

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Town of Princeton

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WildSafeBC Princeton Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Carolyn Blank, for the Town of Princeton. WildSafeBC (WSBC) Princeton provides programming across the valley bottom where the Tulameen River, Similkameen River, and Asp Creek meet (fig.1).

The program had a busy start to the year with lots of black bear activity in the spring. There were five black bears reported in May and more reports followed in June, July, and August. There were a total of 69 black bear reports between January 1 and November 15, 2019. This number of reports is similar to last year but much higher than any year prior to that. Deer were the second most reported type of wildlife this season. There were 48 reports related to deer which is consistent with the annual average of 43.

The WCC facilitated several outreach campaigns to promote best practices of removing wildlife attractants including but not limited to: door-to-door education at 682 homes; 18 WildSafe Ranger presentations to 887 students; 3 bear spray workshops with 45 participants; 187 garbage bins tagged with educational stickers; and 1,470 face-to-face contacts made through 17 education display booths. The WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page reached 11,683 people and page likes grew by 12%. Additionally, 12 newspaper articles were published.

Residential and commercial garbage management has remained a challenge. Goals for the 2020 season would include: continued educational campaigns expanding to include businesses; bear spray workshops (including protection from aggressive deer); working towards Bear Smart Community status; connecting residents through a Facebook fruit sharing group; increased door-to-door and garbage tagging campaigns in hotspots; and increased collaboration with the bylaw department.

Significant progress was made in terms of preventing conflict this year, thanks to residents who were open to adopting new practices for removing wildlife attractants. This would not have been possible without the contributions and commitment of the Town of Princeton, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the Conservation Officer Service (COS), School District 58, Zoe Kirk, and everyone supporting the program. The WCC looks forward to continuing this momentum next year as we work together to keep our wildlife wild and our community safe.

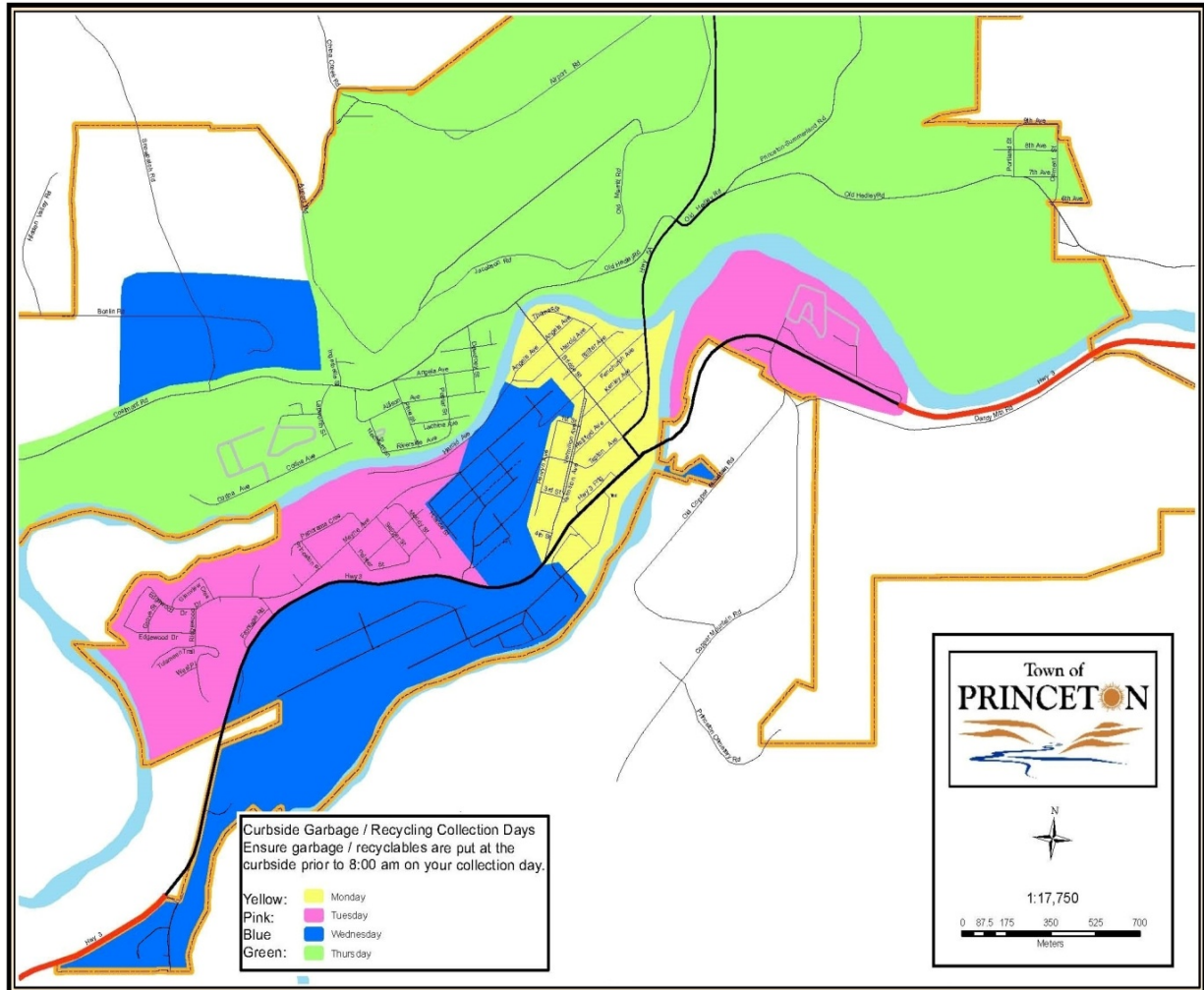


Figure 1 WSBC Princeton Program Coverage

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Cover Photo: WildSafeBC Community Coordinator Carolyn Blank presenting wildlife awareness and safety to John Allison Elementary students – June 2019 assembly.

Highlights from the 2018 Season

Wildlife Activity

Princeton is located along multiple natural wildlife corridors. As a result, there is an abundance of wildlife that passes through town and will continue to do so.

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). Over 130 wildlife reports were made between January 1, 2019 and November 15, 2019.

The community voices consistent concern regarding our resident mule deer population that is habituated and rarely leaves the town boundaries. Their seasonal aggression during fawning season, brazen behavior during the rut, and unpredictable behavior during the rest of the year is putting people at risk in the community. This is discouraging seniors from walking outdoors and causing concern for students and parents walking to and from school. The deer in the community are also impacted as they are more likely to be hit by a vehicle or destroyed because they have become too dangerous. Deer were the second most reported wildlife in 2019. There were 47 reports related to deer which is consistent with the annual average of 43. Of these calls, 77% of calls to the RAPP line were for injured or distressed deer (Figure 2).

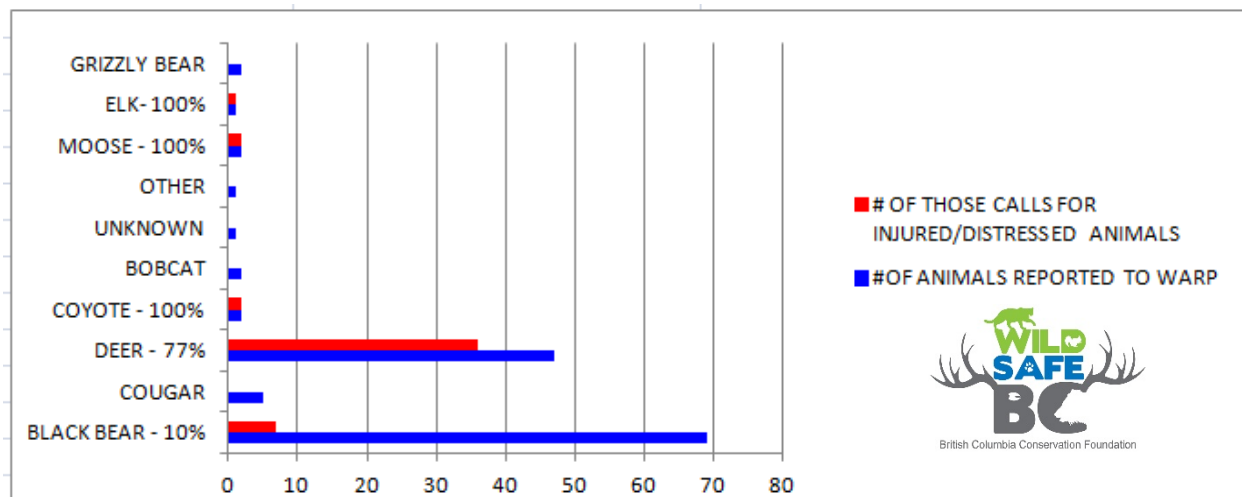


Figure 2. Number of calls to RAPP line in 2019 with the number of those calls being for injured/distressed.

There were 69 black bear reports from January 1, 2019 to November 15, 2019 (Figure 3). This level of conflict is similar to 2018; however, the 3 year average before that was 37. Black bear activity started earlier in the year than usual (Figure 3). This may be attributed to some bears that had great success accessing unsecured wildlife attractants in the community during the previous autumn, and a very dry spring that pushed bears into valley bottoms to look for emerging greenery.

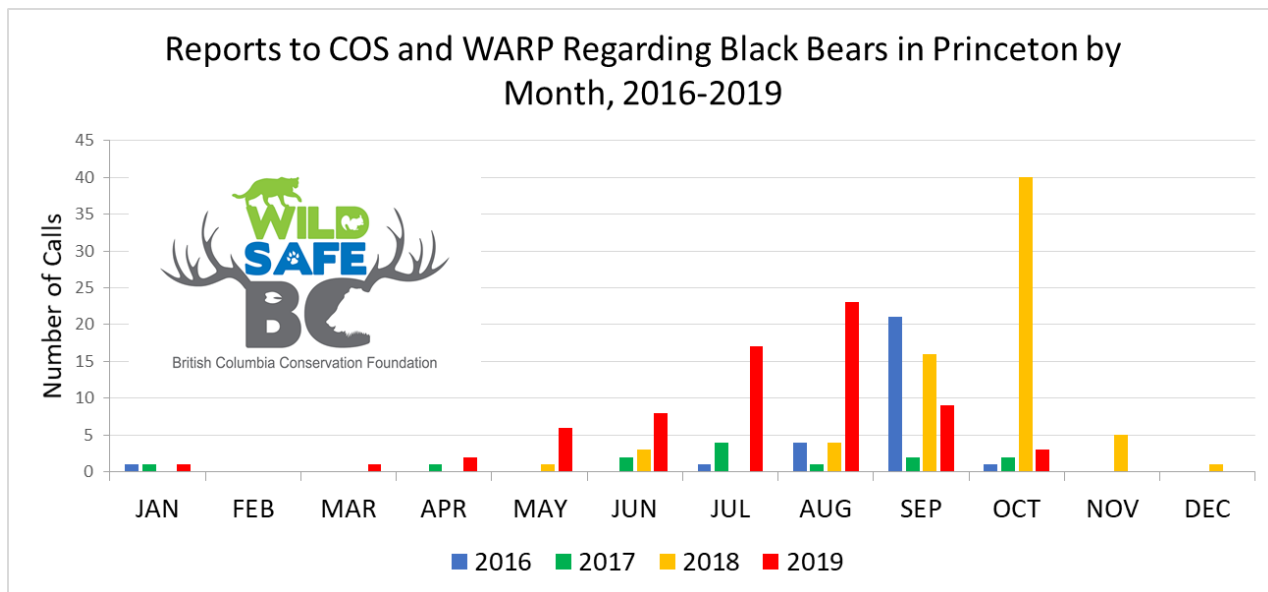


Figure 3. Reports to COS and WARP regarding black bears in Princeton by month, 2016-2019.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by other, fruit trees, pets and outdoor freezers (Figure 4).

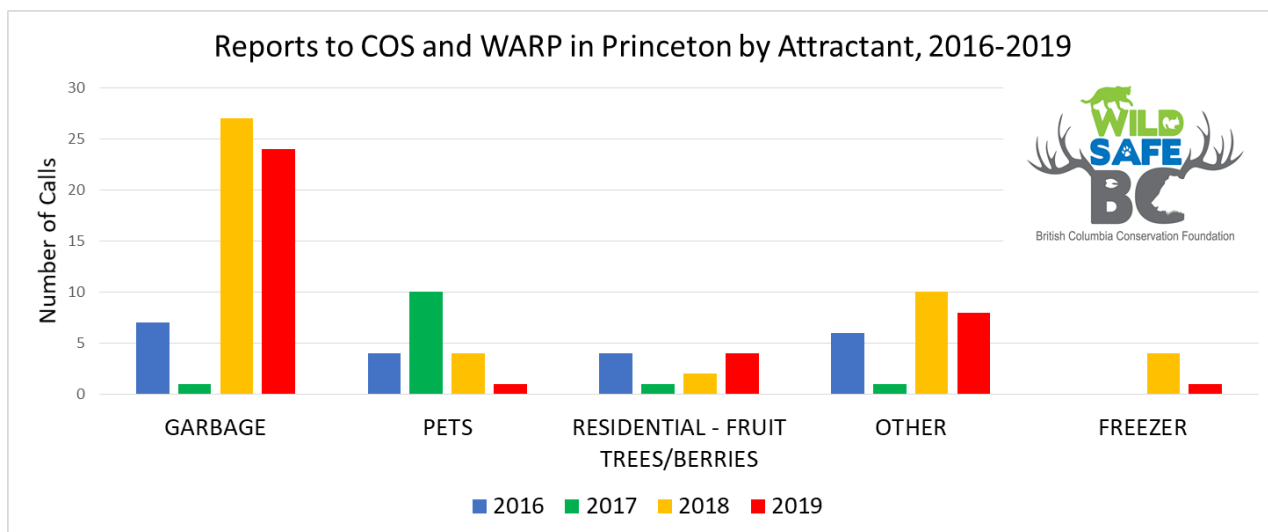


Figure 4. Reports to COS and WARP in Princeton by attractant, 2016-2019.

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to WildSafe Ranger. This is a keystone of our program. Though educational presentations, children learn about how to reduce human wildlife conflict, manage attractants, and how to react if they encounter wildlife. In 2019, 887 children and youth were provided the WildSafe Ranger Program presentation (Table 1).

Table 1. Students that received the WildSafeBC Ranger Program in 2019.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
John Allison Elementary	Assembly	180	
Vermilion Forks Elementary	Assembly	165	
Princeton Secondary School	Year End BBQ	160	
Kids Fun Zone	Elementary	50	Yes (3)
Little Seeds Daycare	Elementary	42	Yes (4)
John Allison Elementary	4, 5, 4/5	45	
Vermilion Forks Elementary	1, 2	76	
Princeton Secondary School	8, 9, 10 ,11, 12	169	

There were seven presentations given at the Town's Kids Fun Zone and Little Seeds Daycare (Figure 5,6 & 7). All 3 schools in Princeton participated with 10 presentations of the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2019. In June 2019, presentations were made in an assembly to both John Allison Elementary and Vermilion Forks Elementary where the WCC was joined by Conservation Officer Tyler Kerr to speak about animal behavior and what to do if you encounter wildlife. At the Princeton Secondary School Year End Student Appreciation Lunch BBQ, an educational display was set up and the WCC helped prepare burgers.



Figure 5. WildSafe Ranger Program games.



Figure 6. WildSafe Ranger Program extended version.



Figure 7. WildSafe Ranger Program presentation.

In the autumn, Princeton Secondary School invited WildSafeBC to present the Ranger Program during three presentations (Figure 8). The high school students showed a deeper understanding than some of the younger students and asked many thoughtful questions. Vermilion Forks Elementary had three presentations and this age group was the most interested in making a difference in the community. John Allison Elementary had two presentations with lots of interest in the wildlife props and what animals eat.



Figure 8. WildSafe Ranger Program at Princeton Secondary School.

Events and Public Displays

The WCC attended several events with an educational displays including: Otter Valley Fish and Game 60th Anniversary Family Day, Canada Day Celebrations, Show n' Shine, Princeton Traditional Music Festival, Community Markets, and Fall Fair (Figure 9). Over 615 people were reached at these events.

There were three bear spray workshops held with 45 participants (Figure 10). Participants learned how to safely deploy bear spray and how to behave if they encounter wildlife. They practiced spraying inert bear spray. The workshops received rave reviews such as:

"Straight after the fair, driving back to our land, we saw two bears and two cubs at Summers creek road, thankfully we were in our truck at the time but definitely felt better prepared after having my bear spray practice. Thank you. "



Figure 9. WildSafeBC Princeton display booth.



Figure 10. Bear spray practice.

As the season progressed, the display improved with contributions from the Town of Princeton, on-loan props from WildSafeBC RDOS, and donations from the community. At the Fall Fair, three tables were needed to display all the props at the booth. This included: two educational boards, an example bear-resistant garbage bin, pelts, skulls, antlers, brochures, magnets, stickers, and tattoos. These materials helped draw interest to the booth and educate the public about wildlife biology, safety when encountering wildlife, and how to manage attractants.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

The WCC introduced herself to 682 residents during door-to-door campaigns. She described the program's mandate and the best practices of reducing human-wildlife conflict:

1. Storing your garbage inside until the morning of collection
2. Pick fruit and berries and do not let any accumulate on the ground
3. Feed and store your pet food inside
4. Bird Seed attracts bears from the beginning of April to the end of November and year round will attract deer, rats, raccoons, squirrels and skunks
5. Clean the grease trap on your BBQ.

The WCC tagged 187 garbage cans over three different weeks. By the end of the third week, garbage cans put out the night before was reduced by 45% (Figure 11).

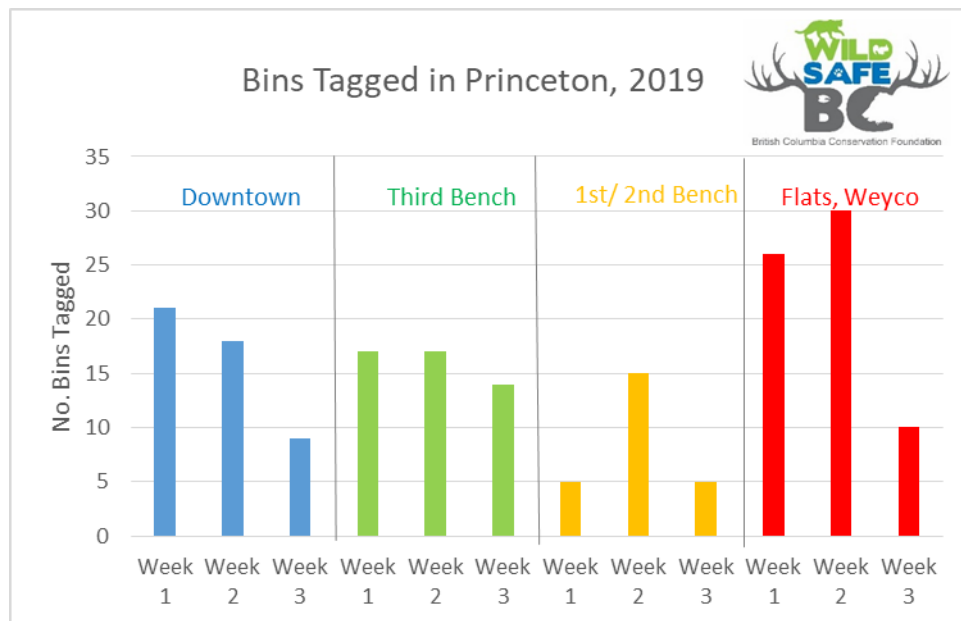


Figure 11. Bins tagged in Princeton in 2019 during the weeks of October 6, 14, and 27, 2019.

Social Media and Press

Social media engagement on the WildSafeBC Princeton Facebook page reached 11,683 people and grew 16% in likes (53 new) from January 1st to November 15, 2019. The most engaging posts included upcoming and current events around town.

Newspaper articles in the Similkameen Spotlight reached 14,400 residents bi-weekly. The articles provided information on how to manage fruit trees and a description of garbage tagging.

Wildlife in Area Signs

There were five “Mountain Biking and Bear Safety” signs were mounted in town at the bike park, municipal campground, and three spaced out on the Kettle Valley Rail Trail to increase awareness and preparedness of residents and tourists recreating around Princeton.

“Aggressive Deer in Area” and “Bear in Area” signs were placed around the community following reported wildlife activity. Hotspots for aggressive deer included behind the hospital, Billiter Ave. on second benches, Allison flats and Grant Ave. Hotspots for bear activity included the Asp Creek trail and bridge between Asp St. and Lapworth Rd., greenspace corridor between Hwy 3 and Auburn Cres., Billiter Ave. on second benches, and Allison flats.



Figure 12. Bear in area sign.



Figure 113. Mountain biking and bear safety sign.

Collaborations and Partners

The success of the WildSafeBC Princeton program would not be possible without the support it receives for collaborators and partners. In particular, WSBC Princeton continues to seek guidance and support from the COS.

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 community appreciated the opportunity to practice using bear spray and was pleased to know it could also be use on other aggressive wildlife such as deer. For more info please see 'Events and Public Displays' section.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC connected with Renee Hartwell, School District 58 Indigenous Education Coordinator, and discussed possible future collaboration. The WCC also attended a Similkameen Aboriginals presentation at the Princeton Museum and Aboriginal Day at the cenotaph.

Special Initiatives

- The Town Council saw a need for bear-resistant garbage bins in their public spaces and proposed \$36,000.00 to their 2020 budget for bear-resistant garbage bins in their public spaces.
- Princeton and District Community Services Society installed a bear-resistant storage bin
- Princeton Real Estate businesses included a WSBC Homeowner's Attractant Checklist and WSBC Black Bear brochure in each new homeowner info package.
- In collaboration with the Town, the Homeowner's Checklist was also with every property tax mail-out to residents.

Challenges and Opportunities

A challenge the Town of Princeton faces continues to be the proper storage of residential garbage. Fruit trees are another source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards which impacts the safety of the neighborhood. Several areas have been identified as hotspots in the community and would benefit from education and fruit gleaning activities.

To address the abundance of accessible garbage and fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2020:

- Work towards Bear Smart community status
- Bear spray workshops (both for bears and other aggressive mammals such as deer)
- Include businesses in WildSafeBC education (eg. WildSafe Business Pledge)
- Education campaign, building on the existing networks
- Connect residents through social media for a fruit picking/sharing group
- Increased door-to-door and garbage tagging campaigns in hotspots
- Collaborate with bylaw to improve management of garbage

Acknowledgements

The WCC is grateful for the generous support of the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the Town of Princeton. Special thanks to the following individuals for the extra time and help with the WildSafeBC program: Barb Gould -Town Council, Lyle Thomas - CAO, Carolyn Schmidt - Admin, Ed Atkinson - Bylaw, Cody Naples and Lori Thomas – Recreation, Gordon Comeau and school staff – SD#58, Tyler Kerr – COS, Zoe Kirk – WildSafeBC RDOS, Meghan Thomas & Brandon Young – Antler donations, and BCCF team. Special thanks to our volunteers (Figure 14): Maria Potter, Anna Tennant, John White, Spencer Blank and Tj Driedger.



Figure 12. WildSafeBC Volunteers who are a highly valued part of the program.