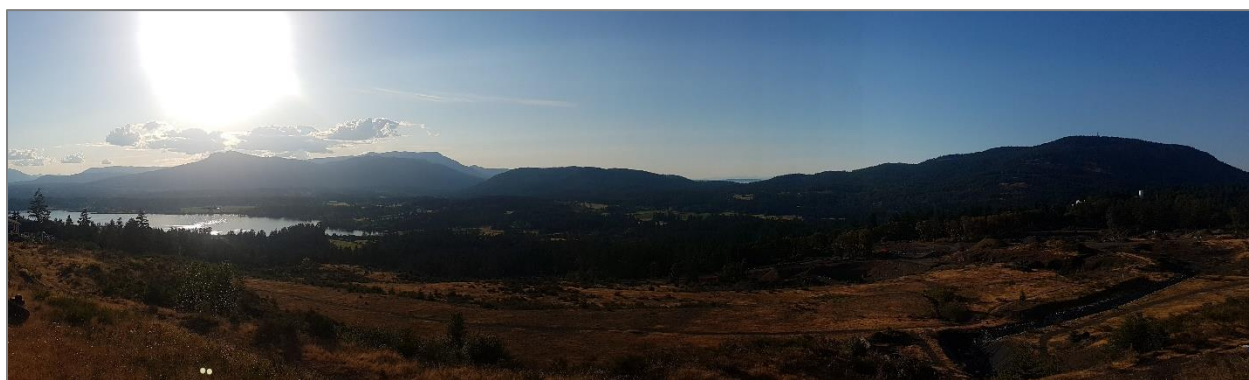


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Cowichan Valley

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Executive Summary

In 2019, the WildSafeBC (WCBC) Cowichan Valley program entered its third year with continued sponsorship from the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) and Town of Ladysmith, and new sponsorship from the Municipality of North Cowichan (MNC) and Town of Lake Cowichan. With a number of bears across the province and two cougars in Lake Cowichan destroyed in 2019, human-wildlife conflict was of high interest across the valley. Black bears attracted to garbage generated the highest number of calls to the BC Conservation Officer Service (COS) in the Cowichan Valley. As a large geographical region (fig. 1), door-to-door education was focused on hotspot areas of bear conflict.

The WSBC Community Coordinator (WCC), Amanda Crowston, gave 25 presentations to over 630 people, reached more than 1,200 people through door-to-door efforts, and spoke with over 950 people at five events across the Cowichan Valley. On social media, 10,450 people were reached and Facebook likes increased 22%. There were six articles printed in two monthly magazines about wildlife safety and reducing wildlife attractants. The WCC was also interviewed for a video on wildlife safety on the trail. The WCC developed partnerships with the CVRD and MNC as well as collaborations with community groups, schools, and the COS.

With over 20 schools in the region, there is an opportunity to reach many students through the WildSafe Ranger program in 2020. Efforts to increase presence at community events will be key to educate the general public and change perception of what human-wildlife conflict is and how to minimize it. Through education, collaboration and community solutions, the Cowichan Valley can help keep wildlife wild and communities safe.



Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: View of Cowichan Valley facing west from Mount Tzoulhalem.

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the COS through the Report All Poachers & Polluters (RAPP) line (1-877-952-7277) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) which is updated daily. This report for Cowichan Valley includes data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 2).

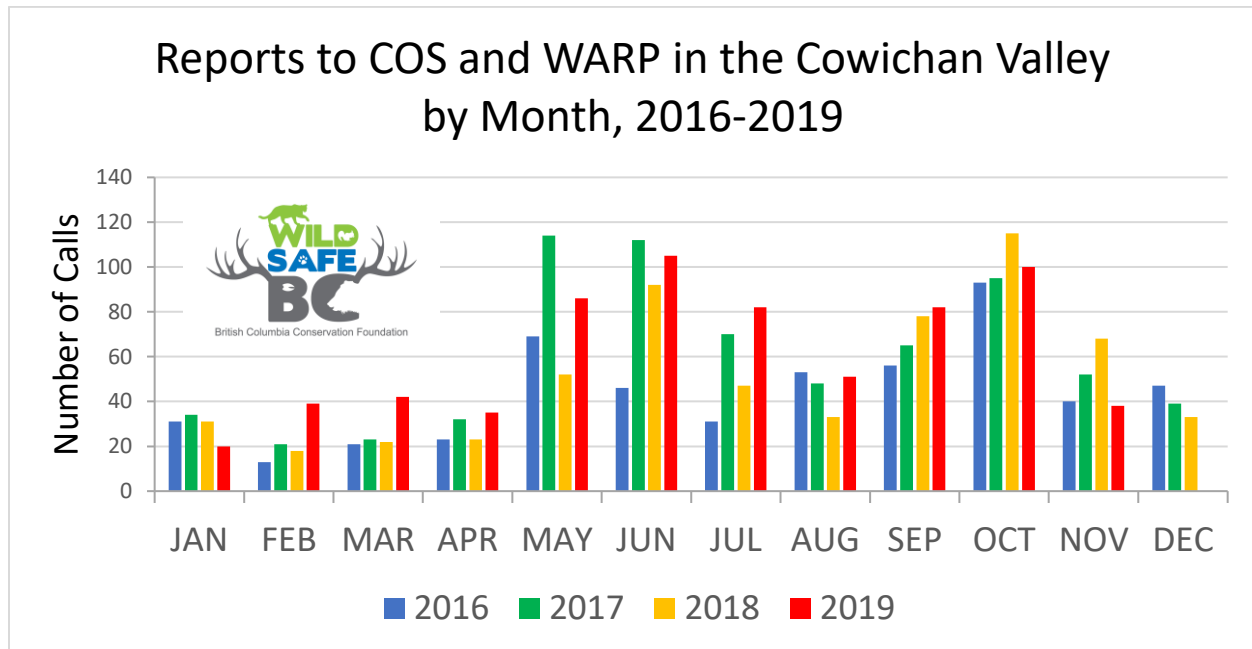


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding all wildlife from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019.

Black bear calls made up over half of all reports (fig. 3), with 343 reports which is higher than the previous three year average of 247 (fig. 4). May and June saw a spike in black bear calls. This is similar to provincial numbers which reflected a higher than average conflict year for bears. It may be a result of natural food availability as the result of a dry spring. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by compost (fig. 5).

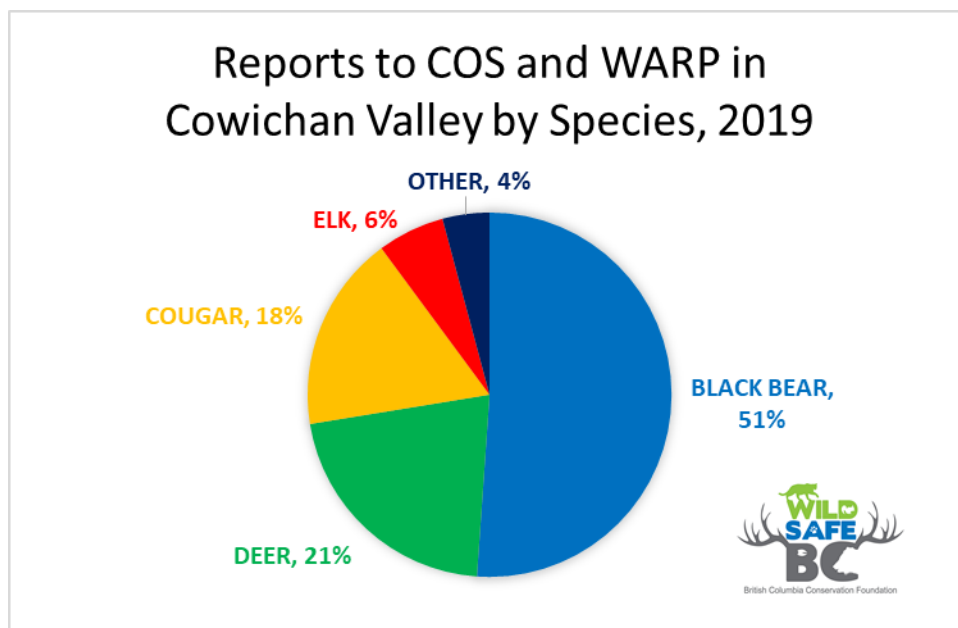


Figure 3. Species reported to the COS and WARP in the Cowichan Valley from January 1 to November 15, 2019.

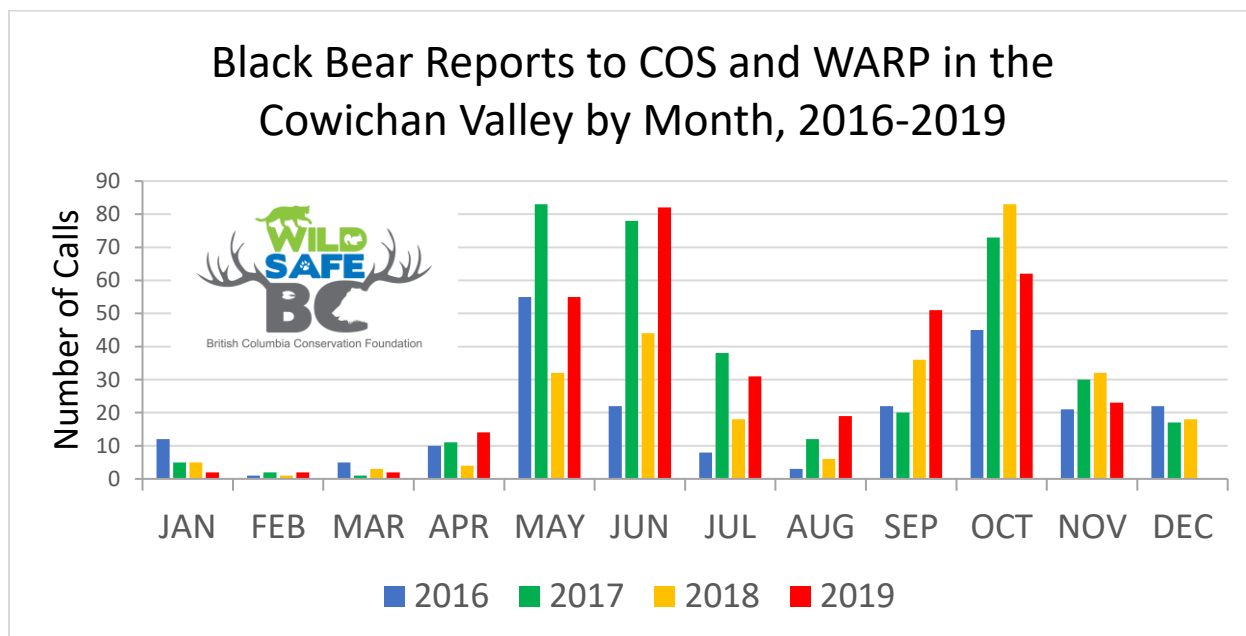


Figure 4. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 in the Cowichan Valley.

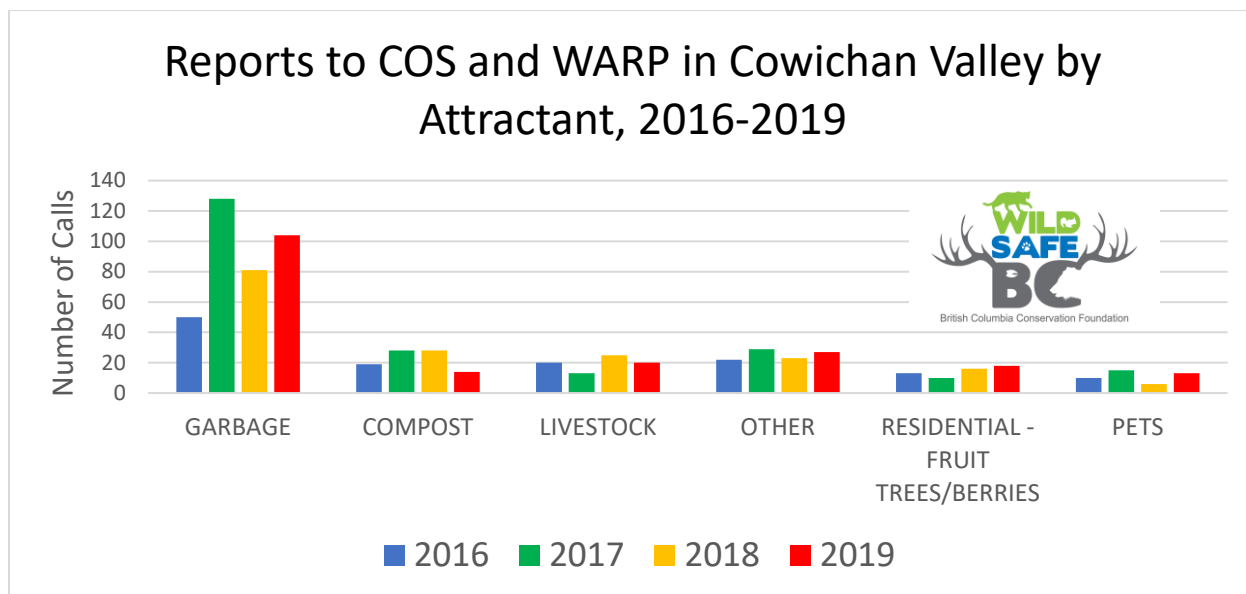


Figure 5. Reports to the COS and WARP by attractant from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 for the Cowichan Valley.

South Cowichan and Ladysmith saw a decrease in wildlife reports to COS and WARP, while the Cowichan Lake area had a slight increase over previous years and Central/North Cowichan increased from 2018 (fig. 6).

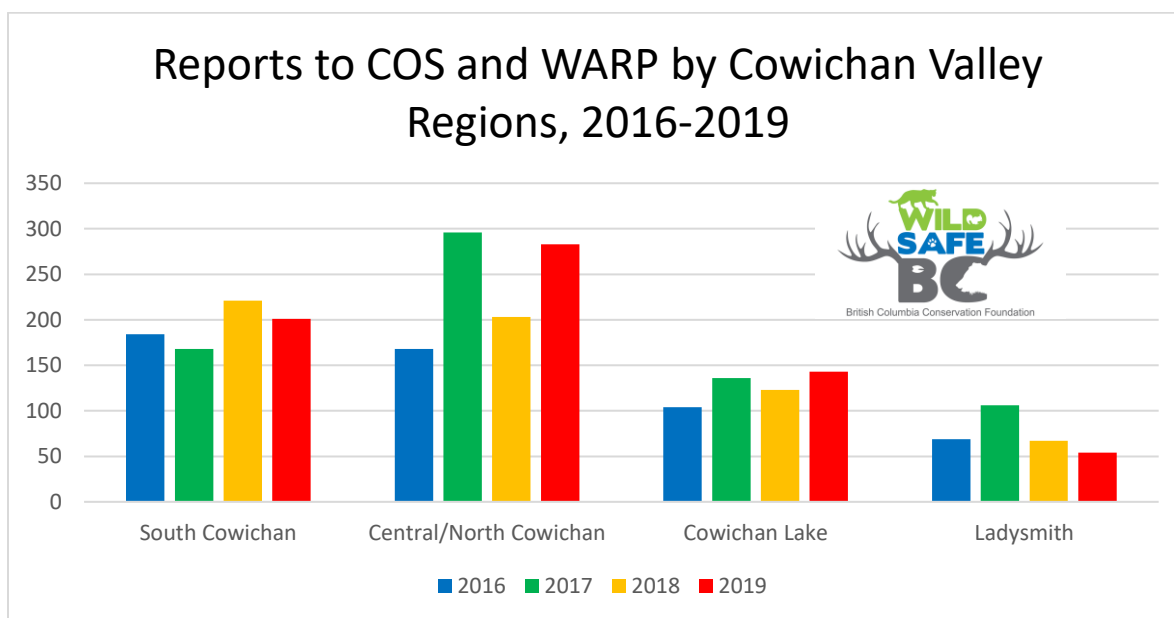


Figure 6. Year-over-year reports for all wildlife in from 2016 to November 15, 2019 in the Cowichan Valley regions.*

*The Cowichan Valley is composed of many communities. For clarity, the WCC categorized the region as follows: South Cowichan: Bamberton, Cobble Hill, Cowichan Bay, Cowichan Station, Malahat, Mill Bay, and Shawnigan Lake; Central/North Cowichan: Chemainus, Cowichan Valley, Cowichan, Crofton, Duncan, Genoa Bay, Glenora, Maple Bay, North Cowichan, Sahtlam, Saltair, Skutz Falls, and Westholme; Cowichan Lake: Caycuse, Cowichan Lake, Honeymoon Bay, Lake Cowichan, Meade Creek, Mesachie Lake, and Youbou; and Ladysmith: Ladysmith, Oyster Bay, Thetis Island and Yellow Point.

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to the WildSafe Ranger Program. The WildSafe Ranger Program introduces students to the concept of human-wildlife conflict and encourages them to take an active role in reducing human-wildlife conflict at home by helping their families identify backyard wildlife attractants.

Five schools participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2019 and 530 students became WildSafe Rangers (Table 1, fig. 7). The extended version, which includes two visits, an outdoor activity and a take home assignment on attractant management, was offered but not taken up.

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

School	Grade	Students
Drinkwater	K-7	115
Ecole Cobble Hill	K, 4, 5	85
George Bonner	K	80
Lake Cowichan	4, 5, 6, 7	150
Ladysmith Primary	K, 1	100



Figure 7. Kindergarteners learn about habitat through a game (left) and household attractants through a felt board (right).

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave two presentations to over 60 participants. The Cowichan Valley Search & Rescue presentation was on wildlife awareness and safety and was presented in collaboration with the South Island COS. The Cowichan Valley Open Learning Co-op presentation was on wildlife safety and bear spray with a bear spray demonstration.

Public Displays and Events

The WCC reached over 950 people at events across the valley including: Chemainus Canada Day (fig. 8), Duncan Day, Youbou Regatta, Cobble Hill Fair (fig. 9), and the Lake-to-Lake Marathon. WildSafeBC had a table set up at the registration pickup in Shawnigan over two days as well as at the start of the Lake-to-Lake Marathon.

WildSafeBC coordinators organize BC Goes Wild events across the province in September. The BC Goes Wild event in the Cowichan Valley was a Bear Spray Workshop held at Fuller Lake Arena and was attended by 20 people.



Figure 8. Cowichan Valley WCC at the Canada Day event in Chemainus.



Figure 9. At the Cobble Hill Fair, volunteer Taylor Brouwer explains managing attractants (left) and the mounted black bear head was a highlight, especially with children (right).

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Areas of concern with regard to black bear activity were identified by COS and the CVRD. The WCC canvassed the area, going door-to-door educating residents (Table 2), or visited neighbourhoods on the night before garbage day, putting stickers on bins to remind residents garbage is a wildlife attractant (Table 3, fig. 10). All areas visited twice for garbage tagging saw a decrease in the number of bins put out the night before collection day (fig. 11).

Table 2. Areas canvassed in 2019.

Area	In Person	Door Hanger
Marble Bay, CVRD	9	31
100 Houses, Lake Cowichan	23	25
Shawnigan Heights, Shawnigan	24	21
Fern Ridge, Mill Bay	6	30

Table 3. Areas that received garbage tagging in 2019.

Area	Bins Tagged (1 st night)	Bins Tagged (2 nd night)	Repeat Offenders
Sahtlam	19	17*	7
Lakes/Wicks Rd	47	38	16
Ladysmith	49	18**	2
Youbou	67	n/a	n/a
Maple Bay (rural)	14	n/a	n/a

*34 bins were tagged on the second night in Sahtlam but half were in areas not covered in the first night. To compare effectiveness of garbage tagging, only areas covered in both nights were used.

**21 bins were tagged on the second night in Ladysmith but three bins were on a street not tagged on the first night of garbage tagging. To compare effectiveness of garbage tagging, only areas covered in both nights were used.



Figure 10. Bins placed on the curb the night before collection received a tag warning that garbage placed out early is a bear attractant.

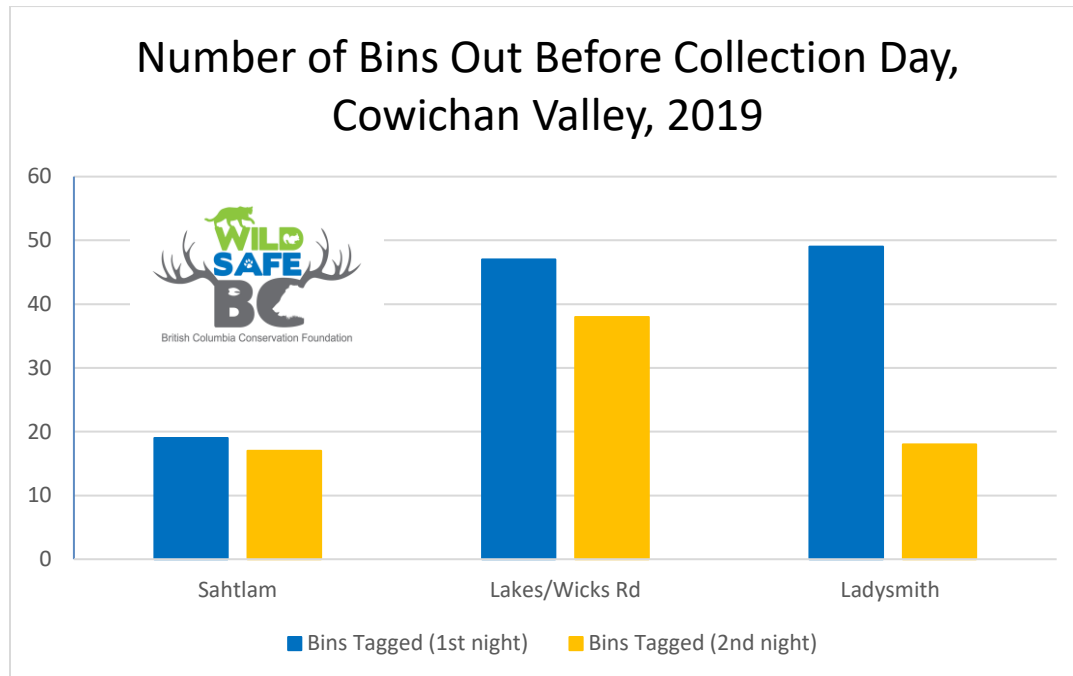


Figure 11. Bins placed on the curb the night before collection day in the Cowichan Valley, BC.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Cowichan Valley Facebook page grew 22% in 2019 from 178 to 218 page likes and had an overall reach of 10,450. The most effective post of the season showed a WARP map of wildlife reports in the valley, discussed reducing food attractants, was shared 11 times and was reached by 1,260 people.

The Cowichan Valley WCC submitted news articles to the Cowichan Valley Voice and South Cowichan Life. The Cowichan Valley Voice published articles about how reducing attractants reduces wildlife conflict, how wildlife conflict increases in the fall and the BC Goes Wild bear spray workshop, and what to do if you see a bear or a cougar. South Cowichan Life published articles about keeping safe on the trails, managing fruit trees, and how to avoid conflict with bears.

The Cowichan Valley WCC was also contacted by the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (NALT), who were making a video about hiking. The WCC was interviewed by NALT about wildlife safety while hiking (fig. 12). The video is due to be completed in February 2020.



Figure 12. NALT interviews the Cowichan Valley WCC, Stoney Hill Regional Park, BC.

Wildlife in Area Signs

No Wildlife in Area signage was used this season.

Collaborations

This year, the WCC collaborated with the COS to canvass Marble Bay. For the BC Goes Wild Bear Spray Workshop, Bucky's Sport Shop and the two hiking clubs in the valley, Cowichan Hikers and Retreads Hiking Club, helped with promotion. The Municipality of North Cowichan partnered with WSBC for the use of a space to hold the workshop at Fuller Lake Arena.

The Cowichan Valley Voice has also offered in-kind advertising space into 2020 to continue education on reducing human-wildlife conflict (fig. 13).

WildSafe Bear Tips

Garbage is the most reported attractant involved in human-bear conflicts.

Bears that access garbage may be injured, cause property damage or become a risk to the community.

- 🐾 Keep garbage, compost and other attractants secure - indoors is best!
- 🐾 Never put your containers out prior to the morning of collection
- 🐾 Freeze smelly items and keep containers clean



Keeping Wildlife Wild and Communities Safe
www.wildsafebc.com
 Contacts us at cowichanvalley@wildsafebc.com

Figure 13. Educational advertisement that will be used in future Cowichan Valley Voice monthly issues.

In October, the CVRD hosted an apple gleaner in Sahtlam in partnership with the Cowichan Green Community. The WCC attended to educate volunteers from Queen Margaret's School about wildlife safety and reducing human-wildlife conflict (fig. 14).



Figure 14. Students from Queen Margaret's School in Duncan joined the CVRD, Cowichan Green Community and WildSafeBC at Currie Park, BC.

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 held two bear spray workshops and trained 40 people on the use of bear spray (fig. 15). Participants reported that they found the workshop informative and they felt



Figure 15. The WCC demonstrated how to use bear spray to the BC Goes Wild Bear Spray Workshop participants behind Fuller Lake Arena.

more prepared to handle bear spray.

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, the Stz'uminus First Nations in the Coastal Salish region of British Columbia. Additionally, efforts were made to reach out to First Nations contacts with the goal of coordinating joint events and other partnerships in the future.

Challenges and Opportunities

Waste continues to be the largest source of attractants in the Cowichan Valley. As this is a region with five systems of waste removal and only one region with a bylaw regarding when to put out garbage, it is challenging to get the message out about making sure bins are on the curb on the day of waste collection and not earlier. There is a reluctance by the public to take responsibility for their role in garbage management and securing it. In areas with high summer visitors, many year-round residents believe it is the visitors who are at fault. To address the issue of waste storage and removal in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2020:

- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through WildSafe Rangers, social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information
- Increase presence at community events
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

Fruit trees continue to be a source of wildlife attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. Many residents seem to believe that leaving fruit on the trees or dumping the fruit as a source of food for wildlife is positive. Lake Cowichan, Honeymoon Bay and Ladysmith have been identified as fruit tree hotspots in the community and would benefit to increased education and fruit gleaning activities. To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives should be implemented in 2020:

- Education campaign focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops
- Engage food banks and other non-profits
- Connect residents to local fruit gleaning organizations
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

Lack of knowledge about WildSafeBC as well as reluctance to call COS when human-bear conflict occurred were also challenges. Increased presence in the community through presentations and events in 2020 will benefit the region. Education about when and why to phone COS, as well as door-to-door canvassing, will aid in changing beliefs about reporting wildlife conflict.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the WildSafeBC program, the WCC would like to thank the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the Municipality of North Cowichan, the Town of Ladysmith, the Town of Lake Cowichan, the Ministry of Environmental and Climate Change Strategy, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation for sponsoring WildSafeBC in the Cowichan Valley.

The WCC also appreciates the assistance of Sgt. Scott Norris, Sgt. Stuart Bates, Officer Robin Sano and Officer Mark Kissinger from the BC Conservation Officer Service, Ilse Saraday, Janine Layseca, and Elizabeth Aitken from the CVRD, Laurel White from the MNC, Shelia Badman from the Cowichan Valley Voice, and volunteers Taylor Brouwer and Jamie Crowston. Special thanks to the South Island BC Conservation Officer Service for the use of wildlife specimens for education and Cowichan Valley Voice and South Cowichan Life for publishing WildSafeBC articles.

Lastly, thank you to all the residents who made an effort this season to remove wildlife attractants from their properties and learn more about our local wildlife. Let's continue to keep wildlife wild and our communities safe!