

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Castlegar and RDCK Areas I and J

Including Addendum: WildSafeBC Columbia Basin Trust
Rural Report 2018

Prepared by: Jenny Wallace, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator



Executive Summary

Overall, reported wildlife conflicts were lower than average with a peak in garbage-related bear conflict calls in May. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) and our summer student, the WildSafeBC Ambassador (WA), worked on a number of initiatives this season to reduce non-compliance. The WCC directed significant time towards the final stages of the City's Bear Smart Community status efforts, working with the City, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and Conservation Officer Service to address remaining community attractant issues. A new Bear Attractant Response Protocol was developed in collaboration with the City's bylaw department and the WCC participated in a new Bear Smart Working Group.

Other highlights of the season included the successful delivery of 55 presentations to over 1000 attendees including the ever-popular Junior Range Program in schools. While conflict was relatively low, the WCC and WA kept responsible attractant management at the forefront of residents' minds by posting "Bear in Area" signs, going door-to-door to speak to 120 residents, and performing 15 days of garbage tagging. The WCC and WA also participated in 16 events over 20 days to increase the reach of our messaging. We provided tips for effective attractant management and posted regular wildlife updates through social media with a reach of over 57,000. Local newsprint and radio outlets supported our efforts by publishing articles and performing interviews.

While reported human-bear conflicts were lower than average, there remained conflicts that were the result of improper storage of garbage and unmanaged fruit trees. The complacency by some members of the community leads to the bear-resistant garbage carts being left unlocked or being put out the night before collection. This lack of commitment on the part of the community remains a significant obstacle to achieving Bear Smart Community status.

The goals for 2019 include ongoing collaboration and partnerships to increase compliance with the City's Wildlife Attractant bylaws and provide the community with a variety of solutions to help them address their wildlife attractants. Moving forward, it is this kind of concerted effort that will "keep wildlife wild and our community safe".

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2018 Season	3
Wildlife Activity	3
Presentations to Schools and Community Groups.....	3
Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging	4
Public Displays and Events	5
‘Bear Smart Community’ Status.....	5
Collaborative City Bear Conflict Response	6
Social Media and Press.....	7
Bear in Area Signs.....	7
West Kootenay Human Bear Conflict Working Group.....	7
Challenges of the 2018 Season	8
Improper Storage of Bear-Resistant Garbage Carts	8
Unpicked Fruit/Nut Trees.....	8
Rural Wildlife Attractant Issues	8
Goals and Opportunities for 2019.....	9
Acknowledgements.....	9
Addendum: WildSafeBC Columbia Basin Trust Rural Report 2018	10
Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Beaver Valley in 2018	10
WildSafeBC Efforts in 2018	10
Recommendations for the Future (adapted from 2016 Report).....	11

Table of Figures

Figure 1. A graph depicting all black bear calls to the Conservation Officer Service from 2014 to October, 2018 for Castlegar and surrounding communities in RDCK Areas I and J.	3
Figure 2. A group of Selkirk International students explore WildSafeBC materials after a presentation, 2018.	4
Figure 3. WA, Alyssa Christianson, manning the WildSafeBC display at Kootenay Festival, 2018.....	5
Figure 4. WCC Jenny Wallace gives Wildlife Conflict Manager, Mike Badry, a tour of Castlegar, 2018.....	6
Figure 5. A Bear in Area sign alerts residents to local bear activity, 2018.....	7
Figure 6. An overflowing garbage cart placed on the curb the night before collection, 2018.....	8

Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Both provincially and locally, 2018 was a relatively quiet season in terms of human-bear conflict. In the Castlegar area, bear conflict peaked in late May with a lot of garbage-related conflict, followed by a very quiet summer (fig. 1).

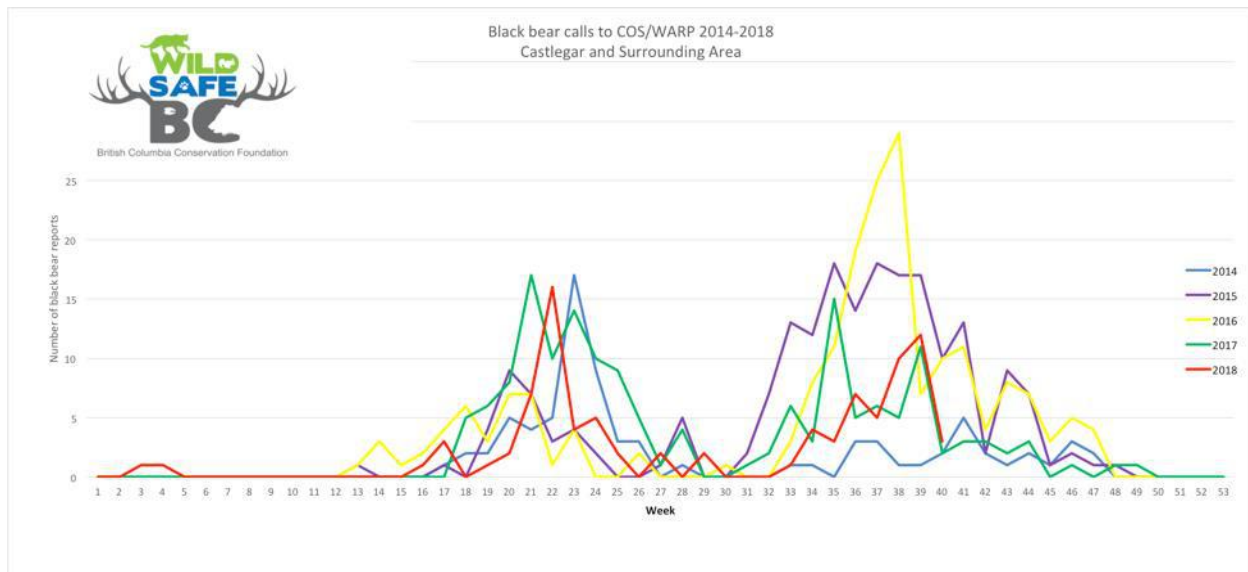


Figure 1. A graph depicting all black bear calls to the Conservation Officer Service from 2014 to October, 2018 for Castlegar and surrounding communities in RDCK Areas I and J.

The fall season, which is typically the busiest time for bear conflict in the valley bottoms, was relatively quiet. From word of mouth accounts, it appeared that many bears were indeed active in the area communities, but they were either staying out of trouble or the conflict was not being reported. The conflict that was reported throughout the fall was attributed mainly to unmanaged fruit and nut trees.

While human-bear conflict remained the most significant wildlife issue in the area, conflict with coyotes, elk, cougars and bobcats was also reported with these animals being drawn into residential areas by gardens, pets, livestock and animal feed.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

WildSafeBC presentations were tailored for a wide range of audiences this season with topics ranging from wildlife safety to general attractant management tips (fig. 2). For younger audiences, the Junior Ranger Program (JRP) kept things entertaining while teaching kids about the root causes of human-wildlife conflict and what we can do to keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

WildSafeBC Castlegar reached over 1000 people through 55 separate presentations this season including:

- Castlegar Primary School x11
- Blueberry Community School x6
- ESL Family Presentation at Kootenay Family Place
- Castlegar Library Summer Reading Club x8
- SPCA Summer Camp x2
- RDCK Summer Cool Camp x2
- USCC Brilliant Orchard Preschool x3
- Blueberry Creek Summer Camp
- CKISS Staff Safety talk
- Twin Rivers Elementary x6
- Selkirk International x4
- City of Castlegar Staff Safety talk
- Castlegar Rotary Club
- Kinnaird Elementary x2
- Silly Monkeys Daycare x6



Figure 2. A group of Selkirk International students explore WildSafeBC materials after a presentation, 2018.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The implementation of bear-resistant garbage carts by the City has resulted in the reduction in garbage-related conflicts. However, there are still issues with residents leaving carts unsecured during the week and placing unlocked carts on the curb too early for collection. In response to these issues, the WCC and WA targeted the reported neighbourhoods with garbage tagging inspections and/or door-to-door visits to encourage responsible attractant management. WildSafeBC conducted 15 garbage tagging inspections throughout the season, placing “Wildlife

Attractant” stickers on bins put out too early. Eight of these inspections were conducted along with the City of Castlegar bylaw officer who followed up the garbage tags with a warning letter. We also visited approximately 120 residences throughout the season to give residents a heads-up about a bear in the area or to discuss neighbourhood attractant issues.

Public Displays and Events

Educational displays at local events were once again a big hit with local children and a great place to discuss local wildlife issues with residents (fig. 3). As always, residents were able to access information and solutions for their unique attractant challenges. WildSafeBC spent 20 days at the following local events:

- Science World Celebration of Science
- Selkirk International Display
- Castlegar Nature and Garden Fest
- Glade Ferry Landing Display
- Kootenay Festival
- Selkirk Get Connected
- Kinnaird Music in the Park x2
- Pass Creek Fall Fair
- Merry Creek Bike Trail Head Pop-Up
- Millennium Park Pop-Up
- CBAL Ready, Set, Learn Events x3
- CECAC Teddy Bear Picnic
- COINS Aboriginal Day Celebration
- Castlegardens Bear Resistant Composter Unveiling
- Castlegar Farmer’s Market
- Lion’s Head Pub Pop-Up



Figure 3. WA, Alyssa Christianson, manning the WildSafeBC display at Kootenay Festival, 2018.

‘Bear Smart Community’ Status

The City of Castlegar has been actively pursuing Bear Smart Community Status since 2015 and officially submitted an application to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (MOECCS) in November, 2017. Thanks to the increased enforcement of the Wildlife Attractant

Bylaw, an updated Official Community Plan that reflects the importance of responsible attractant management, new bear-resistant public garbage cans and a bear-resistant solid waste management system, there has been a significant reduction of accessible wildlife attractants in the community.

The City hosted three Bear Smart meetings this season with the Wildlife Conflict Manager for MOECCS, Mike Badry (fig. 4). These meetings provided city staff, Councillors, local Conservation Officers and WildSafeBC with the opportunity to identify innovative solutions to our continued human-bear conflict issues.

The Bear Smart process is ongoing due to Castlegar's complicated bear situation. Historically, Castlegar has seen some of the highest levels of bear conflict in the Province. This is due in part to the quality of black bear habitat in such close proximity to the long, narrow community. While we have made huge strides towards reducing wildlife attractants in recent years, extra steps will be necessary to significantly reduce the conflict we experience.

The biggest obstacle on the path to Bear Smart Community status has been identified as the lack of community participation in managing attractants. Despite community-wide bear-resistant garbage carts, there has been a big issue with residents storing carts outside, unlocked and accessible to bears. In order to encourage responsible attractant management, a protocol for responding to bear issues was established to ensure education and bylaw enforcement are utilized effectively. Once compliance with the Wildlife Attractant Bylaw is achieved on a wider scale, Castlegar will be very well poised for Official Bear Smart Community designation.



Figure 4. WCC Jenny Wallace gives Wildlife Conflict Manager, Mike Badry, a tour of Castlegar, 2018.

Collaborative City Bear Attractant Response

As a result of discussions at our Bear Smart meeting, WildSafeBC worked with the City to create a shared spreadsheet for tracking bear attractant issues (either those reported to the City, to WildSafeBC or issues noticed on neighbourhood patrols). The following response protocol has since been implemented:

- WildSafeBC will canvass the neighbourhood, reaching out with educational materials.

- If the problem continues, the City bylaw officer will issue a warning letter.
- If the problem still continues, a bylaw ticket will be issued.
- If the problem persists, the Conservation Officer Service will be notified.

All steps will be recorded on a shared spreadsheet and will be summarized by WildSafeBC at the end of each season to be shared with the City and the Conservation Officer Service. This protocol ensures all issues are dealt with consistently and effectively. Several chronic attractant issues have been resolved this season thanks to this new protocol.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page was updated regularly throughout the season, garnering over 57,000 page views and providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Local media outlets helped spread WildSafeBC's messaging to a wide audience through publishing articles in local papers and playing radio interviews with the WA and WCC and sharing information through social media.

Bear in Area Signs

WildSafeBC's bright yellow "Bear in Area" signs are an effective way to give residents a heads up about local bear activity (fig. 5). As usual, the WA and WCC posted signs in response to specific wildlife conflict reports but also received many requests for signage from residents and from city staff.



Figure 5. A Bear in Area sign alerts residents to local bear activity, 2018.

West Kootenay Human Bear Conflict Working Group

The WCC continues to sit on this collaborative working group, made up of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets biannually to identify and implement innovative solutions to local human-bear conflicts.

Challenges of the 2018 Season

Improper Storage of Bear-Resistant Garbage Carts

While many residents continue to store their bear-resistant carts in a locked garage or shed (the safest place for garbage), there have been numerous cases of carts stored outdoors without the clips locked or placed on the curb for collection too early (fig. 6). These carts will only be effective if residents keep both clips locked at all times between collection days, without exception. This issue is the main obstacle standing between Castlegar and official Bear Smart Community status. An integral part of this process will be continued education and proactive enforcement to ensure the necessary steps are being taken to keep these carts secure.

Unpicked Fruit/Nut Trees

Unpicked fruit leads to conflict every year, but domestic fruit trees were responsible for the majority of conflict throughout the region this fall. There is significant interest in fruit gleaning in the community, but thus far, there have been no successful formal initiatives. Revitalizing the local fruit gleaning movement in the future could help address this significant attractant issue, providing fresh fruit for local families; not bears.

Rural Wildlife Attractant Issues

Another recurring challenge is the lack of bylaws regulating the management of wildlife attractants in the Regional District of Central Kootenay. Without a Wildlife Attractant Bylaw, there are limited consequences for residents that continually leave attractants accessible to wildlife outside of City limits.



Figure 6. An overflowing garbage cart placed on the curb the night before collection, 2018.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

Looking forward to the 2019 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make concrete solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues.

- Assist the City of Castlegar in finalizing the Bear Smart Community Status process
- Continue to organize and participate in Castlegar's newly formed Bear Smart Working Group with representatives from the City, Conservation Officer Service, and other community stakeholders. Invite RDCK Area I and J representatives.
- Continue to implement the City's new Bear Conflict Response Protocol in partnership with the City and the Bylaw Enforcement Officer.
- Expand our program's presence in the rural communities of RDCK Areas I and J
- Collaborate with community groups to increase local capacity for fruit gleaning projects
- Continue to explore innovative solutions to community attractant issues

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Castlegar is grateful for the generous support the program receives from our sponsors: Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the City of Castlegar, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, Canada Summer Jobs and the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

Our community partners have provided invaluable support and guidance. Thank you to: the local Conservation Officer Service; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the members of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group; the great staff at City Hall; Mayor Chernoff and City of Castlegar Councillors; WSBC Volunteers; Frank Ritcey and the always-supportive staff at BCCF; and the fantastic WSBC Ambassadors and Coordinators across the province.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties.



Addendum: WildSafeBC Columbia Basin Trust Rural Report 2018

Thanks to additional funding from Columbia Basin Trust, WildSafeBC was able to provide partial programming to communities in the Beaver Valley this season.

**A WildSafeBC Report written in 2016 gives more in depth background information and identifies some of the root causes of human-wildlife conflict in the Beaver Valley. This report can be accessed through the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

Human-Wildlife Conflict in the Beaver Valley in 2018

Provincially, 2018 was a relatively quiet season in terms of human-bear conflict and Fruitvale and Montrose were no different. There were a couple of black bear reports each month throughout the season, with bears attracted by garbage, fruit trees, livestock, livestock feed, and barbeques. Typically, we see a peak of bear reports in the fall as bears get ready for hibernation, but this season, the fall remained relatively quiet. Despite the hot, dry weather, it seemed there was enough natural food available to keep the majority of bears out of conflict. However, it is also very likely that some conflict went unreported. As always, attractant management is the best long-term solution to human-bear conflict. If there is no unnatural food accessible to bears passing through the community, they will not stick around. Careful attractant management keeps wildlife wild and communities safe.

There were several calls to the Conservation Officer Service hotline this season reporting cougar sightings, with a couple of these cougars having been attracted by livestock. The best way to prevent conflict with cougars is to keep pets under close watch and carefully manage livestock attractants by storing feed securely, locking animals in at night and considering the use of electric fencing or livestock guardian dogs.

WildSafeBC Efforts in 2018

Presentations (18):

- Fruitvale Strongstart
- Beaver Valley Nursery School x2
- Beaver Valley Library Summer Reading presentation
- Fruitvale Elementary presentations x14

Community Education:

- Dropped off brochures and info at Village Offices (Fruitvale and Montrose)
- Posted notices, posters and Bear in Area signs
- Canvassed a Montrose neighbourhood experiencing bear conflict

Garbage Inspections:

- Spent two evenings ‘tagging’ garbage placed out for collection too early (North and South Fruitvale; Montrose)

Recommendations for the Future (adapted from 2016 Report)

Eliminating wildlife attractants from the community will make for a safer, cleaner and more sustainable community, reducing human-bear conflict and the associated costs. The following recommendations have been proven to help reduce human-wildlife conflict in other WildSafeBC communities:

Garbage Management Recommendations:

- All residential garbage should be stored securely inside a locked building until the morning of collection.
- All public garbage cans should be emptied daily. Ideally, these should be replaced with bear-resistant models.
- All commercial dumpsters should be kept locked between uses. Business owners should consider having plastic lidded dumpsters replaced with a bear resistant model (metal lid with a locking ‘bear bar’ OR bear resistant hatches).
- Trailer courts should be encouraged to use communal bear resistant dumpsters, eliminating the need for residents to store garbage on individual trailer lots.
- All schoolyard garbage receptacles should be emptied daily. Ideally, these should be replaced with bear-resistant models.
- All schoolyard dumpsters should have a metal lid and should be locked at all times between uses, especially overnight.

Domestic Fruit Management Recommendations:

- All fruit should be picked as it ripens and fallen fruit should never be allowed to accumulate beneath.
- Harvest Rescue-type programs should be supported and promoted by the community so that unpicked fruit can be picked for families, not bears.
- Any new trees planted for Village landscaping should be ornamental, non-fruit bearing varieties.
- Any unmanaged ‘rogue’ fruit trees on Village property should be removed.

Other Attractant Management Recommendations:

- Cooked food, grains, meat, fish, oils and bones should not be permitted in backyard composts.
- Pet food should be stored indoors.
- Birdfeeders should only be used during winter months.
- Backyard chickens, livestock and bees should be housed in a way that will deter wildlife (ie: with a properly installed and maintained predator-electric fence)
- Livestock feed should be stored securely in a locked building or bear-resistant container

If your community is interested in securing a WildSafeBC program in 2019 and beyond, please contact the Provincial WildSafeBC program directly by email (bc@wildsafebc.com) for more information on the funding process and next steps.