

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

Okanagan Westside

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Photo Credit: Scott

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Ministry of Environment

Executive Summary

The 2017 season was the second year for the WildSafeBC program for the Okanagan Westside. Funding for the program was provided by the City of West Kelowna, District of Peachland, and the Regional District

In Peachland and West Kelowna, there were a total of 439 wildlife conflict reports between January 1, 2017 and November 20, 2017. Black bear accounted for approximately 52% of reports in West Kelowna and approximately 80% in Peachland. Other wildlife regularly reported in the area included: deer, coyote, cougar, rattlesnakes and several others.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) regularly attended the Peachland Farmers and Crafters Market and other community events throughout the year, conducted door-to-door education, presented to school children and clubs, and established a strong media presence through social media and press coverage.

This year the WCC also held the second annual WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild weekend, which included two events: a nature walk and scavenger hunt for families, and a bear spray and wildlife safety training course.

The WildSafeBC program has played an important role in continuing to spread information about wildlife safety, sightings and attractant management in West Kelowna and Peachland, in an effort to reduce human-wildlife conflicts in the Okanagan.



Figure 1: WCC speaks to residents at the Peachland Farmers and Crafters Market

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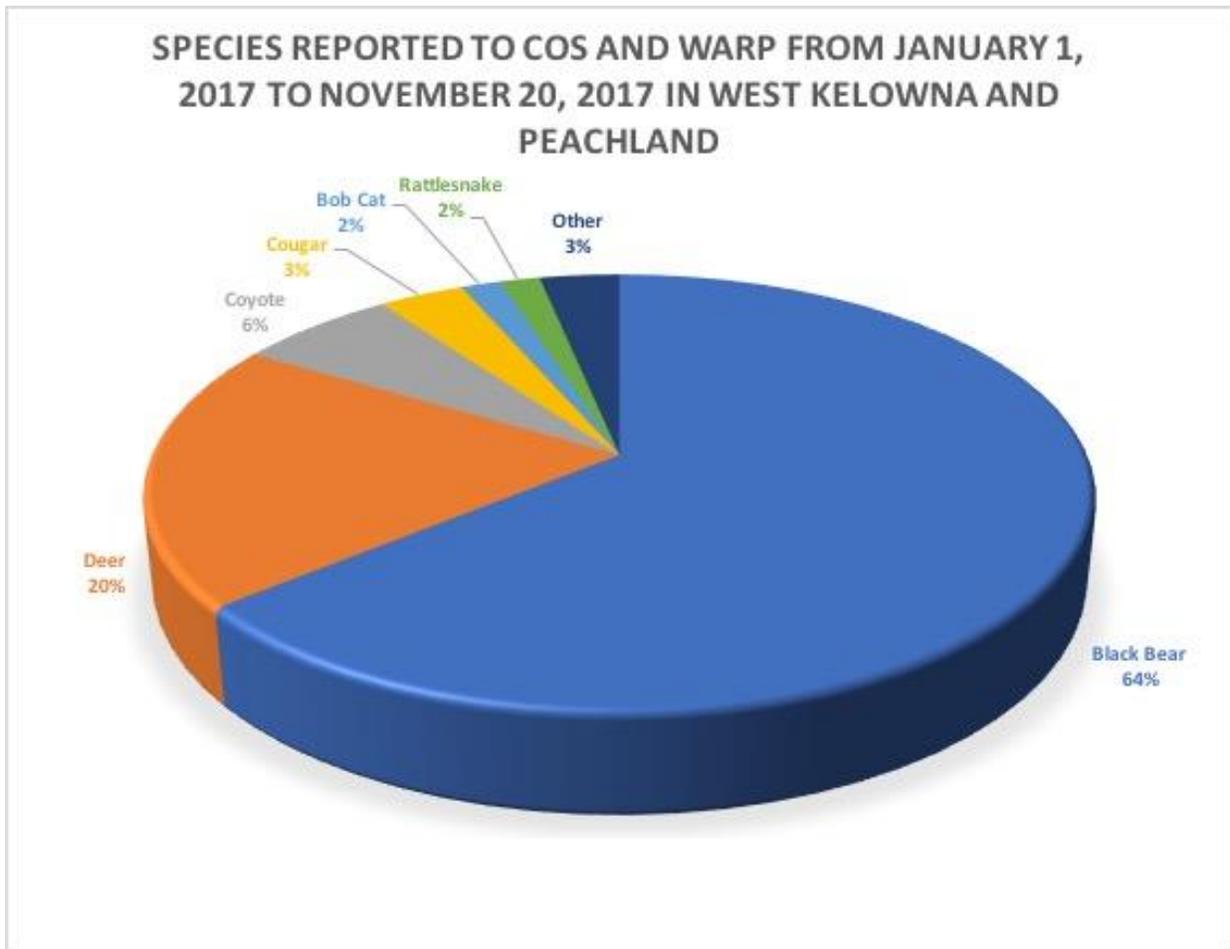


Figure 3: Species reports in West Kelowna and Peachland (January 1 to November 20, 2107)

The chart above depicts the breakdown of the species reported to COS and the Wildlife Alert Report Program (WARP) during the period from January 1 to November 20, 2017. Black bear accounted for approximately 64% of all the wildlife reports to the COS and WARP, with a total of 278 black bear reports during the specified period. Approximately half of these reports were in West Kelowna and the other half in Peachland. Other wildlife regularly reported in the area included: deer, coyote, cougar and rattlesnakes.

In West Kelowna attractants were identified in only 54% of the black bear reports. Where the attractant was specified, approximately 54% of those reports were the result of unsecured garbage. Fruit trees accounted for approximately 26% of reports. Other attractants identified included livestock, bird feeders and compost.

In Peachland attractants were identified in 58% of the black bear reports. Where the attractant was specified, approximately 68% of those reports were the result of unsecured garbage. Fruit trees accounted for approximately 11% of reports. Other attractants identified included compost, pets and bird feeders.

Evidently, garbage continues to be the most significant attractant of black bears in city of West Kelowna and District of Peachland.

Presentations

Presentations are a great way to convey detailed information about the basics of wildlife biology and behaviour. This helps to provide insights into the reasons human-wildlife conflict occurs and what we can do to reduce it. Presentations were developed for adult groups, elementary school students, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts, and pre-school age children this season. Following the presentations children were provided with either a Junior Rangers package which included a colouring book or some colouring pages, a bookmark, a button, Junior Ranger membership card and oath card, and temporary tattoos. The WildSafeBC OK-Westside program received 250 extra kits donated by Telus this year. Many of the teachers took advantage of extended classroom presentations, which included three presentations for the students, so the children could gain a more in-depth understanding about wildlife, safety around wildlife and reducing human-wildlife conflict. Through the extended program, students were given the opportunity to play games and have more time for interactive classroom learning, which help to reinforce the concepts taught.

The teachers at each of the schools were provided with information on how they could continue education in the classroom on reducing human-wildlife conflict; to facilitate this, the WCC advised the teachers of the Junior Ranger activities and the Wild Wednesday videos. The WCC for the Okanagan Westside gave a total of 51 presentations to over 800 participants including:

- 4 x Shannon Lake Elementary Grades 4 and 5 - 139 students
- 28 x George Pringle Elementary Grades K to 6 - 275 students
- 7 x Peachland Elementary Grades K to 5 - 131 students
- George Pringle Strong Start - 18 children and their parents
- 2 x Constable Neil Bruce Middle School - 60 children
- NW Cubs and Guides - 15 children and their parents
- 1st Westbank Sparks - 21 children
- West Kelowna Scouts - 6 children
- RDCO Fur and Fins Exhibit - 10 children
- Ladies Friendship Hiking Club - 25 attendees
- Peachland Library Bear Aware Program - 3 attendees
- Peachland Public Library Summer Reading Club - 20 children and their parents

- 4th Naitaka Guides - 15 children
- BC Goes Wild Weekend Scavenger hunt – 30 children and their parents
- BG Goes Wild Weekend Nature Walk and Bear Spray Training – 45 participants

On the weekend of September 16th and 17th, WildSafeBC held their second annual BC Goes Wild weekend. This third weekend in September is the time when human-bear conflict tends to peak in the province, and WildSafeBC held numerous events across the province to encourage people to “Keep wildlife wild and communities’ safe”. On September 16, in coordination with the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO), WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside held a family-friendly event which included a nature walk followed by a scavenger hunt, at Shannon Lake Regional Park. The event was very successful and drew 30 participant children, as well as their parents (Figure 6).

On September 17, the WCC, in collaboration with the RDCO and local hiking group, Hiking Addiction, held a bear safety and bear spray training course followed by a hike at Rose Valley Regional Park, in West Kelowna. This event was also very successful and drew 45 enthusiastic participants (Figure 7).

Prizes for participants were collected from several local businesses, and were graciously accepted as wonderful contributions to enhance these events. Donations were received from Wholesale Sports in West Kelowna, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Johnson Bentley Memorial Pool, and Ogopogo’s Treasure Chest.



Figure 6: RDCO representative, Risti Lesperence, leads a nature walk for BC Goes Wild Weekend



Figure 7: WCC provides bear safety and bear spray training for BC Goes Wild Weekend

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door education is an important part of the WildSafeBC program, as it enables the WCC to make direct contact with residents in neighbourhoods where there have been reports of human wildlife conflict. Given that the program is still in its infancy, it is also a way to introduce many residents to WildSafeBC, meet their local coordinator, and learn about the many resources available to them through the WildSafeBC website and Facebook page.

New this year, residents were provided with a Homeowner's Checklist (Figure 8). Often the more significant attractants, namely garbage, are discussed during door-to-door visits. The Homeowner's Checklist leaves the resident with a clear guide to managing all possible attractants on their property. Residents were also provided a WildSafeBC Black Bear brochure. When residents were not at home, they were also left this information, as well as a door hanger with contact information for the WCC. Door-to-door education was conducted in both Peachland and West Kelowna. In total, more than 500 residents were contacted through door-to-door education.



Bears that start using human-provided foods may become food-conditioned. Once a bear starts equating humans with food, they can lose their natural wariness of humans and become human-habituated. A habituated bear tolerates humans in much closer proximity than what is safe for both bears and humans. This increases the potential for a dangerous interaction between the bears and us.

PLEASE DO YOUR PART IN KEEPING OUR COMMUNITY SAFE BY MANAGING THE WILDLIFE ATTRACTANTS AROUND YOUR HOME.

Homeowner’s Checklist

- Garbage** Keep in the house or enclosed shed/garage until morning of pick-up day, or take to garbage facility.
- Recycling** Wash recyclables and keep bins clean.
- Bird Food** Use birdfeeders only in the winter. Attract birds with birdbaths and birdhouses instead. Bird seed is an attractant for all sorts of wildlife, from bears to rats.
- Compost** Turn compost regularly, add half brown materials, like leaves or shredded paper. Avoid adding fish, meat, grease/oil, or milk products.
- Fruit Trees** Pick ripe/fallen fruit daily, or arrange for volunteers to pick. Remove fruit trees that aren’t being utilized. Install electric fence to deter wildlife.
- Barbeque** Burn off grill and clean grease trap after each use. Store covered and in a secure area.
- Pet Food** Bring dishes inside at night. Store pet food inside.
- Human food** Keep food secured indoors, not in vehicles. Avoid the use of outdoor freezers.

If you see a bear (or other wildlife species) in your area:

- Go indoors. Stay calm and do not run or taunt the animal.
- Alert your neighbours.
- Report human-wildlife conflicts to the BC Conservation Officer Service **1-877-952-7277**

If you have questions or would like assistance with solving a bear or other wildlife attractant problem, please call the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator for the Okanagan Westside, Andrea Tait, at 250-862-7336 or e-mail okwestside@wildsafebc.com.

WildSafeBC is a program designed by the BC Conservation Foundation, a non-profit organization, with the objective of reducing human-wildlife conflict across the province of BC. For more information, visit www.wildsafebc.com.

Revised May 2017

Figure 8: WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Homeowner Checklist

The WCC also conducted garbage tagging throughout the season, placing bright yellow “Wildlife Attractant” stickers on bins put out too early. Garbage tagging was conducted in the Glenrosa, Shannon Lake, Smith Creek, Tallus Ridge, Shannon Woods, and Rose Valley communities of West Kelowna. Bear activity in these neighbourhoods is often directly correlated to the night before garbage pick-up. As the following image depicts, a black bear had accessed this garbage cart placed out the night before pickup. Despite being tipped over and having its contents strewn across the driveway and street, a yellow warning sticker was still placed on this cart.



Figure 9: A garbage cart, knocked over by a bear, is tagged with a yellow warning sticker

Displays

Educational displays at local events were popular with 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 display is inviting and engaging, with a bear and cougar hide and several wildlife skulls for the residents to view and explore. Residents were drawn in by these items and they created an opportunity to discuss the additional topics of wildlife attractants and human-wildlife conflict. The WCC gave out bookmarks, colouring pages, 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. WildSafeBC held displays at the following local events:

- RDCO Go Fish Event
- Westside Daze (West Kelowna)
- Canada Day Festival
- Peachland Farmers and Crafters Market (6 days)
- City of West Kelowna Open House
- RDCO Friends of Kalamo Park Pancake Breakfast



Figure 10: Booth display the Peachland Farmer and Crafters Market

Media

The WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Facebook page was updated regularly throughout the season, garnering thousands of page views. The number of page followers increased from 65 to 190. Facebook has provided a platform for communicating wildlife activity in a particular area, discussion wildlife attractants and preventing human-wildlife conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC’s messaging through published articles in online news and television news reports. In total, eight media stories were published throughout the season. The WCC also shared these news stories and article through social media. Articles were published in the following newspapers: Kelowna Daily Courier, Castanet, Kelowna Capital News (x 2), Global News Okanagan (x 2).



Figure 11: News Report on Global News warns West Kelowna residents about bears in area

Additionally, the City of West Kelowna and the District of Peachland included WildSafeBC articles in the July newsletter that was sent to all homeowners along with the quarterly utility bill. The City of West Kelowna also included a WildSafeBC notice on wildlife attractants in the October newsletter. In total, approximately 17,000 residents received each of these newsletters. The newsletter was an excellent opportunity to introduce residents to the WildSafeBC program, and was regularly mentioned by residents when they contacted the WCC. The City of West

Kelowna also updated their website to clearly state when garbage should be placed curbside, as well as information on being “bear aware” with links to WildSafeBC.

Bear in Area Signage

Early in the season the District of Peachland staff worked with the WCC to develop a Bear in Area sandwich board. The board will continue to be utilized in the future to effectively notify residents when there is a “Bear in Area”.



Figure 12: Bear in Area sign developed with the District of Peachland

Challenges of the 2017 Season

Unsecured garbage continues to be one of the most significant challenges for the community, with most residents storing their garbage outside, beside their homes. The importance of securing garbage was the primary focus of all media communication, public displays, presentations, and one-on-one conversations with residents. There was some resistance to this, due to the smell, or the fact that many residents did not possess a shed or garage. Methods for reducing smell were provided, such as freezing certain items that may create the most smell. In some communities, there continues to be a reactive mindset to “problem bears”, while other neighbourhoods are more proactive in their attractant management. Door-to-door education is important for addressing this challenge; however, it is a time-consuming activity. Rallying volunteers to assist with door-to-door education would be highly beneficial, although rallying volunteers for this activity has also proven to be challenging.

The population of the area has grown considerably in the past decade, with many residents moving to the area from other parts of the country or from abroad. Evidently there is little understanding of the wildlife that may be present in the area, wildlife attractants and how to effectively manage these attractants. In addition, many long-time residents of the area have become complacent with bears in their neighbourhoods, and do not recognize the risks associated with “inviting” wildlife into their community.

Given the temperate climate, the area is also home to many orchards and vineyards, and residential fruit trees. Many residents misunderstand the significance of wildlife, namely bears, accessing fruit trees. Special attention was given at public displays and presentations to explain that access to fruit trees is a step towards habituation and thus potentially a garbage-conditioned bear. Workshops to educate residents, particularly those with smaller orchards and vineyards, on electric fencing would have enhanced the program, however, due to limited resources this was not able to be achieved this season.

Goals and Opportunities for 2018

Looking forward to the 2018 season, WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make WildSafeBC an integral part of the communities of West Kelowna and Peachland. There are many opportunities available to continue and develop the program in the community, including:

- Begin to develop strategies which work towards achieving Bear Smart Community status. The first step may be to establish a Steering Committee or Advisory Group to implement “Bear Smart” criteria for each of these cities. This may include a review and update of bylaws in relation to attractant management, namely by specifying requirements for properly securing garbage. The Advisory Group may also work with OK Environmental and the RDCO to review the feasibility of having bear-resistant garbage carts as part of their regular garbage cart rental program.

Opportunities to continue public education include:

- Increased presence at public events, such as the Peachland Farmers and Crafters Market, was very successful in 2017 and should be continued in coming years.
- Create additional opportunities for bear spray and bear safety training workshops.
- Create opportunities to provide electric fencing workshops, which would be beneficial for many of the small, family-run vineyards and orchards.
- Efforts to contact developers were initiated, but there is an opportunity to continue this work next season. Given the continued influx of new communities, it would be beneficial to contact new residents when they move into their new home. When properties are sold, often the developer provides a “welcome to the community” booklet, and there is an opportunity to reach new residents with WildSafeBC messaging in this way.
- Continue to make door-to-door education an integral part of the program, as this is an excellent way to speak directly to residents in high-risk areas.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the City of West Kelowna, the District of Peachland, the Regional District of Central Okanagan, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for funding this year's program and activities. Thanks to the Thompson Okanagan Telus Community Board for their support of the Junior Ranger Program in our area.

Special thanks to Shelley Schnitzler and Kirsten Jones of the City of West Kelowna; Nicole Cressman with the District of Peachland; Nicole Kittmer and Risti Lesperance with the Regional District of Central Okanagan.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank David Cox of the Conservation Officer Service, Mike Cain and Patti Nelson, Bylaw Enforcement with the City of West Kelowna, for their assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing.

For helping to make the second annual BC Goes Wild weekend events a huge success, I would like to thank Josh Hoggan, Nicole Kittmer and Risti Lesperance for their significant time contributions to these events.

Thank you to Frank Ritcey of the WildSafeBC program for your guidance throughout the season; Trina Radford, Corinne Hutchinson, and Shelley Nohels of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for your continued support and assistance.

Finally, thank you to my dedicated volunteer, Ann Graham, who generously donated many weekends to the WildSafeBC program. Thank you for always showing up with a smile, and a willingness to help out wherever you were needed. Your assistance was invaluable.

Last but not least, thank you to the residents who made an effort to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.

Let's continue to work together to keep wildlife wild and our community safe!

