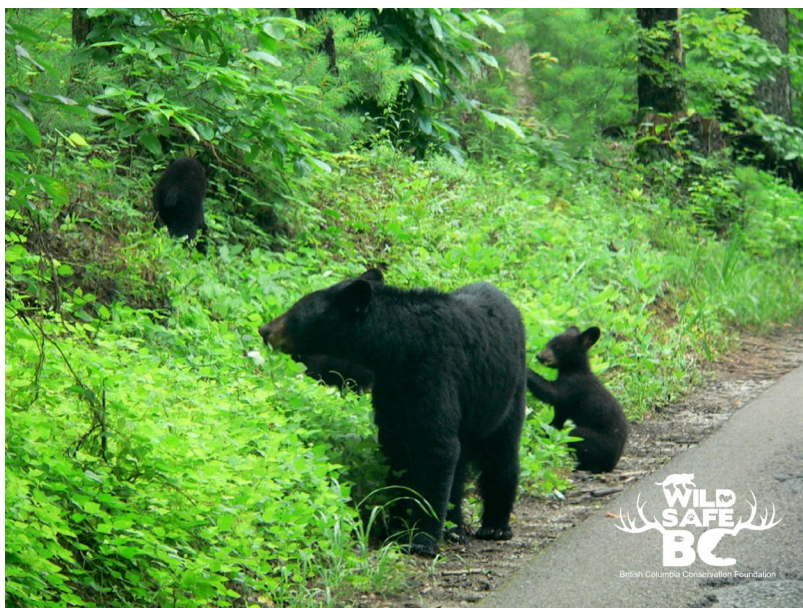


WildSafeBC Annual Report 2020

Castlegar and Area

Prepared by: Pat Wray, WildSafeBC Castlegar Coordinator



Executive Summary

This report describes the activities, highlights and challenges of the WildSafeBC Castlegar Program between May 1 and November 30, 2020. The program area includes the City of Castlegar and the communities located in Areas I and J within the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) (Figure 1). WildSafeBC would like to acknowledge that Castlegar and the surrounding area are located on traditional territories of the Sinixt Nation.

In 2020, in Castlegar and the surrounding area, black bear wildlife reports far exceeded any other species with 203 reports to the Conservation Officer Services (COS) (Figure 2). Black bear reports increased over 2019 with 144 compared to 105. There were 12 reports each for coyotes and cougars, and 11 reports for deer for a total of 35 reports. Although anecdotal reports from residents in Ootischenia indicated an increase in elk herd size the number of reports was less than any year since 2016.

The main goal of the WildSafeBC Community Coordinator (WCC) is to assist in preventing conflicts with wildlife in the community of Castlegar and surrounding RDCK Areas I and J. This goal is achieved through several educational programs and collaborative work with the City of Castlegar and the Conservation Officer Services (COS). In the 2020 field season, several program modifications were implemented in order to follow COVID-19 safety precautions.

The following WSBC activities were completed by the WCC in the City of Castlegar and surrounding areas:

- Two WildSafe Ranger presentation in a classroom setting and two Zoom presentations with 51 children in attendance.
- One Wildlife Safety and Wildlife Attractant Management presentation to Selkirk International students.
- One presentation given to the Pass Creek Neighbourhood Association.
- A total of 1,399 brochures or door hangers were distributed through canvassing.
- Bin tagging took place over 12 nights in four different areas within the City of Castlegar. There were 78 education stickers placed and 4 repeats.
- There were 5 display booths reaching 223 adults and/or children
- The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page grew from 625 to 687 followers; an increase of 8%.
- Four campgrounds were approached regarding the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Wildlife in Area signs were rotated through 15 different locations.
- In collaboration with the Kootenay Food Strategy Society (KFSS), 10 “Pick Me, Please” signs were erected by the WCC on residential property to encourage people to harvest fruit to prevent food waste and prevent human-wildlife conflicts.

The WCC would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the British Columbia Conservation Foundation, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, the RDCK, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their support of this program. The WCCs would also like to thank the residence of Castlegar for their support and interest in keeping wildlife wild and communities safe by managing attractants that lead to food conditioned animals.



Figure 1. WildSafeBc Castlegar Program Coverage Area.

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Cover Photo: Black bear family foraging for natural food sources (WildSafeBC file photo).

Highlights from the 2020 Season

Wildlife Activity

Reports made to the Conservation Officer Service (COS) through the RAPP line (1-877-952-7277) and the 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 the Sunshine Coast includes data from January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

In 2020, in Castlegar and the surrounding area, black bear wildlife reports far exceeded any other species with 203 reports to the Conservation Officer Services (Figure 2). While black bear reports increased from 2019, they were comparable to the three year average. This may indicate multiple reports for a couple of bears that were occupying an area in Castlegar referred to as Old Downtown for several weeks during the fruit season. From January 1 to October 31, 2020, there were 12 reports each for coyotes and cougars, and 11 reports for deer. Although anecdotal reports from residents in Ootischenia indicated an increase in elk herd size the number of reports were less than any year since 2016.

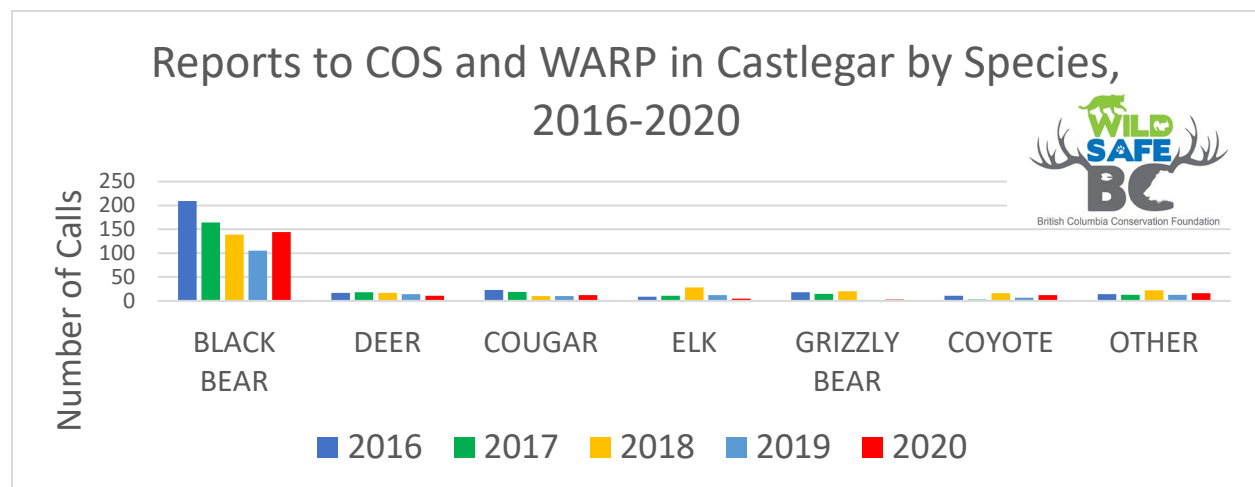


Figure 2. Wildlife Alert Reports to COS by species, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

Garbage continues to be the most reported attractant for black bears in residential Castlegar. Wildlife Alert Reports for residential fruit trees appears minimal, however, the WCC received approximately 20 calls from residents concerned about black bears in their neighbourhood due to fruit and nut trees (Figure 3). There is a reluctance by the public to recognize fruit as an attractant that leads to conflict. Unlike garbage, fruit is perceived as health form of calories while disregarding the fact that a bear had been encourage to forage among densely populated areas. Once the fruit wanes, these food-conditioned and human-habituated bears may then turn to other sources of nearby food such as garbage. There is also a reluctance to call the COS as it is believed the bears will automatically be destroyed.

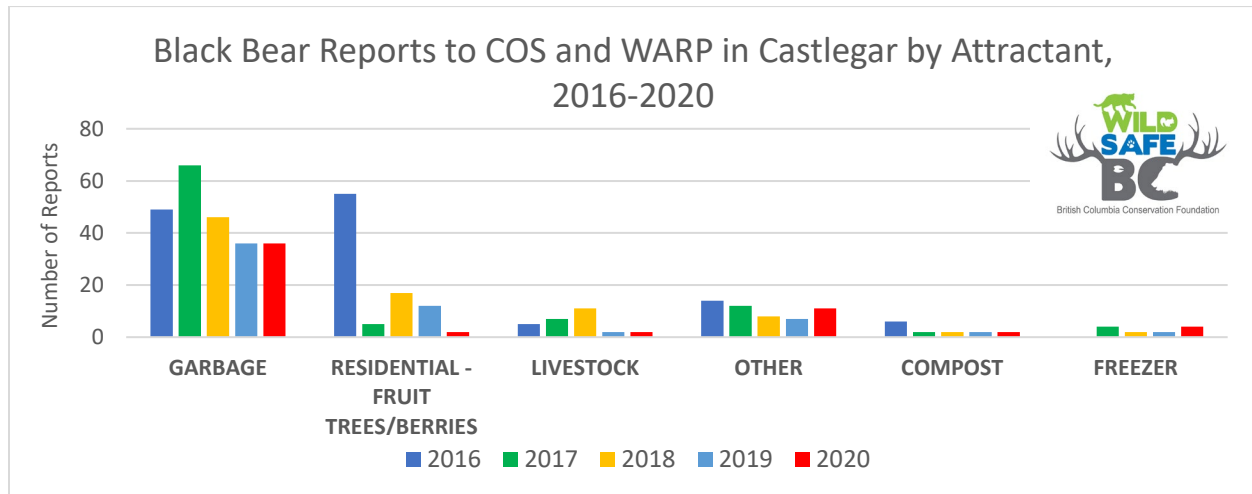


Figure 3. Black bear reports to COS in Castlegar by attractant, January 1, 2016 to October 31, 2020.

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

WildSafeBC introduces youth to the concept of human-wildlife conflicts and what they can do to stay safe and secure wildlife attractants around the home. Due to COVID-19, school participation was limited in 2020. In the summer, the Castlegar Public Library Reading Program hosted two Zoom presentations for children between the ages of three and six. In the fall, Kinnaird Elementary School requested two WildSafe Ranger Presentations, one for grade ones (18 children) and one for grade six (25 children) (Table 1, Figure 4).

Table 1. Number of children participating in WildSafe Ranger Program, 2020

Schools/Organizations	Grade	# of Students
Castlegar Public Library Summer Reading Program	Pre-school and Grade 1	8
Kinnaird Elementary	Grade 1	18
Kinnaird Elementary	Grade 6	25
TOTAL		51



Figure 4. WildSafe Ranger presentation to Kinnaird School, Grade 1, 2020.

Presentations to Community Groups

There were two WildSafeBC presentations delivered this summer: one to the Pass Creek Neighbourhood Association (PCNA); and the other to the Selkirk International Student Program (SISP). The presentation to the PCNA, given by the WCC, emphasized the role and activities of the WCC within the area as well as how to manage attractants to prevent human-wildlife conflict. The evening also included a presentation by Grizzly Bear Coexistence Solution on bear identification, natural history and safety. The presentation given to the SISP covered all the same topics but was delivered by the WCC only.

Display Booths

Though many large events were cancelled this season because of COVID-19 safety concerns, the WCC was able to setup several display booths at smaller venues reaching 223 people (Table 2).

Table 2. WildSafeBC display booths in Castlegar and surrounding area, 2020.

Venue	Date	# of Participants
Canadian Tire	June 6	57
Castlegar Farmer's Market	June 27	51
Castlegar Farmer's Market	July 11	49
Castlegar Farmer's Market	August 1	55
Castlegar Farmer's Market	September 5	41
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS		223

BC Goes Wild

The BC Goes Wild Event was a display booth at the Castlegar Farmer's Market on September 5 (Table 2). The WildSafeBC colouring contest was setup, following a COVID-19 mitigation safety plan. Children and their parents took the colouring contest home as opposed to letting the children participate at the booth.

Door-to-Door Education and Bin Tagging

Door-to-door education was modified this year. Instead of knocking on doors and talking to people, door hangers and brochures were distributed. If residents were outside when the WCC was going door-to-door, the WCC would speak with the residents while maintaining physical distance. After Phase 3 was launched, the WCC was able to knock at a residence then immediately stand back two meters for a personal discussion at the door or outside.

In May and June, over 600 rat brochures were delivered to the old part of Castlegar. This is where the vast majority of reports originated. Another small rat brochure campaign was done in the Ridgewood Drive Area. The rat problem was a major focus of the City this season and after hand delivering to specific areas in Castlegar, the City staff copied the BCCF rat brochure and sent it out with the quarterly utility bill to every property owner within Castlegar.

Over 600 door hangers or Black Bear brochures were delivered to Castlegar residents, approximately 90 were delivered to Ootischenia or Robson, and 80 were delivered to local campgrounds (Table 3).

Table 3. Brochures and door hangers distributed in Castlegar and Area, 2020

Species	# of Brochures/Door Hangers	Locations Delivered
Rat	451	Northwest end of Castlegar in the old section of town; Ridgewood/Pinewood Drives; Selkirk Trailer Court
Black Bear	819 (30 residents also received letters)	Arrow Lake Drive Area; Grosvenor, Highland Grandview Subdivisions, Millenium Park Area and Northwest of Millenium Park, Zuckerberg Island Area, 103 rd Street Area, all the campgrounds,
Black Bear	91	Ootischenia (Hillview Road), Robson (McDiarmid and Fox Roads)
Black Bear	80	4 campgrounds in Castlegar Area
TOTAL BROCHURES	1,399	

Garbage bin tagging consists of placing a highly visible and removable warning sticker on top of containers set curbside the day before collection. During 12 outings, a total of 78 bins were tagged in the City of Castlegar (Figure 5). Of these, four were repeat offenders and this indicates the effectiveness of bin tagging for changing human behaviour (Figure 5). Tickets by the City of Castlegar Bylaw Officer are issued under the Waste Disposal Bylaw 1148 on the second infraction.

The third bin tagging patrol was done in West Castlegar, Blueberry and West Castlegar during early November, 2020. The increase in the infractions is most likely explained by residents assuming there were no further possibilities of bear activity so it was acceptable to place bins out the night before regardless of bylaws. All bin tagging was completed in Old Downtown during the summer and there was a steady increase in compliance. This is most likely the result of the bin tagging protocol and WildSafeBC education in the area. One of the challenges in the area of Old Downtown is that residents do not have garages and leave bins outside quite often. It is recommended that these be secured to trees or posts. This area gives rise to frequent wildlife alerts and garbage strewn reports.

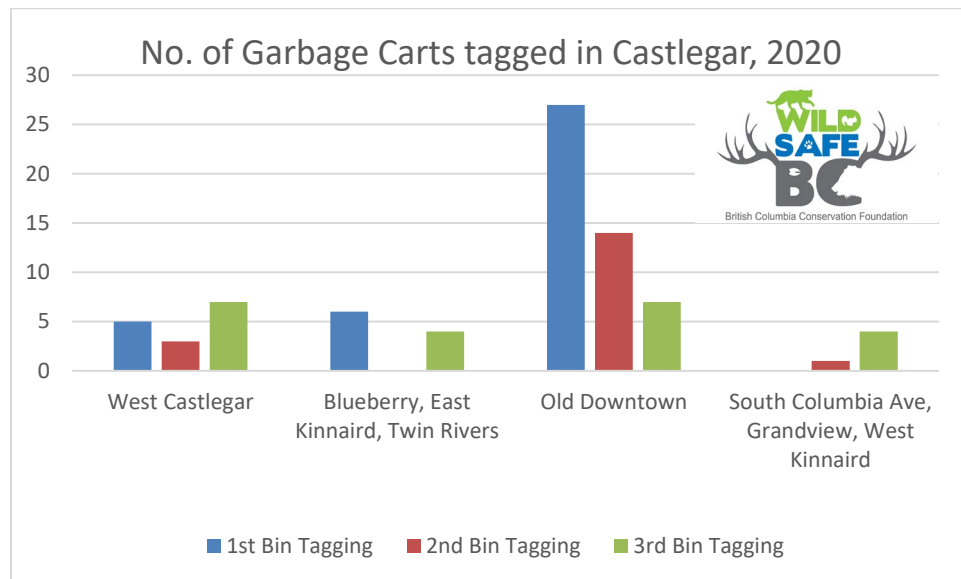


Figure 5. Number of garbage carts placed out early for collection and tagged in Castlegar, 2020.

Social Media and Press

The WildSafeBC Castlegar Facebook page has been an effective way to reach residents. One of the most popular posts was in regards to the Kootenay Food Strategy Society with their Food 4 All signage campaign. This campaign helps connect fruit owners to fruit pickers. The number of page followers increased from 635 to 687; an increase of 8%.

The WCC submitted five news article to the Castlegar News including:

- Introduction of new WCC
- What to do if You See a Fawn
- Wildlife Alert Update
- Fruit Season is Here!
- Fruit Tree Management (Reposting of article by Dave White from 2019 in Nelson Star)

One Facebook post was read by Castlegar News staff and subsequently published in the Castlegar News.

Wildlife in Area Signs

All Bear in Area Signs were erected when residents specifically phoned the City of Castlegar staff to report bear sightings and when the COS requested signage to be displayed. By October 1 all the WSBC signage was in use and the WCC was able to supplement signage made by the RDCK (Figure 6). In total, signage was rotationally erected in 15 different locations within the City of Castlegar.



Figure 6. Working with Castlegar Bylaw Officer, Wayne Cox, 2020.

Collaborations

The WCC collaborated with the local Castlegar Kootenay Food Strategy Society (KFSS) to place “Pick Me, Please” signage within City limits. This was a pilot project proposed by the KFSS and funded by the Columbia Basin Trust. The goal of these signs was to prevent food waste and prevent bears from becoming food-conditioned to fruit trees which can lead to human-wildlife conflicts. Residents were able to request signs which encouraged others to glean the excess fruit (refer to Social Media and Press section).

The Kootenay Foods Society, in the past, has hosted an apple gleaning event at the MIR Peace Centre at Selkirk College; however, this year, the apple crop did not warrant an event.



Figure 7. Residents of Castlegar placing signs provided by KFSS for assistance in picking fruit.

Challenges and Opportunities

The City of Castlegar continues to have challenges in managing attractants that lead to food-conditioned bears. The old, established area of Castlegar in the northwest end of town east of Columbia Avenue has a proliferation of fruit and walnut trees that are a major attractant. Bears have damaged trees and are seen at all times of the day sitting in walnut trees with their cubs, and raking grapes from grape vines. Education should focus on solutions to prevent wildlife from accessing these attractants. This can include a flyer in tax notices or utility bills.

Recommendations include education on: preventing fruiting trees from flowering; replacing fruit or nut-bearing trees with other suitable trees; and highlighting the wildlife attractant and solid waste bylaws upheld by the City of Castlegar. There are many new residents to Castlegar that are unaware of the bylaws and would appreciate this information. It would also be beneficial to inform residents that they can make bin repair requests to the City which will be followed up on by public works.

Many of the homes in the old section of town do not have garages giving residents no choice but to store garbage outside and it is often accessible to bears. While some residents effectively chain the bear-resistant bins to posts, many do not, which means bears can drag the garbage away and rip the bin apart. The result is a food-conditioned bear. There was an emphasis on education in this area, however, this must be ongoing.

The following additional initiatives are recommended for 2021:

- Electric fence demonstration(s)
- Encourage food banks and other non-profits to setup fruit gleaning groups
- Continue the “Pick Me, Please” collaboration with the KFSS
- Continue door-to-door campaigns in hotspots
- Continue education through newspaper articles and social media
- Initiate the WildSafe Business Pledge component to the Castlegar WildSafeBC Program.
- Follow up on preliminary contacts with local campgrounds in the area to promote the WildSafeBC Bare Campsite Program.
- Install a large community bin in a well-lit location, for example, adjacent to the Castlegar Firehall. Installing a large community bin will assist shift workers in managing garbage. A well-lit location will allow the bin to be monitored and hopefully prevent misuse.
- Establish a local Wildlife Working Group to facilitate ongoing implementation of Castlegar’s Bear Conflict Management Plan, as well as communication between the City, WildSafeBC, the COS and other stakeholders. A recommended frequency is at the start of bear season (April or May), midsummer and the fall.
- Initiate a pilot project in Old Downtown offering residents a cost share option to remove their fruit trees and replace with non-fruiting trees. This type of program already exists in the City of Canmore.
- Expand the number of WildSafeBC presentations at Selkirk College. Currently, presentations are given to the International Student Program to educate foreign students about local wildlife natural history and safety in bear country; however, foreign students

also attend other programs such as the English Language Program and several hospitality programs.

- Increase the number of bin tagging patrols over the summer and continue into the fall. Improve the consistency of patrols and patrol results by tagging all four neighbourhoods during the same collection week.

In the RDCK, specifically the communities of Raspberry, Brilliant, Robson and Ootischenia, there is no garbage pick-up. Similar to the City of Castlegar, there is an abundance of fruit trees. These are largely unmanaged, old, historical Doukhobor orchards that often have no resident living on the property. This year, the apple crop on these trees was very sparse. This may indicate the trees may be too old to reproduce. This resulted in fewer reported human-wildlife conflicts on neighbouring properties. It is recommended that this situation continue to be monitored.

Acknowledgements

The WCC would like to thank the City of Castlegar, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Strategy, the RDCK, the BC Conservation Foundation, and the Columbia Basin Trust for their financial support of this program. Thank you to: local Conservation Officer Service; Castlegar Bylaw Officer Wayne Cox; the great staff at City Hall; Angela Jakobs from the KFSS; the media outlets for running stories and broadcasts that helped spread the messaging of WildSafeBC; Jenny Wallace for her historical perspective on WildSafeBC in the Castlegar Area. The WCC would like to thank the community members of Castlegar for their support and readiness to learn about wildlife and attractant management strategies.