

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2017

City of Vernon

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Photo credit: Peter
Sulzle



Ministry of
Environment



Executive Summary

2017 was a very successful year for the WildSafeBC (WSBC) program in the City of Vernon. By using the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP), the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) was able to educate residents and visitors in areas with high incidence of wildlife conflicts, and collect data of the species involved in conflicts. The American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) was the most reported species through WARP for Vernon. Bear conflicts peaked in the spring, as bears came out of hibernation and into neighborhoods looking for easily accessible food sources. However, with an unusually high occurrence of hot temperatures, wildfires and smoke during this year's summer months, bear sightings were fewer in the months of July and August. The number of bear sightings during the autumn months was average when compared to the data of the past two years.

Incidences of bear conflicts related to residential garbage increased compared to previous years' reports. The WCC noted poor attractant management by residents with regards to birdfeed, fruit trees, and residential garbage. Managing all types of attractants, notably garbage, was the forefront of conversations with residents followed by wildlife safety.

The WCC attended several events and presented wildlife safety education throughout the city (Figure 1). In addition, there was ample outreach through door-to-door education and garbage tagging in areas with a high incidence of human-wildlife conflict.

Many residents were happy to see the WildSafeBC program back in their community this year and looked forward to its return next year.



Figure 1. The WCC presenting wildlife safety advice to a resident at the Sunshine Festival

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Highlights from the 2017 Program

During the 2017 season, the WCC was actively engaged with the public via door-to-door education, garbage bin tagging, media releases, social media promotions, public displays, and presentations in schools. The WCC endeavored to reach all neighborhoods within the city; however, it was a challenge reaching all households due to the size of Vernon. This year WSBC reached 12,237 people from the beginning of June to the end of October (Figure 2).

CONTACTS MADE WITHIN VERNON BY WILDSAFEBC

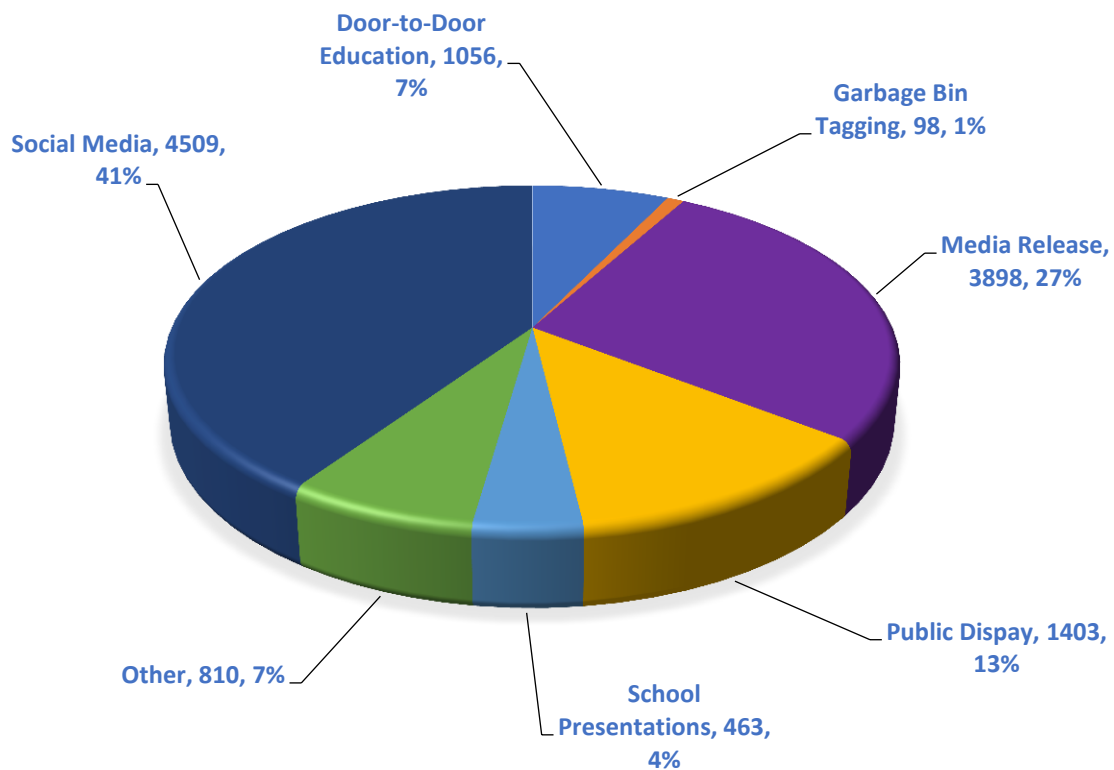


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the WSBC Vernon program reach

Community Events

A benefit of public displays and events is that it targets a diverse range of people. This provided WildSafeBC with a platform to build a stronger connection with the public, and with individuals that may have had little or no knowledge of our program or of our goal of “keeping wildlife wild and community’s safe.”

The displays permitted the WCC to get closer to the residents of Vernon by providing information and advice to people that have wildlife questions and people who may have had wildlife encounters or live near wildlife. The displays usually consisted of informational pamphlets and images depicting wildlife hazards, attractants, habituated wildlife, food-conditioned animals, and human-wildlife conflicts (Figure 3).

This year WSBC attended 11 community events reaching a total of 2,213 people including:

- Sunshine Festival
- Vernon Farmer’s Market (x 2)
- Canada Day
- Allan Brooks Nature Centre (x 3)
- BC Nature Conference (x 3)
- BC Goes Wild



Photo Credit: Andrew Otto-Artavia

Figure 3. WildSafeBC educational booth display

Presentations

Whenever you talk about wildlife with young audiences in classroom presentations or large public shows, you have a great opportunity to interest them in nature and inspire them to help meet our goals of reducing human-wildlife conflict. Children also bring home this message to their parents and families. The WCC was able to present to a total of 579 children and adults. The WildSafeBC Vernon program received 250 extra kits donated by Telus this year. Attending children at school presentations received a Junior Ranger kit which included a colouring book, pencil, ruler, badge, sticker, oath card, and a membership card (Figure 4). Presentations delivered in 2017 included:

- BX Elementary School
- Creekside Montessori Children's School
- Allan Brooks Nature Centre (x2)



Photo Credit: Andrew Otto-Artavia

Figure 4. WCC Andrew Otto-Artavia presenting to children at the Allan Brook's Nature Centre

Door-to-Door

For the WCC in the City of Vernon, door-to-door outreach was one of the most effective ways of distributing information pamphlets and educating residents with a high incidence of human-wildlife conflict. It was a great method for the WCC to evaluate wildlife hazards and attractants for the community, and a great way for people to remember the WildSafeBC program. If we come to somebody's home, there was a greater chance that the person remembered us when compared to someone who read an article about us in the local press. It also allowed us to educate people that left their garbage out and other attractants on the spot.

The WCC worked with the Conservation Officer Services (COS) when a neighborhood or a residence needed education on wildlife safety. The Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) also gave the WCC valuable indications of areas with high human-wildlife encounters. Figure 5 presents the WARP data for the Vernon community which allowed the WCC to educate and target areas with high incidences of human-wildlife conflict. WARP also provides information regarding the attractant type associated with wildlife encounters colour codes. When compared to other communities and the province, Vernon has more garbage-related incidents than average. Over 800 people were reached this year through door-to-door education in the city of Vernon.

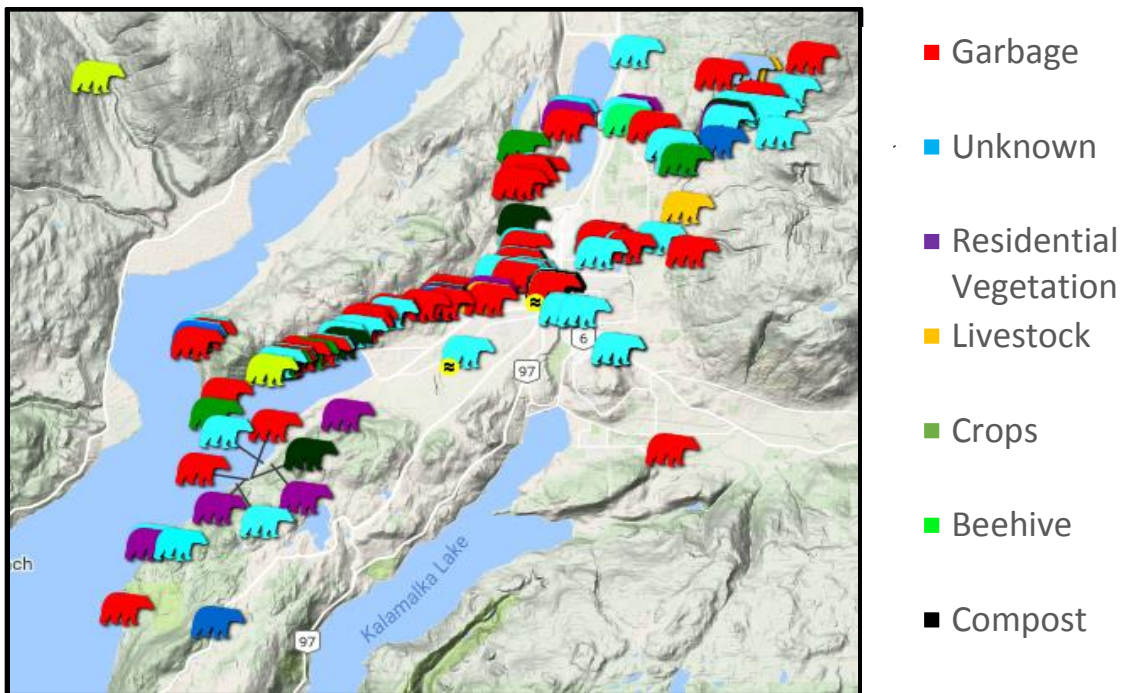


Figure 5. Bear activity from January 1st to October 2nd, 2017

Garbage Tagging

Garbage tagging consisted of the WCC going out in the evening or the day before refuse collection, and placing a bright yellow “Wildlife Attractant” sticker on the garbage cans put out early. However, many residences across the various neighborhoods of Vernon did not possess a garbage can for storing their residential garbage, therefore garbage bags were frequently placed out on the curb for collection (Figure 6).



Photo Credit: Andrew Otto-Artavia

Figure 6. An example of garbage bag placement on the street curb prior to collection day in Predator Ridge

Media

Many forms of media were used to reach audiences including; press releases and interviews that were given to local newspapers and web media. The WCC was featured in the Morning Star Newspaper and on Castanet.net. The WSBC Vernon Facebook page was another form of media used to reach Vernon residents and to provide information on wildlife safety and advance notice of events.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

This year the WCC participated in the provincial event “BC Goes Wild Weekend”, which took place on the third weekend of September. The event is designed to teach participants about their surroundings and gain an appreciation for wildlife and plants in the wild. The WCC organized a nature walk on Turtle Mountain Trail. The event was promoted through the Vernon WildSafeBC Facebook page and printed poster materials around the Turtle Mountain Trail area (Figure 7).



Figure 7. BC Goes Wild Weekend promotional material

Challenges to 2017 the Program

The main challenge for Vernon remains that of changing the residents attitude towards wildlife attractants; particularly garbage.

In Vernon, garbage continues to be a major source for conflict with bears. Many households in Vernon do not have garbage bins (Figure 8). In addition, waste management bylaws allow residents to place household refuse out for collection by 5:00 pm on the day before collection day, and permits plastic bags to be placed outside of a garbage container.

There were occasional times this year where the WCC met with residents unwilling to secure garbage and attractants when bears were in the area. Upon discussion with the local Conservation Officer, it is evident that a significant change in garbage bylaws needs to be made in the City of Vernon.

A second challenge was the size of Vernon and increasing the educational reach of the WSBC program to more neighborhoods.



Photo Credit: Andrew Otto-

Figure 8. A garbage bag opened by wildlife on Bellavista Road, Vernon

Wildlife Activity

This year, from January 1st to October 1st, there were 380 human-wildlife conflicts in Vernon (Table 1).

Data for all wildlife species was gathered through WARP. WARP is a program that can be found on the WildSafeBC website, and is available to the public. Stats showed that the overall number of bear conflicts have increased in Vernon from the previous two years (Figure 9). Garbage remains the number one attractant as supported by previous WildSafeBC year-end reports. A total of 404 bear related calls have been recorded through January 2015 up to August 24th, 2017. So far, 163 calls from Vernon have been reported to the Conservation Officer Service Centre in 2017.

Table 1. Wildlife activity recoded on WARP including species and attractant

Attractant	All wildlife activity recorded on WARP					Total
	Bear	Deer	Cougar	Coyote	Other	
Garbage	79	0	0	0	1	80
Fruit/Berries	11	0	0	0	0	11
Agriculture/Farms	13	0	6	3	7	29
Other	118	103	18	19	2	267
Total	221	103	24	22	10	380

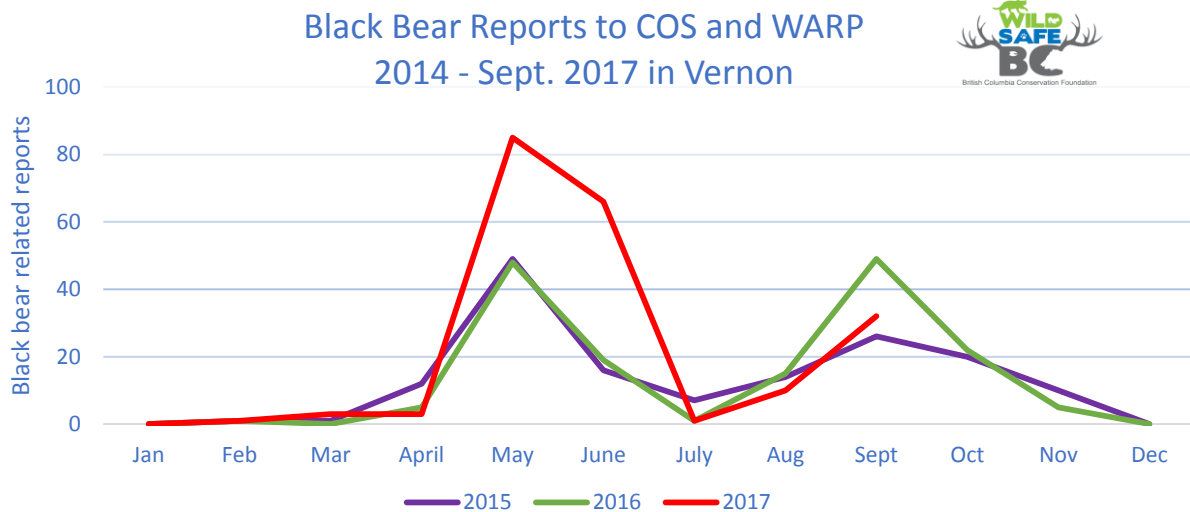


Figure 9. Comparison of Black Bear reports from 2014 – 2017 in Vernon

Goals for 2018

The WCC anticipates accomplishing the following goals in 2018:

- To encourage the City of Vernon to bring forth a bylaw to only allow for garbage to be put out the morning of collection, and only allow garbage to be placed in a secure garbage bin; preferably bear resistant;
- Continue building a stronger relationship with the Conservation Officer Services
- Create new relationships with community groups;
- Recruit volunteers to canvass more neighborhoods;
- Increase the number of followers of the WildSafeBC Facebook page;
- Acquire a bear pelt for instructive purposes through a donation; and
- Continue building the WildSafeBC reputation within the Vernon community.



Figure 10. Example of signage placed on walking trails in key wildlife habitat areas

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC would like to thank the Ministry of Environment and the City of Vernon for funding the program this year. Thanks go out to the Thompson Okanagan Telus Community Board for supplying Junior Ranger Program kits. We extend our special gratitude to the Conservation Officer Service, Vernon Farmer's Market, the Nature Club of Vernon, the Allan Brooks Nature Centre, the local media (Morning Star and Castanet), and the BC Conservation Foundation staff.

Lastly, WildSafeBC would like to thank all the residents who made the effort this year to remove wildlife attractants from their property and encouraged their neighbors to do the same.