

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Powell River and qathet Regional District

Prepared by: Francine Ulmer, WildSafeBC Community Coordinator



Executive Summary

For a fourth consecutive year the qathet Regional District (qRD) has sponsored the WildSafeBC Program and as a result there is a recognizable increase in program recognition across the community. Through social media, school presentations, public displays, and workshops, WildSafeBC is spreading public education messages around attractant management and human-wildlife conflict reduction.

Across the province human-wildlife conflict calls into the Conservation Officer Service (COS) were well below average and the statistics for Powell River reflect this trend as well. Black bears remain the most reported species at 64% followed by deer at 23%. Livestock/feed and garbage were almost tied as the most reported attractants for wildlife. Coyotes were reported for the first time in Westview and this activity will need to be monitored in the future.

The WildSafeBC Coordinator (WCC) gave a total of 20 presentations to over 500 participants this season and attend 7 events over 11 days. This included Junior Ranger Program presentations to three schools. Other outreach included the local social media WildSafeBC Facebook page which grew this season by 14% and now has 627 likes. Many posts were shared and received 2,000 to 6,000 views.

The WCC also performed garbage audits and provided education around managing compost bins provided by the Community Organics Recovery Exchange. It is important that these green totes are kept in a secure location at all times and placed on the curb only on the morning of collection.

The WCC also provided electric fence technical expertise in the community and received additional items for the program's electric demonstration kit. Over 10 households borrowed equipment from the kit and were provided advice. Fruit trees produced abundant crops this season and many residents were referred to Skookum Gleaners and the Powell River Shop N' Swap Facebook page.

Recommendations for 2019 include the establishment of a Bear Smart Working Group, a review of the garbage collection bylaw 2144, and the production and installation of educational garbage tote stickers. The WildSafeBC program acknowledges the generous support of its funding partners, volunteers and community members.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the Conservation Officer Service’s RAPP line are uploaded daily to WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This information available to the public on WildSafeBC’s website and provides statistics for this report which are summarized in the addendum. It is important to remember that much human-wildlife conflict goes unreported and these numbers do not reflect all conflict in the community.

Each year human-wildlife conflict statistics vary, and although lower for 2018, there were a number of significant cases worth noting. In the spring a bobcat was released by the COS back into the wild after being separated from its family by a dog. Unusual for the area, there were three coyote sightings in Westview, indicating that this may be a future conflict species to be aware of in the future. In the spring a black bear cub was released on logging roads near Theodosia Inlet and within two weeks the bear was spotted in the Lund area. The bear made several appearances at residences along the highway, eventually being destroyed by COS due to conflict in Tlaamin where it had been found orphaned last fall. We must continue to work at addressing the root cause of attractant management issues in the community through education, innovation, and cooperation.

As of November 15, 2018, wildlife reports were down year-over-year with 193 calls in 2018 compared to 287 in 2017. Black bears represent 64% of the calls at 123, followed by 45 deer (23%) and 10 cougars (5.2%)(fig. 1).

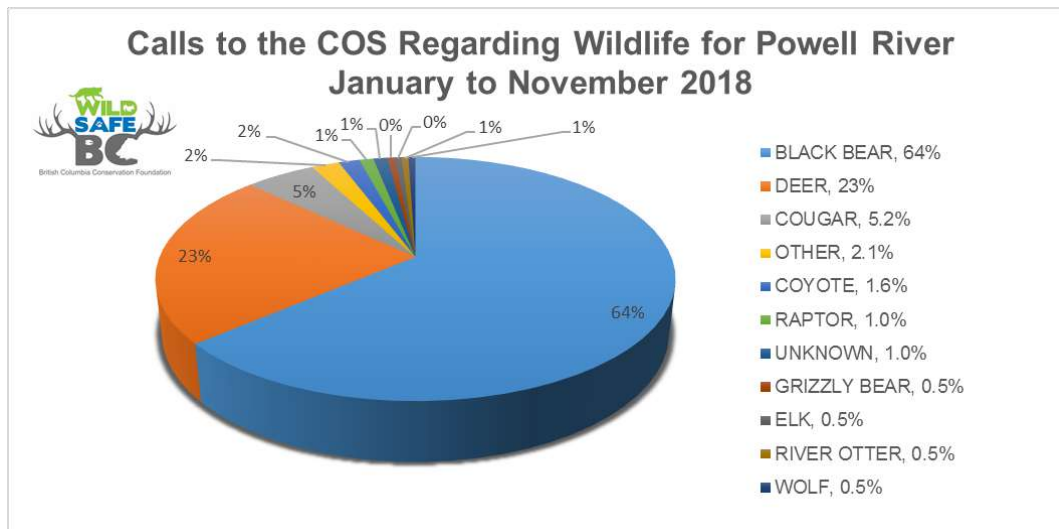


Figure 1. Black bears remain the most reported species in Powell River followed by deer and cougar. Coyote reports were new to Powell River in 2018 (data up to November 15, 2018).

Over 49% of calls to the COS were not associated with an attractant which was a positive sign that proactive reports were being made. For the program’s first time, livestock/feed edged out

garbage as the most reported attractant at 25 calls compared to 24 (fig. 2). In 2017, livestock/feed represented 6% of the calls compared to garbage at 17%.

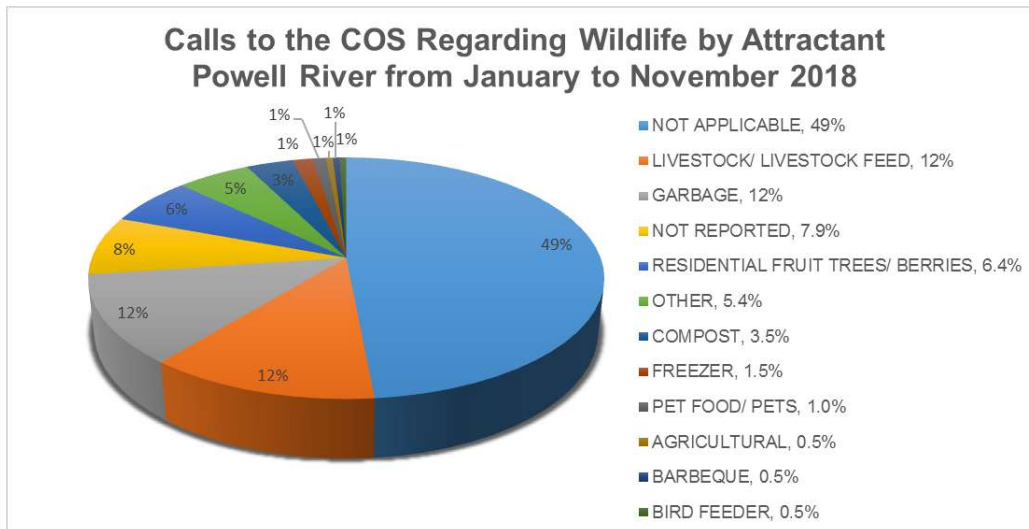


Figure 2. Calls to the COS regarding wildlife with associated attractant from January to November 2018. Calls that are sightings will have “not applicable” listed (data up to November 15, 2018).

Also of note, 54 calls indicated injured or distressed wildlife which was an increase over 2017 (Table 1). There were also 13 calls which indicated livestock or pets were killed or injured. Urban chickens account for a large number of human-bear conflicts which is why electric fences are an invaluable tool in reducing food-conditioning and related wildlife conflicts. There were 7 animals that were destroyed due to injury and motor vehicle accidents are a serious concern for the safety of both humans and wildlife. The 4 sightings of bears at either a school, park or playground also reinforces the need for bear safety education.

Table 1. Calls to the COS for all wildlife and encounter type in Powell River and qathet Regional District.

ENCOUNTER TYPE	NUMBER OF CALLS
AGGRESSIVE	6
CONFINED	3
DAMAGE TO PROPERTY	10
DEAD WILDLIFE	7
FOOD CONDITIONED	50
INJURED/DISTRESSED	54
LIVESTOCK OR PETS (KILLED OR INJURED)	13
ORPHANED	6
OTHER	2
SCHOOL/PARK/PLAYGROUND	4
SIGHTINGS	38
WILDLIFE IN TRAP	0
TOTAL	193

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) for the qathet Regional District gave a total of 20 presentations to over 500 participants including:

- Kelly Creek Elementary
- James Thomson Elementary
- Edgehill Elementary



Figure 3. Rubber casts of wildlife tracks at a school presentation.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The qathet Regional District does not have a garbage bylaw that sets “Bear Smart” guidelines for waste storage or set out times. As a result, waste management practices vary from resident to resident and garbage continues to be a major attractant for bears every year. This year the pilot program for the Community Organics Recovery Exchange (C.O.R.E.) provided 500 green totes throughout the community. The WCC surveyed the community in July and found that the overall number of garbage bags and C.O.R.E. totes left out was surprisingly low at 25 across all zones. However, half of the carts placed curbside the night before collection were C.O.R.E. green totes and many additional C.O.R.E. totes were observed to be stored outside alongside the houses. The WCC did encounter a black bear in a Townsite alley during these surveys on a street where several garbage cans and C.O.R.E. totes were left out.

Public Displays and Events

The display booth was very popular with international students, tourists, children, and new residents. The display booth has become a regular stop at events for residents to check in and share human-wildlife conflict stories. WildSafeBC attended the following events and shared information on community resources and attractant management tips.

- Powell River Farmers Market
- Lund Shellfish Festival
- Inland Lake Fathers' Day Family Fishing Weekend
- Logger Sports (all 3 days)
- Canada Day Celebration at Willingdon Beach
- Sandcastle Weekend on Texada Island (2 days)
- Fall Fair (2 days)



Figure 4. The WildSafeBC display booth is a great way to connect with the community.

Social Media and Press

Facebook has been a way to increase program recognition across the community and provide an easy point of contact for residents seeking information. Many posts on the Facebook page received 2,000 to 6,000 views and stimulated many conversations in local community groups. Facebook page likes increased this season by 14% to 627. Many followers expressed interest in reviewing the bylaws to allow for electric fencing to secure fruit, nuts, apiaries and chickens from predators.

Electric Fencing Education

The Senior WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator, Frank Ritcey, came to town to teach a free electric fence workshop. Each year these workshops gain popularity with residents interested in securing livestock from predators. A limited area within city limits allows for electric fences and many residents want to expand the range to encompass the whole town, especially now that so many residents have had bears kill their urban chickens. There has been a noticeable increase in understanding the benefits of this technology among residents interested in reducing human-wildlife conflict while protecting their investment in fruit, nuts and livestock.

This year the WCC received additional training in electric fence set up and became authorized to provide this technical expertise to the community. Additionally, the program used funding to top up the electric fence demonstration kit and these resources were made available to the community for free. Many residents asked for advice on setting up their electric fence and 10 households used pieces of the community electric fence kit such as the energizer, post pounder, and the fence tester.

Confusion exists in the community about what sort of supplies to purchase because the set up to keep livestock in is different than the set up to keep predators out. Unless a resident has attended our WSBC electric fence workshop they often encounter challenges when designing and purchasing supplies. A special training session and resources were designed for a local retailer to educate staff on proper set up of electric fences for protection from predators and minimum requirements for a bear resistant set up.



Figure 5. WildSafeBC Community Coordinator, Francine Ulmer, demonstrating an electric fence set up to exclude predators and protect livestock.

Fruit Tree Outreach and Education

WildSafeBC promoted fruit tree gleaning through social media and radio Public Service Announcements. Educational messages focused on promoting qathet Regional District composting depots and the C.O.R.E. pilot program in an effort to combat the illegal roadside dumping of windfall fruit. Fruit and nut trees are consistently the second top attractant in Powell River and warrant significant attention due to the agricultural focus in the community and the high number of heritage trees. The fruit crops had much higher yields than last year, and as a result there was a greater gleaning effort. Skookum Gleaners had a dramatic increase in the number of calls out to fruit pickers over last year. The residents in the community used popular Facebook sites such as Powell River Shop N' Swap to share the bounty as well.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

A significant challenge for 2018 was that the bear conflicts were lower than previous years giving residents a false sense of security. Although a good berry crop did manage to keep bears fed on wild foods, we did still experience a significant amount of conflict and we must not let our guard down. We have a long way to go in the qathet Regional District when it comes to attractant management and human-wildlife conflict reduction.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

Consolidated Garbage Collection Bylaw 2144 states: “Garbage bags shall be of heavy duty construction and not easily torn, punctured or stretched and as necessary shall be placed out for collection in a fashion that prevents disturbances of the garbage by animals.” This is the only reference to wildlife and the bylaw could use an update in order to support proper storage and set out procedures for the new C.O.R.E. infrastructure as we transition to citywide automated compost and garbage collection. New garbage tote stickers are being designed and could provide an important educational message to residents about waste management.

A Bear Smart Community Working Group would connect experts in the community with local politicians to collaborate through education, innovation and cooperation. Many communities benefit from a dedicated group effort in working towards becoming a Bear Smart Community.

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC program would not be possible without the sponsorship of the qathet Regional District and we are grateful for their continued support. Generous funding from the City of Powell River through the Powell River Community Forest enables a sustainable joint funding model and fosters community partnerships.

Thanks to the staff at the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for their technical support through networking, training, administration and resources. Special acknowledgement goes to Trina Radford, Jen Bellhouse, Frank Ritcey, Shelley Nohels and Mitchell Bymoan for their assistance and expertise.

Thank you to Andrew Anaka, Gerry Lister, and Dean Miller for their invaluable insight into the unique nature of local attractant management issues. Thank you to Mike Badry from the Ministry of Environment for the information and support in working toward promoting the Bear Smart Community Program.

Many thanks to Tai, Abby, and Inger-Lise of the Let’s Talk Trash Team for co-creating resources and continuing to spread information about attractant management.

Resources can be found at <http://letstalktrash.ca/>

<http://letstalktrash.ca/resources/bear-smart/>

http://letstalktrash.ca/wp-content/uploads/composting_brochure_2016.pdf

Addendum

Wildlife Conflict Data from WARP and the COS

Table 2. Human-Wildlife Encounter Types for 2018 shows that food conditioned wildlife remains a top reason for conflict in our community. WildSafeBC attractant management educational messages and best practices aim to reduce damage to property, injured/distressed wildlife, and killed or injured livestock and pets among other negative encounters (data up to November 15, 2018).

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OTHER	2
SCHOOL/PARK/PLAYGROUND	4
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TOTAL	193

Table 3. Calls to the COS for 2018 reporting wildlife species. Black bears remain the most reported species. Each year these numbers vary however the addition of coyote on the Upper Sunshine Coast is something to monitor in the future (data up to November 15, 2018).

Wildlife Species	Number of Calls
BLACK BEAR	123
BOBCAT	0
COUGAR	10
COYOTE	3
DEER	45
GRIZZLY BEAR	1
ELK	1
OTHER/ SPECIES NOT SPECIFIED	4
RACCOON	0
RAPTOR	2
RIVER OTTER	1
UNKNOWN	2
WOLF	1
TOTAL	193

Table 4. Human-Wildlife Conflict Outcomes for 2018 shows that providing advice is the number one response by COS. Calls that have the outcome listed as “other” or “not specified” likely received advice from the RAPP line operator or a follow up conversation with local COS or WildSafeBC Community Coordinator later. With these three categories making up the bulk of the outcomes we see how WildSafeBC Community Coordinators are an important community asset in responding to conflicts (data up to November 15, 2018).

Human-Wildlife Conflict Outcomes	Number of Calls
ADVICE PROVIDED	77
DESTROYED BY COS	7
DESTROYED BY OTHER	4
GONE ON ARRIVAL	11
HAZED	0
NOT SPECIFIED	52
OTHER	38
TRANSFERRED TO REHAB	2
TRAP SET- NO CAPTURE	2
TOTAL	193

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Attractants	Number of Calls
AGRICULTURAL	1
BARBEQUE	1
BIRD FEEDER	1
COMPOST	7
FREEZER	3
GARBAGE	24
LIVESTOCK/ LIVESTOCK FEED	25
NOT APPLICABLE	98
OTHER	11
PET FOOD/ PETS	2
RESIDENTIAL FRUIT TREES/ BERRIES	13
BLANK	16
TOTAL	202