

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2018

District of Vanderhoof

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Executive Summary

WildSafeBC began its second year in the District of Vanderhoof after the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) Alyssa Keenan-Toop completed training in May.

The WildSafeBC program, has been actively working to reduce human-wildlife conflict in BC communities through education, innovation, and cooperation. The program has been well received by the residents of Vanderhoof. The WCC attended the local farmers markets and community events with the WildSafeBC informational display booth where wildlife attractant management brochures were distributed. The WCC also provided 9 presentations to local schools with 180 participants using the Junior Ranger Program for the elementary schools. A modified presentation was given to high school students. Garbage tagging and door-to-door canvassing continued this year, with the focus being on historically higher conflict neighborhoods according to the data on the Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (W.A.R.P.).

Vanderhoof has a variety of natural and unnatural wildlife attractants that draw wildlife into the community. There are multiple green spaces that offer feeding and bedding opportunities, as well as the extensive riparian areas along the Nechako River that provide a corridor through the community. Alongside those more natural attractants there are also unnatural attractants, such as bird feeders, fruit trees, and garbage. In 2018 there were 144 calls to the Conservation Officer Service regarding wildlife in conflict or sightings in urban settings.

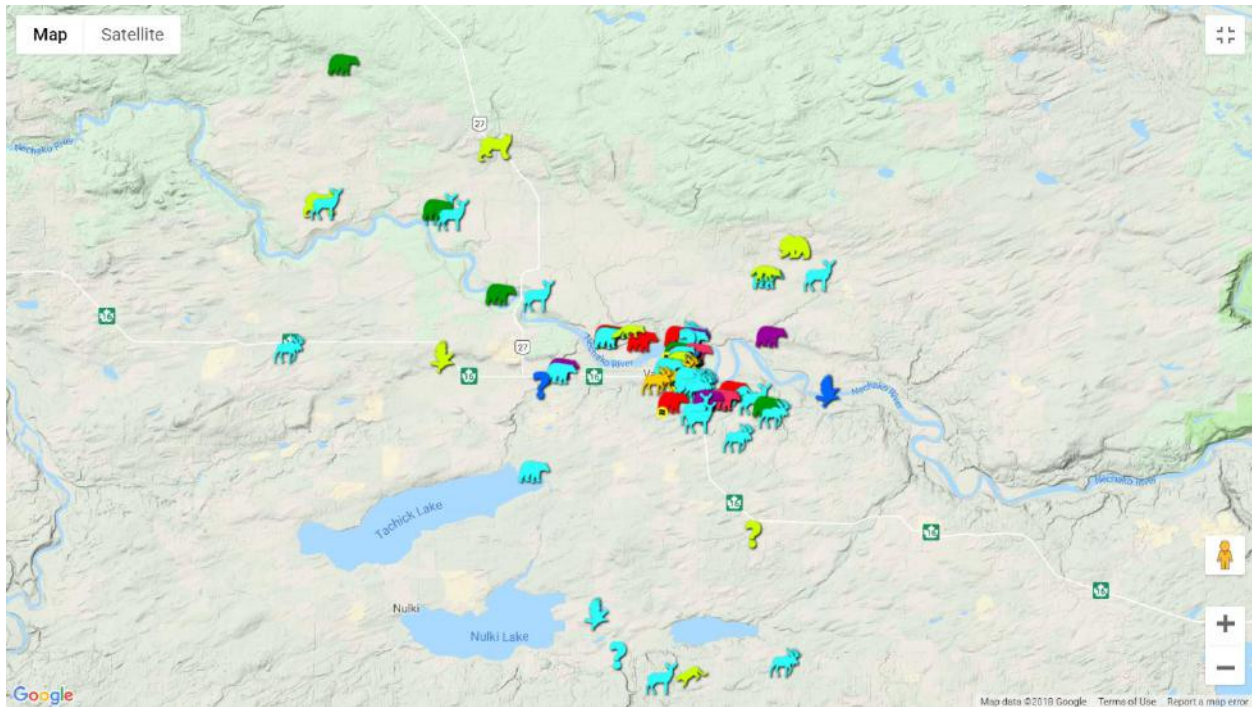


Figure 1. Wildlife reports in Vanderhoof reported through WARP.

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Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Encounters

Calls received through the Conservation Officer Service's 24/7 RAPP line are uploaded daily to WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This information is publicly available on our website and is an important tool in conveying wildlife sightings and conflicts in the community. The majority of the calls are concerning black bears; moose and deer are the next most common calls. More moose were reported in town during the snowy months. The public are urged to report any dangerous wildlife (bear, cougar, wolf or coyote) in the community or any wildlife in conflict. This information allows us to identify attractants leading to conflict and the location of high conflict areas. In this way, we can better prioritize resources and efforts.

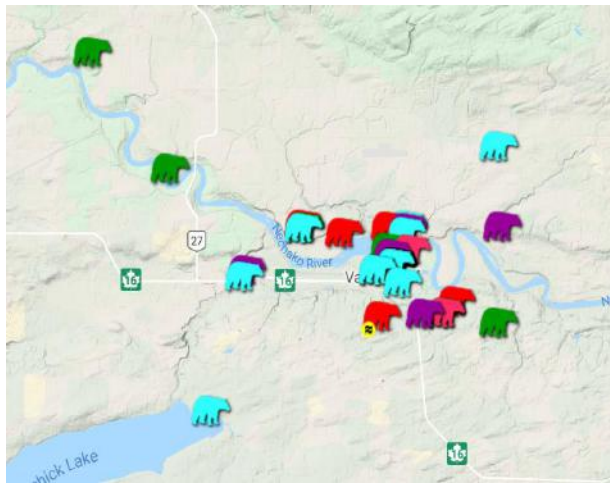


Figure 2. Bears reported through WARP in 2018 with the red icons representing bears in conflict due to garbage.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

WildSafeBC presentations provide an interactive opportunity for education on wildlife biology, local ecosystems, and attractant management to help reduce the amount of human wildlife conflict. Although being present at community events is great for reaching an adult audience in the community it is just as important to reach the children and youth audience through school presentations. The elementary schools receive the ever-popular Junior Ranger Program while the high school students are presented with a more in-depth presentation. The WCC gave a total of 9 presentation to over 180 participants at Nechako Valley Secondary School and W.L. McLeod Elementary School.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC stays in communication with the local Vanderhoof Conservation Officers (CO). When there are reports of bears accessing unsecured attractants that are within the community the COs can request the WCC provide education in these areas. This is often done through garbage tagging and/or door-to-door visits. Garbage tagging involves placing educational

stickers on garbage placed out on the street the night before collection. This is followed up with door-to-door visits to provide advice to residents on how attractants can be better managed.

Public Displays and Events

The WildSafeBC display booth was always welcomed by residents of all ages and was a great opportunity to discuss local wildlife issues that concerned the public. Attendees appreciate the opportunity to share observations about local wildlife activity and attractant management success stories. The WCC attended the Vanderhoof Farmers Market, BC Goes Wild Weekend, and World Rivers Day celebration in Vanderhoof.



Figure 3. WildSafeBC at the Vanderhoof Farmers Market

BC Goes Wild Weekend

The annual BC Goes Wild Weekend is held across the province on the third weekend of September, which coincides closely with the highest number of calls to the Conservation Officer Service. There are various types of events organized by the WCCs that consist of hikes, presentations, games, nature hunts and more. The Vanderhoof event was held on the 16th in Ferland Park and consisted of a nature Bingo game and bear craft.

The nature Bingo game motivated children and parents to explore the park and look for evidence of animals, plants, and tracks. The bear craft allowed for one on one interaction with the participants to further discuss different concerns and observations that residents have with wildlife in the area. This was followed by a CO talk regarding bear activity in the area and what residents can do to prevent conflict with bears. Although the group of participants was small, it

was well received by those who came and participated. For future events it would be more successful to attempt to partner with another event in the community for greater participation.



Figure 4. The WCC at the BC Goes Wild Weekend in Vanderhoof.

Social Media and Press

The provincial WildSafeBC provides messaging through their website and social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Vimeo. The local WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Facebook page provides additional local content including safety information, best practices, heightened wildlife activity and WSBC event promotion. This platform allows our messaging and events to be shared quickly and efficiently within the community. It also allows for further connection and collaboration with other groups within the District of Vanderhoof.



Figure 5. Reach of WildSafeBC Vanderhoof Facebook Page from May 21st - October 15th

Challenges for the 2018 Season

The intensity of the fire season in the District of Vanderhoof made outdoor events challenging at times due to the air quality being dangerously poor. Contingency plans should be made in future years to include indoor options.

Poorly managed garbage appears to be a growing concern in the District of Vanderhoof. The community would make great strides in reducing human-wildlife conflicts if the District would consider a bylaw restricting when residential garbage can be set on the street. Wildlife was observed accessing garbage in open public refuse containers. The use of bear-resistant containers has been adopted in several communities in bear country and is an effective way to reduce human-wildlife conflicts.

Goals and Opportunities for 2019

The WCC looks forward to the 2019 season with the following goals:

- Assist the District of Vanderhoof in developing bylaws to reduce the availability of garbage to wildlife.
- Increase social media presence to engage with the community and promote events.
- Expand the Junior Ranger Program to reach more elementary schools and children.
- Work with the District of Vanderhoof on the introduction of bear resistant garbage bins to lower human-wildlife conflicts within the District.

- Support the District of Vanderhoof in meeting the six criteria required to achieve Bear Smart Community status.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC Vanderhoof program, I would like to thank the District of Vanderhoof, the Ministry of Environment, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding this year's programs and activities.

Special thanks to Hilary Irvine of the District of Vanderhoof and the BCCF team for their support.

The WCC would like to thank all of the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wild species and ecosystems. The WCC is looking forward to continuing to the next season. Let's continue to keep "wildlife wild and our community safe".