

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Kimberley - Cranbrook

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Ministry of
Environment and
Climate Change Strategy



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MOUNTAINS OF OPPORTUNITY
CRANBROOK



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook Program from April to November of 2019. The program area covers Kimberley, Cranbrook, Bull River, Marysville, Meadowbrook, Wycliffe, Moyie, Wardner, Fort Steele, and surrounding areas (Figure 1, Figure 2). It was another high conflict year with 564 wildlife reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) reporting line and the Wildlife Alert Report Program (WARP).

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) was busy providing educational outreach regarding human wildlife conflicts this season. There were 34 presentations provided to the community regarding wildlife awareness and the safe use of bear spray. With the WildSafe Rangers Program (WRP) in high demand, the WCC provided 33 WRP presentations this season. The WCC attended 13 events and organized a successful BC Goes Wild Weekend in collaboration with Wildsight and Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions. Media presence became an important avenue for promoting events and sharing tips. Over 30 interviews and articles were generated. Other activities such “bear in area” signs, garbage tagging, and door-to-door campaigns were also effective.

Key highlights from 2019 included participating in Indigenous Peoples Day at Idlewild Lake in Cranbrook and fostering partnerships with the Ktunaxa Nation. Several notable events included the Cranbrook International Exchange student’s Wildlife Day, the Canada Day Celebration, and Cranbrook Community Forests Society events.

New to the WildSafeBC Kimberley – Cranbrook program is the WildSafe Business Pledge. The Pledge is something that business owners, managers and staff must sign off on once they are demonstrating that they are following the WildSafe guidelines. So far, 12 businesses have been fully trained and reviewed and another 35 have indicated their interest in the Pledge. The first business to commit to the Pledge was the Kimberley Bavarian Home Hardware.

There were several challenges this season including: garbage stored in unsecure bins or outdoors prior to the night of collection, human-habituated/food-conditioned and aggressive black bears in Kimberley, and the ongoing issue of winter feeding of urban deer. However, with the support of the funders and continuous work from the WCC, there are opportunities to make important strides forward in these areas. An important goal for 2020 will be developing a Bear Working Group in Kimberley and Cranbrook which will be a big start towards achieving Bear Smart status.

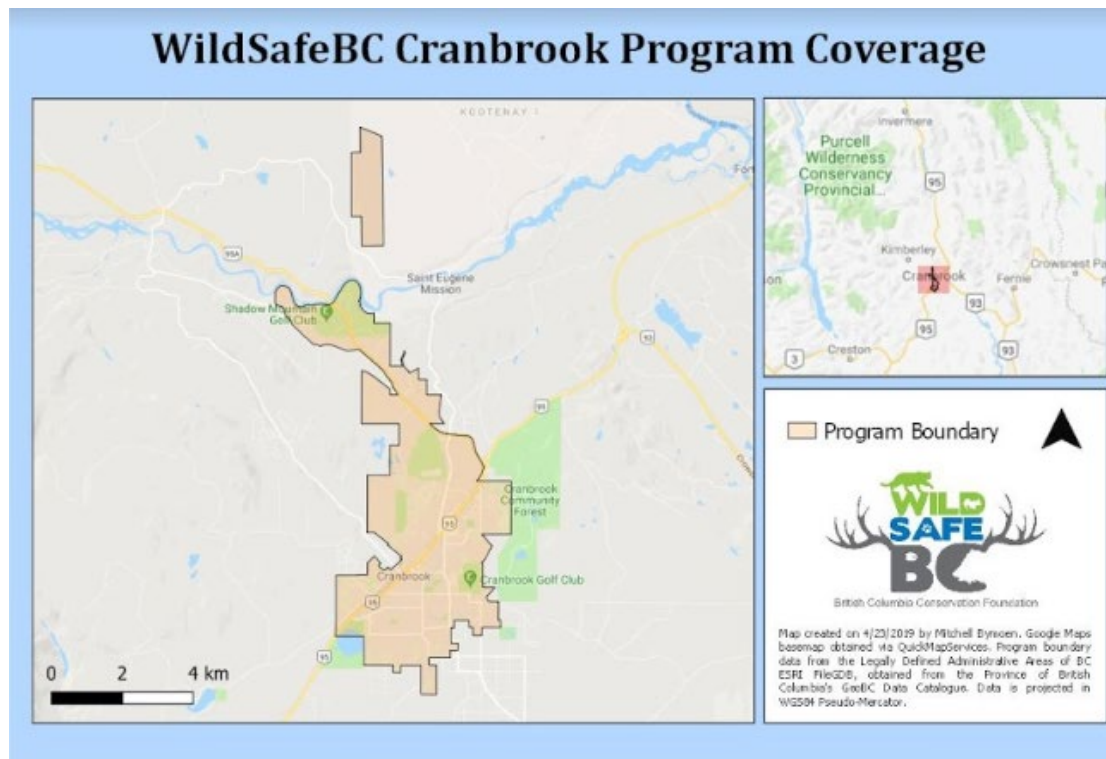


Figure 1. Map of WildSafeBC program coverage for Cranbrook.

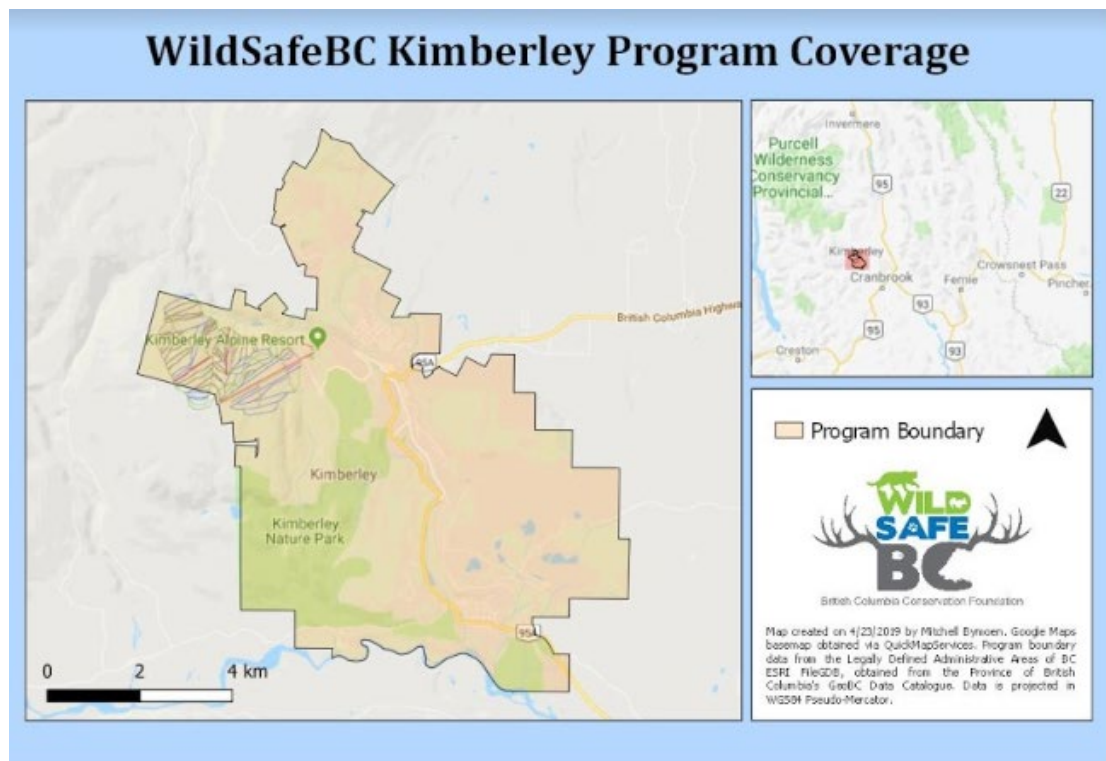


Figure 2. Map of WildSafeBC program coverage for Kimberley.

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Cover photo: WildSafeBC Community Coordinator with WildSafe Rangers

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

The Kimberley-Cranbrook area had another active year with regards to wildlife. Wildlife reports are made to the Conservation Officer Service's RAPP line and uploaded daily to WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). Public use of this service has increased and this has been a huge benefit for promoting the need for education and safe use and deployment of bear spray. From January 1st to November 15th, 2019, there were 564 wildlife reports in Cranbrook and Kimberley. In both communities, deer and black bear were the top species reported (Figure 3). Of the 564 reports, 41% were deer, 30% were black bear, 8% were grizzly bear, 6% were elk, 2% cougar and 7% of the reports were regarding other wildlife such as raccoons, skunks, and raptors.

All wildlife activity spiked in April and May and dropped down in July. Wildlife reports started to spike back up in late August and September (Figure 4). More deer conflicts were reported in each community in May and June while black bears accounted for the spikes in August and September.

Increased bear conflicts in the fall are typical for Kimberley and Cranbrook (Figure 4), as well as many parts of BC (Figure 5). This increase is driven by their need for high calories prior to hibernation and the availability of unmanaged attractants. As the bears go into their dens, the conflict numbers tend to taper off.

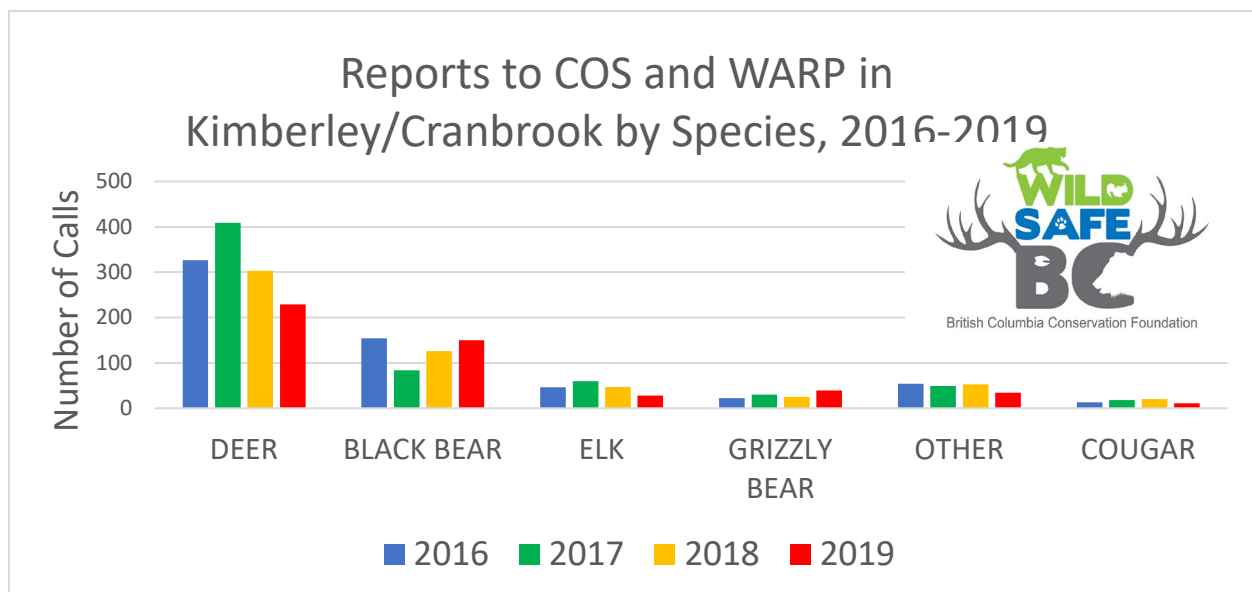


Figure 3. The bar graph above illustrates the top species in Kimberley and Cranbrook for 2019. The top 3 species reported in 2019 are: deer (229 reports), black bear (150 reports), grizzly bear (39 reports). The other relevant species are elk (28 reports) and cougar (11 reports).

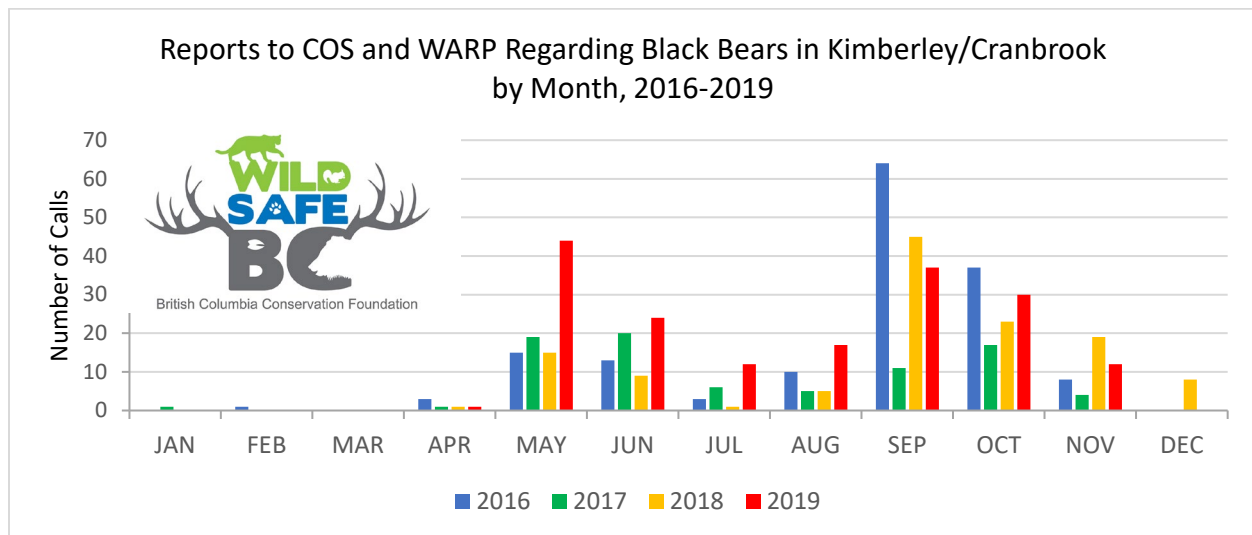


Figure 4. Bar graph illustrating the spike in Spring 2019, dip in the Summer and an increase of reports in the Fall. September had the highest number of black bear reports. Historically, the overall average of bear conflicts in BC spike in the third week of September as bears increase their caloric intake prior to denning.

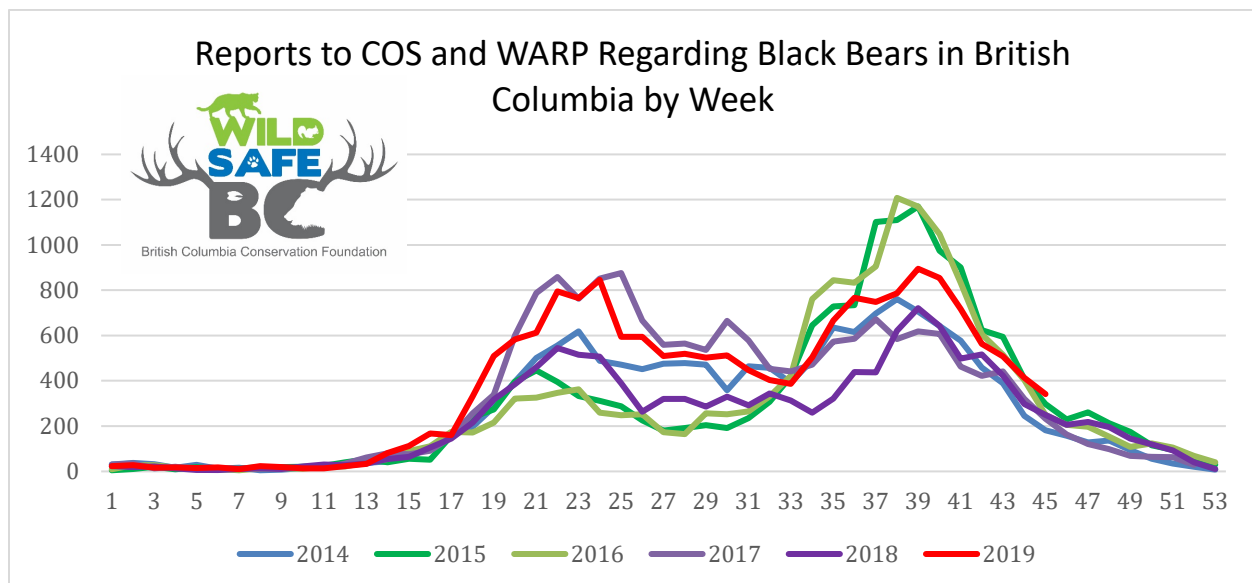


Figure 5. Line graph illustrating the reports to the COS RAPP Line and WildSafeBC's WARP website regarding black bears.

There are many natural and human-made attractants around each community. Most BC communities list garbage as the primary source of wildlife conflict. Kimberley follows this trend however the top attractant reported in Cranbrook was pets and pet food along with livestock and feed. Combined, the top attractant was garbage followed by pets/pet food, livestock/feed, residential fruit trees/berries, and bird seed (Figure 6). Residential fruit trees/berries as well as bird feeder reports are down from 2018 and 2016. Garbage reports have increased by 17. This demonstrates an ongoing need for more education including a focus on pets, pet food and livestock for the 2020 season.

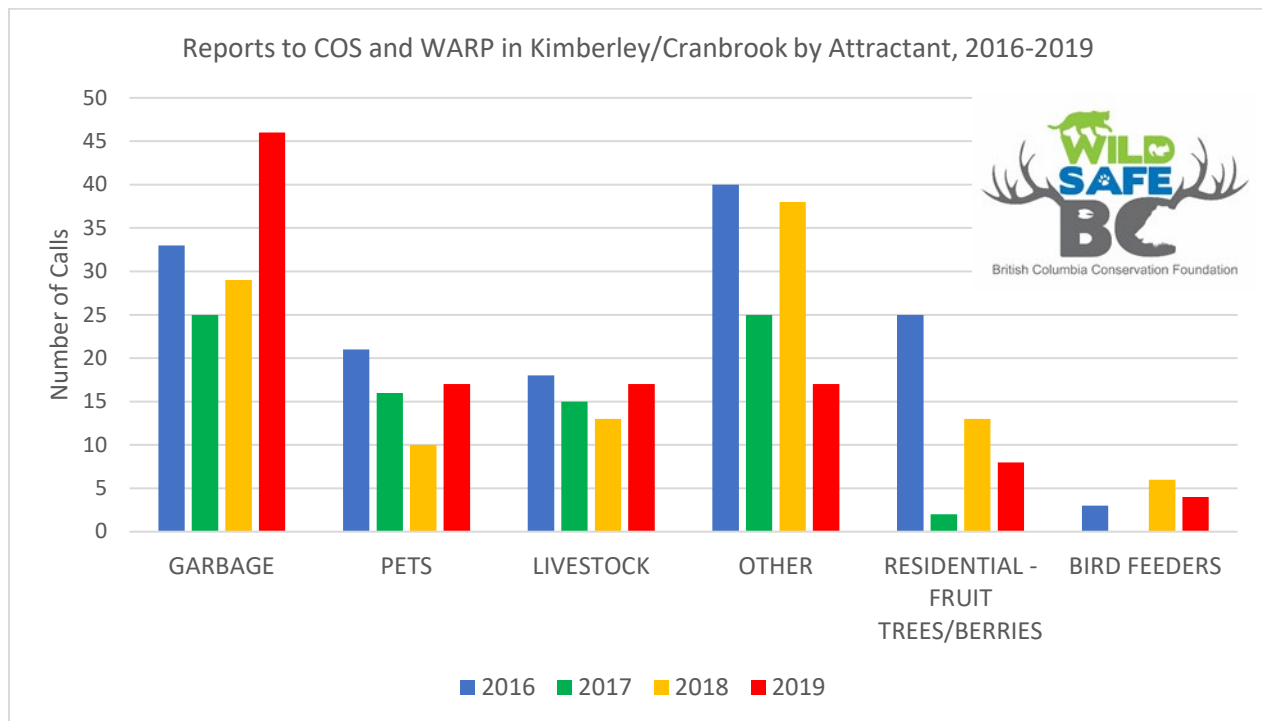


Figure 6. The top 5 attractants for Kimberley and Cranbrook in 2019. Garbage accounted for 42% of the reported attractants in 2019, pets/pet food and livestock/feed each accounted for 16% of reports followed by residential fruit trees and berries which account for 7% of reports, 3% of reports were from bird feeders leaving 16% of reports of other types of attractants such as compost, BBQs, etc.

WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) continues to be a great success. Demand for presentations is always increasing as a result of teachers referring the program to other teachers. New for 2019 were the activity booklets which the teachers appreciated. Also, the extended WRP program provided an opportunity for a follow up visit with hands-on activities such as wildlife identification and outdoor wildlife habitat games (Figure 7). The WCC provided 32 presentations to:

- Scouts
- Girl Guides
- Lindsay Park Elementary
- Lindsay Park Elementary
- Marysville Elementary
- Marysville Elementary
- Kootenay Orchards Elementary
- Parkland Middle School
- Mount Baker Secondary School
- Aqamnik School (K-6)(Figure 7)
- Boys and Girls Club
- Cranbrook Summer Playground Program
- BC SPCA (x4)
- Kimberley Independent School
- McKim Middle School
- TM Roberts Elementary
- St. Mary's Elementary School
- Steeples Elementary
- Amy Woodland Elementary
- YouthWiseEco Centre



Figure 7 Aqamnik School experiences Wildlife Rangers Presentation at Rotary Park in Cranbrook.

Presentations to Schools and Community Groups

The WCC gave 19 presentations regarding wildlife awareness and 15 workshops on the safe use of bear spray to the following organizations:

- East Kootenay Outdoors Club
- Cranbrook Community Forest Society
- Kimberley Nature Park Society
- Moyie Provincial Park (x5)
- WildWoods
- Prime Time
- Gordon Terrace
- EK Realty
- City of Kimberley
- Nordic Club
- International Students Program at the College of the Rockies (2 days)
- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy – Settlement Program
- Cranbrook & District 4H Council
- Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development Department – summer students

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

This season, the WCC received calls from the public about black and grizzly bears, deer, cougars, moose, elk, raccoons and skunks. There was a noticeable increase of calls (9 in 2019 compared to 2 calls in 2018) concerning raccoons and skunks in Kimberley compared to

previous years. In Cranbrook, numbers remained consistent to previous years (5 in both 2018 and 2019). To address these rising concerns, the WCC did door-to-door education as well as garbage tagging.

During door-to-door campaigns, the WCC reached over 620 residents through face-to face discussions or by leaving a door hanger. Education focused on preventing wildlife from human habituation and food conditioning.

There was a major challenge with the shift in the new solid waste collection system in 2018. However, compliance with garbage bylaws seemed to improve in 2019. This year, residences were surveyed on 18 occasions and 54 bins that were placed on the curb before the day of collection were tagged with yellow educational stickers (Figure 8). Of the bins tagged, only 5 were repeat offenders. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviours is demonstrated by the 91% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during later surveys. If bins are repeatedly tagged, bylaw enforcement takes place and/or the Conservation Officer Service steps in. A major challenge continues to be with new residents and shift workers.



Figure 8. Photos of garbage tagged the evening prior to garbage collection, in various neighbourhoods throughout the 2019 season.

Public Displays and Events

WildSafeBC Kimberley – Cranbrook attended 23 community events which were all a huge success due to the efforts of networking and social media.

WildSafeBC's annual BC Goes Wild (BCGW) is one of the community's favourite events. This year it took place on the third weekend from September 20th through to the 22nd. On the 20th, the WCC worked with the Cranbrook Boys and Girls Club and Wildwoods group in the morning to share the importance of keeping wildlife wild and communities safe by learning bear behaviour, identification and what they eat that can potentially bring them into urban areas. In the afternoon, the WCC teamed up with Wildsight's new education coordinator for a pressing apples event; making apple sauce and juice.

As livestock and beehives have been an attractant reported more frequently over the last two years, WildSafeBC teamed up with the owner of Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions, Gillian Sanders, for an electric fence demonstration (Figure 9). WSBC also teamed up with Wildsight's gleaning group, Apple Capture for a pick and press event. The WCC put on two bear spray demonstrations, one at the College of the Rockies entrance to the Cranbrook Community Forest on the 21st and the other, during Wildsight's Harvest Party on the 22nd. The weather was excellent all weekend and the number of participants, feedback and continued interest in WildSafeBC activities was outstanding for only being its fourth annual event. The 11 other public displays and events included: Cranbrook's Farmer's Market, Kimberley's Farmer's Market, Indigenous Peoples Day, Tri-Village Annual Kids Festival, Kaleidoscope Festival, First Saturdays, Same Steele Days, Boys & Girls Club Annual Superhero Dash, International Students Wildlife Day, Canada Day in Kimberley's Platzl, and Children's Festival.



Figure 9 Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solutions and WildSafeBC's volunteer Mike Gaetano demonstrating the effectiveness of electric fences.

Social Media and Press

The WCC used social media and press releases to distribute WildSafeBC messaging and wildlife information. Biweekly updates were made either through radio stations such as The Drive, B104 & Summit and/or newspapers such as The Kimberley Bulletin, E-Know, & the Cranbrook Townsman. The WCC connected with radio and newsprint media 33 times over the season. Of these, 12 were initiated by the media outlets. The Kimberley-Cranbrook Facebook page likes increased by 4% and the page has 903 followers. Overall, the page had a reach of x this season.

Wildlife in Area Signs

In terms of wildlife signs, Bear in Area signs have been a huge success and are believed to be very important near active trail heads, especially near high tourist activity and recreation areas. The Kimberley-Cranbrook program has 10 signs which are circulated ever week or two in high bear activity areas. Feedback has been very positive. A challenge is keeping the signs in place without tourists or other careless residents removing the signs to take home. Last year, four signs were misplaced. This year, there were only 2 signs misplaced; one being returned with a note that apologized for the removal.

Collaborations

Once again, WildSafeBC Kimberley – Cranbrook was fortunate to partner with Patty Kolesnichenko, an environmental educator and member of the retired Urban Deer Committee, to educate children about deer biology, behavior, attractant management and safety in the spring of 2019. Topics covered fawning season, bucks and rutting season, and the importance of “keeping wildlife wild and communities safe” by not feeding deer. All schools in Kimberley were reached via presentation and hands-on learning such as question and answers, games and activity sheets specific to deer safety.

The City of Kimberley is working towards Bear Smart Community status. One of the ways Kimberley decided to tackle the criteria necessary to achieving Bear Smart status is through engaging businesses by having guidelines set in place for reducing human-wildlife conflict in commercial settings. Kayleigh Cook, a Wildlife Safety Officer at the Conservation Officer Service, worked with the WCC to begin the first couple steps in rolling out WildSafe’s Business Pledge.

Continued partnerships from last year included the East Kootenay Outdoors Club, Cranbrook Community Forest Society, Kimberley Nature Park Society, Wildsight Apple Capture gleaning program, EK Parks, the Conservation Officer Service, the City of Cranbrook and Kimberley bylaw and operations departments, the Tri-Village Kids First Annual Kids Festival, School District 5 and 6, and the Nordic Club. WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook continues to attend events that partners put on.

WildSafeBC and the Wildsight Kimberley and Cranbrook branch worked together again to promote their annual gleaning group and the events they were hosting. Wildsight's gleaning group, Apple Capture, lead events in both Kimberley and Cranbrook in late August and throughout the month of September. The event in Kimberley was held over the BC Goes Wild event which included a day of community volunteers gleaning apples from Wildsight's online tree board followed by a day of pressing apples at the community garden.

Cranbrook's Pick and Press event was done over a few days, as there were more trees registered on Wildsight's Tree Board than last year. Wildsight's Tree Board allows community members who are unable to harvest their fruit to register their name and address so that the public can pick their tree. The product from the tree is donated to a food security initiative around town. This is a great way to promote the management of domestic fruit to cottage owners. However, this is a temporary solution to a long-term issue. The ideal solution is to remove apple and other mast-producing trees that are not maintained in a homeowner's absence. A non-mast producing tree incentive would help accelerate this best practice.

Province-wide Initiatives for 2019

Bear Spray

Bear Spray demonstrations were a huge hit this season. As more demonstrations occurred the word began to spread rapidly and there was an increase in bear spray demonstrations towards the second half of the season. Fifteen bear spray demonstrations were provided in 2019.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

WildSafeBC Kimberley-Cranbrook was once again fortunate to attend Indigenous Peoples Day at Idlewild Lake in Cranbrook (10). The celebration included Métis jigging, Ktunaxa legends, The little Dippers drumming, and much more.



Figure 10 Image of WCC Danica Roussy at her display booth while attending the 2019 Indigenous Peoples at Idlewild Park, Cranbrook. They are sharing stories as to what wildlife means to them and expressing how important wildlife is.

Special Initiatives - WildSafe Business Pledge

The WildSafe Business Pledge is something that business owners, managers and staff must sign off on once they are demonstrating that they are following the WildSafe guidelines. Guidelines may vary depending on the businesses (i.e. a restaurant vs a library); however, some of the guidelines include but are not limited to the following:

1. Keep garbage, recycling and organics secure at all times. Including washing out recyclables, locking garbage and grease bins overnight and, where possible, secured to a foundation where wildlife cannot remove.
2. Keep the exterior of business building free of attractants such as spilled grease, garbage and food.
3. Act appropriately if a bear approaches and call the COS RAPP Line – 1-877-95-7277 when safe.
4. Train staff to follow practices that support our WildSafe Business Pledge.

5. Provide accurate advice to staff and customers by referring them to WildSafeBC's website: www.wildsafebc.com

Twelve businesses have been fully trained and certified and another 35 have indicated their interest in the Pledge. The Kimberley Bavarian Home Hardware was the first business to complete the pledge (Figure 11). As well, the Kimberley Bavarian Home Hardware has helped promote the importance of proper transport and deployment of bear spray. They also collect and dispose of empty bear spray cans. WildSafeBC appreciates businesses that make it easier for residents and visitors to adopt best safety practices.



Figure 11 Image of two Kimberley Bavarian Home Hardware staff. They have completed their training and are holding WildSafeBC's WildSafe Business Smart Pledge as well as their expired bear spray bin.

Challenges and Opportunities

The proper management of residential garbage continues to be an issue in Kimberley and Cranbrook. Also, it is essential that winter feeding of urban deer discontinue in order to reduce human-deer conflicts. With the abundance of deer in town, there are increasing safety issues and 'Aggressive Deer in Area' signs were used this year. There was a significant amount of negative feedback regarding the signs and a new approach will be developed for next year. Fruit trees are another ongoing challenge in Kimberley and Cranbrook as they are generally not recognized as a significant source of human-wildlife conflict. Some residents are not aware of their impact or they are absentee homeowners. Unmanaged fruit trees draw wildlife into the community and lead to food conditioning and human habituation. Unlike garbage, fruit trees are a reliable and consistent source of high calorie food – year after year.

To address these challenges, the following initiatives should be prioritized for 2020:

1. Facilitate a presentation by the Province to Kimberley regarding the Bear Smart Community program.
2. Complete Bear Hazard Assessments and present to Kimberley and Cranbrook.
3. Continue to work towards completing WildSafe Business Pledge training and to then move onto the Family/Household pledge.
4. Present the idea of a Bear Working Group for the purpose of producing a Bear Management Plan for Kimberley that include stakeholders, community organizations, members of the public, government officials, etc.
5. Begin working with stakeholders on Bear Conflict Management Plans.
6. Encourage the City of Kimberley and Cranbrook to implement bylaws that prohibit the mismanagement of wildlife attractants. Bylaws are one of the six criteria required for Bear Smart Community status.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC is grateful for the consistent support of its sponsors: Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the Columbia Basin Trust, the Regional District of East Kootenay, the City of Cranbrook and the City of Kimberley.

As always, the WCC would like to give a big thank you to the Conservation Officer Service and their staff, in particular Denny Chretien, Jeffrey Scott and Matthew Corbet for the great communication and participation in promoting WildSafeBC awareness. These partnerships are vital for the effectiveness and consistency of our messaging and our goal to “keep wildlife wild and communities safe”. A big thank you goes out to the operations, communications and planning staff of the City of Cranbrook and the City of Kimberley who have been proactive in collaborating with WildSafeBC to find lasting solutions to human-wildlife conflict.

The support from School District 5 and 6 staff was incredible this year and the WCC could not be more grateful for the ever-increasing participation in the educational wildlife presentations, the WildSafe Ranger Program and use of WARP.

Thank you to the media outlets for sharing WildSafeBC’s message and wildlife information and tips, using WARP to report wildlife encounters of note, and for sharing BC Goes Wild Weekend’s events and photo contests.

Thank you to the community members and visitors to the area that participated in our events and support our messaging. It is such an incredible opportunity to watch community members become more invested in keeping wildlife wild and their communities safe! Thank you for being proactive and taking responsibility in managing attractants in order to minimize the potential for wildlife conflict.