

WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Fraser Valley Regional District

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Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC (WSBC) program coverage in the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) predominantly includes the municipalities of Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Harrison Hot Springs, Mission, and surrounding areas (fig. 1). Wildlife activity in the FVRD during the 2019 season (January 1st to November 15th, 2019) resulted in 1,158 total calls to the COS, with 72% (838) of these calls pertaining to black bears. This season, the municipalities of Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and Mission constituted a substantial portion of wildlife reports/calls in the FVRD. Garbage remained the most reported attractant noted by reports at 46% of the 2019 total call volume. At the time of this report, the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) delivered the program activities to reach:

- 684 people through 25 presentations
- 200 people through door-to-door education and garbage tagging
- 2,700 people through 11 community events
- 61,702 people through social media, and
- An additional 203 “likes” on Facebook (29% growth over last year)

The WCC continued to assist the District of Mission on the Fraser in their pursuit of Bear Smart Community status, and helped the Mission summer students with a new sticker initiative for garbage bin tagging to further aid in the City’s Bear Aware Program.

Municipal sponsors provided feedback regarding future opportunities for closer collaborative initiatives, such as synchronizing municipal attractant management messaging with WSBC messaging and preparing WSBC information for inclusion on future interpretive signage. The WCC was able to collaborate with Conservation Officers to target areas for their fall attractant audit, and the COS provided guidance and support to the WCC in determining areas in need of door-to-door education and additional attractant management support for the community.

The size of the program coverage area was a key challenge for the 2019 season. Opportunities include growing the FVRD WSBC volunteer base by reaching out to graduating high school students in need of volunteer hours, creating a working group to help connect the WCC to smaller municipalities, and taking better advantage of the full array of WSBC resources to effectively spread WSBC messaging farther and wider in the 2020 season. By closely examining the successful, and less successful, endeavors of the 2019 WCC, the 2020 season will undoubtedly continue to improve WSBC messaging in the FVRD, serving to further reduce human-wildlife conflict and “keep wildlife wild and communities safe.”

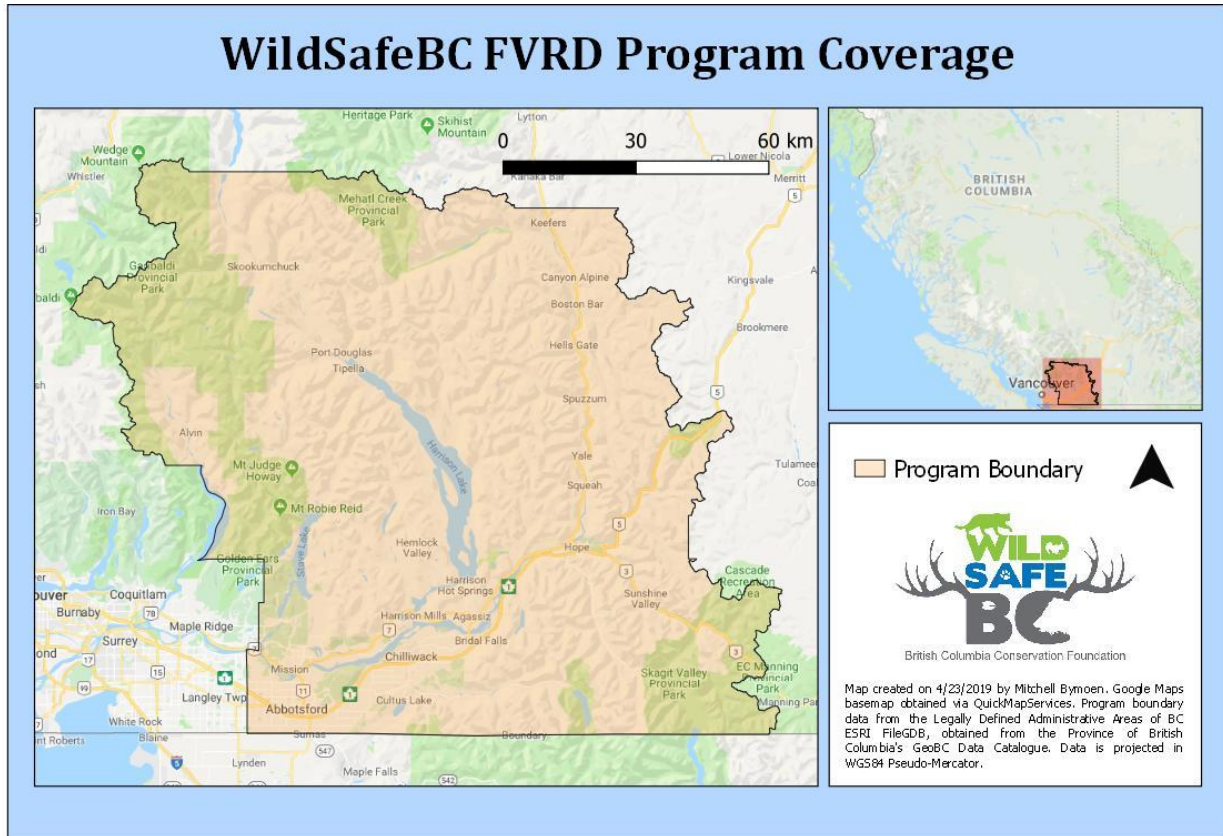


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Fraser Valley Regional District program coverage area.

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Cover Photo: FVRD Community Coordinator, Erin Patrick, with the WildSafeBC event booth at the Abbotsford-Mission Recycling Depot community event “A Day of Pumpkin Decorating”. Photo by Mallory Palliyaguru (used with permission).

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls 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). This data is updated daily and this report for the Fraser Valley Regional District includes data from January 1st, 2016 to November 15th, 2019. Of the total calls made to the COS and WARP during this time, calls concerning black bears accounted for 59% of total wildlife call volume (Fig. 2a). Calls concerning black bear in the 2019 season accounted for 72% of the total call volume for the season (Fig. 2b).

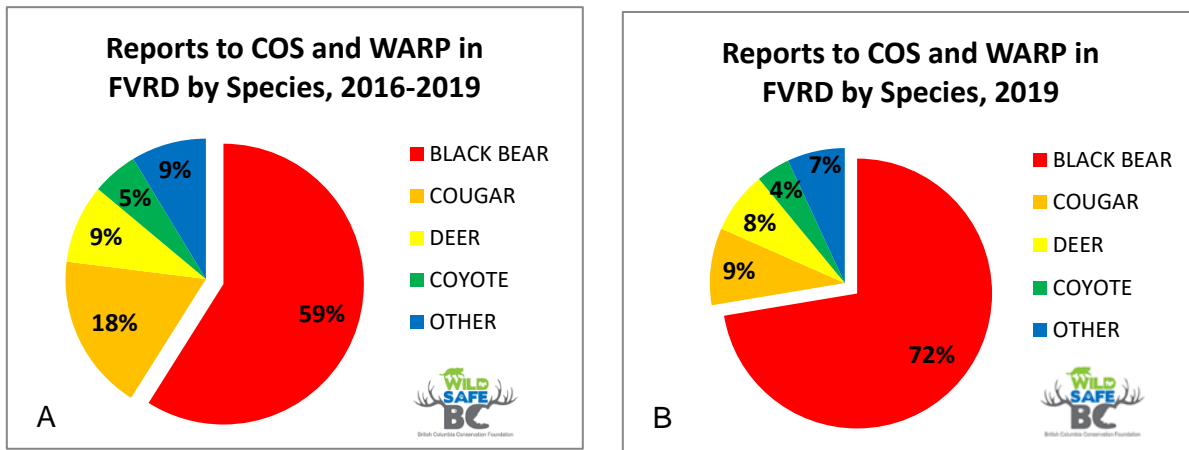


Figure 2. A) Species reported to the COS and WARP in the FVRD from January 1st, 2016 to November 15th, 2019; Black bears accounted for 72% of the total reports (838 out of 1,159). B) Species reported to the COS and WARP in the FVRD from January 1st to November 15th, 2019; Black bears accounted for 59% of the total reports (1,158 out of 3,734).

As of November 15th, there have been 838 reports concerning black bears in 2019, which is higher than the three-year average of 557 calls (2016-2018). Call volume concerning black bears peaked in June, surpassing call volumes for this species for all previous years (fig. 3).

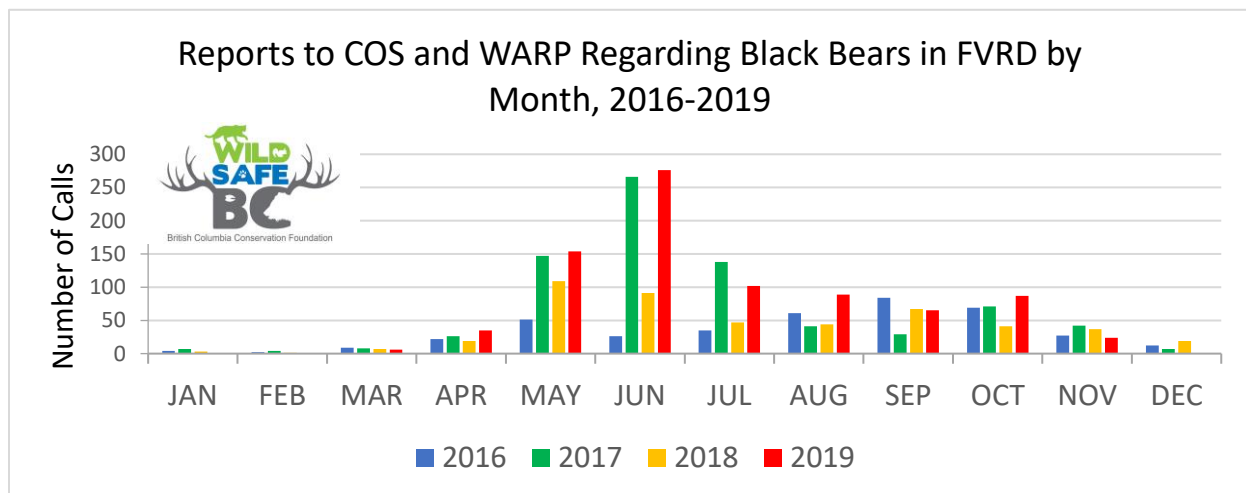


Figure 3. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to November 15th, 2019.

This is contrary to many other communities in the southern half of the province which typically have peaks in September when bears are entering hyperphagia (a period of intense eating prior to denning). The higher number of calls can be related to a number of factors that are difficult to tease apart. These can include the low availability of natural foods (predominantly berries and salmon), population dynamics (increased numbers and dispersal), and returning food-conditioned bears into the community.

Examining call volume by municipality indicates that the majority of wildlife reports made to the COS are in regards to wildlife activity in Abbotsford, with Chilliwack and Mission accounting for a comparably high number of wildlife reports made to the COS and WARP in the FVRD (fig. 4).

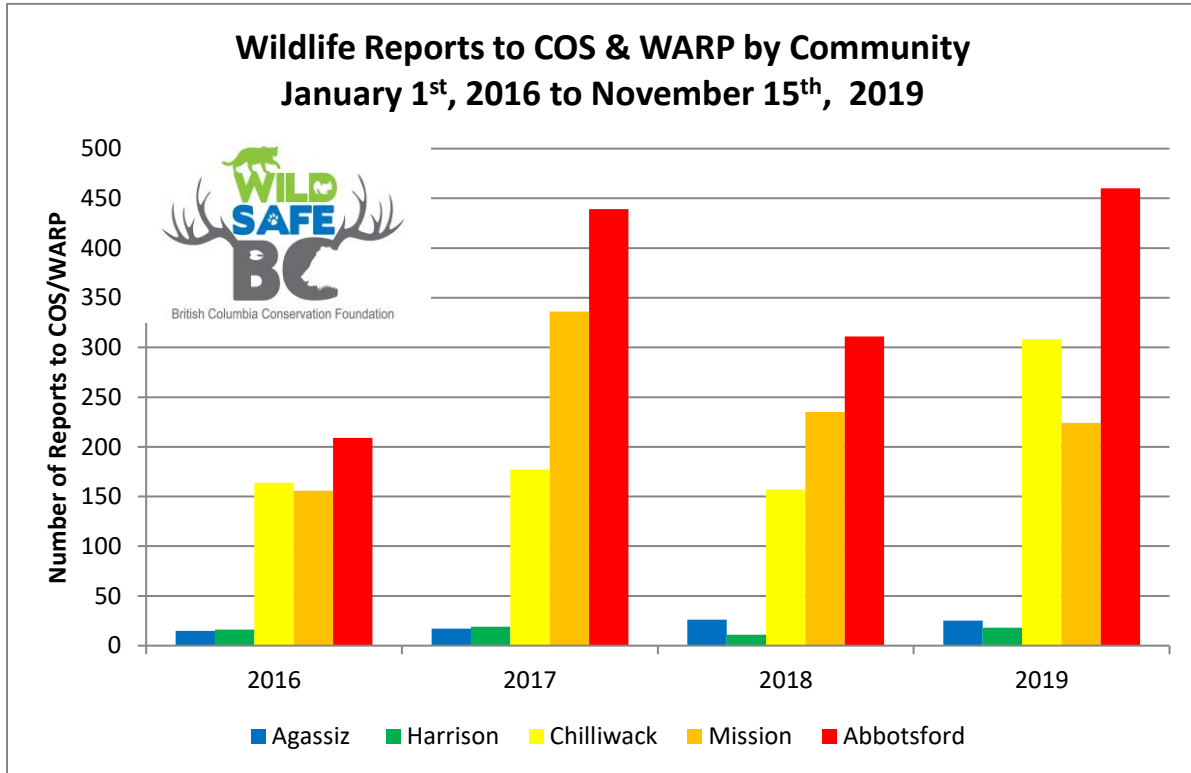


Figure 4. Year-to-year reports of wildlife in FVRD communities from January 1st, 2016 to November 15th, 2019.

Garbage remains the most reported attractant accounting for 46% of total 2019 call volume, followed by “other” attractants at 15%, and livestock and residential fruit trees/berries tying at 10% of the total call volume each (fig. 5).

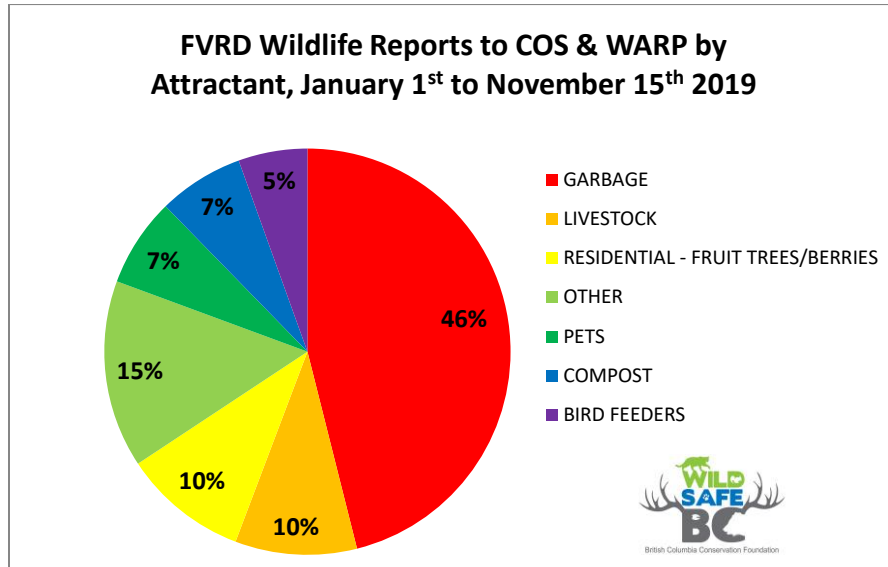


Figure 5. Percentage of wildlife reports to COS and WARP between January 1st and November 15th, 2019 by attractant type.

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed the WildSafe Rangers Program (WRP). The WRP is a cornerstone of the WildSafeBC program; it helps children understand attractant management and their role in reducing human-wildlife conflict by assisting them in the development of best management practice skills.



Figure 6. A) The WCC and Mission Settlement Program Summer Camp kids touching bear. B) The WCC and Dewdney Elementary students confirming who has seen a bear by giving a show of hands.

From June 1st to November 25th, 2019, the WCC gave a total of 20 WRP presentations at 5 schools, delivering WRP content to 499 students in the FVRD with 57 students receiving a WRP extension (Table 1). At the time of this report, the WCC has two additional WRP presentations scheduled (November 29th and December 3rd, 2019).

Table 1. Schools that received the Junior Ranger Program from 01 June to 25 November 2019.

School	Municipality	# Presentations	Grade	Students	Extended
Abbotsford Christian Elementary	Abbotsford	2	1	80	
Dewdney Elementary	Dewdney (Mission area)	7	K - 6	135	
Harrison Hot Springs Elementary	Harrison Hot Springs	5	K - 6	105	
Stave Falls Elementary	Mission	3	K - 6	57	Yes
Squiala Elementary	Chilliwack	3	1 - 6	122	
Total		20		499	

Students receiving the extended WRP had two visits with the WCC with one visit including “unstructured outdoor time” requested by the Stave Falls school principal. The group practiced bear awareness and safety behaviour, examined wildlife trees, and learned to identify native plants. The 15 Kindergarten students also practiced attractant management using a felt storyboard (fig. 7a).



Figure 7. An interactive felt storyboard made by the WCC to discuss attractant management with younger children (pre-school to kindergarten).

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 5 presentations on wildlife safety and awareness to 185 participants in Mission and Abbotsford (Table 2).

Table 2. Community groups that received WildSafeBC presentations and messaging from June 1st to November 25th, 2019.

Organization	Municipality	Topic	Participants
Canada Post, Abbotsford distribution centre	Abbotsford	Wildlife awareness and safety, bear focus	60
Girl Guides of Canada, adult guider training	Abbotsford	Wildlife awareness and safety, communicating wildlife safety information to children	30
Canada Post, Mission distribution centre	Mission	Dangerous wildlife safety, bear focus	50
Settlement Program, Mission Community Services	Mission	Intro to local wildlife and wildlife safety, bear/cougar focus	10
Settlement Program summer camp, Mission Community Services	Mission	Intro to WildSafeBC & Resources, bear safety	35
Total			185

Public Displays and Events

The WCC attended 11 community events with the WildSafeBC booth, reaching 2,700 people (Table 3).

Table 3. WildSafeBC public displays/events in the FVRD from June 1st to November 25th, 2019.

Event	Municipality	# People Reached
BerryFest, Abbotsford Downtown Business Association	Abbotsford	252
Canada Day Strong & Free Celebration, City of Abbotsford	Abbotsford	327
Family Fishing Day, Fraser Valley Trout Hatchery	Abbotsford	140
A Day of Pumpkin Decorating with Abbotsford-Mission Recycling Depot	Abbotsford	104
Chilliwack Garlic and Harvest Festival*, Fantasy Farms	Chilliwack	300
Fraser Valley Bald Eagle Festival*, FVBEF Committee	Harrison Mills	301
Halloween Hoot Pre-school Event, Mission Leisure Centre	Mission	136

Indoor Holiday Market , Mission City Farmer's Market	Mission	88
Fire Life & Safety Fair , Mission Fire Rescue Services	Mission	336
Powerhouse at Stave Falls , BC Hydro	Mission	600
BC Goes Wild Weekend*	Chilliwack/ Harrison Hot Springs/ Mission	116
Total		2,700

* Two-day event, with the number of people reached representing the total over both days.

BC Goes Wild Weekend

The WCC planned a two-day event for BC Goes Wild Weekend (BCGWW) on 27-28 September 2019 with activities in Chilliwack, Harrison Hot Springs, and Mission. BCGW events coincided with the Provincial BC Culture Days Celebrations (a province-wide celebration of BC arts and culture) and were officially registered as BC Culture Days events. The FVRD BCGW sought to connect wildlife and nature more closely with BC arts and culture, highlighting the important role of attractant management in reducing human-wildlife conflict. Events included a public display at the Chilliwack Community Forest, a guided forest walk at the East Sector Lands in Harrison Hot Springs, and inclusion of the WildSafeBC event booth at the Mission City Farmer's Market. A bear spray workshop was held in each municipality (three workshops, total), with a total of 16 people receiving hands-on training in the safe and effective use of bear spray.

Two collaborators for the 2019 BCGWW Harrison Hot Springs event were vital to the events' success. Janne Perrin (Chilliwack Field Naturalists Club, Miami River Streamkeepers Society) was a key contact for organizing the event. Carrielynn Victor (local plant practitioner and artist, Cheam First Nation) played another key role as a guest speaker and guide on an informative walk in the East Sector Lands.



Figure 8. A) WCC Erin Patrick and CO Alicia Stark at Family Fishing Day in Abbotsford. B) WSBC event booth display at the Halloween Hoot pre-school event in Mission. C) WCC Erin Patrick guiding a participant during the bear spray workshop at the BCGWW event in Chilliwack.

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

From June 1st to October 30th, 2019, the WCC completed door-to-door canvassing activities on three occasions in response to reported wildlife activity. In August, the WCC canvassed 47 homes in the Promontory area of Chilliwack in response to cougar activity. In October and November, the WCC canvassed 101 homes in the areas of Rowanna Crescent and Ledgestone Place in Chilliwack regarding bear activity. The WCC also provided a “crash course” on the WARP map and its parameters (e.g. selecting “attractant type”) as a resource for assisting with route planning for municipal canvassing efforts in Abbotsford.

Over the same time period, the WCC executed garbage bin-tagging activities four times. On June 25th, the WCC joined the Mission Summer Students on their bin-tagging route, covering an area containing approximately 600 homes in Mission and tagging 30 garbage bins. On October 1st, the WCC and a volunteer covered an area containing approximately 1,500 homes in Abbotsford and tagged 8 bins. On October 15th, the WCC and a volunteer covered an area containing approximately 400 homes and tagged only four bins. On November 18th, the WCC

and a volunteer covered an area containing approximately 150 homes and tagged 10 bins. The WCC intends to continue garbage tagging in November and early December, revisiting neighbourhoods in Chilliwack and Mission to determine the number of repeat offenders and graph changes over time [to be included in next report submission].

Municipal Staff Efforts

Municipal staff in Abbotsford executed door-to-door education by providing WSBC door hangers to 900 homes during the summer months. The Mission Summer Students executed door-to-door education regarding attractant management (bins set out the night before solid waste collection) in the summer months, noting 569 early set-outs and 71 repeat offences.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Fraser Valley Facebook page grew 29% in 2019 from 491 page likes on January 1st to 693 page likes as of November 25th, 2019. During that same period, 157 posts made on the WSBC FVRD page had an overall reach of 61,702 people.

A press release, issued by the WCC with assistance from the Provincial Coordinator, regarding cougar activity in the Promontory area of Chilliwack ran on the July 12th edition of the Chilliwack Progress newspaper. The WCC used also posted the press release on the WSBC FVRD Facebook page, reaching an estimated 6,200 Facebook users.

In preparation for FVRD BCGW weekend, the WCC used several avenues to advertise events. The WCC registered the FVRD BCGW events as official Culture Days events, which were advertised through the BC Culture Days website; the WCC created a central [Culture Days Hub](#) for the events. The District of Mission advertised BCGW events in The Mission City Record newspaper in two print editions (September 20th and September 27th) that were also available online. A local Chilliwack radio station, 98.3 Star FM, advertised the BCGW weekend events on their website's community event page. Tourism Harrison printed and posted BCGW event posters in the Village of Harrison Hot Springs. The editor of the Agassiz-Harrison Observer newspaper attended the beginning of the activities in Harrison to ask questions and take photos, writing an article about the event at the East Sector Lands available online at the [Agassiz-Harrison Observer website](#) and in a print edition that ran October 3rd.

Wildlife in Area Signs

No 'Wildlife in Area' signs were posted this season; however, hotspot areas for conflict were targeted for canvassing.

At the request of the Abbotsford Sponsor, Shawn Gurney, the WCC will assist the City of Abbotsford in preparing interpretive wildlife signage for use in Abbotsford parks. The WCC will draw on approved WildSafeBC messaging and images to create a draft for review by the Provincial Coordinator. Gurney expressed a preference for interpretive signage over "bear in area" signage as wildlife are always moving and people may believe bears have left the area after signage is removed. Gurney also expressed an interest in a City-wide

awareness/education campaign to complement the public outreach provided by WSBC, presenting an opportunity for continued collaboration.

Collaborations

Conservation Officer Services and Municipal Bylaw Officers

In July, Conservation Officer Marc Plamondon provided information and guidance related to the cougar activity in Chilliwack. Conservation Officer Alicia Stark joined the WCC and WSBC event booth at the Family Fishing Day event at the Fraser Valley Trout Hatchery in June. CO Stark also reached out to the WCC in preparation for the CO fall attractants audit, and the WCC provided feedback regarding wildlife hotspot activity in the Abbotsford, Chilliwack, and Mission areas.

Wildlife Safety Officer, Mackenzie Mercer, informed the WCC regarding unsecured and overloaded dumpsters at a motel in Mission. Bylaw Officer Harminder Gill and the WCC attended the property together as the property was known as a repeat offender. The WCC supplied a letter focused on attractant management and outlining WSBC online resources. Gill issued a total of \$1,000 in bylaw infraction fines regarding the ongoing issue. At the time of this report, the dumpsters on site have plastic and non-locking lids, presenting an opportunity for additional follow-up and potential initiatives. The information provided by the WCC was shared with Sgt. Todd Hunter of the COS, and this location was noted by the WCC in response to CO Stark's request for fall attraction audit tips.

Fruit Gleaning

The WCC made four referrals to the Valley Permaculture Guild regarding fruit gleaning requests from members of the public at community events. Discussing fruit gleaning as an attractant management option was another prominent topic of discussion at various presentations given and events attended by the WCC.

Directed 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 focused on furthering this directed initiative whenever possible during conversations with the public at community events, presentations to community groups, and with residents receiving door-to-door education. Though the WCC estimates that over 200 people received bear spray specific information outside of scheduled presentations or workshops.

The WCC made the increased use and acceptance of bear spray a focal topic/activity during the BCGWW by leading three workshops, one in each of the three municipalities that hosted BCGW events (Chilliwack, Harrison Hot Springs, and Mission). Sixteen people were trained in the safe and effective use of bear spray, including the two BCGWW event volunteers. Workshop participants received an email containing a summary/follow-up document from the WCC reiterating important information from the workshop.

Feedback from participants was very positive following each workshop, with several participants responding to the follow-up email to share their appreciation for the workshop experience. The workshops were a highlight of the WCC's 2019 season.

At the time of this report, the WCC is gauging interest in a bear spray workshop with the Chilliwack Outdoors Club; the WCC has been invited to speak on behalf of WSBC at a monthly Chilliwack Outdoors Club meeting pending program hour availability in January 2020. The WCC will also reach out to the Chilliwack Field Naturalists to gauge interest in a workshop; there was some interest among the group in attending a BCGWW bear spray workshop, but the group had a schedule conflict with another event commitment.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

The WCC sought out a guest speaker for a FVRD BCGWW event who could speak from an Indigenous perspective. Carrielynn Victor, a local plant practitioner, artist, and member of the Cheam First Nation lead the WCC and event participants on a guided forest walk to share Traditional Ecological Knowledge about Cheam relationships with the local flora and fauna. As mentioned in the Social Media and Press section of this report, this event attracted the attention of the local newspaper and resulted in a print and online article about the knowledge shared that day. The WCC will continue to improve upon Indigenous awareness and engagement in the 2020 season by reaching out and looking for future collaborative opportunities with local bands.

Special Initiatives

The District of Mission on the Fraser is in the process of pursuing Bear Smart Community status. The WCC assisted the 2019 Mission Summer Students, Jaquelyn Alexander and Jaimie Jagpal, in reviewing the document and constructing a plan to build on the application following feedback from the Provincial Wildlife Conflict Manager, Mike Badry. The WCC contributed information to the document regarding WildSafeBC programming/activities. At the time of this report, the WCC is still in the process of contributing to the current version of the Mission Bear Smart Application.

The WCC attended the summer Northeast Sector Bear Meeting to discuss bear-smart initiatives and challenges in various municipalities in the Lower Mainland. Following this meeting, the WCC shared an example of the solid waste bin violation sticker used in Coquitlam with the Mission Summer Students. The sticker, similar in function to those used by WildSafeBC, is used not only to communicate attractant management information but also bylaw and fine information in the City of Coquitlam (a Bear Smart community). With support from the Mission sponsor, Jennifer Meier, the Mission Summer Students implemented a similar sticker (fig. 7) conveying bear-specific bylaw and fine information to inform residents about wildlife attractant management. The sticker includes key words in the most common non-English language spoken in the city as well as contact information for the City of Mission and the WildSafeBC website. The WCC will be attending the upcoming fall meeting for the NE Sector Bear Committee on November 28th.



Figure 9. The violation sticker implemented by the District of Mission for garbage bin-tagging purposes, containing bylaw information. This sticker can also serve as a first written warning when residents are in contravention of bear-specific bylaws when used by District staff.

After connecting at the FVRD BCGWW event in Mission, Tracy Lyster, editor of a free magazine called The Footprint Press, invited the WCC to write an article for the magazine to be published in early 2020.

Challenges and Opportunities

It was a challenge to effectively deliver program coverage over such a large area as one person. Continuing to broaden the volunteer base in the FVRD will assist the delivery of WSBC programming in the FVRD. The WCC was able to secure the assistance of five new volunteers this season by reaching out to her network at British Columbia Institute of Technology, recruiting friends and family members, and by using a Google Docs volunteer form link found in the Google Drive resources created by a previous WCC. Another potential way to recruit volunteers for 2020 would be to put out a volunteer request through local high school district offices, as grade 12 students often have volunteer hour requirements to meet for completion of Career and Personal Planning courses.

To improve relationships with smaller communities in the FVRD that don't receive as many opportunities for WSBC activities as larger municipalities, the 2019 WCC recommends trying to institute a working group of community representatives to help spread the WSBC messaging. By connecting with committed individuals in these smaller areas, we can make WSBC messaging more available to people and areas that the WCC is not able to visit and support as consistently.

As suggested by Chilliwack sponsor, Christina Vugteveen, an opportunity exists to better align municipal messaging with WildSafeBC messaging regarding reduced human-wildlife conflict through improved attractant management. The wide-ranging resources prepared and provided by WildSafeBC present a straightforward opportunity for improving the reach of WSBC messaging across the FVRD in the 2020 season.

Continuing to assist the District of Mission in their pursuit of Bear Smart Community status by contributing to their evolving application document is another valuable goal to pursue through the end of the 2019 season and into 2020.

Acknowledgements

The success of the 2019 season can be attributed to the many supporters and collaborators with whom the WCC was fortunate to work. Special thanks and acknowledgement is owed to the following people:

The BCCF/WildSafeBC team for all their support and guidance during the 2019 season.

Primary contacts for each sponsoring municipality, as well as additional/supporting municipal staff, were key in assessing the needs/challenges of FVRD municipalities. Thanks to Christina Vugteveen (Chilliwack Sponsor) and Meghan Jackson at the FVRD office; Jennifer Meier (Mission Sponsor) and the Mission Summer Students Jaquelyn Alexander and Jaimie Jagpal; Shawn Gurney (Abbotsford Sponsor) and Nicole MacDonald; and of course to each FVRD municipality that hosted me during my WSBC activities in the 2019 season! Special thanks to Lydia Koot of the Hope Mountain Black Bear Committee for delivering bear awareness/safety and attractant management messaging in Hope B.C.

The COS work tirelessly to protect the public and wildlife alike. My special thanks to Don Stahl, Marc Plamondon, and Alicia Stark, as well as Wildlife Safety Officer Mackenzie Mercer.

I tip my hat to municipal bylaw officers across the FVRD who work to enforce local solid waste management bylaws that ultimately reduce human-wildlife conflict through attractant management. Special thanks to Harminder Gill for teaming up with me to provide outreach and education to a local business in Mission.

Collaborators are pivotal to the success of community events across the FVRD. My sincere thanks to all who invited me to attend community events, and to those who reached out to me to schedule presentations for school groups and other community groups. Two collaborators were especially important to the success of the BCGWW events in the FVRD; Janne Perrin and Carrielynn Victor, I cannot thank you enough for your involvement and support of the BCGWW events.

Many hands made for lighter work; sincere thanks and appreciation to those who volunteered their time to assist me in my WildSafeBC activities and related events in the 2019 season. Thank you David Charbula, Ally Truscott, Louise Patrick, and Olivia Kwan. The unofficial title of "WSBC FVRD Volunteer of the Year" goes to James Campbell, for his endless enthusiasm, schedule flexibility, and willingness to learn about WSBC and reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Last but certainly not least, my sincere thanks to all those FVRD community members with whom I chatted during events, presentations, and door-to-door/garbage tagging activities. Thank you for being so receptive to WSBC messaging and efforts!