

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Golden

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Executive Summary

Thanks to the financial support of the British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation (BCCF), the Town of Golden, and the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT), WildSafeBC (WSBC) continues to deliver programming in Golden and the Columbia Shuswap Regional District Area A (CSRDA) (Figure 1). This rural area of the North-East Kootenays includes the Town of Golden, along with the unincorporated communities of Harrogate, Castledale, Parson, Nicholson, Donald and Blaeberry as well as the Town of Field. It is located on the unceded traditional territory of the Ktunaxa Nation, the traditional territory of the Secwépemc and the traditional territory of the Métis Nation.

In 2019, the WSBC community coordinator (WCC) aimed to provide further educational activities on attractant management and to support the final rollout of the bear-resistant bins throughout the Town of Golden. To accomplish this, the WCC worked collaboratively with the Town of Golden and VP Waste Solutions Ltd to place bear-shaped instruction stickers on over 600 new bear-resistant bins outfitted in mid-July. Garbage tagging took place over 10 days and 153 warning stickers were placed on garbage bins put out curbside the night before collection. Door-to-door canvassing reached roughly 150 residents.

Through collaborating with key organizations, WSBC Golden participated in 20 events including Farmers' Markets (8), Tourism Golden's *Saturday Showcase* (2), public presentations (3), and bear spray demonstrations (2). All these events reached out to more than a thousand people. Through social media, WSBC Golden furthered its reach to over 32,000 people and counting.

In terms of wildlife activity, there are generally two peaks observed in reporting bears: one in the spring, when bears come out of hibernation and one in the fall as they prepare to enter hibernation. Garbage remained the most reported attractant, followed by fruit trees. This valuable knowledge helped guide the WCC as to when and where to focus their educational efforts. Together with its community members, the WSBC Golden program works at keeping wildlife wild and communities safe.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Golden program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Golden Community Coordinator at the Golden 24 Annual Biking Event: Reminding people how to best behave in bear country, starting by biking with bear spray!

All photo credits: Johanne Lamoureux, WildSafeBC Golden Community Coordinator (unless otherwise mentioned).

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](#)). The data in this report for Golden and the CSRD-A ranges from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019. For the Golden and CSRD-A, the top three reported wildlife are black bears, deer, and cougars. In 2019, there was no reports of grizzly bear activity, a decrease compared with the last three-year average of six reports. However, there were 129 black bear reports (Figure 2) which accounted for 66% of the total reports. This is higher than the last three-year average of 81 reports (54%) but similar to provincial numbers which reflected a higher than average conflict year for bears. This trend may be a result of natural food availability which could be associated with a very dry spring.

The increase in bear reports may also be due to an increase in bear populations, or to an increase in human-bear interactions as local population sizes continue to increase as well as visitor visits. Increase in awareness of the RAPP line and the benefits of WARP may also lead to increased reports. Year after year, reports regarding black bears are generally observed in two peaks: one in the spring when the bears come out of hibernation and one in the fall as they prepare to enter hibernation. Also worth noting for 2019 is that garbage remained the most reported attractant (36%) followed by fruit trees (18%) (Figure 3). As for other species in 2019 (data not shown), the number of reports for deer (35 or 18%) remained the same last year, while those for cougars were slightly higher (14 or 7%) than the last three-year average (7 reports).

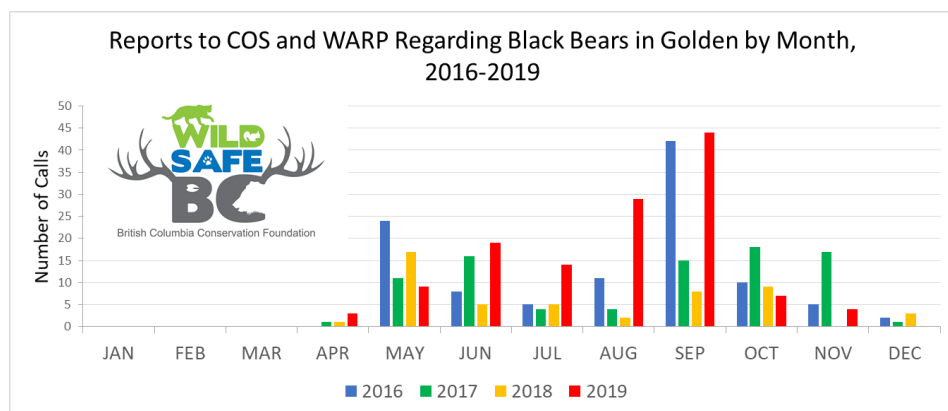


Figure 2. Black bears reports to the COS and WARP in the Golden (CSRD-A area; Jan. 1 to Nov. 15, 2019).

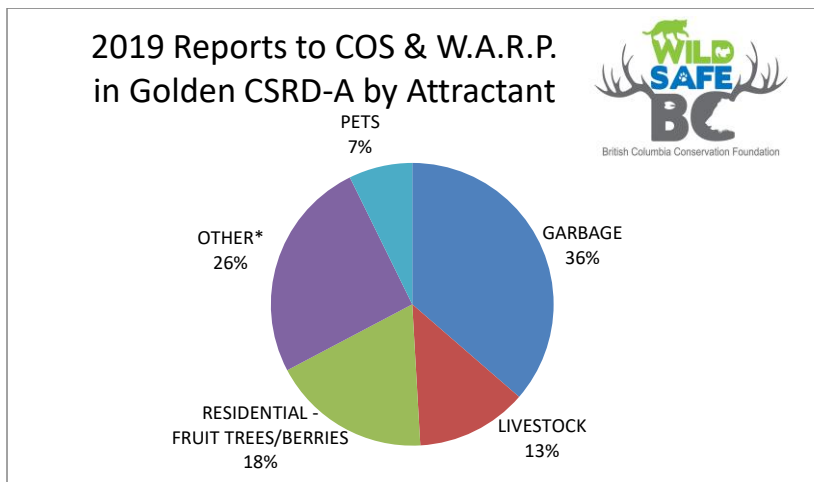


Figure 3 Reports to the COS and WARP in the Golden (CSR-D-A area; Jan. 1 to Nov. 15, 2019) by attractants.
*Other: BBQ, Compost, Bird Feeder, Freezer, Beehive, Livestock Feed, Commercial-vineyards/orchard.

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program, which is a keystone of the program, was renamed to WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP). In May, a special presentation (a modified version of the WRP) was delivered for the international students at the Golden Secondary School reaching 28 people. The presentation was followed by a viewing of the educational video *Staying Safe in Bear Country*. This video is the consensus opinion of leading experts on bear behaviour and its relevance to human safety. It provides information on how to reduce human-wildlife conflicts with both grizzly and black bears in North America.

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided a presentation and a viewing of *Staying Safe in Bear Country* to approximately 20 participants from Heather Mountain Lodge in June.

The WCC also interacted with over 20 people at the Town of Golden Parent and Tot Playground (November). Various stations were set up. One table had educational colouring pages and a colouring contest, another had wildlife props and WSBC take-home material (bookmarks, pins, temporary body-stickers). The final activity was a reading of the English version of Parks Canada bilingual educational book [A Beary, Berry Good Day, Une « baie » bonne journée](#).

Commented [J1]: Again, the French community in Golden is fast increasing. They just opened a new French only school this fall! Hence why it is important for me to mention that this book is bilingual, and to have its full title listed.

Public Displays and Events

Through partnering and collaborating with local organisations, WSBC Golden participated in 20 events and reached over 1,000 people. Farmers' Markets continue to be a popular opportunity for the WSBC Golden program to set up a public booth (Figure 4). In May, the WCC also organized a hands-on bear S.P.R.A.Y. demonstration using inert bear spray, to promote the use and acceptance of the deterrent. In the summer, the WCC held a booth at the Golden 24 annual biking event (see cover photo), as well as at two *Saturday Showcases* by Tourism Golden. At the end of the summer, the WCC participated in the annual Town of Golden Rec Plex's Fall Connections and the Golden Museum's Annual Fall Fair. The WCC also organised a full day of events for WSBC's annual BC Goes Wild event in September: a public booth at the Golden Ultra annual racing event; a presentation on *Keeping Wildlife Wild and Communities Safe* with a viewing of the *Staying Safe in Bear Country* educational video at the Golden branch of the ORL; and finally another hands-on bear S.P.R.A.Y. demonstration. During the last week of October, the WCC attended a final Farmers' Market in Parson, during the annual Bat Week. The weekly international celebration of the role of bats in nature is designed to raise awareness about the need for bat conservation. This final public event is thus also an opportunity to promote the Kootenay Community Bat Project (KCBP), from the "Got Bat?" Initiative, a network of community bat programs in BC. Public displays also promoted the WSBC annual colouring and photography contests.



Figure 4. Display booth at Farmers' Market (May 2019).

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC went door-to-door canvassing based on requests from either members of the public or the COS. These educational efforts were directed to areas with unsecured attractants. As of this report, 150 people were contacted either directly or through a WSBC “while you were out” door hanger which was left with a hand-written note mentioning the attractants (usually garbage and/or fruit trees) as well as brochure on the wildlife of concern (often bears).

Garbage bin tagging is an educational activity performed by a WildSafeBC Community Coordinator. It consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection, outside the time period permitted by local bylaws. The Town’s bylaw requires bins to be placed on the curbside between 6 am and 8 am on collection days only; bear-resistant bins should be placed unclipped. While WSBC provides information on these bylaws, it does not enforce them or deliver fines.

In 2019, the garbage tagging was planned to coincide with the peaks in wildlife activity based on WARP data from 2014 to 2018: early spring and fall. A total of 153 warning stickers were distributed over 10 outings. Five outings occurred in the spring (from late April to early June), and five occurred in the fall (in October), during which 103 and 50 warning stickers were distributed respectively, for an average of 15 per night. Although this figure is slightly higher than last year average of 12.5 nightly warnings (all distributed in the fall), this decrease in the total number of warnings issued in 2019 could arguably be attributed to the educational efforts put in place by the WCC. Indeed, of the 1,500 bins surveyed (the entire Town surveyed on Tuesdays & Wednesdays combined), about 10% were non-compliant. There were 15 repeat offenders (1%), for an average of 21 warnings distributed per night in the spring compared with only 10 warnings in the fall. This represents a 20% decrease compared with the average for last fall alone and a 51% decrease in seasonal tagging.

Social Media and Press

The [WildSafeBC Golden Facebook page](#) continues to be a source of local and provincial information on wildlife and the WildSafeBC program. The page increased its “Likes” by 5% since the beginning of 2019 and now stands at 470. The page had over 100 posts again this year and reached over 32,000 people. Examples of popular post topics included: video footage of local wildlife (Figure 5 and 6), wildlife collision prevention, and garbage tagging. The WCC uses these engaging pictures and posts to communicate local safety messaging and tips on management attractant.

The WildSafeBC Golden program was also promoted through the [Golden Tourism](#) Facebook page with the use of two promotional videos for the *Saturday Showcase* events (July [video](#), August [video](#)). Finally, the WildSafeBC Golden program was featured, along with the other programs from the basin area (Castlegar, Cranbrook/Kimberley, Creston/Selkirk, Purcells, Fernie/Elk Valley, Invermere, Kaslo, Nelson, New Denver, Radium/Fairmont and Rossland/Trail) in a short story from the Columbia Basin Trust (CBT) titled [Keeping Wild Things Wild](#).



Figure 5 Example of a popular Facebook post using recent wildlife trail camera footage of a local cougar.



Figure 6 Example of a popular Facebook post using recent local wildlife footage to educate on bear jam and wildlife collision prevention.

Collaborations

WildSafeBC Golden plays a role in connecting local volunteers with local fruit tree owners and those interested in using the fruit. Domestic fruit is an unnatural source of high calorie food at a time when bears are preparing for winter hibernation. Bears will often teach their offspring where to find these food sources which can lead to repeated conflicts (Figure 7. Local black bear sow with two cubs in a residential apple tree. It is important to keep bears away from these unnatural food sources by picking fruit early before it is fully ripened. The WSBC Golden Facebook page is instrumental in bringing together community efforts to reduce attractants by using educational posts and by connecting fruit-picking volunteers with fruit-tree owners and with those interested in picked fruits (e.g. horse and pig owners).



Figure 7. Local black bear sow with two cubs in a residential apple tree.

Directed Initiatives

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

Bear Spray

As mentioned in the Public Displays and Events section of this report, two hands-on bear spray demonstrations were offered: one in the spring which only reached three people, and one in the fall which reached six people. Despite the small number of attendees, their response was positive. Those who participated were pleased to individually try inert spray, to see the deployment of gas upon release, and to review the various steps of the mnemonic acronym S.P.R.A.Y.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

One of the program provincial goals for 2019 was to increase Indigenous awareness and engagement. As such, the WCC continued to build on previous training through webinars on the subject matter and through conducting research regarding the local First Nations - the Ktunaxa Nation, the Secwépemc, and the Métis Nation. Including an unceded land acknowledgement is a first step in raising Indigenous awareness and looking forward to future engagements.

Special Initiatives

The WCC assisted with the third and final deployment of bear-resistant bins in July 2019 (Figure 8). On July 17th and 18th, residents placed their green bins at the curb for their regular waste pickup day. Over 600 bins were collected and replaced with new bear-resistant ones, along with an instruction sheet outlining the rules and expectations for residents using these.

This was the third and final deployment. With their working partner VP Waste Solutions Ltd, the Town of Golden has distributed approximately 1,500 bear-resistant bins since 2017 (approximately 400 in 2017, 460 in 2018, and 650 in 2019). Residents are encouraged to take steps to ensure bears do not have access to residential garbage.



Figure 8. WildSafeBC Golden assists with the third and final deployment of bear-resistant bins (July 2019).

Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage continues to be the most reported unnatural attractant in our communities. Fruit trees are another source of attractants, drawing wildlife into residential areas, which impacts human safety. When areas are identified as hotspots in a community, it could be beneficial to increase education and fruit gleaning activities. To address these attractants within the community, the following initiatives could be explored in 2020:

- Promoting the use of electric fencing;
- Conducting educational campaigns focussed on hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information, etc.;
- Encouraging food banks or other non-profits to connect residents via social media food sharing groups;
- Increasing door-to-door campaigns and using wildlife area signage in hotspots.

Acknowledgements

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Finally, the WCC would like to thank Mel Worth, Aquatic Invasive Species Inspector with the Conservation Officer Service, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, in Golden for her many hours of volunteering for WildSafeBC Golden. Last but not the least, special thanks to Michel Beauchemin, Parks Canada Resource Conservation Officer, for his continued volunteering efforts for the program throughout the seasons. Thank you/Merci!