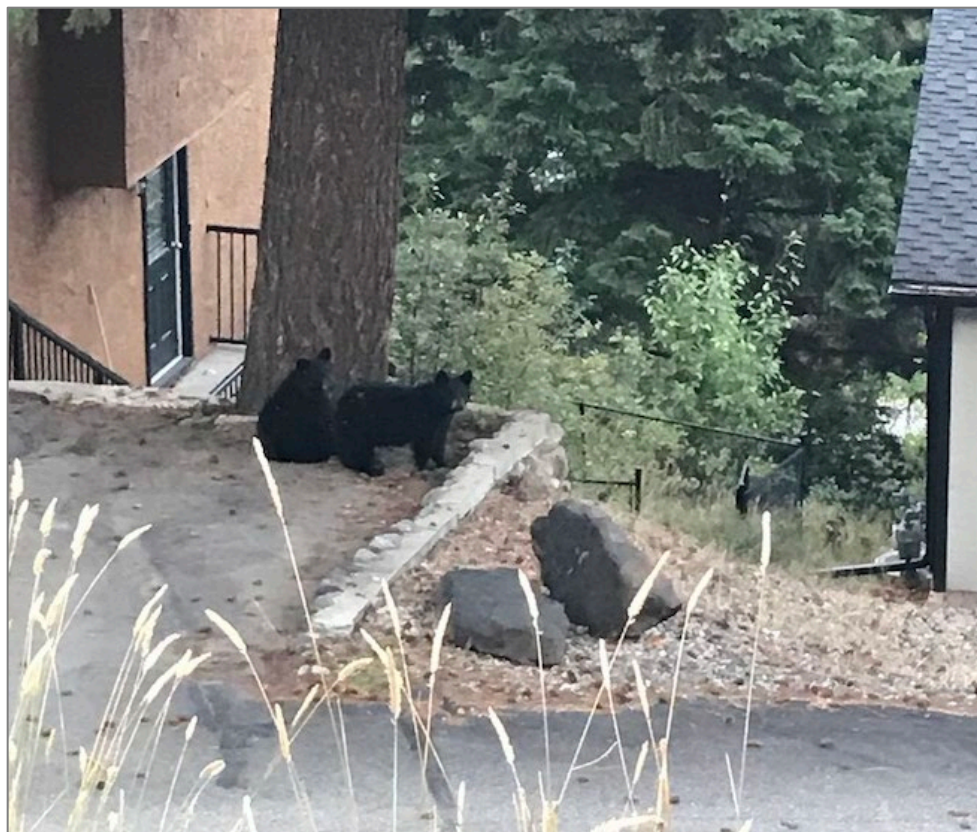


# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

## Okanagan Westside

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Community Coordinator



## Executive Summary

This was the fourth year for the Okanagan Westside Program, which delivers WildSafeBC programming in the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation and the District of Peachland (Figure 1, Figure 2). It was a challenging year for human-bear conflicts, and there was the highest amount of black bear reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) since the beginning of the program.

In response to the high bear activity, outreach activities were intensified. Through door-to-door education and garbage tagging, 225 and 325 people were reached respectively. Print, television and social media was also used to deliver bear in area alerts and messaging around attractant management. The Okanagan Westside Facebook page had a reach of over 40,000 and grew in page likes by 39% this year. Due to their popularity, an increased amount of bear spray demonstrations and workshops were offered to 80 participants. There were 5 other community presentations with over 100 participants. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator attended 8 community events with a WildSafeBC display, attaining a reach of over 800 people. The WildSafe Ranger Program was delivered to over 450 students, including 19 from the sēnsisyustən House of Learning who participated in the extended program. Thanks to additional funding provided by the Regional District of Central Okanagan, WildSafeBC programming was also delivered in the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area and at the Mission Creek Salmon Festival.

A main challenge continues to be responsible management of wildlife attractants on private property. This year, there were more requests by the public, COS, and bylaw for educational messaging on attractant management than there was the capacity to accommodate. A key opportunity for next year is to establish a stronger partnership with bylaw departments and work together to tackle attractant challenges in neighbourhoods. There is also an opportunity for the Okanagan Westside communities to start identifying and addressing the root causes of human-bear conflicts, by committing additional funds to conduct a Bear Hazard Assessment. A Bear Hazard Assessment is the first step towards becoming certified as a Bear Smart Community. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

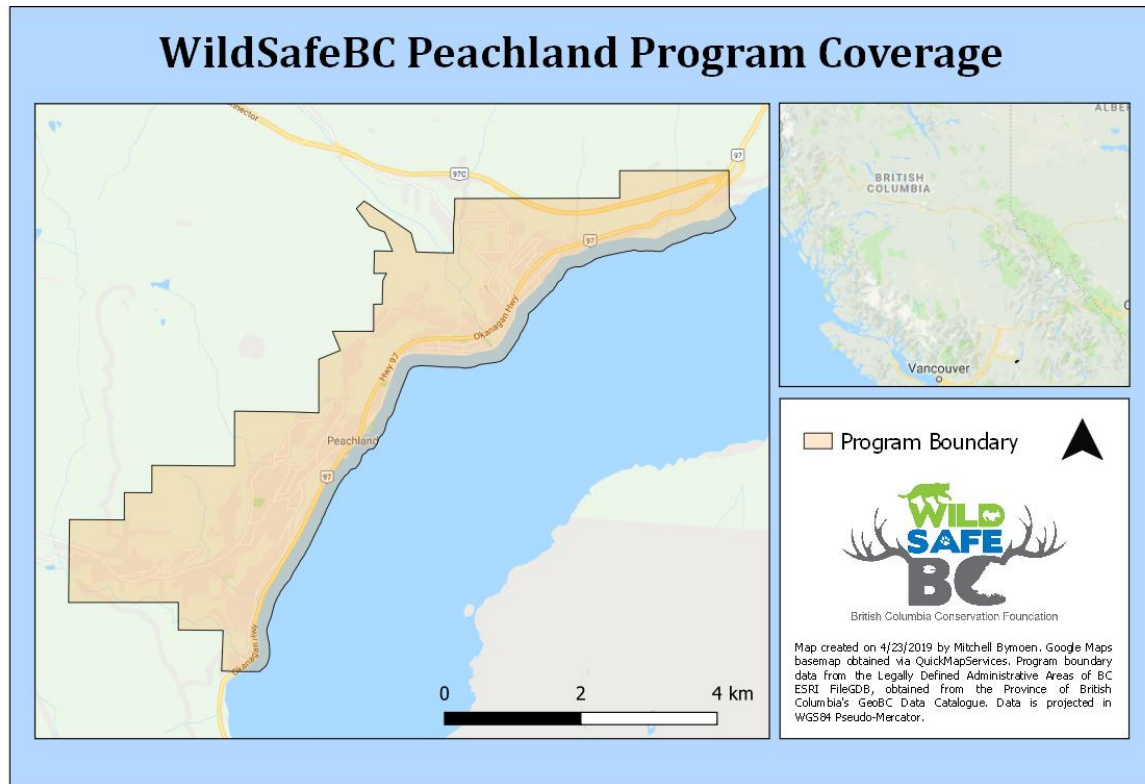


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program Coverage –Peachland.

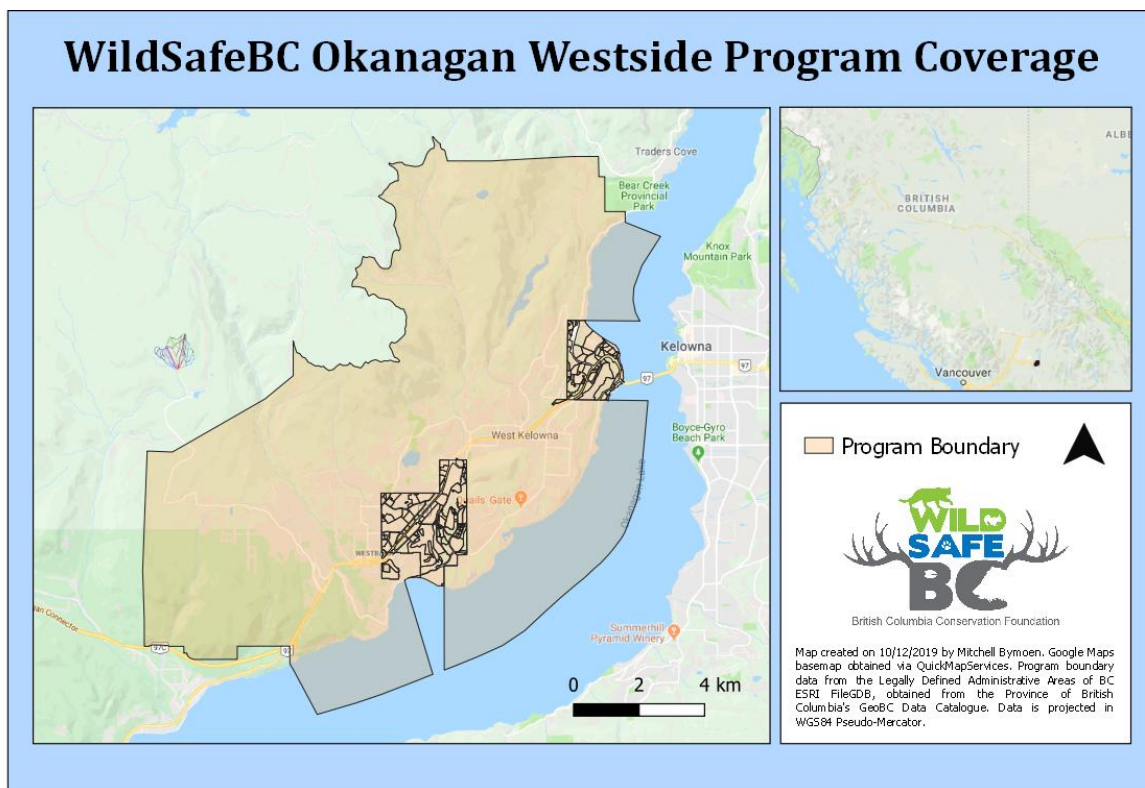


Figure 2. WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Program Coverage – West Kelowna and Westbank First Nation.

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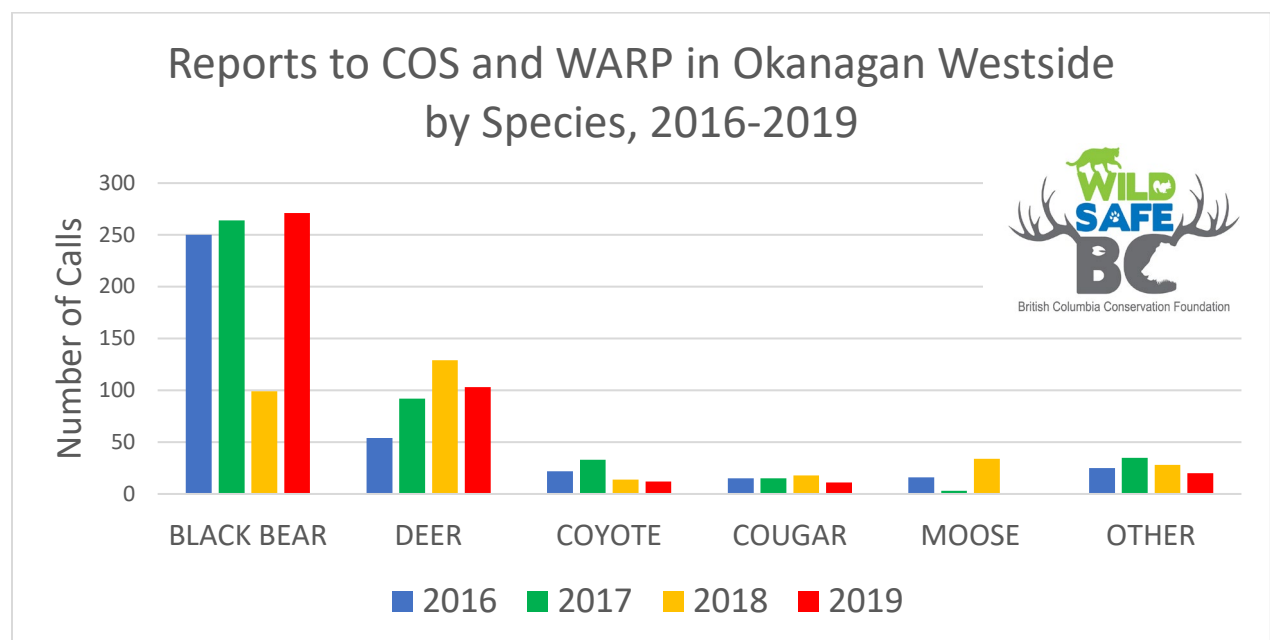
Cover Photo: Two black bear cubs observed playing at the base of a tree in an Okanagan Westside neighbourhood, while the sow and another cub watched from above.



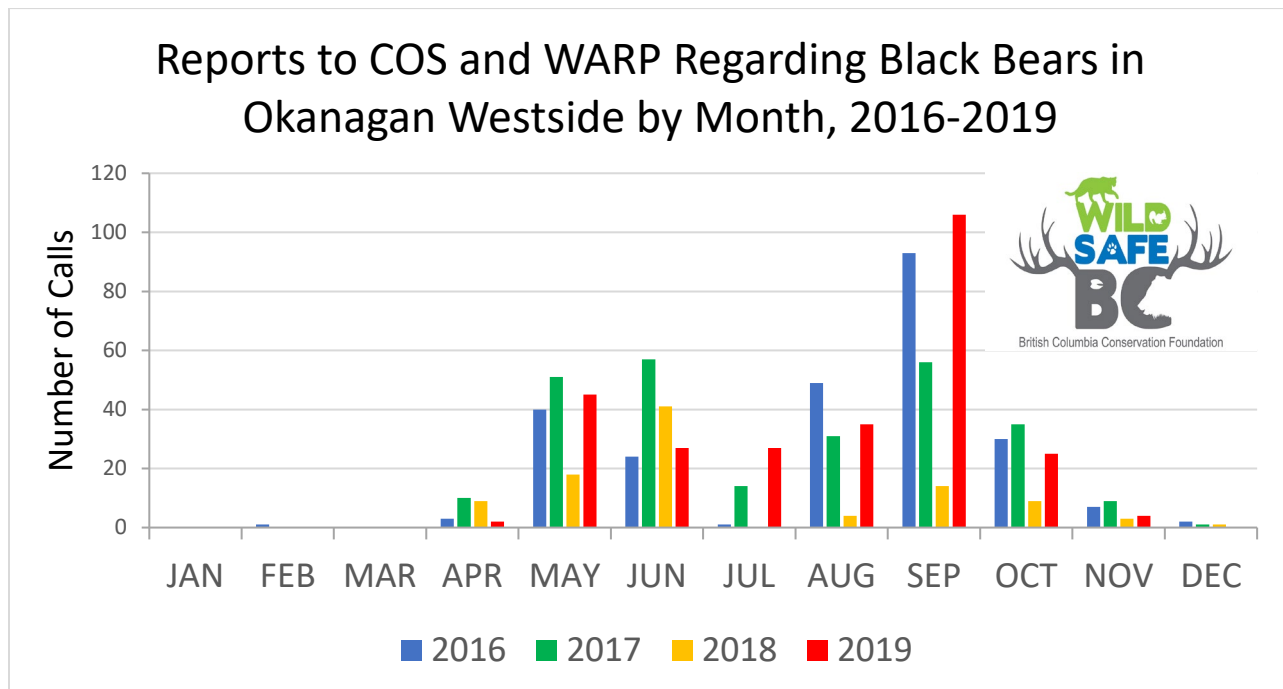
## Highlights from the 2018 Season

### Wildlife Activity

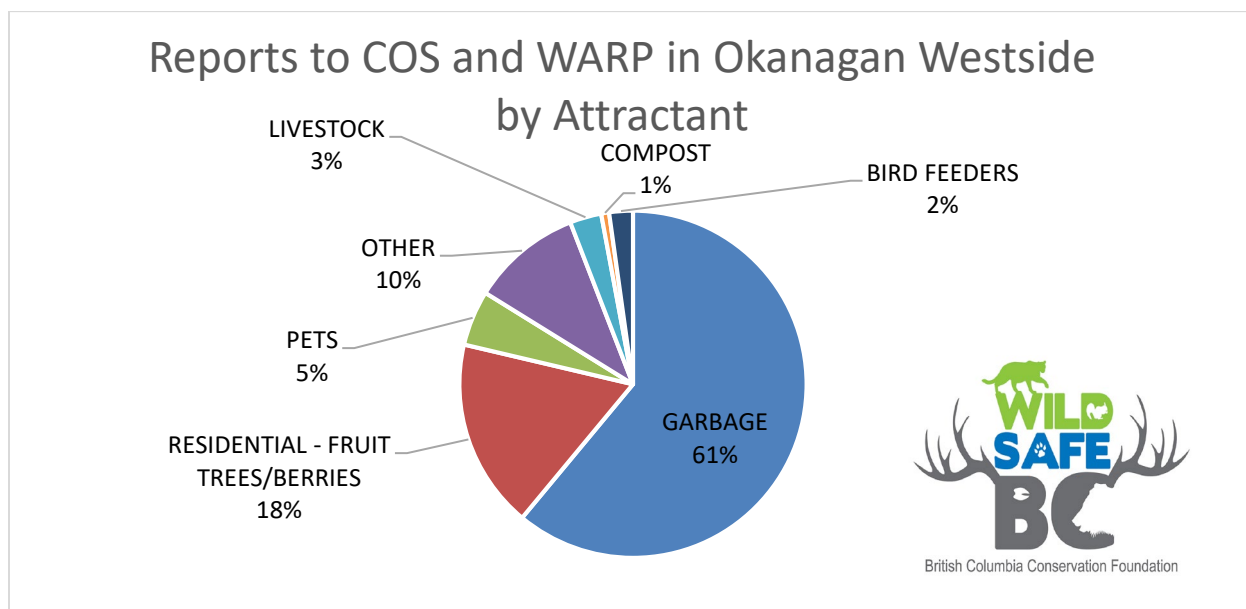
Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for the Okanagan Westside includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019. There were 271 black bear reports in 2019 which is higher than the 4-year average of 221 reports (Figure 3). This is similar to trends in provincial numbers which reflect a higher than average conflict year for bears. It is difficult to identify causes of the high conflict observed this year, but it could be due to a shortage of natural food availability and/or a high amount of unnatural foods (attractants) present in communities. Black bear reports continue to show a seasonal trend in Okanagan Westside communities with increased conflicts in the spring and fall, with September being the month of highest conflict (Figure 4). These seasonal patterns can be attributed to natural food availability being lower in the spring and fall, so bears are opportunistically foraging in communities. Also, the peak in September coincides with bears entering a period of intense eating, called hyperphagia, in order to prepare for winter denning. Deer conflicts showed a decline this year, after a steady increase during the last three years (Figure 3). Reports of other species were lower than average (Figure 3). Garbage continues to remain the most reported attractant followed by residential fruit trees and berries (Figure 5).



**Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP in the Okanagan Westside by species from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.**



**Figure 4. Black bear reports by month to COS and WARP in Okanagan Westside Communities from January 1, 2016 – November 15, 2019.**



**Figure 5. Attractants identified in reports to COS and WARP in the Okanagan Westside from January 1- November 15, 2019.**

## WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to the WildSafe Ranger Program. A total of six schools participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) in Okanagan Westside communities and over 520 youth became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1). Of these, 19 students received the extended version which included two classroom presentations, plus a third visit for an outdoor activity (Figure 6, Figure 7).



Figure 6. WCC conducting an outdoor activity as part of the WildSafe Ranger extended program.

Table 1. Schools that received the WRP in 2019.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Chief Tomat Elementary	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	250	
Mar Jok Elementary	3	72	
Our Lady of Lourdes	1, 2	36	
Peachland Elementary	Strong Start, K, 1	47	
sənsisyustən House of Learning	2, 3	19	yes
Shannon Lake Elementary	5	56	
City of West Kelowna Dragons Den Camp		23	
Westbank Library Summer Reading Program		35	
West Kelowna Girl Guides		16	



Figure 7. The WCC delivering a WRP presentation to students at sənsisyustən House of Learning.



## Presentations to Community Groups

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) gave a total of 8 community presentations, with over 75 participants (Table 2). A successful community forum was conducted for residents of a large mobile home park who faced bear conflicts this year, in addition to regular conflicts with other species like rats and coyotes (Figure 8). The WCC provided residents of the mobile home park information on human-wildlife conflicts and attractant management practices, and facilitated a community discussion to identify and find solutions to the human-wildlife conflicts in the community.

**Table 2. Community groups or organizations that received presentations by the WCC in 2019.**

Community Group or Organization	Type/Topic	Participants
<b>District of Peachland Staff</b>	WildSafeBC Program & Peachland wildlife	10
<b>RDCO Wild Walk</b>	bear spray demo & wildlife safety talk	27
<b>District of Peachland Staff</b>	bear spray workshop	18
<b>Crystal Springs Mobile Home Park</b>	co-existing with wildlife presentation & forum	23
<b>Peachland Trail Awareness Day</b>	bear spray workshop	10

## Public Displays and Events

In 2019, 8 community events were attended with a WildSafeBC display booth, reaching over 850 people (Table 3). At Westside Daze, Conservation Officer Murdoch from the COS joined the WCC and volunteer Ann Graham in engaging with the public (Figure 9). Also at Westside Daze, a new game was introduced, “Poop’s n’ Print’s”, which proved to be a popular excellent engagement tool (Figure 10).



**Figure 8. The WCC conducting a community forum for residents at Crystal Springs Mobile Home Park.**



**Figure 9. Conservation Officer Murdock and WCC Meg Bjordal interacting with public at Westside Daze.**



**Figure 10. Poop's n' Print's Game.**

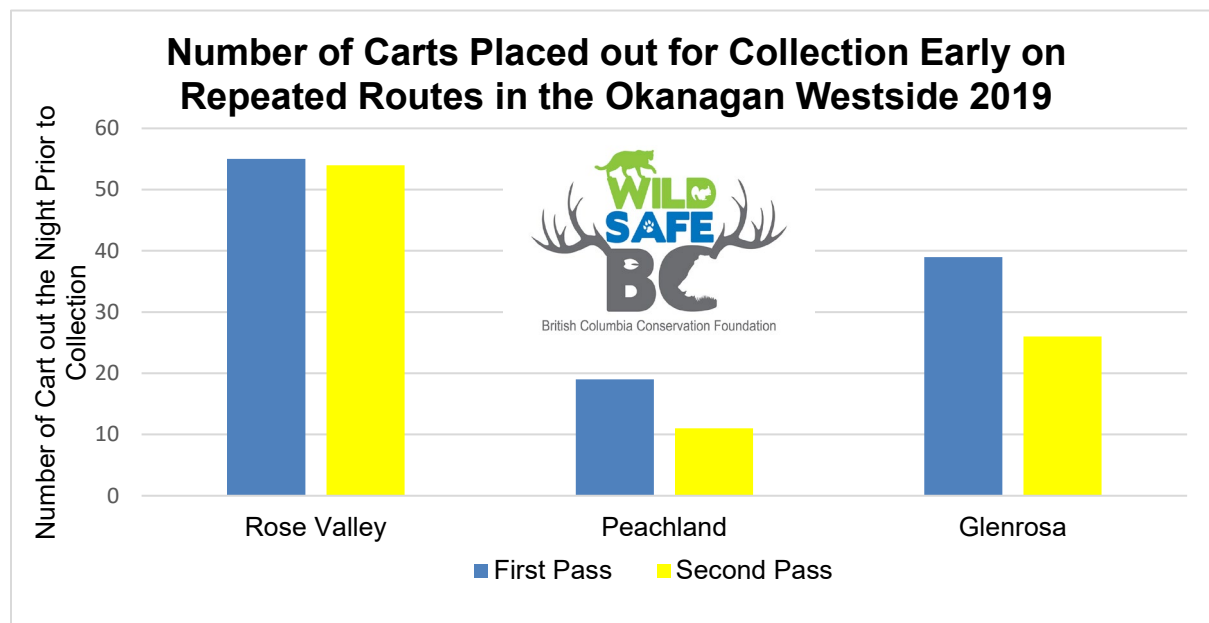
As part of WildSafeBC's BC Goes Wild Weekend in September, the WCC hosted a large bear spray workshop in partnership with a local hiking group, Hiking Addiction. Despite poor weather, 25 people still came out to learn about wildlife safety and gain bear spray training using inert spray.

**Table 3. Events attended by the WCC, with a WildSafeBC display in 2019.**

Event	Reach
<b>RDCO Go Fish</b>	124
<b>Kalamoior Pancake Breakfast</b>	80
<b>WFN syia Celebration</b>	180
<b>Peachland Farmers Market (June)</b>	95
<b>Westside Daze</b>	175
<b>Peachland Farmers Market (July)</b>	105
<b>RDCO Salmon Festival</b>	100
<b>WildSafeBC BC Goes Wild Weekend</b>	25
<b>Peachland Trail Awareness Day</b>	20

## Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Garbage tagging was conducted on eight different nights, with the WCC visiting five different areas throughout the Okanagan Westside. A total of 325 garbage carts were observed to have been placed out on the curb the night before collection day. These carts either had an educational sticker reminding residents that garbage placed out early is a wildlife attractant placed on them or the homeowner was directly spoken with. Of these routes, three were repeated on a second date, to measure if residents were responding to the stickers (Figure 9). The routes conducted in Peachland and Glenrosa did show a 42% and 33% reduction respectively, in carts placed out early on the second pass; however, on the Rose Valley route only one less bin was observed on the second pass (Figure 11). Of the bins observed that were placed out early on the second pass for the Peachland route, only one was a repeat address, and in Glenrosa, only three were repeat addresses, versus the Rose Valley route which had 19 repeat addresses. It is difficult to pin point why the garbage tagging activity was less effective in Rose Valley, and it is notable that this West Kelowna neighborhood also had a high amount of bear activity this fall.



**Figure 10.** Comparison of repeated garbage tagging routes in Okanagan Westside neighborhoods of the amount of garbage carts placed out the night before collection day, from the first pass to the second pass of the same route.

In response to high bear activity in residential areas of the Okanagan Westside, the WCC visited these areas to deliver door-to-door education. The WCC knocked on 225 doors and if residents were home they were given a Homeowner's Checklist and WildSafeBC black bear brochure in addition to having a conversation about attractant management with the WCC. If residents did not answer the door, a WildSafeBC door hanger was left with the WCC contact info and attractant management tips.

## Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside Facebook page grew 39% in 2019 from 237 to 330 page likes and had an overall reach greater than 40,000. The posts with the highest reach were the ones alerting residents to wildlife in neighbourhoods. Monitoring of community Facebook pages for neighbourhoods within the program area provided very valuable insight on wildlife activity within the neighbourhoods, as activity would often be reported here and not to the COS. These community pages were also good locations to share posts from the Okanagan Westside page to reach more people, and provided an opportunity to address situations in specific neighbourhoods when necessary.

Municipal newsletters were also utilized for WildSafeBC messaging. WildSafeBC articles were included in the District of Peachland summer and fall newsletters, and in the summer City of West Kelowna newsletter, which go out to about 2,600 and 13,500 homes respectively. WildSafeBC articles were also included in the WFN membership newsletters sent monthly to around 800 people.

The WCC was interviewed for several traditional print, online and television news stories (Addendum, Table 4). These stories raised awareness of the challenges with human-wildlife conflict in the area. Most discussed bears and the need for residents to manage attractants around their home, especially garbage, though one focused on information about deer fawns, and another on bear spray.

## Wildlife in Area Signs

When bears were confirmed to be frequenting a particular area (usually through multiple sightings), the WCC requested that the program sponsor placed a sign in the area to alert residents of the bear and remind them to secure garbage. In Peachland, there was only one sandwich board sign available. So in the spring, when there were multiple bears frequenting different areas of the community, laminated signs were printed for the WCC to tape to mailboxes. Signs were usually only kept up for 1-2 weeks depending on bear activity, but Westbank First Nation had to leave signs out for several weeks due to a very active bear in the community.

## Collaborations

Thanks to additional funding provided by the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO), the WCC was able to provide some programming in the Central Okanagan West Electoral Area which included door-to-door education in wildlife hotspot areas off of Westside Rd and a presentation on attractant management and wildlife safety at Camp Owaissi. Further funding through the RDCO parks department allowed for a WildSafeBC booth and bear spray demo at the Mission Creek Salmon Festival, which had a reach of over 200 people. Additionally, the WCC provided information and support to the RDCO Waste Reduction Office as they launched a pilot project with bear-resistant garbage carts. As the City of Kelowna does not have a WildSafeBC Program, two schools in Kelowna directly funded presentations by the WCC,



allowing for 44 students at Rutland Elementary and 260 students at Quigley Elementary to experience the WildSafe Ranger Program.

## 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

The WCC offered an increased amount of bear spray demos and workshops this season, for a total of four, including BC Goes Wild Weekend. These workshops were well received and participants greatly appreciated the knowledge gained and the opportunity to gain hands on practice using inert spray.

### Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC continued relationship building with members of Westbank First Nation (WFN) in the 2019 season, and was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend the 2019 síya? celebration (Figure 12). Some door-door education was conducted in the core community in response to bear activity this season. Management of all mobile home parks on WFN land on the Westside were contacted and offered support around attractant management and resident education in relation to human-wildlife conflicts, particularly bears.

ḥsyilxcín words for animals were continued to be displayed on materials and discussed during WildSafe Ranger presentations, and the WCC continued practicing and learning pronunciation.



Figure 11. WildSafeBC booth at the 2019 síya? celebration.



## Challenges and Opportunities

A main challenge continues to be getting residents to take responsibility to manage bear attractants in and around their property, particularly in relation to garbage which remains the main attractant. As seen with the repeated garbage tagging routes, some areas seem responsive to messaging and education, while others are less so. The WCC noticed an increased amount of calls from the public and growing frustration around neighbours not managing attractants. There seems to be an appetite among the public for bylaws and access to bear-resistant garbage carts in order to help address challenges around bear (and other wildlife) attractants in the community. If program sponsors have interest in looking into these solutions, the WCC should continue to support them with information and suggestions next season.

In addition to increased calls from the public, the WCC also received increased requests from community bylaw officers and the COS to deliver educational programming on streets with a lot of attractant issues and high levels of wildlife activity. A key opportunity for next year is to establish a stronger partnership with bylaw departments and work together to tackle attractant challenges in neighbourhoods.

There is also an opportunity for the Okanagan Westside communities to start identifying and addressing the root causes of human-bear conflicts, by conducting a Bear Hazard Assessment. A Bear Hazard Assessment is the first step towards becoming certified as a Bear Smart Community. This project would require additional funding to bring to fruition. Moving forward, these initiatives and partnerships will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support the WildSafeBC Okanagan Westside program receives from its funders including the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the City of West Kelowna, Westbank First Nation and the District of Peachland. Thank you to the talented people within the sponsor organizations who assisted with program support, event planning and information sharing.

A big thank you to all the Conservation Officers from the North Okanagan Zone for their collaboration. The WCC also thanks the BCCF team for their guidance and help throughout the season. Finally, a special thanks goes out to the invaluable volunteers, Rose Gunoff and Ann Graham – without whom the program would not have the reach it does.

## Addendum

**Table 4. List of media stories the WCC was interviewed for during 2019.**

Date	Media Outlet Name	Type	Title (click link to read full article)
5/11/2019	Global News	online article	<a href="#">Bear sightings in BC interior prompt warning from WildSafeBC</a>
5/11/2019	Kelowna Now	online article	<a href="#">WildSafeBC responds to numerous bear sightings in the Okanagan</a>
5/21/2019	Vernon Morning Star	online article	<a href="#">WildSafeBC comes to the Okanagan to reduce wildlife conflict</a>
5/22/2019	Global News	TV, online article	<a href="#">Bear activity spiking in BC community</a>
5/23/2019	Global News	TV, online article	<a href="#">BC wildlife dine and dash</a>
5/24/2019	Peachland Views	print, online article	<a href="#">29 bear sightings in 21 days: expert says we need to be more bear aware</a>
5/29/2019	Castanet	online article	<a href="#">Don't dare touch baby deer</a>
6/25/2019	Infonews	online article	<a href="#">Want to keep bears out of garbage? work with your neighbours</a>
9/26/2019	Global News	TV, online article	<a href="#">West Kelowna residents asked to be bear aware with waste</a>
10/11/2019	Infonews	online article	<a href="#">Looking for a solution to your urban rat problem? They've been here all along.</a>
10/15/2019	Castanet	online article & video	<a href="#">Prepping for a bear encounter</a>
10/16/2019	Salmon Arm Observer	online article, print	<a href="#">six bears destroyed in 3 days in West Kelowna</a>
10/16/2019	Kelowna Capitol News	online article, print	<a href="#">Lake Country begins testing bear-resistant garbage carts</a>
11/08/2019	Infonews	online article	<a href="#">Westside residents still drawing bears to their garbage</a>