

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

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Executive Summary

This year marks the second year that the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality (NRRM) participated in the WildSafeBC program which ran from May until November (Figure 1). This report will give an overview of WildSafeBC activities throughout the season as well as challenges and future goals for the program.

In 2019, there were 151 black bear reports; this is much higher than 2018 but similar to 2016 and 2017. Grizzly bear activity was much higher than average with 28 reports. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinators did 10 presentations, and attended 8 events. Partnerships that were established in the 2018 season continued to grow with local organizations and the Conservation Officer Service (COS). WildSafeBC brochures and posters were distributed throughout the community and events were promoted through social media and community bulletin boards. There was an increased focus on garbage tagging this season. This involved residents receiving educational warning stickers on garbage carts put out the night before collection and/or for garbage being left out after 9 pm after collection. Bin tagging for carts being left out late was new in 2019.

As the NRRM encompasses a vast area, efforts were focused on the Fort Nelson townsite which has the highest density of people. The program would benefit from having more support from local schools to deliver the WildSafe Ranger Program although we were able to present to two elementary schools and provide students with a bear safety presentation. Local volunteers were lacking in 2019, however three individuals having already expressed interest for 2020. Both the COS and the Northern Rockies Fire Rescue (NRRM Bylaw) worked side by side with WildSafeBC in 2019 and the same level of collaboration is anticipated in 2020. Interest by local government in pursuing Bear Smart Community status is promising and would support our messaging of “keeping wildlife wild and our community safe.”

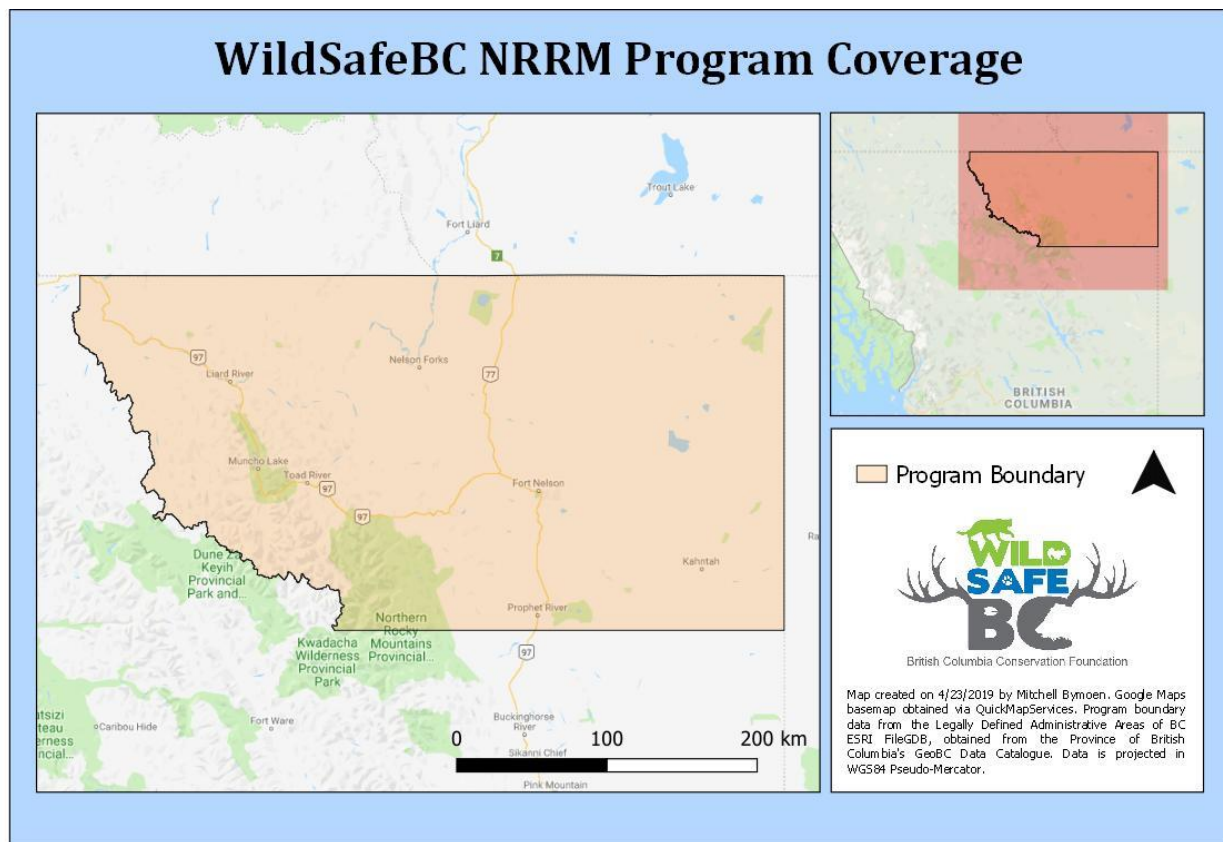


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Regional Municipality coverage area.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Highlights from the 2018 Season	4
Wildlife Activity	4
WildSafe Ranger Program	6
Presentations to Community Groups	7
Public Displays and Events	7
Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging	8
Social Media and Press	11
Collaborations	11
Province-wide Initiatives for 2019	11
Bear Spray	11
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement	11
Special Initiatives	12
Challenges and Opportunities	12
Acknowledgements	14

Table of Figures

Figure 1. WildSafeBC Northern Rockies Regional Municipality coverage area.....	2
Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019	4
Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears by month, from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.....	5
Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant for all species, January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.	5
Figure 5. WildSafe Ranger Program at JS Clarke Elementary School Grades 1 to 5.	6
Figure 9. Garbage bins put out prior to collection time of 5:00 am on collection day.	10
Figure 10. Garbage bins left out after the prescribed time of 9:00 pm.	10
Figure 12. Display at Fort Nelson First Nation Treaty Days with the Conservation Officer Service.....	12

Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls 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 includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 2). There were 151 black bear reports, which is much higher than 2018 but similar to 2016 and 2017 (fig. 2). This is similar to the provincial numbers which reflected a higher than average conflict year for bears. This may be a result of natural food availability because of a very dry spring.

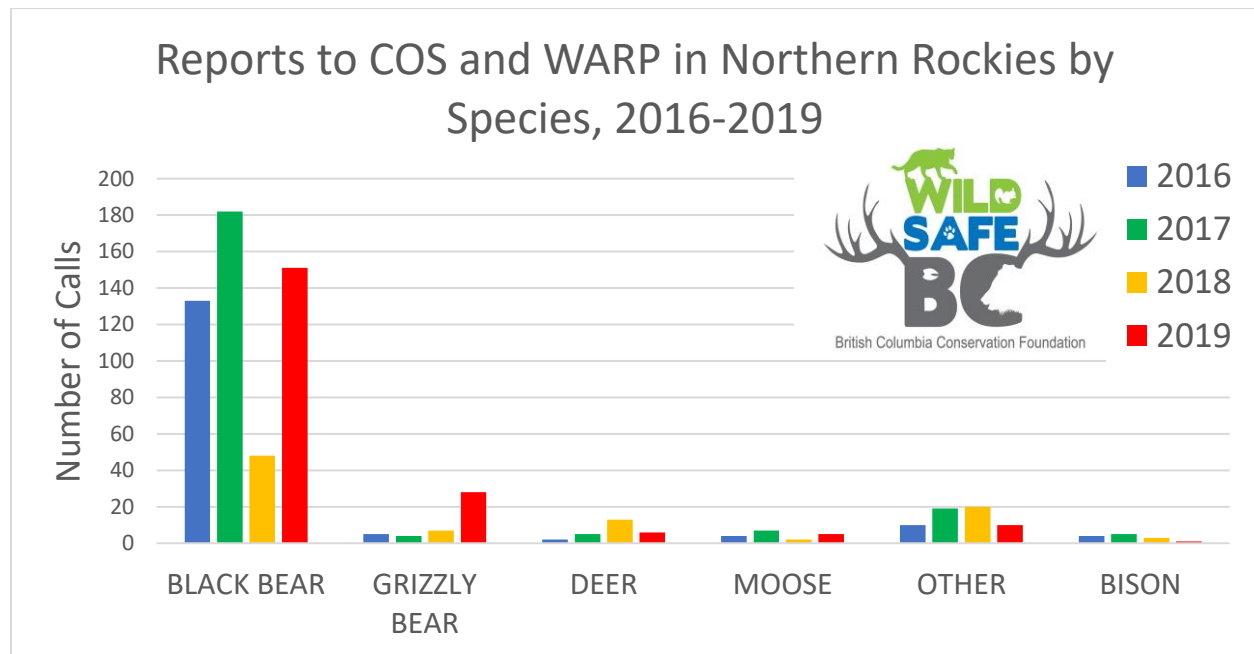


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019

In 2019, black bear calls peaked in September and when bears entered hyperphagia, a period of intense eating in preparation for hibernation (fig.3). Garbage remained the most reported attractant for all species.

Grizzly bear activity was also higher than average with 28 reports (fig.2). Grizzly bear sightings in rural residential areas approximately two to three kilometers from town were of significant concern to residents in the affected area. Grizzly bear sightings that close to town are not typical, but not unheard of. A wide variety of attractants were identified including fruit trees, large vegetable gardens, apiaries and livestock. These unnatural attractants, combined with natural vegetation, drew grizzly bears into rural residential areas longer than usual.

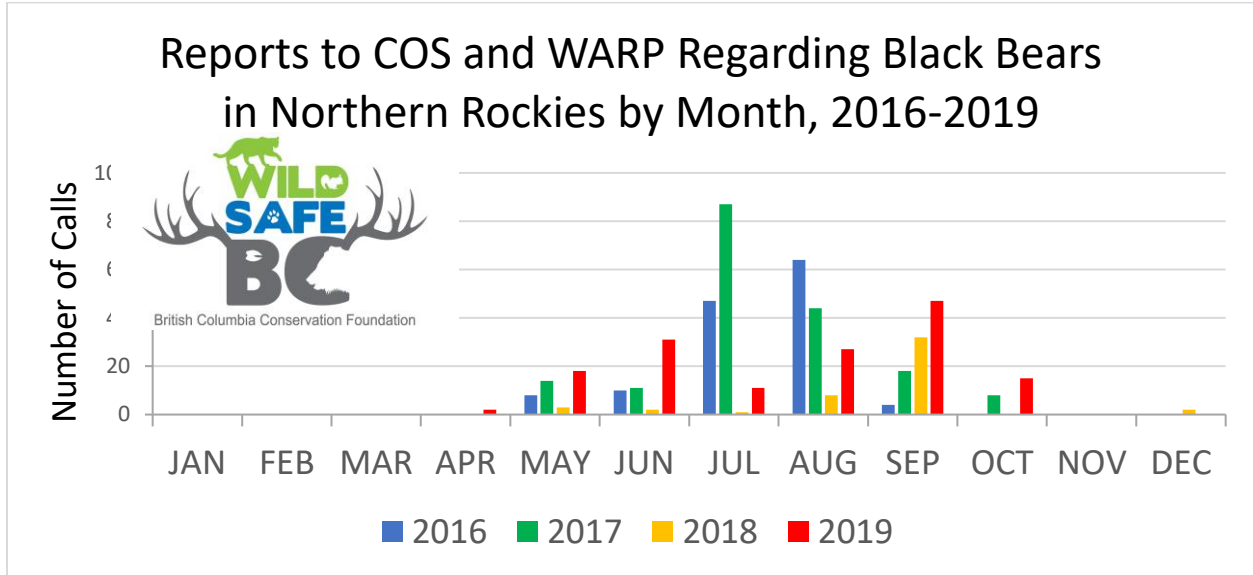


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears by month, from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

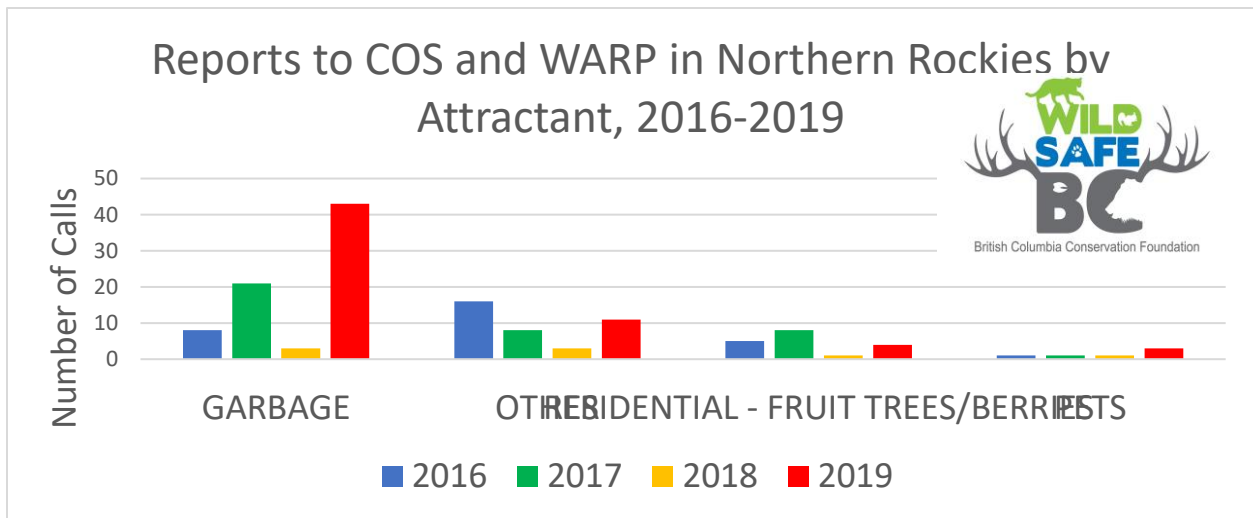


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant for all species, January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinators (WCC) did four bear safety presentations to two elementary schools. Principals were somewhat reluctant to engage in the full WildSafeBC Ranger Program this year and wanted more focus on what to do if students saw a bear in the playground or on their way to school. The WildSafeBC Program also covers the habitat needs of wildlife and how attractants play a role in human-wildlife conflicts. It is hoped that based on the positive feedback received, more schools will participate in the full WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020. The coordinator will reach out to schools early in the 2020 season. Presentations were conducted at the following locations (number of participants in brackets):

- RL Angus Elementary School 3 presentations (150)
JS Clark Elementary School (60)



Figure 5. WildSafe Ranger Program at JS Clarke Elementary School Grades 1 to 5.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC was invited to give a total of 10 presentation to approximately 300 participants. These presentations were custom tailored to the needs of the audience but always promoted the keeping wildlife wild and communities safe message. Key information about local wildlife, attractant management, and wildlife safety were also consistent themes throughout.

Presentations were conducted at the following locations (number of participants in brackets):

- Fort Nelson Public Library Summer Reading Program (14)
- Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society (24)
- Girl Guides of Canada (32)
- NRRM Rec Center Staff (8)
- NRRM Kids Summer Camp (27)
- Baby Got Trail (5)

Public Displays and Events

The WCC attended 8 events with approximately 900 attendees. Participating in these events provided a valuable platform for the WCC to reach many residents with face-to-face conversations. WildSafeBC's display booth provided an approachable space for questions and answers regarding human-wildlife conflict, bear biology, attractant management, and a place for residents to voice their concerns (eg. bears in the community). The display was filled with take home educational material. The following events were attended (participant numbers in brackets):

- NRRM Sustainable Communities (25)
- Culturefest (150) (Figure 6)
- Canada Day Festivities (115)
- Farmers Market (120)
- Chamber of Commerce Trade Show (377)
- BC Goes Wild Weekend (15) (Figure)
- FNFN Treaty Days (100)



Figure 6. Display at Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society Culturefest.



Figure 7. BC Goes Wild Weekend at the Fort Nelson Demo Forest.

As a result of WildSafeBC's successful collaboration in 2018, the WCC once again partnered with the Fort Nelson Public Library and the Fort Nelson IGA for the BC Goes Wild Event at the Fort Nelson Demonstration Forest. A display was set up at the entrance (fig.6) and families were encouraged to spend the day outdoors completing a scavenger hunt, sharing stories by the campfire, and making s'mores (fig.7).

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door canvassing was completed three times during the season. At the request of the COS, canvassing was completed on Minnaker Crescent and Churchill Drive, at a total of 35 houses. This was in response to a black bear that kept returning to the neighborhood and continued to be able to access household garbage. Residents were reminded to store garbage securely. Residents that had bins stores outdoors were encouraged to store them in a garage or storage shed in an effort to reduce access by the food-conditioned bear in the neighborhood. This was very well received in the neighborhood with only one resident that continued to be non-compliant with the NRRM bylaw. Door-to-door canvassing in conjunction with the COS was also completed on Pioneer Way on two consecutive evenings back to back. A total of 15 rural acreages were visited with clear and concise messaging regarding wildlife attractants. This was in response to a grizzly bear that continued to return to the area and that was repeatedly accessing fruit trees and vegetable gardens.

There was an increased focus on garbage tagging this season. A total of 522 bins were tagged in 2019. The purpose of garbage tagging is to remind residents that garbage placed out the day before pick up is a wildlife attractant. This season we also tagged bins that were left out too late. It should be noted that even empty, carts provide a visual cue and smell that draws in bears into the community. Bright yellow and removable “WARNING” stickers are placed on bins that have been put out too early or brought in too late (fig.8). Northern Rockies Regional Municipality bylaw states that bins can’t be placed at the curb prior to 5:00 am the morning of pick up and must be removed from the curb by 7:00 pm the same day. Garbage tagging was conducted between 9:00pm and 11:00pm, four days a week, with one evening being done after 1:00 am.



Figure 8. Bin tagging with a cart receiving several stickers over multiple tagging events.

Bin tagging took place from May 27th to June 12th. After a brief break, tagging continued over the next 13 consecutive weeks. From July 29th to October 24th, 470 bins were tagged (fig. 9 and 10). There were 123 that received more than one sticker and these were forwarded to NRRM Bylaw for further follow up (fig.8). This indicates that for over 80% of the residences where bins were tagged, there was a successful change in behaviour resulting in carts being less accessible to bears. It should be noted that weather was an important factor when it came to leaving bins out. For example, when it was raining or snowing there was a larger number of bins still out on the street. There were an average of 761 bins that were emptied during garbage collection every week. Of those bins, an average of 0.5% were tagged on a given night for being out too early and an average of 1.8% were tagged for being out too late. This indicates that most residences are in compliance of the NRRM Bylaw. However, there remains a significant amount of education and awareness that needs to take place in this regard as it only takes one encounter with a food reward that can lead to food conditioning bears. Carts should also be cleaned periodically to reduce food smells.

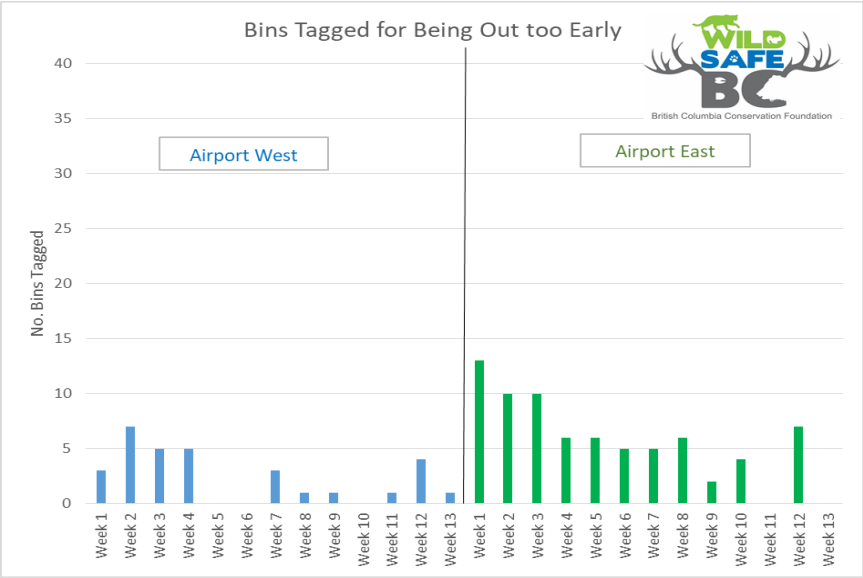


Figure 6. Garbage bins put out prior to collection time of 5:00 am on collection day.

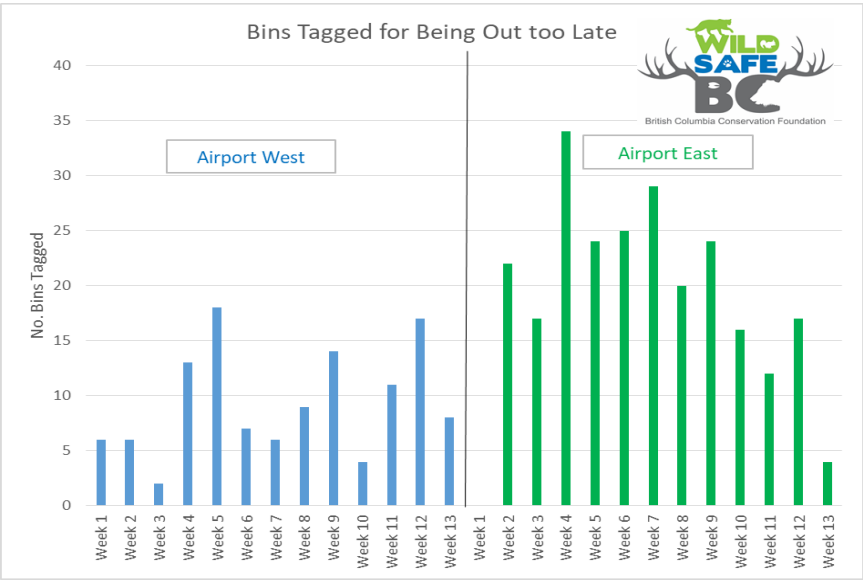


Figure 70. Garbage bins left out after the prescribed time of 9:00 pm.

Social Media and Press

WildSafeBC reached over 22,000 people through the WildSafeBC Fort Nelson Facebook page in 2019. The popularity of the page increased this year from 130 likes on January 1st of 2019 to 230 likes on October 30th, an increase of 77%. There were no press releases or interviews.

Collaborations

The WCC continued to strengthen its collaboration with the COS in 2019. The Conservation Officers continued to provide guidance and support. We were able to attend some events together, partnered on door-to-door canvassing, and the Conservation Officers went bin tagging on two separate evenings.

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

Although advertised on both social media, during presentations, as well as in general discussions, there were no requests for bear spray demonstrations in 2019.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC attended the FNFN Treaty days in 2019 (shared a booth with the Conservation Officer Service) and discussions were started with their Community Liaison on what we can work on together for 2020 (fig. 11).



Figure 8. Display at Fort Nelson First Nation Treaty Days with the Conservation Officer Service.

Special Initiatives

Fort Nelson is pursuing Bear Smart Community status and the WCC assisted the NRRM and BCCF staff with the Bear Hazard Assessment. The NRRM, WCC, and the Conservation Officer Services were able to identify wildlife corridors surrounding the community, both municipal and privately-owned fruit trees, as well as some more popular travel routes for wildlife through the community. Further, the WCC and COS identified all residential homes that did not have either a garage or shed to securely store garbage.

Challenges and Opportunities

Size: The NRRM encompasses almost 10% of the entire province, roughly 85,000 square kilometers with an approximate population of 5200 people. The majority, about 3000, reside in Fort Nelson. The WCC focused their efforts on the more densely populated community of Fort Nelson with plans to reach out to the communities of Toad River, Fort Nelson First Nation, and Prophet River First Nation in 2020.

Volunteers: Recruiting volunteers was a challenge again in 2019 but some residents have shown a keen interest for 2020. Volunteers are needed for safety reasons to aid with garbage tagging as well as door-to-door canvassing. Volunteers are also appreciated as they increase efficiencies and provide physical help when setting up tents and booth displays. An experienced

volunteer also becomes a good ambassador for the program. The WCC appreciated the support and time of an on and off duty Conservation Officer during the 2019 season as well as a family member who stayed awake and acted as a safety line for the summer.

RAPP line: Community members prefer to post bear sightings on social media as opposed to calling in those sightings to the RAPP number (1-877-952-7277). WildSafeBC urges community members to report sightings early so that they appear on WARP which is readily available to anyone who has internet access. It also provides valuable information for prioritizing areas for door-to-door education campaigns.

WildSafeBC Ranger Program: Contact was made mid-season with all elementary schools in Fort Nelson. Bear safety presentations were given in two schools to a total of four groups. The WCC believes this is the start of a positive relationship that needs to take place in an effort to get the WRP implemented in all of the elementary schools.

Garbage was the most reported attractant in the community and resulted in bears wandering along community streets and in people's yards which impacted community safety and enjoyment of their property. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and in 2020 it would be a benefit to increase education and awareness in a more proactive manner. Fruit trees were also identified as an attractant.

In an effort to address the improper storage of garbage and the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2020:

- Increased door-to-door campaigns at the onset of the season in hotspot areas.
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops and flyers in municipal tax information.
- Host a community meeting to bring partners and collaborators together to provide the community with detailed information regarding the combined activities and the desired outcome to promote community participation.
- Increase social media presence by gaining more followers on the WildSafeBC Fort Nelson Facebook page. Make the WSBC Facebook Fort Nelson page the place where residents can go to seek current, valuable, and factual information.
- Promote the use of WARP and reporting to the RAPP line.
- Continue to strengthen and build relationships as well as form partnerships wherever and whenever possible.
- Continue to support the NRRM in working towards Bear Smart Community status.
- Increase human-deer conflict reduction education in a proactive manner in order to avoid the human-deer conflicts reported in other BC communities. Once established, urban deer issues can be very challenging and expensive to resolve.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the NRRM, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) for funding this project. Thank you to the Conservation Officer Service for their expertise in current and historical wildlife conflicts within the region and for joining the WCC on many activities. The WCC would also like to thank the residents of Fort Nelson for embracing the WildSafeBC Program. A special thank you to all of the Kamloops BCCF team for their hard work. Their advice, ongoing support, and various skills in communication, budgeting, and organization were appreciated and helped the WildSafeBC Fort Nelson have a successful and impactful season.