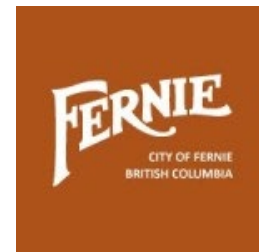


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Fernie

Prepared by: Kathy Murray, WildSafeBC Community
Coordinator





Executive Summary

Through collaboration, education, and community solutions, the WildSafeBC Fernie program aims to prevent human-wildlife conflict in the program coverage area (Figure 1). As of October 29, there were just over 130 black and grizzly bear reports to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) this year in Fernie which is above the average since 2015. Although the number of bear reports is higher, black and grizzly bear mortality has shown a decreasing trend since 2015 when 22 bears were destroyed in Fernie. To date, two (one black and one grizzly) food-conditioned and habituated bears have been destroyed this year.

More than 220 children participated in the WildSafeBC Ranger Program and 270 adults attended 9 wildlife awareness and bear spray workshops. A total of 125 Facebook posts reached more than 31,000 people and there were over 14,000 views on the WildSafeBC Elk Valley Facebook page. A broad range of people throughout a large geographic area were reached through 12 news articles in the Free Press, 18 radio interviews between The Drive and Summit 107 and 2 interviews on CBC Daybreak. WildSafeBC and the Wildlife Safety Response Officer (WSRO) assessed over 450 properties and found that post education, 85% of residents were keeping garbage indoors and inaccessible to bears in neighborhoods with larger homes and a garage. Properties were also assessed on Slalom Drive, a neighborhood with smaller homes and trailers and found that more than 50% of homes had garbage outdoors accessible to wildlife.

The storage of garbage outdoors, unmanaged fruit trees, as well as increased human activity in the back country all contribute to human-wildlife conflict. Ongoing support from sponsors, collaboration with community groups and support from local media has enabled WildSafeBC to reach a broad range of residents and visitors. Moving forward, WildSafeBC is looking forward to the opportunity to keep working with residents, visitors and collaborating with community groups to help keep wildlife wild and our community safe.

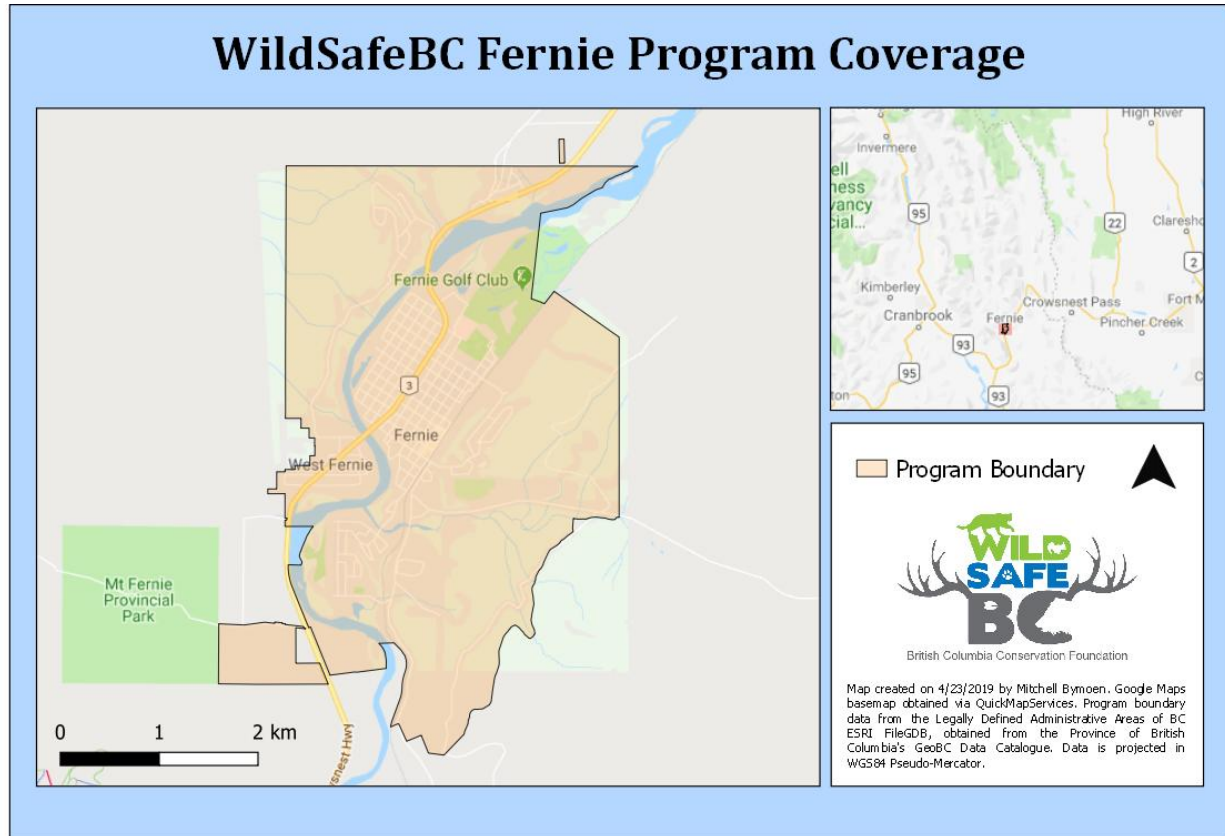


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Fernie program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Fernie Black Bear Family. Photo courtesy of Marcie Welsh

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

As of October 29, there were just over 130 black and grizzly bear reports to the COS this year in Fernie (Figure 2). This is above average since 2015. The increase in reports might be attributed to a high bear population due to good berry crops and a higher bear birth rate the past few years. An increase in development, logging, tourism, trail and backcountry use are other factors that may have contributed to an increase in bear reports to the COS.

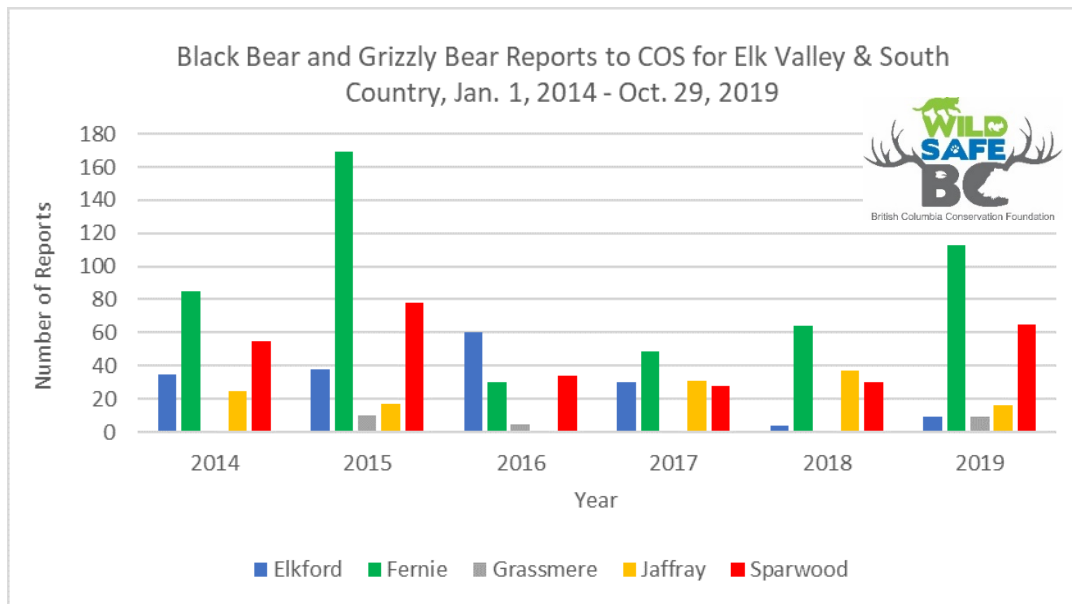


Figure 2. Black and grizzly bear reports to the COS by community from January 1, 2014 to October 29, 2019.

Although the number of bear reports is higher than average, black and grizzly bear mortality has shown a decreasing trend since 2015 when 22 bears were destroyed in Fernie. To date, two bears have been destroyed this year. One human-habituated and food-conditioned black bear was destroyed in early June on Mount Minton Street. One grizzly bear that had been reported trying to break into homes on two occasions on Highline Drive at Fernie Alpine Resort was also destroyed on June 28.

This decrease in bear mortality may be attributed to availability of natural food, increased awareness and better management of wildlife attractants. There seems to be less wind strewn litter and garbage accessible to wildlife with gravity locking residential carts and communal bear-resistant dumpsters.

However, garbage remains the most reported attractant for all wildlife combined. Although residential fruit trees are seldom reported, they remain a significant attractant and require better management (Figure 3).

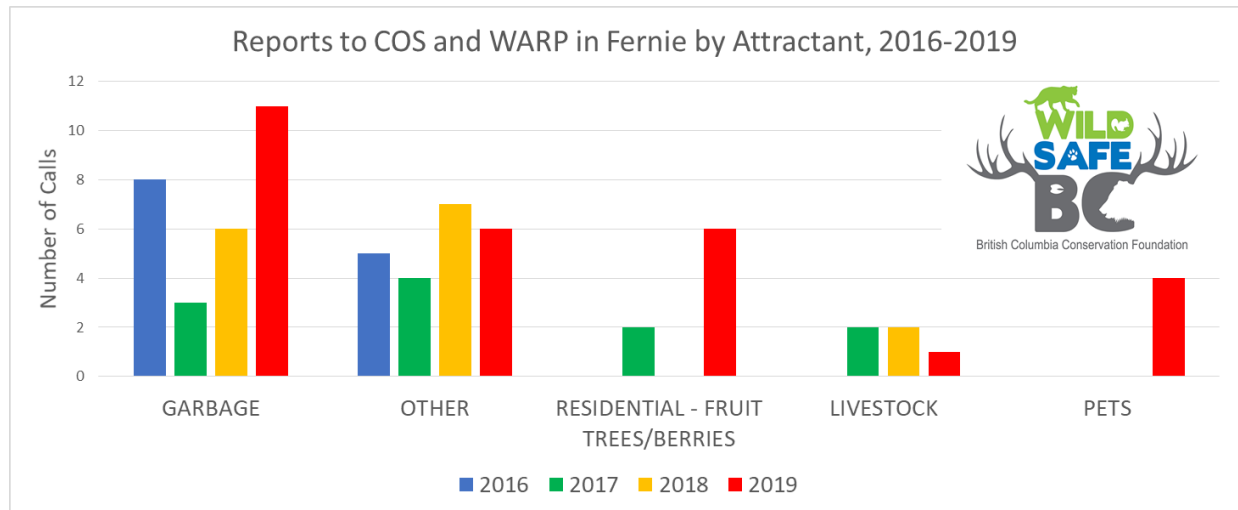


Figure 3. Garbage remains the most reported attractant in 2019 in Fernie

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program was delivered to more than 220 children in Fernie including: elementary schools, daycare, preschool and summer camps (Figure 4). The WildSafe Ranger Program is a keystone of the WildSafeBC Program and the yearly increase in demand for presentations is indicative of the program's success.

A total of seven school and children's groups participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program. More than 200 students became WildSafe Rangers and received toolkits (Table 1).

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

School/Program	Age	Children
IDES Elementary	kindergarten	90
Branch Out Learning	10 to 12 yrs	6
Fernie After School Program	8 to 12 yrs	25
Outdoor Connections	5 to 9 yrs	30
Outdoor Connections	3 to 5 yrs	20
Bright Beginnings Daycare	3 to 5 yrs	15
Fernie Secondary International Students	15 to 17 yrs	18



Figure 4. Outdoor Connections Forest School. Photo by Courtenay Hausler.

Presentations to Community Groups

Presentations regarding wildlife biology, preventing and responding to wildlife encounters, and safe use of bear spray (Figure 5) was delivered to over 260 adults during presentations to groups of interest and public events (Table 2)

Table 2. Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Training

Organization	Attendees
Island Lake Lodge staff	45
Fernie Women on Wheels	13
CBAL new settlers literacy	10
Fernie Alpine Resort Staff	50
Chamber of Commerce Public Event	45
MAST outdoor Ed program	19
Fernie Fire Dept. Safety Day	42
Fernie Bike Park Public Event	37



Figure 5. Bear spray demo at Fernie Chamber of Commerce. Photo by Brad Parcell.

Public Displays and Events

The WildSafeBC public information display (Figure 6) was set up at a variety of community events and continues to be a very effective way to increase awareness of the program. More than 700 contacts were made with the public and other exhibitors. WildSafeBC spent six days at the following community events: Fernie Farmers Markets, Canada Day Event, Fernie Fall Fair, Children's Festival and Family Safety Day Awareness Event.



Figure 6. WildSafeBC display at the Fernie Fire Department Family Safety Day.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The new gravity locking carts acquired in 2018 and the bear resistant communal dumpsters provided to residents in 2016 have resulted in less wind strewn litter and garbage accessible to wildlife. Residences also seem generally compliant in not leaving garbage on the curb except for on the day of garbage collection.

The storage of garbage outdoors (eg. in the carport, backyard, or on the porch) between collection days continues to be a contributing factor to human-wildlife conflict in Fernie. To address this issue, the WildSafeBC Coordinator and the Wildlife Safety Response Officer (WSRO) collaborated in a targeted educational effort. Over 350 residences were assessed in neighborhoods with a history of human-wildlife conflict including: Ridgemont, The Annex and Parkland Terrace (Figure 7). There were 68 (19%) of the residences that had garbage outdoors accessible to wildlife and were given an educational message reminding them to keep garbage secured and encouraged to use the communal bear resistant dumpsters provided by the City of Fernie free of charge. A post education assessment showed that 38 residents had relocated their carts indoors and inaccessible to wildlife resulting in 85% compliance with local bylaws. Fernie Waste regulation Bylaw No. 1845 requires all waste to be stored indoors between collection days. A list of addresses where garbage continued to be left outdoors was given to Bylaw Services who followed up accordingly.

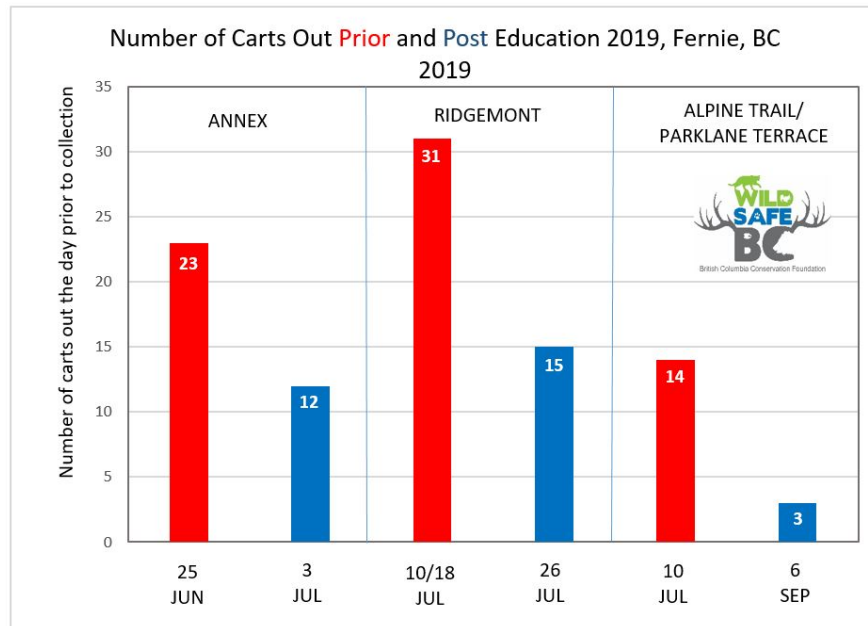


Figure 7. Carts stored outdoors between collection days before and after education activities in Fernie, BC.

An additional assessment of wildlife attractants was conducted on Slalom Drive where most of the small homes and trailers have no garage to keep garbage indoors between collection days. Of the 97 properties assessed, 45 (46%) had garbage outdoors visible from our vehicle. This illustrates the need for communal bear resistant dumpsters to enable residents in smaller homes with no garage to manage garbage responsibly.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Elk Valley page grew 11% in 2019 from 525 to 595 page likes and had an overall reach of 31,000 with 125 posts. The WildSafeBC Elk Valley site had over 14,000 views. The most effective posts were regarding people throwing food at a bear in Mount Fernie Provincial Park earlier in the summer. Although this was an unfortunate incident, it was a useful educational opportunity to explain the process of habituation and food conditioning of wildlife.

The WildSafeBC Fernie Coordinator submitted bi-weekly columns to the Free Press providing a summary of wildlife activity with an appropriate educational message. The columns generated a lot of discussion and interest from other media outlets such as local radio stations. The Drive 99.1 and Summit 107 contacted the coordinator on a regular basis for wildlife updates and educational messages. A broad range of people throughout a large geographic area were reached through twelve news articles and eighteen radio interviews.

Additionally, the WildSafeBC Fernie Coordinator was interviewed live on CBC Daybreak about the Wildlife Attractant Targeted Educational Efforts and the Ministry of Transport Infrastructure (MOTI) constructing enclosed carcass pits in an effort to find a solution to manage grizzly bear attractants.

Wildlife in Area Signs

The WildSafeBC “Bear in Area” signs were placed in areas with current bear activity and served as a reminder for people to give bears space if observed and a reminder to keep garbage and other attractants secure. When possible, a handwritten message on bright orange duct tape was added with a date and type of bear seen. The signs were left for one week at a time and removed if bears had moved on so that people didn’t become desensitized to the message.

This initiative also proved to be a great opportunity to engage the neighborhood, start discussions and create awareness for people passing by, long-time residents, new seasonal residents and visitors. The signs are a very effective tool to get the message out to a broad range of people in a larger geographic area when it is not always possible to do door-to-door canvassing.

Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Program has been very well supported, received, and in demand from Fernie organizations and residents. Over the years, the program has formed many valuable partnerships and has collaborated with many community organizations. There were three public Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Demonstrations that were co-hosted by other organizations: Fernie Mountain Bike Club, Chamber of Commerce and Fernie Fire Department. These collaborative efforts proved very successful and resulted in very well-attended events.

Province-wide Initiatives for 2019

WildSafeBC focused on two initiatives in 2019: increased use and acceptance of bear spray and increased Indigenous awareness and engagement.

Bear Spray

More than 260 people participated in eight Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Training Sessions this year in Fernie (Table 2). The three public events were very well-attended and the request from groups of interest to return every year is indicative of the success and quality of the program. The feedback received in surveys was all very positive.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WildSafeBC Coordinator was requested to do wildlife awareness and bear spray presentation for the Nupqu Development Corporation which specializes in natural resource management within the Ktunaxa Traditional Territory and is proudly owned by all communities of the Ktunaxa Nation. Over 45 staff and management attended the presentation. This was a great first step in engaging with local First Nations.

Special Initiatives

WildSafeBC and other community safety partners joined the Fernie Fire Department for the Family Safety Day (Figure 8). The event featured displays from WorkSafeBC, BC Hydro, Search and Rescue, Avalanche Canada, BC Ambulance Service, a fire fighter challenge, and a bear

spray demonstration. More than 200 people attended the event and 42 took part in the Wildlife Awareness and Bear Spray Demonstration. The event was very well promoted by the fire department and required minimal effort and cost to the WildSafeBC program. This was the perfect opportunity to deliver our message to a large audience.



Figure 8. Fire department poster promoting the WildSafeBC bear spray demo.

Challenges and Opportunities

The storage of garbage outdoors between collection days and unmanaged fruit trees continue to be a source of attractants that draw wildlife into residential areas. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and were made a priority for targeted educational initiatives. An increase in trail and back country use has also increased the number of human-wildlife encounters.

To address the availability of garbage and fruit accessible to wildlife and reduce human-wildlife encounters in the recreational areas, the following initiatives should be prioritized in Fernie in 2020:

- Door-to-door education campaigns in areas with high wildlife activity.
- Education campaigns focusing on hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, radio interviews, workshops, newsletters and flyers.
- Work with City of Fernie to map out fruit trees on city property and show leadership by example by cleaning up fruit trees on city property.
- Connect residents through social media, radio, local newspaper and word of mouth with local fruit gleaning group Elk Valley Homesteading.

- Collaborate with community organizations to organize educational workshops to reach a broader range of people.
- Deliver the WildSafeBC Ranger program to preschool and school-aged children.
- Promote the importance of preventing encounters in recreation areas and encourage safe use of bear spray.
- Deploy an educational campaign aimed at businesses to promote the “WildSafeBC Business Pledge” that proved very successful in Kimberley.
- Attend a variety of community events with the educational WildSafeBC display.
- Deliver the WildSafeBC wildlife and bear spray program to front-line resort staff.
- Work with the Fernie Trails Alliance to have more signage at trail heads and promote the importance of preventing encounters with wildlife and safe use of bear spray.

Acknowledgements

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