

# WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

## Alberni Valley

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## Executive Summary

This report describes the activities of the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Program between May 1 and November 30, 2020. The program covers the City of Port Alberni, and the surrounding Alberni Clayoquot Regional District (ACRD) electoral areas of Sproat Lake, Cherry Creek, Beaver Creek and Beaufort (Figure 1). They reside on the traditional territory of the Hupacasath and Tseshaht First Nations. Port Alberni is one of nine communities in BC that has received Bear Smart Community designation by the Province.

This season the most reported animals were black bears, black-tailed deer, and cougars. Black bear reports were below average, possibly as a result of increased natural food availability. Garbage was the most reported attractant.

The WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) performed outreach activity with the goal of preventing conflict with wildlife in the community. Following COVID-19 safety precautions, several of the standard WildSafeBC program activities were modified to ensure proper sanitization and physical distancing measures were in place.

Human-wildlife conflict prevention activities conducted by the program included:

- 60 people reached through door-to-door outreach.
- 411 Students received the WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) and became WildSafe Rangers.
- The new WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Facebook page was created and had a reach of over 10,000 people and 119 followers.
- Over 100 people received education stickers during 8 bin-tagging events.
- Multiple interviews for local media and newspapers.
- Several volunteers were recruited and assisted in various capacities.
- The WCC supported the ACRD with the planned Curbside Organics roll out in 2021.
- Over 130 people were reached through booths.

Thank you to the BC Conservation Foundation, the ACRD, and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, for sponsoring the WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Program. Thank you to all the collaborators and volunteers who helped make this season successful. Moving forward, focus should continue on attractant management, solutions and relationship building with other local organizations. As well education and training with bear spray, and hosting electric fencing workshops, will help “keep wildlife wild and our community safe”.

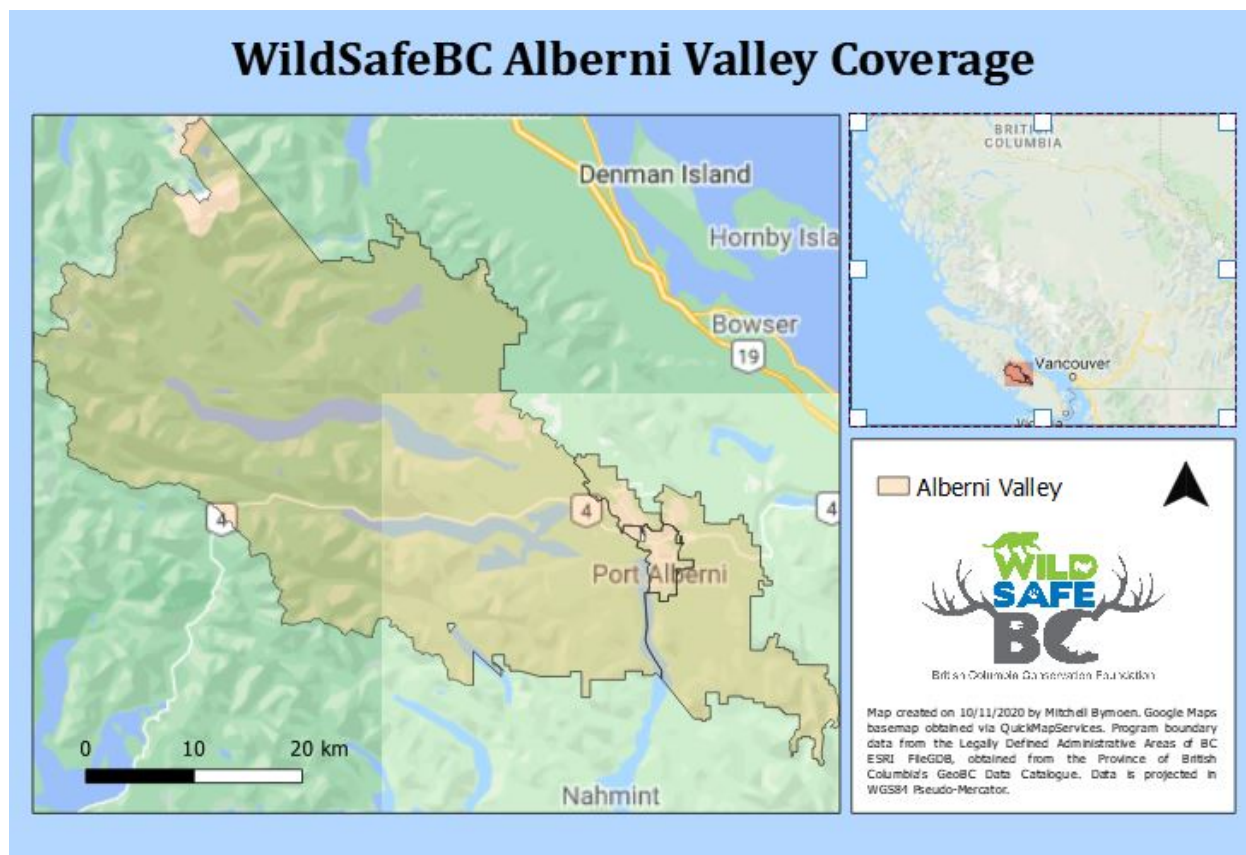


Figure 1. WildSafeBC Alberni Valley program coverage area.

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**Cover Photo:** View from the lookout trail during the BC Goes Wild hike and presentation.

## Highlights from the 2020 Season

### Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and online form (<https://forms.gov.bc.ca/environment/rapp/>) are available to the public through WildSafeBC's Wildlife Alert Reporting Program (WARP) on the WildSafeBC website. This data is updated daily and this report for Alberni Valley includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020 (Figure 2). There were 57 black bear reports which is significantly lower than the 3 year average of 202. Other species such as cougars also reported a lower than average conflict year. Lower numbers of conflict reports may reflect a higher amount of natural food availability this year. Garbage remained the most reported attractant followed by livestock (Figure 3).

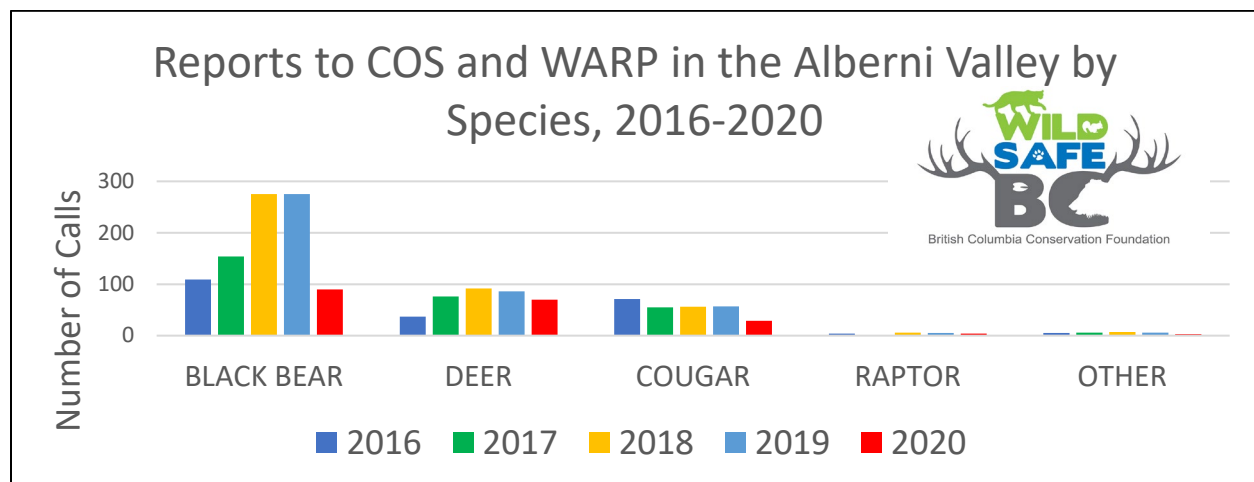


Figure 2. Reports to the COS and WARP regarding black bears from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020

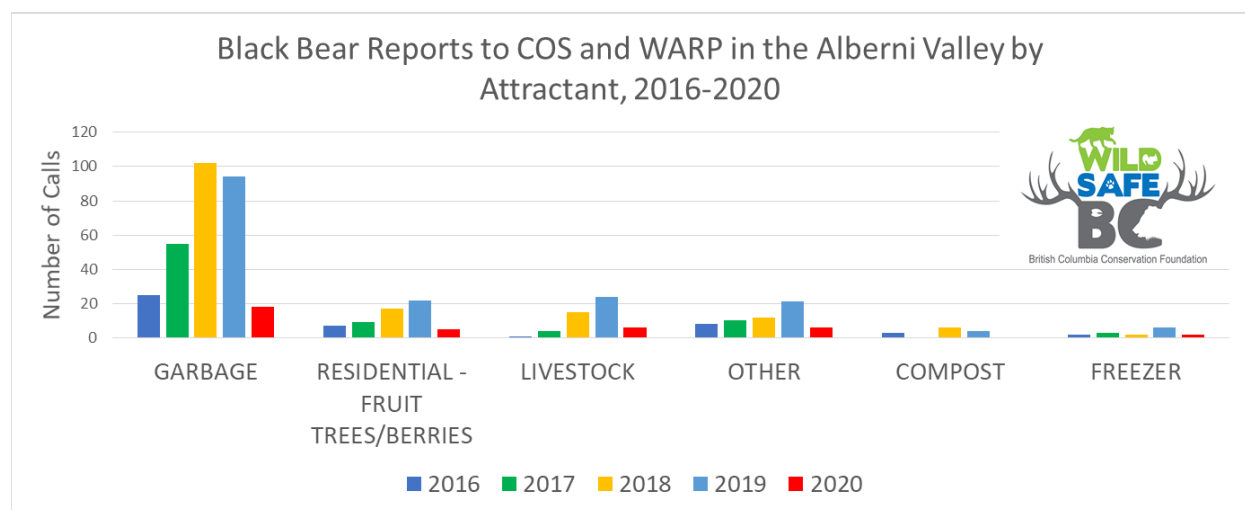


Figure 3. Black Bear Reports to the COS and WARP by Attractant from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.



## WildSafeBC COVID-19 Mitigation

All of the activities performed this season followed safety guidelines provided by the Province, WorkSafeBC and/or the BC Conservation Foundation's Safety Coordinator. The WCCs were required to provide safety plans if they were organizing events where people would congregate. Wherever possible, in person activities were replaced with video conferencing. WildSafeBC adapted and modified requirements as the Province moved from Phase 1 to Phase 3. The WCCs worked closely with their local communities to ensure that all local requirements and restrictions were respected.

## WildSafe Ranger Program

The WildSafe Ranger Program (WRP) introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflict. A total of three schools, and Alberni Parks, Recreation and Heritage, participated in the WRP through presentations in both English and French. The program was modified to allow for physical distancing. Over 400 students became WildSafe Rangers and received kits (Table 1, Figure 4). Of these, 60 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. The WildSafe Ranger educational materials (colouring books, puzzle books, tattoos, colouring contest sheets and bookmarks) were popular with children at the WildSafeBC booth at various public events. Teachers and camp leaders were thrilled with the student interaction and being able to bring WildSafeBC curriculum into the schools and summer camps.

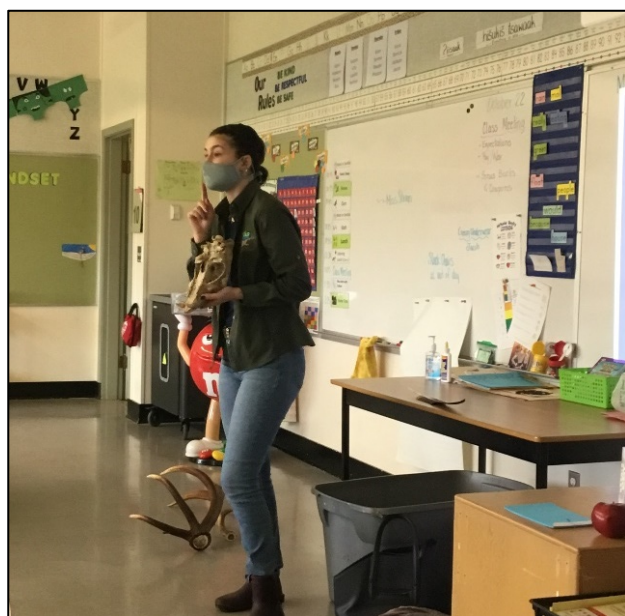


Figure 4. The WCC presenting to a class.

Table 1. Schools that received the WildSafe Ranger Program in 2020.

School	Grade	Students	Extended
<b>Parks, Recreation &amp; Heritage</b>	3-6, K-2	112	Yes
<b>Alberni Elementary</b>	K-6	160	No
<b>École des Grands-cèdres</b>	K-7	39	No
<b>John Howitt</b>	K-7	100	No

## Presentations to Community Groups

The WCC provided an outdoor presentation during BC Goes Wild, which is a campaign to celebrate wildlife in BC. It occurs in September which is typically the month when human-bear conflicts are at their highest in the province. The Alberni Valley did a safety presentation and hike on September 19. It was a small and intimate event, with only five members coming out, the community potentially still being wary of the smoke and COVID-19.

The hike started at the beginning of the Lookout Trail, a popular hiking spot in the Alberni Valley. We went over how to stay safe while exploring the outdoors and how to best avoid a wildlife encounter. The WCC did an in depth presentation around the use of bear spray. During the hike, we tried to spot potential attractants and signs of wildlife.

## Display Booths

The WCC hosted three display booths at local events this year (Table 2, Figure 5). It was an effective way to reach out to community members in person and better determine the needs of residents in Port Alberni. It was also helpful in spreading the news that WildSafeBC was in the valley and providing support to the community.

Additionally, an online “display booth” was hosted on the Virtual Alberni District Fall Fair. WildSafeBC information was available online through this virtual platform and viewed by 480 people.



Figure 5. WCC hosting a booth at the spirit square farmers market.

Table 2. Summary of booths held by the local coordinator.

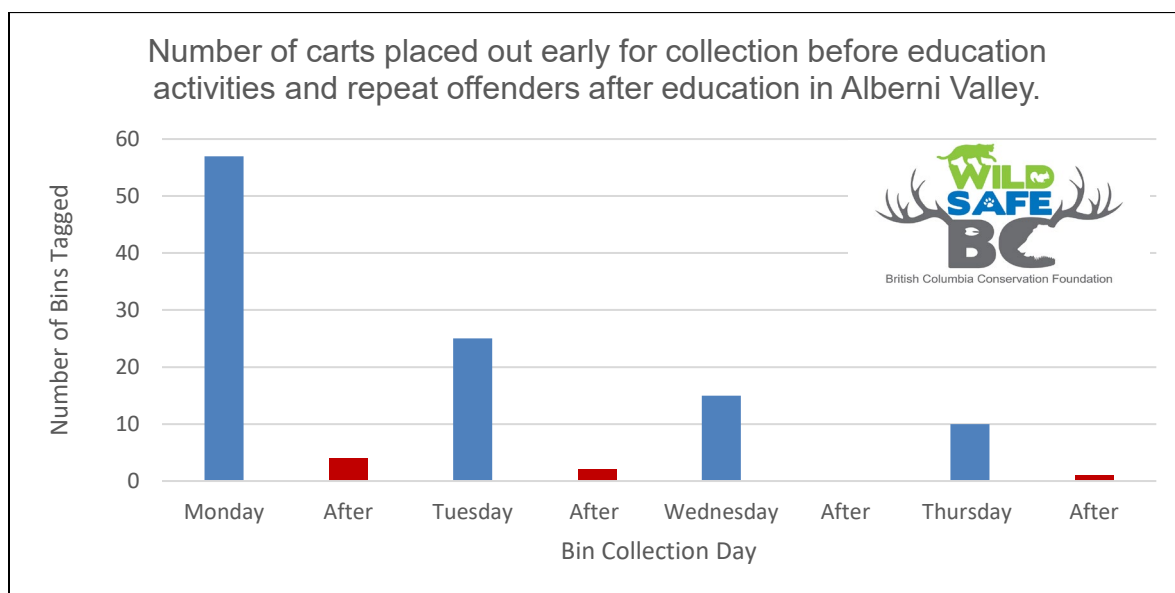
Event	Date	People reached
<b>Farmers Market</b>	August 22	60
<b>Farmers Market</b>	October 17	40
<b>Farmers Market</b>	October 24	30

## Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year to consist of leaving door hangers; the WCC did not knock on door as would be typically done. A total of 60 door hangers were distributed in the neighbourhood above Leslie Street. The WCC had three in-person conversations about attractant management while delivering door hangers.

Bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of garbage containers set curbside the day before collection. During 5 outings, 107 bins were tagged in the City of Port Alberni and 7 were repeat offenders. The effectiveness of garbage tagging for changing behaviors is demonstrated by the 95% of the residences whose bins were tagged during the initial survey and then were not found on the curb again during the second survey (Figure 6).

The results of each survey were communicated to Bylaw Services and the COS. Through a combination of education by the WCC, and follow up by Bylaw Services and the COS, all repeat offences were resolved. There were zero tickets written in 2020 compared to the 200 written up in 2019 for waste management. This demonstrates the benefits of having an education program and the collaboration of multiple agencies.

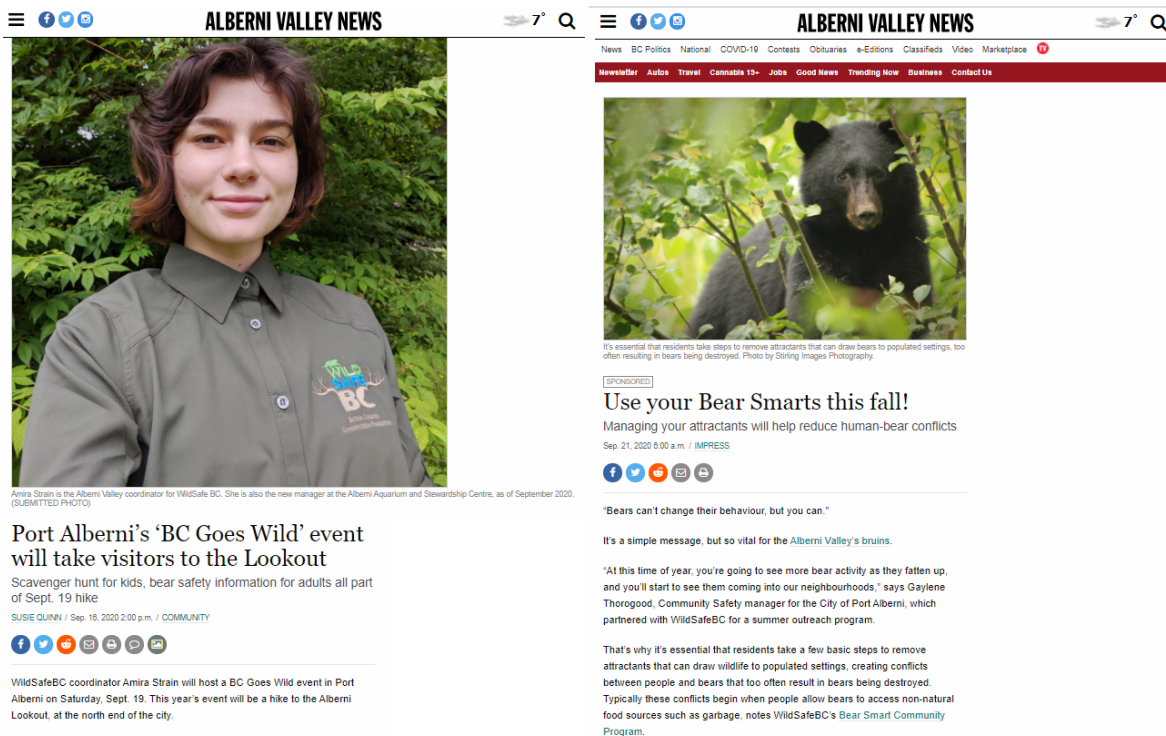


**Figure 6. Number of carts placed out early for collection before education activities and repeat offenders after education in Alberni Valley, BC.**

## Social Media and Press

The newly created WildSafeBC Alberni Valley Facebook page garnered over 100 followers in its first season. Posts from the page, both local and provincial, reached over 10,000 people. The WCC published articles in the Alberni Valley News about [attractant management](#) and collaborated with the City on an article about [BC Goes Wild](#) (Figure 7).





**Figure 7. News article about BC Goes Wild and attractant management.**

## Collaborations

The WCC collaborated with Bylaw Officers and the COS on garbage tagging. The COS was also helpful in providing hot spot areas that needed education or that had heightened wildlife activity. The WCC also collaborated with a local organization who helps locals harvest their unwanted fruit. The WCC provided referrals to residents and promoted the benefits of recycling unused fruit. The local Farmers' Institute also benefits from discarded fruit that can be used for livestock feed. Fruit is a strong attractant for bears and draws them into the community. When bears become food-conditioned, they may then focus on other attractants such as garbage or small livestock. The WCC also collaborated closely with the City of Port Alberni.

## Special Initiatives

The WCC assisted the ACRD in planning the rollout of curbside organics collection. Once the program is launched, it will need to be monitored to ensure it does not become another attractant causing human-wildlife conflicts. To ensure its success, the following should be considered:

- Installing bear-resistant hardware on all organic bins prior to distributing to households
- Providing an informational flyer/door hanger to accompany bins upon roll out.
- Installing education stickers on the bins to ensure they are used correctly.

- Conducting bin tagging after implementing the program to ensure residents are following bylaw restrictions and not placing carts out the night before collection.

The WCC also participated in the annual Alberni Valley Pumpkin Pick-up (Figure 7). Over 375 pumpkins were collected, with a total weight of 3,555 pounds. The pumpkins were then redistributed with 60% going to human consumption, 30% going to livestock, and 10% sent for composting. This initiative successfully helped prevent bears and other wildlife from accessing the pumpkins.



Figure 7. The WCC with some of the pumpkins collected during the annual Alberni Valley Pumpkin Pick-up.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Garbage continues to be the most reported attractant, especially for black bears. Through garbage tagging and education, there has been a significant decrease in bins being set out the night before collection. There was also a notable reduction in calls regarding wildlife and garbage. In 2021, the WildSafeBC program should:

- Continue to provide education through bin tagging (in conjunction with organics bins).
- Encourage residents to store their bins in a secure location such as a shed or garage, or secure bear-resistant containers to a solid structure (so as to not be dragged away by bears).

Fruit trees continue to be a source of attractants in the community that draw wildlife into residential areas. Bears have been reported damaging fences and remaining in people's yards which impacts the safety of the neighbourhood. Several areas have been identified as 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 2021:

- Electric fence demonstration(s) for residential gardens, apiaries, fruit trees and livestock.
- Education campaigns through social media, news articles, workshops, flyer in municipal tax information, with a focus on the impacts of unsecured fruit and solutions.
- Engage and collaborate with food banks and other non-profits.
- Advertise solutions such as the Gleaning Project and/or connecting with the Farmers' Institute for windblown and undesirable fruit to be used as livestock feed.
- Connect residents through a social media food-sharing group
- Increased door-to-door campaigns in hotspots.

Additionally, a priority will be to continue to promote the use of bear spray and encourage more businesses to carry this important safety product. This can be done through the WildSafe Business Pledge Program.

The WildSafe Business Pledge Program has been developed to encourage businesses to set good examples in their community on how to safely co-exist with wildlife. To take the pledge, a business is required to follow best practices in solid waste management, provide adequate training to staff and support WildSafeBC's safety and conflict reduction information. In return, WildSafeBC will provide ongoing support to the business in the form of staff training, WildSafeBC materials (subject to budget constraints) and a WildSafeBC Business Pledge poster. A suitable business that carries bear spray can receive support from WildSafeBC in terms of staff training. They should also carry other essential equipment such as holsters and safety travel canisters. WildSafeBC plans to hosts more bear spray workshops and encourage residents to shop local where they can.

## Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the BC Conservation Foundation team, as well as Jenny Brunn from the ACRD, and Alicia Puusepp and Sara Darling from the City of Port Alberni. Thanks to Conservation Officer Daniel Eichstadter, for providing information on high conflict areas and ongoing issues in the valley. WildSafeBC is grateful for Alberni Valley Times editor Susie Quinn, for getting the word out about BC Goes Wild along with articles around being "Bear Smart" and managing your fruit. Special thanks to Shawn Bourgoïn and Jessica Gilchrist, the recreation programmers for the City who helped organize WRP presentations and a bear spray workshop. Lastly, the program would not be as successful without the help of my volunteers, Bronwyn Currey, Renae Ivezich, Michael Lewis, Mollie Brooks, and Malachi Strain. Thanks to all of the residents who remain committed to Port Alberni being a Bear Smart Community.