000 hectares of land, with evacuations west of Savona and continuing north to the TNRD border of 70 Mile House during the summer. These evacuations were in effect and ongoing for most of the season, the WCC was unable to visit these communities during the 2017 program. When evacuation orders were lifted it was expressed by some of the communities to hold off on WildSafeBC presentations until the spring of 2018.

Unsecured garbage and fruit trees continued to be some of the biggest attractants in the 2017 season along with inappropriate behaviours from tourists getting too close to wildlife. It was anecdotally reported in many communities that there were fewer bear sightings this year than compared to previous years. The WCC continued to deliver messaging to ensure communities did not get complacent due to fewer bears being reported. It is important that messaging through education programs, speaking one on one with residents, and distributing posters and brochures to educate tourists continued through the season.

Door-to-door activity proves to be challenging within the TNRD, since many communities are quite rural, with houses far apart from each other, fenced off properties or difficult/unsafe to access. These rural areas make connecting with many residents in a work day hard to achieve than compared to a larger city block. The WCC would like to focus on public places such as downtown hubs, shopping centres and parks in 2018 to connect with more local residents that may be missed from a door-to-door visit in a community.

Garbage tagging was focused on Merritt and Logan Lake due to corresponding bylaws that work together with the WildSafeBC warning stickers. A creation of bylaws in other garbage collection communities within the TNRD would better help encourage communities to ensure that garbage is not placed on the curb too early, which attracts wildlife.



Figure 10. A black bear sighted near Blue River with vehicles pulled over to take pictures

Goals for 2018

The WCC looks forward to jumping into the 2018 season with goals in mind, and what to focus attention on in this region such as:

- Continue to promote the Merritt Bear-Resistant Bin program.
- Encourage the residents of the TNRD to follow our social media pages and stay connected to events and activities in our communities.
- Work with the TNRD to implement bylaws in communities regarding garbage collection pick up, to better enforce managing garbage attractants.
- Expand our program's presence in smaller communities by connecting WildSafeBC with local events and committees and setting up engaging programs/workshops for better attendance.
- Continue to work with Sun Peaks to implement the Bear Smart Community Status.



Figure 11. Children enjoy the Junior Ranger kits, Merritt 2017

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC TNRD program, I would like to thank the Thompson-Nicola Regional District, the Ministry of Environment, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and Telus for funding this year's program and activities.

I would also like to acknowledge the various media outlets that ran stories to help spread the WildSafeBC message. These include The Sun Peaks Independent, Savona Activities and Savona Newsletter, Clearwater Times and Q101.1 Merritt.

Special thanks to Cassie Enns, Denise Roberts, Adriana Mailloux, and Jamie Vieira of the TNRD; Frank Ritcey, and Courtney Hawkins of the WildSafeBC program; and Corinne Hutchinson, Shelley Nohels, Trina Radford and Mitchell Bymoen of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the WildSafeBC TNRD Volunteer, David Nasz.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wild species. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!

