

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Okanagan Westside

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program saw the start of its third year with a new WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Meg Bjordal, and local sponsorship by the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation, District of Peachland, and the Central Okanagan Regional District.

Goals for the 2018 season were achieved through multiple WildSafeBC activities including: presentations, door-to-door education, garbage tagging, public events, BC Goes Wild Weekend, and the use of social media alongside traditional print and TV media. Junior Ranger Program presentations were in demand, and the WCC provided three new schools with Junior Ranger presentations this year, as well as delivered the extended Junior Ranger Program to three classes. A total of eight events were attended this year, reaching over 750 people. This year there were four stories produced by media outlets which also helped to get important messaging around attractant management out to more people. Additionally, the WCC worked with the Sncəwips Heritage Museum to learn about the cultural significance of black bears for the sylix/Okanagan peoples, as well as, ḥsyilxcín (language of the sylix/Okanagan peoples) words for common wildlife species in the area, and this knowledge was then incorporated into event display materials and Junior Ranger presentations.

The main challenge for the 2018 season was lack of public acceptance of the need to report bear sightings or bears in conflict to the Conservation Officer Service 24/7 RAPP line. Attractant management could be improved and work still needs to be done in this area.

Opportunities for next season include complex goals to work with orchards and vineyards to encourage attractant management efforts, and working with program sponsors to develop practices and policies to improve attractant management challenges in the community. Other opportunities involve developing neighbour-to-neighbour education and attending or hosting more events.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

This is the third year for the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program and local sponsorships included the City of West Kelowna (WK), Westbank First Nation (WFN), District of Peachland (DoP), and the Regional District of the Central Okanagan Regional District (RDCO). This is the first season for WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Meg Bjordal. Goals for this season included building on and expanding community presence, focusing on messaging around managing attractants, specifically garbage, and being proactive in preventing human-wildlife conflicts in the community. These goals were achieved through multiple activities, outlined below in this report.

Human-Wildlife Conflicts

From November 20, 2017 to November 20, 2018, there were notably less black bear reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) in the Okanagan Westside program area, then in the previous two years (fig.1). This trend was observed in many other communities across the province this year and may be a result of the good growing conditions for natural foods and their availability to bears in the wild. It is also possible that increased education provided by the WildSafeBC program has led to changes in behaviour which has led to the better management of unnatural attractants. However, garbage continues to be the main attractant for black bears in the Okanagan Westside area (fig.2).

Another notable trend in human-wildlife conflicts for the Okanagan Westside area is the steady increase in deer reports over the last three years (fig.1). The majority (88%) of these reports

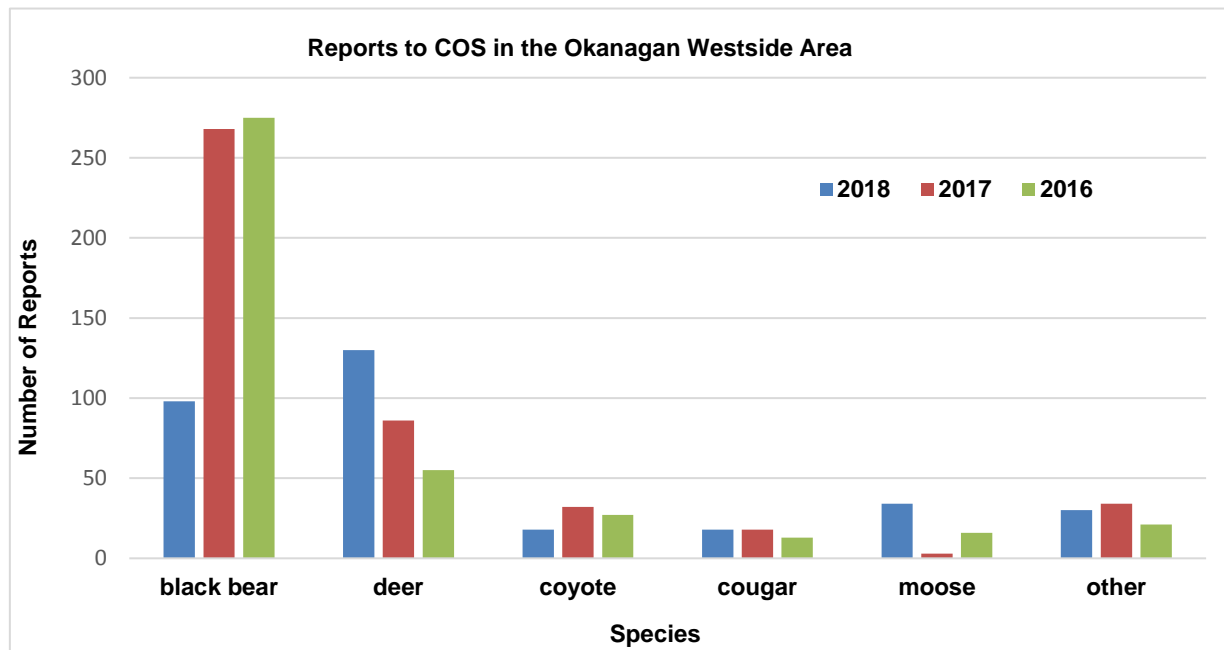
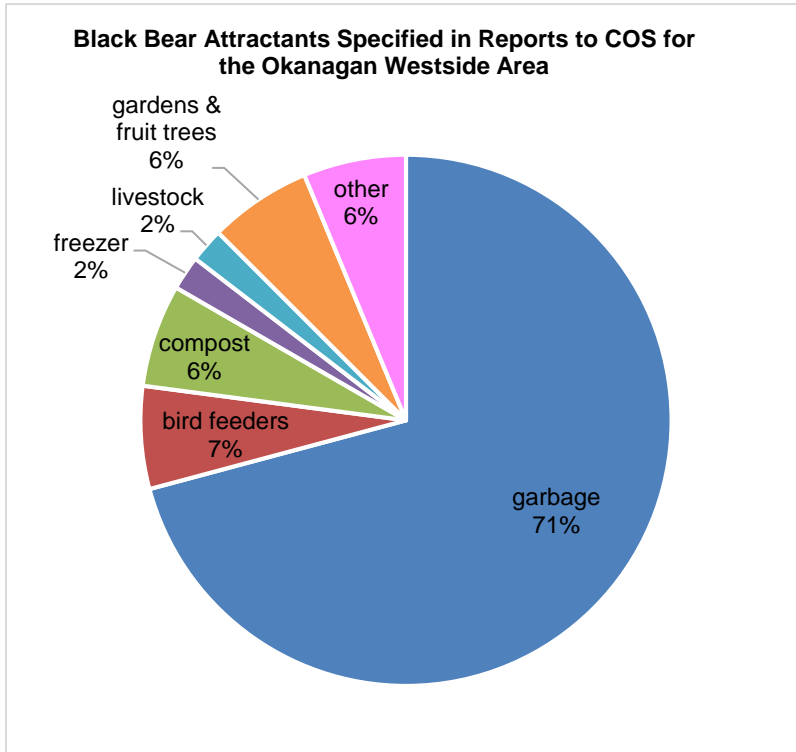


Figure 1. Bar graph illustrating the number of reports by species made to the Conservation Officer Service year over year. Date ranges are November 20 to November 19 of the next year and include 365 days of data. “Other” wildlife includes rattlesnakes, wild sheep, mountain goats, bobcats and raptors.



over the past year (November 20, 2017-November 19, 2018) were regarding injured, distressed or dead deer. Clearly there are safety issues for the deer to be in the urban environment, but human safety can also be an issue with risks for vehicle collisions, as well as aggressive deer that may be food conditioned or protecting fawns. Due to this growing trend, human-deer conflicts will need to be given a similar level of consideration as human-bear conflicts in the Okanagan Westside area.

Figure 2. Pie chart illustrating the attractants that were identified for 48 of the 98 black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service during November 20, 2017-November 19, 2018, in the Okanagan Westside area.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WCC for the Okanagan Westside gave a total of 36 presentations to over 900 participants including:

- West Kelowna Dragons Den Summer Camps
- Westbank Summer Library Program
- District of Peachland Staff
- YMCA Beyond the Bell Program
- George Pringle Elementary
- Hudson Road Elementary
- Glenrosa Elementary
- sensisyusten House of Learning
- Girl Guides



Figure 3. The WCC showing a bear skull to students during a Junior Ranger presentation.

The WCC received many requests for Junior Ranger Program (JRP)

presentations, and while trying to accommodate all requests, effort was made to also reach out to schools that have not had visits from WildSafeBC in the past. This resulted in JRP presentations for every class at Hudson Road Elementary, as well as grades K-4 at s̓ənsisyustən House of Learning, the WFN elementary school. Three classes from grades 2 to 4 at Glenrosa Elementary, who were also identified as not having JRP presentations before, participated in the extended program. This consisted of three separate visits to each class for an in-depth learning experience of human-wildlife conflict. There were 200 JRP kits given out to students, and all other JRP participants were provided with handouts including a bookmark, colouring book or sheet, and a JRP activity to complete with their family.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door education was carried out in Peachland and the Glenrosa neighbourhood of West Kelowna, reaching over 100 people.

This education tool was used in response to bear activity in neighbourhoods and was well received by residents. Homeowners were provided with either a checklist for managing attractants around the home and a brochure on black bears, or a door hanger with information on attractant management was left.

Garbage tagging was carried out in the Ponderosa Drive and Trepanier areas of Peachland (fig.4), and the Upper Glenrosa, Tallus Ridge, Shannon Woods, and Rose Valley areas of West Kelowna, including the 115 home strata property of Pinewoods

Villa at 1750 Lenz Rd in partnership with the strata. In total, 121 garbage bins were tagged with warning stickers, reminding residents that garbage put out early is a wildlife attractant.



Figure 4. The WCC garbage tagging in Peachland (photo credit: Global Okanagan).

Public Displays and Events

The WildSafeBC information booth and display at events throughout the Okanagan Westside continue to be popular with the public, and a great opportunity for the WCC to engage with residents. The WCC attended a total of eight events, reaching over 750 people.

Events attended included:

- RDCO Friends of Kalamoior Pancake Breakfast
- National Aboriginal Day Celebration
- Westside Daze
- Peachland Farmers Market
- Westbank Farmers Market
- RDCO Welcome the Kokanee event at Hardy Falls (fig.5)
- RDCO Wild Walk at Glen Canyon Regional Park

In addition to attending events, WildSafeBC brochures and other materials were made available at the Westbank and Peachland Libraries, Sncəwips Heritage Museum, RDCO Environmental Education Center, and the West Kelowna and Peachland Visitor Centres.



Figure 5. WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside display booth at the RDCO “Welcome the Kokanee” event.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside participated in the third annual WildSafeBC Goes Wild Weekend (BCGWW) by hosting two events. On Saturday, September 15th, a “Family Afternoon in the Park” event was held at Shannon Lake Regional Park, and on Sunday, September 15th, a bear spray demonstration and nature walk was held at Kalamoior Regional Park.

Partnerships proved to be valuable for these events: the Saturday family event was attended by an RDCO Park Interpreter who lead pond studies which were very popular; and for the Sunday event a local hiking group, Hiking Addiction, lead the nature walk. Hiking Addiction also assisted with event advertising, planning and registration prior to the event. The RDCO Park Interpreter also helped secure permits for use of the Regional Parks for both events.



Figure 6. Setup for the Family Afternoon in the Park BCGWW event with the pond study in the foreground, and activity table and display booth under the tents.

In addition to the pond study, the family event also included an activity table, the WildSafeBC information booth and a nature-themed scavenger hunt complete with JRP kits for prizes (fig.6). While the participants all seemed to enjoy the event, only 21 people attended. This was despite reaching over 1,500 people about the event on Facebook, plus posters distributed around the area. The Sunday event was better attended and seemed well received with 31 participants who had great questions. Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn how to use bear spray (fig.7).



Figure 7. The WCC giving a bear safety talk for BCGWW.

Social Media and Press

Facebook continues to be an excellent resource to reach people with WildSafeBC messaging; with over 26 posts by the WCC, and a reach of almost 4000 people on the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside page during the 2018 season. Posts notifying residents of wildlife in neighbourhoods, based on information from WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP), had the most reach (fig.8). Monitoring of community Facebook pages for neighbourhoods within the program area provided very valuable insight on wildlife activity within the neighbourhoods, as activity would often be reported here and not to COS. These community pages were also good locations to share posts from the Okanagan Westside page to reach more people, and provided an opportunity to address situations in specific neighbourhoods when necessary.

Besides social media, sponsor newsletters were also utilized for WildSafeBC messaging. In the summer and fall, WildSafeBC articles were included in the DoP and WK newsletters, which go out to about 2,600 and 13,500 homes respectively. WildSafeBC articles were also included in the WFN membership newsletters sent monthly to around 800 people.

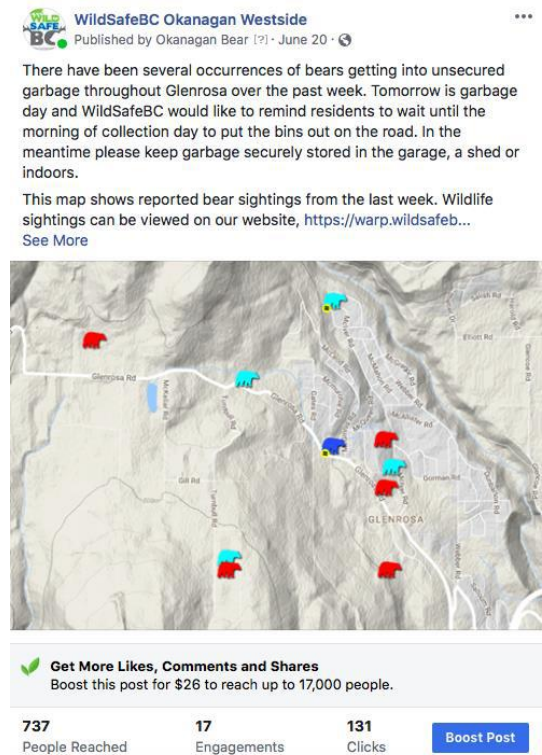


Figure 8. Example of a Facebook post used to notify residents of bear activity in a West Kelowna neighbourhood.

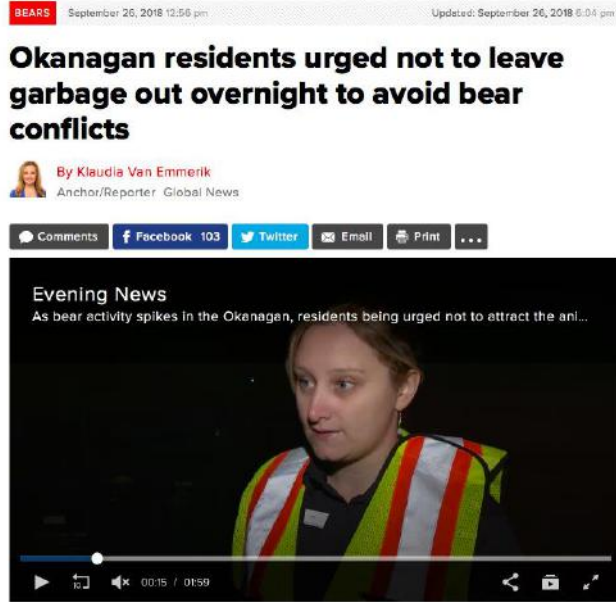


Figure 9. An example of one of the Global News media stories.

The Okanagan Westside program had press coverage for a total of four pieces – two newspaper articles by the Kelowna Capital News (one online only, and one in both print and online), and two Global Okanagan News stories, which appeared both on TV and as online articles (fig.9). These pieces all helped to raise awareness of the challenges with human-bear conflict in the area and the need for residents to manage attractants around their home, especially garbage.

Inclusion of Westbank First Nation Language and Culture

This year the WCC worked with Jordan Coble from the Sncəwips Heritage Museum to incorporate some of the ḥsyilxcín (language of the sylix/Okanagan peoples) words for common wildlife species into the Okanagan Westside program. These translations were put on event display materials and practiced during Junior Ranger presentations (fig.10)

As black bears are the most common conflict species throughout the Okanagan Westside area, but also significant culturally to the sylix/Okanagan peoples, the WCC felt it was valuable to learn more about this cultural significance. Again, with help from the Sncəwips Heritage Museum, this resulted in the creation of a poster for the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside event display (fig.11). An excerpt of the poster was also used in a newsletter article.



Figure 10. Example of display materials with ḥsyilxcín words for wildlife.

WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside recognizes the land we operate on as the unceded traditional territories of the syilx/Okanagan people. We asked our friends at the Sncəwips Heritage Museum if they could explain a bit about the importance of black bears in syilx culture, and the relationship between black bears and humans.

skm̓xist - black bear

skm̓xist is acknowledged as Chief of all life that walks on the land, including us as human beings. From our captíkʷ4 (oral history), it is explained that skm̓xist was the first to offer his life and all that he is Chief over to the people to be in order to provide food, clothing, tools and other resources. skm̓xist as a Chief provides balance to the community and is a leader through encouragement of utilizing each individual's gifts, as opposed to simply giving direction. This balance can be equated to our responsibilities as humans to ensure we are stewarding these lands and resources in a respectful, sustainable and reciprocal fashion. If we take care of the rightful home of skm̓xist, if they have a place where food is abundant, shade to rest and areas to make their homes, bears will not bother us in the spaces we have chosen to make our homes.

Although skm̓xist is Chief of all that walks on the land, all living creatures are interconnected. skm̓xist thrives off the same resources as us, the salmon, berries, fruits and other vegetation. When we gather our resources from the forests and mountains, we must always be sure to leave enough for our four-legged relatives and to ensure they have a healthy way of being and not searching for food in places where humans are too quick to judge and harm them.

We must always remember to treat all life respectfully. Bears are a major aspect of our ecosystems and we must never be too hasty to acknowledge the roles they play in maintaining balance for all walks of life.



Figure 11: Poster on the cultural significance of black bears.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

One of the biggest challenges this season was getting people to report bear sightings and wildlife conflicts through the proper channels (COS RAPP line, or at least WARP for sightings). For example, there was a bear destroyed in the Tallus Ridge neighbourhood of West Kelowna after it ended up in multiple conflict situations, which were escalating in risk to the public.

Unfortunately, people had been aware of the bear in the area for a while and did not report it to the WCC or the COS until it had already become food conditioned and human-habituated. There is reluctance by the public to report black bear sightings as they are concerned that the Conservation Officers will respond by destroying the bear. Also, people have become accustomed to seeing black bears on a frequent basis and do not perceive them as a risk to public safety.

Wherever possible the WCC tried to address these concerns by explaining the value of reporting. Early reports help to identify areas of high bear activity and potential attractants in the area. Resources and education campaigns can then be prioritized to focus on these hotspots.

Another challenge was getting people to take responsibility to manage bear attractants in and around their property, as well as in their own neighbourhoods, particularly in relation to garbage which remains the main attractant. The WCC noticed streets that had high compliance with attractant management, had a high level of neighbour-to-neighbour education and cooperation, so efforts were made to encourage people to open dialogues with their neighbours.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

Complex goals to address next year include working with commercial vineyards and orchards on attractant management, and working with program sponsors to develop policies and practices for stronger management of wildlife attractants in the community. Residents have indicated to the WCC a strong desire for bylaws around garbage to reduce opportunities for bears and other wildlife to have access.

To assist with addressing the challenges from this year, there may be opportunities to reach out to strata communities that have curbside garbage collection, or other neighbourhood groups to encourage and support neighbour-to-neighbour driven efforts to improve compliance with attractant management. At the end of the 2018 season, the WCC was contacted by a couple of dedicated residents in a mobile home community asking for 'bear smart materials' for a strata meeting. The WCC took advantage of this opportunity to work with the residents and their strata to get them set up with the education and tools so they can develop high compliance with attractant management in their own community. This 'pilot project' was successful and could be continued and expanded.

The Peachland Farmers Market and Westside Daze were the most well attended events this year and attendance therefore should be continued. A great opportunity for a new event to attend next year is the annual Westbank First Nation siya? celebration, which is held in early June. It would be ideal to offer a bear spray demonstration at the start of the season, and this could likely be organized in conjunction with Hiking Addiction. For BCGWW, the bear spray demonstration event would likely be valuable to repeat. However, the family activity event should change or further advertising opportunities explored in order to improve attendance.

Acknowledgements

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The WCC thanks the WildSafeBC Senior Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, Social Media Expert, Mitchell Bymoen, and Provincial Coordinator, Vanessa Isnardy, for their guidance; as well as BC Conservation Foundation staff, Jen Bellhouse, Trina Radford and Shelley Nohels for all of their help.

Thank you to the Conservation Officer Service for their collaboration and kindly allowing use of their animal pelts and skulls for public displays and presentations.

Finally, a special thanks goes to out to all the garbage tagging volunteers, and the event volunteer, Ann Graham, who's enthusiasm and commitment was unwavering and invaluable.