

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

## Kaslo and Area D

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## Executive Summary

This year-end report will describe the activities of the 2019 WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Mark Northey, in Kaslo and Area D (fig. 1). In 2019, wildlife activity was on par with previous years and there were 65 wildlife reports made to the Conservation Officer Service. There has been a heightened awareness of wildlife conflict in the community after a bear was sighted at Jazz Fest; however, cautionary measures prevented the situation from escalating.

Over 1,000 tourists and residents participated in outreach events including: display booths at the Kaslo Farmers Market, an apple press, and the BC Goes Wild event in September. The J.V. Humphries School hosted a number of WildSafe Ranger Program presentations to students of eight different grade levels. The WCC reached 400 residents through door-to-door visits. This included a few homesteads in remote locations such as Birchdale, where the information and recommendations were well-received by residents. Keeping wildlife wild and communities safe through attractant management was the primary message shared by the WCC. Bear spray workshops were one of the more popular services provided. More than 20 people attended one of 3 classes featuring hands-on deployment of inert bear spray. Following a presentation to Council early in the season, the Village has shown interest in acquiring Bear Smart Community status.

Community Coordinator Mark Northey is grateful for cooperation and collaborations with several organizations including: Kaslo Food Hub; Langham Society; Kaslo Outdoor Recreation and Trails Society; Kaslo Saturday Market; J.V. Humphries school; Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions; Kaslo Jazz Fest; and St John in the Wilderness Society.

While Kaslo residents have done an excellent job managing garbage this year, a key challenge is access to a local waste transfer station in smaller communities such as Lardeau. Helping these smaller communities find a creative way to keep garbage from attracting wildlife should be a part of our focus for next season. While fruit remains a strong attractant in the community, there is a strong desire by the community to manage these resources rather than removing them. By supporting, encouraging, and facilitating efforts by volunteers, organizations, and the Village to manage fruit, we can aim to make use of Kaslo's abundant fruit in a responsible and grateful manner. Tools such as electric fencing and gleaning programs will be essential in feeding people and not bears. Ongoing efforts in these and other ways will continue to keep our wildlife wild and communities safe.

## WildSafeBC Kaslo Program Coverage

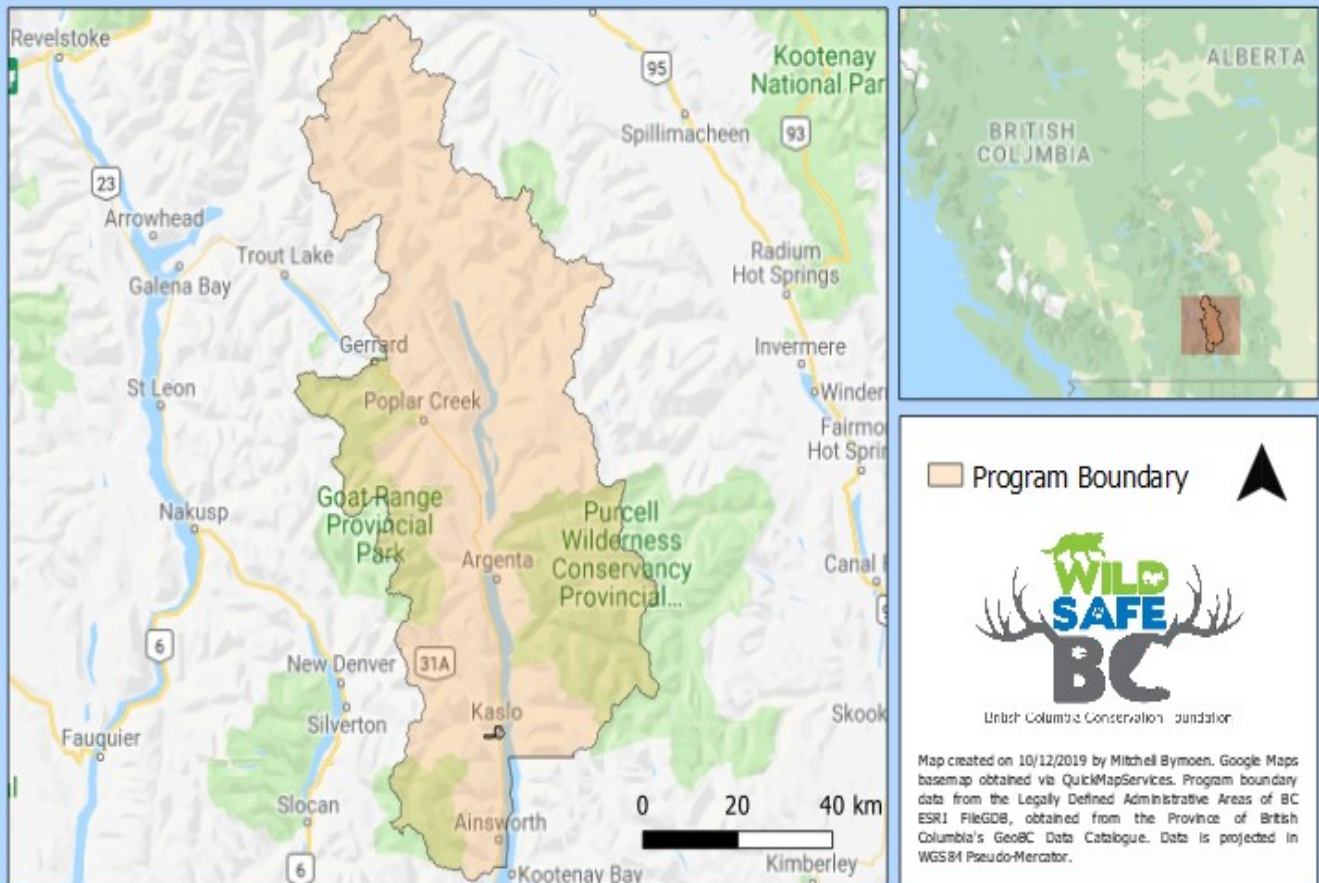


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Kaslo and Area D program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: WildSafe Kaslo Coordinator Mark Northey waving from Slate peak, overlooking Purcell Wilderness Conservancy at the edge of Area D in the Kootenays.

## 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 Kaslo includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 2). There were 28 black bear reports which is comparable to the three year average, excepting the outlier of 2016. The peak in May is likely due to the population influx for May Days and the repeated problems faced in Lardeau.

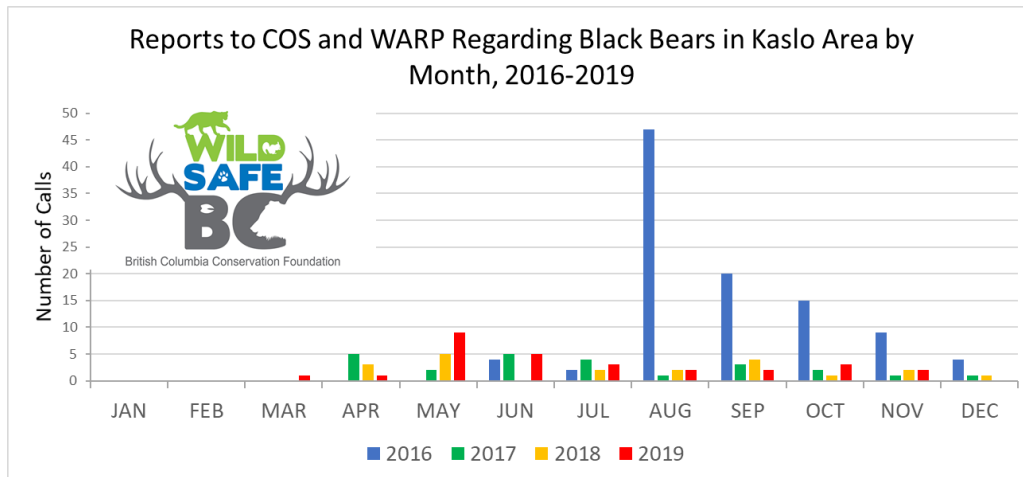


Figure 2. Reports regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to October 15, 2019.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees. Local Conservation Officer Nathan Smienk has commented that this was a relatively quiet year. As anticipated in this year's Wildlife Hazard Report, cougar encounters continued to rise. In 2019, there were nearly as many calls concerning cougars (24) as black bears (28) (fig. 3). Conflicts with cougars have steadily risen since 2017, and there is a general sense among residents and especially those in out skirting communities that conflict with this species is of rising concern.

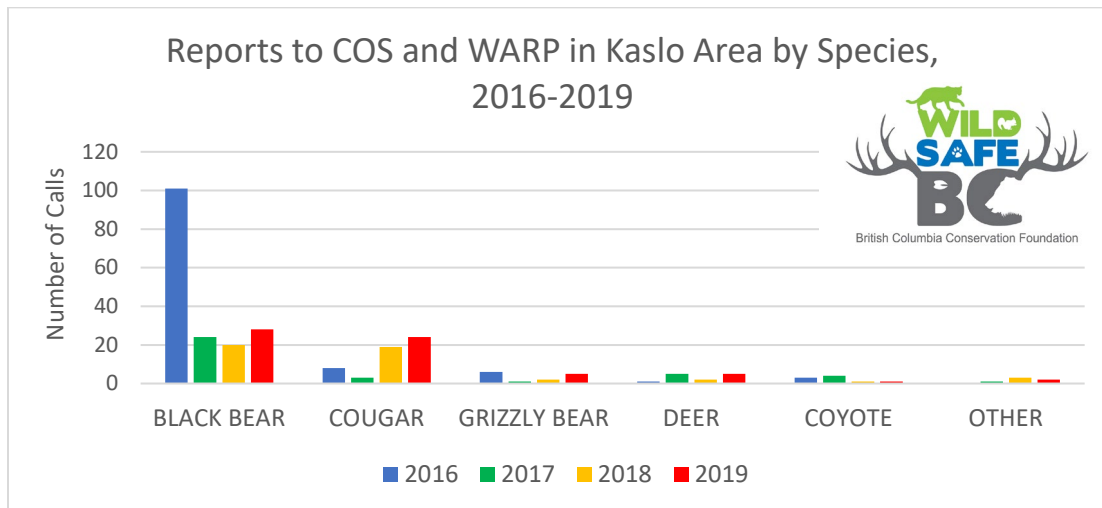


Figure 3. Reports by species, showing a rise in cougar prevalence.



## WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to WildSafe Ranger Program. This is a keystone of our program. As a BC trained teacher, the WCC took this service to heart, bringing his extensive outdoor education and hands-on experience to the task. Students and teachers alike responded very positively. There were 3 presentations delivered to more than 60 students from 8 different grades in our Village's small school, J.V. Humphries (JVH). Primary students learned an essential heuristic for all dangerous wildlife encounters, energetically repeating the rhyme: **"Number one, do not run!"** Students were able to act out four different scenarios for our major wild predators, bears and cougars. They took the key message about managing attractants such as garbage and fruit trees home to adults (fig. 4).



Figure 4. WildSafe Rangers at JVH School learning what to do- and what not to do- when encountering wildlife. "Number one, do not run!"

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC held 3 special presentations for community groups in Kaslo, reaching over 100 participants. Kaslo Outdoor Recreation and Trails Society learned about safety on trails while harvesting wild edible mushrooms, at the Unity Bridge celebration. The Langham Theatre hosted a Safety in Bear Country presentation, and St. John in the Wilderness Orthodox Society hosted a small workshop on wildlife safety in a remote location (Birchdale, B.C.).

## Public Displays and Events

The WCC was a regular at this year's weekly Kaslo Saturday Market (Figure 5). By far the most popular way for locals and tourists to learn our messaging, over 1,000 people visited a WildSafe display on 1 of 13 different occasions.

We had loads of fun at this year's BC Goes Wild weekend on September 21<sup>st</sup>, sharing our message about managing fruit tree attractants while serving freshly pressed apple juice at the last Kaslo Saturday Market. Several people were interested in the wild edible mushrooms on display, and had a chance to learn about safety on the trails and proper use of bear spray while at it.



**Figure 5. The WCC at Kaslo Saturday Market, with his youngest and most faithful volunteers.**



## Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

It was wonderful meeting with so many neighbours in Kaslo and our surrounding communities, carrying out door-to-door messaging. Community members were a great source for information about local wildlife activity, and most were very sensitive and aware of our need to manage attractants responsibly. In total the WCC was able to make over 400 visits to residences, especially focusing on hot spots in our communities such as the bear activity in Lardeau.

The WCC also visited remote homesteads (fig. 7). It is noteworthy that outlying communities such as Johnson's Landing, and even more remote Birchdale, are less likely to use the RAPP line and WARP due to their chosen lifestyle yet often have far more interactions with dangerous wildlife (corroborated by word of mouth reports around town and CO input). Homesteads in these remote areas are far more likely to keep small livestock, a key attractant for cougars. These communities must not be neglected in attention and WildSafe messaging; they are often key links and catalysts to the more central communities and population of Kaslo proper.



Figure 7. On-site visit to a homestead in Birchdale



Figure 6. Garbage canister put out the night before collection receives a warning sticker.

In six separate outings, only three garbage bins were found placed out the night before garbage pick-up day. A warning sticker reminding residents to wait until the morning of garbage day to place their bins out (fig. 6), usually resulted in improvements the following weeks. Residents in remote communities who do not receive garbage service were reached on the road to the Waste Transfer station, and received the same messaging.



## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Kaslo Facebook page continues to provide information on all manner of human-wildlife interactions and conflict. Over 180 people have “liked” our page, which is impressive in a town of 800 year-round residents. The WCC was interviewed in the Valley Voice about managing attractants and general wildlife safety. The article was well received and generated several phone calls and leads for further education opportunities (page 7, [http://www.valleyvoice.ca/PDF\\_2016/ValleyVoice190718web.pdf](http://www.valleyvoice.ca/PDF_2016/ValleyVoice190718web.pdf)).

## Wildlife in Area Signs

Hotspot areas for wildlife conflict (fig. 8) were the primary recipients of “Bear in Area” signage this season. An effort was made to leave signs up no more than 3 days, if further bear activity was not reported in the area.

The “little valley” of Upper Kaslo is particularly attractive to bears. Four signs of the seven in total placed this year were in this locale. This productive land is the former flood plain of the Kaslo River, with over 100 fruit trees, largely remnants of a past settlement. While most of these trees are well managed by homeowners, a few neglected specimens still draw bears in from nearby Mt. Buchanan. Signage went up in and around this valley a number of times.

The JVH School is located at the top of this “little valley.” Surrounding trails received a “Bear in Area” sign when the WCC was alerted to particular sighting. The JVH school sees more bear activity than other parts of town during harvest months. While signage at critical moments is important, encouraging this gleaning program should be a critical focus of local WildSafeBC attention.

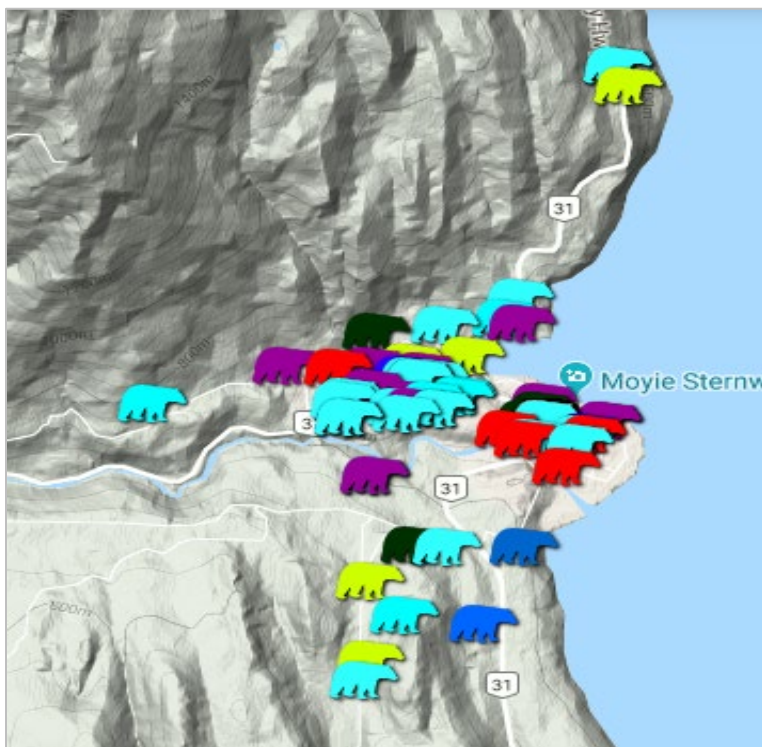


Figure 8. Kaslo Black Bear reports to the COS and WARP from Jan. 1, 2016 to Nov. 15, 2019.

## Collaborations

The WildSafeBC Kaslo and Area D Program Coordinator received appreciated support from local Conservation Officers, Kaslo Food Hub fruit gleaners, Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, and other non-profits, First Nations, businesses, and organizations that have supported our efforts. Although WildSafeBC does not participate directly in fruit gleaning activities, it does help connect people to the Kaslo Food Hub, where volunteers carried out this essential service to our community.

## 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

There were 20 people signed up for 1 of 3 different bear spray presentations, while dozens more received advice and tips when they approached a display or received a home visit. This was by far the most popular and requested service.

### Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC learned about how to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples through a training webinar this year. Also, the WCC conducted research to learn more about local Sinixt First Nations. The WCC met with other First Nations members of our community, and listened to the interests of some who hope for a deeper understanding of Indigenous values with respect to co-existing with wildlife.

## Special Initiatives

Kaslo Village Council responded positively to a presentation on Bear Smart Community status. Showing continued openness to improving wildlife safety and attractant management, the Village is still deciding what steps to take to better manage wildlife-human conflict in Kaslo.

## Challenges and Opportunities

While 2019 was a relatively low-conflict season, this always runs the risk of subsequent complacency and relaxed management practices. To curtail this effect, an early and strong local messaging campaign should be implemented by the WCC next spring, along with continuing the conversation about Bear Smart Community status with Village Council. Closely monitoring cougar activity and continuing to bring our messaging to peripheral residences in remote locations will help stop conflicts “at the gate” so to speak. Respecting the community’s attachment to fruit trees and food security, our focus should be on responsible management of these attractants. Below are suggestions for 2020:

- Start early and strong with a positive message of managing attractants to continue keeping conflict low.
- Continue visiting homesteads. Offer recommendations for attractant management of fruit trees and livestock and educate about cougar safety.
- Respect the community’s value of food security by focusing on responsible management of fruit abundance (pruning, harvesting, fencing), for existing fruit trees.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the BCCF team and local Conservation Officers Nathan Smienk and Jason Hawkes, whose support was invaluable this season. Thanks also to Chief Administrative Officer Ian Dunlop and Kaslo Village Council for their receptivity to our Bear Smart Community presentation and wildlife safety initiatives. Thank you to Columbia Basin Trust, and BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy as well for recognizing the need for this work and providing funding. Thank you Patrick Steiner of the Kaslo Food Hub for coordinating fruit gleaning volunteers and joining us in this year's BC Goes Wild Weekend. Thank you Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions for your expertise in electric fencing. Finally, thank you especially to faithful volunteers Nikolai Northey, William Northey, Shayna Jones, Joshua Rempel, Daniel Amy, and Eric Savage for your help throughout the season.