

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Village of Cumberland

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Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy



Executive Summary

The Village of Cumberland's second full season with the WildSafeBC program was a fantastic season with considerable community engagement, low wildlife encounters and low human-wildlife conflict within the Village of Cumberland (VOC). Key program activities included 17 presentations to over 340 participants, attendance at 6 events, garbage tagging over 13 nights and door-to-door campaigns to 16 residences. Highlights of the season included an electric fencing and bear spray demonstration by the Senior Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey and completion of the Bear Hazard Assessment and report to Council. As well, important collaborations took place with community groups such as the Cumberland Bear Initiative and LUSH Valley fruit gleaners. The WCC received strong support by the community and media such as the local paper and radio stations.

The VOC made great progress this year with the completion of the Bear Hazard Assessment by the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC). The VOC Council has committed to supporting the steps required to achieve Bear Smart Community status with the Province. Taking these steps will increase awareness of wildlife and human-wildlife conflict issues in the community and put strategies in place to "keep wildlife wild and communities safe".

Some of the challenges this season included the lack of public reports of wildlife in conflict or dangerous wildlife within urban areas to the RAPP line. These reports are critical as they can be shared publicly through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). Not only does it inform the community, it also provides critical information to the WCC for targeting areas for education campaigns. As well, there are a high number of fruit trees both on private property and in public parks and green spaces. The situation is complicated by the heritage nature of the fruit trees in Rotary Orchard Park and No.1 Japanese Town Site Park. These high-calorie and consistent sources of food attract bears year over year. While the town has seen improvement, improperly stored garbage and unmanaged fruit trees are still the top reported attractants in the VOC.

Goals for 2019 include making further progress towards achieving Bear Smart Community status, proposals for fruit tree management and increased community partnerships and volunteer recruitment and engagement.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports of wildlife activity to the Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line and reflected in WildSafeBC's (WSBC) Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) were low this season for most species. Black bear reports were well-below the three year average (fig.1) and this was mirrored in many communities throughout the province. According to WARP, only 20 reports came in from January 1, 2018 to mid-October 2018. There were nine reports for deer, only three reports were made for black bears in the Village of Cumberland (VOC) and six for cougar sightings or encounters.

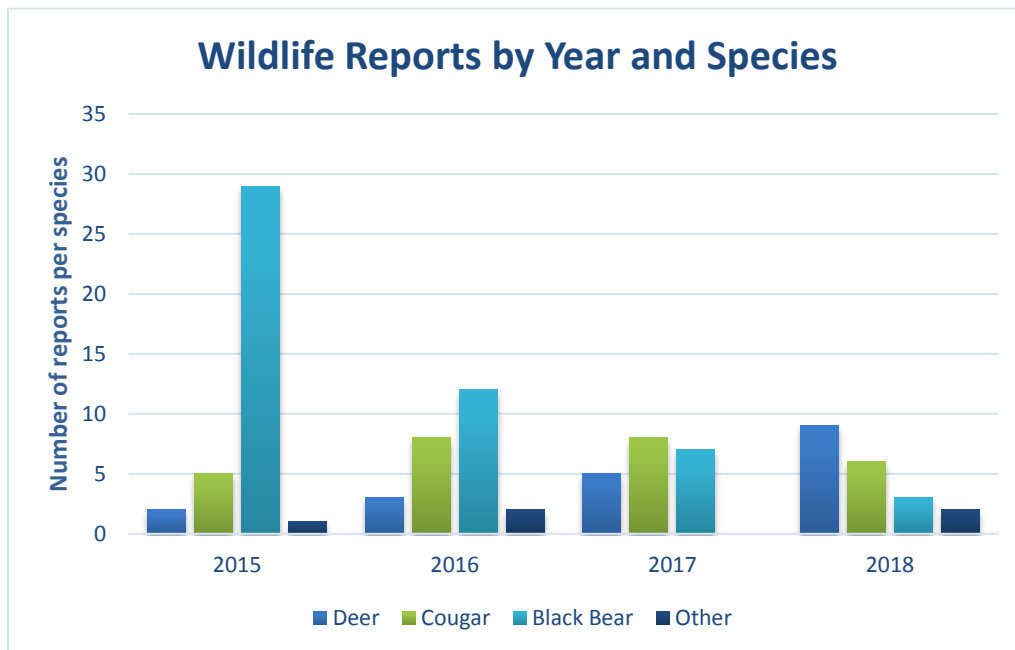


Figure 1. Wildlife reports to the RAPP line by year and by species.

Like previous years, the most commonly reported attractants for bears were garbage and residential fruit trees, however, the majority of black bear reports did not list an attractant type. Attractant type was generally not listed for cougars with the exception of one encounter listing livestock as the attractant.

As stated in the previous annual report and the Bear Hazard Assessment for the VOC, 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 and can be seen regularly in parks and crossing roads. People are so accustomed to seeing the deer throughout the Village that they are very rarely reported and 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 scat, damage to residential fruit trees and property, chewed garbage cans, scratches and marking and garbage scattered through the surrounding bushlands and greenways. Reports are often spread by word of mouth instead of

using the RAPP line. This season however, there were less indicators of obvious bear activity in the Village. There were fewer garbage cans destroyed, waste strewn and low numbers of verbal reports of encounters or damage. As of the writing of this report, bears seemed to be keeping a low profile and moving mostly at night. This was based on low numbers of verbal reports of sightings with scat being one of the few signs that they are present in the Village.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) gave a total of 17 presentations to an over 340 participants including:

- Electric fencing workshop for beekeepers and members of the public with Frank Ritcey, Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator, Municipal Peace Officer James Abrams, and Conservation Officer Sergeant Mike Newton
- Presentation to Comox Valley Bee Keepers Club
- Village recreation summer camp presentations x5
- Presentation to the Village Council (for the Bear Hazard Assessment)
- Cumberland Community School class presentations x7
- Bear spray demonstration for BC Goes Wild Weekend
- One wildlife safety talk and film night for BC Goes Wild Weekend



Figure 2. Electric fence demonstration by Frank Ritcey.



Figure 3. Participant at BC Goes Wild Weekend bear spray demonstration.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Approximately 16 residences were visited by the WCC during door-to-door campaigns. Few were in direct response to bear activity as it was well below average. The COS confirmed that there was little of note this year for the Village in terms of bear activity. Cougar sightings remained fairly high based on verbal reports but reporting numbers remained low to the RAPP line. Most reports were mostly on trails and not in any specific area within the Village. Most residents seem quite knowledgeable about cougar safety.

Garbage Tagging was carried out over 13 nights from May through to November. Warning stickers were placed on garbage or organics bins that were placed on the curb the night before collection. These are in non-compliance of local bylaws and are easier to access by bears at night when human encounters are low.



Figure 4. Warning sticker placed on garbage bin, 2018.

Public Displays and Events

The WCC attended a number of great community events this season including several inaugural ones for 2018. The WSBC booth is always a big hit with locals and visitors alike, especially the child specific educational games such as “natural versus non-natural foods” categorization game and the “wildlife safety scrabble” game inspired by another WSBC community program. We were able to respond to some great questions including whether bear spray would be effective on cougars (yes it is). The events attended included:

- First Credit Union Movie Under the Stars
- Picnic in the Park in July (put on by the Rec Centre, over 300 attendees)(fig. 6, 7 and 8)
- Picnic in the Park in August (put on by the Rec Centre, over 200 attendees)
- Two Village Square Farmers Markets
- BC Bike Race (fig. 9)



Figure 5. The WCC and Rec Centre Summer Camp attendees, 2018.



Figure 6. Clowning around at the VOC Picnic in the park.



Figure 7. Children trying the bear safety scrabble at picnic in the park.



Figure 8. Picnic in the park.



Figure 9. WSBC booth at BC Bike Race.

Social Media and Press

The WCC had five interviews with media this season including radio interviews with Jon De Roo to give regular updates on wildlife news and activity in the Village. This was also an opportunity to provide WildSafeBC educational messages and event information. A phone interview with the Comox Valley Record lead to a news article about bear attractants and safety. Additionally, a representative from the Eagle Radio Station 97.3 attended the bear spray demonstration for BC Goes Wild Weekend. He did a live-on-site interview about bear and cougar safety and took pictures and video of the demonstration and participants deploying bear spray.

Partnerships

The WCC collaborated with the Cumberland Bear Initiative (CBI) and attended meetings at the beginning of the season. However, CBI was not as active this year as many of the members were busy with other priorities. Despite this, the WCC worked with CBI on a street banner for the VOC with attractant management messaging and created the design for the banner.

The WCC worked with a number of community groups and organizations in partnership to bring WSBC messaging to a number of big community events such as the First Credit Union Movie Under the Stars event and the VOC Parks and Recreation Picnic in the Park events. These partnerships were an asset to the program as they provided great opportunities to reach many people at highly publicized events. Turn out for all these events was great and the organizations were excited to have WSBC involved and expressed requests to have WSBC attend with the information booth at future events.

Fruit Tree Outreach and Education

Fruit tree outreach and education is complicated in Cumberland given the great number of fruit trees and the limited resources of the Municipality. A large number of unmaintained fruit trees exist on public property, crown land, in parks and boulevards. Fruit is allowed to ripen and fall on the ground in many areas. Policies and best practices to address this are unclear. The community and several Council members recognize the history of these fruit trees in the Village, Rotary Orchard Park and No.1 Japanese Town Site Park. However, these heritage fruit trees also attract bear activity every year. The Bear Hazard Assessment Report documented this issue for Cumberland and has brought it to Village Council as a hazard for Cumberland. Residential fruit trees are also abundant and the WCC went door-to-door visiting a number of residences with unpicked or unmanaged fruit trees to speak to residents about fruit trees as a strong bear attractant and offered solutions such as the LUSH Valley fruit gleaning program.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

- Lack of wildlife reports to the RAPP line by the community
- Unsecured residential garbage (improper storage and lack of storage options)
- Unmanaged fruit trees and heritage orchards

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

- Proposals for management strategies for fruit trees and heritage orchards
- Increased social media presence and following
- Increased community partnerships and volunteers
- Continued progress toward Bear Smart Community status

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland would like to acknowledge the generous support of the program's sponsor, supporters, 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 Climate Change Strategy, 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 Bylaw Officer James Abrams for support, contributing knowledge and experience as well as many volunteer hours to ensure the program was a success.

The WCC also thanks Sergeant Mike Newton (COS) for his support, information and expertise and Sarah Ellis, Black Creek Conservation Officer Services office, for providing and organizing wildlife education kit materials for the school presentations and events.

Thank you to Mike Badry from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy for supporting the Bear Smart Community application process and providing information and data for the Bear Hazard Assessment.

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