

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

Thompson Nicola Regional District

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Ministry of
Environment and
Climate Change Strategy



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC (WSBC) Program was delivered to the Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD) by WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Rhiannon Guerra.

In her second year of program delivery, the WCC provided 17 presentations to over 300 participants and provided several bear spray demonstrations. The large geographic area and low population density of the region required innovative solutions to perform typical WSBC activities. Door-to-door was modified by taking the information brochures to transfer stations and Eco Depots. In this way, over 200 residents were contacted in a more cost-effective and efficient manner. As well, communities that had not received a visit in 2017 were prioritized for 2018.

The diverse nature of the communities also made social media engagement challenging, however Facebook page “likes” were increased by 34% over the season. The BC Goes Wild Weekend had an artistic component in 2018 and engaged community members for a unique perspective.

The WCC participated in the Sun Peaks Bear Smart Committee and Kamloops Bear Committee meetings and is working on a Bear Hazard Assessment for the municipality of Sun Peaks. The WCC also worked with Provincial biologists to address a human-badger conflict situation at a TNRD transfer stations.

WildSafeBC is continually evolving and assessing where we can be the most effective at meeting our core goals of reducing human-wildlife conflict by increasing knowledge and reducing the access to attractants by wildlife. While conflicts were lower than average in 2018, the area still received 109 calls to the Conservation Office Service regarding black bears and 108 regarding deer. The most reported attractant leading to human-wildlife conflicts were livestock (27.6%) followed by garbage (19.5%). The WildSafeBC Program works with communities to reduce human-wildlife conflicts through education, innovation and cooperation.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

The Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD)¹ experienced lower than average calls regarding wildlife to the Conservation Officer Service’s RAPP line (fig. 1). These reports are uploaded daily to WildSafeBC’s Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) and are available to the public and for reporting purposes.

Calls to COS Regarding Wildlife 2013 - November 28th 2018

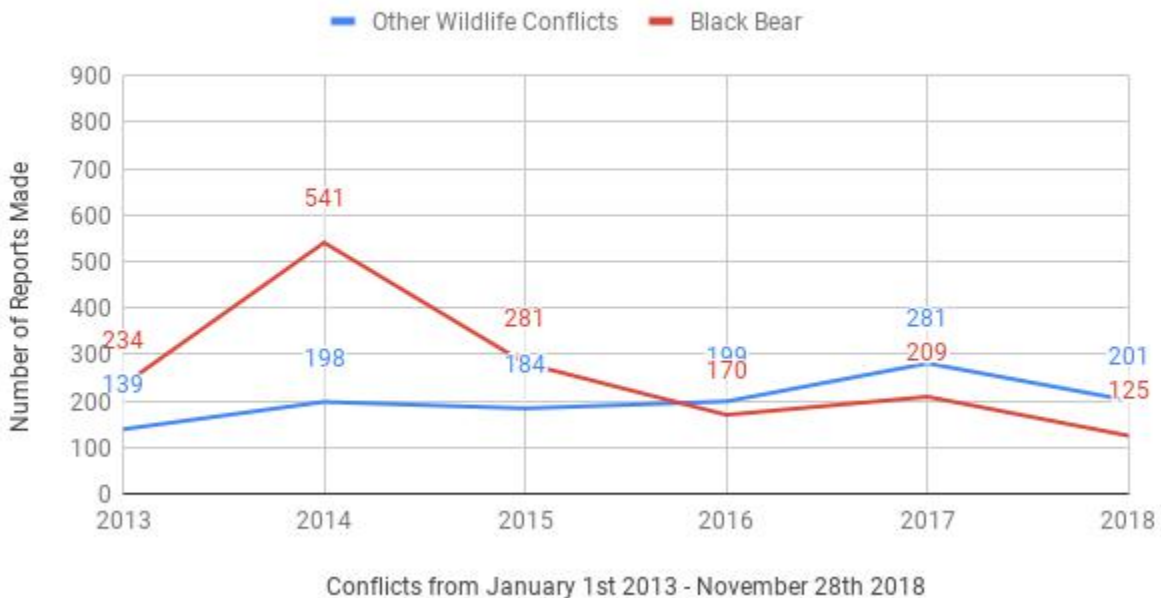


Figure 1. Calls to the Conservation Officer Service regarding wildlife and black bears in the TNRD.

¹ Note that for the purposes of the featured data on this report the Thompson Nicola Regional District is defined as the following communities: Merritt, Lower Nicola, Brookemere, Kingsvale, Aspen Grove, Quilchena, Douglas Lake, Lytton, Spences Bridge, Logan Lake, Ashcroft, Cache Creek, Walhachin, Savona, Cherry Creek, Monte Creek, Monte Lake, Westwold, Pritchard, Chase, Sun Peaks, Heffley Creek, Heffley Lake, McClure, Darfield, Barriere, Louis Creek, Little Fort, Clearwater, Chua Chua, Simpcw, Clinton, 70 Mile, Jesmond, Vavenby, Blue River, Avola.

The majority of the calls are in regards to black bears (109) followed by deer (108) and cougars (38) (fig. 2).

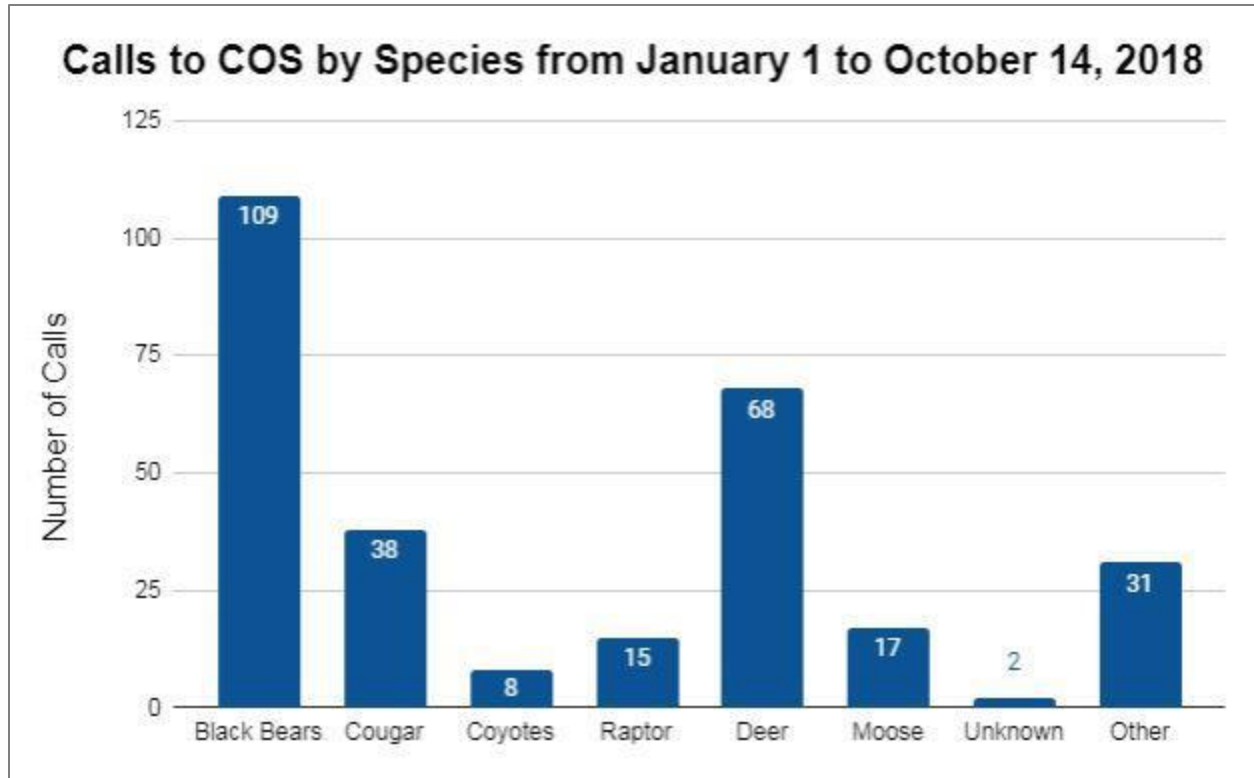


Figure 2. Calls to the Conservation Officer Service from January 1 to October 14, 2018 by species.

The TNRD is comprised mostly of rural and farming communities which results in over 27% of calls listing livestock as the most common attractant or source of conflict with wildlife (fig. 3). WildSafeBC provides solutions to reduce these conflicts and this was featured in an educational video on the TNRD Facebook page for small scale hobby farmers. Other attractants include garbage at 19.5% and fruit trees 6.5%.

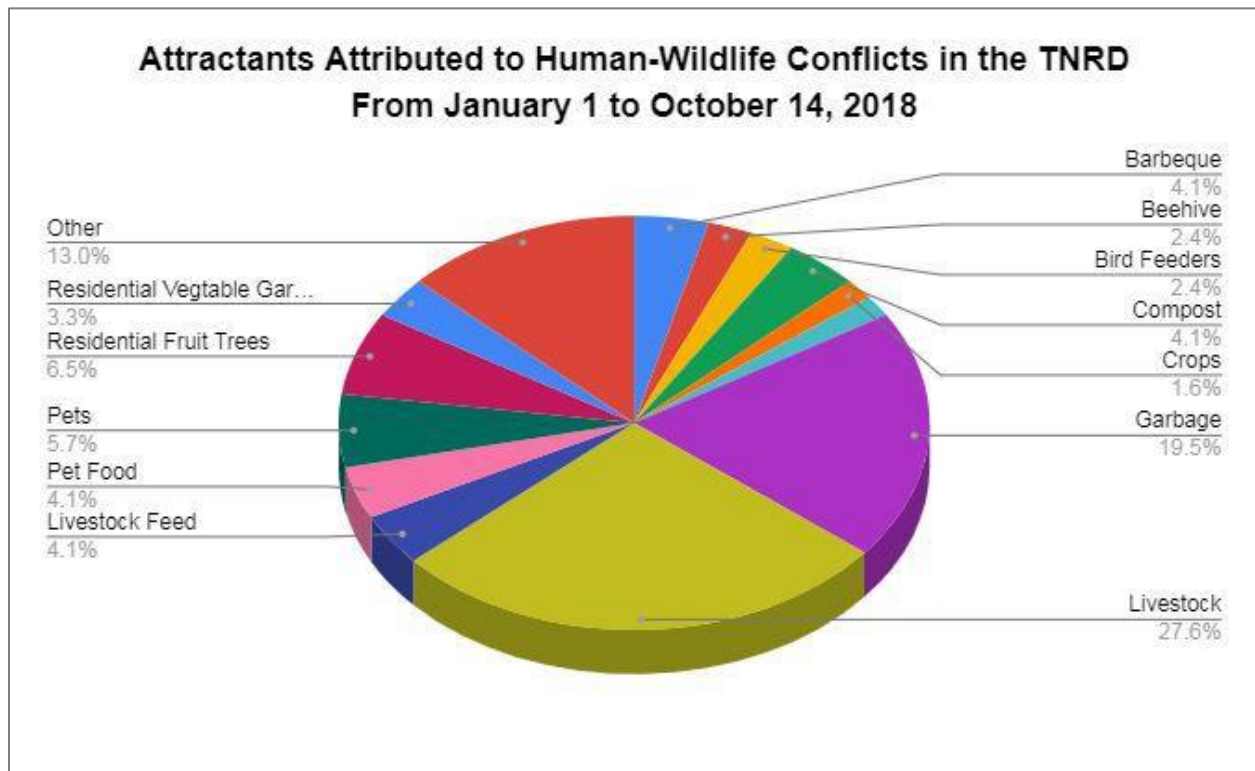


Figure 3. Wildlife attractants reported to the Conservation Officer Service in the TNRD in 2018.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) also participated in a badger stewardship project at a local transfer station site along with the Ministry of Forest, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development biologists (fig. 4). The site was assessed for badgers and solutions explored to reduce the conflict between staff, public and the resident badgers. Badgers are a Provincially Red-listed species and their population is in decline due to factors such as habitat loss. An education sign was created, to be posted by the TNRD, to warn transfer station users of the presence of badgers and to give them ample space.



Figure 4. The WCC assessing a badger den at a transfer station site in the TNRD in 2018.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 17 presentations to over 300 participants including:

- Chase Outdoors Nature Program
- Heffley Lake Outdoor Nature Group
- Lac Le Jeune Casual Outdoor Enthusiast Group
- Logan Lake Campground
- Lytton Eureka Science Camp
- Clearwater Eureka Science Camp
- Sun Peaks Bear Smart Committee
- Blue River Mike Wiegele Helicopter Tours Employees
- Adams Lake Girl Guides Campout Retreat
- Clearwater Secondary School

Bear spray training demonstrations were also held for outdoor enthusiasts. These consisted on reviewing the effectiveness of bear spray, the purchase and safe transport as well as proper deployment. Participants had the opportunity to practice with cans of inert spray (fig. 5).



Figure 5. Bear spray demonstrations occurred rain, snow or shine, 2018.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

For 2018, the WCC came up with innovative strategies to address the large geographic distances between homes that made door-to-door canvassing costly and inefficient. Through a typical door-to-door campaign, only 10 people could be reached in a span of four hours. After consulting with the TNRD sponsor, it was decided that the WCC would perform outreach activities at the local transfer stations and eco-depots. Transfer stations are a place where residents who do not have garbage collection take their garbage and recycling. The WCC reached out to the visitors and provided them with WildSafeBC brochures (fig.6). The average number of residents contacted within a 4 hour time frame was between 25 and 40. Transfer stations that were visited were Vavenby, Lytton, Heffley Creek, Clinton, Clearwater, and Little Fort with over 200 residents contacted.



Figure 6. The WCC at the Clearwater Eco Depot handing out bear brochures, 2018.

Public Displays and Events

The WildSafeBC display booth was a favorite feature at many local events. These included:

- The Salute to the Sockeye Salmon in Chase
- The North Thompson Fall Fair and Rodeo
- TRU Back to School BBQ
- The Logan Lake Highland Valley Copper Open House Day
- Pinantan Country Fair
- Chase Corn Stalk Day
- Canada Day at Riverside Park with the Kamloops WCC
- Chase Kindergarten Fair
- Clearwater Safety Day
- Kamloops Green Living Expo with Kamloops WCC
- Clinton Seedy Sunday
- Clearwater Farmers' Markets
- Lytton Farmers' Markets
- Merritt Farmers' Markets

Social Media and Press

WildSafeBC TNRD was well-supported by local media such as the Clearwater Time and the Sun Peaks Independent News in sharing events and ongoing WSBC messaging. The TNRD social media Facebook page gained 34% more “likes” this year and stands at 265 as of October 2018.

BC Goes Wild Weekend Event

BC Goes Wild Weekend is held on the third weekend of September every year to celebrate wildlife and nature as well as to mark the start of the peak season of human-bear conflicts throughout the province. Every WCC in BC holds their own unique event for community members to have fun and get involved with WildSafeBC activities. This year the TNRD WCC held a Paint Night event in Little Fort at the Community Hall. The event featured a guided painting session of a landscape featuring a black bear as well as discussion on human-bear conflict, attractant management and staying safe in bear country. This event was a fantastic way to attract attendance by those that may not have participated in a wildlife or outdoors type event. In this way the participants had fun but still received information about reducing human-wildlife conflicts.

Bear Bin Loan Out Program

There was a reduction in delivering the Bear Bin Loan Out Program for Merritt in 2018, but there was some interest generated from the public on possibly purchasing the bear resistant containers. An inventory was made of the bins available for the program from the Merritt public works yard. The TNRD and WCC will review the program, how it is run, and gauge community interest in either continuing or restructuring the program.

Sun Peaks Bear Smart Status

The WCC continued to work with the Sun Peaks Municipality on their Bear Smart Community status. This initiative was started in 2016 by the previous WCC and more work was completed in 2018. The WCC attended Bear Smart Committee Meetings in Sun Peaks and has been working on the Bear Hazard Assessment. The municipality of Sun Peaks has already implemented the removal of bear-attractant landscaping in the village and has organized education presentations for staff.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

One of the challenges faced by the WCC this season was a low number of booked classroom presentations within local schools. This is counter to the increased interest in the number of general presentations and workshops. It was also found that the social media engagement was a challenge for 2018. It is important to post content that is relevant to local communities to generate more 'likes' and shares. The TNRD is a large region composed of many towns/municipalities and it was found that if something was posted for example that engaged Merritt, the members of Clearwater would become uninterested in the content and possibly unfollow. Garbage tagging had not been as involved as last year and would be something to engage more with in 2019. There are only two communities (Merritt and Logan Lake) that have bylaws regarding garbage collection. There are other communities, (Savona, Cherry Creek, Barriere, Clearwater, Blue River) that have garbage collection along with local transfer stations but no bylaws regarding garbage bin placement time frames. Some communities do not even require garbage bins and garbage bags are placed out on the roadside. Having consistent bear smart bylaws throughout the TNRD would promote best practices uniformly.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

Some goals for the 2019 season should include:

- Increasing classroom engagement and finding innovative ways to book classrooms with local TNRD schools. These can include online 'Webinar' interactive presentations for rural communities, faxed posters or mail out sheets to encourage teacher sign up and more extended classroom programs held.
- Find and plan more engaging content for the WildSafeBC TNRD Facebook page and generate more followers.
- Evaluate and update the Bear Bin Loan Out Program either from Merritt or another interested community and perform thorough garbage tagging for all garbage collection communities.
- Continue and increase 'Door-to-Door' engagement through local eco-depots and transfer stations throughout the TNRD as this strategy was found to be effective in 2018.
- Fruit trees continue to be a 'hot topic' around the TNRD during the fall months and residents continue to leave fruit fallen or unpicked for bears and other wildlife to access. The WCC should explore fruit gleaning options and gauge interest from local groups to start volunteer programs like the one run in Kamloops.
- To continue to work with Sun Peaks Mountain Resort Municipality on their Bear Smart Community status application.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, the WCC would like to thank the Thompson-Nicola Regional District, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

The WCC would also like to acknowledge the various media outlets that ran stories to help spread the WildSafeBC message. These include The Sun Peaks Independent, and the Clearwater Times. Special thanks to Robyn Reudink of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development; Adriana Mailloux, Denise Roberts, and Jamie Vieira of the TNRD; Frank Ritcey, Vanessa Isnardy, and Courtney Hawkins of the WildSafeBC program; and Jen Bellhouse, Shelley Nohels, Trina Radford and Mitchell Bymoan of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation as well as the WSBC TNRD Volunteer, David Nasz.

Finally, thank you to all those residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wild species. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!