

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Powell River and qathet Regional District

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WildSafeBC: Credit J. Couperus



Executive Summary

In its fifth consecutive year, WildSafeBC (WSBC) qathet Regional District Program (qRD)(fig. 1) has continued to grow and program recognition has increased across the community. Through social media, door-to-door public outreach, school presentations, public displays and workshops the WSBC Program is helping to create increased public understanding of the connection between attractant management and human-wildlife conflict.

Across the province, human-wildlife conflict calls into the Conservation Officer Service (COS) were well over average and the statistics for the qRD reflect this trend as well. Westview was a particularly high conflict area. Black bears remain the most reported species at 77%, followed by deer at 15%. Garbage was the top reported attractant, followed by fruit trees and then livestock. There were three grizzly bear sightings were reported in the qRD, these included a sow with three cubs near a popular trail system and a grizzly that was euthanized as a result of a conflict with a mountain biker in a remote area.

The WildSafeBC Coordinator (WCC) gave a total of 13 presentations to over 850 participants this season and attended 3 events over 7 days. This included 4 bear spray demos and 9 WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) presentations in two schools. Over 110 people were reached through door-to-door canvassing. Other outreach included the local social media WildSafeBC Facebook page which grew this season by 9% and now has 688 likes and 714 followers as of November 15, 2019. Many posts were shared and the page had an overall reach of 48,551.

New educational wildlife in area signs were created, printed and laminated courtesy of Operational Services at qRD, and placed at trailheads and a local beach. Most of the trail sign installation was conducted through Powell River Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture. The WCC worked with the local COS to identify areas with high human-wildlife conflict to target them with education, and with the Powell River Farmers' market organizer on making the BC Goes Wild Weekend a success. The WCC and WSBC Provincial Coordinator were able to collaborate with the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Powell River on the wording of the new electric fencing regulations. The new bylaw will provide increased opportunities for promoting and educating residents about the use of electric fencing. The WCC has begun collaborating with the Superintendent of Public Services for Powell River on creating a Bear Smart waste management plan.

A Bear Smart Community Working Group would benefit Powell River and qRD, connecting experts and local politicians, collaborating on education, innovation and new initiatives and working towards becoming a Bear Smart Community. A bylaw addressing the feeding of wildlife such as deer, raccoons, and raptors would also help to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Moving forward, these initiatives and collaborations will help "keep wildlife wild and our community safe".

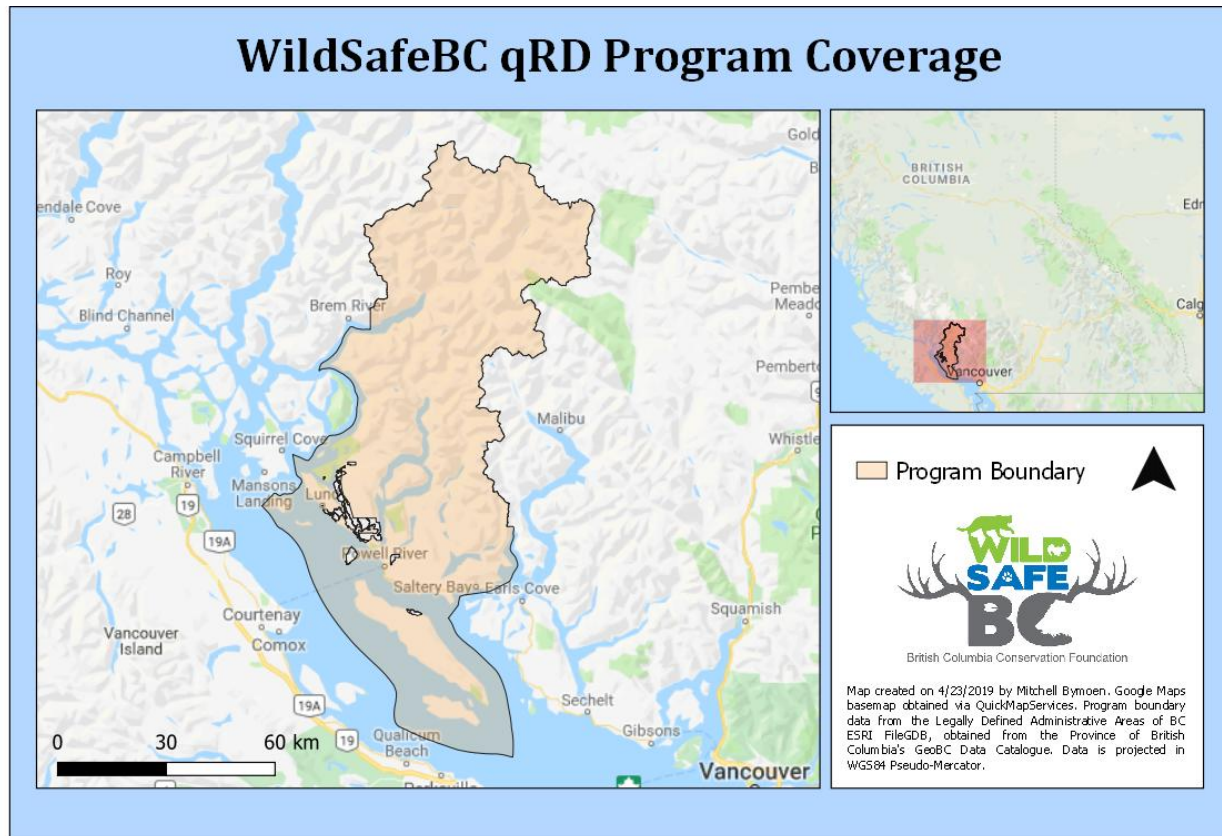


Figure 1. WildSafeBC qathet Regional District Program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: Young black bear by J. Couperus

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). The data is updated daily and this report includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 2). It is important to keep in mind that many wildlife sightings and human-wildlife conflicts go unreported and these numbers do not reflect all conflict in the community.

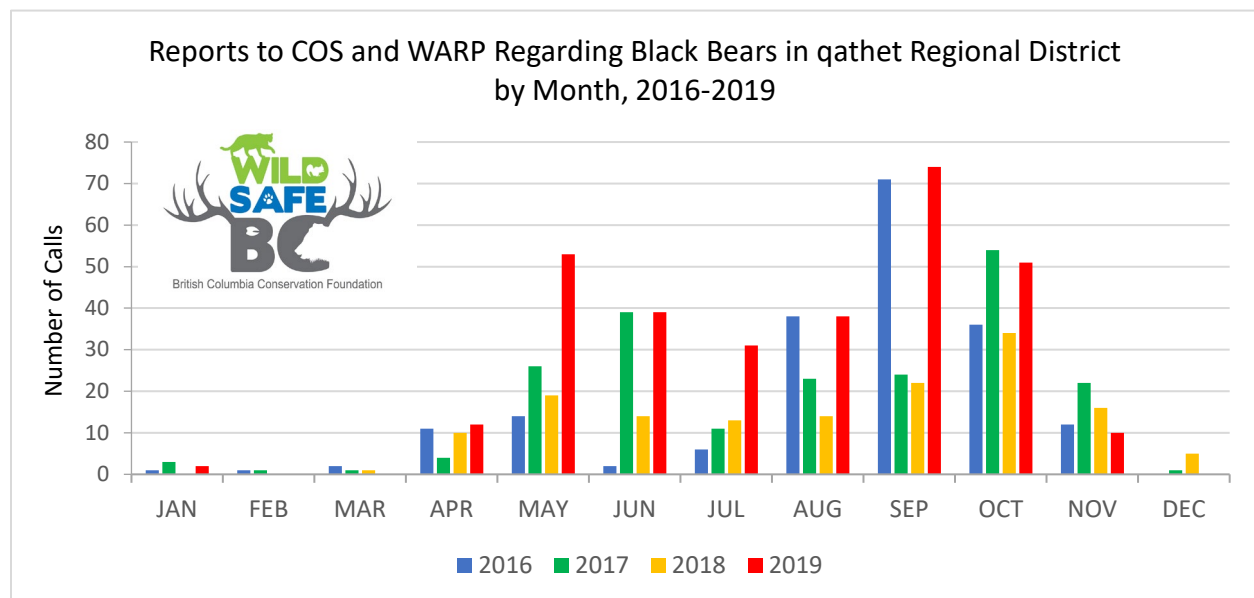


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

There were two separate incidents involving small dogs and bears in Powell River. On July 7, two off leash pets approached and were injured by a bear on Second Beach; one dog later died. The other occurred on August 7th. A bear was euthanized after an altercation and subsequent disappearance of two off leash dogs in the wooded area behind the RCMP Detachment. It is notable, that approximately 50% of attacks on humans across North America have involved dogs (Herrero and Hristienko 2014).

There were 310 black bear reports in the qRD, which is higher than the 4 year average of 215 (fig. 2). Although the berry crop in and around Powell River seemed plentiful this year, abundant anthropogenic foods may have been available as a result of widespread improper attractant management. Other factors that may contribute to increased reports are black bear population dynamics and increasing numbers of food-conditioned and human-habituated bears. A small peak in report numbers occurred in May and then a high peak in September when bears have increased caloric demands in preparation for winter denning. The number of monthly reports for 2019, except for in October, were either as high or surpassed the highest numbers from 2016 to 2018. Provincial reports also reflected a higher than average conflict year for bears.

By far the most reports, 43%, made to the COS were associated with garbage (fig. 3), the hotspot of Powell River being Westview. Through phone calls, door to door canvassing and Facebook, the WCC was made aware of garbage being dragged onto school property in Townside and several incidents in both Townside and Westview of bears breaking into sheds and garages and an enclosed porch. Public Services for Powell River is in the process of updating waste management services and intends to collaborate with WSBC in order to mitigate wildlife conflict. Residential fruit trees and berry bushes accounted for 15% of reports and 13% were regarding damage to livestock, including chickens. Powell River City Council amended the animal control bylaw on October 3, 2019 to allow electric fencing in all city zones; increased promotion of the use of electric fencing could help reduce these conflicts substantially. Eighteen percent of reports involved other attractants; residential freezers, birdseed, barbeques, pet food, livestock feed, and other agricultural items.

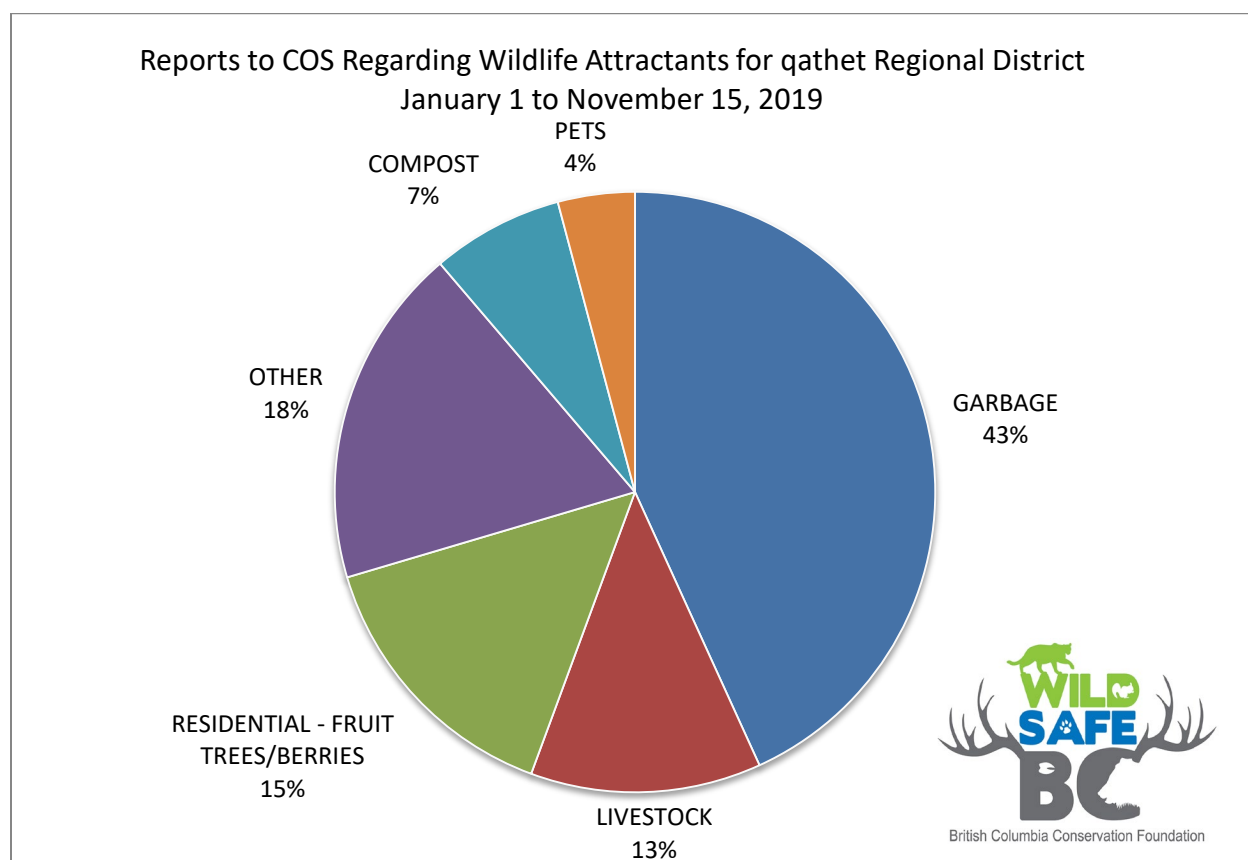


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding wildlife attractants from January 1, 2019 to November 15, 2019. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by fruit trees.

Grizzly bear activity was average with three reports (fig. 4). A sow with 3 cubs was reported near a popular trail system and a grizzly was located and euthanized as a result of a conflict with a mountain biker in a remote area. There were 59 reports of deer, which show an increasing trend since 2016 when there were 24. There were six reports of wolves in the area, the same as in 2016, however there was only one per year in 2017 and 2018. Cougar sightings were lower than average, with 14 animals reported.

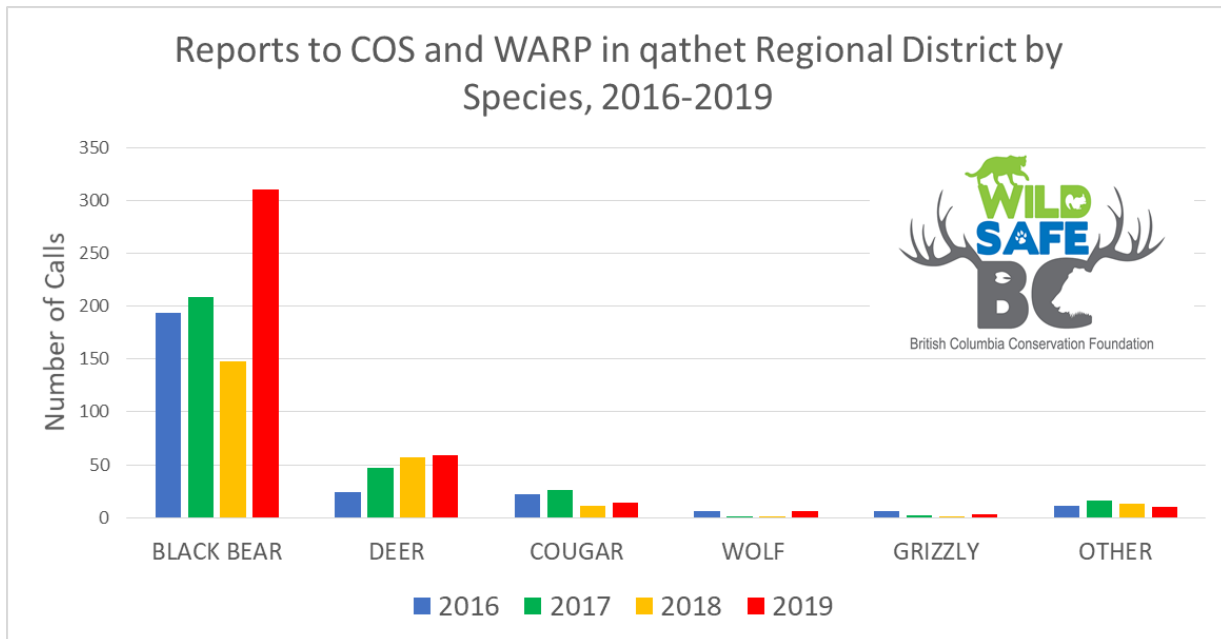


Figure 4. Species reported to the COS and WARP in qathet Regional District from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019. Black bears account for 77% of all reports (310 out of 402) in 2019.

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to the WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP). This is a keystone of our program. The WCC gave 8 WRP presentations to 2 schools and 171 students became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits (fig. 5, Table 1). Of these, 34 students received the extended version, which included two visits, an outdoor activity and a take home assignment on attractant management that was reviewed in class.



Figure 5. Children examining tracks and skulls at a school presentation.

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

School	Grade	Students	Extended
Powell River Christian School	K-3	34	No
	4-7	35	Yes
Edgehill Elementary	K-1, 1-2, 1-2, 2-3, K	100	No

Public Displays and Events

The display booth was a hit with children, residents (long-time and new), tourists and international students. People were attracted to the skulls and paw prints and stopped by to share wildlife stories, get advice on bear safety, talk about human-wildlife conflict issues and take away literature (fig. 7). The WCC attended the following events and shared information on community resources and attractant management tips.

- Powell River Farmers Market (2 days) - 140 attendees
- Powell River Blackberry Festival – 150 - attendees
- Fall Fair and BC Goes Wild Event (2 days) - 400 attendees

The BC Goes Wild Weekend display was set up during the Powell River Fall Fair. Approximately 400 people dropped by the booth that weekend. More than 70 people attended 4 twenty minute wildlife safety/bear spray demos. Children could chose a mask from the 3 species of North American bears to colour and assemble and then measured themselves up to a large as life bear size chart (fig. 6).



Figure 6. Children with bear masks



Figure 7. Booth display

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door canvassing was targeted in high conflict areas and often as a response to the COS suggestions. Few residents in Powell River use trash bins and predominantly use plastic bags. The qathet Regional District does not have a garbage bylaw that sets “Bear Smart” guidelines for waste storage or set out times. However, a more efficient and wildlife-friendly waste management strategy, including the possible use of bear resistant bins and the possibility of a waste management bylaw, have been discussed. During door-to-door surveys, the WCC found recycling and/or garbage on the porch or near the house, or was told that they had recently witnessed a bear getting into neighbourhood garbage by 16% of the occupants. Of all residents interviewed, 12% admitted that a bear had previously accessed their own garbage. There were several instances of garbage bags being shredded and dragged away by bears. During door-to-door as well as the night survey, several compost totes were sighted in plain view. These can create conflict issues when filled with food items. The WCC was able to speak to most of these residents and to help them mitigate these issues. A local retail outlet was storing a sizable amount of used frying oil containers on the property. The WCC spoke to the manager and a few days later they were taken away and are now being stored more securely and temporarily until removed.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC qathet Regional District Facebook page grew 9% in 2019 from 631 to 688 page likes, 714 followers and had an overall reach of 48,551 from January 1 to November 15, 2019. The posts with the greatest reach and engagement tended to be ‘wildlife in area’ alerts, a grizzly sow with cubs, cougar sightings, as well as black bear reports, especially in Westview (Addendum, Table 2). The post on pumpkins was popular perhaps because many people were not aware that they are attractants. The post with tips on managing compost was also popular.

The WCC submitted press releases and news articles to numerous local media including radio, print and online news and was interviewed several times. Articles on attractant management appeared in both the Powell River Peak and My Powell River Now online news (Addendum, Table 3). The Powell River Peak included the WCC’s comments in an article about the use of Karelian Bear Dogs as a tool in bear management, and Powell River Living Magazine featured an article on dogs and bears in their September issue.

Wildlife in Area Signs

Several 'Bear in Area' signs were installed in areas of high conflict. Of note, a resident requested a sign and installed it on her block and another was placed on a school ground where two piles of garbage had been dragged by a bear. WildSafeBC created two caution signs (fig. 8, fig. 9) and they were printed and laminated courtesy of Operational Services, qathet Regional District. There were three 'Caution do not discard compost, fish or meat on beach' signs installed in an area of new bear sightings, where it was known that residents had been feeding eagles with unwanted meat. Two of the signs were removed, in the specific area where it was known residents were depositing attractants, within a few days. There were 10 "bear in area" signs were given to Powell River Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture who posted them on the Millennium Trail System. Also, five "bear in area" signs were placed on Wildwood area trails where residents frequently encountered bears this season.



Figure 8. Caution sign placed on beach.



Figure 9. Bear in Area sign placed on Millennium Park trail system and several local trail heads.

Collaborations

The WCC collaborated with the local COS to identify properties and neighbourhoods with high human-wildlife conflict. Outreach was done through phone conversations, door-to-door education and Facebook. The WCC also worked with the Powell River Farmers' Market organizer to secure an appropriate location for the displays and promote events.

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

During the season, the WCC spoke to many community members about wildlife safety, promoting the use of bear spray, and giving instructions on proper use. In addition, during the BC Goes Wild Weekend, more than 70 people attended 4 bear spray demos that lasted approximately 20 minutes each. They were also directed to the WSBC website to review the information and watch the instructional video. Participants were enthusiastic about learning and many stayed behind to ask more questions and inquire where to purchase bear spray locally.

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 Tla'amin Nation.

Special Initiatives

As a result of the efforts of the previous WCC, Powell River Council proposed an amendment to the animal control bylaw to allow electric fencing in all city zones. The past and present WCCs attended the public hearing with further suggestions. When it passed on October 3, 2019, WSBC was able to collaborate with the City of Powell River Deputy Chief Administrative Officer on the wording of the fence regulations. The new bylaw will facilitate promoting the use of electric fencing in the city and help reduce conflicts with fruit trees and small urban farms.

The recent adoption of the Powell River electric fencing bylaw provides increased opportunities for promoting and educating residents about the use of electric fencing. Fruit trees continue to be one of the top attractants that draw wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences, lingering in nearby green spaces and in people's yards, impacting the safety of neighbourhoods.

The WCC met with the Superintendent of Public Services for Powell River to discuss waste management issues, including the effectiveness and issues with the green totes provided through the Community Organics Recovery Exchange (C.O.R.E.). The green totes are problematic because many dispose of food waste in them and then store them outdoors because of the odour. According to the Superintendent of Public Services for Powell River, several have been returned for these reasons. The city is in the process of updating waste management services and intends to collaborate with WSBC in order to mitigate human-wildlife

conflict. This includes providing input on the use and distribution of bear-resistant bins, new bylaws and attending waste management outreach displays.

Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage bags, even when put out on the curb on the morning of pick-up, are vulnerable to bears, raptors, raccoons, rats and other wildlife until they are collected, often hours later.

Initiatives to consider for next year include:

- Improvements to the waste management system including the introduction of bear-resistant garbage bins
- Updating attractant management bylaws to require the safe storage of garbage, compost and recycling between collection days
 - All waste, compost and recycling to be put out on curb no earlier than 5:30 am on collection day
 - Secured lids on compost, waste and recycling
- Collaborative public education forums could be held on new initiatives and bylaws
- Although there is provincial legislation against feeding dangerous wildlife (bears, coyotes, cougars, wolves) a bylaw addressing the feeding of wildlife such as deer, raccoons and raptors would also help to reduce human-wildlife conflict
- A Bear Smart Community Working Group would benefit Powell River and qRD connecting experts and local politicians, collaborating on education, innovation and new initiatives and working towards becoming a Bear Smart Community

To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2019:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Education campaign focusing on hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information
- Promote and facilitate fruit gleaning
 - Engage food banks and other non-profits
 - Connect residents through social media food sharing group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

Acknowledgements

The WildSafeBC program would not be possible without funding from the qRD, the City of Powell River through the Powell River Community Forest, and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

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Thanks to qRD Manager of Operational Services Patrick Devereaux for his ongoing support and advice as well as Parks and Property Supervisor Regan Keil; Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture Ray Boogaards. Many thanks to Powell River City Council for implementing the new electric fencing bylaw, and special mention to City of Powell River Senior City Planner Daniella Fergusson, and Councilors Rob Southcott and Chris Jackson for their efforts, insights and support in the process. Thanks also to Superintendent of Public Services Murray Steer for his efforts towards creating a Bear Smart waste management plan.

Thank you to Francine Ulmer, former WCC, and CO Andrew Anaka and Gerry Lister for their invaluable insight into local attractant management issues. Thanks to Mike Badry from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy for the information and support in working toward promoting the Bear Smart Community Program.

References

Herrero, S. and Hristienko, H. 2014. Are dogs “saviours” or are they contributing factors in black bear attacks on people? International Bear News, vol. 23 no. 1.

Addendum

Table 2. Top Facebook posts with reaches and engagements on the WildSafeBC qathet Regional District page.

Date	Post	Area	Reach	Engagement
09/06/2019	GRIZZLY SOW AND THREE CUBS	Duck Lake - Deighton Road	16,982	5,239
10/08/2019	BEARS IN AREA	Westview	2,765	843
10/01/2019	COUGAR SIGHTING and safety tips	Wildwood	1,316	273
10/22/2019	BEARS ARE STILL VERY ACTIVE	Powell River	858	252
10/11/2019	TRICK OR TREAT Pumpkins as bear attractants	general	828	141
08/01/2019	BLACK BEAR	Townsite	649	100
09/04/2019	MANAGING COMPOST	general	595	69

Table 3. Articles in Powell River print and online media for the 2019 season included articles on attractant management; they appeared in both the Powell River Peak and My Powell River Now online news.

Media Articles	
Powell River Peak July 31, 2019	https://www.prpeak.com/community/wildsafebc-coordinator-educates-public-on-bear-safety-in-powell-river-area-1.23902308
My Powell River Now August 5, 2019	https://www.mypowellrivernow.com/24276/qathet-regional-district-welcomes-new-wildsafe-bc-coordinator/
Powell River Peak August 15, 2019	https://www.prpeak.com/community/us-program-has-success-relocating-conflict-animals-with-dogs-1.23916873
Powell River Living pg. 20, September 2019	https://issuu.com/powellriverliving/docs/1909_september_2019