

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019 Bella Coola Valley

Prepared by: Fraser Koroluk, WildSafeBC Electric Fence Contractor



Vancity
Community Foundation



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC program aims to reduce human-wildlife conflict throughout British Columbia. The program was partially delivered to communities of the Bella Coola Valley in 2019 by WildSafeBC Electric Fence Contractor Fraser Koroluk, in cooperation with the Conservation Officers Service (COS), BC Parks and the Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department.

Unlike previous years (2014 to 2018), in 2019 there was not a designated WSBC Community Coordinator (WCC) as the position was not filled. As Electric Fence Contractor, F. Koroluk primarily filled needs identified by the community or COS to reduce bear access to attractants at areas of potential human-wildlife conflict through deployment of electric fences.

Chum salmon were relatively abundant in rivers of the lower Bella Coola Valley in early-mid summer of 2019, however it was a well-below average for pink salmon returns to the Bella Coola River watershed. Early and mid-summer conflicts of bears accessing fruit and other attractants were noted by the COS (RAPP). Similarly after salmon spawning was complete mid to late September there was another increase in reported conflict with bears and attractants.

Similar to 2018, in 2019 bears in Bella Coola Valley were reported accessing poultry, fish from smoke houses, fruits, gardens, garbage, pet food, compost, and food within closed buildings/freezers. It appears 2018 and 2019 have had higher than historic reports and incidences of human-bear conflict related to human attractants. There were fewer natural mountain ash berries noted in 2019 than 2018, and reports of bears eating those berries in inhabited areas was less than 2018.

The WildSafeBC Electric Fence Contractor continued to work closely with the local COS and visiting Conservation Officers from other regions. The Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee continued to meet in 2019 to move forward on initiatives of reducing human-bear conflict and increasing human safety in the community. The Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) began attending these meetings and this was a positive step forward in addressing local attractant management.

This annual report summarizes the activities, successes and challenges of the reduced WSBC program in 2019. This report also provides recommendations for future Community Coordinator initiatives that stem from this year's experiences.

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Introduction

Bella Coola Valley is a low-to-moderately populated coastal valley including three unincorporated communities: Bella Coola, Hagensborg and Firvale. Residents are spread throughout these communities in low density with abundant wilderness and natural landscape between populated areas. Bella Coola Valley is within the Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) and Traditional First Nations territories, including the Nuxalk Nation. There are no incorporated towns within the CCRD, and therefore, there is little or no bylaw or municipal governance/enforcement within Bella Coola Valley. In 2018 a permanent Conservation Officer (CO) was positioned in Bella Coola for the first time in 11 years. Before this the nearest permanently staffed Conservation Officer Service (COS) office was in Williams Lake, approximately 450 kilometers east. Within the BC Parks staff, there is also an auxiliary Conservation Officer. Grizzly bears, black bears and cougars are the predominant species concerning human safety within the Bella Coola Valley. There is also a Human–Bear Safety Committee consisting of a variety of governing and resource agencies to deal with human-wildlife conflict and safety, in particular, bear issues. Appendix 1 presents representative photographs of the 2019 season.

Wildlife Activity

The majority of call calls to the Conservation Officer Service are regarding black and grizzly bears in the Bella Coola Valley and these are reflected in WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP)(Fig. 1). In 2019 there were 155 calls regarding bears compared to 135 the previous year. Of these calls, 111 were in Bella Coola. The peak levels of calls were from mid-July to mid-August and the COS responded by adding additional staff resources. Unmanaged attractants that lead to food-conditioning included pet food left on porches, unprocessed fish, cherries in the spring and then apples in the fall. When fruit trees began to wane, bears turned to other food sources such as garbage. Conflict escalated as bears also began breaking into structures that contained potential food sources such as freezers. As a result of these high levels of conflict and the threat to personal safety, 10 grizzly bears were destroyed in the valley and 2 black bears. Two grizzly bear cubs were also found dead alongside the road near the landfill, likely hit by a passing vehicle. Also, two tourists were charged for feeding bears. The COS reports that 11 bears were hazed and 6 grizzly bears and 1 black bear were relocated a short distance for bears that met certain criteria. Relocation is only a temporary solution as food-conditioned bears often return to known food sources. Long distance relocation is rarely used as they often result in poor outcomes for the animal.

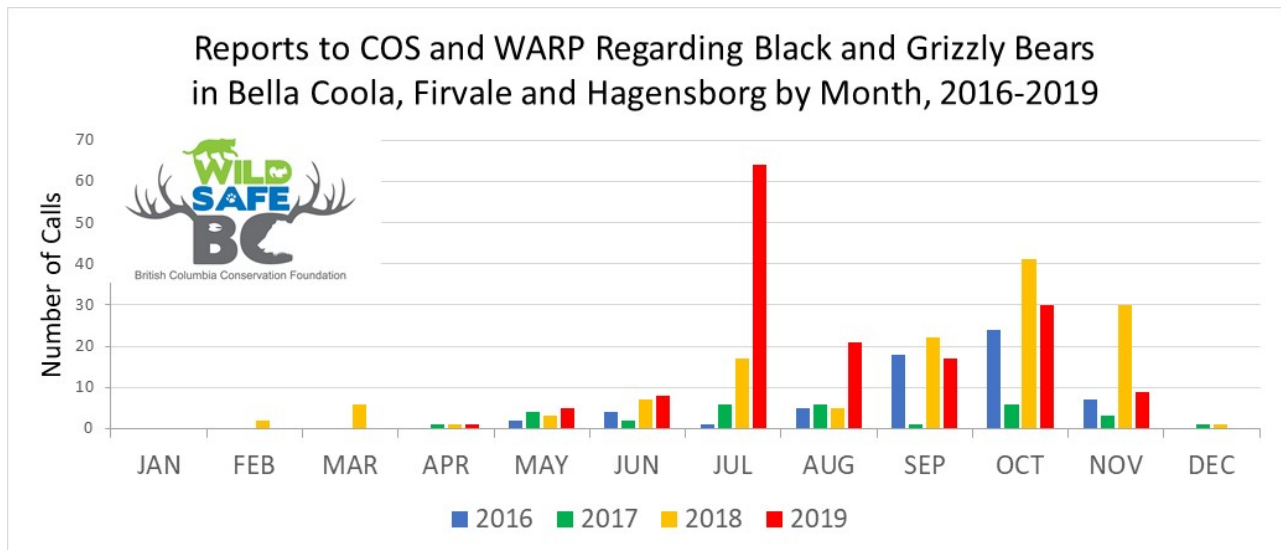


Figure 1. Reports to the Conservation Officer Service RAPP line and WARP regarding black bears and grizzly bears in the Bella Coola Valley from Firvale to Bella Coola from January 1, 2016 to November 30, 2019.

Highlights of the Program

Interaction & Involvement with Conservation Officer Service & BC Parks

Although in a limited capacity, the Electric Fence Contractor for WildSafeBC has continued to provide field support to COS members in aspects of attractant management, door-to-door canvassing and interviews with residents, and general community outreach. The main focus of this Electric Fence Contract position was electric fence installation. Owing to the unique nature of the COS/BC Parks interrelatedness in Bella Coola, the Contractor has developed a strong working relationship with BC Parks staff as well as COS and often responded directly from information gathered from COS or at their request.

Community Meetings & School Presentations

Presentations and meetings were held with various community associations and government representatives/organizations in 2019. The focus of these meetings was predominantly wildlife deterrence related to grizzly bears. Meetings held during 2019 included:

- Bella Coola Valley Human-Bear Safety Committee (May and Sept), continued to work with founding agencies to review annual progress of activities and disseminate information to the community (including Nuxalk First Nation, Ministry of Environment and Climate

Change Strategy, COS, Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and RCMP).

- Conservation Officer Service (field visits and meetings) reviewed specific regional areas and properties to effect attractant management and promote and install electric fencing.
- Central Coast Regional District (CCRD) general strategy meeting with Nuxalk Nation, COS, and CCRD staff to seek funding and wildlife management support from Provincial Government.
- Commercial Bear Viewing Association (CBVA) discussion of access to funding from the organization's user fees.

Partnership with Nuxalk Stewardship Department

The WildSafeBC Electric Fence Contactor maintained a working partnership with the Nuxalk First Nation Stewardship Department in 2019, including sharing information and equipment.

School presentations were not undertaken in the 2019 season in Bella Coola.

Bear Aware & Attractant Reviews

The Electric Fence Coordinator visited numerous properties throughout Bella Coola Valley to discuss site-specific attractant management strategies to reduce human-wildlife conflict. Visits included: private residences, commercial campgrounds, and, agricultural holdings/farms.

Where wildlife attractants were observed, management solutions were discussed including complete attractant removal, attractant management (i.e., fruit picking), or electric fencing. In many instances these were in response to requests from the COS to review attractants at properties owing to calls received on the RAPP line regarding grizzly and black bears.

Electric Fencing

Electric fence materials and supplies owned by WildSafeBC were again loaned to community members as needed in 2019. Materials available included four portable electric fence kits, 18 additional fence chargers and numerous fence stakes and appropriate fence wire.

Since 2014, WSBC had been assisting with temporary loaner or permanent electric fence solutions. Many of these sites use a loaner fence or have purchased their own fence components. In total, there are approximately 33 existing electric fences that the Electric Fence Contractor has been involved with, including installation of new fence components at 21 new sites in 2019, including:

- 1 storage shed or workshop containing attractants;
- 11 fruit trees/orchards;
- 1 chicken coop
- 4 Mixed Compost/Garbage/Pet; and
- 4 smoke houses.

In addition to these temporary or ongoing seasonal fence installations, the Electric Fence Contractor offered support through loaning materials which were then replaced by the land owner at two locations. As well, the Electric Fence Contractor assisted with maintenance of existing fences installed in 2014 through 2018. A spreadsheet is attached as Appendix 2 showing total approximate fence locations and their nature in Bella Coola Valley offered by WSBC

Five new chargers, various wire and insulators and miscellaneous fence equipment were purchased with project funds in 2019 to replace and bolster the inventory supply of fence material available for loan within the program. In 2018-2019, local merchants agreed to supply appropriate electric fence materials at their retail outlets, ensuring locally available components for WildSafeBC and community members.

Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee

The Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee met five times in 2019 with representatives from Nuxalk Nation, BC Parks, COS, Bella Coola Tourism, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Central Coast Regional District, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agricultural Society, Ministry of Forest, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, WildSafeBC and other stakeholders. In late November, this group gathered to review the challenges of the past season and make recommendations on actions moving forward.

It was reinforced that education and strategies around reducing the number of bears accessing unnatural food sources would make a significant impact on reducing human-bear conflicts in the valley. The group discussed opportunities to pursue, many of which are contingent on securing funding. These included:

- Hiring a WildSafeBC Bella Coola Coordinator
- Producing a Bear Hazard Assessment and Human Bear Conflict Management Plan
- Increased capacity for supporting more electric fencing in the valley
- Increased capacity for assisting people with fruit tree pruning to make them more manageable and improve the harvest
- Increased education to visitors to the valley
- Increase the number of bear-resistant containers in Bella Coola
- Finding ways to manage meat and fish carcasses in a bear-proof manner
- Applying for grants that support the work described above
- Continued collaboration and communication amongst members of the Committee and others interested in reducing human-bear conflicts

Challenges

Through recent observations by Mr. Koroluk in his roles with WSBC (2014 to 2019) as WildSafeBC Community Coordinator and Electric Fence Contractor, it appears bears are becoming more aware and often avoiding those sites with continuous, or otherwise regular electric

fence presence. However, it is also noted that bears are finding other attractants to access, including commercial garbage dumpsters, sheds/outbuildings with deep freezers, vehicles with food or refuse in them and other attractants in close proximity to human residences. These include domestic pet foods on porches' or outbuildings, domestic garbage, BBQ's, beverage containers/recycling etc. Animal attraction to these types of attractants was not notable in past years (e.g., 2014 to 2017), with 2018 and 2019 having the highest numbers of incidents of these types of attractants presenting a food reward to bears, particularly grizzly bears. It is undetermined whether this is due to increased activity by animals or more reporting of these occurrences owing to COS presence in the Bella Coola Valley (since 2018), however this is a notable change from past years activity.

The primary challenge to the WildSafeBC program is recruiting a dedicated individual to fill the WildSafeBC role as Community Coordinator. In addition to this, limited regional tax base restricts the Regional District (CCRD) from having sufficient funds to support the WildSafeBC program.

As well, there remains considerable confusion of the citizens' responsibility under the *BC Wildlife Act* regarding attractants on private property, including areas of Nuxalk Nation administration on the Town Site and Four Mile Subdivisions. Neither governing organization has established bylaws, nor is there bylaw enforcement within their jurisdictions, therefore there is little past experience with residents regarding rural wildlife conflict and responsibilities typical of an established community elsewhere in BC.

Addition of a permanent COS member in 2018 helped identify potential high human-bear conflict areas through shared information reported to them by residents. This was where most requests for electric fences were identified in late 2018 and throughout 2019.

Other challenges included long-established orchards and gardens that have fallen partially into decay and may not be harvested promptly or at all, providing well established and known food sources for multiple generations of bears, making the habit of accessing these attractants by bears very difficult to break. Also, the CCRD Land Fill and Recycle Center is only open two days each week, resulting in some residents with limited transportation means, not being able to access it when their waste and refuse accumulates.

Goals for the 2020 Program

The following is a list of recommendations for WildSafeBC initiatives within Bella Coola Valley for future years:

- Recruit and retain a dedicated WildSafeBC Bella Coola Coordinator
- Expand rural landowner knowledge of bear attractants and responsibility to manage attractants.
- Increase interest and understanding of importance to report wildlife conflicts to the Conservation Officer Service RAPP line and continue to foster a strong working relationship with the COS.

- Strengthen the established partnership with Nuxalk Nation Stewardship Department to achieve buy-in from all valley residents regarding WildSafeBC program initiatives.
- Support and/or work on a Bear Hazard Assessment and Bear Conflict Management Plan
- Continue with predator-exclusion electric fencing workshops and/or bear spray training days.
- Identifying electric fencing needs (materials and support) and work with the community, stakeholders and other funding partners in long-term solutions to increase wide spread acceptance and use.
- Collaborate with other groups such as the Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agricultural Society Board in reducing access by bears to fruit and other crops
- Work collaboratively with Tourism Bella Coola on messaging tailored to visitors of the valley.
- Provide WildSafe Ranger presentations in the schools
- Increase education outreach through local news articles, radio interviews, community booths, presentations and social media.
- Continue participation in the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety committee.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Ministry of Forests Lands Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Bella Coola Heli Sports, and The Sawicki/Runka Sustainable Environment Fund at Vancity Community Foundation for funding the program this year.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the COS and BC Parks (Hagensborg Field Office) for assistance and cooperation in project delivery and information sharing allowing WildSafeBC to provide electric fence components to interested local landowners. As well, thanks to all volunteers that helped where they could on various projects in Bella Coola.

Special thanks to all members of the Bella Coola Human-Bear Safety Committee for ongoing dialogue, in particular the Nuxalk Stewardship Department, for their ongoing support to these objectives.

Appendix 1: Photographs

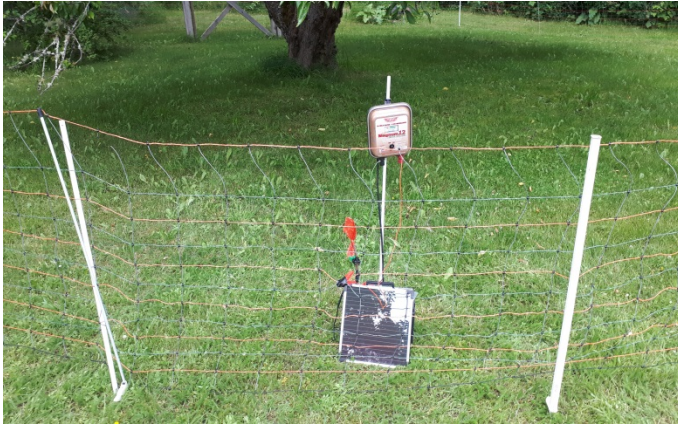


Photo 1: Temporary seasonal electric fence around fruit trees (plastic stakes and solar 12v energizer)



Photo 2: Semi-permanent electric fence around entrance and working area of smoke house (steel stakes and 110v energizer).



Photo 3: damage done to an unprotected fruit tree prior to electric fence installation.



Photo 4: Grizzly sow and cub in their natural environment of the local rivers.

Appendix 2: Electric Fence Sites Monitored in 2019

2019 Activity to date					
Site	Date Installed	New/Existing	Location	Attractant Type	Fence Description
1	11-Jun-19	New	Firvale	Orchard	New Temporary Fence Around Fruit trees
2	21-Jun-19	existing	Firvale	Garden	Property owner own charger, lender stakes and wire supplied
3	16-Jul-19	existing	Nusatsum	Garden/trees/fish	Property owner owns stakes, wire, loaner charger supplied
4	09-Jun-19	existing	Nusatsum	Fruit trees	Re established previously installed fence built by WildsafeBC 2017
5	10-Jun-19	new	Nusatsum	Garden	new fence around garden and blue berries
6	25-Jul-19	new	Nusatsum	Dog food-garbage	new fence attached to home at entrance/pourch
7	11-Jun-19	existing	Nusatsum	orchard	maintenance to existin permanent fence built by WSBC 2016
8	15-Jul-19	existing	Nusatsum	chickens	previously supplied permanent built 2016, owner now has charger
9	15-Jul-19	existing	Nusatsum	Variety	existing fence installed by previous owner, assisted with connection
10	10-Jul-19	existing	Hagensborg	Garden	trouble shoot and replace the charger with a loaner
11	01-Jul-19	new	Hagensborg	fruit trees	Temporary fence around cherry trees (removed)
12	12-Jun-19	existing	nusatsum	gargen	Replaces undersized charger and added stakes and strands to fence
13	12-Jun-19	new	hagensborg	cherry tree	Temporary fence around cherry trees (removed)
14	12-Jun-19	new	Snootli	cherry trees	Temporary fence around cherry trees (removed)
15	03-Jul-19	new	Grant Road	fruit trees	Temporary fence around mixed fruit trees
16	03-Jul-19	existing	Hagensborg	Pop Cans/ Freezer	Tempoary fence re-installed around enclosed pourch
17	05-Jul	new	Bella Coola	Cherries	Temporary fence around cherry trees (removed)
18	07-Jul-19	new	Grant Road	fruit trees	Additional Fence - Temporary fence around mixed fruit trees
19	10-Jul-19	new	Hagensborg	Fruit trees	install 2 fences around distinct fruit tree clusters
20	09-Jul-19	existing	Four Mile	Fruit Trees	lent charger to replace broken unit on existing fence built by owner
21	19-Jul-19	new	Hagensborg	apple trees	replace temporary fence around apples after cherries finished
22	10-Jul-19	new	Bella Coola	Smoke House	new fence around smoke house
23	25-Jul-19	new	four Mile	Smoke House	new fence around smoke house
24	25-Jul-19	existing	Grant Road	Gargden/orchard	Established semi-permentant fence (2017) revisit
25	25-Jul-19	existitng	Hagensborg	Orchard	Established semi-permanent fence (2016) no charger at this moment
26	20-Jun-19	existing	hagensborg	garden/fruit trees	Give advice and loan 25 insulators on owner-build fence
27	05-Aug-19	new	Nusatsum	Pourch/Fruit trees	installed fence around entrance porch & another around apple trees
28	12-Aug-19	new	Four mile	Smoke House	installed partial temporary fence around fron entrance and work area
29	12-Aug-19	new	Nusatsum	Fruit trees	Enclosed 3 fruit trees at COS request
30	09-Oct-19	new	Four mile	Smoke House	installed partial temporary fence around fron entrance and work area
31	12-Oct-19	new	Nusatsum	Barn/chicken feed	additional fence at entrance area of barn to dissuade bears. Temporary
32	10-Oct-19	new	Hagensborg	Chickens	Bear in chicken coop - e- fenced perimeter with temporary fence