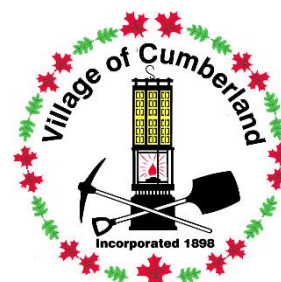


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2019

Cumberland

Prepared by: Cali Barton, WildSafeBC Cumberland Community Coordinator



Executive Summary

The WildSafeBC (WSBC) Cumberland Program covers the Village of Cumberland including the surrounding parks, recreation areas, mountain biking trails, Comox Lake, and Cumberland Lake campground (fig.1). The third season of the WSBC Cumberland Program was another great success. Since 2016, there has been a trend of reduced human-wildlife conflict. Outreach activities and events were well received by the community. Education remains key as our community continues to grow and expand with new residents, visitors and businesses.

The coordinators gave 14 presentations to over 290 participants this season including presentations to the Cumberland Community School and Cumberland Parks and Recreation, among others. This year, 180 children participated in the WildSafe Ranger program which remains a popular service in the community. The WSBC booth was popular at many events and over 850 people were reached directly. Bin tagging took place over 20 times in the community and through ongoing education and bylaw enforcement, the number of bins placed out early remains low.

The WSBC coordinators maintained partnerships with the Conservation Officer Service (COS), Cumberland Parks and Recreation, the Rotary Club, and Cumberland Bear Initiative Society. Two new volunteers were trained and welcomed to the program. James Abrams, WSBC Co-Coordinator, presented to the Cumberland Rotary Club and was honored with a donation to begin building WSBC Village of Cumberland's education kit with the purchase of a bear or cougar pelt. Currently pelts and skulls are borrowed from COS and private collections. We look forward to having the valuable addition of a pelt.

Progress towards Bear Smart Community status is an important goal for the community. During the spring of 2019, the Bear Hazard Assessment was approved. With support from the Village Council and staff, the Bear Conflict Management Plan is now underway and is almost complete. Mike Badry, Wildlife Conflict Manager at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, has been a source of expertise and guidance during this process.

A challenge for the community has been the continued under-reporting of wildlife conflicts. Much of the community seems to resist reporting sightings and encounters through the COS RAPP line. Additionally, fruit trees remain a complicated challenge. Opportunities for the program are significant for the 2020 season including continued work towards Bear Smart Community status, and growing partnerships with local K'ómoks First Nations and other organizations.

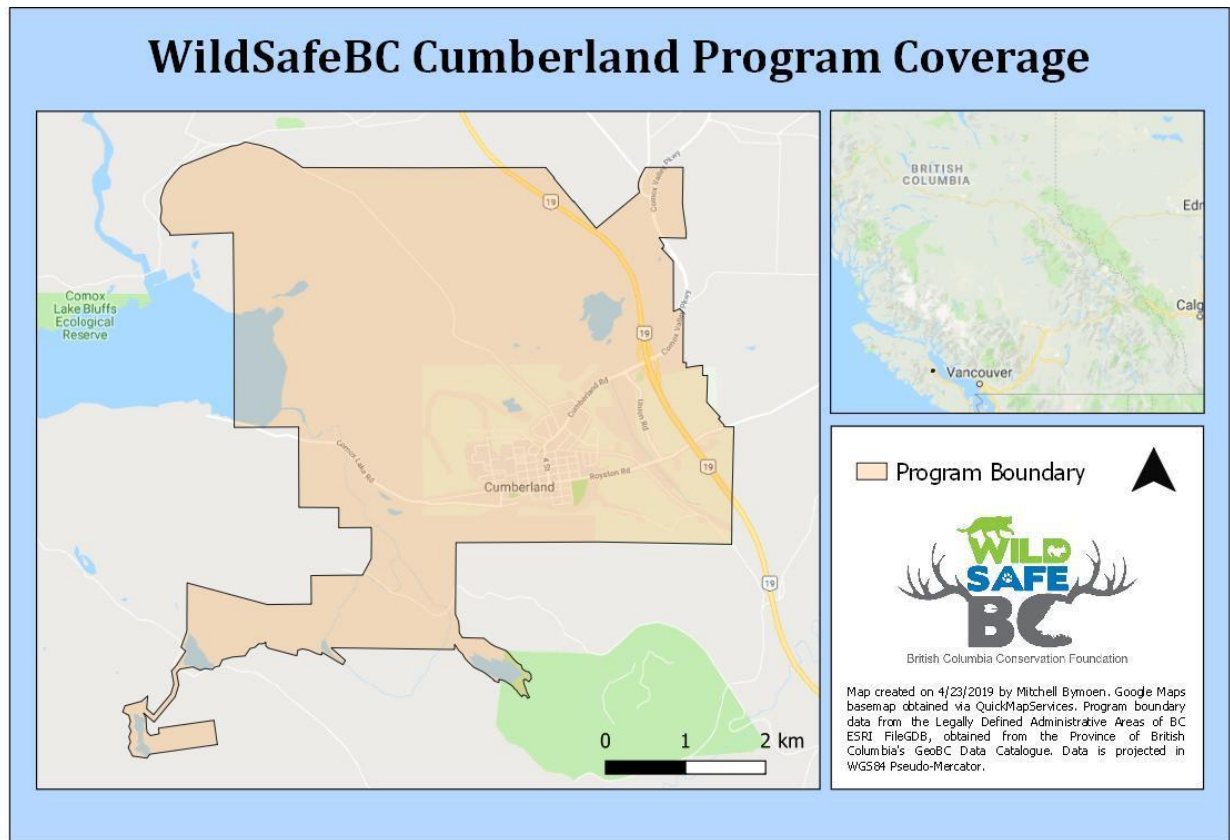


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Cumberland program coverage area.

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Cover photo: Cumberland Community Rec Centre WildSafeBC Rangers Summer 2019, photo credit James Abrams

Highlights from the 2019 Season

Wildlife Activity

Calls made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) are made available to the public through the WildSafeBC Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP). This data is updated daily and the graphs below include wildlife encounter data from January 1, 2016 to November 15, 2019 (fig. 2).

Despite the high number of verbal reports and evidence of black bear activity (bear scat, damaged property etc.), there remain low numbers of reports to the RAPP line. These are likely a combination of two factors; the resistance of the public to report bear and other wildlife sightings and the positive impact of education and bylaw enforcement. The enforcement of the garbage bylaw has resulted in less attractants being available and fewer food-conditioned animals that would get into conflict. While other communities are seeing increases in human-wildlife conflicts, the Village has seen an overall declining trend. No black bears were destroyed in the Village of Cumberland in 2019 to date, and in the last three consecutive years.

Though there are less cougar reports this year compared to previous years, cougars are always present in and around the Village of Cumberland. They tend to keep a low profile but their presence are known to locals who verbally report sightings fairly often. Cougar encounters consist mostly of sightings and occasional reports of cougars preying on domestic cats. WildSafeBC recommends trail users carry bear spray and that house cats be kept indoors, especially at night.

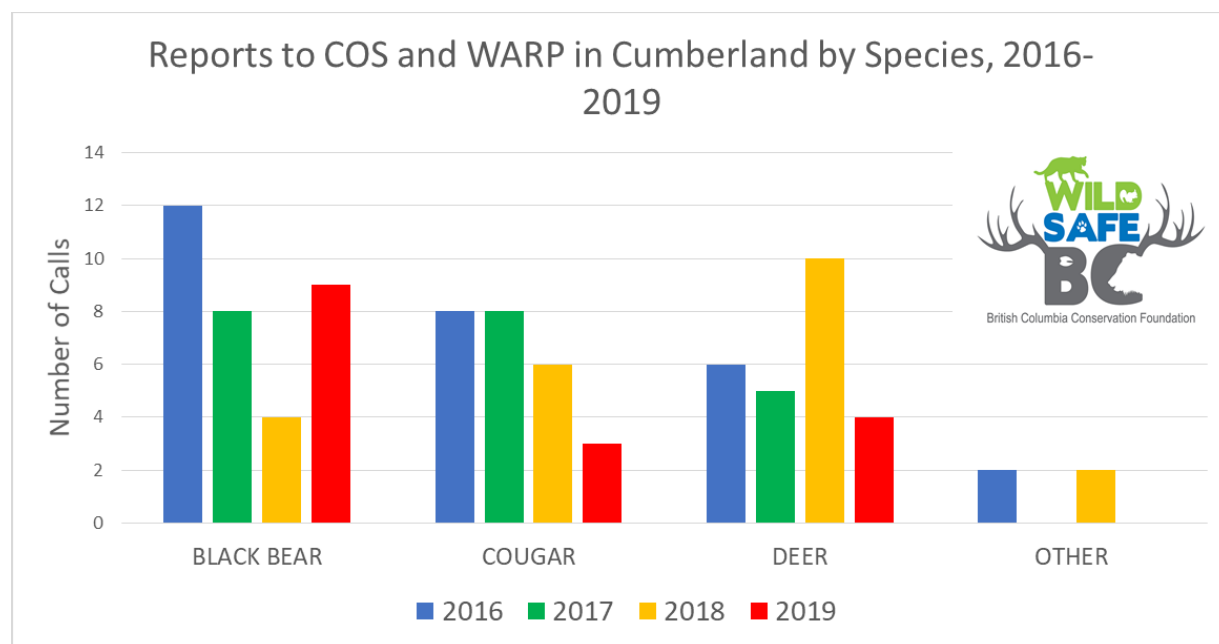


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1st, 2016 to November 15th, 2019.

Also absent from the data are the large number of deer that consistently roam throughout the Village on a daily basis. Urban deer are a growing concern in many communities and conflicts are increasing province-wide. Deer will at times aggressively protect their fawns leading to human and pet injury. Deer are also a leading species involved in vehicle collisions.

Black bear activity is seasonal province-wide and in the Village of Cumberland (fig.3). Over the winter, most black bears will enter their dens as food becomes more scarce. However, in milder climates such as Vancouver Island, some bears may remain active, especially if they find sources of food. Bears are typically most active April to November. Bear conflict reports increase when domestic fruit becomes available or when the bears enter hyperphagia, a period of intense eating in the fall prior to denning. The availability of unnatural foods close to people's homes and natural foods in the wild, all play a factor in the number of conflicts.

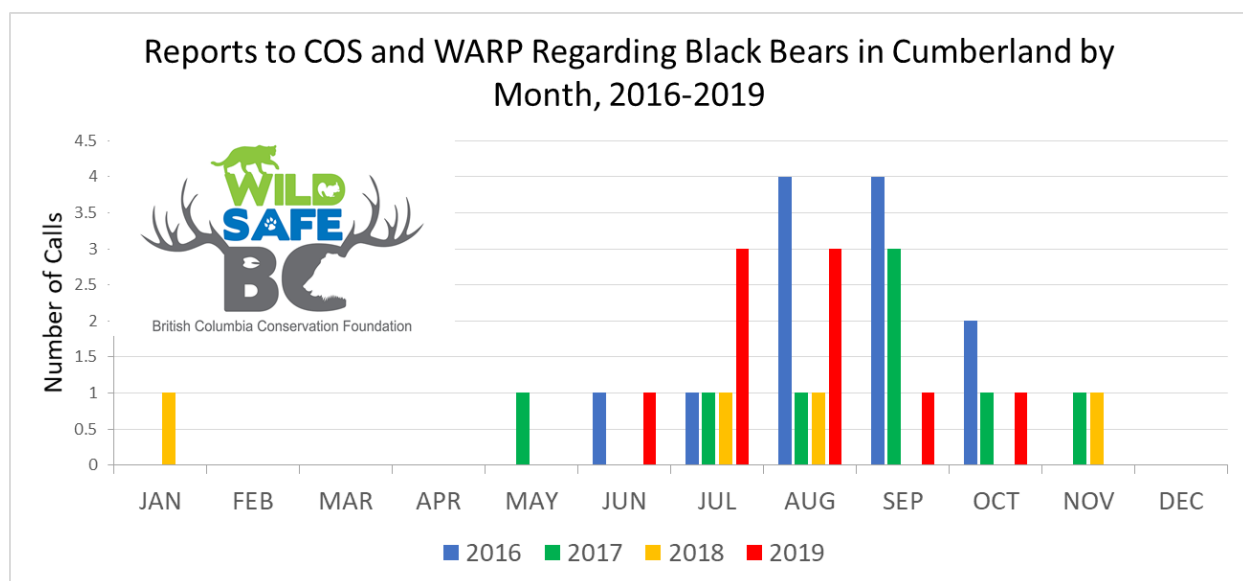


Figure 3. Year-over-year reports for black bears in from January 1st, 2016 to November 15th, 2019 in the Village of Cumberland.

Garbage is consistently the most reported attractant for black bears in the Village of Cumberland and throughout the province (fig. 4). This is followed by fruit trees which are abundant throughout the Village both on residential property and public lands such as streets and parks. Old heritage fruit trees (apple, pear and plum) are distributed throughout parks and properties, often in dense brush, while wild chokecherry trees line some streets and walking trails in greenways and alleys. The Village has a strong cultural attachment to their two heritage orchards which are not consistently managed and are a consistent source of food for bears in the fall. The Village Council is aware of these issues and is working to find possible solutions.

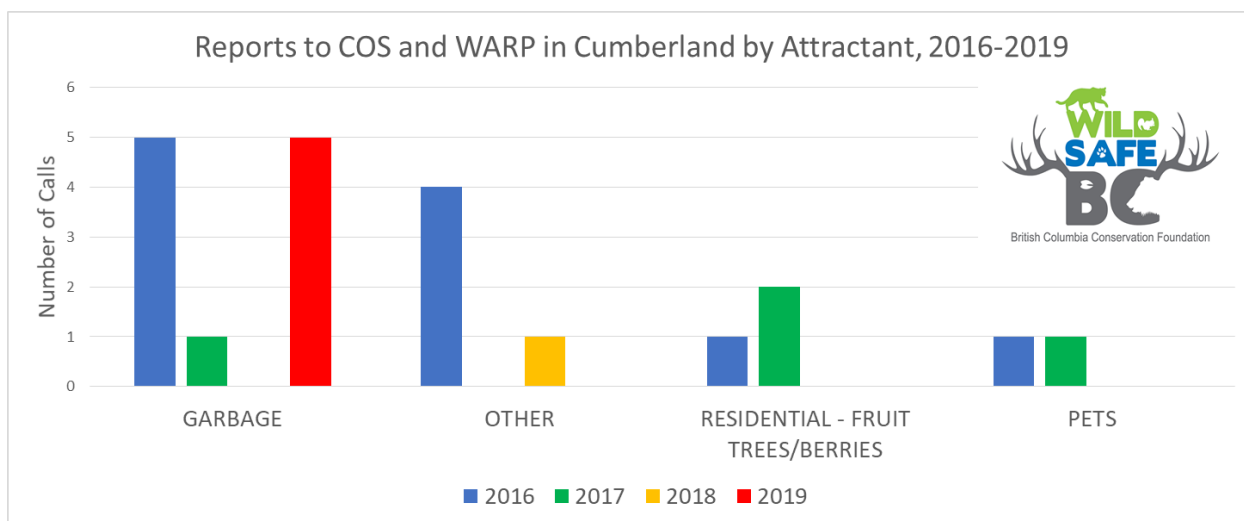


Figure 4. Wildlife Attractants in Cumberland, 2016-2019

WildSafe Ranger Program

In 2019, the Junior Ranger Program was renamed to the WildSafe Ranger Program. This is a keystone of the WSBC education program as children bring home and share their wildlife knowledge and educational materials with their parents, siblings and guardians. It is a wonderful way to inspire the next generation to care for wildlife and reduce conflict in their community.

Cumberland Community School and Cumberland Parks and Recreation summer programs participated in the WildSafe Ranger Program this year with 8 presentations to over 180 students who became WildSafe Rangers and received WildSafe Ranger kits. The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) for the Village of Cumberland is still in the midst of school presentations, and receiving more requests from teachers. Final numbers will be reported in a program addendum. The COS kindly lends their wildlife pelts and skulls to the program for school presentations so that the kids have a unique opportunity to touch, explore and learn respect for wildlife.



Figure 5. Cumberland Rec Centre Summer Camp WildSafe Rangers, photo credit Rebecca (Camp Counselor).

Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC gave a total of 14 presentations to over 290 participants including:

- Bear Safety and Electric Fencing Presentation to the Comox Valley Bee keepers Association
- Two presentations to the Cumberland Rotary Club
- Presentation of the Bear Hazard Assessment and progress with Bear Smart Community status and program goals to the Village of Cumberland Council
- A Bear Safety Presentation to Comox lake Campground staff

Public Displays and Events

The education booth was great fun as always, with lots of wonderful questions and great public engagement (fig.6). The busiest events were Mayday and the final Farmers' Market Day for the season. Games and activities continued to be a great way to engage children and the wildlife tattoos are another reliable resource for keeping kids engaged. Meanwhile, adults had the opportunity to ask questions and learn something new. The Program reached over 850 people through WSBC information displays this season.



Figure 6. Village Square Farmers Market (top), Community Discovery Night booth (left), BCGWW info booth (right).

Door-to-Door Education and Garbage Tagging

Door-to-door canvassing is typically focused on homes with unmanaged fruit trees that are easily viewed from public roads and right-of-ways. Reminders to residences to manage their attractants were sent out several times in bylaw flyers and Currently Cumberland (local news flyer). Illegal dumping is also an issue in Cumberland but is currently being attended to by the bylaw department and the municipality with efforts to catch offenders and reduce this issue.

As of this report, garbage tagging was carried out over 20 nights from February to November 2019 and approximately 1,800 residences were canvassed per event. Bin tagging consists of placing education “Warning” stickers on garbage cans and/or organics bins that are placed on the curb the night before collection. Garbage tagging numbers remained low with an average of 3 to 4 infractions per night before collection day (garbage collection is biweekly in Cumberland). One event had 15 bins tagged which was unusually high. Ticketing by the bylaw department has been very effective in reducing these numbers and most people comply to avoid the fine.

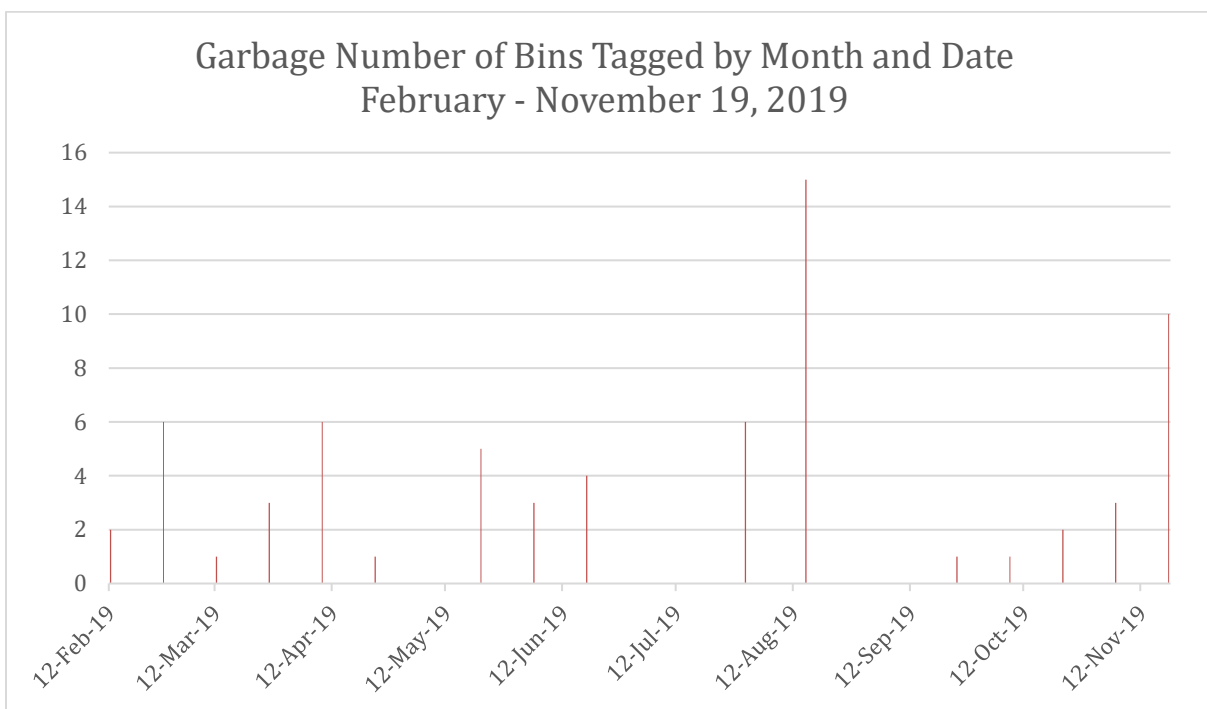


Figure 7. Number of bins tagged with an education sticker from February to November, 2019. An average of 1,800 residences were canvassed during each tagging event.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland page's popularity grew, with 188 followers on January 1st, 2019 to 212 on November 15th. The page has an overall reach of 12769. In 2019, 129 posts were made to the page including posts shared provincially. The WCC was interviewed on local radio stations 97.3 the Eagle and 98.9 The Goat. These interviews were rebroadcasted several times. Additionally, a press release and summarized interview were published online by local news sources, the Comox Valley Record and My Comox Valley Now:

My Comox Valley Now: <https://www.mycomoxvalleynow.com/58166/wildsafe-bc-hosting-4th-annual-bc-goes-wild-event/>

Comox Valley Record: <https://www.comoxvalleyrecord.com/community/cumberland-hosting-wildsafebcs-bc-goes-wild-event/>

The local radio stations and news companies cover both the Comox Valley and Campbell River with over 90,000 residents.

Wildlife in Area Signs

We are currently working with the Village of Cumberland staff to update signage at key trail heads and hotspots around the community with bear and cougar safety signage. Original WSBC wildlife awareness signage were laminated paper signs which were posted at 7 locations at prominent hiking and biking trail heads last year and replaced if damaged over the 2019 season. Cumberland is a mountain bike mecca with hundreds of kilometers of biking trails and hiking paths in the hills and mountains behind the community. Signage is vital to keep community members and visitors informed and aware they are in bear and cougar country. New signage includes safety tips for bikers and hikers.

Collaborations

WildSafeBC Cumberland continues to work in collaboration with the Conservation Officer Service who provide much needed support, information, and updates on wildlife activity. The Rotary Club gave the program a generous donation to purchase a pelt to begin building the WSBC Village of Cumberland education kit. Collaborating with Cumberland Parks and Recreation is also a valued partnership. This year we provided WildSafe Ranger presentations at the summer camps put on by the Rec Centre. A new collaboration for this year was joining the Community Discovery night for non-profits on BC Goes Wild Weekend. We are currently working with the Village front office staff to make brochures, program information, and basic info available to the public. The Comox Valley Tourism and Information Centre continues to distribute WSBC brochures and provide information about our program.

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

Bear spray education was a focus for WSBC across the province during the 2019 season. The WCC offered bear spray awareness and demonstrations and also increased messaging in social media posts. Bear spray continues to be an important focus in Cumberland as the community revolves around recreation and outdoor activity, especially mountain biking. The program will continue to reach out to more biking clubs such as United Riders of Cumberland (UROC) to offer demonstrations and encouragement around bear spray use.

Indigenous Awareness and Engagement

Indigenous awareness and engagement was a key initiative for WSBC this year. Research was conducted on local First Nations, the K'omoks. The WCC increased cultural awareness during a training workshop. Initial outreach to the K'omoks Band was made in hopes of coordinating joint events and other partnerships in the future.

Special Initiatives

The Village of Cumberland and WSBC have been working in collaboration for the last two seasons on progressing towards Bear Smart Community status. The Bear Hazard Assessment was completed in early 2019 and approved by the Village Council. The Bear Conflict Management Plan (BCMP) is almost complete and a plan to address changes to the Official Community Plan (OCP) is also underway.

Challenges and Opportunities

As discussed in previous sections of this report, fruit-producing trees remain a source of conflict in the Village both as an attractant to wildlife (bear, deer, raccoon, and rats) and a cultural conflict with many local people at odds in terms of how to resolve the issue. There are a number of consistent hotspots in the Village for black bears due to consistent sources of fruit (Keswick and Allen Avenue and the Colliery Trail running behind the south side of town).

To address the abundance of fruit in the community, the following initiatives are suggested as potential opportunities for 2020:

- Electric fence demonstrations
- Education campaigns focusing on the hazards and solutions through social media, news articles, workshops, flyers in municipal tax information
- Engaging food banks and other non-profits in greater gleaning activities and events
- Connecting residents through a social media food sharing group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots

Other opportunities for WSBC in 2020 include supporting the community on achieving Bear Smart Community status. This includes providing input on the Official Community Plan, formation of a bear smart steering committee, designing of a pilot program to affordably replace or subsidize bear-resistant garbage cans, and working with local businesses to improve waste management. It is also a priority to build and grow partnerships with the K'ómoks First Nation, and other organizations. Other areas for improvement and change include increased social media presence and following and increased volunteer base. As well, the Program hopes to reach out to surrounding communities and share best practices in the hopes that they will also consider the need for wildlife education programming throughout the Comox Valley.

Acknowledgements

WildSafeBC Village of Cumberland would like to acknowledge our generous sponsors, supporters, and partners. A big thank you to the sponsors of this program who make it possible including the Village of Cumberland, the British Columbia Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, and the British Columbia Conservation Foundation.

We would like to recognize our two new volunteers this season, Margaret Neal from the Cumberland Bear Initiative Society, and Cathy Ruskin. Thank you to the staff of the Village of Cumberland for providing a welcoming space for program work and delivery and storage of program materials and equipment. Thank you to James Abrams for his support as bylaw officer for the Village and for also providing support as a Community Co-Coordinator.

Thank you to Sergeant Mike Newton and the Conservation Service Officers as well as the Black Creek COS office. Special thanks to Sarah Ellis for providing and organizing wildlife education kit materials for the school presentations and events. Thank you to Mike Badry from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy for supporting the work towards Bear Smart Community status. Thanks as well to the BCCF team for their support.

Addendum

The following addendum to the WildSafeBC Cumberland 2019 Annual Report summarizes additional work completed by the Cumberland WCC between November 25th, 2019 and January 31st, 2020.

Typically, bears often do not hibernate in the Cumberland area due to warm winters and wildlife conflict often reduces; however this year, December and January were particularly quiet months for Cumberland with regards to wildlife activity. The cold spell in January was perhaps enough to motivate bears to keep a low profile or go into a rest state.

Despite the lower number of conflicts this season, it is still imperative to maintain awareness of wildlife in the community. From November 15th to January 31st, the WCC continued to deliver WildSafeBC program activities including:

- WildSafe Ranger presentations to 22 youth
- garbage tagging on 3 nights reaching 18 residents
- a presentation to the Village of Cumberland council