

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

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Executive Summary

In 2018, the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) participated in its first WildSafeBC season, with the program running from May to November. This report will give an overview of WildSafeBC Fort Nelson activities throughout the season as well as challenges and future goals for the program. The NRRM, as well as much of British Columbia, experienced record lows in human-wildlife conflict for 2018. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) took advantage of this slow season by building relationships, forming partnerships, and spreading community awareness to promote WildSafeBC's messaging.

Highlights of the season included a presentation by the Senior Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, and a forum by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy's Wildlife Conflict Prevention Manager, Mike Badry, on what is involved in becoming a Bear Smart Community. The WCC did nine presentations and attended ten events. Several partnerships were developed with local organizations and the Conservation Officer Service (COS). WildSafeBC brochures and posters were distributed throughout the community and events were promoted through social media and community bulletin boards. Garbage tagging occurred over five consecutive weeks and a total of 162 bins, or just over 11 percent of households, received educational warning stickers for being put out the night before collection.

As the NRRM encompasses a vast area, efforts were focused on Fort Nelson proper which has the highest density of people. The program would benefit from having more support from local schools to deliver the Junior Ranger Program and local volunteers to assist in activities such as garbage tagging and special events. Interest by local government in pursuing Bear Smart Community status is promising and would support our messaging of "keeping wildlife wild and our community safe".

Cover photo: BC Goes Wild Weekend at a local park in Fort Nelson.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports of wildlife to the Conservation Officer Service (COS)'s Report All Poachers and Polluters (RAPP) line are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). The NRRM, as well as much of British Columbia, experienced record lows in human-black bear conflict for 2018 (fig. 1).

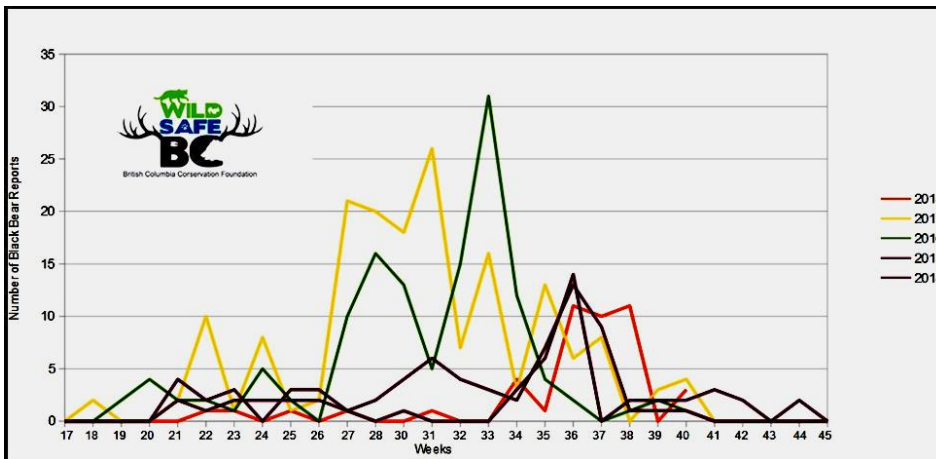


Figure 1. Black bear reports for the NRRM from the WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program.

Presentations

The Senior Provincial WildSafeBC Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, came to visit Fort Nelson late in the season with a presentation called 'Staying Safe on Both Sides of the Glass' (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Senior WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey presenting in Fort Nelson.

It was followed by a bear spray demonstration. This was a well attended presentation where residents got to enjoy watching clips from Frank's many adventures. They also learned how to respond to wildlife encounters and get hands-on experience using inert bear spray (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Frank Ritcey doing a workshop on bear spray.

Mike Badry, Provincial Wildlife Conflict Manager, also visited Fort Nelson at this time to conduct an informal forum to encourage and share ideas about the NRRM pursuing Bear Smart Community status. His presentation was well received and there has been interest by local government for more information.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) was invited to do nine presentations. These presentations were tailored to each specific audience and were delivered with humour while also promoting WildSafeBC's message of keeping wildlife wild and communities safe. Key information about local wildlife, attractant management and wildlife safety were consistent themes throughout. The presentations were well-received and enjoyed by children, tourists, residents, and newcomers to Canada. Presentations were conducted at the following locations:

- Fort Nelson Public Library
- Fort Nelson Heritage Museum
- NRRM Visitor Information Centre
- Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society (FNCLS)

Garbage Tagging

The purpose of garbage tagging is to remind residents that garbage placed out the day before pick up is a wildlife attractant. Friendly, bright yellow "WARNING" stickers are placed on bins that have been put out early (fig. 4).



Figure 4. Bright yellow warning stickers and information brochures used for garbage tagging.

For best results, garbage tagging is typically done late in the evening, on the night before collection day. To begin the season, the WCC and a volunteer, went out every Monday and Wednesday evening (the NRRM is divided into two collection zones) for five consecutive weeks. After a pause, garbage tagging resumed again in the fall. The WCC discovered that as the season progressed, more residents placed their bins out early. This behavior is counter to what was expected, however it was also noted that once a bin was tagged, it was unlikely to reoffend. Of the 162 bins that were tagged, only three households were noted to repeat the behavior. With approximately 1,424 residential units and 8 visits over the season, this results in 11.4% residents receiving notices. This highlights the success of the program and the ongoing need for further education.

Public Displays and Events

The WCC attended ten events in 2018 with approximately 600 attendees. Participating in these events provided a platform for the WCC to reach many residents and tourists with face-to-face conversations. WildSafeBC's display booth provided an approachable space for questions and answers on human-wildlife conflict, animal biology, attractant management, and a place to share wildlife stories (fig. 5). In addition to educational wildlife props, the display was filled with brochures and attractant checklists. Children enjoyed the giveaways and caregivers were provided activity sheets.

The following events were attended (participant numbers in brackets):

- Summer Solstice (62)
- Canada Day (74)
- The NRRM Visitor Information Centre (39)
- FNCLS (17)
- Guided hike with the FNCLS (22)
- BC Goes Wild Weekend (11)
- WSBC bear spray demonstration (14)
- Community Farmer's Marker (87)
- Fort Nelson First Nation Annual Celebration (107)
- Gathering Circle at the NL College (12)
- Culture Fest 2018 (150)



Figure 5. WildSafeBC booth display with CO Hamlyn and CO Pauls at the FNFN annual celebration.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

The BC Goes Wild Weekend (BCGWW) is an annual event that occurs the third weekend of September. This is a time when WildSafeBC encourages residents of British Columbia to safely enjoy wildlife in the wild and not in our urban spaces. British Columbians are encouraged to participate by entering the province-wide photography contest, by safely spending the day

outdoors, or by taking part in one of the many community events happening throughout the province. The WCC partnered with the Fort Nelson Public Library and IGA, to celebrate BCGWW with an afternoon at Andy Bailey Regional Park. WildSafeBC organized a display booth, scavenger hunt, leaf rubbings, campfire stories and s'mores (fig. 6). As a result of cold weather and competition with other events, turnout was relatively low. However, the 11 that attended enjoyed the activities. The BCGWW was considered successful – especially for an inaugural event in Fort Nelson. Ideas were generated for increasing turnout in successive years.



Figure 6. WildSafeBC booth display at the community's farmers' market.

Poster and Brochure Distribution

WildSafeBC's 'BC is Bear Country' posters (fig. 7) and all relevant WildSafeBC brochures were distributed and posted at many locations including: local grocery stores, several hotels, post office, library, outdoor stores, and other public spaces. All events were advertised with social media posts in addition to posters at all of the above locations and community bulletin boards.



Figure 7. The WCC was invited to join the FNCLS on their annual group hike.

Partnerships

The COS partnered with the WCC for Canada Day and the Fort Nelson First Nation Annual Celebration. Partnerships were also made with the FNCLS, Fort Nelson Public Library, Fort Nelson Northern Lights College, IGA grocery store, and the NRRM Visitor Information Centre.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

Size:

The NRRM encompasses approximately ten percent of the entire province, roughly 85,000 km² with approximately 5,200 people. The majority, about 3,000, reside in Fort Nelson proper. The WCC focused their efforts on the more densely populated community of Fort Nelson with plans to reach out to the communities of Toad River, Fort Nelson First Nation, and Prophet River First Nation in the future.

Volunteers:

As this was the first season for WildSafeBC Fort Nelson, recruiting volunteers was a significant challenge. Volunteers are needed for safety reasons to aid with garbage tagging as well as door-to-door canvassing. Volunteers are also appreciated as they increase efficiencies and provide physical help when setting up tents and booth displays. An experience volunteer also

becomes a good ambassador for the program. The WCC appreciated the support and time of an off-duty Conservation Officer during the 2018 season.

Low human-wildlife conflict season:

While having lower numbers on human-wildlife conflicts within the NRRM is positive, it did make it more challenging to keep attractant management at the forefront of people's minds. This impacted the priority residents gave to becoming a Bear Smart Community. The WCC will continue to promote the message of "keeping wildlife wild and communities safe" and encourage residents to proactively manage their attractants before human-wildlife conflicts occur.

Junior Rangers Program (JRP):

The WCC personally visited each school principal and emailed out a summary of the program and available delivery options for the program. However, no interest for fall programming was generated. Fort Nelson has historically had the CO's visit each school in the spring to give a 'Bear Aware' presentation. The WCC will contact the principals and teachers again at the very beginning of the 2019 season to offer the JRP in the spring and again in the fall. The JRP offers benefits such as extended program with repeat visits and customization to meet special interests or complimentary projects the teachers may be working on with their students.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

- Increased effort recruiting volunteers next season will include social media requests on Facebook. This will be made easier now that the page is up and starting to gain followers. Additionally, posters will be placed around town and advertisements sent out to local media.
- Work on building the WildSafeBC reputation within the school system by promoting the Junior Ranger Program and delivering the program in a suitable time frame for NRRM teachers.
- Support the NRRM in pursuing Bear Smart Community status. At the request of two council members, budget proposals for the Bear Hazard Assessment were provided. Conversations will continue with newly elected and returning Councilors.
- Increase social media presence by gaining more followers on the 'WildSafeBC Fort Nelson' Facebook page and strengthen relationships with local media outlets
- The WCC will continue to build relationships, form partnerships, and spread community awareness to promote WildSafeBC's messaging.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the NRRM, Ministry of Environment, and the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding this project. Thank you to the COS for the use of their educational materials, their expertise in current and historical wildlife conflicts within the region, and for joining the WCC at several public events. Thanks to the NRRM Recreation Centre for loaning the WCC one of their tents for the entire season. The WCC would also like to thank the residents of Fort Nelson for embracing the WildSafeBC program – it's the people that make it a success.

Finally, a special thank you to all of the Kamloops BCCF staff for their hard work. Their advice, support, and various skills in communication, budgeting, and organization were appreciated and helped the WildSafeBC Fort Nelson have a successful and impactful season.