

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

## District of Invermere

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## Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) worked closely with Groundswell Network Society this season, piloting an Apple Rescue Program where property owners wanting help gleaning their trees signed up to have organized volunteers do so. The program focused on apple trees and homeowners who were either seniors or part-time residents. The pilot was successful with 12 properties gleaned by Groundswell volunteers throughout August and September; over 1,550 pounds of apples were removed. WildSafeBC supported this initiative by identifying the locations of unmanaged fruit trees, canvassing door-to-door and promotion at WildSafeBC events.

The bear-resistant bins at the transfer station received much-needed lid maintenance and new “Be Bear Aware” stickers with direction on proper usage of the bins.

The Conservation Officer Service (COS) was very supportive, joining WildSafeBC at another successful “Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day” event as well as an attractant audit in the Westside Park neighborhood.

The District of Invermere Bylaw Enforcement Officer offered support by following up with properties that were not managing their attractants properly; 14 written warnings were delivered over the season. Bylaw also passed along wildlife reports he received from the public and assisted putting up “Bear in Area” signs when bear sightings were reported to him.

In the Invermere area, since January 2018, there have been 21 reports of black bears, zero reports of grizzlies, 65 deer reports and four cougar reports to the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). To date, no bears have been destroyed this year. While bear reports were down this year in Invermere and province-wide, there was a large increase in aggressive deer reports in Invermere this spring and summer (19 reports) compared to 2017 (2 reports).

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## Highlights from the 2018 Season

New to WildSafeBC this season, the WCC felt successful in getting her feet wet, but sees the potential for much more in-depth work to be carried out in the District of Invermere (DOI). Highlights included, partnering with Groundswell in the initiation of a fruit gleaning pilot program, utilizing the fruit tree database created by the previous WCC in 2017, and upholding a positive presence in the community at a number of events and through door-to-door canvassing. Lower bear conflict province-wide was a bonus.



**Figure 1: Children playing a WildSafeBC attractant game at the Movies in the Mountains showing of Paddington Bear**



**Figure 2: Children engaging with the WildSafeBC booth at Valley Appreciation Day**

## Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WCC for the District of Invermere gave a total of seven presentations to over 150 participants including:

- Eileen Madson Primary School
- David Thompson Secondary School
- College of the Rockies
- Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day
- BC Goes Wild Weekend

The WCCs for Invermere and Radium partnered together to host events for BC Goes Wild Weekend which is a WildSafeBC initiative held annually throughout the province on the third weekend in September. They set up a display booth at the Radium Market near the Car Show and had approximately 80 contacts. They also provided a guided nature walk at the Old Coach Trail and a bear spray demonstration where they reviewed key benefits and safety considerations (Figure 3). The S.P.R.A.Y. acronym was reviewed and 16 participants had a chance to practice with inert spray (Figure 4).



**Figure 3: WCC Jenna Milne discusses the safe use and deployment of bear spray to a group of participants during the BC Goes Wild Weekend**



**Figure 4: WCC Thea Rodgers oversees a participant practicing the “SPRAY” technique using inert spray**

## Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC conducted six garbage tagging events to date and found that more than 98% of residences with curbside pickup did not leave their garbage bins out the night before their collection day, and the number of bins left out steadily decreased over the weeks.

The WCC went door-to-door on 11 separate occasions within the District of Invermere (DOI), educating nearly 400 residents about proper attractant management (especially garbage and fruit trees). This was also an opportunity to advise residents if there were bears or aggressive

deer in the area. The WCC and Katrina Kellner of Groundswell Network Society canvassed the Wilder and Fort Point neighborhoods introducing the Apple Rescue Program and encouraging property owners requiring assistance to pick their fruit to sign up for the program.

## Public Displays and Events

The WCC made over 660 contacts at seven public displays and events including:

- Invermere Farmers and Artists Market
- Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day (Figure 5)
- Movies in the Mountains showing of Paddington Bear
- Radium Market on Main (Figure 6)



**Figure 5: CO Greg Kruger gives a presentation and bear trap demonstration at Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day**



**Figure 6: WildSafeBC booth at Radium Market on Main during the BC Goes Wild Weekend**

## Social Media and Press

The Columbia Valley Pioneer interviewed the new WCC for the DOI and printed an article in July which included information about her background, the goals of the WildSafeBC program, and a warning about the high volume of aggressive doe reports in town at that time.

In August, Groundswell submitted an article about the Apple Rescue Program mentioning WildSafeBC's involvement and the high priority of managing fruit trees to reduce human-wildlife conflict.

In September, WCCs for Invermere and Radium/RDEK Areas F & G collaborated on a submission regarding the BC Goes Wild Weekend and the importance of managing attractants during the fall season when bear activity is heightened.

Facebook posts by the WCC for the DOI reached almost 12,000 people. Posts discussed a variety of topics including wildlife sightings, tips for encounters, fruit tree management and the local gleaning program, garbage tagging results, reminders about current or expected periods of higher conflict life cycle activities such as deer fawning season and bear hyperphagia.

## Bear in Area Signs

Bear in area signs were used a number of times in the CastleRock, Fort Point, and Westside Park neighborhoods as highly visible reminders to manage attractants and stay safe when bears were reported to the RAPP line and WARP.

## Partnerships

The WCC partnered with Groundswell Network Society to help implement a pilot program, affectionately named the Apple Rescue Program, created to reduce human-wildlife conflict, divert waste from the landfill and promote food systems education. Building on the fruit tree database created by the previous WCC, Andrea Smillie, Groundswell and the WCC worked together contacting property owners with fruit trees. The program was promoted in newsprint and social media as well. Interested candidates signed up and volunteers were coordinated to glean their trees (Figure 7). Groundswell organized and supervised the fruit gleaning operations. A total of 12 properties with 20 trees were gleaned, for a total of 1,567 pounds of apples rescued.



**Figure 7: A volunteer with the Apple Rescue Program piloted by Groundswell Network Society gleans apples from an Invermere property**

Continued partnerships with the COS and bylaw officer for Invermere provided support in encouraging residents to properly manage their attractants. The COS attended “Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day” and teamed up for an attractant audit through the Westside Park neighborhood following a report of a bear in the area.

Floyd Sam with the Shuswap Indian Band, who previously received WildSafeBC training, was keen to participate in the WildSafeBC program this year. Floyd joined the “Ursus and Us Bear Awareness Day” on short notice. However, scheduling conflicts prevented further participation throughout the season.

## Fruit Tree Outreach and Education

Fruit trees were a primary focus again this year coming into the fall. The WCC went door-to-door on several occasions, focusing on the Fort Point and Wilder neighborhoods, reminding people to properly manage their fruit trees or sign up for the pilot Apple Rescue Program (Figure 8). Following a couple reminders from the WCC, one property in Fort Point cut down a large pear tree that they were not able to manage, and another Fort Point property vigorously pruned a large ornamental apple tree.

The WCC also used public display booths at events such as the Invermere Farmers and Artists Market as opportunities to discuss the importance of fruit tree management with the public, and to distribute pamphlets about the Apple Rescue Program. The Apple Rescue Program was also promoted through an article in the local newspaper submitted by Groundswell, tear-off posters placed around town by the WCC, and Facebook posts.



**Figure 8: Pears cover the ground at a part-time residence in Fort Point. Four fruit trees on this property were later gleaned by volunteers with the Apple Rescue Program.**



## Challenges for the 2018 Season

Fruit trees proved a challenge again this season. While the Apple Rescue Program was effective in removing a lot of apples (and some crabapples and pears) from trees in the DOI, there were still properties along 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue with ripe fruit that attracted a young bear. The bear was hazed out of the area on two separate occasions by the COS.

Reaching part-time homeowners continued to be a challenge this year, particularly regarding fruit trees and trying to promote involvement in the Apple Rescue Program. Door hangers were not as effective when the homeowners were away for weeks at a time. As well, many residences did not have current phone numbers listed with the DOI.

The lack of appropriate signage made it challenging to warn people, especially those walking dogs, about aggressively protective does with fawns. WildSafeBC is working to create signage that will address this.

There remain some homeowners that are still storing garbage outside or putting bins out the night before.

## Goals and Opportunities for 2019

**Continued partnership with Groundswell to advance the Apple Rescue Program:** Key points will include expanding the fruit tree database created by Andrea Smillie in 2017, contacting fruit trees owners early in the year to suggest management options such as vigorous pruning, hosing off blossoms, or signing up with the Apple Rescue Program for gleaning in late summer.

**Continued partnerships with COS and Bylaw Enforcement:** Joint participation at community events and joint efforts, such as attractant audits, and garbage tagging follow-up, provide invaluable support in encouraging community members to properly manage their attractants.

**Continued waste management improvement:** Bins at the Invermere Transfer Station and other DOI contracted bins should be inspected to confirm if they are functioning properly. Necessary repairs should occur promptly by Southeast Disposal. Westside Park, along with the entire DOI still requires a long-term plan for waste storage and pick-up. Residents should be encouraged to purchase bear-proof bins or this should be facilitated by the DOI. If the DOI initiates curbside compost pick up the plan needs to consider the strong potential for human wildlife conflict.

**Continued work towards Bear Smart Community status:** In order to apply for Bear Smart Community status the DOI will need to update bylaws as mentioned by Andrea Smillie in the 2017 WildSafeBC Annual Report and strengthen the bear-proofing of the waste management system.

**Pursue involvement in the regional working group:** The Columbia Valley Human-Wildlife Conflict Reduction (CVHWCR) Working Group was created in 2017 as a means to link community members and professionals in the Columbia Valley to share human-wildlife conflict experiences and solutions.

**Follow up with CBEEN Leadership Clinic results:** Previous WCC Andrea Smillie was involved with a community-based social marketing clinic which could help provide the Invermere WildSafeBC program with achievable goals that will address how to change behaviors surrounding garbage and fruit trees.

## Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Invermere would like to acknowledge the ongoing support from its sponsors, including the District of Invermere, the Columbia Basin Trust, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

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Thank you!