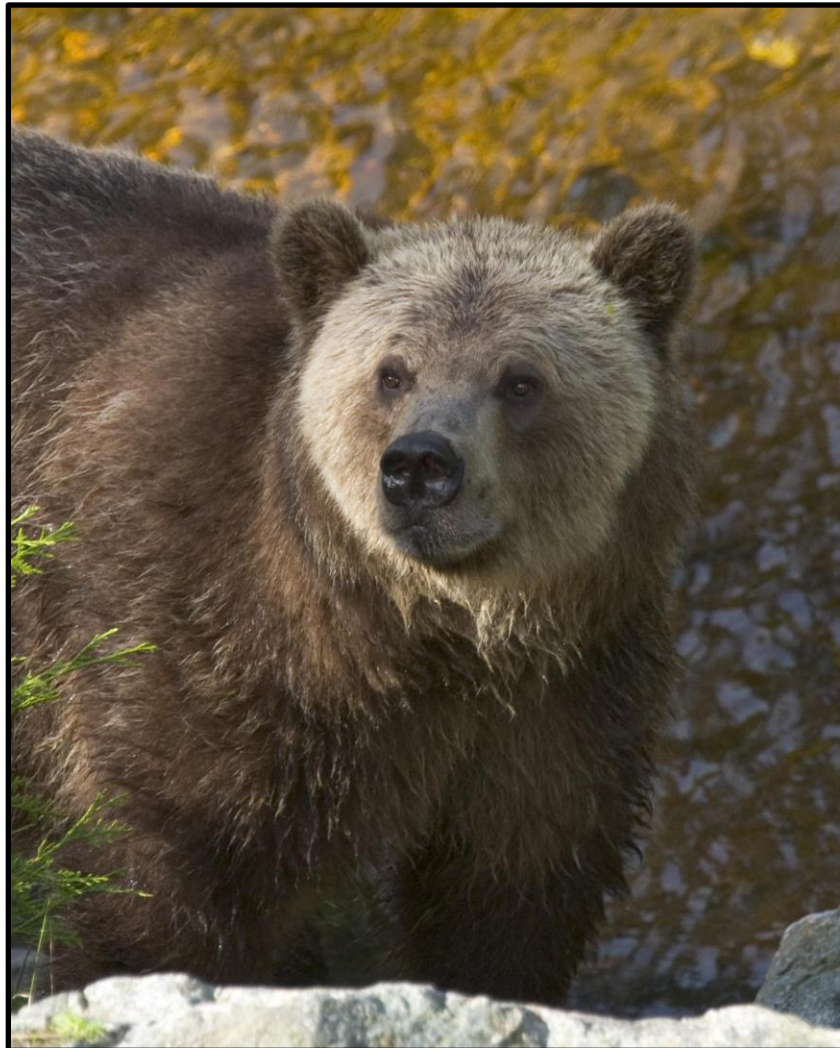


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

District of Tumbler Ridge

Prepared by: Gavin Friend, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator



Executive Summary

WildSafeBC began its third year in the District of Tumbler Ridge following a week of training in May for the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Gavin Friend.

Evolved from the Bear Aware program, the BC Conservation Foundation's WildSafeBC program is designed to reduce human-wildlife conflict through education, innovation, and cooperation. The program is continuing to grow throughout BC, with more and more communities participating every year. The Community Coordinator in the District of Tumbler Ridge provided education to residents and tourists through display booths at community events, door-to-door discussions, garbage tagging, presentations to local students, and organizing local events for the second annual BC Goes Wild Weekend. The focus for the 2017 season was on research, educating via public interaction/display, and encouraging appropriate attractant management through garbage tagging and door-to-door discussions.

Table of Content

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2017 Season	3
Presentations	3
Public Displays	3
Junior Ranger Program	4
BC Goes Wild Weekend	4
Door-to-door Discussions & Bear Signage	6
Garbage Tagging	7
Social Media	8
Challenges and Goals for the District and WildSafeBC Program	9
Acknowledgements	12

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC presentation setup at Tumbler Ridge Elementary	3
Figure 2. WCC, Gavin Friend and WildSafeBC booth setup at Grizfest 2017	4
Figure 3. BC Goes Wild Weekend “Bare Camping” activity at Flatbed Falls Interpretive Centre	6
Figure 4. Bear in Area sign placed on popular walking path, near the August Grizzly Bear sightings	7
Figure 5. Percent of bin tagging during the 2017 season in the three garbage pick-up zones.	8
Figure 6. Graph showing all calls to COS from 2014-2017 for the District of Tumbler Ridge	10
Figure 7. Grizzly bear sightings reported to COS in the DTR June 1 – Oct 5 2017	11
Figure 8. Green spaces in close proximity to residential areas and priority areas for native berry management (red lines)	11

Highlights from the 2017 Season

Presentations

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator focused on the educating young residents in the District of Tumbler Ridge, early on during the 2017 season. In June, our WCC visited Tumbler Ridge Elementary for presentations just before summer vacation. The material focused on best practices for attractant management and how to avoid conflict with wildlife while recreating. The community coordinator also presented at the Public Library's Summer Reading Club, Dinosaur Discovery Gallery Dino Camp, and Tumbler Ridge Secondary School's grade 7 and 8 Outdoor Education classes.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC presentation setup at Tumbler Ridge Elementary

Public Displays

The use of public displays allowed the WCC to take part in a variety of local community events. Public displays involved a booth, consisting of a display board with wildlife attractants photos, wildlife photos, informational brochures on local species, a black bear skin, 3D printed black bear paw, bear spray information, and prints of several common wildlife species to encourage track recognition. Booth patrons were allowed to take their time reviewing WildSafeBC material and were then encouraged to ask questions and/or converse. This type of interaction with residents is unique, in that it is more passive than other methods, allowing people the opportunity to engage or not. The 2017 WCC noticed that discussions flowed well in this setting and visitors to the booth often shared stories and asked questions about wildlife, issues related to conflict, and the WildSafeBC program.

The booth was on display at the following locations in 2017:

- Canada Day celebrations
- Grizfest Music Festival
- Children's Health and Safety Fair
- BCGW Weekend Day 1 & 2



Figure 2. WCC, Gavin Friend and WildSafeBC booth setup at Grizfest 2017

Junior Ranger Program

The Junior Ranger Program was delivered to the students of Tumbler Ridge Elementary, and the Tumbler Ridge library's Summer Reading Club. Approximately 150 local youth were educated and engaged with as Junior Rangers, and tasked with helping 'keep wildlife wild and communities safe'. Basic bear behavior, attractant management, and encounter strategies were discussed with the children in attendance.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

WildSafeBC held its second annual BC Goes Wild (BCGW) Weekend on September 17/18th. BC Goes Wild Weekend brings attention to the time of year with the greatest human-wildlife conflict and educates people on how to safely enjoy recreating in the outdoors. By emphasizing the fact the wildlife should be in the wilds - and not in our urban areas, WildSafeBC hopes that people will help the program meet its goal of "keeping wildlife wild and communities' safe."

In 2017, the District of Tumbler Ridge WCC developed educational events spanning two days, with activities geared towards learning about recreation practices that are safe for humans and wildlife. The District of Tumbler Ridge BCGW weekend Day 1 kicked off with an interpretive walk / interactive activity where attendees were educated and quizzed along a scenic trail. Topics covered included: animal sign identification, true/false WildSafeBC content (conflict/reduction, safe recreating, wildlife facts, etc.), and food source identification / "who eats what". The walk concluded at a staged camp that showcased examples of poor attractant management at a campsite. After a brief discussion, attendees worked together to reconcile the site into a "bare campsite".

The second day of BCGW weekend started with a bear spray information session and inert spray demonstration. The set up included a talk, exploring facts/myths, and markers to show minimum spray distance and charging speeds, etc. At the end of the information session, attendees were given the opportunity to practice proper deployment by discharging an inert bear spray canister. Later that evening, a night walk was planned along the TR Point Trail. It was lightly peppered with facts about nocturnal animals and their hidden lives. This was done along a very scenic bird sanctuary trail that overlooks the Murray River.

Unfortunately, the weekend was busy with other local events and advertisement of the event (on Facebook and in a few local businesses) did not evoke a turn out or response, as few people participated. Next year's efforts could benefit from advertising, starting as soon as the program is active and by partnering with other local events/programs that have an already established audience (Fall Fair, Wolverine Nordic Society, VIC).



Figure 3. BC Goes Wild Weekend “Bare Camping” activity at Flatbed Falls Interpretive Centre

Door-to-door Discussions & Bear Signage

For the 2017 season, door-to-door was first implemented in high priority areas that reported the most activity in the previous calendar year. As the season progressed, door-to-door efforts were coupled with other tools available to the WCC. For example, when there were wildlife sightings in town, the WCC responded by 1) posting on Facebook, 2) placing signage out where appropriate, and finally 3) going door-to-door, canvassing in the nearest neighbourhood (if applicable). This doorstep visit was an opportunity to introduce our program, inform residents about a recent sighting, give information on the species of interest, and to encourage proper attractant management (and to pass it on!).

Approximately five hundred people were contacted via door-to-door canvassing. The one-on-one discussions raised residents’ awareness of our presence and role, local wildlife sightings, and ultimately led to discussing how one can reduce the potential for conflict.



Figure 4. Bear in Area sign placed on popular walking path, near the August Grizzly Bear sightings

Garbage Tagging

In its second year of implementation, the garbage tagging program targeted bins placed out the night before collection day. Garbage tagging involved documenting and tagging non-conformant bins with a sticker that warns residents that garbage placed out early was a wildlife attractant. The results were positive, with only a handful of households being tagged more than three times and a majority of the other tags being one-time incidents, that is to say, that they were not tagged again for the remainder of the season (See Figure 5).

As with last year's observations, the 2017 WCC also noticed that a majority of residents do not store their garbage bins in secure, wildlife-resistant bins and/or in secure areas, such as a shed or garage. For the most part, bins are still stored alongside houses or behind a fence throughout the week. Easily accessible and typically not bear-resistant, these bins are an attractant management concern going forward. Luckily, in mid-October 2017, the District of Tumbler Ridge will be rolling out a new waste management program with bear-resistant bins. WildSafeBC is proud of this commitment put forward by the town, to reduce the potential for wildlife conflict related to garbage.

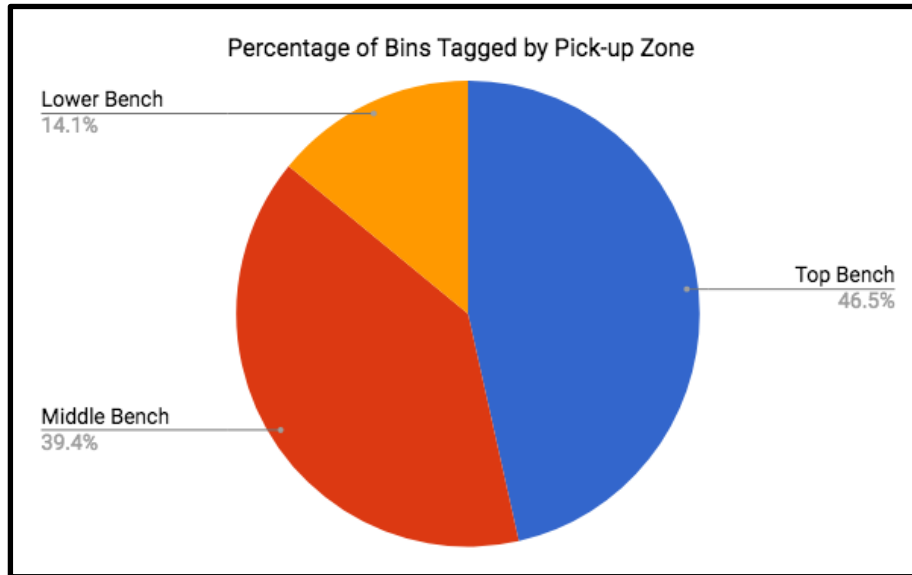


Figure 5. Percent of bin tagging during the 2017 season in the three garbage pick-up zones.

Social Media

Due to the recent closing of the local newspaper, the WCC relied heavily on social media, specifically Facebook, as a way of disseminating messages and alerts to the public in 2017. Informative posts regarding monthly updates, recent sightings, events, etc. were posted to the WildSafeBC page and shared to larger audiences through associated and supportive Facebook groups. Throughout the season, the WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Facebook page number of 'Likes' increased ~10%, and approximately 2800 people were reached per month. As with previous years, evidence showed that residents tend to prefer reporting wildlife sightings on Tumbler Ridge Facebook groups instead of the Conservation Officer Service (COS). This year however, Facebook posts concerning wildlife were always responded to by multiple dedicated citizens, encouraging a proper reporting to the COS, most often with the correct phone number added too. As a follower of these groups, the WCC was able to appreciate the efforts of the community and also monitor unreported sightings/incidents, conveying any discrepancies to the Conservation Officer Service (COS).

Challenges and Goals for the District and WildSafeBC Program

The 2017 season was relatively quiet, with reports to the COS consisting of mostly sightings. However, there are still a few areas of concern in regards to attractant management and conflict reduction that can be addressed moving forward.

Garbage

As previously mentioned, garbage represents a few problems: first, there are between 4-10 households per pick-up schedule day, that are putting garbage bins out the night before pickup. In addition to this, a majority of garbage bins are not bear-resistant and they are rarely secured between pickup days; it isn't uncommon to see garbage bins at the side of the house, on the porch, or in the backyard. Fortunately, there were only two reports of garbage being accessed by bears this season and the district is planning on rolling out bear-resistant bins mid-October.

Residential Fruit

Unharvested residential fruit trees were another source of concern and the reason behind three calls to the COS this year. There are many households that have Crabapple, Mountain Ash, or Cherry trees in their yards. If harvested, it is often for consumption and therefore fruit stays on the tree until mid-September. Unfortunately, this is also during the period of time when the highest levels of human-wildlife conflict occur in the province. Most residents practice appropriate attractant management, but there are still trees with fruit and visible windfall collecting. The 2017 season showed evidence that most unmanaged fruit trees were at vacant houses, contractor houses, and senior residents.

Native Berry Crop in Green Spaces

Beyond residential attractant management, the heavy presence of native berry producing plants in local green spaces and habitat corridors is another concern. These habitat corridors provide important cover for bears passing through town, allowing them space and opportunity to avoid residents, etc. Unfortunately, the presence of healthy berry crops in these green spaces could potentially encourage a bear to stay and forage, rather than pass through. These green spaces are in close proximity to residential areas and unnatural food-sources; having a bear get comfortable in these areas could give rise to potential conflict down the line.

Given these concerns, the following suggestions were made to the District regarding wildlife attractant management:

- Help facilitate (or encourage the creation of) an entity that can assist residents in

managing fruit producing trees. This could be achieved through the creation of a community fruit gleaning program for residential fruit trees. The program should advocate for the removal of unwanted fruit trees and help coordinate the gleaning of wanted fruit as it ripens. A fruit gleaning program, when offered in conjunction with applicable bylaws, could help capture a majority of residential fruit.

- Encourage the replacement of fruiting trees, with non-fruiting native alternatives. See <https://squamish.ca/assets/Bear-Aware/2016-landscaping.pdf> for great resources on this topic.
- Purchase an emergency response electric fence kit that can be dispatched by a qualified individual, in the event that fruit is being accessed by bears in town.
- Remove berry producing bushes and reduce the undergrowth in local green belts, or spray the blossoms with a high-powered hose before they set in the spring, to reduce berry production. The areas of greatest concern are:
 - The Pioneer Loop and up Pioneer Drive, Mackenzie Way, Chamberlain Place green space, 50 meter buffer behind Peace River Crescent/Steeprock close, and any other green space that is entirely surrounded by residential properties (See Figure 8).
- Undocumented ATV trails going through green space and onto private properties should be rehabilitated and new trails should be warned against. Wildlife utilize trails much the same way that people do, and so these trails have the potential to lead wildlife directly into backyards.
- Residents will be receiving bear-resistant bins as part of the upgraded waste management system. As a potentially new concept, residents should be warned that bear-resistant is not bear-proof and therefore cannot be relied on as such.

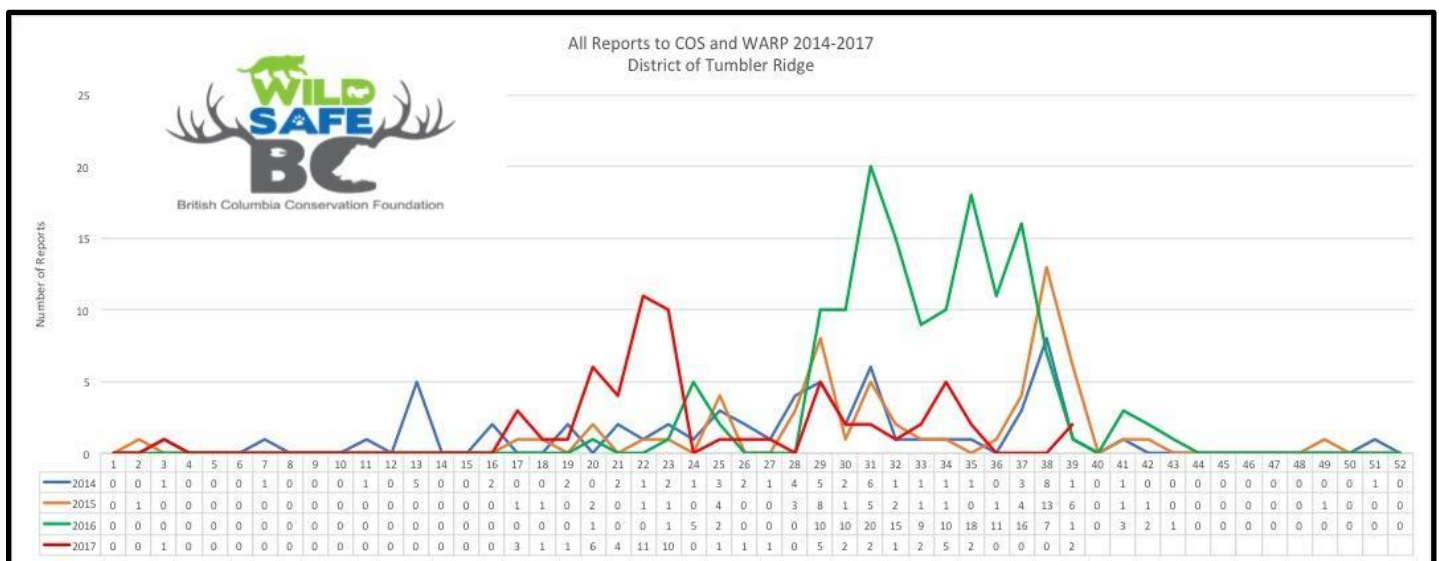


Figure 6. Graph showing all calls to COS from 2014-2017 for the District of Tumbler Ridge

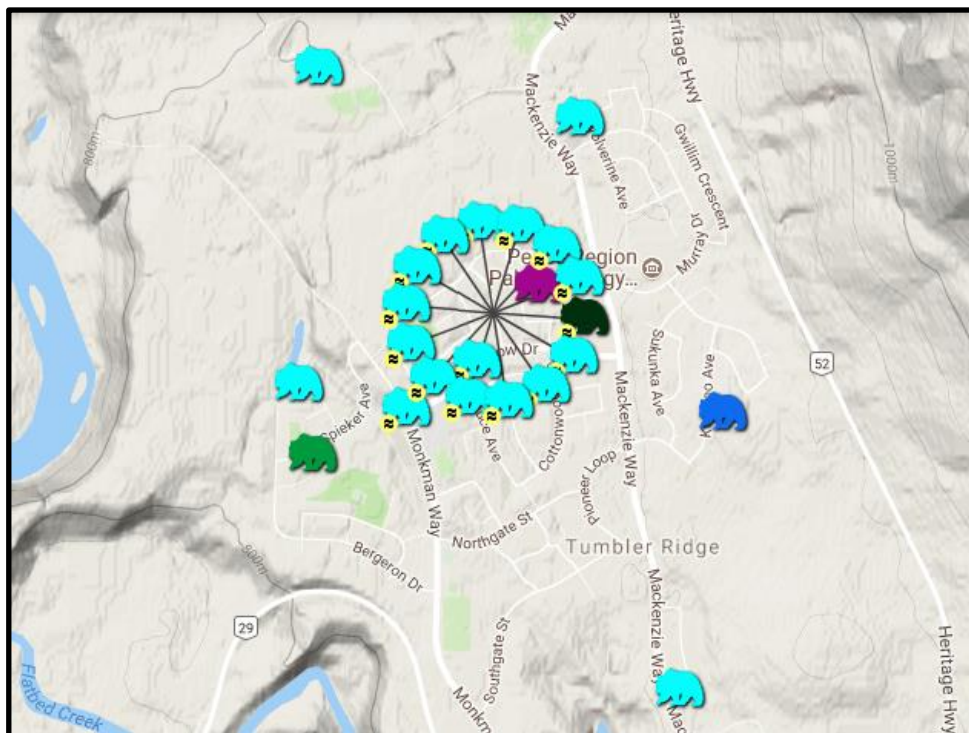


Figure 7. Grizzly bear sightings reported to COS in the DTR June 1 – Oct 5 2017



Figure 8. Green spaces in close proximity to residential areas and priority areas for native berry management (red lines)

Acknowledgements

In its third year, the District of Tumbler Ridge WildSafeBC Program was warmly embraced by friends from last season. Throughout the year, the WCC enjoyed adding names to our ever growing list of community ties. The WildSafeBC program is thankfully supported by numerous organizations and individuals throughout the community of the District of Tumbler Ridge. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Environment, District of Tumbler Ridge, Chetwynd and Dawson Creek Conservation Officer Service, Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark, Tumbler Ridge Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Information Center, local businesses that displayed brochures and posters, School District #59 for allowing WildSafeBC to present to their students, and the residents of Tumbler Ridge for its support of the program.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator would also like to thank the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, specifically Trina Radford, Corinne Hutchinson, Shelley Nohels, and Frank Ritcey, for their guidance and support of the WildSafeBC program in the District of Tumbler Ridge.