

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Castlegar

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Executive Summary

This report describes the activities for the WildSafeBC Castlegar program (fig. 1) between May 1st and November 15, 2019, including the highlights and challenges of delivering the program to residents and visitors in the City of Castlegar and its rural areas. In the past 4 years, Castlegar had 896 reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS). Black bears remain the most frequently reported wildlife in Castlegar and garbage and residential fruit trees remain the greatest unmanaged attractant. Other wildlife reported include coyotes, grizzly bear, cougars and deer.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCC) visited 2 schools and 8 summer camps, delivering the WildSafe Ranger Program and reaching over 389 students. Due to unmanaged fruit trees and poorly stored garbage, 120 households were visited through door-to-door outreach. Garbage tagging was performed six times in Castlegar in which the bylaw officer was present. There were 7 educational displays and 326 attendees. In addition, the WCCs used social media to help spread messaging in Castlegar. The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page reached over 13,000 page views and 624 likes in 2019.

Despite the fact that reported human-bear conflicts were lower than average, there remained conflicts that were the result of improper storage of garbage and unmanaged fruit trees. Some of the ongoing challenges in 2019 were vast amounts of unpicked fruit trees, improper storage of bear-resistant garbage carts, and the lack of bylaws regulating the management of wildlife attractants in the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDKB). The goals for 2020 include ongoing collaboration and partnerships to increase compliance with the City's Wildlife Attractant bylaws and provide the community with a variety of solutions to help them address their wildlife attractants. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help "keep wildlife wild and our community safe".

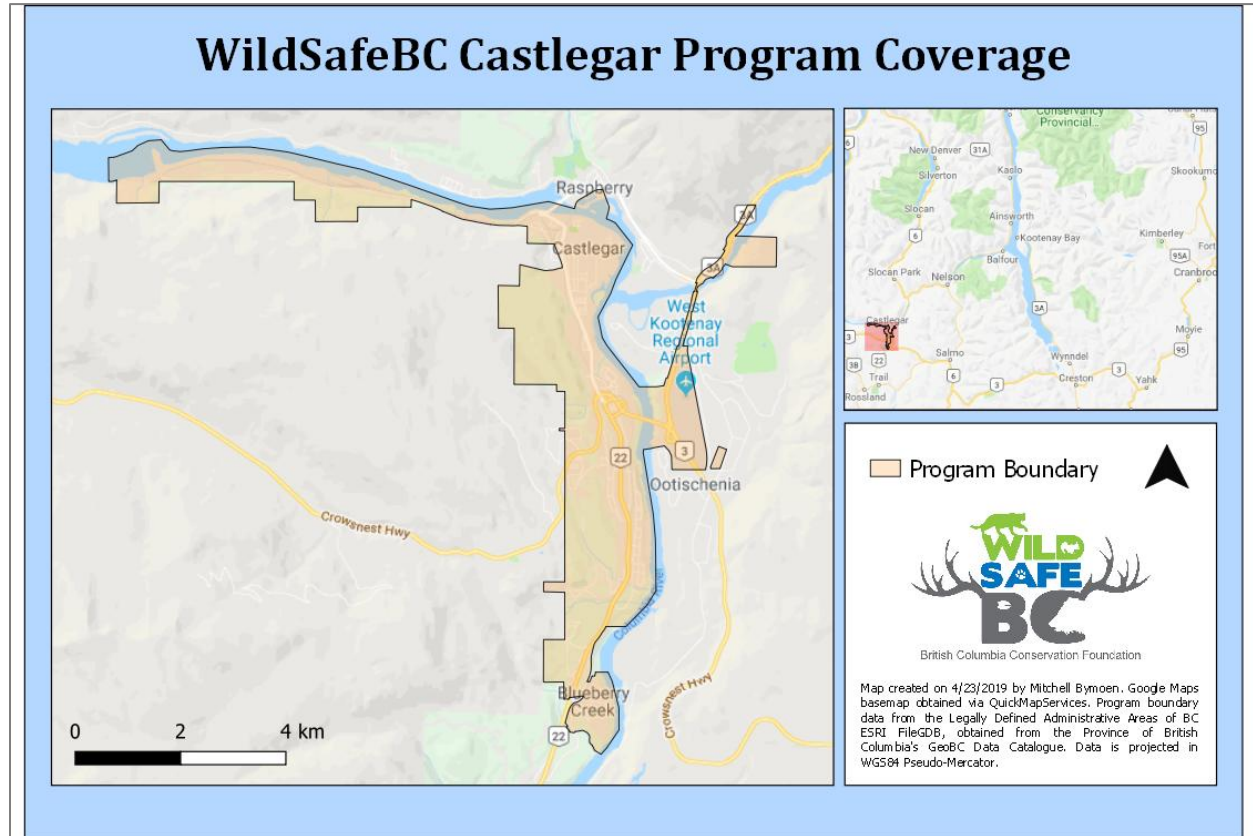


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Castlegar program coverage area.

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Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for Castlegar includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 15, 2019.

Castlegar had a range of wildlife reports from 2016-2019 with over 896 reports made to COS. This year there were fewer wildlife conflicts for all species of wildlife and in particular black bears. Conflict with coyotes, elk, cougars and deer were also reported with these animals being drawn into residential areas (fig. 2).

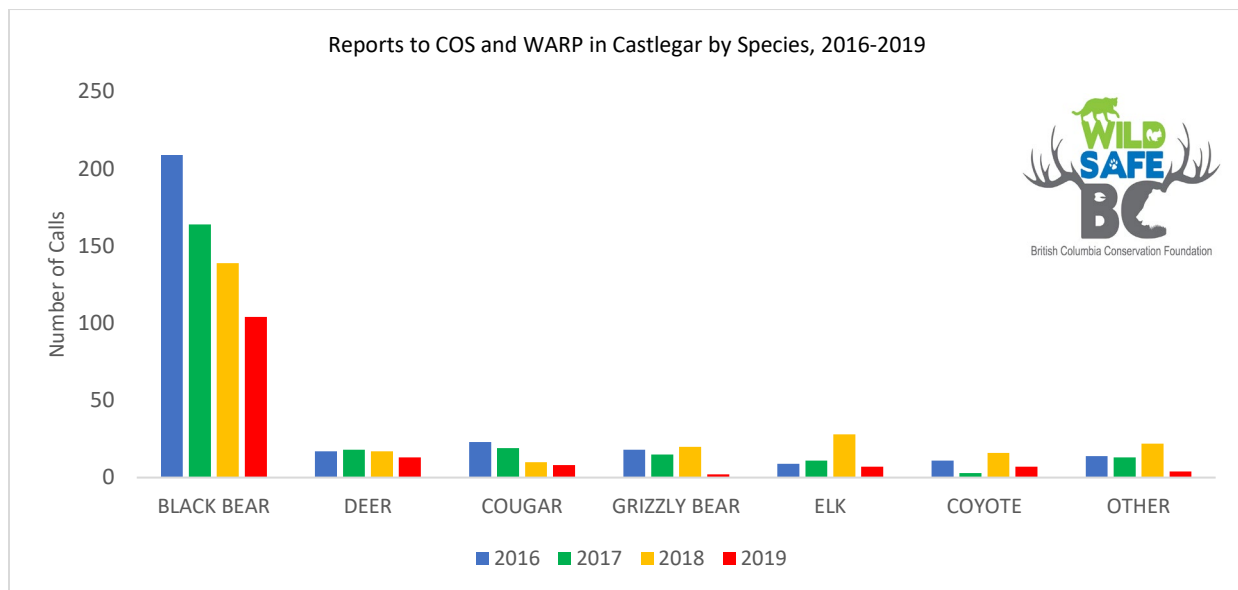


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP in Castlegar by species, January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

Garbage and residential fruit trees continue to be an attractant issue however data indicates that it has been decreasing. Other attractants were livestock, pets and compost (fig.3).

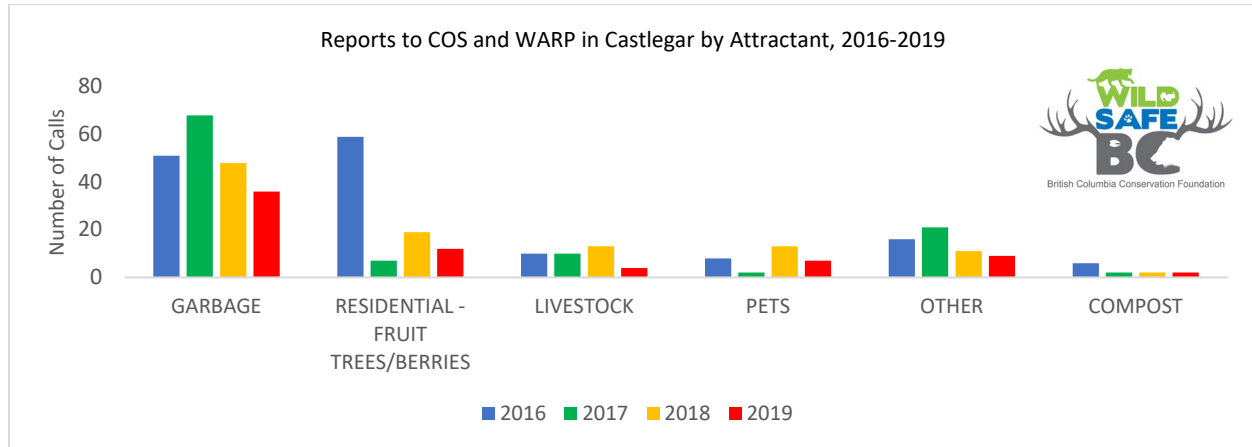


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant in Castlegar from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

WildSafe Ranger Program

For younger audiences, the WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) kept things entertaining while teaching kids about the root causes of human-wildlife conflict and what we can do to keep wildlife wild and our community safe. A total of two schools and eight summer camps participated in the WRP and over 389 students became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits (Table 1).

Table 1. Schools that received the Junior Ranger Program in 2019.

Name of organization	Grade	Students
Castlegar Primary	K x2, K/1 x2, 1/2 x3	159
SPCA camp x4	Multiple	51
Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacyx2	Multiple	28
Community Complex Outdoors camp x2	Multiple	44
Blueberry Primary	Preschool x3	45
Silly Monkeys Childcare	Preschool x5	62

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCCs gave 2 presentations to the Selkirk College International Students in which there were over 58 attendees.

Public Displays and Events

Educational displays at local events were a great success with local residents and tourists in attendance. Residents were able to access information on solutions for their unique attractant challenges. The WCCs spent seven days at events and reached 326 people (Table 2; fig. 4, fig. 5)

Table 2. Participation at community events, 2019.

Name of event	# of participants
Castlegar Market x4	133
Selkirk College	37
Kootenay Food Pick	21
Pass Creek Fair	135



Figure 4. Rock Creek Fall Fair, 2019.



Figure 5. Castlegar Market, 2019.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door campaigns are an important part of the WildSafeBC program. It increases the coordinators knowledge of the community and allows residents to get to know the coordinators and the program. These campaigns are often initiated by the COS from an immediate conflict or attractant management issue. Door-to-door initiatives reached over 170 households that were contacted through face-to-face conversations or through the WildSafeBC “while you were out” door hanger and brochure regarding the wildlife of concern. The neighborhoods visited include:

- Pass Creek Campground
- Blueberry x4
- Castlegar x4

Castlegar has bi-weekly garbage collection from Monday to Thursday. Throughout the season, the WCCs conducted six garbage tagging inspections in Castlegar. “Wildlife attractant” removable warning stickers were placed on bins that were out on the curb the night before collection day. All inspections were conducted along with the City of Castlegar bylaw officer who followed up the garbage tags with a warning letter. The WCCs then followed up with garbage management best practices and a bear brochure. A total of 27 hours were spent on this initiative. Monday’s collection days were visited two nights (Sunday), Tuesdays were visited two nights (Monday), Wednesdays were visited two nights (Tuesday), and Thursdays were visited one night (Wednesday). There were total of 37 bins tagged in which 2 households were 2nd time offenders and there were zero third-time offenders (fig. 6). The smaller number of repeat offenders is an indication of the bin tagging program’s effectiveness in changing behaviours and reducing the amount of unsecured garbage available to bears.

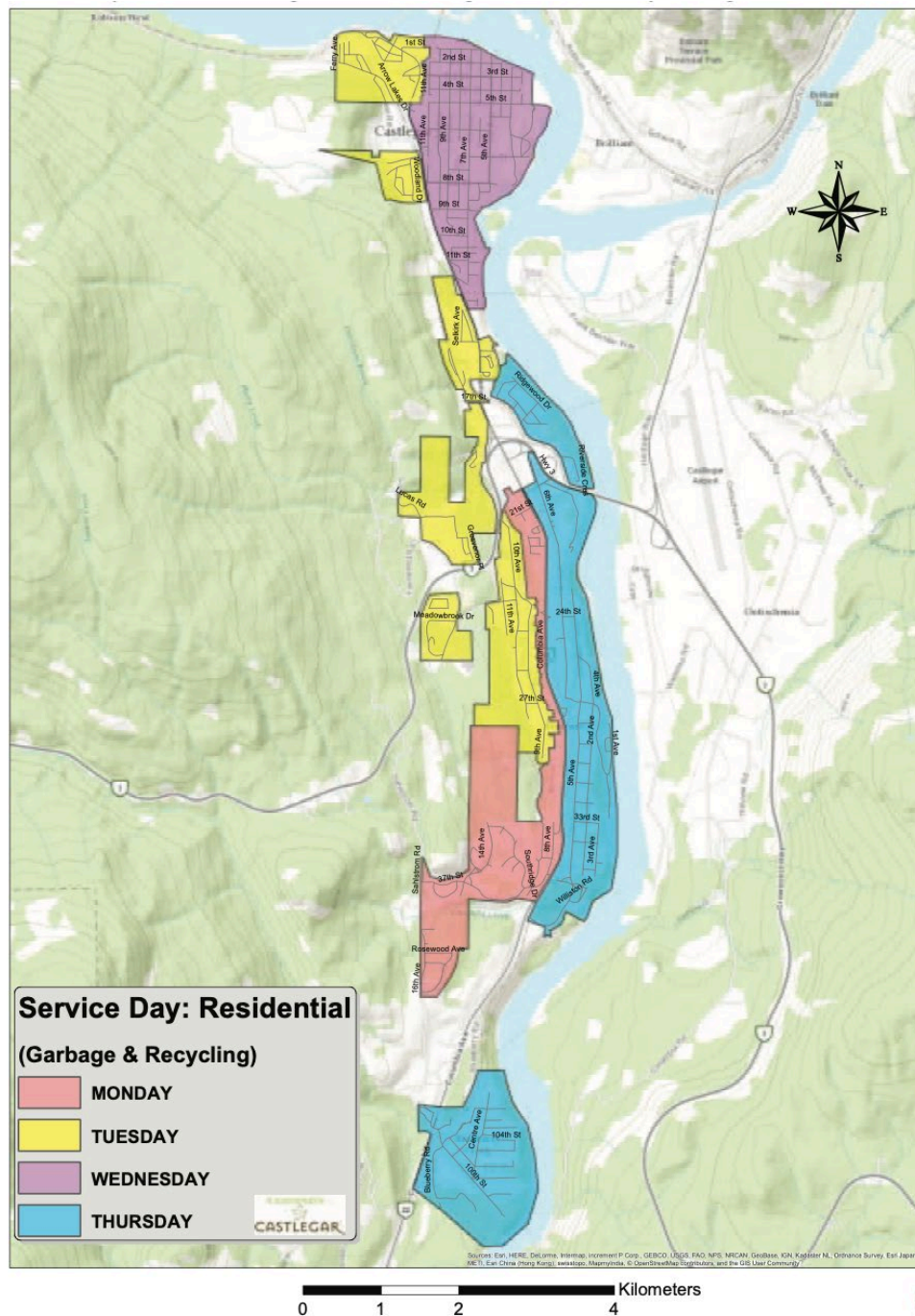


Figure 6. City of Castlegar: Garbage and Recycling Service.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Castlegar page was updated regularly throughout the season, reaching over 13,000 page views and 624 likes from January 1st to October 12, 2019 providing a platform for community discussion around local wildlife activity and preventing conflicts.

Wildlife in Area Signs

WildSafeBC's bright yellow "Bear in Area" signs are an effective way to give residents a heads up about local bear activity. The WCCs posted signs in response to specific wildlife conflict reports but also received requests from residents and businesses. A total of two signs were put out in Castlegar.

Collaborations

Working with other stakeholders and community members is a key part of WildSafeBC's mission in reducing human-wildlife conflicts. The WCCs collaborated with The West Kootenay Human Bear Conflict Working Group which consists of local bear biologists, Conservation Officers, local government representatives, area residents and other WildSafeBC Coordinators. The group meets annually to identify and implement innovative solutions to local human-bear conflicts. The WCCs also supported the work of Kootenay Real Foods with fruit gleaning at the Mir Centre at Selkirk College (fig. 7). Over 1,000 lbs of apples were picked for the Press Fest at Slocan park. There was also a WildSafeBC booth stationed at the event. The WCCs also worked closely with the City of Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox on six garbage tagging nights.



Figure 7. Mir Centre fruit gleaning with Kootenay Real Foods, 2019.

Challenges & Opportunities

There are vast amounts of residential fruit trees in Castlegar and this continues to be one of the main causes of human wildlife conflicts in the region. Several bears have been reported damaging property and remaining in neighborhoods due to this unmanaged attractant. Revitalizing the local fruit gleaning movement in the future would help address this significant attractant issue, providing fresh fruit for local families; not bears.

Another challenge is the improper storage of bear-resistant garbage carts. While many residents continue to store their bear-resistant carts in a locked garage or shed (the safest place for garbage), there have been numerous cases of carts stored outdoors without the clips locked or placed on the curb for collection too early. These carts will only be effective if residents keep both clips locked at all times between collection days, without exception. An integral part of addressing this issue will be continued education and proactive enforcement to ensure the necessary steps are being taken to keep these carts secure. Moreover, initiating more bylaws into the RDCKB would be very beneficial and would help regulate the management of wildlife attractants. This would allow consequences for residents that continually leave attractants accessible to wildlife outside of City limits.

Looking forward to the 2019 season, WildSafeBC hopes to continue to collaborate with community partners to make effective solutions available for local wildlife attractant issues. Recommendations for 2020 include:

- Assisting the City of Castlegar in finalizing the Bear Smart Community status process;
- Continue to organize and participate in Castlegar's newly formed Bear Smart Working Group with representatives from the City, Conservation Officer Service, and other community stakeholders. Invite RDCK Area I and J representatives;
- Continue to implement the City's new Bear Conflict Response Protocol in partnership with the City and bylaw officer;
- Expand the WildSafeBC program's presence in the rural communities of RDCK Areas I;
- Collaborate with community groups to increase local capacity for fruit gleaning projects;
- Continue to explore innovative solutions to community attractant issues.

Acknowledgements

The WCCs would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the RDCKB, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their support of this program. Thank you to local Conservation Officer Service, Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox, the members of West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group and the great staff at City Hall. Special thanks to the volunteers that helped with garbage tagging. A special thank you to the media outlets for their stories and broadcasts that helped spread the messaging of WildSafeBC. The WCCs would like to thank the community members of Castlegar for their support and readiness to learn about the wildlife and attractant management strategies.