

WildSafeBC Annual Report

Tumbler Ridge, BC

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Ministry of
Environment and
Climate Change Strategy



British Columbia Conservation Foundation



Executive Summary

Now nearing the end of its third year of delivery, WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge continues its work to provide education to the residents of this town with the goal of ultimately reducing the occurrence of human-wildlife conflict within the District and fulfilling WildSafeBC's mission of "keeping wildlife wild and communities safe".

Highlights from the year included a Wild and Safe Community Forum with WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator Frank Ritcey and the BC Provincial Government Wildlife Conflict Manager Micheal Badry. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) gave 4 presentations to over 250 participants and delivered the Junior Ranger Program to five elementary school classes. Outreach continued with door-to-door campaigns, "bear in area" signage, and 120 garbage bins were tagged. The WCC attended 4 events and had great community engagement. The social media reach grew over the season with a 37% in page "likes" on Facebook.

There was a dramatic decrease in grizzly bear reports to the Conservation Officer Service 24/7 RAPP line for Tumbler Ridge in 2018, with only 2 sightings reported as of the end of September, compared with 34 sightings reported in 2017 and 28 sightings in 2016 during the same timeframe. Black bear activity on the other hand was up 79 reports this year compared with 16 in 2017 and 55 in 2016. All of these reports are publicly available through the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website.



Figure 1: Rebecca Robertson worked as the WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge Community Coordinator (WCC) during the 2018 season



Figure 2: The wilderness surrounding Tumbler Ridge is enjoyed by hikers and wildlife alike

The uptick in black bear reports may be partly a result of better levels of reporting in 2018 compared with previous years, but it is also likely reflective of high levels of black bear activity that occurred in July. This bear activity was not consistent with patterns in previous years, which made it hard to predict where and when to best focus educational efforts and resources. However, partnerships with various groups such as the Conservation Officer Service (COS), local law enforcement, community organizations, and local individuals were developed and these groups proved to be valuable allies in pursuing the reduction of human-wildlife conflict throughout the season.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) for Tumbler Ridge gave 4 presentations to over 250 participants including:

Garbage Pick-up with Karate Club: A short presentation on bear safety in the wild was given and the WCC carried bear spray while helping the group pick-up garbage on a 5km stretch of highway

Summer Reading Club: A large group of children engaged in an interactive presentation about wildlife safety and played a habitat game that emphasized the damage done by unnatural food sources.

Wild & Safe Community Forum: WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge was fortunate enough to host Frank Ritcey, WildSafeBC Provincial Coordinator and Micheal Badry, Provincial Wildlife Conflict Manager for two days in September. Together with the WCC they delivered a presentation at the Community Centre that focused on bear activity in Tumbler Ridge, the Bear Smart Community Program, and general safety around local wildlife.

Junior Ranger Program: Five elementary school classes attended the half hour Junior Ranger Program presentations where they learned about wildlife habitat, attractant management, and bear safety.



Figure 3: Bear safety training and garbage cleanup with the local karate club



Figure 4: Summer reading club Junior Rangers Program presentation

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging



Figure 5: Door hangers were placed in several neighborhoods after reports of wildlife activity or attractants being present

Door-to-Door Education

“Bare” camping brochures, posters and signage was provided to campground owner Roxanne Gulick at Monkman RV Park after several reports of bear sightings. This included an incident involving a black bear damaging a tent and a cooler in the campground in late June. Tree planters who were camping along the tree line in the campsite were given information about safe tenting practices and ways to avoid future human-wildlife conflict.

Cougar safety information and brochures were provided to homes in the Chamberlain neighborhood after several reports of cougar sightings in Chamberlain Park in June.

Fruit tree and attractant management information and brochures were handed out to Dawson Place neighbourhood residents after receiving reports of ravens accessing food and compost in items in August.

Garbage Tagging

In autumn 2017, the District of Tumbler Ridge distributed bear resistant garbage bins to every residential property within the District. This effort has resulted in a qualitatively observable trend in 2018 of a reduction in the amount of garbage stored within easy access to bears within the community. Combined with the continued efforts of garbage tagging and public education campaigns both on Facebook and face-to-face in the community, it seems that Tumbler Ridge is making positive and effective steps towards the goal of reducing human-wildlife conflict.

With the help of a volunteer, garbage tagging was conducted three different times this year for the entire town. In total, approximately 120 stickers were placed on garbage bins put out the night before collection. Fortunately the vast majority of residents are putting their garbage out at the right time and remembering to use the clips on the new bins. However, further education is required to help residents understand the



Figure 6: Garbage tagging was conducted three different times for the entire town in 2018

bins are “bear resistant” not “bear proof” and why it is important to secure bins during the week to prevent access by bears.

Public Displays and Events

Canada Day: The WCC handed out tattoos, bookmarks, and brochures and spoke with around 150 people, mostly local. The timing of the event was perfect for educational purposes because of the current uptick in bear sightings in town. Many people were informed about WARP and advice given on proper garbage storage.

Emperor’s Challenge: The WCC set up a booth and handed out brochures to race participants with approximately 500 people coming by. The WCC gave instructions on how to use and carry bear spray and what to do in case of a bear encounter during the run.

Snowmobile Show & Shine: This was a poorly attended event (<20 people stopped at the booth) but a good opportunity to meet Conservation Office Service (COS) officers in person.

Fall Fair: This was a very well attended event and conversations were held with over 200 people with regards to bear spray, hiking safety, human-wildlife conflict, garbage storage, and fruit tree management. The eye-catching display at the booth with wildlife props donated by the COS drew people’s attention and initiated many conversations.



Figure 7: The WildSafeBC booth for Canada Day included brochures, free tattoos and bookmarks, several display boards, a bear spray safety display, and a community coordinator happy to discuss topics related to wildlife in Tumbler Ridge!

Social Media and Press

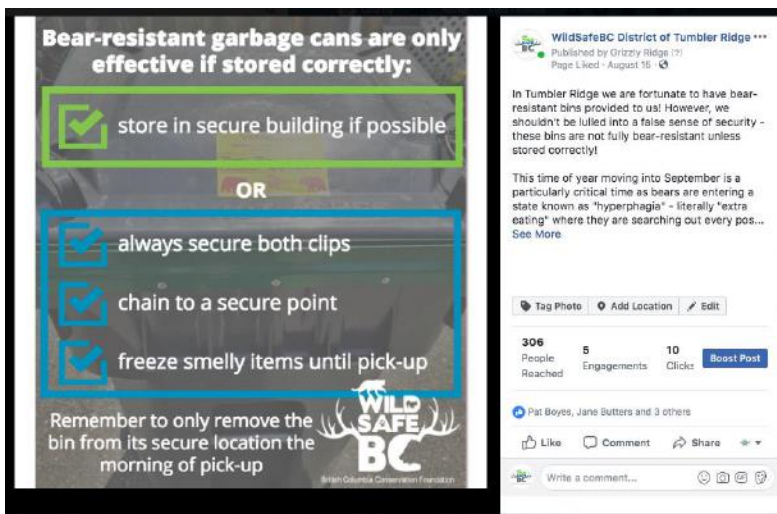


Figure 8: An example of the sort of messaging that can be distributed to a large audience using Facebook

Social Media: The WildSafeBC District of Tumbler Ridge Facebook page really took off this year! The total number of people that “liked” the page increased from 249 at the beginning of May to 395 by the end of September - a 37% increase. Additionally, the number of post “likes” was 14 times higher than last year, helped in part by a post that ended up going viral about a grizzly bear on a popular hiking

trail outside of town. Social media proved to be one of the most effective means of spreading the WildSafeBC message to residents of Tumbler Ridge and had an overall reach of over 50,000 post views from the beginning of the WCC's term until the end of September.

Press: The WCC reached out to the Fort St. John "Energetic City" online news service but unfortunately did not get a response. Hopefully next year the local Tumbler Ridge Newspaper will be operating again as it is an ideal way to communicate information to residents.

Bear in Area Signs

Since Tumbler Ridge is small enough for a bear to travel anywhere within town limits in under half an hour, focus was put on displaying "Bear in Area" signs in high traffic areas and where bear sightings were recurring. Bear in area signage was installed at the following locations over the course of the season:

- Gwillim bear walk
- Monkman RV Park and Campground
- Tumbler Ridge Transfer Station
- Golf Course
- Murray Drive / Mackenzie Way intersection
- Cottonwood Playground
- Southgate Street / Pioneer Loop intersection

Unfortunately three of the four "Bear in Area" signs were stolen over the course of the season.



Figure 9: A bear in area sign was placed near town hall after several calls to the COS about a black bear in close proximity to the Kinuseo Cafe

Partnerships



Figure 10: Some of the items lent to WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge for display purposes by the Dawson Creek COS

Conservation Officer Service: The WCC was able to establish a working relationship with the Conservation Officers in Dawson Creek and Chetwynd from the beginning of the season and this proved to be a helpful partnership. The COS was able to lend a large toolkit of animal wildlife parts including antlers, horns, and skins to WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge for educational purposes during the course of the late summer and autumn. The WCC was able to help the COS by checking into reports of sightings and attractants for officers.

GeoPark: WildSafeBC provided a guideline on wildlife safety practices to use when hiking or camping for TRUGG Geological Field Guide. The WildSafeBC brochures were displayed at the visitor's center managed by the GeoPark. Several partnered hikes were organized but unfortunately all had to be cancelled for various reasons (e.g. weather, lack of attendance, scheduling conflicts).

Fruit Tree Outreach and Education

Although no specific fruit tree outreach program was implemented this year, the topic was addressed in a variety of different formats throughout the season. August is generally a period with the highest number of fruit tree generated conflict and the WCC focused education efforts to coincide with this time. Education on the management of fruit trees took place through door-to-door efforts, Facebook posts, and event displays. Additionally, all elementary students that participated in the Junior Rangers Program were given a checklist to do around their home. These included solution based prompts that reflected what they had just learned in the presentation at their school.

Challenges for the 2018 Season

Atypical Wildlife Activity

The online WARP program can be a very useful tool for community coordinators and local residents alike to observe and anticipate wildlife activity trends. Using this online program, it can be seen that 2018 was an unusual year in Tumbler Ridge. While bear sightings were substantially lower than normal for nearly every month, July was the exception. Over 80% of bear sighting reports in Tumbler Ridge were made in the first few weeks of July alone. Unfortunately this situation escalated quickly and ultimately three male black bears displaying food-conditioned behaviour had to be destroyed by the COS within the period of a single week for the purpose of public safety. While considering this event can be discouraging, it can be learned from and used as a motivator to remind residents that vigilance through all periods of bear activity is essential – not just the traditionally high-conflict months of August and September.

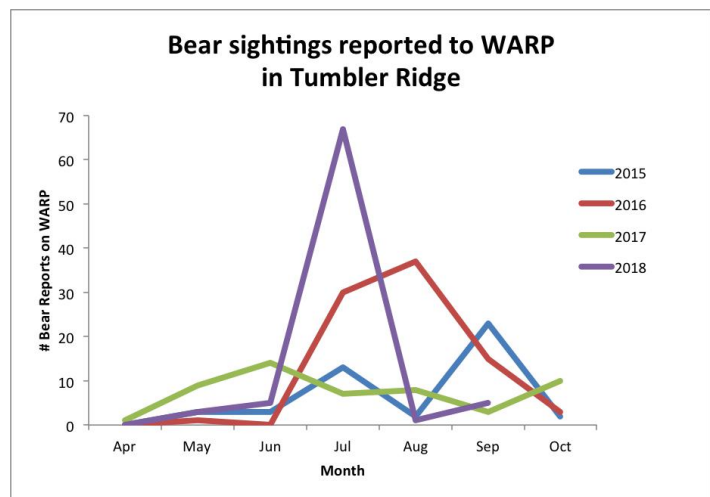


Figure 4: Bear activity was much more concentrated in 2018 than previous years.



Figure 12: One of the black bears that had to be destroyed in July became so human-habituated it walked right up to the Kinuseo Cafe restaurant to observe diners eating their meals

Community Attendance & Engagement

As in many small communities it can be difficult in Tumbler Ridge to rally support and engagement around issues not immediately relevant to daily life. This was likely the case with the Community Forum held in early September. It seems likely that if there had been a large amount of bear activity and human-wildlife conflict in the weeks preceding this event there would have been greater attendance numbers and social “buzz” surrounding the topics discussed. Additionally, constraints on advertising due to the lack of a town newspaper and/or radio station meant that Facebook, posters, and word of mouth were the only means available to advertise this event. As a result, only three community members attended. In the future it may be useful to prepare event material beforehand so that when there is a call for action and discussion in the midst of crisis an event could plausibly be organized on short notice.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

Bear Smart Community Status

An encouraging development in 2018 was the aforementioned visit from Frank Ritcey and Micheal Badry to Tumbler Ridge. Both of these experts were impressed with the already existing bylaws, infrastructure, and community resolve to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Their observations led them to recommend pursuing Bear Smart Community status as a way to bolster Tumbler Ridge’s reputation within the province and beyond. It would be an exciting project to pursue in 2019 as part of WildSafeBC’s continued mandate in Tumbler Ridge.

Develop Partnerships

The WCC will continue to collaborate with the GeoPark to advertise and host hikes, educational programs. There is a potential for a bear spray rental/training at the visitor’s center which could prove beneficial to both parties.

There is an opportunity to partner with the Community Kitchen to create a local “Wild Edibles” guide or join forces to host an apple harvest and cooking event. These could be a great way to spread awareness about topics such as safe hiking practices, bear food, and fruit tree management.

The WCC will work with real estate agents and/or rental associations to reach new-to-town residents. This could be an effective way of spreading the word about bylaws and best practices.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Tumbler Ridge would like to acknowledge the ongoing support from its sponsors including the District of Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia Conservation Foundation, and the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategies.

Additionally, thank you for the support by the BCCF and WildSafeBC team as well as the following people who have contributed to our success: Micheal Badry, Murray Booth, Brad Lacey, Blake Parker, Dustin Curry, Enzo Calla, Aleen Torraville, Cam Drever, Jenna McQueen, Tumbler Ridge Community Center, and many more!