

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

## Selkirk-Purcells

Prepared by: Rosie Wijenberg,  
WildSafeBC Selkirk-Purcells Coordinator



## Executive Summary

The Selkirk-Purcells WildSafeBC (WSBC) Program covers the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) management zones A, B, C and G including the towns of Creston, Erickson, Yahk, Salmo, Ymir, Crawford Bay, Yaqaan Nukiy and surrounding areas (Figure 1). The goal of WSBC is to reduce human-wildlife conflicts in order to increase public safety and keep wildlife wild. The Selkirk-Purcells WSBC program provides education and promotes best practices to reduce human-wildlife conflict within the program area.

It was an active year for Selkirk-Purcells WSBC with a new WSBC community coordinator (WCC) arriving this year. In the spring, there was substantial activity from black bears and other wildlife. This kept the WCC busy knocking on doors and providing attractant management education in areas where conflict was highest. A relatively quiet summer was followed by an increasingly busy fall in Creston, Erickson, Crawford Bay and Salmo with reports of grizzly bear, black bear and cougar sharply increasing towards the end of October. The WCC responded with increased door-to-door education, targeted attractant reviews, and by hosting collaborative community educational events.

The WSBC Program had a strong community presence in the area this season, contacting thousands of residents through door-to-door, bin tagging, information booths, multiple articles for the Creston Valley Advance, and by actively collaborating with the local radio station Juice FM to provide both on-air and online educational content. Social media provided a powerful tool to gather knowledge of local human-wildlife conflict events and to reach out directly to community members. Youth continued to be an important audience at summer camps and elementary schools with the WildSafe Ranger Program being presented to over 600 youth in 5 communities including Creston, Erickson, Crawford Bay, Salmo, West Creston and Yaqaan Nukiy.

This season, WSBC continued to expand its messaging to include information about rat attractants for Creston and Erickson. Outreach via public events, print, radio and online resources was supplemented by a targeted door-to-door campaign in areas affected by rats, reaching over 350 households. In addition, garbage tagging in Creston and Salmo was used as a tool to educate residents with regards to garbage as a rat and bear attractant and reached over 100 households.

An additional focus this year was sources of fruit including residential fruit trees and orchards in the Creston Valley. Attractant reviews were conducted in Creston and Erickson in conjunction with the COS. Bear access to fruit trees is often seen as innocuous in the region. To address this perception, the WCC provided information to fruit tree owners on the wildlife hazards associated fruit trees. The WCC offered over 100 individuals guidance on managing this attractant, including referrals to a cost-sharing electric fencing program and professional consultation.

Hotspots for human-wildlife conflict this year were Crawford Bay, Salmo and West Creston. These areas were provided with four wildlife safety and attractant management workshops in collaboration with the COS and Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Solutions. These workshops were attended by over 50 interested residents and focused on grizzly bears, black bears and cougars, depending on the area. We also made strides to have an increased presence and awareness in areas that do not generally report wildlife conflict. Attractant reviews in Yahk, Kingsgate and Kitchener increased knowledge in these areas.

A key challenge was meeting the demand of such a large and diverse area. Attitudes, awareness and conflict issues vary widely over the region. Continued outreach and increased community presence is needed to both gather knowledge and provide better service to the differing regions. In addition, increased Indigenous awareness and outreach will be a key goal next year. We also look to increase the number of bear spray demonstrations provided.



**Figure 1. WildSafeBC Selkirk-Purcells program coverage area.**

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
Highlights from the 2019 Season .....	4
Wildlife Activity .....	4
WildSafe Ranger Program.....	5
Presentations to Community Groups .....	6
Public Displays and Events .....	6
Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging .....	8
Social Media and Press.....	9
Brochure and Signage Distribution .....	9
Collaborations .....	10
Province-wide Initiatives for 2019 .....	11
Bear Spray.....	11
Indigenous Awareness and Engagement.....	11
Special Initiatives.....	11
Challenges and Opportunities .....	11
Acknowledgements.....	13
Appendix.....	14

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 WildSafeBC Selkirk-Purcells program coverage area.....	2
Figure 2 Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2014 to November 15, 2019. ....	4
Figure 3 Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears month by month from January 1, 2014 to Nov 15, 2019.....	5
Figure 4 Reports to the COS and WARP regarding attractants from January 1, 2014 to November 15, 2019. ....	5
Figure 5 WCC with display booth .....	7
Figure 6 Garbage bin that has been accessed by a bear and tagged.....	8
Figure 7 Garbage placed on the curb the night before collection before and after education activities in Creston, BC. ....	9
Figure 8 Bear in Area sign .....	10

Cover Photo: Photo of a young bear approaching a house in Salmo provided with permission from an anonymous resident

## Highlights from the 2019 Season

### Wildlife Activity

WildSafeBC uses calls made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) as an indicator of wildlife conflict levels in an area. Calls made to the COS through the RAPP line are available to the public through WSBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and this report for the Selkirk-Purcells includes data from January 1, 2016 to Nov 15, 2019 (Figure 2). Since many people in rural areas do not report wildlife conflict to the RAPP line, it is important to note that this data may not accurately reflect human-wildlife conflict levels in an area.

There were 69 black bear reports so far this year which is slightly higher than the last 2 years but much lower than 2016 when the wild huckleberry season crashed (Figure 3). Grizzly bear activity was lower than average with 9 reports (Figure 2); however, groundwork in the area reflects a reality that grizzly-human conflict in the area is under-reported to the COS but is a major area of concern to residents of West Creston, Yaqa Nukiy, the Creston Flats and Wynndel.

Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees and compost (Figure 4). While garbage is the most reported attractant in more residential and urban areas such as Creston, Salmo and Crawford Bay; Fruit trees, livestock, livestock feed and field crops tend to be the major reported attractants in the more rural areas that make up the majority of the area. Fruit trees in general are under-reported as an attractant as people in the area tend to see bears in fruit trees as innocuous or unavoidable.

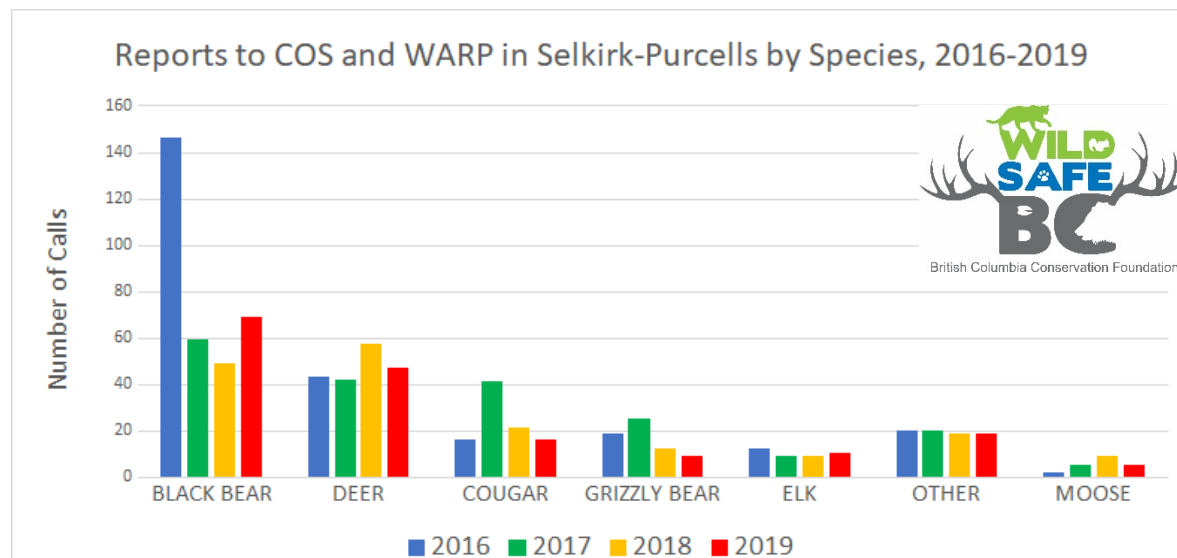
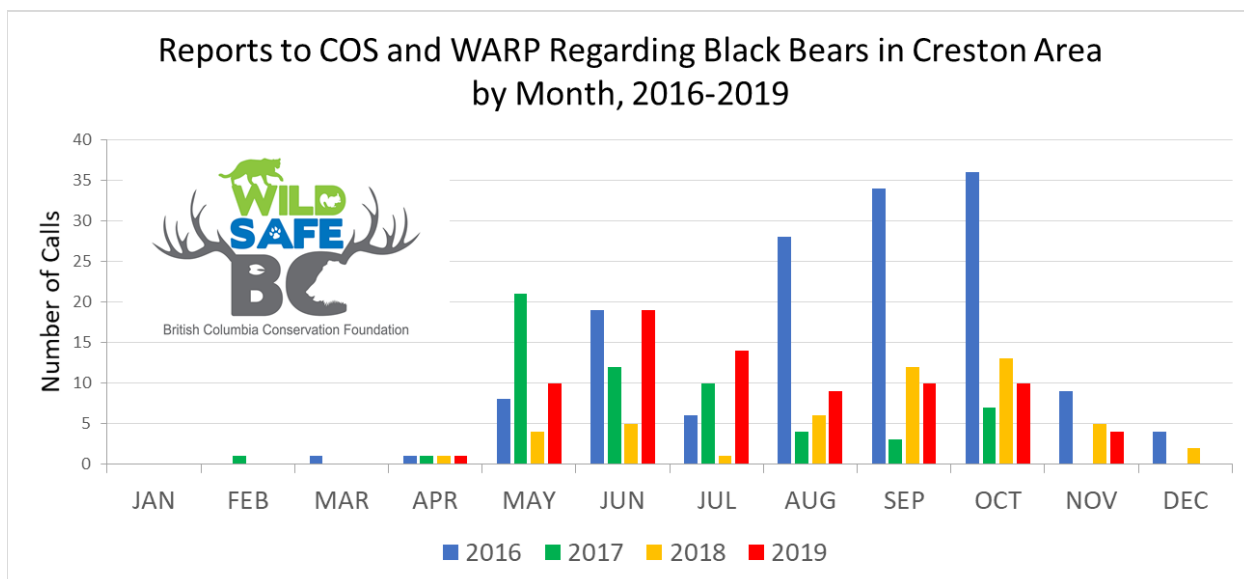
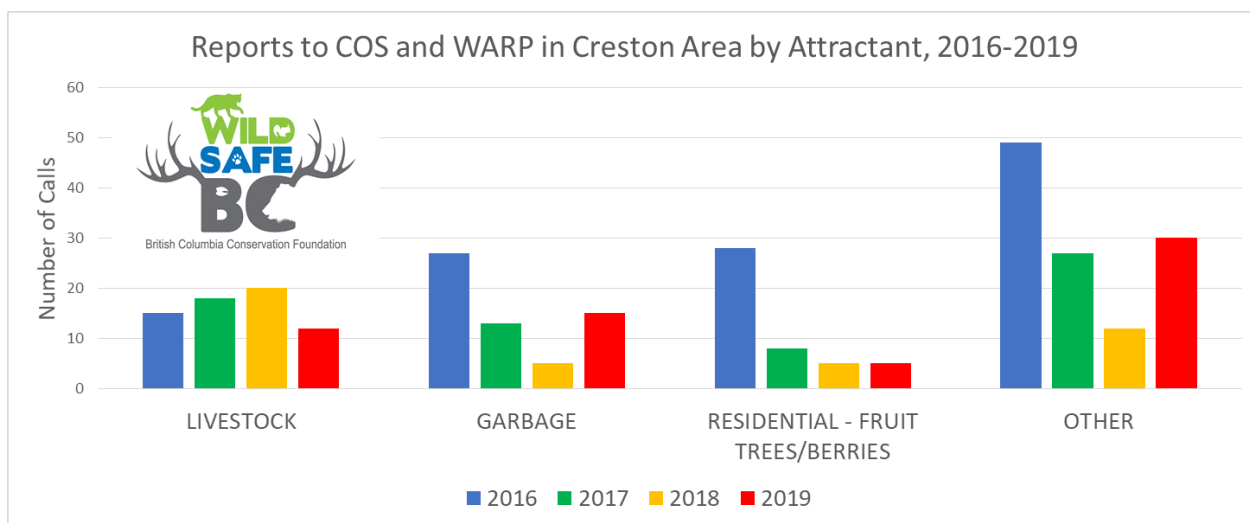


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2014 to November 15, 2019.





**Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears month by month from January 1, 2014 to Nov 15, 2019.**



**Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding attractants from January 1, 2014 to November 15, 2019.**

## WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, WSBC provided 36 presentations to schools and youth organizations over the season. The presentations focused on managing attractants for bears, cougars and rats and how to avoid dangerous encounters with bears and other predators while traveling in the wilderness.

A total of five schools and the one summer camp program participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program and over 800 students became WildSafe Rangers and 300 received WildSafe Ranger kits (Table 1).

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2019.

School	Grade	Students
Salmo	K-Grade 7	130
Erickson	K-Grade 7	195
ARES	K-Grade 7	264
Yaqaan Nikuy	K-Grade 7	115
Wilderness School	K-Grade 3	23
Creston Valley Wildlife Management Authority Camps	K-7	75

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC presented at several smaller outreach events in the summer, doing a nature walk in Ymir (10 people), a presentation and bear spray demo at the Moyie River ranch in Yahk (20 people), a wildlife attractant management workshop at the Salmo Library (6 people), and wildlife education for seniors at Crestview residential home in Creston (15 people). Kootenay Bay Ferry was a great location for education on the busy StarBelly Jam Weekend to educate visitors to the area on attractant management.

## Public Displays and Events

The WCC took part in and hosted several community events this year. These activities afforded an opportunity to network and engage with many citizens and address all manner of concerns, such as garbage and fruit management, questions of biology, to electric fencing installation and bear spray usage. This included booths at farmers' markets in Salmo and Creston for a total of 4 each (Figure 5). These important community events provided outreach to over 475 individuals and were important to show regular visibility in the communities.

Canada Day long weekend in Salmo was busy for WSBC. During the well-attended 3-day long softball tournament and campout, several bears were active in the campground and attractants were abundant. The WSBC activities that weekend included an info booth but also involved direct outreach with campers and surrounding residents to help minimize attractants during the events.

September is historically a month where human-bear conflict is at its highest. BC Goes Wild coincides with this month to bring awareness to these issues while also promoting ways we can live, work, play and grow in wildlife country. As part of WSBC provincial BC Goes Wild Events in September, WSBC hosted public information tables at the Creston Valley Fall Fair and Salmo and District Fall Fair reaching over 400 people between the two events. In addition, we hosted bear safety and electric fencing workshops in Salmo and Ymir with Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Solutions that were modestly attended by 15 enthusiastic participants.

The Creston Chamber of Commerce and WSBC shared a display booth at the Creston Valley Fall fair allowing increased visibility for both organizations with funding provided by the Chamber. The Chamber-sponsored event, the 2019 Kootenay Lake Gran Fondo bike race, was promoted alongside attractant management issues. The WCC took advantage of the bike race visibility to promote wildlife safety for bicyclists.

The WCC's final events of the season were in late October in response to increased grizzly and black bear activity in West Creston and Crawford Bay. WSBC hosted workshops in each community featuring presentations by WSBC, the COS and Grizzly Bear Solutions and offered information on bear safety, attractant management and electric fencing (50 people).



Figure 5. WCC with display booth.



## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

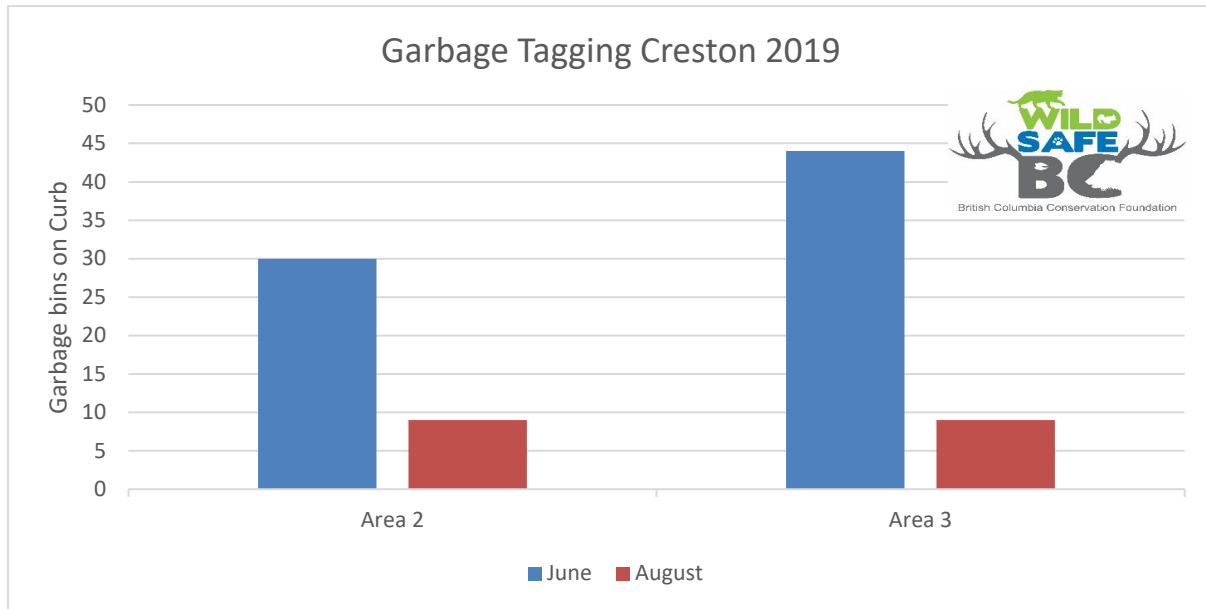
Door-to-door campaigns are one of WSBC's most important activities. It is the action often requested by the COS, to assist them with issues that are causing human-bear conflicts. The WCCs also learn more about the community at large and the community gets to know their coordinator. Unsecured garbage and unmanaged fruit trees are the most common issues discussed, but livestock/pet predation can also be a topic.

Door-to-door targeted areas impacted by rats, with bear and other human-wildlife conflict were also part of this conversation. The WCC developed a map of reported rat sightings to guide these activities. Over 350 households were contacted with most people appreciative of the knowledge. Door-to-door education focused on human-grizzly conflict in West Creston and Wynndel (35 and 20 households), fruit tree management in Erickson (80 households), and conflict hotspots in Salmo and Crawford Bay (54 and 24 households).

Bin tagging is an educational activity performed by WSBC consisting of placing highly visible, removable stickers containing educational messaging on garbage containers placed out the night before pickup (Figure 6). Containers placed out too early can attract wildlife and rats to neighbourhoods. Garbage pickup in the region only occurs in Salmo and Creston. In some areas bin-tagging is used in conjunction with attractant bylaws. Neither Salmo nor Creston have a bylaw directing residents to only place garbage out the morning of pick-up, so bin-tagging was used as an education tool only. In Creston, bin-tagging targeted Area 2 and 3 both pre- and post-education. There was a 3 to 4-fold reduction in bins left out when comparing pre- and post-education (Figure 7). Bin tagging was done in Salmo only once and only found 2 bins left out.



Figure 6. Garbage bin that has been accessed by a bear and tagged.



**Figure 7. Garbage placed on the curb the night before collection before and after education activities in Creston, BC.**

## Social Media and Press

The WCC was active on social media sites engaging residents through the Selkirk-Purcells WSBC Facebook page and through community pages for Salmo, Creston, Crawford Bay and the Kootenays in general. Social media engagement was increased through cross-posting to online forums and community pages. The most effective posts were in response to posts on community pages detailing human-wildlife conflict events and forums such as Farm the Kootenays.

The editor of the Creston Valley Advance newspaper and WSBC worked together to provide information regarding wildlife safety and attractant management to the community. The WCC submitted articles to and was interviewed by The Creston Valley Advance resulting in four articles over the 2019 season and mentions in many more. Topics included an introduction to the WSBC program, local rat population management, bear safety, and attractant management (see Appendix).

Radio station 94.1 Juice FM continued to be supportive, providing ample air-time and interviewing the WCC regularly to discuss issues such as human-wildlife conflict, local garbage tagging activities, rat attractant management, fruit trees and bears and to promote grizzly and black bear safety workshops in the area. They also published several online articles in support of the on-air content on their MyCrestonNow site (see Appendix).

## Brochure and Signage Distribution

The WSBC brochures provide biological and behavioural information about wildlife species, as well as safety information and best practices on how to avoid conflict. Brochures are distributed as part of the door-to-door campaigns and are distributed to service centers, visitor centers and

stores. Brochures were also distributed to the Town of Creston Municipal Hall, Salmo Village office, Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area, Crawford Bay Visitor Center, Creston Visitor Center, the Ymir General Store, the Riondel General Store and all borders, campgrounds and parks in the area.

The WCC distributed posters and signage in the area. Local hiking groups and campgrounds in the area were provided with posters outlining best practices around attractant management in the wild. The Village of Salmo used WSBC wildlife in area signs to alert residents of active cougars and bears in residential areas (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Bear in Area sign.

## Collaborations

The WCC worked closely with the COS in Creston, West Creston, Yahk, Erickson and Crawford Bay. Door-to-door attractant reviews were conducted in partnership with the COS seasonal wildlife conflict staff and COS officers, with over 300 contacts made. Orchards in Creston and Erickson were the focus of these reviews in order to promote electric fencing and attractant management by both residents and larger commercial operations. In Crawford Bay, commercial operations and commercial garbage collection operators were contacted in response to ongoing conflict issues in the town center. Human-grizzly bear conflict was a focus of the reviews in West Creston.

The WCC collaborated with Gillian Sanders of Grizzly Bear Solutions this year and referrals were made to Grizzly Bear Solutions for their electric fencing cost-sharing program and bear-resistant garbage bin loaner program when suitable.

This year, the WCC continued to participate in meetings of the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group. This group includes WSBC coordinators, wildlife biologists, conservation officers, local government officials and waste recovery specialists and allows them to network together to help reduce human-bear conflict. This group makes a difference in the West Kootenays by supporting towns and villages in the area to obtain Provincial Bear Smart Community status and by providing outreach and resources such as the bear-resistant garbage bins.

The WSBC Program worked with the Creston Rat Patrol to collect information and map rat sightings in Creston and Erickson. This information was used to provide targeted door-to-door education to residents.

## 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

A bear spray demonstration was conducted at the Moyie River ranch in Yahk and 20 people attended. Participants were instructed on how to safely use bear spray and what to do if they encounter wildlife.

### Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC received training about how to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples and conducted research to learn more about the local first Nations which include the Ktunaxa Nation Yakan Nukiy.

## Special Initiatives

The Village of Salmo continues to work towards Bear Smart Community status and the WCC continued to support them by providing education in the area and providing educational signage. The Village in turn supported WSBC with promotion of events and supplying printing of educational materials.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage is the most reported attractant in the Town of Creston for both rats and other wildlife. To improve garbage management, the following opportunities have been identified:

- Continued promotion or expansion of the bear-resistant bin cost-sharing and loaner program.
- Securing funding for bear-resistant bins suitable for use in residential care home and independent living facilities.
- Support the graduated introduction of bear-resistant bins into municipal and commercial spaces.
- The introduction of an attractant bylaw that would provide increased community awareness and decrease social license around not managing attractants. This would also provide a tool to increase compliance in best practices for those not as receptive to educational messaging.
- Rat populations were the number one species of concern voiced by residents of Creston and Erickson to WSBC this year. Increased education on attractant management should continue to be expanded next year with a focus on garbage.



Fruit trees and livestock continued to be a source of attractants in both residential and rural parts of the area. Following our targeted outreach in Creston and Erickson this year around fruit tree management, continued activities should include:

- Electric fence demonstrations in Creston, Erickson and Wynndel.
- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information.
- Increased referrals and cooperation with fruit-gleaning organizations.
- Engage food banks and other non-profits.
- Connect residents through a social media food sharing group.
- Continued door-to-door campaigns in hotspots.
- Focused outreach in Salmo, Ymir, West Creston, Canyon-Lister and Crawford Bay.

Grizzly bear activity in the West Creston and Creston flats area continued to be a source of human-wildlife conflict, with bears accessing field and orchard crops and anecdotally becoming increasingly bold. Long-term, innovative and collaborative solutions involving residents, farmers, biologists, government, the COS and organizations such as WSBC, will be needed in order to alleviate a serious and ongoing human-wildlife conflict.

Safety continues to be a concern of recreational users over the entire area, particularly with respect to grizzly bears. Bear spray use, although increasing in acceptance, continues to be looked at with by suspicion by many residents. Bear spray education and training should be a focus in 2020 with efforts made to work with commercial businesses and local outdoor recreational groups to promote bear spray usage.

To manage human-wildlife conflict over such a large and heterogeneous area, collaboration and cooperation are key. Our diversity can be our strength if efforts to increase connectivity between different individuals, organizations and government agencies are encouraged. Specifically:

- Continued participation and encouragement of partners to take part in the West Kootenay Bear Conflict Working Group
- Encouraging increased cooperation and communication with respect to rat population management in the Creston Valley with regards to different levels of government, commercial entities, community groups and residents
- Continued outreach through local media to spread information widely and effectively, in particular reaching out to the East Shore News next year and increasing collaboration with Creston Juice FM to possibly include regular wildlife updates

The WSBC Program will continue to collaborate with other organizations and provide public education through educational seminars, WildSafe Ranger Program presentations, and special events. The WCC is committed to supporting the city of towns of Creston and Salmo, the Regional Districts, local businesses, schools, and non-profit groups in reducing human-wildlife conflicts

## Acknowledgements

The WSBC Selkirk-Purcells program would like to acknowledge the generous support it receives from its sponsors: the Columbia Basin Trust, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the Regional District of Central Kootenay, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation and the Town of Creston.

The WSBC Selkirk-Purcells Program also values the incredible support provided by local Conservation Officers in helping direct the coordinators to problem neighborhoods, be a part of presentations and for their direct collaboration when addressing attractant issues through collaborative attractant reviews. Many thanks again to media outlets such as 94.1 Juice FM, and the Creston Valley Advance for allowing our voice to be magnified throughout the Selkirk-Purcells area. Special thanks to Gillian Sanders from Grizzly Bear Solutions for her efforts and willingness to work together for a variety of presentations and programs throughout the region. Thank you to the Village of Salmo for their support with presentations and publicity and for being actively engaged with wildlife conflict issues in their town.

The WCC would also like to thank the staff of School District 8 and CVWMA for their commitment to the WSBC education program. A big thank you to the Creston Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring our table at the Creston Fall Fair and to the Salmo Fall Fair for providing us with a free table. Also thank you to the Crestview Residential Home, Moyie River Ranch, Salmo and District Youth and Community Center, the Salmo Library and the Ymir Museum and Arts Society for providing spaces for and hosting events. Lastly thank you to Cheyenne Hofer for her great volunteer work this summer helping me bin tag in Creston.

## Appendix

Newspaper articles in the Creston Valley Advance:

<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/the-bears-are-back-in-town-and-so-is-wildsafebc/>

<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/rat-population-growing-in-the-creston-valley/>

<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/managing-fruit-trees-critical-to-avoiding-human-wildlife-conflicts/>

<https://www.crestonvalleyadvance.ca/news/grizzly-bear-presentations-coming-to-west-creston-and-crawford-bay/>

Radio station 94.1 Juice FM published several online articles in support of the on-air content on their MyCrestonNow site including:

<https://www.mycrestonnow.com/22656/how-to-stop-falling-fruit-from-attracting-pests/>,

<https://www.mycrestonnow.com/21825/wildsafe-bc-to-tag-garbage-left-out-too-early/>,

<https://www.mycrestonnow.com/22208/well-fed-rats-nesting-in-creston/>