

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Village of Cumberland

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Executive Summary

The Village of Cumberland participated in its first WildSafeBC season in 2017 with the program in place from May to November. It was a moderate year for human-wildlife conflicts which is a positive sign. However, access to garbage by black bears remains a significant problem within the Village of Cumberland coupled with an abundance of unmanaged fruit trees. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Cali Barton worked to build relationships within the community to promote the messaging of the WildSafeBC program.

This report gives an overview of WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland activities from the season as well as challenges and future goals. An outcome of note for the 2017 WildSafeBC program includes the extension of the program past November 30th to the end of January for the WCC to develop a Bear Hazard Assessment (BHA) report. Additionally, the Village of Cumberland has initiated the first steps of pursuing Bear Smart Community status and the WCC will assist in progressing this application.

Wildlife Activity

Reports for wildlife activity to the Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line and the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) were relatively low during the 2017 season. Few sightings and reports occurred in the spring and summer, with a peak in reports occurring in August for cougar, and September for black bears. From January 1st to November 1st a total of 8 cougar, 7 black bear and 5 deer were reported to RAPP and WARP combined (Figure 1).

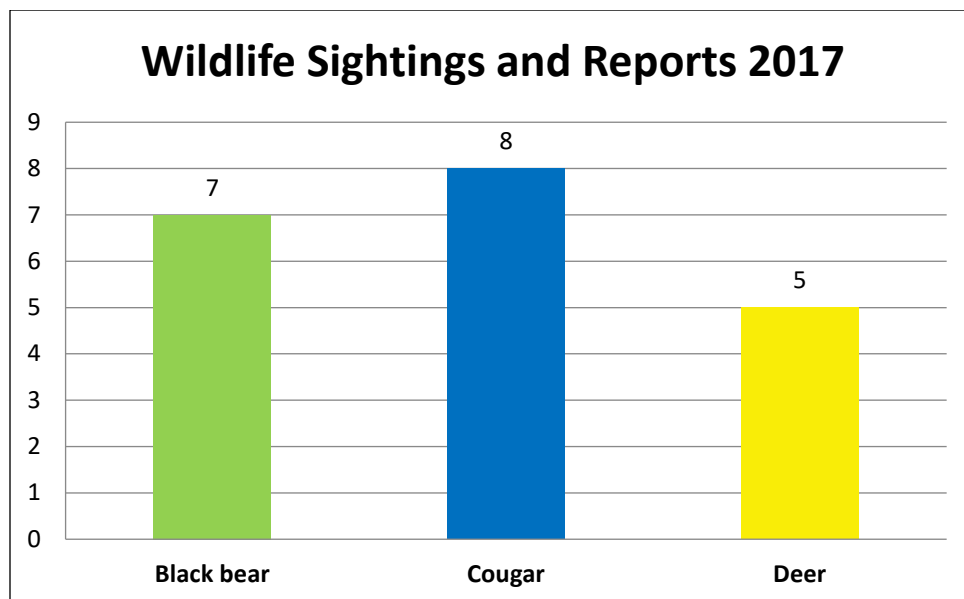


Figure 1. WARP data for all species reports to COS Jan. 1 - Nov. 1, 2017

The number of reports was comparable to the previous year 2016, but down from 2015 with a total of 51 black bear sightings and/or encounters reported in the Village of Cumberland between Jan 1st, 2015 and November 1st in 2015 (Figure 2).

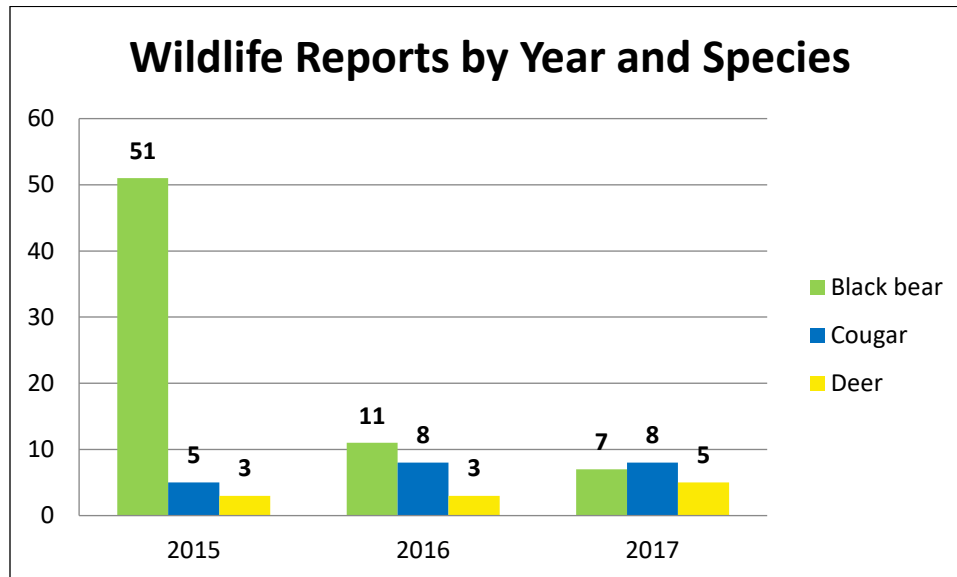


Figure 2. WARP data for all species reports to COS Jan. 1 - Nov. 1 2015, 2016, and 2017

According to the WARP data, the most commonly reported attractant for bears was garbage, followed by residential fruit trees and berry bushes. The majority of black bear reports unfortunately did not list an attractant type. Pets were reported as an attractant for cougars, although most reports did not specify an attractant type.

The low number of reports may not be an accurate indicator of wildlife activity in the Village especially for black bears and deer. A large number of deer roam the Village on a daily basis (anywhere from 2 to 20+ can be spotted at any given time and any given day within the Village). People are so accustomed to seeing the deer throughout the Village that they are very rarely reported, usually only when they have been injured, are sick, or fawns appear to be abandoned. Black bear activity is also known to be higher than what is reported, with evidence in the form of bear signs such as scat, damage to residential fruit trees, chewed garbage cans, garbage scattered through the surrounding bushlands and greenways, property damage, scratches and markings, and local sightings around the Village and trails that are reported by word of mouth only, information from experts and professionals (such as COS, bylaw and the local fire department). Based on these sources of information bear activity in the Village may have been quite high this year and there are a couple of garbage conditioned bears that were causing problems on the Southeastern side of the Village and Kendal avenue and supposedly exhibiting human habituated behavior. On a positive note, no bears were destroyed in the Village of Cumberland this season.

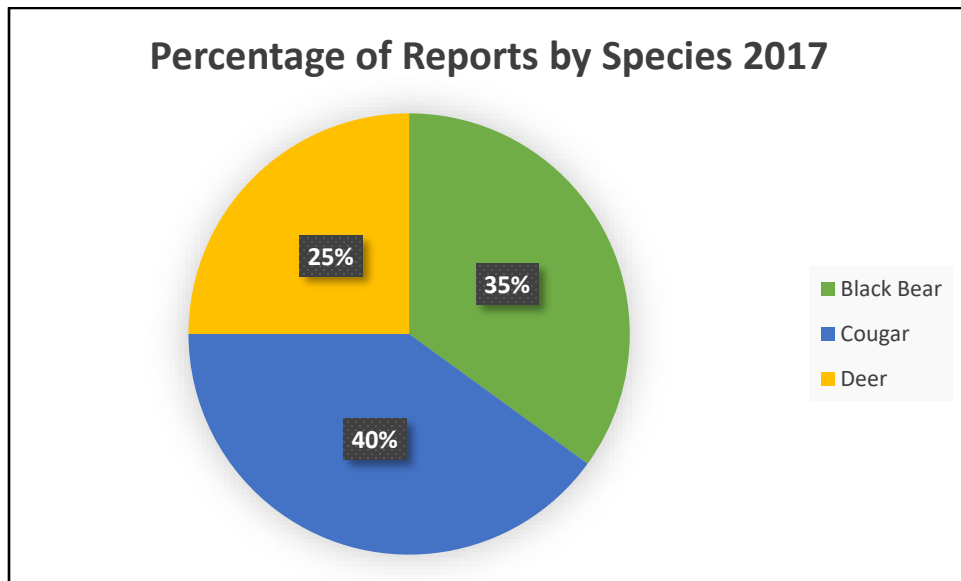


Figure 3. WARP data showing report percentage by species Jan. 1 - Nov. 1, 2017

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Highlights from the 2017 Season

Public Events

The WCC attended a number of events during the 2017 season including the Farmers Market, Filberg Apple Press Festival and the Foggy Mountain Fall Fair. These events offered a great opportunity for the WCC to speak with the general public, answer questions, spread awareness and provide information materials (e.g. brochures, WARP statistics, hands-on learning, fun swag for the kids like tattoos and colouring books). It helped to promote the WildSafeBC program and to establish relationships within the community.



Figure 4. Foggy Mountain poster and WildSafeBC booth at FMFF



Figure 5. WCC and Junior Ranger at Cumberland Community Farmers Market

Junior Ranger Program and School Presentations

The Junior Ranger Program was a great success this year with seven school presentations and 160 Junior Ranger kits provided to participants from classes at Cumberland Community School. The coordinator also visited two classes from the Hand-in-Hand nature education program (seeds and roots). The kids seemed to have a blast and learn a lot. It was a great way to disseminate information throughout the community. Some of the older classes were a bit too mature for the Junior Ranger kits so instead the coordinator offered a photo contest for two of the older classes (grades 6-7). The photo contests required the kids to photo document activities like looking for bear signs, secure an attractant in their home/community and share WildSafeBC's messaging with others (e.g. read and share the brochures with others). The contests were a huge hit and seemed to work well to get the kids involved in attractant management and spreading awareness through the community. An additional benefit was that the contest resulted in an increase in Facebook followers for WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland's Facebook page and increased the community's awareness of the program resulting in larger turn out to WildSafeBC events.



Figure 6. School presentation at Cumberland Community School

Other Presentations and Events

This year the WCC also gave an informative presentation to the Village Municipal Council and the Cumberland Rotary Club. The Cumberland Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) report developed by the WCC was presented to the Village Council early in the season. Rotary Club was given a general presentation about the WildSafeBC program, current WARP statistics and how community members can get involved. Both were well received and provided additional opportunities to build a presence in the community, build connections and spread information.

The WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey came to visit Cumberland twice this season. The first visit WildSafeBC Cumberland hosted an electric fencing workshop for community members, which was run by Frank. The turnout was not large but it was a necessary beginning step in gaining an understanding of the role of electric fences for livestock and backyard wildlife attractants such as chickens, fruit trees and vegetable gardens.

WildSafeBC Cumberland also hosted a well-attended and much enjoyed film night with Frank. Frank gave his “staying safe on both sides of the glass” wildlife talk with fantastic film footage he took from his adventures around BC. It was a fun and informative night for all and a great way to bring a diverse group of community members together to share knowledge and information. Cookies, tea and coffee were provided and Frank answered many questions from community members.



Figure 7. Junior Ranger presentations with Hand-in-Hand Nature Education Program



Figure 8. Electric fence installation with Frank Ritcey and Amanda from CBI

BC Goes Wild Weekend

For the second annual BC Goes Wild Weekend, the WildSafeBC Cumberland program offered three fun family-friendly events including an education booth with craft tables and scavenger hunt, a film night screening Wild Wednesday and bear spray clips and a nature walk with a local naturalist. The first two events were held in the OAP Hall at 2674 Dunsmuir Avenue.

For the education booth, a substantial amount of information and materials were set up in the OAP Hall with three tables for activities. Table one had colouring pages and general craft supplies. Table two had a nature activity where the participants gathered sticks and other objects from nature and used them to create a nature weaving/mobile. Table three had scavenger hunt printouts and a bear scat photo competition with an opportunity to win a prize. For the film night a large projector screen was set up and chairs like a theatre and free popcorn and snacks were offered.

Although attendance at the Cumberland events was somewhat low the BC Goes Wild weekend events were a fun opportunity to engage with the community and seemed to be enjoyed by all.



Figure 9. Participants at BC Goes Wild Weekend nature crafts event

Garbage Tagging

A total of eleven garbage tagging patrols were carried out biweekly in partnership with Village bylaw officers. Thirty six stickers were placed on garbage bins that were put out too early (each residence which placed a bin out early in violation of the Solid Waste bylaw also received a municipal ticket). Enforcement of garbage bylaws may be one of the greater factors contributing to lower encounters with bears in the Village. During one patrol a bear was spotted crossing the street looking for garbage bins put out early.



Figure 10. A tagged garbage bin (left) and a bin with damage from a bear (right)

Door-to-Door Canvassing

Approximately 163 houses were visited through a number of canvassing initiatives throughout the season. Door-to-door visits provide an opportunity to speak directly with residents about attractant management practices as well as listening to feedback and answering questions. Visits were conducted in areas experiencing high bear and wildlife activity, as well as areas deemed to be high risk based on information from bylaw, COS and wildlife reports to WARP.

Media and Social Media

A number of media sources were utilized this season to promote WildSafeBC's messaging about reducing human-wildlife conflict in the Village of Cumberland and throughout the Comox Valley. Four radio interviews were given during the 2017 season, with three to the Eagle 97.3 FM and one to the Goat 98.9 FM on topics such as bear activity, WARP and reporting, bear safety, WildSafeBC events and advertising. Advertising, posters and brochures were promoted by the Comox Valley Visitors Centre and Comox Military Family Resource Centre. The WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland Facebook page was used to spread information, promote events and engage with the community. Additional partners and community groups helped share the WildSafeBC Facebook posts including the Cumberland Bear Initiative (CBI), Cumberland Parks and Recreation, Cumberland Lake Wilderness Society and the Village of Cumberland. Posters and visual messaging was spread throughout the Village to promote the BC Goes Wild Weekend events and to increase presence and visibility in the community.

CBI and Partners

Cumberland Bear Initiative (CBI) has been operating in the Village of Cumberland for a couple of years working to promote bear aware messaging and reduce human-wildlife conflict with bears in and around the Village. A natural partner for WildSafeBC, they worked with last year's Community Coordinator Angeline Seed. This year the WildSafeBC Coordinator attended CBI meetings and contributed to future plans and goals, specifically CBI will be working alongside WildSafeBC to assist with the work towards investigating what would be required to achieve bear smart status for the Village of Cumberland.

Bear Smart Community Status

Part of the work undertaken in the 2017 WildSafeBC season in Cumberland was investigation of required steps towards Bear Smart Community status. The Village of Cumberland granted additional funding and resources for this year's WCC to begin assessing the work required of the Village to achieve status. A number of meetings were held to discuss the steps involved in the process and to assess the potential for the Village to work towards this goal. Frank Ritcey (WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator) and Mike Badry (Wildlife Conflicts Prevention Coordinator for the Ministry of Environment) visited mid-October to present to Village representatives and

CBI about Bear Smart Community status and a meeting was held with Frank, Mike Badry, the WCC, James Abrams (bylaw) and Sergeant Mike Newton (of Conservation Services) to discuss priorities and challenges for the program and work towards achieving status. Over all the meetings were rewarding for all and resulted in the Village of Cumberland approving an inquiry into the next steps for Bear Smart status including a number of budgeted hours this season for the WCC to prepare an initial assessment and report of the Village's current progress in the process including a timeline and resource estimate.



Figure 11. Bear Smart Community Status meetings with Mike Badry, Cali Barton, James Abrams and Mike Newton (left to right)

Challenge for the 2017 Season

Challenges for the 2017 season include:

- A general lack of public reporting of wildlife sightings/encounters or conflict
- An abundance of unmanaged residential fruit trees throughout Village and the old orchard sites
- A lack of secure public garbage infrastructure and appropriate indoor storage for residential garbage

- A lack of volunteers and resources needed to conduct larger scale surveys, door-to-door education and steps towards Bear Smart Community status

Many of the challenges for the 2017 season are worked into the goals for the 2018 season. A particularly difficult challenge to the Village of Cumberland is the lack of appropriate indoor storage space for residential garbage and waste given the historical nature of residences. Many of the residences are heritage houses with little or no garage or secure storage space and narrow streets, boulevards and yards creating little space for outdoor enclosures such as sheds. The community is very attached to their fruit trees which are spread throughout the Village and to the heritage orchards, however, a very small percentage of these trees are appropriately managed and present a serious challenge to keeping bears out of the Village boundaries.

Goals for 2018

Goals for the 2018 WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland program include:

- Developing a proactive approach to fruit tree management by utilizing the CBI data to develop support for a larger scale door-to-door education program, as well as coordination of gleaning groups to address old orchard sites.
- Continued efforts to reduce garbage as an attractant including working with the Village regarding bylaw enforcement strategies, continued public education, innovative solutions for storage on streets with little indoor storage options, working with developers to ensure planning around garage, and continued discussion and assessment of alternative options (e.g. community bear resistant bins).
- Continued community outreach through additional Junior Ranger programs and attendance at community events.
- Maintain and grow partnerships and volunteers.
- Encourage reporting and use of WARP.
- Increased followers on Facebook and general presence in the community as well as media exposure (e.g. a column in local newspaper).
- Development of the Bear Hazard Assessment and investigate the initial steps towards Bear Smart status.
- Development of information methods to reach visitors, campers and tourists.



Figure 12. Bear resistant bin installation in the community park

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland would like to acknowledge the generous support of the program's sponsor, supporters, volunteers, and partners. A big thank-you to the sponsors of this program who make it possible including the Village of Cumberland, the British Columbia Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Thank you to the staff of the Village of Cumberland for providing a welcoming space for program work and delivery and storage of program materials and equipment. Thank you to James Abrams Village bylaw enforcement officer for support, contributing knowledge and experience as well as many volunteer hours to ensure the program was a success.

Sergeant Mike Newton, Conservation Services for the support, information and expertise and the Black Creek Conservation Services Office and Sarah Ellis for providing and organizing wildlife education kit materials for the school presentations and events.

Mike Badry from the Ministry of Environment for presenting to the Village and supporting the Bear Smart Community application process.

Thank you Cumberland Bear Initiative for your partnership, support and enthusiasm for the program and goals. A special thanks to Caroline Bradfield, Kayt Chambers and Loys Maingon for volunteering last minute with BC Goes Wild Weekend events.

Finally, thank you to our inspiring Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey and the amazing staff at the BCCF Kamloops office Corinne, Trina, , Mitch and others for making the program delivery possible and all your hard work and support.